

# Suspension, Higher-Order Evidence, and Defeat<sup>1</sup>

Errol Lord (Penn) and Kurt Sylvan (Southampton)

## 1. Introduction

In regulating one's intellectual life, one should pay heed to the evidence. Often this is a matter of considering which facts confirm or disconfirm some hypothesis one is considering. Although this is hard enough, it turns out that reckoning with the evidence would be much easier if this were the only task. For besides evidence that confirms or disconfirms a hypothesis one is considering (*first-order evidence*), there is also evidence that bears on our rationality in inquiring into the hypothesis (*higher-order evidence*). So, for example, you might know that you are prone to make mistakes when reasoning about the significance of certain statistical information; or you might know that, given the fact that you've been driving all night, you are in less than ideal condition for doing mental math; or you might know that, despite your having conscientiously reached a conclusion on a difficult subject, someone you take to be cleverer disagrees. All these facts about one's competence, condition, or situation bear on whether one's stance is rational, but it is unclear at best how they bear on truth-value of the hypothesis one is considering.<sup>2</sup>

As it happens, this basic contrast between first-order evidence and higher-order evidence raises a host of puzzles and problems. These difficulties have led many philosophers to adopt some extreme views in two related debates. The first debate is about the rational impact of disagreement. The second is about whether it is possible for there to be rational epistemic akrasia (e.g., cases where one rationally has a doxastic attitude *D* even though one believes one shouldn't have *D*).

When it comes to disagreement, extreme views abound. On one extreme, it has become popular to think that the higher-order evidence provided by peer disagreement *always* has a *dramatic* impact; on this view, higher-order evidence provided by peer disagreement always requires us to converge in some way with those with whom we disagree. On the other extreme lies the view that the higher-order evidence provided by disagreement has no rational impact whatsoever. According to this view, we should always just go with the first-order evidence and hence stick to our guns.

Extreme views also have considerable popularity in the other debate. Some think nothing prevents higher-order evidence from giving rise to rational epistemic akrasia. According to this view, there are not the right sorts of systematic connections between first-order evidence and higher-order evidence to prevent such uncomfortable situations. Although this view has its opponents, little has been done by them to explain why avoiding epistemic akrasia is required. It is hard to believe that avoiding akrasia is a *fundamental* obligation: as the vast literature on the normativity of rationality suggests,<sup>3</sup> coherence requirements of this kind are dubious as absolute requirements, and even dubious as principles there is *any* reason to follow, barring some further story about *what this reason is*. Without a vindication of the normativity of coherence requirements, it is not easy to feel comfortable ruling out the extreme view.

We think such extreme views must be wrong. But we want a framework that explains why they are wrong, and partly for this reason we also aren't satisfied with existing moderate approaches.<sup>4</sup> Hence, our central task is to develop a principled moderate framework for accommodating the normative significance of higher-order evidence.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Jade Fletcher, Mona Simion, Justin Snedegar, and Daniel Whiting for detailed comments, and to audiences at the University of Southampton and New York University for questions which shaped the paper.

<sup>2</sup> There are possible cases in which HOE alters first-order relations of evidential confirmation. But we will be arguing that the *distinctive significance* of HOE does not consist in this kind of impact.

<sup>3</sup> For overviews, see Way (2010) and Lord (forthcoming-1).

<sup>4</sup> As we will acknowledge again in the next section, some principled moderate stories have been told—e.g., the accuracy-based epistemic consequentialist story of Schoenfield (2018). But we think these stories are overly committal on foundational normative questions on which we think the best general view about the impact of higher-order evidence would be non-committal. One of us is also an epistemic non-consequentialist (see Sylvan (forthcoming)), and for this reason cannot accept Schoenfield's story as the fundamental story.

The work in the paper can be divided into two parts: negative and positive. Our negative claim is that the gridlock between extreme views and the existing moderate views owes to mistaken background assumptions about the relationship between first-order relations of evidential favoring, reasons for belief, and reasons for suspension. We think, however, that more work needs to be done to provide a systematic explanation of why these background assumptions fail in the cases that interest us. For this reason we also have a positive project.

The positive view in turn has two parts. The first part is the idea that higher-order evidence provides direct reasons for suspending judgment that typically leave evidential support relations on the first order intact: instead of destroying these relations, the reasons for suspension defeat or compete with the epistemic reasons for belief generated by these relations. Secondly, and more importantly, our framework explains how this defeat is possible by showing how these distinctive reasons for suspension of judgment flow from the constitution of suspension of judgment. As a result, our framework is embedded within an account of suspension of judgment that shows how new insights about its nature lead to a different picture of its rational profile. This framework provides a compelling basis for more moderate positions about disagreement and epistemic akrasia, which show the puzzles about these topics to rest on more fundamental mistakes about suspension and the relationship between reasons for suspension, reasons for belief, and evidence.

Our framework for explaining HOE-based reasons for suspension might be described as a sort of *constitutivist* framework. But we would want to stress two things before having the reader embrace this description. Firstly, we're neutral on whether to think about the constitutivism as a constitutivism of aims (leading to teleology) or a constitutivism of norms (leading to a non-teleological view). Secondly, to be neutral in a further way, we are here understanding constitutivism differently than it is normally understood, following Markovits (2014)'s understanding of Kantianism about reasons. Markovits took the Kantian view to be consistent with non-naturalism, and to be a substantive view according to which reasons are ultimately *given by* but perhaps not *reductively explained by* facts about the nature of agency. Although we happen to like reductive constitutivist views (see Lord and Sylvan (2019)), we here don't use 'constitutivism' to refer to such views. Hence we take this paper to be neutral on the obviously quite controversial question of whether a constitutivist reduction of normativity is possible.

With these aims and ideas in view, here is our plan. In the next section, we will provide some initial motivation for thinking that a framework like ours is needed by looking at the gridlock that has emerged between principled but extreme views and moderate but unsatisfying or unprincipled views about epistemic akrasia and disagreement. The gridlock owes, we'll see, to overlooked assumptions about the relationship between first-order relations of evidential favoring, reasons for belief, and reasons for suspension. But a systematic framework like ours is needed to explain how these assumptions could fail. Having made these points, we turn to our positive work in Section 3, seeking to provide a more fundamental motivation for the claim that higher-order evidence provides reasons to suspend judgment. We will do this by showing both how this claim fits into a more general view of the nature and rational profile of suspension, and by showing that pure evidentialists about epistemic rationality have a hard time accounting for the full range of higher-order evidence. In Section 4, we explain how our view accounts for the full range of higher-order evidence, and why it is preferable to existing views. We then draw things to a close in Section 5 by taking a step back to consider two ways in which our view can be incorporated into more fundamental frameworks in the ethics of belief.

## 2. Extremism, Moderation, and a New Third Way

### 2.1. *Extremism and Moderation*

To appreciate why some have been led to extreme views about the epistemically appropriate response to disagreement and other sources of higher-order evidence, it will help to reflect on examples. Consider a now-classic example that we take verbatim from Christensen (2010: 187):

*Drugs.* 'I am asked to be a subject in an experiment. Subjects are given a drug, and then asked to draw conclusions about simple logical puzzles. The drug has been shown to degrade people's performance in just this kind of task quite sharply. [...] I accept the offer, and, after

sipping a coffee while reading the consent form, I tell them I'm ready to begin. Before giving me any pills, they give me a practice question:

Suppose all bulls are fierce and Ferdinand is not a fierce bull. Which of the following must be true? (a) Ferdinand is fierce; (b) Ferdinand is not fierce; (c) Ferdinand is a bull; (d) Ferdinand is not a bull.

I become extremely confident that the answer is that only (d) must be true. But then I'm told that the coffee they gave me actually was laced with the drug. My confidence that the answer is 'only (d)' drops dramatically.'

