Structural Encroachment

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Abstract

Moral encroachment states that moral factors can make a difference to what we are epistemically justified in believing. I present two motivating cases that resemble a common example in the moral encroachment literature to show that the agent's commitments and beliefs, and not the moral factors of the situation, influence epistemic justification. I call this view Structural Encroachment.

0. Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to introduce a new type of encroachment on epistemic justification: *structural encroachment*. In simple terms, structural encroachment is the view that one's commitments and one's other mental states (e.g., beliefs) can influence the threshold for how much evidence is required to have a justified belief.

Structural encroachment differs from the familiar moral and pragmatic encroachment views, which state that moral or pragmatic factors respectively can make a difference to what we are epistemically justified in believing. In my view, neither moral nor pragmatic factors raise the epistemic threshold for justification. Likewise, structural encroachment should not be confused with purism, the view that whether a belief is justified only depends on truth-relevant factors. In my view, whether a person has a justified belief can also be influenced by the agent's commitments and some of the agent's other mental states.

This is the roadmap of the paper. In the first section, I will provide a couple of examples to motivate structural encroachment. In the second section, I will briefly explore the concept of commitments—understood in normative terms. In the third section, I will introduce structural encroachment fully. In the fourth section, I will consider three possible objections to my view.

1. Identifying a New Type of Encroachment: Two Key Cases

Consider the following case:

Foreigner in Texas: Ana, a foreigner visiting the US for the first time, travels to Houston, Texas. Her perceptions of the US primarily come from blockbuster movies, which depict the US as a place where everyone has equal opportunities to achieve the American dream. During the initial days of her visit, she observes that the servers at the (Mexican) restaurants she happens to visit are predominantly people of color. Of course, for Ana, that a person is a server does not carry any negative connotation with it. As her trip nears its end, she visits one last (Mexican) restaurant. She sees the only person of color in the restaurant, Maria, and assumes that she must be a server. Curious about the food options they offer, she approaches and asks her a question.[1]

This case seems similar in some ways to some examples that moral encroachers use to motivate their view.[2] Their diagnosis of a case like this would be to say that Ana did something both epistemically and morally wrong. She formed the belief that Maria is a server solely on the basis of statistical evidence about the skin color of people working as servers in Mexican restaurants in Texas. This is morally wrong, they would argue, because given some of the struggles that people of color face in a state like Texas—where they suffer marginalization—solely using statistical evidence about race to support our beliefs would result in harm towards Maria, or it will perpetuate existing structures of oppression which would harm both Maria and other people of color. [3] Furthermore, according to moral encroachers, if our beliefs or our belief formation processes hurt or harm others, then it cannot be the case that those beliefs are epistemically impeccable. Hence, they would argue, Ana must have done something epistemically wrong too. She needed to gather more evidence before forming this belief about Maria, failed to do so, and now holds both an immoral and unjustified belief.

I find this hypothetical moral encroachers' diagnosis unconvincing. To me, Ana did not do anything wrong, either morally, or epistemically. To see this, I think we need to keep in mind some things:

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[1] In many places, including the US, people from various social strata take on service jobs. Some do so regularly, while others work in these roles sporadically. Unless one believes that being a server is inherently associated with lower social status or that these jobs are only for people who may not be suited for more "intellectually demanding" roles, there is no obvious reason why anyone inside or outside the US would hold a negative view of people in such occupations. This point has been made by Georgie Gardiner (ms.)

[2] Notably (Basu, 2019a; Basu & Schroeder, 2018; Bolinger, 2020; Moss, 2018). They all use variations of the Cosmos Club case which was first introduced by Tamar Gendler (2011).

[3] Compare (Basu, 2019a, 2019b; Bolinger, 2020; Moss, 2018).

a) Ana observed that servers in all the restaurants she visited tended to be people of color.
b) Ana believes that the US is a place where everyone has the same opportunities.
c) Ana is a visitor who hasn't spent much time in Texas to update her belief in (b).
d) For Ana, that a person is a server does not carry any negative connotation.

If (a) to (d) are true, then the fact that Ana took her evidence at face value should not raise suspicion that an injustice has taken place and, hence, that something epistemically wrong happened too. On the contrary, it is far from clear why Ana should refrain from forming her belief about Maria based on her observations. Ana's belief is the result of attentively observing her environment and relying on induction, which should yield a justified belief. This belief, then, seems epistemically good. So, as things stand, it is not clear that Ana did something epistemically or morally wrong.

