

Believing Badly: Doxastic Duties are not Epistemic Duties

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0. Introduction

This paper has two main aims. The first is to establish that if the normative domain termed “epistemic” is taken to be autonomous (i.e. independent of the ethical domain) then what are called “epistemic duties” do not help us understand what it is to believe badly. If we do have duties to believe (i.e. *doxastic* duties) then they are not *purely* epistemic ones. Second, I will suggest that the language of duty and obligation does not best capture the ways we fall short as believers. What is central to cases of believing badly is that the believer exhibits a lack of care, and in so doing, fails to meet appropriate expectations we have of each other. This second conclusion is suggestive because I won’t have the space here to fully develop the alternative account.

What I mean by “believing badly” is when someone believes in such a way that a negative reaction attitude – blame, or something very blame-like -- is appropriate. Many common reactions to each other’s beliefs exhibit attitudes that display negative judgments and emotions; someone’s belief can elicit what Peter Strawson referred to as “reactive attitudes” such as anger and contempt. We ask in an incredulous tone, “How can you believe that?” or exclaim, “What a ridiculous thing to believe!” I am sure we have all seen a look of disgust on someone at a philosophy talk elicited by what is taken to be the deeply mistaken belief being expressed by the speaker.

It has been noted by many that this feature of our doxastic practice is puzzling given how little direct control we have over what we believe. I am not here centrally concerned with this puzzle, namely the puzzle of how to make sense of the doxastic responsibility that these attitudes seem to assume, though what I say will have some bearing on it. I am interested, rather, in the different ways that one can believe badly, the different kinds of flaws that one can exhibit in believing as one does, and the different kinds of criticisms, and attitudes that such doxastic flaws generate. We criticize beliefs for different reasons and in different ways and our attitudes differ depending on the ways in which we find people falling short or being defective in their

belief maintenance practices. I will argue that if the flaw is a *purely* epistemic, then blame is not appropriate. If this is so then epistemic duties are only duties in a deflated sense; they are like the duties of etiquette – conventional and contingent. My argument can be summarized as follows:

- (1) If, by φ -ing, S violates a duty, then S is subject to blame
 - (2) If the doxastic flaw with S's φ -ing is purely epistemic, then S is not subject to blame.
- C. So if the doxastic flaw with S's φ -ing is purely epistemic, then, by φ -ing, S has not violated a duty.

The first premise may seem too strong as some may allow for cases of blameless violations of duties. It could be, for example, that if one violates a duty with a good excuse then blame ceases to be appropriate. So, perhaps, something like *prima facie* should be inserted before “subject to blame.” Though, in the moral context, most will say that if one is really excused then the duty disappears. Others will say that you are still subject to blame but that the expression of blame should be mitigated because of the excuse.¹ How best to think of these matters won't matter for my purposes because I will argue that, when it comes to believing, if the flaw is purely epistemic, then one isn't subject to blame in any sense. In the context of believing, blame is only appropriate, when the flaw extends into the broadly practical domain. And so, I will be mostly concerned with providing reasons to accept (2). I will do this, mostly, by reflecting on cases. I will begin (in section one) by clarifying what a purported purely epistemic duty is and I will argue that these can be violated – even when the violation is not excused or justified -- without believing badly; the kind of criticism registers a flaw but does not appropriately warrant reactive attitudes like blame or indignation. These blameless norm violations show that many violations of such norms are not best thought of as violation of duties, and if this is so then violation of these purported duties is not sufficient for believing badly. I will then consider cases (in sections two and three) where blame is appropriate. Some of these are cases where no epistemic norms are violated. If there are such cases, this shows that one could fulfill all one's supposed epistemic duties and still fail to believe as one ought: The ideal epistemic agent and the ideal doxastic agent diverge. Finally, I will consider cases where

¹ For an illuminating discussion of why overridden duties no longer count as duties see Herman (1993). For arguments for why someone can be blameworthy but actually blaming would not be appropriate see Pickard (2011) and Westlund (2018)

epistemic norms are violated and such attitudes do seem appropriate. I will argue that these are distinguished from the first kind of cases in that the flaw or defect being targeted is not purely epistemic. I don't think, however, these cases are all best understood as a violation of duties. The kind of reproach appropriate in the doxastic realm does not usually stem from a violation of duties, epistemic or otherwise. Rather, doxastic flaws point to different kinds of flaws of agency and to a lack of certain virtues. I will end (in section 4) by considering some objections.

