

No kind of reason is the wrong kind of reason

Draft of paper published in ed. McCain *Believing in Accordance with the Evidence: New Essays on Evidentialism*. (Springer 2018, 261-276) Please cite published version. This one almost certainly contains typos.

Miriam Schleifer McCormick mmccorm2@richmond.edu

1. Introduction

A reason is said to be “of the wrong kind” when, although it counts as a consideration broadly in favor of (or against) having an attitude it seems to *not* bear on the object of the attitude in a way that is relevant to determining whether the attitude is appropriate. For example, it seems to count in favor of admiring a bowl of mud that a demon offers me a huge sum of money to do so or threatens to kill me if I do not, but such considerations tell me nothing about the qualities of the bowl of mud that speak to its being admirable. When applied to belief it is often taken as a datum that the only genuine or “right” reasons for belief are those that bear directly on the question of “whether p”; such reasons are often called “evidential” “epistemic” or perhaps “truth-directed” or “alethic.” Considerations about whether it would be good or worthwhile to believe something, what I will term “practical reasons” may be reasons for another kind of attitude but, many contend, are not reasons for belief; they are the “wrong kind of reason” (WKR) for belief. Wrong kinds of reasons may have the appearance of reasons, but are not *genuine* reasons. The challenge, or what is sometimes called “the wrong kind of reason problem” is to explain why these are the wrong kind of reasons, to find some criterion which will delineate the right kind from the wrong kind such that only evidential reasons end up as the right kind. If the wrong kind of reasons problem could be solved it would also reveal the truth of a position that is sometimes referred to as “evidentialism,” which states that the only reasons for belief are evidential and contrasts with “pragmatism” which states that there are at least some non-evidential reasons for belief.”¹

Many solutions have been offered and rejected, but there is a general consensus that there is a real distinction here and the challenge is to construct a theory which captures it. I will argue that there is no distinction to capture, at least in the case of reasons for belief. If I am right this would help explain the problem’s seeming intractability. I will consider, in turn, three general strategies for showing why practical reasons are the wrong kind of reasons for belief and argue that none of them succeed. The first appeals to the nature of reasons; this is a highly generalized approach to the WKR problem that can then be applied to belief. The second appeals to the nature of belief, arguing that it is built in to what is it to be a belief that practical reasons are of the

¹ Nishi Shah defines evidentialism this way, namely as the view that “only evidence can be a reason for belief” and the pragmatist as one “committed to the existence of at least some non-evidential reasons for belief.” (Shah 2006, 482) Evidentialism is often used to describe a position about *justification*, and argues that beliefs are only justified if they are based on evidence; those opposed will offer examples where it appears that a belief can be justified without evidence. But anti-evidentialists of this kind are often also anti-pragmatists and so evidentialists in Shah’s sense. How these two kinds of evidentialism are connected is an interesting question, one I hope to pursue in future work. It should also be noted that some who are committed to evidentialism as a theory of justification can allow that non-evidential reasons exist, but that these are not relevant when we are evaluating belief from an *epistemic* perspective, and that believing for such reasons will lead one away from rationality. This is, for example, Richard Feldman’s (2000) view. I discuss and critique this view in Chapter 2 of *Believing Against the Evidence*.

wrong kind. The third appeals to the nature of the basing relation between a belief and a reason, arguing that this relation rules out practical reasons being reasons for belief. As we will see the division between these approaches is not a sharp one; there is much overlap between them but there is a clear difference in their emphases. Other papers which criticize possible solutions to the WKR problem end by suggesting we have more work to do and perhaps offer a direction to take in finding a successful solution. I end with a different suggestion; perhaps what is taken as a datum in need of explaining has been incorrectly identified. The distinction between good and bad reasons provides us with all the resources we need to make sense of cases that are used to motivate the WKR problem. There is no need to delineate a kind with feature x such that any reason which possesses feature x is thereby of the wrong kind.

2. The nature of reasons and standards of correctness

One way to diagnose the WKR problem, is to claim that it is primarily generated by a particular view about the nature of reasons, and to argue that an alternate view of reasons can offer a way out. Pamela Hieronymi's discussion is most explicit in taking this approach. A common way of understanding what it means for something to be a reason for an attitude is that it is a consideration that "counts in favor" of that attitude. But if this is all that it takes to be a reason, it is hard to see how paradigmatically "wrong" kind of reasons, such as monetary incentives to believe something false, or to admire a bowl of mud, do not count in favor of believing or admiring. Hieronymi argues instead that a reason is better understood as a consideration that "bears on a question." We can sort reasons into different "kinds" by distinguishing between the kinds of questions on which different considerations can bear. In general, we can distinguish between questions concerning the content of the attitude and questions which ask directly whether the attitude in question would be good to have, e.g. whether x is admirable vs. whether it would be good to admire x .² In the case of belief, it seems two different kinds of questions can be asked, one that bears on the content of the belief and one that bears on whether the belief would be good to have: "a consideration can count in favor of p by bearing on whether p or by bearing on whether the belief that p is in some way good to have." (444)

