

Evidentialism Doesn't Make an Exception for Belief

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Abstract

Susanna Rinard has recently offered a new argument for pragmatism and against evidentialism. According to Rinard, evidentialists must hold that the rationality of belief is determined in a way that is different from how the rationality of other states is determined. She argues that we should instead endorse a view she calls *Equal Treatment*, according to which the rationality of all states is determined in the same way. In this paper, I show that Rinard's claims are mistaken, and that evidentialism is more theoretically virtuous than its opponents sometimes give it credit for. Not only does evidentialism *not* make an exception for belief, but it fits naturally into a unified, explanatorily powerful account of the rationality of intentional mental states. According to such an account, the rationality of all intentional mental states, including belief, is determined by the right kind of reasons for those states. Since the right kind of reasons for belief just are evidential considerations, this unified account entails evidentialism. I conclude, contra Rinard, that evidentialism can be (and often is) situated within a general account of rationality that is at least as theoretically virtuous as pragmatism, if not more so.

1. Introduction *

As the longstanding debate between evidentialists and pragmatists rages on, Susanna Rinard (2017) has recently offered a new argument for pragmatism and against evidentialism.¹ According to Rinard, evidentialism must hold that the rationality of belief is determined in a way that is different from how the rationality of other states is determined. Thus, as she puts it, evidentialism makes an exception for belief. She argues that we should instead endorse a view she calls *Equal Treatment*, according to which the rationality of all states is determined in the same way.² And since the rationality of some states is

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¹ I'll understand evidentialism (as Rinard does), as the thesis that the rationality of belief is determined solely by evidential considerations. I'll understand pragmatism as the thesis that the rationality of belief is determined at least partly by practical considerations.

² Although Rinard is (to my knowledge) the first to motivate Equal Treatment by levelling the charge of 'exceptionalism' against evidentialism, she is not the first to propose such a view. Stich (1990) argues for something like Equal Treatment on the grounds that only practical considerations (and not truth) have normative force. Stich's argument differs in

determined by practical considerations, this gets us a kind of pragmatism about rationality. Rinard claims that since Equal Treatment constitutes a more unified approach to rationality, and thereby yields a simpler and more elegant theory, it is theoretically superior to evidentialism.

My aim in this paper is to show that Rinard's argument fails to show that pragmatism is theoretically superior to evidentialism. Not only does evidentialism *not* make an exception for belief, but it fits naturally into a unified, explanatorily powerful account of the rationality of intentional mental states. While such an account unifies a smaller class of states than Rinard's, I argue that this is ultimately a virtue. Thus, evidentialism is at least as theoretically virtuous as pragmatism when it comes to unification.

The paper proceeds as follows. In §2, I briefly reconstruct Rinard's primary argument against evidentialism. In §3, I argue that an alternative version of Equal Treatment is at least as plausible as Rinard's, but compatible with evidentialism. In §4, I show that evidentialism can be understood as an application to belief of a general account of the rationality of intentional mental states, and so it does not make an exception for belief. In §5, I argue that the best unifying principle only unifies the rationality of belief with that of other intentional mental states, and that this more modest principle can account for nuances and complexities in the landscape of rationality that Rinard's cannot. In §6, I show how the account of rationality sketched in previous sections is a natural extension of claims long made by evidentialists about the rationality of belief and other mental states. In §7, I offer brief concluding remarks.

2. Rinard's Argument

Rinard argues that evidentialism makes an exception for belief because it enjoins us to treat the rationality of belief in a way that is different from how we treat the rationality of other states. She asks us to consider states like the following:

- (A) Wearing a raincoat
- (B) Listening to a Leo Kottke CD
- (C) Playing with one's dog

important ways from Rinard's, but comes to the common conclusion of a hard pragmatist view about the rationality of belief. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

- (D) Mowing the lawn
- (E) Being a member of the APA

As she notes, the rationality of such states is clearly determined by practical considerations. Candidates for such practical considerations are the usual suspects: that the state will maximize expected value, that it will be an effective means to one's ends, or that it will be an effective means to the ends one ought to have.