On the one hand, it is tempting to think that the subject's reaction in this case is rational, and that it would be *irrational* to maintain confidence that 'only (d)' is the correct answer. This thought is tempting because it is tempting to think that Christensen should not be confident that he has sufficient reason to believe this conclusion, and hence should not believe it. On the other hand, this conclusion does follow from the premises, and we can imagine that the subject sees that this is the case before learning about the coffee. Hence, it appears that 'only (d)' is the conclusion that there is conclusive reason to believe, given straightforwardly apprehensible logical truths. It is hard to think the subject ceases to possess this reason just owing to the information about the drug. From these apparent facts, we already have a strong intuitive tension, which can be more officially seen with the help of two plausible principles:

**Conclusive Reason:** If there is a conclusive reason R to believe that p, and S possesses this reason, then it cannot be irrational for S to believe p on the basis of R.

**Level-Bridging:** If there is a strong undefeated reason to believe that one lacks sufficient reason to believe that p, then one is rationally required not to believe p.

From the Conclusive Reason principle and the thought that there is conclusive reason to believe simple logical consequences of rational beliefs, we get the conclusion that the subject in Christensen's example cannot be irrational to believe that the answer is 'only (d)'. But from the Level-Bridging principle, we appear to get the opposite conclusion.

Something, it seems, must go. Three kinds of extreme views have emerged to explain what should go. On the one hand, some accept Conclusive Reason but reject Level-Bridging. This option is defended by Coates (2012). He agrees that if there is a strong undefeated reason to believe that one lacks sufficient reason to believe that p, then one ought to believe that one lacks sufficient reason to believe that p. But he denies that if one rationally believes that one lacks sufficient reason to believe that p, it cannot still be rational for one to believe that p. Hence he thinks that rational epistemic akrasia is possible. This idea is, we think, worth avoiding if possible.

On the other hand, some try to accept both principles but deny that they conflict by denying that one can have a strong undefeated reason to believe a false proposition about what the reasons recommend. Titelbaum (2015) and Way and Whiting (2016) in effect defend this option. Although we respect the arguments given by these authors, we also think that it would be nice to avoid the view that mistakes about what the reasons recommend are impossible. Such mistakes seem possible.

Finally, some accept the Level-Bridging Principle but reject Conclusive Reason. Worsnip (2015) recommends an intriguing version of this option. He follows philosophers of practical reason like Scanlon (1998), Kolodny (2005), and Broome (2013) in distinguishing between what reasons require and what rationality requires. Defenders of this option would then recommend replacing Conclusive Reason with a principle that replaces the 'it cannot be irrational' with a 'it cannot be contrary to reason'. Although we agree that we should distinguish between what reasons simpliciter require and what formal rationality requires (and we take this to be all Scanlon and Kolodny believe), we think it is extremely counterintuitive to deny that *possessed* reasons and rationality can issue conflicting requirements. For this reason, we also see Worsnip's tack as a last resort.

In the narrower literature on the higher-order evidence provided by disagreement, we find a different batch of extreme views. On the one hand, there are those who hold the *equal weight* view,

which maintains that whenever you disagree with epistemic peers,<sup>5</sup> you are rationally required to split the difference between your credence and theirs. Translating to ‘coarse-grained’ or outright attitudes (our focus here),<sup>6</sup> the equal weight view predicts that whenever you disagree with an epistemic peer, you are rationally required to suspend judgment. On the other extreme there are what we’ll call *extreme steadfasters*. Extreme steadfasters maintain that you are never required to change your mind in the face of peer disagreement.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most popular strategies for defending these positions rely on the idea that one sort of evidence is irrelevant. Equal weight theorists argue that when you disagree, you are required to set aside the first-order evidence you initially heeded.<sup>7</sup> Once you bracket this evidence, though, there isn’t anything left to support belief or disbelief. Thus, suspension is required.

On the other side, there are theorists arguing that the higher-order evidence is not relevant at all. According to them, the evidence says what it says and we should just follow it. Most of the arguments for this position contend that giving higher-order evidence rational power creates more problems than it is worth. Weatherson (2019), for example, argues that thinking that higher-order evidence generates first-order reasons gives rise to vicious regresses, which are avoidable only by ‘screening off’ the rational impact of higher-order evidence. He uses this view to support a steadfast line on disagreement.

Each extreme view about the rational impact of disagreement is a member of a wider class of views. The equal weight view is a form of conciliationism, a more general view which holds that the fact that some peer disagrees is always a reason to reform one’s opinion. Conciliationism on its own says nothing about *how much* one should reform one’s opinion. The equal weight view takes an extreme line on this. On the other hand, the extreme steadfast view is a member of a wider class of steadfast views, which all maintain that *at least sometimes* it is rational to maintain one’s original belief in the face of disagreement.<sup>8</sup> Steadfasting *per se* is compatible with disagreement having massive rational effects in many cases. It just denies that it always has these effects.

Steadfasting is compatible with conciliationism. It is compatible with the claim that at least sometimes one can maintain one’s original view that facts about disagreement always provide reasons against belief. And, indeed, this combination of views is downright commonsensical. It is, we think, a moderate position worth fighting for, and we intend to fight for it. The problem, though, is that it is unclear *how* to vindicate it. Extant versions of moderate conciliationism and steadfasting have been light on the details,<sup>9</sup> with the notable exception of Schoenfield’s consequentialist conciliationism (which we think is overly committal on foundational normative questions). They fail to offer views about the mechanics of the rational impact of disagreement that vindicate common sense. One of our main goals is to provide a framework for delivering these mechanics.

## 2.2. *Making Room for Moderation*

To shed light on the under-explored area of logical space we would like to inhabit, we need to consider an insufficiently targeted background assumption lurking behind our earlier formulation of the akrasia puzzle. Here it will help to consider a further kind of case and a specific version of the reasoning that has appeared in the literature. Worsnip (2015)’s discussion is, we think, instructive. Worsnip suggests that in cases where we can rationally believe false propositions about what the evidence supports, it can be rational to hold doxastic attitudes that are not supported by the epistemic

---

<sup>5</sup> Various definitions of epistemic peerhood are provided in the literature. The rough idea is that your epistemic peers are those with whom you share evidence and who are just as good as you at processing that evidence.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that the view we develop below is, in the first instance, about outright attitudes. There is then a hard and interesting question about the relationship between these attitudes and credences. We don’t know how to resolve that question. But we would want to resolve it before saying anything directly about credences. Thanks to Jade Fletcher for pressing for clarification here.

<sup>7</sup> This is often done by appealing to a principle like David Christensen’s Independence principle (see Christensen (2007), Christensen (2011), Christensen (2009), and also Elga 2007, Cohen (2013); for criticism, see Kelly (2013), Sosa (2013), Lackey (2010), and Lord (2014)).

<sup>8</sup> Most extant opponents of the equal weight view (and other extreme conciliationist views) are in fact moderate steadfasters rather than extreme steadfasters, with Tom Kelly being the exemplar.

<sup>9</sup> See Lord (2014) for discussion.

reasons that this evidence provides. Now, to get to Worsnip's conclusion in such cases, we will need the following assumption:

**Evidential Confirmation-Reasons Principle:** Necessarily, if the evidence confirms attitude A, then the epistemic reasons favor attitude A.

From this assumption and our two earlier principles, we can infer that in such cases, it could be rational to hold doxastic attitudes which are not supported by the epistemic reasons. But if this assumption is false, we cannot make this inference. We could give a different diagnosis: while the evidence bears a strong probabilistic relation to a certain conclusion, and favors that conclusion more than others, there is not yet sufficient reason to jump to that conclusion. This diagnosis would avoid a tension between our two principles. It would restore the connection between levels at the cost of weakening the link between strength of evidential confirmation and overall strength of reasons.

Is this option worth considering? We think so. Reflecting on another hidden assumption in the discussion of our first example gives strong reason to consider it. Notice that in *Drugs*, we cannot generate a tension between the Conclusive Reason and Level-Bridging principles without the help of the following assumption:

**Entailment-Reasons Principle:** Necessarily, if the facts entail that p and one is aware of them, then one's epistemic reasons decisively favor believing p.