Hieronymi rightly points out that the content/attitude distinction is not sufficient to do the kind of sorting needed to deal with the WKR problem. Questions about content can bear on the questions about whether the attitude is good to have and vice-versa. This can be seen most clearly when we think that in establishing whether p is true we also often find out that it would be a good belief to have (for having true beliefs is generally a good thing). A further distinction is needed to be able to properly sort reasons, according to Hieronymi, and she argues, that the relevant distinction is between reasons that are "constitutive" and those that are "extrinsic." In the case of belief, reasons which one takes to show that the content of a belief is true are "constitutive;" finding such reasons convincing amounts to having the belief. These reasons are taken to settle the question "whether p " and, in settling that question, one believes p . All remaining reasons for believing p -those which (are taken to) count in favor of believing p independently of whether p are "extrinsic." Finding these convincing does not amount to believing p . Considering that it would save your life if you believed the butler did it does not, according to Hieronymi, provide you with a reason to believe the butler did it. Rather, "by finding these reasons convincing, you form a second-order belief about the belief that butler did it: you believe it would be good to believe he did...This distinction between constitutive and extrinsic reasons for a belief that p marks the distinction between the "right kind" and the "wrong kind" of reasons for believing p . The right kind of reasons for believing p are those that (are taken to) bear on whether p -that is, those that

² This distinction is often put in terms of state given reasons and object given reasons.

(are taken to) bear on the question, the settling of which amounts to believing. Extrinsic reasons are not "really" reasons for believing p , we can say, because they are not the kind of reasons which, simply by finding convincing, one would believe p ." (448)

If I take a consideration to bear on whether p , that is if I take a consideration to show it more or less likely that p is true, then, on this taxonomy it is the "right" kind. But is there any reason that just by its nature or content is excluded from bearing on whether p ? And in particular, why are practical reasons excluded as ones that can be taken to bear on whether p . If I take it that the fact that it would save my life makes it more likely that the butler did it then it would be a right kind of reason for belief. The inference "Believing the butler did it will save my life and so the butler did it" is probably a very bad inference, but we know people are capable of very faulty reasoning.³ Some argue that such inferences are psychologically or conceptually impossible but nothing Hieronymi says rules it out.⁴

Further, a consideration can bear on the truth of p without settling the question of whether p . In Hieronymi's initial characterization it sounds like a reason must be convincing for it count as a right kind of reason, that only those reasons which actually settle the question of whether p are real reasons. But what if I am still deliberating? I see a consideration as making p more likely but I also see another one which puts p in question. We have been presented with the counterfactual that says if we find reasons convincing and settle the question that p , then those reasons are constitutive. But what are we to say of considerations discarded in the process of deliberation? They seem to bear on whether p because if I ever were to settle the question I would then believe, but what if, in the end, my settling the question did not take these in account at all? Do they lose their status as reasons, or reasons of the right kind? And what if I never settle the question, or the question that concerns me is fundamentally unsettle-able?

These considerations suggest that if one were not already convinced that certain type of reasons (usually called "evidential") were the right kinds and that another type (often called practical) were the wrong kind, this constitutive/extrinsic distinction need not capture the same distinction. It remains open that practical reasons can help settle the question whether p , and it also seems that evidential considerations still count as reasons even if they bear on questions that can never be settled.

Mark Schroeder has criticized Hieronymi's approach, as well as many others, to the WKR problem by arguing that their scope is too narrow. Schroeder views the problem as one that is very general, that arises for any state or activity governed by standards of correctness, and so a solution, he thinks should also be very general. Hieronymi is clear that her approach only applies to what she terms "commitment-constituting" attitudes, that is attitudes that one can form or revise simply by settling for oneself a question. One is "committed, in the sense that if one has the attitude, one is answerable to certain questions and criticisms ~ namely those questions and criticisms would be answered by the considerations that bear on those relevant question(s). So, for example, if I believe p then I am committed to p , that is I am answerable to questions and criticisms that would be answered by the considerations that bear on whether p ." (450)

These attitudes include intentions and beliefs, and Hieronymi is inclined to think they could include much more. But this distinction cannot be drawn, she says for all attitudes or rational activity; it cannot be drawn in the case of "ordinary actions"; one does not act simply by settling the question whether to act. Schroeder thinks one can generate the same kind of problem for all kinds of actions, for example, the activity of tying a knot. Since my discussion here is limited to

³ The reasoning may not be as bad as it appears. Something like "The only way that believing the butler did it will save my life is if the butler did it" could be a suppressed premise.