It is not important to Rinard's argument which of these practical considerations determine the rationality of states like (A)-(E). What is important for her is that the rationality of these states is determined by practical considerations. Evidentialism holds that the rationality of belief is determined by evidence, not by practical considerations. So, according to Rinard, evidentialism makes an exception for belief. She concludes that evidentialism is in this way an 'exceptionalist' view about the rationality of belief.

Rinard argues that on grounds of unification, we should reject exceptionalist views and instead accept the following principle:

Equal Treatment: However the rationality of states like (A)-(E) is determined, the rationality of any other state—in particular, any [belief] state—is determined in precisely the same way (p. 123).³

According to Equal Treatment, the rationality of belief is determined by the very same practical considerations that determine the rationality of (A)-(E), whatever those considerations are. This would entail the falsity of evidentialism and the truth of some kind of pragmatism about the rationality of belief.

One of Rinard's key claims is that evidentialism, as an exceptionalist view, "presents us with a fractured and thereby more complicated theory of rationality" (p. 124). And since most philosophers agree that we should aim for "simplicity and elegance" in our theorizing, this supports Equal Treatment over evidentialism. Furthermore, she claims that Equal Treatment can do just as good a job of making

³ The word 'belief' is missing from Rinard's formulation of Equal Treatment, but it is clear from context that it should be present. Rinard discusses the principle throughout her paper as if it is present, and it is difficult to make sense of the "in particular" clause of the principle without its presence.

sense of why it is intuitively rational to believe in accordance with the evidence: it's because practical considerations justify believing in accordance with the evidence most of the time. Finally, she sees cases in which practical considerations fail to justify believing in accordance with the evidence as instances of welcome flexibility that can be captured by Equal Treatment, but not by evidentialism.

Rinard makes a number of other, smaller points in her paper that I will not discuss here. I take the above to be her primary argument against evidentialism and in favor of a kind of pragmatism. And I grant that if evidentialism made an exception of belief, leading to a fractured theory of rationality, this really would undermine evidentialism. But fortunately for evidentialists, it doesn't.

3. The Problem with Equal Treatment

The spirit of Equal Treatment is that we should treat the rationality of belief the same way we treat the rationality of anything else, lest we end up with a disunified theory of rationality. But what is the relevant comparison class? According to Rinard, it is simply "states." Unfortunately, she says little about the nature of this category. All she tells us is that (A)-(E) are states, and that all other states, including belief, are rationalized in just the same way as them.

Given Rinard's stated aim of showing that belief is to be treated just like any other state, it would be reasonable to expect the category of states to be illustrated using a representative sample of states. Strikingly, however, (A)-(E) is far from such a sample. First, some of the items in (A)-(E) are arguably not states at all. Consider (B)-(D): listening to a Leo Kottke CD, playing with one's dog, and mowing the lawn are intuitively not states at all, but rather actions. For various reasons, actions are not standardly thought to be states. One such reason is that actions are dynamic processes that admit of completion, whereas states are static and don't admit of completion.⁴ While we can't fully adjudicate the metaphysics of states here, at least the following seems undeniable: (B)-(D) are at worst not states at all, and at best non-standard examples thereof.

Even if (B)-(D) *are* states, the entire list of (A)-(E) is still strikingly unrepresentative. This is because (A)-(E) all have something in common that is not a shared feature of states in general. While Rinard

⁴ See Marcus (2009) and Setiya (2013).

is silent about it, it's not difficult to see what this common feature is: insofar as (A)-(E) are all rationally evaluable states, they are all constituted by the performance of certain actions. For example, insofar as wearing a raincoat is a rationally evaluable state, it must be constituted by having put on a raincoat (or at least by opting not to take it off). Similarly, it seems one is in the rationally evaluable state of being a member of the APA in virtue of performing a variety of actions, such as renewing one's membership every year. The same goes for (B)-(D), insofar as they are really states at all. Listening to a Leo Kottke CD, playing with one's dog, and mowing the lawn are rationally evaluable states only when they are constituted by the performance of actions. Let's call such states action-constituted states.