This principle is far from obvious, as the literature querying the relationship between logic and reasons for belief already suggests.<sup>10</sup> Admittedly, the existing literature mainly suggests that there cannot necessarily be objective reason to believe whatever is entailed by one's beliefs, since these beliefs may be unjustified. But as both of us have more recently stressed in developing accounts of possessed normative reasons,<sup>11</sup> it is also not plausible that one *possesses* a reason to believe p simply in virtue of having a justified belief which entails that p: one must also be sensitive to the relevant ground of the reason-for relation (e.g., some relevant logical relation or evidential relation). What we want to suggest here is that the example of higher-order evidence gives a further reason for doubting this principle.<sup>12</sup>

We can now state the more general doctrine that we take to be indispensable for generating a tension between the Conclusive Reason and Level-Bridging principles:

**Logico-Evidentialism about Epistemic Reasons:** If the evidence E entails or strongly confirms p, then there is always a correspondingly strong reason to believe p.

Of course, a story does need to be told about *why* this doctrine fails in the cases that interest us. It may, after all, remain tempting to think that this principle at least generates default reasons that would need to be defeated by competing reasons, and we need to know more about the mechanics of this interaction. As Christensen and others have noted, it isn't enough here to appeal to the notion of undercutting defeat, since undercutting defeaters are meant to sever evidence-for relations, and these relations are not severed in the examples that concern us.<sup>13</sup>

Here, however, we think some further existing literature serves as a useful guide. Note that we are not the first theorists to reject this doctrine. Defenders of pragmatic encroachment have already rejected it. Schroeder (2012)'s story is instructive. He suggests that even if all epistemic reasons *for* belief are generated by the logical and probabilistic relations between the evidence and further propositions, it does not follow that all reasons *against* belief have the same foundation. And if not, then it cannot be obvious that there is *sufficient* epistemic reason to believe even straightforward consequences of one's evidence. For even if there is an impeccable reason for belief,

---

<sup>10</sup> For the *locus classicus*, see Harman (1984).

<sup>11</sup> See Sylvan (2015) and Lord (2018).

<sup>12</sup> Gonzalez de Prado Salas (forthcoming) argues that higher-order evidence casts doubt on the Entailment-Reasons Principle precisely because it makes it the case that one fails to possess the first-order evidence, by making one insensitive to the grounds of the reason. This does happen, but we don't think it is a fully general explanation.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Christensen (2010), Lasonen-Aarnio (2014), and Pryor (2013).

one cannot follow it if there is an impeccable reason against. Schroeder suggests that stakes generate such reasons against belief, yielding a deeper explanation of how pragmatic encroachment works.<sup>14</sup>

We think that higher-order evidence plays a similar role to the role Schroeder thinks the stakes play.<sup>15</sup> In one respect, we are on easier footing than Schroeder, since it is more obvious why the reasons here should be properly epistemic.<sup>16</sup> But again, to get an account that is preferable to extant views, more will need to be said about why such reasons for suspension exist.

Thankfully, ideas already on the shelf provide a guide. Many epistemologists and philosophers of normativity are attracted to the idea that epistemic reasons for belief are generated by standards derived from the essential nature of belief.<sup>17</sup> A common example of such a story is the attempt to ground epistemic reasons for belief by appealing to the essential aim or standard of correctness for belief. Given Schroeder's observations, it would be natural to tell a similar story about how the nature of suspension might be able to generate properly epistemic but non-evidential reasons for belief. One might claim that suspending judgment essentially aims to protect us from the risk of being wrong, where the relevant notion of risk isn't purely evidence-determined. This is why, one might suggest, it is possible to suspend judgment in a high-stakes case on the basis of the stakes attaching to acting on the belief. The naturalness of extending a constitutivist account of epistemic reasons for belief to reasons for suspension provides a strategic basis for our project. The resulting derivation of reasons for suspension from the nature of suspension will take place at a high level. It could then be interpreted differently by theorists with different larger normative frameworks; epistemic non-consequentialists, for example, might develop the story about the details in one way, and consequentialists in another way. But while the account leaves some theoretical options open in this respect, it is clearly a principled and explanatory account.

We suggest that this kind of account provides the best general explanation of why higher-order evidence generates defeaters. We will turn in the next section to consider the nature of suspension of judgment and how this leads to higher-order defeaters, and then return in the section after to explain in more detail how the account resolves the gridlock and fits in the literature on disagreement and higher-order evidence. We will conclude with some directions for further research, noting two importantly different avenues left open: one avenue unites the story with Schroeder's account of pragmatic encroachment, while a different avenue remains within a non-pragmatic, purely accuracy-based epistemology.

### 3. Higher-Order Evidence and Reasons to Suspend

In this section we will provide motivation for thinking that higher-order evidence generates reasons to suspend. This motivation has two parts. Firstly, continuing the train of thought started in the last section, we will argue further against the idea that we can fully explain epistemic rationality by appealing to facts that confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis. We will do this by arguing that such views cannot account for the rational impact of all higher-order evidence. This argument will provide independent motivation for denying the Logico-Evidentialist background assumptions at the heart of the debates canvassed in the previous section. It will also motivate the claim that higher-order evidence provides direct reasons to suspend judgment.

The second ambition of this section is to argue that a plausible general account of the nature of suspension and reasons to suspend implies that higher-order evidence provides direct reasons to suspend. We will sketch this general account and provide some motivation for it, but we won't fully

---

<sup>14</sup> As a matter of detail, Schroeder does *not* maintain that the stakes directly provide reasons to suspend. Instead, he holds that the stakes provide reasons against belief, and that sometimes those reasons are strong enough that the balance of the reasons for and against belief requires suspension. EL argues against this in favor of the view that we need to posit direct reasons to suspend in Lord (forthcoming-2). On pragmatic encroachment, EL then defends similar conclusions to Schroeder.

Similar moves are made within a contrastivist framework in Snedegar (2017: Chapter 6). We want to be neutral in this paper on whether contrastivism is true. KS indicates some sympathy for contrastivism in Fogal and Sylvan (2016). We might be willing to embrace it if it is needed to explain the weight of some reasons for withholding, as Snedegar suggests.

<sup>15</sup> But again, we think that the higher-order evidence provides direct reasons to suspend, not just reasons *against* belief.

<sup>16</sup> See Lord (forthcoming-2) for a more systematic argument that they are properly epistemic.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Velleman (2000), Sosa (2007), Sosa (2010), Sosa (2015), Shah (2003), Wedgwood (2002), and Lord and Sylvan (2019).

defend it. Our goal is merely to show that we have a plausible story about how higher-order evidence provides direct reasons to suspend.

### 3.1. *When the Evidence Gives Out*

Those attracted to broadly evidentialist views—i.e., nearly all the main participants in our two debates—might doubt the need to use direct reasons to suspend to understand the rational impact of higher-order evidence. Why posit direct reasons to suspend if you can get by just with the evidence?

There are several reasons why we need reasons to suspend which aren't determined just by evidential confirmation relations and logical relations between evidence and attitudes.<sup>18</sup> One of these reasons is particularly germane here: there is no plausible straightforward evidentialist explanation of the full range of cases involving higher-order evidence. This is because some higher-order evidence is *merely* higher-order evidence—i.e., it is evidence that *only* bears on your rational standing vis-à-vis some question. It doesn't speak to the first-order question at all. This fact precludes any straightforward evidentialist account of the rational role of the higher-order evidence.<sup>19</sup>

Let's unpack the thought. Consider *Drugs* again:<sup>20</sup>

*Drugs.* 'I am asked to be a subject in an experiment. Subjects are given a drug, and then asked to draw conclusions about simple logical puzzles. The drug has been shown to degrade people's performance in just this kind of task quite sharply. [...] I accept the offer, and, after sipping a coffee while reading the consent form, I tell them I'm ready to begin. Before giving me any pills, they give me a practice question:

Suppose all bulls are fierce and Ferdinand is not a fierce bull. Which of the following must be true? (a) Ferdinand is fierce; (b) Ferdinand is not fierce; (c) Ferdinand is a bull; (d) Ferdinand is not a bull.

I become extremely confident that the answer is that only (d) must be true. But then I'm told that the coffee they gave me actually was laced with the drug. My confidence that the answer is 'only (d)' drops dramatically.'

Plausibly, the fact that the coffee is laced with the drug has some impact on what the subject epistemically ought to do. Indeed, it is plausible that he is forbidden from believing that (d) is the right answer. He ought to suspend judgment. Furthermore, this intuition remains even if we emphasize that his reasoning was logically impeccable and he had *proof* that (d) is the correct answer.