⁴ We will see an example of such an argument when discussing Nishi Shah's view.

reasons for belief, I am only interested in what his solution tells us about reasons for believing, and if it does, in fact rule out practical reasons for belief as being “genuine” reasons. Schroeder thinks it is important to note that “wrong kinds of reasons” are almost always relativized to a particular subject and context (often involving evil demons or eccentric billionaires) and so are “idiosyncratic” whereas right kind of reasons are universal in some sense. Here is his characterization of a right kind of reason (RKR):

“The right kind of reasons with respect to any activity, A, are all and only those reasons which are shared by necessarily every able person engaging in A, because they are engaged in A, together with all reasons which are derivative from such reasons.” (2010, 39)

The idea is that if an activity has standards of correctness, these standards provide reasons for anyone engaged in that activity; “only the ‘right’ kind contribute to standards of correctness.” If, for example, you are engaged in the activity of playing chess then you have a reason to move your bishop diagonally and not horizontally, and if you are trying to execute a particular endgame you have reason to move your rook one way and not another: “Placing one’s rook in the third rank is an incorrect way to execute the Lucena endgame position, but it is the correct way to throw the match – so the very same action can be the correct way of doing one thing but an incorrect way of doing another.”

What does it mean for a reason to “contribute” to a standard of correctness? In executing an endgame you have a reason to move your rook one way rather than another because doing so will help you succeed in the execution. In the activity of tying a knot, you have a reason to manipulate the rope or string in such a way that they cohere together; you must have a minimal aim that these pieces of rope or string achieve at least some cohesion, and anyone engaged in tying knots will “share any reasons that arise from this aim.” (40) This is why the eccentric millionaire’s offer of a huge sum of money to just lay one rope on top of the other does not provide you with a reason to tie knots that way; it is not a “tying knot” reason. No such incentive affects the correct way to tie a knot.

In these cases, that of executing endgames and tying knots, it is clear that standards of correctness are tied to aims; the standards are there to help achieve specific aims, and the right kind of reasons are the ones that, in principle, help us achieve these aims. But Schroeder’s approach is supposed to apply to mental states as well. Do these all have standards of correctness, and if they do, can they be tied to aims in a way that allows us to make sense of reasons which “contribute” to those standards and those that do not? Schroeder considers the case of admiring, realizing that figuring out standards of correctness will be more complicated than in the case of an intentional activity like tying a knot. He argues, however, that “there are going to be some important reasons shared by anyone who is engaged in admiring.” (42) Remember these reasons need to be tied in some sense to standards of correctness, and so we need to say something about what it is to admire such that one can do so correctly or incorrectly. Schroeder considers a couple of ways we might do this. The first appeals to facts about admiring; perhaps it is a fact that if one admires someone one is motivated to emulate that person and so anyone engaged in admiring only has a reason to admire someone if it would not be bad to emulate them. Or maybe we have standing reason to not have false mental representations and “if admiration is an attitude which represents its objects as being in a certain way... then we can take the view that having the attitude of admiration triggers these reasons not to have false representations, by giving you reasons not to admire people who lack the feature that admiration represents people as having.” (42)

While Schroeder says that his initial characterization, and solution to the WKR problem, leaves open which activities have standards of correctness, what they are, and how they generate

reasons, his brief discussion of the attitude of admiring suggests that while his approach works for actions (as Hieronymi's does not), it is far from straightforward how it applies to attitudes which is where the WKR problem is generated. When it comes to admiring, the only shared reasons he has suggested are reasons *not* to admire; one has a reason not to admire someone it would be bad to emulate or not to admire someone who lacks feature *x*; this sounds very close to saying one has reason not to admire someone who is not admirable. But are there any shared reasons *to* admire for anyone engaged in the "activity" of admiring in a way analogous to there being shared reasons to manipulate string a certain way for anyone engaged in the activity of rope-tying? So many of these may well be idiosyncratic which was supposed to be a hallmark of the wrong kind of reasons. Given *my* desires and preferences it seems I may have a reason to admire someone who you do not, even if we share reasons not to admire someone wholly despicable.⁵

Schroeder says he conceives of believing as an activity and mentions it as one of those to which the WKR problem arises but he does not discuss it directly as one of his examples. How would the standard of correctness for belief need to be characterized such that practical reasons were necessarily the wrong kind of reasons for belief? While one may question whether the attitude of admiration even has a standard of correctness, beliefs clearly do. A belief's standard of correctness is truth. But what does this standard tell us about reasons for belief? It can tell us we have a reason not to believe falsehoods. Taken in one way this is a platitude which any believer accepts, in some sense *must* accept. If I believe something I take it that what I believe is true; I cannot believe what I take to be false. But this is a long way from ruling out a class of considerations as reasons to believe. Again, as was the case when thinking about Hieronymi's solution, it is useful to think about doxastic deliberation; when I am trying to figure out what to believe is when I am most clearly considering reasons for and against the belief, not when I am already fully committed. Nothing about belief's standard of correctness alone dictates what the content or nature of a reason for belief must be. And what we often find is a mixture of different kind of considerations when engaged in such deliberation. Consider this example:

Referee: Geoff, an experienced referee, is refereeing a high school soccer match. He blows his whistle, declaring that a player is offside. He can see from the reactions of both teams, and the fans, that they think the call was mistaken. Based on this new evidence he asks himself "What should I believe? Should I believe I made a mistake? Should I revise my belief that the player was off-side?" In the process of this deliberation, Geoff considers that if he were to revise his belief or now believe he made a mistake, he would both (a) replay the past event in his head to try check if he made a mistake and (b) overanalyze future events. The former increases the chances he will miss crucial evidence in the future while the latter increases the chances that he will draw the wrong conclusion from the evidence he does collect. In either case, he will be a poorer judge or collector of the evidence as the game proceeds, thus making him both an inferior epistemic agent, as well as worse referee. He continues to believe the call was correct and the player was indeed off-side.