I would like to forestall one worry at the outset. I have said that I am skeptical that there are any epistemic duties that are more robust than, for example, duties of etiquette. But one may wonder if this would be a problem for those who think there are epistemic duties; does anyone think of them as normatively on par with moral duties? I will return to this question when considering objections, but there is much in the literature which suggests that such duties are often taken to be substantially normative. Most discussion of epistemic duties assumes that it is an unproblematic category and then the questions turn on figuring out some specifics about them: Is there a duty to seek more evidence? Is there a duty to alter one's doxastic state in the face of peer disagreement? Are there only negative ones? When and why can one be blameless in violating one? What is the difference between justification and excuses when it comes to such violations?² The debate between whether one is justified or only excused if the beliefs are false but the result of proper cognitive functioning shows that this kind of language is often thought of as robustly normative. In arguing that this debate is not "merely verbal", Daniel Greco says that whether one is merely excused in such context *matters*:

"to label reasonable false beliefs as merely excused is to damn them with faint praise; excused beliefs you form because you're a child, or insane, or drugged. To lump ...beliefs that are the product of impeccable reasoning – into such a category seems indiscriminating." (forthcoming)

Talk of duties and "oughts" sounds like it should offer guidance for someone seeking to be a good doxastic agent, who wants to avoid believing badly. But if we want to hold on to the idea of there being ways of believing badly that consists in a violation of

² For a discussion of different ways of thinking about blameless norm violations see Brown (2017).

duties, they cannot be merely or purely epistemic. Those kinds of reactions are always pointing to something in the agent beyond a violation of a purely epistemic duty.

1. Violations of epistemic duties without believing badly

One kind of doxastic flaw arises from violating what some call epistemic duties. While the term “epistemic” is usually left undefined, it is often taken to mean pertaining to truth, evidence, or knowledge. Epistemic duties, are duties grounded in purely epistemic considerations, namely those duties which one must fulfill to gain truth or knowledge. It is further often assumed that whatever duties we have regarding belief, that is what we are obligated to believe or to not believe, are epistemic. According to Richard Feldman “our epistemological duty is to believe as the evidence we have dictates.” (Feldman, 2002, 364)

Here are some other possible candidate epistemic duties:

Do not believe falsehoods.

Only believe truths.

Only believe when you have sufficient evidence.

Only believe when you are in a position to know.

If you are in a position to know then believe.

Do not believe if you lack justification.

Do not believe without good reasons.

Depending on one’s view about the norms of belief some of these imperatives might be expressing the same view. So, for example, an evidentialist about justification would say that the duty to believe in accordance with evidence (and to only believe when one’s evidence is sufficient) is tantamount to saying do not believe when you lack justification. For those who think that some beliefs, such as non-inferential ones, can be justified without evidence, then these would come apart.³

³ See, for example, Littlejohn (2018)

Despite different views about the norm or norms of belief, all agree that having an ill-founded false belief violates an epistemic norm but all would also agree that such violations are often blameless. Even those who want to say one can never be justified in believing falsehoods but only excused, think being so excused gets you off the hook for blame. Now one might take the fact that there is an extensive debate about what makes a belief that violates an epistemic norm “blameless” to show that most (or many) cases of such violations provide examples of blameworthy beliefs. I will argue that according to all the different views of what constitutes blame, where blame goes beyond pointing to the cause such as when we say the hurricane is to blame for the city’s destruction, to say such violations of purely epistemic norms are worthy of blame is misguided. In discussions about when violating certain epistemic norms is “blameless” (whether such believing is justified or only excused) what is being asked is whether there is something about the situation which gets the believer off the hook from any kind of reproach. But in the cases where the fault is being viewed only as a violation of an epistemic norm (and such norms are viewed as entirely distinct from moral ones) to think of the kind of criticism as including an attitude of blame would force us to widen the concept of blame far beyond its usual boundaries.⁴