(A)-(E) is a strikingly unrepresentative list of states because it contains only action-constituted states, and many rationally evaluable states are not action-constituted states. For example, a variety of intentional mental states like desire, hope, fear, and regret are standardly thought to be rationally evaluable, but *not* standardly thought to be constituted by actions.⁵ And most importantly, the same goes for belief: it's standardly thought to be an intentional mental state that is rationally evaluable but not constituted by the performance of actions. This makes Rinard's use of action-constituted states in formulating Equal Treatment especially suspicious, since a *prima facie* difference between states like (A)-(E) and intentional mental states like belief is that the former are action-constituted whereas the latter are not.

Furthermore, (A)-(E) don't have anything else in common with belief that would provide independent reasons to treat belief in the same way as (A)-(E), such as propositional content or intentionality. If we are trying to figure out whether our account of the rationality of belief fits with our account of the rationality of other states, we surely ought to look at a wide variety of states, including at least some states that share salient characteristics with belief.⁶

⁵ By 'intentional mental states' I mean mental states that have intentionality, in the sense of having objects at which they're directed. I clarify this because 'intentional' also sometimes means 'having to do with intention,' which isn't what I mean here. This is an unfortunate coincidence of philosophical terminology.

⁶ I owe this way of phrasing my point to Alex Worsnip.

But (A)-(E) does the exact opposite of this. Instead of including states that we would antecedently expect to be rationalized in the same way as beliefs, it includes only action-constituted states, which are *prima facie* very different from belief. And since actions are standardly understood as rationalized by practical considerations, Rinard's inclusion of only action-constituted states to illustrate the comparison class for belief all but stacks the deck in favor of pragmatism. It's difficult to see, therefore, what could motivate the selection of (A)-(E) in formulating Equal Treatment besides an antecedent commitment to pragmatism.

In light of the above, if we're going to focus on some sample of states to illustrate the comparison class for belief, intentional mental states look like a much more natural candidate than action-constituted states.⁷ Since belief is *prima facie* much more like other intentional mental states than it is like action-constituted states, attempts to incorporate belief into a unified account of rationality should start by unifying them with other intentional mental states, not action-constituted states. This is a deep problem for Rinard's argument, since unlike actions (and by extension, action-constituted states), intentional mental states are not standardly thought of as rationalized by practical considerations.⁸

Thus, Rinard's appeal to unification doesn't provide the support for Equal Treatment she claims it does. Equal Treatment treats the rationality of belief in the same way it's standard to treat the rationality of action-constituted states, but it fails to treat the rationality of belief in the same way it's standard to treat the rationality of other intentional mental states. Rinard provides no argument for why evidentialists shouldn't accept a principle that does the opposite, such as the following:

Equal Treatment*: However the rationality of states like desire, hope, fear, and regret is determined, the rationality of any other state—in particular, any belief state—is determined in precisely the same way.

⁷ Of course, there may be some mental states, such as perceptions, that are intentional but not rationally evaluable. Those obviously shouldn't be part of the relevant comparison class. All future references to intentional mental states should be read as referring only to those that are rationally evaluable.

⁸ Of course, certain intentional mental states, such as desire and intention, *are* standardly thought of as rationalized by some kinds of practical considerations. But even states like desire and intention are not standardly thought of as rationalized by practical considerations in the way Rinard argues. Cases like Kavka's (1983) toxin puzzle are often thought to show that incentives to desire or intend to φ that are not also incentives to φ can't rationalize desiring or intending to φ . The crucial point is that even if states like desire and intention are rationalized by a certain kind of practical consideration, they're not rationalized by practical considerations *concerning the value or utility of being in those states per se*. Thanks to Alex Worsnip for helping me clarify this.

Equal Treatment* is like Equal Treatment, but it uses intentional mental states instead of action-constituted states to illustrate the comparison class for belief. It's just as unificatory, and if anything is a better candidate for unifying the rationality of belief with the rationality of other states, since belief is itself an intentional mental state. Nothing Rinard says compels evidentialists to accept Equal Treatment over Equal Treatment*. And unlike Equal Treatment, Equal Treatment* doesn't militate in favor of pragmatism. So, if it is just as open to the evidentialist to accept Equal Treatment* as it is to accept Equal Treatment, Rinard's argument begins to fall apart.