The considerations that bear on whether Geoff should maintain his belief (even from Geoff's perspective) are not all evidential; he is also thinking about whether it would be good for him to maintain his belief and bad for him to revise it; the fact that it would make him a worse referee if he were to revise is salient in his deliberation, but this is clearly a non-evidential reason. If he is right that he also has reason to maintain his belief because doing so will allow him to form more true beliefs in the future then some of the non-evidential reasons may be what Brian Talbot

⁵ For discussion and criticisms of Schroeder's view along similar lines see Sharadin (2013)

has called “truth promoting non-evidential reasons for belief.” (Talbot, 2014) If this is the case then we can see even more clearly that belief’s standard of correctness will not decide, in a simple way, that only considerations of a certain kind count as reasons for belief. Now if one is already committed to the view that the only genuine reasons for belief are evidential, one will find a way of re-describing this case (and others like it) that does not undermine that view. But another kind of argument is needed to show that practical reasons are reasons of the wrong kind. ⁶

3. The nature of belief

Both Schroeder and Hieronymi are interested in getting a deeper understanding of the nature of reasons in general, but others have argued that one can grasp why only certain kinds of reasons are reasons for belief by thinking more specifically about the nature and norms of *belief*. These solutions may not be able to address wider issues generated by the WKR problem, but that is not my concern here.

I have discussed this approach at length elsewhere⁷ and so will be fairly brief in my discussion here. We saw that there is a straightforward way to tie reasons to standards of correctness in the cases of activities that have aims. While the idea of admiring having an aim seems odd, it is quite common to find talk of the aim of belief, and most construe the aim as truth. If beliefs (or believing?) have an aim, this could provide a way of revealing which reasons are of the right kind and which are not, depending on whether they help achieve the aim. While Bernard Williams (1973) was the first to explicitly introduce the idea of beliefs aiming at truth, this idea has been expanded and elaborated in many ways more recently. One common way of making sense of Williams’s idea that beliefs “aim at truth,” is to argue that beliefs are governed by, and only by, truth-related norms. “Normativism” about belief has become very widespread; on this view it is built into what it is to be a belief (as opposed to some other sort of mental attitude) that beliefs are subject to certain norms, and, while there is some disagreement of how to characterize these constitutive norms, it is agreed that they are alethic, or epistemic.⁸ Further, on this view, the only reasons for believing *must* be reasons that relate to the truth. In some sense, these accounts bring together Hieronymi’s observations about constitutive reasons, and Schroeder’s ideas about standards of correctness.

While one can find many examples of discussions of the nature of belief which purport to explain why practical reasons are not really reasons for belief, Nishi Shah’s (2003, 2006) discussion is the most explicit in its defense of this view. Further, I emphasized that when thinking about what kinds of considerations count as reasons for belief, we should think about considerations that arise in the context of doxastic deliberation, and Shah agrees. Yet he thinks that reflecting on

⁶ In (2017) I discuss the Referee example as well as some other cases where it appears agents have practical reasons to believe. There are many ways that one can re-describe this case to preserve the idea that only right kind of reasons for belief are ones that raise the probability of the belief being true. One could say that the non-evidential reasons are not reasons which bear on whether or not to revise one’s belief but instead bear on one’s broader epistemic goals. Or one might suggest that these are reasons which bear on Geoff’s action, namely the making of the call. I present cases like this not as way of demonstrating that they conclusively show that practical reasons can be genuine reasons for belief, but to try to show that in a very natural way of thinking about doxastic deliberation, non-evidential considerations are salient. If there are independent reasons for thinking that such cases cannot exist, then the motivation for such re-descriptions are clear. But whether such independent reasons have been given exactly what I am questioning.

⁷ In (2015) and (2017)

⁸ For a helpful recent discussion of normativism about belief see Nolfi (2015). Among those Nolfi cites as endorsing normativism are Jonathan Adler, Allan Gibbard, Peter Graham, Peter Railton, Nishi Shah, Ernest Sosa and Ralph Wedgwood. Stephanie Leary (2016) argues that the strategy of appealing to the constitutive standards of correctness of belief to rule out non-evidential reasons for beliefs fails.

such deliberation will help to reveal why only evidential considerations can be reasons. Shah begins with what he takes to be a fact about such deliberation. He says that when we reason, or deliberate, about what to believe, then only truth-related questions matter; we are concerned only with evidence. Shah calls this phenomenon “transparency”; the question *whether to believe that p* collapses into the question of *whether p is true*. He first introduces this idea when contrasting beliefs formed in a deliberative context and when they are not, posing what he calls the “teleologist’s dilemma.”