In response to this line of argument, moral encroachers could point out that Ana should know better. Social injustice is a serious and harmful issue, and everyone has a moral obligation to know about it. One's ignorance of social injustice is harmful to people of color who face marginalization. In this scenario, Ana failed in her moral duty to be informed about the social injustices affecting people like Maria. Hence, she did something morally harmful and, therefore, epistemically wrong.

My impression is that this response fails because Ana is a foreigner who does not live in the US. It would be too demanding to ask anyone, regardless of who they are or where they live, to know about the social injustices happening everywhere in the world. If, instead, moral encroachers seriously required anyone in the world to be aware of the social struggles inside the US, that would be very US-centered and *ad-hoc*. So, I think this reply is not convincing.

A second counter that moral encroachers could give is that although Ana did something morally and epistemically wrong, she is excused—her moral and epistemic wronging did not harm Ana. This point is complicated, and it needs careful attention. I will develop it and address it at length in section 4.2 below.

While I think that in **Foreigner in Texas**, there is nothing wrong with Ana's belief, the same is not true of all cases. Consider, for example, the following case:

Antiracist in Texas: Taylor, a dedicated local antiracist residing in Houston, Texas, is actively involved in researching and addressing social and racial injustice in the state. She has

done plenty of research on social injustice in Texas and believes that Houston is a city where people of color face marginalization—including being subject to harmful stereotypes associating them with service-related occupations. Taylor observes that the servers at the Mexican restaurants she frequents are predominantly people of color. During one instance, Taylor visits a Mexican restaurant and, with no further information available, she takes it that Maria who is the only person of color there is a server. Driven by her curiosity about a dish she has never heard of, she approaches and asks Maria a question about the dish.

Now, in **Antiracist in Texas**, it does seem that Taylor *should not have* formed the belief that Maria works as a server in the restaurant. Somehow, her antiracist commitments and her beliefs about the marginalization of people of color in Houston—including the harmful stereotyping they suffer—entail that Taylor should have sought more evidence to support her belief. How can one be an antiracist, believe that using statistical evidence about race can be harmful to people of color, and then hold one's belief solely based on that evidence? Here, unlike in our previous example, something wrong happened. I think that the wrong that happened was epistemic.

Notice that in **Antiracist in Texas**, Taylor does not have less evidence than Ana about whether Maria is a server. She is just more knowledgeable about social dynamics in the US and has antiracist commitments. However, Ana and Taylor do not share the same antiracist commitments or beliefs about the marginalization of people of color in Houston. These mental states, I will argue, are linked to Taylor's requirement to seek more evidence before forming this belief about Maria.

As we have seen, our two cases seem to yield different results: in the first one Ana seems to have done nothing epistemically faulty, in the second one Taylor seems to have done so. However, the moral encroachers' diagnosis cannot account for this intuitive difference between the cases. I think structural encroachment can help us make sense of these cases. Before explaining how Taylor's belief entails an epistemic mistake, let's pause for a second to consider the notion of 'commitment' because, I will argue, the difference between our two cases partially lies in the agents' commitments.

2. Interlude – Commitments

The concept of 'commitment' is multifaceted. Although I cannot cover every possible use of the term, my aim is to explore the central feature of commitments that will help me explain what's going on in the two cases from the previous section.

The sense of commitment that I am interested in is primarily normative. When one makes a commitment, one seems to become subject to some *coherence norms* that narrow down the things we can do to those that cohere with one's commitment. It is the sense that when one is committed to something, one's options shrink not because we cannot do them anymore, but because we *ought not* to do them. [4]

Consider, for example, someone making a promise (i.e., a commitment to do or not to do something). For example, when we promise a friend to take care of her plants every Wednesday while she is away, this promise constrains our foreseeable Wednesdays to planning activities that enable us to fulfill this commitment. This limitation is not due to our inability to do something else on Wednesday; rather, it is a normative requirement not to do so because otherwise, we would not be able to fulfill our commitment. Failing to uphold the commitment would subject us to criticism for incoherence or suggest that our promise was insincere. It is this normative aspect of commitments that interests me: holding a commitment subjects one to coherence norms, which enable one to live up to that commitment.