My goal here is not to argue that Equal Treatment* is true. In fact, as I'll discuss further in §5, I think there's a decisive objection to Equal Treatment*: it obscures important differences in how different kinds of states are rationalized. But crucially, this is just as much an objection to Equal Treatment as it is to Equal Treatment*, because what it objects to is an overly broad scope of unification. So, while I'll ultimately argue against both principles on such grounds, I'll set that aside for now. The important point for present purposes is that there doesn't seem to be anything aside from an antecedent commitment to pragmatism that compels us to accept Equal Treatment over Equal Treatment*.

4. Evidentialism without Exceptionalism

If Equal Treatment* is at least as good of a unificatory principle as Equal Treatment, then it's quite straightforward to show how evidentialism doesn't make an exception out of belief. All that must be shown is that there is a plausible general account of the rationality of intentional mental states that is compatible with evidentialism, and that satisfies Equal Treatment*. In this section, I'll show that evidentialism can be understood as falling out of just such an account.

Evidentialism says that the rationality of belief is determined by evidence alone, not by practical considerations (such as whether a belief maximizes expected utility or is effective means to one's ends). If Rinard were correct that the rationality of all other states is determined by practical considerations, then evidentialism would indeed be making an exception for belief. But as I've shown in §3, Rinard fails to establish this. Because her arguments provide no reason to accept Equal Treatment over Equal Treatment*, it is open to evidentialists to unify belief in the first instance with other intentional mental states rather than action-constituted states.

Furthermore, because her arguments provide no independent reason to think that the rationality of other intentional mental states is determined by practical considerations, the need for a unified account of intentional mental states provides no support for pragmatism. Because she focuses on action-constituted states like (A)-(E), Rinard at most shows that the rationality of all other *action-constituted* states is determined by practical considerations. This obviously falls short of showing that the rationality of all non-belief states is determined by practical considerations.

With that in mind, I'll now sketch a unified account of the rationality of intentional mental states that both satisfies Equal Treatment* and entails (or at least strongly suggests) evidentialism.

It's widely recognized that intentional mental states like belief, desire, hope, fear, and regret admit of a distinction between the right and wrong kinds of reasons for those states.⁹ For instance, it's standardly thought that evidence for p provides the right kind of reason to believe p , whereas being offered money to believe p provides the wrong kind of reason. We might also think, for example, that considerations that bear on whether something is dangerous are the right kind of reason to fear it, whereas (as with belief) incentives to fear something provide the wrong kind of reason. For many, the point of drawing this distinction is to show that there is some way in which wrong-kind reasons are objectionable or deficient. At best, they are reasons that, by their nature, can't count toward important normative statuses like rationality. At worst, they are not genuine normative reasons at all.¹⁰

There are a variety of different accounts of the distinction between the right and wrong kinds of reason. However, since all such accounts are answerable to the kinds of verdicts described above, it won't be necessary to commit to a particular account here. For ease of explication, I'll work with one popular account of the distinction: the correctness-based account.¹¹ Intentional mental states have correctness conditions that have to do with the properties possessed by their objects. A belief is correct if and only if the believed proposition is true, fear is correct if and only if the feared object is dangerous,

⁹ For an overview of the literature on right and wrong kinds of reasons, see Gertken and Kiesewetter (2017).

¹⁰ For arguments that wrong-kind reasons are not really reasons at all, see Skorupski (2007), Parfit (2011), and Way (2012). For dissent, see Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004), Howard (2016), and Leary (2017).