In many contexts in which we form beliefs, or are caused to have beliefs, non-evidential processes such as wishful thinking are responsible. If the teleologist, weakens the disposition to form true beliefs to allow for cases of wishful thinking and other non-evidential processes, then they cannot explain why evidence plays an exclusive role in reasoning about what to believe. To account for this, the teleologist would have to strengthen the aiming-at-truth disposition so as to exclude influence of non-truth-regarding considerations. Shah’s problem is summarized as follows: “We need an account that explains why deliberative belief-formation is regulated solely by a disposition to be moved by alethic considerations, but doesn’t require non-deliberative instances of belief-formation be also solely regulated by such a disposition.”(2003, 467) His way out of the dilemma is to emphasize the *conceptual* necessity of truth being the standard of correctness for belief; built into the concept of belief is the idea that a correct belief is a true one. Here is a clear statement of what he takes that to imply: “To say that it is a conceptual rather than merely metaphysical matter that truth is the standard of correctness for belief is to say that a competent user of the concept of belief must accept the prescription to believe *p* only if *p* is true for any activity that he conceives of as belief-formation.” (2003, 470) This understanding of the connection between belief and truth offers a way out of the teleologist’s dilemma. According to Shah, when one applies the concept in one’s reasoning, truth-relevant considerations must be applied; but in non-deliberative contexts where the concept is not *exercised*, one’s cognitive activity need not be regulated by truth-relevant dispositions.

Shah further argues that reflection on transparency can help to show the truth of evidentialism. Evidentialism, he argues, is “built in” to the nature of doxastic deliberation. Although transparency does not immediately imply evidentialism (namely, the view that only evidence can serve as a reason for belief), it is so implied when coupled with what Shah calls “the deliberative constraint on reasons.” This constraint tells us that something can be a reason to *X* only if it is *possible* for it to function as a premise in deliberation to *X*. When this constraint is applied to belief, the following holds:

R is a reason for *X* to believe that *p* only if *R* is capable of disposing *X* towards believing that *p* in a way characteristic of *R*’s functioning as a premise in doxastic deliberation.

Given that transparency shows that questions related to the truth of *p* are the sole focus of our attention in doxastic deliberation, when it is combined with the deliberative constraint, pragmatic considerations for believing are shown to be impossible. Practical reasons focus on the attractiveness of doing something but nothing about the *attractiveness* of believing (aside from whether is true), if we accept transparency, can serve as reason for believing from the perspective of the believer.

From my discussion so far it should be clear that I am questioning what is often taken as unquestionable fact (either a contingent, but universal one, or a conceptually necessary one), namely that “the deliberative question *whether to believe that p* inevitably gives way to the factual question *whether p*.” This characterization does not exhaust the ways in which we consider the question *whether to believe p*. Non-alethic considerations can be part of even first-person doxastic deliberation. Further, even if there is a sense in which the question *whether to believe p* ends up

collapsing into the question *whether p*, it is not clear that all the considerations opposed to or in favor of *p* are strictly “evidential.”

In thinking about the Referee case, Shah could allow that non-evidential factors enter into the *causes* of Geoff’s belief, what is precluded by his account is that Geoff could view such non-alethic considerations as *reasons* to believe. But why can’t such practical considerations be reasons for belief? The deliberative constraint on reasons says a consideration can only be a reason to *x* if it is capable of “functioning as a premise” in deliberation to *x*. Now, if deliberation is characterized as a kind of deductive *argument* with premises and conclusions, it would certainly be very odd for a practical consideration to function as a premise in whether to believe something. To say I am hungry and tired and, *therefore*, the witness is innocent is very bad reasoning, though, again, not obviously impossible. But, is deliberation really best understood as an argument with the conclusion being an action or belief?

In thinking about practical deliberation, it seems we deliberate when it is not immediately clear what to do; it is usually when there are reasons supporting different, often conflicting, actions. I have to decide whether I should stay home and grade, or go see my friend’s band play. What goes on when I deliberate about this? It seems I make a kind of list of considerations in favor and opposed to each course of action. Some people even transfer this mental list on to actual paper to assist in their deliberation. If, in the end, I decide to stay home and grade, it seems anything that came up in that list can be a *reason* for my staying home and grading. But did it function as *premise*? Would it make sense to think of my deliberative process along these lines:

If I don’t grade tonight it will just make things worse for me tomorrow. Things being worse for me tomorrow is something I should avoid. Therefore, I should grade.

One can reconstruct practical reasoning in such a way, though it bears little resemblance to what I think actually goes on in such deliberation. And its conclusion is not an actual action but a normative statement. If weak-willed actions are possible, I may go through that process and still go out to the show. This way of thinking about deliberation fails to capture, for example, all the considerations that were rejected that supported another course of action. Now Shah is not committed to saying something can only be a reason if it actually functions as a premise in deliberation; it must only be *capable* of doing so. But it seems all considerations that arise during the course of deliberation, even if they are rejected or overshadowed, should count as possible reasons, though it is hard to see how to reconstruct such complex, and somewhat messy, thoughts into argument form.