Think about the huge number of ill-founded false beliefs we all hold. Perhaps these can be minimized to some degree if one has a view that full beliefs require a very high credence. But one of our ordinary ways of attributing beliefs is by looking at what one asserts (or would be willing to assert), and by this measure we hold many false beliefs. The previous sentence I asserted, for example, may be expressing a false belief. In non-philosophical contexts they are ubiquitous: beliefs about directions, beliefs about the weather, beliefs about the precise time that your friend’s plane arrives or the movie starts. Now some of these false beliefs may be held fleetingly and are easily corrected. For example, you believe, based on your memory, that your friend’s plane arrives at 1:00. You check the calendar on your phone and see she arrives at 1:30 (1:00 was the time you need to leave your house so that’s what stuck in your mind). If one thinks that one is blameworthy if one violates an epistemic norm if there are no mitigating factors to excuse or justify such violations then each instance of believing an ill-founded

⁴ Sometimes the question is put in terms of whether the believer is responsible for the belief. There may well be notions of responsibility where one can be responsible but not blameworthy (See Pickard 2011, Westlund 2018). I can allow for this divergence; there are many times when one is responsible without violating a duty. I am claiming that holding on to this strong deontological language commits one to saying the believer is subject to blame.

falsehood when there are no mitigating factors to excuse or justify so believing warrants blame.⁵

One may respond to these cases by saying all I have shown is that “don't believe falsehoods” is not a good candidate as an epistemic duty, and so not all epistemic norms are epistemic duties. But take any candidate epistemic norm and we will find our violations ubiquitous. Violating these norms does show our beliefs are defective according to a particular standard but blame is only appropriate once more context is provided.

While I cannot here do justice to the extensive literature on the meaning and purpose of blame, if we take a moment to canvass some of the central ideas connected with blame, it reveals how misguided it would be to say that your false belief about your friend's arrival time is blameworthy.⁶ Blame carries with it some normative force that seems to require that it includes a negative evaluative judgment of the person being blamed. Yet, it seems wrong to think of blame as a purely cognitive attitude because when we blame others, negative emotions are often included in the blaming. While there is dispute among theorists of blame whether any particular emotions are necessary, the challenge for those who deny any are required, is to explain the special force that blame has. All agree that to blame someone goes beyond mere description; it is not simply to register that someone has failed to meet a particular standard. I can describe you as flawed in a certain way without blaming you or judging you blameworthy. Imagine I am on your team playing a casual pick-up soccer game. You know I am not very good at soccer but I enjoy it; it's a fun way to get some exercise and I can run pretty fast so sometimes I manage to get to the ball before our opponents and can get it to someone who can actually help us score. When I miss an easy pass and the other team scores, you are accurate in evaluating my soccer-playing as deeply flawed, as judging my playing as very poor, but you would not blame me, or if you did it would not be appropriate.

⁵ One may think that the evidentialist norm that says one should only believe on sufficient evidence, or that says “If S adopts a doxastic attitude toward p, S ought to adopt the doxastic attitude that fits her evidence “ is not violated in this case. Your belief is based on your memory so that is some evidence in support of the it. By positing that the belief is not well-founded, I have built in to the case the idea that this memory-evidence is not sufficient. We can even add that you are aware that you often make mistakes when you rely only on your memory. Still, when such a belief is so easily corrected, and has no negative results, to say that it is a violation of an obligation and you are subject to blame is misguided.

⁶ See Tognazzini and Coates, (2018) for a very helpful overview.

Similarly in the epistemic realm I can point to a flaw in your reasoning; I can accurately describe you as having a flawed belief but the fact that an epistemic norm has been violated without excuse or justification does not settle the question of whether blame is appropriate. Here we begin to see that thinking about these violations as violations of duties is misleading. An unexcused and not overridden violation of a moral duty always warrants blame while an unexcused and not overridden violation of a purely epistemic “duty” does not. We will see that when such a violation does warrant blame, it is because it matters ethically. Your particular context or role reveals that your believing as you do is flawed in a way that is not merely epistemic. I will turn now to thinking about when blame does seem appropriate in the doxastic realm, and we will see that these cases are all morally tinged.