Commitments cannot be coerced. For instance, it is unreasonable to assert that one is honestly committed to perpetually looking after someone's well-being if one undertook this commitment while having a gun pointed at one. Such extreme circumstances would likely create a survival mechanism rather than a genuine commitment. However, commitments need not always be consciously undertaken; it is possible for individuals to find themselves undertaking a commitment without deliberate contemplation. For example, one might realize that one has unknowingly committed to looking after one's aging neighbor's well-being after noticing that one regularly checks on her, provides her with food, and, in general, prioritizes her well-being over personal endeavors. An unconscious commitment to look after that person's well-being developed over time without one's conscious awareness. Despite not being explicitly thought through, this commitment still operates within the normative framework I mentioned above: through coherence norms. These norms guide the person's actions and mental states toward fulfilling their commitment.

We have said that undertaking a commitment imposes coherence requirements on us that enable us to fulfill the relevant commitment. In other words, we are required to hold mental states, like beliefs or intentions, that are not incoherent with each other and with our commitment.

[4] I took this phrasing of 'options shrinking' from (Tebben, 2018).

However, what does it mean to say that different mental states are incoherent? Here, I am following Alex Worsnip (2018b), who holds that attitudes are incoherent if a rational agent is disposed to give up one of these attitudes upon becoming aware of holding them together, or at least she would experience some level of psychological resistance to jointly holding these attitudes. For example, if one believes that it is raining and at the same time believes that it is not raining. In conditions of full transparency, a rational agent would be disposed to give up one of these beliefs or would at least be psychologically resistant to holding them together. According to Worsnip, coherence requirements are requirements of rationality concerning the *structural coherence* between one's mental attitudes. These requirements specify which combinations of attitudes, including the absence of certain attitudes, are rational or irrational to hold simultaneously.

The specifics of these requirements vary based on the alignment between our commitment and our other mental states, including our beliefs, and thus differ from person to person. For instance, consider two individuals committed to fighting sexism. One believes that this fight involves vocally addressing every instance of sexist behavior she encounters. The other does not share this belief. Consequently, while the first individual may feel compelled to speak out against a sexist remark made by a colleague in a meeting, the second might deem it more detrimental to other women in the office to do so and, therefore, choose to remain silent.

While one retains the ability to deviate from these coherence norms, if one were to realize that doing so results in holding incoherent mental states, one would find some psychological resistance to such states. Furthermore, failing to satisfy these norms can lead to criticism for inconsistency or undermine the validity of the commitment itself.

3. Structural Encroachment

Let's go back to our initial examples: **Foreigner in Texas** and **Antiracist in Texas**.

For moral encroachers, these two cases yield the same result: Both Ana and Taylor did something epistemically and morally wrong when they formed the belief they did.

This diagnosis misses the mark in two places:

1. The moral encroacher's diagnosis that Ana's belief is irrational is too demanding because it relies on the assumption that she should have been aware of the marginalization of people of color in the United States.

2. The moral encroacher's diagnosis that Taylor's belief is unjustified is, in some sense, not severe enough. For it's true that, living in Texas, she should be aware of the marginalization of people of color in the US and so raise her epistemic threshold for the belief, but her belief seems especially irrational considering Taylor's explicitly antiracist commitments. So, Taylor forming the belief seems, in some sense, epistemically worse than someone else holding the same belief but who didn't have this commitment.

Although the focus of this paper is moral encroachers and how their diagnosis is not robust enough to account for the two cases, I want to briefly mention why we should not immediately turn to purism—the view that only evidential considerations are relevant for epistemic justification—for an answer.

Stereotypical purists would say that both Ana's and Taylor's beliefs are sufficiently supported by the same evidence; hence, they didn't do anything epistemically wrong.[5] Other purists might claim that in both cases something epistemically wrong happened because it is an epistemic mistake to use statistical evidence about groups to make inferences about persons.[6] So, in either way of developing purism, we would be unable to explain both why it seems that Ana didn't do anything wrong, and why Taylor's mistake seems to be even worse than if the mistake was made by someone without her commitments. How, then, can we explain our competing intuitions about these two cases?[7]

What I want to suggest is that it is one's commitments (*e.g.*, to be antiracist) along with some of our beliefs (*e.g.*, that in Texas people of color are wrongfully stereotyped as service workers) that can influence the threshold for a justified belief. I call this kind of phenomenon *structural encroachment*.