In addressing the question of what is going on when it *seems* as if practical considerations function as reasons in deliberation about whether to believe something, Shah considers a number of explanations. One is that an agent can be mistaken about what counts as evidence. If someone takes it as a general principle that if something is good for him, it is probably true, then it is possible that when thinking about whether to believe something, such a person would think that facts about his good provide him with reasons to believe. Shah says such a person is not mistaking a practical consideration for an evidential one, but is accepting an unwarranted evidential principle. So, though a third-person perspective can indicate that his belief is not based on evidential reasons, from a first-person perspective, the agent mistakenly sees desirability as an indicator of truth. What Shah thinks these examples usually reveal, however, is a conflation of the question of whether to bring about the belief, and the question of whether to believe. This brings us back to Hieronymi’s way of distinguishing between the two kinds of reasons by thinking about the questions upon which they bear and, once again, I question whether there is a class or kind of considerations that can be delineated which bears on one, but not the other.

4. The basing relation

Evidentialists tend to not be fazed by examples (like Referee) which purport to show that practical reasons can be reasons for belief.⁹ All will admit that non-evidential considerations, in fact, can contribute causally to what one believes. Many (though not all) will even say that such considerations can count as reasons for these subjects to believe and, again, such reasons may partially cause the beliefs. What they deny, however, is that these non-evidential reasons are reasons *for which* these subjects believe; beliefs, they say, cannot be *based* on such reasons. To try to articulate what it means for a belief to be based on reason, as opposed to the reason simply being one of the causes of the belief is not simple and philosophers disagree on the nature of the relationship. The Referee example is supposed to provide a case where one's beliefs are, at least partly, so based. As I said, if one is already convinced that such reasons are ruled out, then one will try to explain cases like this away. We have seen that some argue that the proper way to think about reasons rules them out, and others think that careful reflection on the nature of belief rules them out. Still others think understanding what it means for a belief to be *based on a reason* reveals that beliefs cannot be based on practical reasons, and if this true, this reveals why they are not *really* reasons.

To assess whether it is the case that there is a whole class of reasons on which beliefs cannot be based, we need some understanding of the basing relation. But providing a characterization of this relation has proved extremely difficult, though there is much recent (and current) work being done trying to clarify it. It should be noted that the motivation to gain a clearer understanding of the basing relation is usually that doing so will help us understand what kind of relationship is required between a belief and a reason so that one is doxastically justified in holding the belief. Often these discussions assume that there are reasons *to justify* the proposition believed (and this is termed “propositional justification”) but for the attitude of belief to be justified by this reason, it must be *based* on this reason, but what does it mean to be so based?¹⁰

The relationship cannot be simply causal as many causes of beliefs may not be reasons at all, let alone reasons *for which* one believes. As Korcz puts it “given that in principle anything can cause anything, a causal account of the basing relation will allow beliefs to be based on reasons which seem completely unrelated to them. For instance, one's belief about having ridden a zebra once might, in principle, cause one to believe that Queen Elizabeth was a member of the Mafia.” (545)

In trying provide an account of the relation, some stick to a general causal story but try to articulate the *appropriate* kind of causation so as to rule out deviant causal chains while others have abandoned that approach in favor of what are sometimes termed “doxastic” accounts which state that a belief is only based on a reason if one has a meta-belief that the appropriate relation holds. Still others are searching for an alternative to either of these general approaches. I do not have space here to discuss and evaluate all these accounts. Instead I will present a number of alternative

⁹ See footnote 6 for some ways of responding to these cases. Another strategy is to argue that practical reasons could not be the kinds of reasons that determine whether one has knowledge and only reasons that are genuine reasons are those such that if one has a true non-Gettiered belief that one would have knowledge. This kind of view is very much like the one that appeals to the truth aim or norm, but instead appeals to knowledge as belief's aim or norm. But again, what rules out that such considerations could bear on knowledge in a significant way? Any theory which allows for pragmatic encroachment on knowledge is allowing that practical considerations are not wholly irrelevant to whether one knows. Further such a view seems to commit one to a particular view of knowledge which precludes that one can have perfectly reasonable belief even when one is not in a position to know.

¹⁰ The distinction is also sometimes made in terms of a belief being *justifiable* and beliefs being *justified*. This is, for example, how Korcz (2000) introduces his discussion. For helpful discussion of what the relation is trying to identify see also McCain (2012) and Neta (ms.)

representative accounts and argue only pure doxastic accounts are likely to show that the basing relation rules out a particular category of reason. Now if one is already convinced that such reasons are the wrong kind of reasons for belief, that doxastic theories can show why this is so, will count in their favor. But such accounts have been criticized on many grounds and if one rejects them in favor of any kind of causal or dispositional account, then one will not be in a position to designate a class of reason as being reasons of the wrong kind by appeal to the nature of the basing relation.