How might the evidentialist explain this result? One sort of evidentialist simply can't. This character accepts what we will call *Strong Evidentialism*:

**Strong Evidentialism:** The rational doxastic attitude toward *p* is solely determined by the evidence for *p* and for  $\sim p$ .

The balance of the evidence for and against whether (d) is the correct answer is clear. Again, we could even imagine that the subject has a proof that (d) is right. So if all we have is the first-order evidence, we can't explain why he should suspend judgment. Of course, not all evidentialists are committed to Strong Evidentialism. The natural place to turn is *Weak Evidentialism*:

**Weak Evidentialism:** The rational doxastic attitude for *S* to adopt is solely determined by *S*'s *total evidence*.

---

<sup>18</sup> See Lord (MS) for a more comprehensive survey.

<sup>19</sup> In one way or another, this fact has been pointed out frequently in the literature. See Christensen (2010), Schoenfield (2015a), and Schoenfield (2015b). Related but more general issues are discussed by Pryor (2013).

<sup>20</sup> See Lord (MS), Lord (forthcoming-2) for further discussion of a similar case that is inspired by Elga (Ms) and Schoenfield (2015a).

This view is the sort of view that both conciliationists and steadfasters have in mind. But here's the problem: it is wholly unclear *how* the 'total evidence' makes it the case that I should suspend judgment. This result cannot simply be explained by probability relations. The interaction between first and higher-order evidence doesn't affect the probability relations between the first-order evidence and proposition at issue. Maybe it's fine to say in these cases that the total evidence 'points toward' suspension. But we want some explanation of why it points toward suspension.<sup>21</sup>

Reasons to suspend offer resources to explain how it is that the higher-order evidence has the requisite effect. It isn't because it evidentially interacts with the first-order evidence to yield sufficiently low confirmation or make the needle on some metaphorical evidential dial move in some direction. Rather, the higher-order evidence directly provides a reason to suspend, which balances against the reasons to believe. In this case, it makes sense for me to suspend. Given what I know about my possible impairment, this is the proper response. Thus, the reason to suspend is intuitively weightier than the reasons to believe.

Opponents will now likely complain that we haven't provided an adequate explanation. For we haven't given a deeper story about why the reason to suspend is weightier. That's true, but it wasn't what we were after. We don't think we need to give a general normative theory of weight; this could only be described through the correct fundamental normative theory, a matter on which we wish to remain neutral here. Rather, what we want is a *structural explanation* of *how* suspension could be required, and direct reasons to suspend provide that explanation.<sup>22</sup> The evidentialist lacks a clear explanation at the same level, since it is not clear what they can invoke to do the explanatory work. They cannot exploit the aspect of evidence one usually exploits to do the work—i.e., to the amount of confirmation or evidential support. By appealing to direct reasons to suspend, we get additional structural resources to explain how suspension could be required despite the confirmational facts.

This fact yields strong initial motivation for appealing to reasons for suspension in the context of theorizing about the rational power of higher-order evidence. In our view, this motivation is decisive. We can't get by simply by with the evidence for and against *p*. But even if we retreat to Weak Evidentialism, we need a tool to help explain *how* mere higher-order evidence can require suspension. Reasons to suspend furnish this tool.

In the next subsection we will further bolster this point by showing how the existence of direct reasons to suspend in higher-order evidence cases flows naturally from a plausible account of suspension of judgment, before turning to argue that reasons to suspend provide the right tool to prop up a principled moderate account in the two debates discussed at the outset.

### 3.2. *The Nature of Suspension and What It Tells Us about the Rational Profile of Suspension*

Whether or not one is a functionalist about mental states, it should seem undeniable that function is a helpful tool for differentiating mental states. With that thought in mind, we will be arguing for a view about suspension which yields direct reasons for suspension on the grounds that it best captures key functional desiderata. In fact, we will argue that there are two different varieties of suspension, and that there are interesting and underappreciated direct reasons for both varieties.

Let's start by thinking about the function of belief and disbelief. A helpful tool in this project is an *intellectual agenda*, which one could represent by a set of questions on which one takes a stand or is seeking to take a stand. Belief and disbelief are ways of determining the status of a question on your agenda. *Determining* is a way of taking a *settled stance* on some issue. When you determine the status of some claim via belief or disbelief, you settle the question for yourself, and thereby add some belief to your doxastic corpus. A functional upshot of this is that when you determine the status of a claim in this way, the claim is available to you for rational purposes.

---

<sup>21</sup> Christensen (2010) suggests that we understand the evidence just in terms of the facts that bear on the rationality of belief. EL argues in (MS) that this view trivializes the debate between evidentialists and pragmatists. Better, we think, to conceive of the evidence as the facts that confirm or disconfirm hypotheses. But doing this necessitates positing reasons to suspend.

<sup>22</sup> There may be more of a puzzle in cases where one has very strong evidence for *p* and equally strong evidence against *p*. Plausibly, these evidential relations generate correspondingly strong reasons, and the reason to suspend must be sufficiently weighty to outweigh them both if we want to explain why one ought to suspend here. Here it may be necessary, as Snedegar (2017: Ch.6) suggests, to combine the kind of account we are offering with a contrastivist picture of the reason-relation.



Suspending judgment is another way of taking a settled stance. However, unlike belief and disbelief, when you suspend you do not add any beliefs to your doxastic corpus. To use Scott Sturgeon's apt phrase, when you suspend about whether *p*, you adopt a *settled neutrality* when it comes to *p*.<sup>23</sup> While you don't add any belief to your doxastic corpus, you do adopt some attitude that leaves the *issue* on your agenda. This thought captures the datum that suspension is an honest-to-goodness attitude, not merely the absence of belief and disbelief.

What is the functional upshot of adopting a state of settled neutrality? Or, to put the question in normative terms, why should one ever adopt such an attitude when one could just remain unopinionated about *p*—i.e., not form a settled stance at all? To answer this question, we need to further investigate the contours of settled neutrality. Cutting to the chase, we think there are two important forms of settled neutrality.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, you can form an *interrogative attitude* about whether *p*.<sup>25</sup> As etymology and syntax suggest, interrogative attitudes seem to be mental states directed at *questions*.<sup>26</sup> Paradigm examples include curiosity and wonder. When you are curious whether *p*, you have an attitude directed at the question of whether *p* is the case: the question is what piques your interest. In paradigmatic cases of curiosity, you don't believe or disbelieve, but you do have some sort of attitude toward the question of whether *p*.

The functional role of this kind of state is to dispose you to determine whether *p*. For example, it grounds dispositions to be on the lookout for evidence salient to whether *p*, to perform actions that will help you settle whether *p*, to draw your attention to other knowledge germane to *p*, and so on. Hopefully it is obvious why this state often has a rational point. Frequently we lack the resources to rationally determine the answer to some question we ought to keep on the agenda. For example, in many cases where one's evidence is evenly split, it makes sense to keep the question of whether *p* on one's agenda even though neither belief nor disbelief is rational. It would be unfortunate if this evidential situation forced us to drop the issue off the agenda completely. Indeed, it is precisely in these sorts of situations that we need a state that disposes us to settle whether *p*. Interrogative attitudes fit the bill.

Thus, interrogative attitudes allow us to take a settled stance without adding some claim (or its negation) to our doxastic corpus. They do this because they are directed at questions. We can thus take a settled stance about *whether p*, and this stance can keep the issue of whether *p* on the agenda without determining the answer. Furthermore, by adopting an interrogative attitude, we adopt an attitude that disposes us to settle whether *p*. Often this attitude is the rational one to adopt.

Interrogative attitudes are useful in situations where we need to keep an issue on the agenda because settling the issue is important. This is why it makes sense to form an interrogative attitude rather than drop the question in cases where one's evidence doesn't justify belief or disbelief. On the other end of the spectrum, there are *anti-interrogative attitudes*. Anti-interrogative attitudes allow us to take a settled stance towards an issue in a way that disposes us *not* to settle the question in the future. Staunch agnosticism in the religious case provides a good example of such an attitude in action: one settles to avoid the question of whether God exists because one doesn't believe one will ever have the evidence needed to settle it. Hence, while forming an interrogative attitude is a way of taking a settled stance that disposes one to settle the issue, and deciding to be unopinionated is a way of dropping the issue, forming an anti-interrogative attitude is a way of *burying* the issue.