¹¹ For examples of correctness-based accounts of the right/wrong kind of reasons distinction, see Danielsson and Olson (2007), Schroeder (2010) and Sharadin (2016).

and so on. The right kind of reasons for an intentional mental state are considerations that bear on whether that state is correct. By contrast, the wrong kind of reasons considerations that bear not on whether some mental state is correct, but rather whether it is good or useful to be in that state.¹²

When it comes to the rationality of intentional mental states, there is considerable pull to the idea that it is determined only by the right kind of reasons. For example, there are plenty of situations in which feeling regret would not maximize expected utility or be an effective means to one's ends. Nevertheless, regret would intuitively be rational as long as it was directed at, and properly responsive to, something regrettable. One way of capturing this is to hold that the considerations that rationalize regret are those that bear on whether regret is correct, not the ones that bear on whether it is good or useful. In other words, only right-kind reasons, not wrong-kind reasons, bear on the rationality of regret.¹³ And it is just as plausible to treat other intentional mental states such as fear and hope similarly.

According to Equal Treatment*, however the rationality of states like desire, hope, fear, and regret is determined, the rationality of any other state is determined in precisely the same way. And there's quite a bit of pull to the idea that states like desire, hope, fear, and regret are all rationalized by a particular kind of consideration – that is, the kind of consideration that, in virtue of its relation to the state in question, counts as the right kind of reason for that state. If right-kind reasons are generated by the constitutive correctness conditions of intentional mental states, then this is a perfectly equal treatment of the rationality of such states. This gives us the beginnings of a unified account of the rationality of *all* (rationally evaluable) intentional mental states, including belief.

It's important to note here that for this to be a unified account, it needn't be the case that all such states are rationalized by the very same considerations. If all intentional mental states are rationalized by reasons of the right kind, then as long as we have a unified account of what makes some

¹² Although I favor the correctness account of the right/wrong kind of reasons distinction, one need not accept it to accept my arguments here. The important thing is that such a distinction can be made. If you don't like this particular account, simply replace it with any other plausible account of the distinction and my arguments should still go through.

¹³ If wrong-kind reasons are not genuine normative reasons at all, the explanation is even simpler: only genuine normative reasons bear on rationality. Since so-called wrong-kind reasons are not genuine normative reasons, they do not bear on rationality. Thanks for an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to clarify what the upshot of drawing this kind of distinction is supposed to be.

considerations the right kind of reasons, all intentional mental states are, at bottom, rationalized in precisely the same way. On my preferred way of thinking of the right/wrong kind of reasons distinction, all intentional mental states are rationalized by considerations that bear on their correctness. Since different states have different correctness conditions, which considerations bear on their correctness will differ from state to state. This poses no threat to the unity of the account.

I'm now in a position to show how evidentialism does not make an exception for belief. Consider the following valid argument:

1. For any rationally evaluable intentional mental state-type S , only considerations that bear on the correctness of S determine whether S is rational.
2. A belief is correct if and only if it is true.
3. Therefore, only considerations that bear on the truth of beliefs determine whether they are rational. (1,2)
4. A consideration is evidential if and only if it bears on the truth of a belief.
5. Therefore, only evidential considerations determine whether beliefs are rational. (3,4)

(1) is the unified account of the rationality of intentional mental states on offer. (2) is a commonly accepted thesis about the correctness conditions for belief. (3) follows from premises 1 and 2. (4) is a plausible thesis about what evidential considerations are. And (5) follows from (3) and (4). The above argument establishes that given the account on offer, evidentialism does not make an exception for belief. Instead, evidentialism falls out of that unified account in combination with the hypothesis that the correctness condition for belief is truth. Since that account satisfies Equal Treatment*, the above argument shows that there need not be anything fragmented or otherwise theoretically vicious about evidentialism as an account of the rationality of belief.

Rinard does not consider the possibility of such a view. The only mention she makes of other intentional mental states is in the following footnote: "Proponents of Exceptionalism about belief may also defend exceptionalist views about other mental states, like intention, fear, regret, hope, etc. In this paper, however, I will focus on belief" (p. 123). In light of the legitimacy of illustrating our comparison class using exactly those states, it's clear that this remark is misguided. If we defend the same non-pragmatist account of the rationality of intention, fear, regret, hope, etc. that we have

offered for the rationality of belief, this is simply not an exceptionalist view in any sense. On the contrary, it's a unified account of the rationality of such states.