Kurt Sylvan (2016) has recently presented a helpful survey and discussion of recent accounts of the basing relation, and some of what follows is indebted to his way of carving up the terrain. The first amendment to a simple causal view is to state that a belief is only based on a reason if the reason “causally sustains the belief.” The central idea of such a view, and which many more complicated theories retain, is that if the reason upon which the belief is based is lost then so is the belief. But just as causes can seem unrelated to the beliefs they cause so can causal sustainers. As John Turri points out, we can imagine “that through some random quirk— the result of a neural assembly malfunctioning— Wilt’s belief that the lettuce wilted [causally sustains] his belief that the Patriots will win twelve games this season.”

To avoid non-deviant causes, Turri introduces the idea of a cognitive trait; a reason non-deviantly causes your belief if it manifests your cognitive traits. He ends with this account of the basing relation: “R is among your reasons for believing Q if and only if R’s causing your belief manifests (at least some of) your cognitive traits.”

Sylvan points out that it is unclear that the cognitive trait requirement blocks all deviance counterexamples, however. He considers this example modified from Boghossian (2014: 4). “A pessimistic character might be regularly caused to think ‘Yet so much food is bad’ whenever he thinks ‘Some food is good’. The fact that this transition manifests his pessimistic character makes no difference to the intuition that he doesn’t base his belief that so much food is bad on his belief that some food is good.”

To overcome the problem of causal deviance (as well as others) many recent theories have tried to articulate a way in which an agent must “treat” the consideration that causally sustains her belief as a reason. This “treating condition” can be characterized in many ways. One way is in terms of an agent’s dispositions. Ian Evans (2013) has recently argued for a dispositional account, characterizing the basing relation as follows:

S’s belief that p is based on m iff S is disposed to revise her belief that p when she loses m.

On such a view your dispositions reveal whether you “treat” a consideration as a reason. More complex accounts of what it is to “treat” something as a reason are found in Lord and Sylvan (ms.) and Neta (ms.). Sylvan summarizes such views of the basing relation as follows:

It is true that S believes q for reason p because “S treats p-like considerations as normative reasons to believe q-like propositions and as a manifestation of that fact, S’s belief that p explains why S believes that q.”

Most views which incorporate a “treating” condition do not rule out practical reasons as being reasons for which one can believe. In Neta’s discussion he provides examples to help illuminate the connection between the agent and the reason so that it provides what is needed, and he says:

[I]t is possible for an agent to C for the reason R even when she doesn’t know what her reason for C’ing is: this is quite common for mature humans, and even more common for the less mature. There might be reasons for which I am angry at my parents, but I might

not know what those reasons are: I can represent an explanatory relation even if I fail to represent some of its relata, just as I can represent a whole even if I fail to represent its parts. Also, my account of the basing relation is consistent with an agent's C'ing for the reason R even when she also believes that R is not a good reason for C'ing...It's possible for an agent to represent an explanatory relation between her reasons and her RDC [rationally determinable condition, e.e belief] even when she is not attentively representing it: when acquiring a skill (e.g., speaking a language, playing a musical instrument, or using Kung Fu), we learn to do various things for various reasons, and to do so quickly and without deliberation or attentive reflection...The musician might not know why she plays a passage in just the way she does, and the Kung Fu expert might not know exactly why she moves in just the way she does, but either expert might come to know the reasons for which she does these things if she reflects skillfully upon those reasons. (ms, 35-56)

The only candidates for accounts of basing which rule out practical reasons as being genuine reasons are those which require one have fully conscious meta-beliefs about the normative status of these reasons. Such views have been criticized for having an overly intellectualist view of what is required for a belief to be based on a reason, and they also seem to commit one to a very strong kind of internalism; in fact this has been seen by some as one of their virtues. Further, one may wonder if one needs to have meta-beliefs about those meta-beliefs, and further meta-meta beliefs, leading to an infinite regress of higher order beliefs.¹¹ Now it may be that even such views do not rule out practical reasons for belief. It is possible in certain cases for agents to recognize their non-evidential reasons for believing.; you can see that some of the considerations sustaining your belief that your lover is faithful are non-evidential. But that one needs to be able to recognize one's reason for believing once one believes seems an overly demanding constraint on what is required to believe for a reason. Consider an ordinary case of believing for an evidential reason. You believe the match will go ahead and the reason you believe this is that it is sunny. If we accept Shah's strong constraint on reasons, namely that for a consideration to be a reason for you to Φ , it must be a consideration from which you could reason to Φ -ing then what makes the fact that it is sunny outside a reason for your belief is that this fact is used in your reasoning to the conclusion that the match will go ahead. Again, in the cases I have presented, the agents do just that. What gives this constraint plausibility is that reasons should guide us. But to add the further constraint that for a consideration to be a reason one *must* have full conscious awareness of the reasons for which one Φ s would imply that we rarely believe (or act for that matter) for reasons. You form the belief that the match will go ahead and so go to the match. If you do not maintain full consciousness of why you so believe, do you thereby no longer believe for a reason?¹²

5. Conclusion: Good and bad, not right and wrong

¹¹ McCain (2016) brings up this objection, as well as many other problems with doxastic accounts in Chapter 7.