Staunch agnosticism aside, it may seem less obvious why forming an anti-interrogative attitude might make rational sense in ordinary cases. To get a better sense of why, notice that there are situations where it makes sense to adopt a settled neutrality even though it doesn't make sense to form an interrogative attitude. For example, consider the question of whether Karl Marx had an odd or even number of food particles in his beard when he died. We take it you are like us and have no evidence bearing on this question. Furthermore, you are highly unlikely to ever get such evidence.

---

<sup>23</sup> See Sturgeon (2010).

<sup>24</sup> For much more, see Lord (MS) and Lord (forthcoming-2).

<sup>25</sup> See Friedman (2013a), Friedman (2013b), and Friedman (2015).

<sup>26</sup> It is controversial whether the *fundamental* objects of interrogative attitudes are questions. But as we indicate above, the surface appearances certainly make them appear to be question-directed: verbs for interrogative attitudes take questions rather than that-clauses as complements, and the word 'interrogative' is derived from the Latin word for questioning. For deeper arguments, however, see Friedman (2013a).

Dropping the issue is one option. But if we were to adopt an attitude regarding the issue, it doesn't look like any of the options considered so far fit. Belief and disbelief are out. Interrogative attitudes dispose us to determine truth-values, but there is little point in having an attitude like that in this case. It is plausible that we *know* that we will never have sufficient evidence to rationally determine the truth-value. In virtue of this last fact, though, it makes sense to form an attitude that insulates you from the question. We don't merely want to forget about it. We want to take steps to make sure it doesn't bother us again. This is what anti-interrogative attitudes do. They dispose you to *not* be on the lookout for evidence, to not pick up on salient background knowledge, to not perform actions that would uncover evidence, and so on. Such attitudes make sense in cases where a stand is needed towards a claim that is unlikely to be rationally settled.<sup>27</sup>

Now we have enough to start to see the contours of reasons to suspend. They will be reasons to form either interrogative or anti-interrogative attitudes. Both sorts of attitudes are forms of settled neutrality. The crucial difference between them is that interrogative attitudes open us up to the evidence relevant to some question, whereas anti-interrogative attitudes insulate us from such evidence. Reasons to suspend are reasons for such attitudes.

As we saw in the last section, there is good reason to think that higher-order evidence provides reasons to suspend, and this is plausible even before investigating suspension and its normative profile. After all, what we want to explain in the most interesting cases involving higher-order evidence is the fact that one ought to suspend judgment on the basis of the higher-order evidence. A natural explanation of this fact is that the higher-order evidence directly provides reasons to suspend that are decisive in the relevant cases.

The plausibility of this claim is reinforced by the positive account given here. Interrogative attitudes are especially relevant. In many of the interesting cases involving higher-order evidence, it is plausible that one should form an interrogative attitude. That is, one should take a stand about the relevant question, but only insofar as one adopts a state that disposes one to determine the answer to the question. This is because in most of the relevant cases, the question is important, and it is also important for one to be disposed to determine its answer. We can confirm this by thinking about Drugs. There it is plausible that the subject should form an interrogative attitude upon learning about the laced coffee. After all, he was asked to form a view about the question. So he should be on the lookout for ways to determine the answer. But given what seems to him to be his likely impairment, it is too risky to rely on the first-order evidence. Forming an interrogative attitude is the thing to do.

#### 4. A Wondrous Resolution

Having sketched our framework, the first thing that we want to note is that it is on track to vindicate conciliationism of some sort.<sup>28</sup> Of course, the claim that higher-order evidence generates reasons for suspension is strictly speaking compatible with the further claim that these reasons are never sufficient, since reasons are one thing and sufficient reasons another. And so full-fledged conciliationism may not appear to be automatically vindicated. But we think our framework gives novel reasons for rejecting extreme steadfast views that deny that there is ever sufficient reason to suspend in the cases at issue.

---

<sup>27</sup> In other work (Lord forthcoming-2) EL argues that anti-interrogative attitudes are also called for in cases where you owe it to yourself (e.g., cases of so-called grit à la Morton and Paul (2018)) or others (e.g., cases where you owe it to your friends to think well of them) to become insulated from evidence. We put these cases to one side because of the controversy surrounding them. For other reasons to adopt anti-interrogative attitudes, see Rosenkranz (2007).

<sup>28</sup> It's not for nothing that we say 'on track'. For there are important exceptions. For example, it is not plausible that there will be a reason against belief *every* time there is disagreement. For there can be undercutting defeaters of the reason to suspend provided by the fact about disagreement. A second point to stress here is that it matters here how you define conciliationism. We don't think our view necessarily provides a vindication of conciliationism about confidence or credence. It's an open question how reasons to suspend impact our credences. So it might be that facts about disagreement don't always provide reasons to lower our confidence, at least on some ways of understanding what it means to lower one's confidence. So what we think is vindicated is conciliationism about belief: facts about disagreement provide reasons against belief. If facts about disagreement provide higher-order evidence and higher-order evidence provides reasons to suspend, then facts about disagreement will provide reasons to suspend. These are reasons that compete with the reasons to believe, and thus are reasons against believing.

To see why, let's first consider extreme steadfast views that seek to accept both of the principles that initially seemed to generate our puzzle while also holding on to Logico-Evidentialism about Epistemic Reasons. These views seek to avoid this implication by holding that one cannot rationally be misled about what the evidence supports. These views imply, we believe, that it cannot be rational even to wonder whether one might have been wrong in thinking that one's evidence supports *p* if it does support *p*. They imply not only that Christensen's confidence shouldn't drop, but also that he shouldn't even be curious about whether his evidence supports *p*. This opposition to curiosity and wonder strikes us as worse than obstinacy or dogmatism: it smacks of anti-intellectualism and illiberalism. Only in cases where it is just obvious that *p* might it seem right to claim that wondering whether *p* involves a failure of rationality. Yet it is not obvious from the subject's perspective that the evidence gives sufficient reason for belief in the Drugs case.<sup>29</sup>

Here is a *reductio* argument for thinking that the steadfast view in question invites this implication. Suppose what is plausible for the sake of argument: the subject in Christensen's example should wonder whether the answer he first embraced is, after all, the right one. More specifically, he should wonder whether he has sufficient evidence for this conclusion. If our view is right, it follows that he should suspend judgment, since suspension of one sort *just is* the holding of some interrogative attitude. Hence if some interrogative attitude is required, one kind of suspension is required. Yet the following more specific principle seems no less plausible than our original Level-Bridging principle:

**Further Level-Bridging Principle:** If one ought rationally to suspend judgment about whether one has sufficient reason to believe that *p*, then one ought rationally not to believe that *p*.

Since the subject ought rationally to wonder whether he has sufficient reason to believe *p* in Christensen's case, it follows that he ought rationally to suspend on whether his evidence supports *p*. Given the bridging principle, it follows that the subject ought rationally not to believe that the answer is 'only (d)'. Yet he intuitively continues to possess conclusive evidence for this conclusion. So, if Logico-Evidentialism is preserved, the tension between level-bridging principles and Conclusive Reason is preserved. But this is contrary to the steadfast view at issue. Hence—barring revisions—the view implies that Christensen's subject would be irrational to wonder about whether his attitude was rational.

We say that it isn't irrational to wonder in such cases. We offer a simpler solution: reject the background assumption of Logico-Evidentialism. This allows us to keep our principles and the data without contempt for curiosity. And again, rejecting Logico-Evidentialism is not an extreme option. It is what the nature of suspension of judgment together with the systematic links between reasons for belief and reasons for suspension recommend.