2. Believing badly without violation of “epistemic duties.”

There has been a recent proliferation of discussion focused on cases where, despite one’s belief being epistemically flawless, agents are still failing to believe as they ought. Many of these concern examples of what is called “moral encroachment,” which is the idea that how to respond to the evidence varies as the moral stakes increase. In a recent discussion, Georgi Gardiner defines the view as stating “What is epistemically rational for a person to believe can, in some cases, be affected by moral factors.”(2018, 173) In a number of recent articles, Rima Basu has explored the idea that beliefs that wrong, like racist beliefs, are unjustified even if they do not violate any standard evidential norms for as she puts it “living in an unjust world will provide evidence for unjust beliefs.” (Basu, forthcoming). While I think these examples do support my view that being a good believer goes beyond attending to purely epistemic considerations, given the resistance to viewing these beliefs as epistemically flawless I will, instead, begin by considering an example where there is no question that one had been a dutiful epistemic agent and, yet, it makes a lot of sense to say one ought not to believe what they do.

Imagine that I know (and so believe) my teenage daughter has a crush on our neighbor, and I know this because I found her well-hidden diary where she writes down all her private thoughts and read it. I have excellent evidence for this belief, but there is a clear sense in which I can be blamed for having it. As David Hunter says about a similar case of someone violating privacy rights by reading confidential medical files “it would be

irrational for him not to believe that she has cancer. Still, it is not the case that he ought to believe it. In fact, he positively ought not to believe it. The right to privacy would not amount to much if we could override it simply by learning the private fact!" (Hunter, 2017).⁷

Another kind of case where it seems one can believe badly even when no epistemic norm is violated is in the domain of friendship and trust. While these examples are controversial, it has seemed to many that if I form beliefs about a friend or a loved one just as I would someone to whom I had no partiality, I am believing badly. Sarah Stroud's discussion of this kind of case was one of the first to highlight this problem and she put it in terms of the demands of friendship conflicting with the demands of epistemic rationality. She asks you to consider how you should respond to evidence that seems to impugn your good friend's character and argues that it would be wrong in such a case to weigh the evidence as you would in any other situation. She suggests that you should interpret what you hear in a less-damaging way than would a stranger, looking for alternative interpretations to the obvious, and damning, ones. Just as a certain way of *behaving* concurs with our ideas of what a good friend would do, so, she argues, does a corresponding manner of *believing*. She says, "the good friend seems eminently subject to epistemic criticism... We thus have a genuine clash between the demands of friendship and the demands of epistemology...friendship requires epistemic irrationality." (Stroud, 2006) This kind of example again points to the limitation in thinking about purely epistemic duties when identifying cases of blameworthy beliefs.

In a recent discussion, Berislav Marušić and Steven White worry that in cases of testimonial injustice, focusing only on epistemic considerations in thinking about the flaw in the belief, fails to adequately explain the wrong being done to the person being dismissed. While disregarding someone's testimonial evidence, if legitimate, will be an epistemic flaw, it is different from other kinds of failure to attend to evidence such as the failure of the detective to attend to the blood stain as evidence that the Butler did it.

⁷ One may object that it is not the belief that is blameworthy but, rather the way the information was gathered. One may think that it isn't that I should not have the belief but, rather, that I should not have read the diary. It is true that I should not have read the diary. but why? Because I should not know what it says. The order of explanation goes from what I ought to know (or not know) to what I ought to investigate (or not investigate). To see this, notice how odd it would be to say that while it is wrong for me to read the diary it is perfectly OK for me to know what it says.