¹² Jonathan Way (2016) has argued that for the constraint on reasoning to preclude non-evidential reasons for belief it needs to be this very strong constraint, but unlike the weaker constraint that just says it needs to be capable of motivating or of operating in deliberation or reasoning "the condition looks gerrymandered to support an argument for evidentialism." (812) Susanna Rinard (2015) has recently argued that the characterizations of the basing relation which rule out non-evidential reasons for belief rule out a lot more, namely they rule out non-evidential reasons for action as well.

For all I have said here it may be the case that practical reasons are never good reasons for beliefs; perhaps beliefs based on such reasons are always improperly based.¹³ But an account of the basing relation should not only explain when beliefs are properly based. In Ram Neta's recent discussion he argues that one of the conditions that a theory of the basing relation should meet is that it can explain the difference between proper and improper basing. On his view, for example, one can be mistaken in one's representation of a consideration as a reason. Korcz makes a similar point when discussing deviant causes. He argues that there is no principled way of ruling out the reasons causing one's Queen Elizabeth belief as being different in kind from what we often take to be very bad reasons. He summarizes his point as follows "any account of the basing relation which denies a mental state the status of being a reason simply because it seems to be a very bad one is likely to face serious counter-examples (545)."

If there were a way to rule out practical reasons as being genuine reasons for belief then there would not be any need to ask the further question as to whether it can ever be permissible to believe for such reasons. Jonathan Adler, for example, was explicit in taking this approach in his *Beliefs' Own Ethics*. One of his central contentions is that it is a mistake to appeal to "normative notions" in assessing what to believe. He refers to such approaches as "extrinsic," and he argues that this notion is based on a faulty assumption, namely that the concept of belief alone does not fix the ethics of belief. Beliefs, he maintains, have their own "ethics," discovered by a clear analysis of the concept of belief. And such an analysis, he claims, shows that we *must* believe according to the evidence and that any mental state based on practical reasons is not really a belief.

If I am right that there is no way, in principle, to rule out practical reasons for belief, except perhaps by adopting some very contentious views, then the argument between evidentialists and pragmatists must be conducted at the level which we find in the classic debate between Clifford and James. The evidentialist must show that even if one *can* believe for non-evidential reasons, we *ought* only believe according to the evidence.

References

Adler, Jonathan. *Beliefs' Own Ethics*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

Evans, Ian "The Problem of the Basing Relation" *Synthese* (2013) 190:2943–2957
DOI 10.1007/s11229-012-0111-1

Hieronymi, Pamela [2005]. 'The Wrong Kind of Reasons.' *Journal of Philosophy*. 102(9): 437-457.

Korcz, K. 'The Causal-Doxastic Theory of the Basing Relation.' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30 (2000): 525–50.

Lord, E. and K. Sylvan. "Prime Time (for the Basing Relation)" (ms.)

McCain, Kevin "The Interventionist Account of Causation and the Basing Relation" *Philosophical Studies*, (2012) 159 (3): 357-382.

~*The Nature of Scientific Knowledge: An Explanatory Approach*. Springer, 2016

¹³ I argue against this view in (2015), especially Chapters 2 and 3. I do not there, however, offer an account of the basing relation so that we can sort reasons into good and bad ones, and so distinguish between cases where a belief is properly based on a practical reason and when it is not. This is the main topic of a forthcoming paper.

McCormick, Miriam Schleifer. 2015. *Believing Against the Evidence: Agency and the Ethics of Belief*. New York. Routledge, 2015.

-- "Responding to Skepticism about Doxastic Agency," *Erkenntnis*, DOI: 10.1007/s10670-017-9906-2 (2017)

Neta, Ram "The Basing Relation" (ms.)

Nolfi, Kate, "How to Be a Normativist About the Nature of Belief", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 96 (2):181-204 (2015)

Rinard, Susanna "Against the New Evidentialists" *Philosophical Issues* 25, 2015. doi: 10.1111/phis.12061

Schroeder, Mark "Value and the Right Kind of Reason," in R. Shafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 5, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 25-55 (2010)

Shah, Nishi. "A New Argument for Evidentialism." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56, no. 225 (2006): 481-498.

--"How Truth Governs Belief." *The Philosophical Review* 112, no. 4 (2003): 447-482.

Sharadin, Nathaniel (2013) "Schroeder on the Wrong Kind of Reasons Problem for Attitudes" *Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy* 7, no. 3

Sylvan, Kurt. "Epistemic Reasons II: Basing." *Philosophy Compass* 11 (7):377-389 (2016)

Talbot, Brian, "Truth promoting non-evidential reasons for belief" *Philosophical Studies* (2014) 168: 599-618.

Turri, John 'Believing for a Reason.' *Erkenntnis* 74 (2011): 383-97.

Way, Jonathan "Two Arguments for Evidentialism" *The Philosophical Quarterly* (2016) 66 (265): 805-818.