Other views encourage the same contempt for curiosity. Consider Worsnip again. Although Worsnip doesn't try to resolve the puzzle by keeping all the principles, he will embrace modified versions of these principles which will still condemn curiosity unless Logico-Evidentialism is rejected. In particular, although Worsnip denies that reasons and rationality go together, he doesn't deny that there is some *other* normative status that co-travels with the reasons. One such status we can call the '*should*' of *all-things-considered reason*. Here is a modified principle that Worsnip would accept:

**Modified Conclusive Reason:** If there is a conclusive reason *R* to believe that *p*, and *S* possesses this reason, then *S* should (given the reasons) believe that *p*.

Yet assuming Logico-Evidentialism, this principle still conflicts with an equally plausible modified version of the second principle:

---

<sup>29</sup> Perhaps there is some purely objective sense in which the underlying logical truths here are obvious, but this sense is not the relevant sense for understanding rationality. Indeed, as far as we can see, no logical truth *L* is so obvious from an objective point of view that it couldn't make sense to wonder whether *L* is true. Otherwise wondering about the possible correctness of various non-classical logics would be necessarily irrational. But it just doesn't seem right to claim that one becomes irrational merely by taking non-classical logics seriously in meta-logical inquiry. Graham Priest may be wrong, but he is not irrational; similarly for people who seriously engage with his work.

**Modified Level-Bridging Principle:** If there is a strong undefeated reason to believe that one lacks sufficient reason to believe that p, then one shouldn't (given the reasons) believe that p.

The only way out for Worsnip is to agree with Titelbaum about the 'should' of all-things-considered reason, and deny that one can have strong undefeated reason to believe false normative propositions of the relevant sort. But this also requires gratuitous condemnation of intellectual curiosity and wonderment. Our view again gives a happier resolution.

Although we think extreme steadfast views are too quick to condemn wonderment, we don't recommend jumping to the opposite extreme. Sometimes it is irrational to wonder whether p. If it is plain that p from the perspective you occupy, it is less clearly acceptable to wonder whether p. For example, if it is clear from your perspective that p (e.g., if you can easily see that p), wondering and wondering whether p would seem to manifest inattention or some other lapse of reason. If one avoids such lapses, one can easily go ahead and get the knowledge from the plain facts. And if that knowledge is obtained, one would do oneself an injustice by allowing the disagreement to obscure one's plain view of the facts. One deserves better.

There is a spectrum of cases between the case of wondering whether p when it is evident that p and wondering whether you selected the right answer in a *Drugs*-like case. At what point does wondering become sensible? Common sense suggests that it is later than extreme conciliationists say, but earlier than extreme steadfast views say. This was why the steadfast conciliationism introduced in Section 2 was commonsensical. Now we can see how our view can vindicate common sense. Higher-order evidence provides reasons to suspend; hence, conciliationism. Sometimes those reasons to suspend are not weighty enough to defeat the reasons to believe provided by the evidence; hence, steadfastness.

#### 4. The Substantive Options for a Finer Resolution

We now have principled structural reasons for accepting a more moderate view about the normative significance of higher-order evidence and disagreement. We do not, however, yet have anything like an exact formula for determining just how strong the reasons for suspension will be in some case, or a systematic normative theory which spits out such a formula. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to develop these things, our framework affords a new way of organizing the options.

The options can all be viewed as answers to the question of what fundamentally determines whether it is epistemically appropriate to inquire into whether p, where inquiry is understood as seeking to help *determine* whether p.<sup>30</sup> These options are constrained by obvious truths. It isn't epistemically appropriate to inquire into whether p in our sense if it is already clear that p or already clear that  $\sim p$ , at least where clarity entails knowledge or being in a position to know (as we assume). It also isn't epistemically appropriate to inquire into whether p in our sense if it is clear that it couldn't

---

<sup>30</sup> We say 'help determine' to indicate that one's contribution to inquiry may be part of a larger inquiry—say, the inquiry of a research team, a social group tasked with answering certain questions (e.g., political figures interested in whether certain acts would be constitutional), or even a whole academic discipline or intellectual tradition. It may be clear that one couldn't *alone* determine whether p in one's life even if it is clear one could partly help some relevant group could determine whether p. Here it may make sense to inquire. But if it is evident that one couldn't even help advance an inquiry, it does seem to us foolhardy to inquire into whether p. (Thanks to Justin Snedegar for making us clarify our beliefs here.)

It is worth stressing that there is an important contrasting notion of *reflection* on an issue that doesn't assume that the issue could ever be rationally decided by an individual or a group. It doesn't, we assume, make sense to seek to determine whether p if it is obvious that p can't be determined. Does it follow that it makes no sense to *think about* p? This seems extreme and indeed anti-philosophical: even if we know we can't settle whether p, it may be worth thinking about what it would take to settle whether p, and what would need to be true for p to be true. Even if no intuitive evidence could ever decide between whether natural properties are tropes or universals, it doesn't follow that the nature of naturalness isn't worth *contemplating*. For this reason, we might call the wider notion of inquiry *contemplation*. It can even make sense to contemplate what it would be for a proposition to turn out true even if one knows it is false: one might deny that gods are actual but still find theology a worthy study in speculative metaphysics. We leave the constitutive norms of contemplation (if there are any) for other theorists to determine. It does, however, seem plausible to us that ideas can be worth contemplating even if we know we will never be able to determine whether they are right. (Indeed, ideas can be worth contemplating even if they are obviously false: consider Leibniz's delightful ontology of monads, for example.)

be determined whether p.<sup>31</sup> These obvious truths give us minimal necessary conditions on epistemically appropriate inquiry: S's inquiry into whether p is epistemically appropriate only if (a) the truth-value of p isn't evident to S, and (b) it isn't evident to S that S couldn't help to determine whether p by her inquiry.

What else is necessary? *Strong liberalism* would say nothing else is necessary. Unfortunately, this view may seem to give a thumbs-up to foolhardy inquiry. If it is unlikely that S could even *help* to determine whether p, it may seem a fool's errand for S to inquire into whether p with any earnestness.<sup>32</sup> Barring rejection of this intuition, it seems we need other conditions on epistemically appropriate inquiry.

We can now see some important large-scale divisions. On the one hand, we can make a broad distinction between consequentialist views and non-consequentialist views. Consequentialist views work under the assumption that the fundamental norm of inquiry is *productivity*: inquiry ought to *efficiently yield results*. It is important to emphasize 'fundamental' here, since other theorists needn't deny that productivity has some derivative significance. At a minimum, they merely deny that a person's intellectual economy should be governed by a principle of 'growth for growth's sake'. The distinction is helpfully illustrated by contrasting the value of research from the researcher's point of view and the value of research from the point of view of a university driven by managers concerned with its profile in the 'knowledge economy'. The sole fundamental intellectual value of such a manager is research output as such. This fact is suggestive: unless the manager is genuinely confused about the structure of intellectual value, it is tempting to think that they don't really care about the research at all, but rather about some extra-intellectual source of value, such as prestige, power, or money. Although researchers can become alienated cogs by internalizing managerial ideology, their natural interest is not in output for output's sake. Still, an unalienated researcher needn't deny value to productivity: they just treat productivity as an upshot of genuine passion for the issues, and as having value as an indicator or manifestation of passion.

A true consequentialist in our sense will view things the other way around: what is fundamentally important is productivity, and since passion is required for it, one should be passionate. Such a consequentialist may recommend the ideology of pure research, but only because of the bad effects of alienation through obsession with productivity for its own sake.<sup>33</sup>

From the objective point of view, this consequentialist may then adopt two sorts of views. A *purist* consequentialist will say that the constitutive norms of inquiry are constrained by purely intellectual value. Her third condition on epistemically proper inquiry might then be something like: inquiry into p is epistemically proper only if it is likely enough that p can be determined in good time, compatibly with a research program that maximizes production of intellectual value. Inquiry into matters that are very unlikely to be determined will often be spurned on the grounds of opportunity cost: the effort would be better spent in areas more likely to yield fruit, and so no research program should permit wasting time on such matters. In such cases, anti-interrogative attitudes or even dropping of the issue are needed to move one into more fertile fields. Such a consequentialist may, however, believe that some matters have great enough intellectual importance that even if they are not particularly likely to be determined in good time, spending more time on them is worth the risk.