In critiquing Miranda Fricker's view of what is wrong when someone (here Herbert) dismisses someone's testimony (here Marge) because that person is a member of a group (here women) who the hearer thinks of as not warranted being listened to, Marušić and White say the following:

[I]n determining what, say, Herbert should believe, all the work is done by epistemic considerations whose rational role seems to have little to do with what Marge might be owed, morally speaking... the relevant epistemic considerations, and the nature of the warrant they provide, seem too far removed from Marge herself, and her value as a person, to serve as a basis for a claim of justice on her part... Fricker's account takes the relevant testimonial wrong to be found in the way that prejudice can distort the hearer's responsiveness to evidence for attributing credibility to a speaker, and thus distort the hearer's doxastic response to the speaker's contribution. It's not clear, though, that this locates the wrong in the right place (2018, 103-04)

In a similar vein, Basu argues one will fail to understand how a racist belief wrongs if one attends only to the strictly epistemic factors involved. She argues that it is important to consider the possibility of a "supposedly rational racist." She imagines such a person, who she calls Spencer, saying the following "Although it might be 'unpopular' or 'politically incorrect' to say this, I'm tired of constantly being called a racist whenever I believe of a black diner in my section that they will tip worse than the white diners in my section." Spencer argues that the facts don't lie; he cites studies that show that on average black diners tip substantially less than white diners. The facts, he insists, aren't racist. If you were to deny his claims and were to believe otherwise, it would be you who is engaging in wishful thinking. It would be you who believes against the evidence. It would be you, not Spencer, who is epistemically irrational.

As mentioned above, a common reaction to a case like this is to locate an epistemic flaw in his thinking such as misusing statistical evidence (Gardiner, 2018, 176-178). But Basu claims, and I think rightly, that it is not such failures of reasoning that are at the core of what is wrong with such beliefs. Instead, she says "anger or dismay is an appropriate reaction to the beliefs in question because these beliefs express or betray moral indifference or insufficient regard." (forthcoming)

3. Believing badly when “epistemic duties” are violated

In my first section I considered examples of epistemically faulty beliefs that are blameless. In the second section I considered cases of believing badly where one's beliefs are epistemically faultless. Other examples, however, of believing badly do seem to focus on the violation of epistemic norms or duties. W.K. Clifford says that the ship owner who ignores the evidence that a ship is not sea-worthy is blameworthy for not believing in accord with the evidence, even if the ship managed to sail without anyone being harmed. Here the blame is being attached to violation of an epistemic duty. But Clifford is clear that believing this way is a moral fault:

It is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything on insufficient evidence . . . Belief, that sacred faculty which prompts the decisions of our will, and knits into harmonious working all the compacted energies of our being, is ours not for ourselves, but for humanity . . . No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal duty of questioning all that we believe. (1987, 24)

Contemporary epistemologists, however, do not want to collapse epistemic flaws into moral ones. For example, in thinking about when and why people are blameworthy for failing to know what “they should have known,” Sandy Goldberg says that he is interested in when such an accusation “alleges a *distinctively epistemic shortcoming*” (2017, 2864). But the examples given to help illustrate when such an accusation is appropriate and blame along with it are ones that reference one's professional duties; the doctor should have known to consult her colleagues, the day care worker should have known to read the allergy report before giving food to a child in their care. And Goldberg's analysis of what grounds the appropriateness of such allegations centers on the nature of participation in a social practice. When these practices are legitimate, we are entitled to expect one another to perform according to the standards of the practice, and some of these expectations include that we believe or know certain things. But once Goldberg explicates the “should have known” phenomenon in terms of practice-generate entitlements it ceases to be clear that the fault is a purely epistemic fault. When the expectations I have of my doctor or my child's day care worker are not met, the

fault is a moral one. These people can be appropriately blamed but only once the wider context of the distinctive role they play is specified.

What about our doxastic practice in general? Does it generate entitled expectations?

Goldberg argues that there are “basic... epistemic expectations that we have of any and all epistemic subjects (no matter our relation to them, or their professional status or institutional roles), [and] that we are entitled to these expectations.” (2017, 2875)

The example he provides is of one where one fails to read carefully and draws a hasty conclusion. Goldberg thinks that abstracting from any professional or institutional role we can appropriately say of any competent adult that they should have known to read more carefully. One can do so “in virtue of the mutual recognition of his status as a mature, literate epistemic subject on whom others were appropriately relying in deliberation and coordinated activity” (2017, 2875). But again, what kind of expectation is this and what sort of flaw is being pointed to? It doesn't seem that far from Clifford's view. We rely on one another's beliefs and the way we form and maintain beliefs affects one another. Once epistemic expectations are tied to social ones, the purity and exclusivity of the epistemic realm is called into question.