The argument I've offered here is unlikely to convince pragmatists to accept an evidentialist-friendly account of the rationality of intentional mental states. But it doesn't need to. All that's necessary to refute Rinard's primary argument is to show that evidentialism is not at all compelled to make an exception for belief. This is exactly what I have done.

5. Equal Treatment Reconsidered

So far, I've argued as follows: for all Rinard says, we have no reason to support Equal Treatment over Equal Treatment*. If anything, Equal Treatment* *better* illustrates the comparison class for belief. Since evidentialism falls out of a general account of the rationality of intentional mental states that is fully compatible with Equal Treatment*, Rinard's argument poses no threat to evidentialism.

In this section, I'll offer some positive support for the general account of the rationality of intentional mental states sketched in §4. However, I won't do this by defending Equal Treatment*. As I mentioned in §3, I think there's a decisive objection to both Equal Treatment *and* Equal Treatment*, which is that they obscure important differences in how different states are rationalized. In particular, there seem to be important differences in how action-constituted states and intentional mental states are rationalized. But both Equal Treatment and Equal Treatment* are committed to saying that action-constituted states and intentional mental states are rationalized in precisely the same way. I'll argue that we should reject both principles in favor of one that's more modest in its unificatory ambitions.

First, it's important to clarify that principles like Equal Treatment and Equal Treatment* can only be meant to apply to those states that are rationally evaluable. Being tired, having pains in your feet, and being six feet tall are all states one might be in, but we don't tend to think of them as states that can themselves be rational or irrational. By contrast, intentional mental states and action-constituted states both seem to be rationally evaluable.

But it would be a mistake to conclude from this that intentional mental states and action-constituted states must be rationalized in the same way. Here's why. The rational evaluability of action-constituted states seems to be parasitic on the rational evaluability of actions – that is, action-constituted states

get to be rationally evaluable in virtue of being constituted by the performance of certain actions that are themselves rationally evaluable. For example, imagine you're in the state of wearing a raincoat, but you never put on a raincoat or performed any other action that explains your being in that state. Instead, someone put a raincoat on you while you were asleep. In this case, it's quite counterintuitive to claim that it's rational or irrational for you to be in that state. This supports the claim that insofar as states like Rinard's (A)-(E) are rationally evaluable, they must be so in virtue of being action-constituted.

This doesn't seem to be the case for intentional mental states. Intentional mental states such as beliefs and desires aren't action-constituted at all, let alone rationally evaluable in virtue of being action-constituted. Of course, it's controversial in virtue of what such states *are* rationally evaluable. But according to a common approach, they're rationally evaluable in virtue of being the kinds of states that can be directly responsive to reasons.¹⁴ Belief, desire, fear, hope, and regret are all states we can be in directly on the basis of reasons. By contrast, action-constituted states are only responsive to reasons derivatively, in the sense that we perform the state-constituting actions on the basis of those reasons.¹⁵

This is an important point because it cuts against the brief justification Rinard offers for appealing to states rather than actions in formulating Equal Treatment:

...why am I focusing on the question whether belief states should be evaluated in the same way as other states, rather than the question whether beliefs should be evaluated in the same way as actions? The reason is that actions are by nature voluntary, whereas being in a state is not. This means that, since belief is not by nature voluntary, there is a fundamental difference between belief and action. However, it would be a mistake to infer from this that we need an entirely different set of standards for the rational assessment of beliefs. What belief is relevantly like, for purposes of rational assessment, is other, non-belief states—such as (A)–(E)—over which one may or may not have voluntary control, depending on various accidents of circumstance. This is

¹⁴ For example, see McHugh (2014, 2017), Nolfi (2015), and Neta (2018). Countless others make similar points, though not always using the terminology of reasons.

¹⁵ Of course, Rinard could simply deny this and insist that all states, including intentional mental states, are rationally evaluable in virtue of being constituted by actions. But this would be at odds with her insistence that her argument doesn't rely on the claim that beliefs are rationalized in the same way as actions. Furthermore, it would be far too revisionary a view for her to be entitled to rely on without substantial further argument.

why I set things up in terms of states, rather than actions—so that the parity of rational (and other) normative evaluation of belief and non-belief postulated by Equal Treatment would not be obscured by the fact that we sometimes lack voluntary control over our beliefs (p. 132).