*Impurist* consequentialism allows further values that are not purely intellectual to encroach on the significance of some issue. Such a consequentialist might instead propose a third condition on epistemically proper inquiry along the following sorts of lines: inquiry into whether p is epistemically proper only if it is likely enough that p can be determined in good time, compatibly with a plan for conduct that maximizes the production of practically important knowledge.

These two kinds of consequentialism have different implications about the conditions under which higher-order evidence can defeat belief. To see why, let's first consider more officially what our framework would say about when suspension of judgment is rational. According to our

---

<sup>31</sup> In this case, the only sort of attitude that is rational is an anti-interrogative attitude (although, sometimes one should form no attitude at all).

<sup>32</sup> Again, in these cases, it is tempting to think one should to form an anti-interrogative attitude. These reasons aren't as strong as the reasons to form anti-interrogative attitudes when we know p is undeterminable, but they might be very strong.

<sup>33</sup> Compare Railton (1984)'s discussion of the alienation objection to ethical consequentialism; it is a sad irony that Railton's idea would here be used to prop up the epistemic analogue of capitalism (or at least the epistemic analogue of neoliberal managerial ideology). Recently Singer (2018) explicitly extends the Railtonian view to epistemology.

framework, suspending judgment about whether p is rational if and only if it is rational to have either an interrogative attitude toward whether p or an anti-interrogative attitude toward whether p. More briefly, given the foregoing points: suspending judgment on whether p is rational if and only if it is epistemically proper to inquire into whether p, assuming the issue shouldn't just be tabled. For simplicity, we can bracket issues that should be tabled by restricting attention to *live* issues (to borrow some language from William James (1896/1956)). It is then epistemically proper to suspend judgment on some live issue if and only if inquiry into the issue is epistemically proper. Higher-order evidence will be sufficient to defeat first-order evidence supporting some belief if it makes it fitting to (re-)inquire into the issue. The wider significance of the inquiry is what matters on this view.

Let's consider cases where one hasn't already formed a belief. And let's imagine that one possesses evidence for p which is, in fact, sufficient to establish that p. Let's also imagine that one possesses higher-order evidence which raises some doubt about the fact that the evidence is sufficient to establish that p. How serious must that doubt be to prevent the evidence from giving sufficient reason for belief? According to the consequentialist proposals we've been considering, the answer is determined by the importance of the issue, since such importance will determine the strength of the reason to inquire. Purist views will deny that the case for scrupulous inquiry is determined by the practical significance of the issue. Intellectual significance alone can justify inquiring longer than might otherwise seem justified. Still, there is a sort of encroachment here by considerations beyond strength of evidential confirmation.

These implications fit with some important intuitions. The intuitions in the case of impurist consequentialism are the familiar ones behind pragmatic encroachment: as practical importance increases, any reasons for hesitancy about whether one has got the data right are magnified, and first-order evidential reasons for belief are defeated. But there is also an overlooked intuition with a structurally similar basis that arguably isn't pragmatist: namely, when the intellectual importance of some issue is great, any reasons for hesitancy about whether one has got the data right are magnified, and first-order evidential reasons for belief are defeated. This idea may help to explain why higher-prestige journals rightly have lower rates of acceptance: more work is needed to quell doubt when the discovery would be significant enough for publication in such a journal.

Our reflections also shed light on an insufficiently noticed attraction of epistemic consequentialism. Although it can be difficult to believe that the consequences of forming a belief should bear on whether there is reason of the right kind for that belief, it is much easier to believe that they bear on whether there is reason of the right kind to inquire into some issue. We can, it seems, respond in a way that isn't roundabout to incentives for and against inquiry that rest on the importance of the discovery. If this is true, then it is easier to understand how the *sufficiency* of some epistemic reason for belief may depend on possible consequences of getting it right or getting it wrong.

Other theorists have already used the framework of epistemic utility theory to provide a systematic and principled account of when higher-order evidence defeats, as we noted earlier. What we have just said suggests a deeper potential reason for signing up to their story: the nature of suspension of judgment together with the systematic connections between the weight of reasons for belief and the weight of reasons for suspension provides independent reason to think that certain sorts of consequences might decide the sufficiency of the evidence.

Nonetheless, we think it would be too quick to assume that the nature of suspension of judgment and data about higher-order defeat force a consequentialist treatment; indeed, one of us is a diehard Kantian. We will conclude with some thoughts about the compatibility of non-consequentialism with our framework, and how a non-consequentialist might offer a different story about higher-order defeat and explain away the apparent evidence for consequentialism.

Epistemic non-consequentialists will deny that fundamental epistemic values such as accuracy are merely 'to be promoted',<sup>34</sup> and for this reason oppose the extension of the ideology of sheer productivity to epistemology. Some of these theorists follow Kant and suggest that fundamental epistemic value is, at bottom, to be *respected* rather than promoted. Now, this kind of picture is well-positioned to explain the significance of higher-order evidence. Even if the evidence entails that p, if you have strong reason to think you're in a state of mind in which you're an unreliable judge of what the evidence supports, it would seem *reckless* to just go ahead and believe that p, other things being

---

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Sylvan (2018), Sylvan (forthcoming-1), Littlejohn (2011), and Gibbons (2013).

equal. These non-consequentialist views will hence fit well with common sense and avoid the pitfalls of extreme steadfast views.

There is, however, some worry that such views might license a kind of stalling. For notice that the constraint of respect for truth is primarily a negative constraint. It rules out believing when doing so would be reckless or negligent by the lights of the value of accuracy. But it does not seem to encourage believing when it wouldn't be reckless or negligent. Of course, if one denies that there are positive epistemic duties, one might be happy with this result: believing is never required. Still, an epistemic version of Hamlet does seem open to a distinctively epistemic sort of criticism. Worrying too much about an issue may seem excessive, and not merely for practical reasons: paranoia is an epistemic vice. It would, for example, seem silly for the subject in Christensen's case to suspend with an interrogative attitude for too long after re-thinking the issue multiple times and coming to see each time that the evidence entails 'only (d)' to be the correct answer.<sup>35</sup>

If epistemic non-consequentialists lacked resources to explain these intuitions, it would represent a significant cost of their approach, though perhaps one that could be partly surmounted by casting doubt on whether the criticisms are genuinely epistemic. Thankfully, however, there are other, more direct responses available to epistemic non-consequentialists. One of these responses is able to capture what seems attractive about some of the consequentialist options described above while also avoiding some so far unmentioned bad features of epistemic consequentialism.

One option turns on a familiar point about many non-consequentialist views in ethics. Non-consequentialists needn't deny that there is reason to bring about good states of affairs, and indeed needn't even deny that there is an underived reason to promote the good. At a minimum, they only must insist that the project of promoting the good take place *within the constraints imposed by respect*. Provided that it wouldn't be disrespectful of truth to believe p, there might then be a promotion-based reason to believe p on such a view. A view of this kind would be reminiscent of a modest deontology that accepts side constraints but recommends doing as much good as possible within these constraints.

Such a view may, however, not be the best kind of non-consequentialist view. This is because it would inherit some of the bad predictions of epistemic consequentialism discussed by Berker 2013.<sup>36</sup> Views of this kind would invite serious inquiry into p in cases where such inquiry would generate *unrelated* epistemic payoffs, even when it is extremely probable that p and there are no real reasons to doubt that p. Indeed, it is hard to see why views of this kind wouldn't recommend inquiry into p when it would have such unrelated benefits even when it is *evident* that p. To be sure, the consequentialist views mentioned above were supposed to be constrained: it is only fitting to inquire into p in cases in which it is not already evident whether p. But this constraint lacks a straightforwardly consequentialist motivation, and so the views discussed earlier were already in one way not fully consequentialist (though their additional condition was specified only in terms of consequences).

Accordingly, there seems to be good reason to pursue a more purely non-consequentialist view. How, though, can such a view generate even proposition-relative reasons for closing inquiry in the aim of thereby learning a truth? Here it is instructive to remember that Kant centrally claimed in his later work—i.e., the *Metaphysics of Morals* in contrast to the *Groundwork*—that personhood demands not only respect but also *love*, and used this to explain positive duties of beneficence, directed at particular individuals. One might similarly claim that truth demands something more like love in addition to respect, and use this requirement to explain why there is something epistemically objectionable about thinkers who are overly chary in forming beliefs, as well as about thinkers who are simply uninquisitive. Such love would be favored on a proposition-by-proposition basis, in much the way that love for personhood is shown through love for particular persons (though unconditionally, as persons, in the case of the morally required sort of love).