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[5] For a defense of this version of purism, see (Gardiner, 2018, ms.)
[6] For a defense of this version of purism, see (Munton, 2019).
[7] There is a version of purism that might be able to explain the differences between Taylor and Ana in moral terms, though not in epistemic terms. One might argue that a moral distinction between Ana and Taylor arises from Taylor's commitment to antiracism and awareness of social injustices in the US. This moral distinction influences what the individuals ought to believe, all things considered. Therefore, even if both Ana and Taylor are epistemically allowed to believe that Maria is a server, morally, Taylor is not permitted to do so because she would be negligent. For further development of this view, see (Hirvelä, 2023).
As I will explain in the remainder of the paper, I think Taylor makes both a moral and an epistemic mistake. The epistemic part becomes evident when noticing that if prompted to reflect on the coherence of her mental states, Taylor would think that she needed more evidence before settling on a belief about Maria's occupation—so, contrary to this version of purism she would not think that she was epistemically allowed to believe as she did. From her perspective, her belief does not amount to negligence but to plain incoherence. Hence, Structural Encroachment still gives us more insight into this case than this development of purism.
A full analysis of how different versions of purism could treat these cases is beyond the scope of this paper—but I hope to provide such an analysis in future work.

Let's get a closer look at our **Antiracist in Texas** case to understand this better.

Someone who is committed to being an antiracist is someone who holds a commitment to act in ways that stand against racism. Of course, one can act in ways that encompass observable behaviors as well as unobservable cognitive ones—such as repressing comments that might offend a person of color or, as with structural encroachment, seeking more evidence before forming a belief that can potentially be harmful to a person of color as in **Antiracist in Texas**. Taylor's antiracist commitment, along with her other beliefs, would require her to look for more evidence about Maria's job. Let me explain why.

Taylor is committed to being an antiracist; as such, she is subject to coherence requirements that would allow her to act and think in ways that support the fight against racism. Taylor had never seen Maria before, and thus, she does not know Maria's occupation. Taylor believes that people of color are often wrongfully stereotyped as belonging to the serving sector. That is, Taylor is aware that rushing into believing a person of color works in the service sector may harm the person of color, so she needs to be particularly careful with those beliefs and gather more evidence. Her commitment to being antiracist seems to raise her evidential threshold for how much evidence she needs to justifiably form the belief. Hence, in these cases and on her own accord, statistical evidence about this topic is not enough for her to form a justified belief. She must gather more evidence about Maria's occupation to be justified in believing that she is a server.

It is important to note that I am assuming that Taylor takes the statistical evidence about the occupations of people of color as providing good support for the truth of the belief but just not enough to be justified. Taylor does not need to deny that statistical evidence is usually a good indicator of the truth of a proposition, but she can still think that this support is not enough in cases like this one where the beliefs concern marginalized people. This important assumption about Taylor will become relevant in section 4.3.

In contrast, Ana is not required to raise her evidential threshold for her belief about Maria's occupation. Ana does not think that people of color are wrongfully stereotyped as belonging to the serving sector. She does not associate service jobs with something negative or demeaning; importantly, she believes that the US is a country with social equality. Believing that Maria works as a server is not incoherent with any of Ana's mental states.

It is the combination of both Taylor's commitment and her other beliefs, then, that requires her to raise the threshold for justification. For this reason, it is only in Taylor's case that structural encroachment takes place.

The specific actions and thoughts required under any commitment are not one-size-fits-all; they vary depending on the individual's unique circumstances and mental states. As I mentioned earlier, these requirements are about the *structural coherence* between one's mental attitudes. These requirements are shaped not only by our commitment but also by the rest of our mental states.

For instance, if someone is an antiracist but holds the belief that speaking up against a racist remark at a work meeting would be detrimental to the people of color they are trying to help, then they would be required not to speak up at this meeting. On the other hand, if they believe that speaking up is always more helpful in the fight against racism, then they would be required to speak up. Remember, to hold a commitment is to be subject to certain norms that, by obeying them, would allow us to live up to our commitment coherently with the rest of our mental states.