In thinking about when believing badly warrants strong reactive attitudes, when, for example indignation is appropriate, sometimes these beliefs can be explicated in terms of violating duties, but this language can obscure the nature of the defect. Many of the accounts trying to make sense of ways that beliefs can be morally wrong or of how one's doxastic attitudes can wrong others point, as Goldberg does, to the expectations we have of each other, and the way we relate to each other. We have seen this is central to Basu's diagnosis of the wrongs of certain racist beliefs. And Marušić and White say “we expect other to regard us in certain ways – which includes believing certain things of us – and these expectations are the grounds for our reactive attitudes” (110).

These thoughts lead to the idea that the ideal doxastic agent will exhibit intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness, inquisitiveness and diligence but will also recognize that this is not all that matters. One must also take care to respect others rational capacities and status as persons when figuring out what to believe. So an ideal doxastic agent would also exhibit the traditionally moral virtues such as benevolence and generosity. This also reminds us of the inextricably social aspect of our doxastic

practices. The ideal doxastic agent will thus exhibit care in the beliefs they maintain, and will recognize the need to engage with others in the shared activity of reasoning. This recognition will reinforce the need to cultivate a carefulness and humility. Considering all the ways that one can believe badly one of the most common defects, I submit, is a lack of care. The kind of carelessness takes a number of forms. It can be exhibited in the hastiness of drawing conclusions which can be often be benign but in certain contexts and when on a greater scale can be catastrophic. Other kinds of believing badly exhibits a lack of care due to persons as such.

4. Objections

Those who are interested in figuring out the nature of epistemic duties may find my discussion orthogonal to their concerns. One might be interested, for example, in the question of whether one is required to alter one's belief based on good first-order evidence if one has higher order evidence that leads one to question the belief- for example that an epistemic peer disagrees with you. For me to say that these kinds of norms do not generate duties because violating them does not warrant blame may seem beside the point since no one was purporting to use duty or blame in a way that is anything like the moral sense. For me to say these are not *really* duties and this isn't *real* blame may seem to beg the question. If I assume that the concepts of duty and blame are essentially moral then it will follow that they are being misapplied if they are being used in a non-moral sense. But it may seem I am being too stringent in what counts as a duty or blame, and that there are obviously contexts in which we can think about duties and blame in a non-moral sense.

First, I will clarify what I take my discussion to have shown. I have argued that in all the clear cases of believing badly, that is where blame is appropriate, the kind of fault is not a strictly epistemic one. I have done this by reflection on different kinds of cases. And so if some of these cases are understood in terms of violating duties to believe a certain way (i.e doxastic duties) then one cannot equate doxastic duties with epistemic ones. Given that my conclusion is based on thinking about cases, I have not established that it is conceptually impossible for blame to be appropriate for a purely epistemic fault, but it does seem that all purported examples are forced and stem from a theoretical commitment to there being such cases.

I will now turn to thinking about other kinds of non-moral duties to see what would be the implications of thinking of epistemic duties as analogous to these. I will end by considering the possibility of thinking about blame in a non-moral sense, something which I am skeptical there is room for beyond the purely causal sense of blame.

(i) Not all duties are moral duties

The most obvious example of a non-moral duty is a legal one. That I have violated a legal duty does not settle the question of whether I have violated a moral one or if I am blameworthy. If we think of requirements and duties as synonymous as some who talk about epistemic duties seem to (though not all) then we can think about a host of other non-epistemic duties. So the custodian is required to empty the trash, the Nazi prison guard to shoot the escaping prisoner. According to the rules of etiquette, I am required to use my fork furthest on the left from my dinner plate first, and according to the rules of the country club to wear a white shirt when playing tennis. Such “duties” are entirely conventional and they are conditional on your “buying into” the normative domain that they generate.