Of course, some have had doubts about love of truth and its relevance to epistemology (e.g., Sosa (2000)). But while there is no requirement to love truth, the intuitions considered above do

---

<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the subject should adopt an anti-interrogative attitude instead, but this also seems a bit extreme: more plausibly, one can and should just go with what repeated witnessing of truth makes plain.

<sup>36</sup> For other kinds of objections that we think would generalize, see Sylvan (forthcoming-1).

suggest that there is some properly epistemic reason to love truth. At some point, we should all learn to stop querying and embrace the truth.

## 6. Conclusion

We must leave the task of deciding between these options for future work: it is a task worthy of many papers and books. What we would like to emphasize in conclusion is that our wondrous structural resolution of the puzzles indicates that wider controversies—most centrally, consequentialism vs. non-consequentialism and purism vs. impurism—must be settled in order for us to know exactly how weighty the higher-order evidence will be in a given case. As far as the general rationale for accepting higher-order defeat goes, we don't think much more can be said beyond what we've said earlier. This fact is heartening for those of us who are more interested in theory than application: for what we've seen suggests that some of the apparent gridlock in the literature on disagreement and higher-order evidence owes simply to the fact that these topics are applied topics, and could never be fully resolved without the help of a systematic normative theory (barring epistemic particularism).

## References

- Berker, S. 2013. 'Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions.' *Philosophical Review* 122: 337-393.
- Broome, J. 2013. *Rationality through Reasoning*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Christensen, D. 2007. 'Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News.' *Philosophical Review* 116: 187-217.
- Christensen, D. 2009. 'Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy.' *Philosophy Compass* 4: 756-767.
- Christensen, D. 2010. 'Higher-Order Evidence.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 81: 185-214.
- Christensen, D. 2011. 'Disagreement, Question-Begging, and Epistemic Self-Criticism.' *Philosophers' Imprint* 11.6.
- Coates, A. 2012. 'Rational Epistemic Akrasia.' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 49: 113-124.
- Cohen, S. 2013. 'A Defense of the (Almost) Equal Weight View' in J. Lackey and D. Christensen (eds.) *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays*. Oxford University Press.
- Elga, A. 2007. 'Reflection and Disagreement.' *Nous* 41: 478-502.
- Elga, A. Ms. 'Lucky to Be Rational.'
- Friedman, J. 2013a. 'Question-Directed Attitudes.' *Philosophical Perspectives* 27: 145-174.
- Friedman, J. 2013b. 'Suspended Judgment.' *Philosophical Studies* 162: 165-181.
- Friedman, J. 2017. 'Why Suspend Judging.' *Nous* 51:2: 302-326
- Gibbons, J. 2013. *The Norm of Belief*. Oxford University Press.
- Gonzalez de Prado Salas, J. Forthcoming. 'Dispossessing Defeat.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Harman, G. 1984. 'Logic and Reasoning.' *Synthese* 60: 107-127.
- James, W. 1896. 'The Will to Believe.' Reprinted in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (1956). New York: Dover.
- Kelly, T. 2013. 'Disagreement and the Burdens of Judgment' in D. Christensen and J. Lackey (eds.) *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays*. Oxford University Press.
- Kolodny, N. 2005. 'Why Be Rational?' *Mind* 114: 509-563.
- Lackey, J. 2010. 'A Justificationist View of Disagreement's Epistemic Significance' in A. Haddock and D. Pritchard (eds.) *Social Epistemology*. Oxford University Press.
- Lasonen-Aarnio, M. 2014. 'Higher-Order Evidence and the Limits of Defeat.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 88: 314-345.
- Littlejohn, C. 2011. 'Reasons and Belief's Justification' in A. Reisner and A. Steglich-Petersen (eds.) *Reasons for Belief*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lord, E. 2014. 'From Independence to Conciliationism: An Obituary.' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 92: 1-13.
- Lord, E. 2018. *The Importance of Being Rational*. Oxford University Press.



- Lord, E. Forthcoming-1. 'The Normativity of Rationality' in Chang, R. and Sylvan, K. (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Practical Reason*. London: Routledge.
- Lord, E. Forthcoming-2. 'Reasons to Suspend, Rationality's Competition, and the Reach of the Epistemic' in G. Ernst & S. Schmidt (Eds.), *The Ethics of Belief and Beyond: Understanding Mental Normativity*. Routledge.
- Lord, E. and Sylvan, K. 2019. 'Reasons: Wrong, Right, Normative, Fundamental.' *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 15: 43-74.
- Lord, E. MS. 'Reasons to Suspend and the Failure of Evidentialism.'
- Markovits, J. 2014. *Moral Reason*. Oxford University Press.
- Morton, J. and Paul, S. 2018. *Ethics* 129: 175-203.
- Pryor, J. 2013. 'Problems for Credulism' in C. Tucker (ed.) *Seemings and Justification: New Essays on Dogmatism and Phenomenal Conservatism*. Oxford University Press.
- Railton, P. 1984. Alienation, consequentialism, and the demands of morality. *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 13: 134-171.
- Rosenkranz, S. 2007. 'Agnosticism as a Third Stance.' *Mind* 116: 55–104.
- Scanlon, T. 1998. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Harvard University Press.
- Schoenfield, M. 2015a. 'Bridging Rationality and Accuracy.' *Journal of Philosophy* 112: 633–657.
- Schoenfield, M. 2015b. 'A Dilemma for Calibrationism.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91: 425–455.
- Schoenfield, M. 2018. 'An Accuracy-Based Approach to Higher-Order Evidence.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 96: 690-715.
- Schroeder, M. 2012. 'Stakes, Withholding, and Pragmatic Encroachment on Knowledge.' *Philosophical Studies* 160: 165–185.
- Shah, N. 2003. 'How Truth Governs Belief.' *Philosophical Review* 112: 447–482.
- Singer, D. J. 2018. 'How to Be an Epistemic Consequentialist.' *Phil. Quarterly* 68: 580–602.
- Snedegar, J. 2018. *Contrastive Reasons*. Oxford University Press.
- Sosa, E. 2007. *A Virtue Epistemology*. Oxford University Press.
- Sosa, E. 2010. *Knowing Full Well*. Princeton University Press.
- Sosa, E. 2013. 'The Epistemology of Disagreement' in J. Lackey & D. Christensen (eds.) *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays*. Oxford University Press.
- Sosa, E. 2015. *Judgment and Agency*. Oxford University Press.
- Sturgeon, S. 2010. 'Confidence and Coarse-Grained Attitudes' in T. S. Gendler & J. Hawthorne (Eds.) *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* (pp. 3–126). Oxford University Press.
- Sylvan, K. 2015. 'What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be.' *Philosophical Studies* 172: 587–606.
- Sylvan, K. 2018. 'Veritism Unswamped.' *Mind* 127: 381–435.
- Sylvan, K. Forthcoming-1. 'An Epistemic Non-Consequentialism.' *Philosophical Review*.
- Sylvan, K. Forthcoming-2. 'Reliabilism without Epistemic Consequentialism.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Titelbaum, M. 2015. 'Rationality's Fixed Point (or: In Defense of Right Reason).' *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* 5(253-294).
- Velleman, D. 2000. 'On the Aim of Belief' in D. Velleman (Ed.) *The Possibility of Practical Reason*. Oxford University Press.
- Way, J. 2010. 'The Normativity of Rationality.' *Philosophy Compass* 5:1057-1068.
- Way, J. & Whiting, D. 2016. 'If You Justifiably Believe You Ought to  $\phi$ , You Ought to  $\phi$ .' *Philosophical Studies* 173: 1873–1895.
- Weatherston, B. 2019. *Normative Externalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Wedgwood, R. 2002. 'Practical Reason and Desire.' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80: 345–358.
- Worsnip, A. 2018. 'The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 96: 3–44.