4. Objections and replies

As I have argued, structural encroachment has certain advantages over moral encroachment in that it can explain the difference between agents like Ana and Taylor. In this section, I want to address several objections that one might raise against the structural encroachment view.

4.1 The Rational Racist

As we stand, someone might object that moral encroachment seems to have an advantage over structural encroachment: moral encroachment applies exactly to cases where people are harmed since it is the harm that raises the evidential threshold for justified beliefs. Structural encroachment lacks this component; it is all about what the agent cares for or perceives as harmful, so it might apply to cases where no one is harmed. Furthermore, structural encroachment would potentially make people with racist behaviors rational in their bigotry. Consider the following example:

> **Racist at a Party.** R.S. is a person with racist beliefs and commitments—in particular, R.S. believes that people of color would lie to make others believe they are better than they are. He also has general knowledge, and he knows that only 5.7% of doctors in America are black.[8] R.S. is invited to a party. He is talking with a group of people he just met. In that group,

[8] Compare (Boyle, 2023)

> Michelle, a black woman, reports that she is a doctor working at the closest hospital. R.S. doubts that Michelle is telling the truth. Hence, he starts interrogating her about her past and about medical facts he knows. He thinks that only if Michelle answers convincingly will he believe she is a doctor.

Let's stipulate that R.S. would believe Michelle's words if she were white; R.S. would take Michelle's testimony as sufficient evidence that she is a doctor. If this is the case, our objector might press, then it seems that either R.S. is being epistemically irrational—he has the same type of evidence that would render similar propositions justified but failed to believe the relevant proposition—or, according to structural encroachment, the evidential threshold for believing that Michelle is a doctor differs in each case. But the latter, intuitively, seems like the wrong result; R.S. should not be justified in his refusal to believe that Michel is a doctor. So, we should reject structural encroachment.

First, it's important to note that structural encroachment is compatible with assessing R.S.'s racist belief that people of color systematically lie as epistemically irrational. There is no evidence that would sufficiently support the truth of this belief. Second, structural encroachment can help us make sense of R.S.'s behavior and predict what he, as a structurally rational agent, would do given his (irrational) beliefs and commitments. This feature of structural encroachment can be very useful when thinking about protecting people from marginalized groups from actions that come from racist beliefs and commitments. In **Racist at a Party**, R.S.'s actions and thoughts are normatively constrained by R.S.'s racist belief that people of color would deceive people about how good at something they are and his belief that only 5.7% of doctors in America are black. Given that he has these two beliefs, it should not be a surprise that he does not take Michelle's words at face value. By his own accord, it is very unlikely that Michelle is telling the truth, both given the statistics about black doctors in America and his racist belief. If a person knows about R.S.'s racist beliefs and commitments, she can anticipate that he will likely be dismissive of Michelle and may do something to prevent Michelle from being harmed by R.S.—such as warning Michelle about R.S.'s beliefs and commitments, be around Michelle and vouch for the things she said or confront R.S. when he displays his racist behaviors. Additionally, a person of color with this knowledge would not be caught off guard when R.S. is around.

Notice that the explanation that structural encroachment provides us with does not entail condoning racism. Structural encroachment just offers us a less simplistic explanation of why, for example, racist people have preferential treatment towards the testimony of white people. Yes, it is related to them being racist, but now we can see that being racist involves being committed to certain

ways of thinking and acting that, in some cases, could involve raising the evidential threshold for believing the testimony of people of color. Furthermore, as I just explained, structural encroachment is not only helpful in understanding the mechanisms behind racist behaviors, but it can also be instrumental in one's support of people from marginalized groups.

4.2 Excuses

Maybe moral encroachers could try to defend their view by arguing that Ana did something morally and epistemically wrong in the **Foreigner in Texas** case, but given that she is a foreigner, she is not blameworthy for the beliefs she holds. Ana is excused.

To address this objection, I want first to point out that there seems to be no room for excuses in paradigmatic cases of moral encroachment, where holding the relevant belief is enough to wrong someone epistemically.[9] For those developments of moral encroachment compatible with this line of objection, a closer analysis reveals that the objection itself is implausible. There are two ways in which Ana might be excused for her alleged wronging: either epistemically or morally. Either way, I will argue, will lead us to an undesirable consequence.