Are we supposed to think about epistemic duties and requirements in this conditional sense? Are they like rules of the epistemic club that you are required to follow as a member? But what marks out membership of this club; can I choose whether I am in or out? I think debates about the ultimate aims or norms of belief are sometimes best seen as attempts to answer this kind of territorial question, namely the question as to what is the mark of the epistemic domain. So if the purpose of the “club” is to gain as much truth as possible, then this would delineate one set of requirements that may differ if the club is seen more as an “achieving knowledge” club.

Let’s take it that this kind of debate is settled and we say, for example, that epistemic requirements refer to whatever is needed to attain knowledge. The discussion then becomes about what is required for knowledge and at this point the talk of duties becomes even more obscuring. For if there is anything uncontroversial we can say about duty, it is that it applies to agents. I can talk about what is required for knowledge or justification without talking about agents at all. Quine’s suggestion that epistemology

be naturalized, seen as a branch of descriptive psychology, seeking to understand, for example, how meager perceptual data can be built into complex knowledge. I take it that the discussion of duties, blamelessness and excuses is attempting to shift the focus away from the belief and what is needed for it to count as knowledge or to be justified on to the agent: how I ought I form and maintain my beliefs? But, once this is the question being asked then, as we have seen, we have taken a step beyond the purely epistemic. Perhaps the bookie-like friend is an ideal epistemic agent but this does not settle the question of what he ought to believe.

Richard Feldman was clear about the limitations of what supposedly epistemic duties can tell us about how we ought to believe. One of the main conclusions in his discussion of “the ethics of belief” is that the epistemic “ought” is entirely distinct from the moral or practical. He contends that for each “ought” there is an associated value and we “ought, in the relevant sense, [to] do the thing that maximizes, or perhaps something that does well enough in achieving that kind the value.” But if these “oughts” conflict, there is no way to adjudicate between them, no meaningful question about what I ought to do or believe all things considered. He says: “We’ve disambiguated ‘ought’ and we can’t put the various senses back together again” (2000, 694).

Others may want to maintain the distinctness of these categories but say we *can* adjudicate between them and in the cases I have pointed to, moral duties override the epistemic ones. The problem with this response is that they *always* do- just as they override duties of etiquette or the duties of the Nazi guard. Again this may not seem to be a problem if one is not claiming that epistemic duties are any different than these conventional ones.

While moral duties can override legal duties as well, there is supposed to be a connection between law and morality; many think, for example, there is a moral duty to obey the law in which case the conflict between a legal and a moral duty would be a conflict between two moral duties. Perhaps one can view epistemic duties as analogous to legal duties in this sense. Doing so may well offer a way of introducing some more substantial normativity. For Cliffordian reasons we might have a moral duty to cultivate doxastic practices that get us truth and knowledge but just as we need to be on

the look-out for unjust laws and professional duties in figuring out how best to act, we also need to recognize the limits of the purely epistemic duties in figuring out what to believe. This idea is something I have explored at length elsewhere but if one goes this route then one must expect that the norms of belief as well as reasons to believe are not *merely* epistemic.⁸

Scott Stapleford argues that we do have purely epistemic duties, but that they are best thought of as imperfect duties. We must set evidential proportion as “an ideal limit on rationality and aim for it. How much deliberation is required, and on which propositions is a matter of judgement...we have a sort of policy obligation – an imperfect epistemic duty – to adopt the end of believing in accordance with the evidence. We are to blame, on purely epistemic grounds, if we make a habit of ignoring our evidence” (2015, 1869-70). Thinking of epistemic duties this way squares well with our actual practice. It is true that we don’t blame a person for each false or unjustified belief they have, or every inference they fail to draw but we do “blame people for inveterate irrationality, for relying on their guts and their creeds and neglecting to think things through” (1870). Elsewhere he puts it his way “we blame people for habitual irrationality or failing to reflect with sufficient care or frequency on the grounds of their beliefs. ‘He’s overly emotional and ignores the evidence’ and ‘She rarely thinks about what she believes’ give natural expression to a common concern --- that someone is managing their belief system poorly” (2015b, 22).