This passage obscures the difference between (A)-(E) and belief highlighted above: (A)-(E) are action-constituted states, whereas belief is an intentional mental state. And since Rinard herself concedes that actions are by nature voluntary, it seems that (A)-(E), being constituted by actions, are also voluntary (at least insofar as they are rationally evaluable).

To be fair to Rinard, her thought seems to be that one could be in states like (A)-(E) not in virtue of having performed certain actions, but just by accidents of circumstance (such as someone putting a raincoat on you while you were asleep). However, as I've already noted, in such cases, being in such a state would be no more rationally evaluable than being six feet tall (assuming that being six feet tall is also, in this case, an accident of circumstance). So, for (A)-(E) to be rationally evaluable at all, they must be constituted by actions, and therefore voluntary. Rinard must therefore concede that for all she says, it's plausible that, unlike intentional mental states, action-constituted states are rationally evaluable in virtue of being constituted by voluntary actions.

If this is right, then it becomes clear that the differences between action and belief are much more relevant than Rinard would like them to be. As she herself notes, the fact that actions are voluntary and beliefs are not is “a fundamental difference between belief and action.” Such fundamental differences make it reasonable to doubt that we need to tell the same story about the rationality of belief and action. By extension, they make it reasonable to doubt that we need to tell the same story about the rationality of belief and action-constituted states. So, Rinard is not entitled to claim that an appeal to states rather than actions delivers her a “parity of rational...evaluation” between belief and states like (A)-(E).

I should note, however, that while Rinard recognizes that actions are voluntary by nature and beliefs are not, she doesn't seem to think this difference ultimately matters for rationality. She could thus concede the point that Equal Treatment ultimately amounts to a principle that attempts to unify the rationality of action and belief but deny there are any relevant differences between action and belief that make this an objectionable move. However, this strategy can't salvage Equal Treatment, because

voluntariness is not the only relevant difference between intentional mental states and action-constituted states like (A)-(E).

I've already highlighted another relevant difference: intentional mental states admit of the right/wrong kind of reasons distinction, while (A)-(E) do not. Since it's independently plausible that this is the case, there's nothing *ad hoc* about relying on this difference in our theorizing. In fact, this difference might explain why pragmatism about the rationality of action is significantly more intuitive than pragmatism about the rationality of belief. We might think that unlike intentional mental states, *no* actions (and by extension, no action-constituted states) admit of the right/wrong kind of reasons distinction.¹⁶ This would explain why it seems that actions can in principle be rationalized by all kinds of considerations, including practical ones, whereas intentional mental states can only be rationalized by considerations that count as the right kind of reasons for those states.¹⁷

The nuances and complexities in the landscape of rationality described above should make us skeptical of any principle that tries to unify the rationality of states simpliciter. Especially if we admit states like Rinard's (A)-(E), the category of states is so broad that such ambitious attempts at unification are bound to obscure important differences like those between intentional mental states and action-constituted states. This suggests that we should reject both Equal Treatment and Equal Treatment*.

Fortunately, this does nothing to undercut the force of the argument provided in §4. We don't need a principle that unifies the rationality of all states to show that evidentialism doesn't make an exception for belief. In fact, restricting the scope of unification only makes it easier for us to show how evidentialism isn't a form of exceptionalism. I've argued that the category of intentional mental states is a more suitable target for unification than the category of states in general. So, if our goal is to

¹⁶ For instances of the view that action doesn't admit of the right/wrong kind of reasons distinction, see Heuer (2010) and Hieronymi (2005, 2013).