If Ana is epistemically excused, that means that although she holds an unjustified belief, she is not epistemically blameworthy. Given that she is a foreigner with no obligation to know about all the injustices that happen in the US, she is excused for holding the belief she holds about Maria's occupation. However, without presupposing moral encroachment, it is hard to see why Ana's belief should be considered unjustified. Ana's cognitive capacities are normal, and while in a foreign land, her attention to her environment tends to be above average. As a foreigner in a new place, she pays a lot of attention to her surroundings and, as a result, forms many new beliefs based on this carefully acquired evidence. This is the case with her belief that Maria is a server.

If her belief about Maria's occupation is unjustified because of circumstances that are completely irrelevant to how dutifully Ana was in collecting and assessing her evidence, then we will have to commit to the idea that one can always hold unjustified beliefs regardless of how careful one is when gathering evidence for them. Usually, whether we end up having a true belief seems to not be entirely up to us—even if our evidence strongly supports the truth of a belief, the world could be

[9] Compare (Basu, 2019b, 2019a; Basu & Schroeder, 2018).

such that the belief is false—but with justification, the burden is usually on us. This proposal implies that neither the truth nor the justification of our beliefs is up to us.[10]

If, on the other hand, Ana is morally excused, it means she committed a moral wrong, yet her circumstances relieve her of moral blame. However, it seems natural to think that if Ana is morally excused, then she should be epistemically excused, too. This conclusion is because moral encroachers argue that a belief's epistemic flaws are often identified through its moral faults. Consequently, if a morally incorrect belief is excused, its associated epistemic faults should be excused as well. But if Ana is epistemically excused, that leads us to the previous conclusion: that one can always hold unjustified beliefs regardless of how careful one is when gathering evidence for them.

4.3 Inter-Level Coherence and Wishful Thinking.

Wishful thinking is a cognitive process where the agent's desire that a proposition *p* is true interferes with the rational formation of that belief by distorting or ignoring evidence that does not support *p*. Wishful thinking is generally considered an epistemic error. An objector might question whether wishful thinking would be rationally permitted under the structural encroachment framework. If structural encroachment allows wishful thinking to be rational, the objector might conclude it should be rejected. Consider the following case:

> **Climate Change:** Greta thinks that her evidence *does not* provide sufficient support for believing that, in general, governments are doing an excellent job in fighting climate change—actually, her evidence supports that they are not. However, Greta, who is committed to fighting climate change, wants it to be the case that all governments are doing as much as possible for the cause, so she believes so.

The objector might argue that, similarly to **Antiracists in Texas,** in the **Climate Change** scenario, Greta's commitments and desires lower the threshold for the amount of evidence she needs to form a justified belief, just like Taylor's commitments raised hers. This makes her otherwise unjustified belief justified. This conclusion is absurd, and so, structural encroachment must be false.

However, structural encroachment does not allow wishful thinking to be rational. Greta's commitment to fighting climate change, along with her other mental states, would not trigger

[10] Not surprisingly, those committed to some types of externalism about justification might find this bullet worth biting. Compare with (Goldman, 1976; Littlejohn, forthcoming).

structural encroachment—lowering her evidential threshold would not be a coherent path for Greta to follow. As a structurally rational agent, Greta's mental states should trigger another coherence requirement. Worsnip (2018, p. 7) has called this requirement Inter-level coherence (ILC):

Inter-level coherence (ILC).

Rationality requires of an agent S that:

(i) If S believes that her evidence [sufficiently] supports D(*p*) → S takes D(*p*)

(ii) If S believes that her evidence does not [sufficiently] support D(*p*) → S does not take D(*p*)

D denotes the appropriate doxastic attitude of either *belief* (when the evidence sufficiently supports that the proposition *p* is more likely than not-*p*), *disbelief* (when the evidence sufficiently supports that not-*p* is more likely than *p*), or suspension of judgment (when the evidence sufficiently supports neither that *p* nor that not-*p* is more likely than the other).