I agree that we make these kinds of normative assessments but if we think about why we reproach each other for these failings we are led back to the Cliffordian idea that we count on each other, and that bad belief forming habits risk doing serious damage. We are currently seeing vivid effects of how this is so. Here are just a few examples: (i) the recent measles outbreak, (ii) the suspicion that the doctors trying to fight Ebola are spreading it, (iii) the scientists trying to combat the olive tree disease in Italy being accused of causing it, (iv) the reluctance to seriously consider the evidence of the effects of climate change.⁹ Stapleford is right that these negative evaluations “needn’t make

⁸ See Schleifer McCormick (2015), especially chapters 2 and 3.

⁹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/congo-s-ebola-response-threatened-conspiracy-theories-rumors-n994156>
<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-thursday-edition-1.5155786/charges-against-scientists-dropped-in-italian-olive-tree-devastation-1.5155817>

any reference to the moral...ramifications of transient or chronic irrationality" but that they need not be referenced does not show that they "stem from epistemic considerations alone"(22). When I say "you are so wrapped up in your work, you are constantly ignoring my emotional needs" I am not referencing the moral ramifications of your lack of care. Yet, they are clearly present.

(ii) Not all blame is moral blame

I have argued that blame is not appropriate when one's fault is purely epistemic and, if this is so, that purely epistemic duties are akin to these more conventional and conditional ones. But perhaps the kind of blame being referred to in discussions of which beliefs are blameworthy is a different kind of blame. I think that sometimes what is in question is the purely causal sense of blame which is no different from the causal sense of responsibility; we blame the wind for blowing over the tent. When one looks to cases where blame is attributed in a non-moral sense, it is this causal sense that is usually being employed. If one does a google search, one can find many stories discussing whether Billy Buckner is "to blame" for losing game 6 of the World Series to the Mets, as well as the series itself. Other factors beyond his error will be pointed to when someone is arguing that he is not to blame. Here the question seems to be one of where best to locate the cause of the loss.

But sometimes when it is clear that a professional athlete was the cause of an important loss, fans will feel angry, betrayed and blame the athlete in a much stronger sense- even to the point of issuing death threats. Is this a case of non-moral blame? I don't think so. I think it is a case of inappropriate moral blame. It again has to do with a failure of expectations, but it is much harder to make sense of how the athlete's failure generates any kind of entitlement. But the fan feels like it does because it feels like they are participating in a social practice together and so the reasons grounding the reaction are the same kind as in the case of the doctor or childcare worker but the fan is mistaken in their description of the relationship.

Jessica Brown offers one of the few (perhaps only?) accounts of epistemic blame which she sees as related but distinct from moral blame. She models her view on George

Sher's account of moral blame. Now Sher's account is controversial and in some ways requires a lot less than other accounts of blame. But even on this more minimal view I don't think we can make sense of blaming people for their purely epistemic faults. On Sher's view we should understand blame as constituted by a belief-desire pair, namely the belief that an agent has acted wrongly and the desire that the person had not performed this bad act, where the desire issues from blamer's general commitment to morality. In adapting Sher's view to the epistemic case, Brown's analogy to acting wrongly is "believing badly" which she equates with violating an epistemic norm without excuse or justification. So "in the case of epistemic blame the relevant belief is that the agent believed badly and the relevant desire is that the agent hadn't believed badly" (2018, 11).

But while we can often have the requisite belief, when do we have the corresponding desire "that the believer appreciate the relevant epistemic reasons that she previously ignored and flouted"? Brown doesn't specify when and why some cases elicit such a desire. I think we have this desire when the ignoring and flouting *matters* or when we view it as *matter*ing. Brown notes that she is not claiming that we have the general desire that no one believes badly and she says this is a "happy result" since "it seems part of the phenomena to be explained that blaming people for their beliefs is less common and often takes a less strong form than blaming people for their bad actions (2018, 13-14)." I agree and think that the instances which give rise to the blame in the doxastic realm are times where the faults display some kind of disregard for something we care about that goes beyond the unexcused violation of an epistemic norm.

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