In **Climate Change**, Greta believes that her evidence does not sufficiently support the belief that governments are doing a good job in fighting climate change. If Greta reported that she believes her evidence does not sufficiently support believing this about the government, but she does it anyway, then we would judge her belief as irrational. In this case, coherence requirements—in the form of ILC—require her not to have this belief about the government and would render it irrational regardless of her desires. Furthermore, this belief might interfere with her personal commitment to fighting climate change.

Compare that case with **Antiracist in Texas**. There, Taylor is not in conflict with ILC when her commitments and beliefs require her to raise her evidential threshold. Importantly, as I mentioned in section 3, Taylor believes that her evidence gives good support to the belief that Maria is a server, but she thinks that that support is not sufficient to give her a justified belief. That is, Taylor exemplifies (ii) above; rationality requires that Taylor does not believe that Maria is a server, given that she believes that her evidence does not sufficiently support that proposition. If Taylor reported that she thinks that there is too much at stake if she falsely believes that Maria is a server, and that is why she needs to gather more evidence for that proposition before believing it, we will not judge her irrational. At an intuitive level, at least, it makes sense that, given her commitment, she is looking for more evidence to avoid false beliefs on this topic. This course of action dovetails

nicely with her antiracist commitments and beliefs in a way that brings about structural encroachment.

I would like to briefly consider one final potential objection in this context. It might be questioned whether **Antiracist in Texas** exemplifies a situation where an agent's substantive and structural rationality requirements are in conflict. Worsnip (2018, pp. 6–9) has called such a conflict *Possibility of Iterative Failure*, (PIF), where one's evidence does not iterate across levels of beliefs. In other words, it is possible that the agent's first-order evidence supports D(p), and her high-order evidence supports believing that her first-order evidence does not support D(p).

An objector could argue that, based on Taylor's first-order statistical evidence, Taylor is obliged to believe that Maria is a server. However, Taylor's higher-order evidence suggests that her first-order statistical evidence does not support this belief, thereby requiring Taylor not to believe that Maria is a server. If this is the case, what I have introduced may simply represent another instance of PIF rather than a novel type of encroachment.

I believe there is no cause for concern in this matter. In **Antiracist in Texas**, what requires Taylor to look for more evidence before believing that Maria is a server in the restaurant is not any higher-order evidence she might possess. Rather, it is her recognition of the significant consequences of forming a false belief about Maria's occupation and her commitment to being an antiracist. As I anticipated in section 3, Taylor does believe that her first-order evidence suggests the proposition in question is more likely true than not, yet it fails to meet the justification threshold. However, her antiracist commitment, combined with the understanding that a false belief on this matter could harm Maria or people like Maria, makes her look for additional evidence. Taylor's commitments and beliefs do not render her evidence about Maria's occupation epistemically ineffective; they raise the threshold required to form a justified belief about this proposition.

Although I think I have provided good reasons to think that moral encroachers cannot deal with cases like **Foreigner in Texas** and **Antiracist in Texas**, let's assume that moral encroachment is true. Would the fact that moral encroachment is true imply that there is no need for structural encroachment?

The answer is no. If moral encroachment is true, structural encroachment would still help us explain why the antiracist in Texas seems to be doubly irrational while forming the belief about Maria's occupation: by her own lights, her evidence was not enough for justification, and

nevertheless, she holds that belief. Structural encroachment has its own right to belong among encroachments on epistemic justification, regardless of whether moral encroachment is true.

Conclusion

Structural encroachment is the view that one's commitments and other mental states (e.g., beliefs) can influence the threshold for evidence required to have a justified belief.

Commitments are normative in that when we undertake one, we become subject to some requirements—coherence requirements between our other mental states and our commitments—that allow us to follow through on our commitment. In some cases, these requirements can encroach on norms of epistemic justification by raising the threshold for the amount of evidence one needs to have a justified belief.

As a last thought, I want to (1) consider the morality of believing things that can bring harm to others and (2) give a possible explanation of why moral encroachers have the intuitions they have.

(1) Am I suggesting that if one does not have a commitment to be an antiracist along with the relevant knowledge of social injustice, one is off the hook both morally and epistemically when one forms a belief that can bring harm to people of color?

The answer is no. I am not saying that most people are off the hook in moral terms. I think it is true that people who live in a country with rampant social injustice have a moral obligation to know about these issues and to act in ways that would support the fight against the marginalization of people of color. I believe, however, that fewer people are making judgments that are epistemically flawed when they form certain beliefs about people of color than some moral encroachers might assume. Those doing something epistemically wrong have embraced a commitment to be a good person—in this case, by being antiracist—and have relevant beliefs about social injustice or marginalization. The things they know about social injustice inform the requirements that they are subject to as antiracists. In the **Antiracist in Texas** case, one of those requirements is a requirement on epistemic justification.

Of course, once one has adopted the commitment to be antiracist, *morally*, one ought not to indiscriminately give it up—which, in cases like **Antiracist in Texas**, would result in one's previously unjustified belief becoming justified and vice versa. Furthermore, in such cases, it will also be *psychologically* difficult for the agent to give these commitments up at random. In general, one can

indeed adopt commitments and eventually not endorse them anymore, with the result that any requirements that would follow from those commitments would no longer have any force on one. For example, if friendship is a commitment that would require me to support my friends when they need me to, I would not be required to do so if the friendship ended. However, cases like **Antiracist in Texas** involve commitments rooted in the agent's moral judgments—not in relationships that one can opt out of—and one usually does not give up these commitments.[11] It would be psychologically unlikely that the agent would give up this type of commitment because it acts as a moral imperative that moral agents feel obligated to follow regardless of their changing personal preferences.

(2) I think that philosophers who feel strongly positive about the truth of moral encroachment and its epistemological consequences belong to the group of people who are required to raise their threshold for justification—this is so because of their beliefs and commitments. They correctly see that they are under this epistemic requirement and want to expand that requirement to everyone else—regardless of who they are.

Now, I think there is a twofold explanation for this tendency to want to expand this requirement to everyone. One part is related to having a commitment to be a good person, and the other to having the relevant beliefs about marginalization in the US.

Let's start with the first part. There is a sense in which it is easy—but incorrect—to assume that we all have a commitment to being good people. Several great philosophers including Plato, Aristotle, and Kant, have suggested that humans are inclined towards goodness, whether through the pursuit of virtue, the realization of one's potential, or rational duty. However, the line between being committed to being a good person and merely having this alleged inclination can become blurry.

The key point is that even if humans naturally tend toward goodness, this is not the same as having a commitment to being good. A related example from personal health might help us see the

[11] Jaakko Hirvelä (2023, pp. 1801–1802) has developed an objection along these lines against radical moral encroachment—that changes in commitments can change an unjustified belief into a justified belief. Hirvelä's cases are very persuasive because he talks about types of commitments we all recognize can end effortlessly, like a friendship or a romantic relationship. Still, the commitments relevant to structural encroachment, at least how I have visualized them in this paper, shield this type of encroachment from these counterexamples—or at least make this counterexample unlikely. In future work, I would like to fully consider this potential challenge in other cases of structural encroachment that might not be rooted in the agent's moral commitments and relevant knowledge of the world.

distinction: we may sincerely express a desire to live healthier lives and eat fewer empty carbs, but without a real commitment, we are unlikely to adopt this lifestyle. Life is complicated, and empty carbs tend to give us a lot of pleasure. In that sense, while we might want to be healthier, we might not be ready to make the necessary changes.

Likewise, one might aspire to be a good person and even have a tendency for the good, but without a commitment to do so, one can truthfully keep saying that one wants to be good without doing what it takes to achieve it.

What about the tendency to expect people to know better about social injustice in the US? In the US, many people are aware that people living in this country have a moral responsibility to be informed about the social struggles of marginalized groups in the country. It is easy to forget that this moral obligation is situated in the US and to think that anyone is subject to it, regardless of who they are, where they live, or their relation to the US.

It might seem that making every person in the world subject to this norm is an acceptable thing to do given the potential moral implications of the requirement: if you know that some people are facing marginalization, that knowledge might motivate you to try to remedy this injustice. Assuming, however, that everyone ought to know about the social struggle of people in the US misses an important fact: there are many social norms, structures, and expectations in the US-context that for someone who did not grow up in or has not lived in the US for a long time are simply impossible to grasp fully.

Structural encroachment, unlike moral encroachment, is compatible with the complexity of moral obligations in society, and it gives us a more nuanced understanding of how sometimes the agent's commitments and other mental states can encroach on norms of epistemic justification.

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