¹⁷ On the other hand, Schroeder (2010) has argued that at least some actions do admit of the right/wrong kind of reasons distinction, because like intentional mental states, these actions have constitutive correctness conditions. For example, activities like playing chess might have constitutive correctness conditions such that chess-actions can only be rationalized by reasons that bear on their correctness. If a view like Schroeder's is right, then there are at least some actions (and so also action-constituted states) for which practical considerations are the wrong kind of reasons, and so don't rationalize such actions/action-constituted states. This would also be a pragmatist-unfriendly conclusion, and would be incompatible with Equal Treatment. It may even support something like Equal Treatment*, which is fully compatible with evidentialism.

subsume the rationality of belief under a more general account of rationality, we should instead endorse something like the following:

Equal Treatment_{INT}: For all (rationally evaluable) intentional mental states, including belief, the rationality of such states is determined in precisely the same way.¹⁸

According to the general account from §4, belief is rationalized in just the same way as other intentional mental states like hope, fear, desire, and regret. Such an account therefore satisfies Equal Treatment_{INT} just as well as it satisfies Equal Treatment*. And satisfying Equal Treatment_{INT} is enough to show that there's no important sense in which evidentialism makes an exception for belief.¹⁹

So, evidentialists can defend their view from charges of exceptionalism with relatively modest resources, and have principled reasons against appealing to more ambitious principles. By contrast, because Rinard seeks to establish an ambitious global pragmatism, she is compelled to rely on a much more ambitious unifying principle, one that is ultimately difficult to support. Again, this is not dispositive of the debate between evidentialism and pragmatism more generally. But it does show that evidentialism fits into a more general account of rationality that is at least as theoretically virtuous as Rinard's, and arguably more so.

Before moving on, it's important to note that the view I've sketched is *not* a version of what Rinard calls *Different Senses*. According to *Different Senses*, "there are two different, incommensurable senses of rationality relative to which we can evaluate the very same belief. One is the sense of rationality that applies to states like (A)–(E). The other is a distinctively epistemic sense of rationality that applies only to beliefs" (p. 123). Rinard objects to *Different Senses* on the grounds that rational norms are supposed to be ones by which we can be guided. But if there are two incommensurable senses of

¹⁸ Again, this isn't meant to imply that the very same considerations rationalize all of these different states. Rather, if all intentional mental states are rationalized by reasons of the right kind, then as long as we have a unified account of what makes some considerations the right kind of reasons, all intentional mental states are, at bottom, rationalized in precisely the same way.

¹⁹ It's worth noting that I've actually established something broader than my primary claim that evidentialism doesn't make an exception for belief. My argument shows that no view that satisfies Equal Treatment_{INT} (or Equal Treatment* for that matter) makes an exception for belief. So, my argument should be of interest to anyone who is sympathetic to such approaches, even if they are not at all sympathetic to evidentialism itself. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

rationality that can generate opposing verdicts about belief, it is hard to see how rational norms can be guiding in this way. Insofar as they are supposed to be guiding, this favors Equal Treatment over Different Senses.

The argument I've presented for Equal Treatment_{INT} does claim that there are relevant differences between the rationality of intentional mental states and the rationality of actions (or action-constituted states). But this doesn't make it a version of Different Senses. Here's why. First, my claim is that the natures of intentional mental states and actions are sufficiently different that we should not expect the rational norms governing them to be exactly the same. But this is not to claim that there are two incommensurable *senses* of 'rationality' that apply to intentional mental states and actions. We can distinguish rational norms that apply to different kinds of states without thereby distinguishing senses of 'rational', just as we can distinguish kinds of food that different creatures eat without distinguishing senses of 'food', or distinguish different kinds of homes that different people live in without distinguishing senses of 'home.' Different kinds of states can univocally possess the same property of rationality even if they aren't rationalized in exactly the same way. So, Equal Treatment_{INT} is compatible with holding that there is only one sense of rationality.

Second, Different Senses is a view according to which there are two different senses of rationality relative to which we can evaluate, as Rinard says, "the very same belief." Equal Treatment_{INT} doesn't imply this. Rather, it implies that the rationality of intentional mental states is determined by something that does not necessarily determine the rationality of actions. Crucially, even if one were to develop Equal Treatment_{INT} to suggest that there is one sense of 'rationality' that applies to intentional mental states and another sense of 'rationality' that applies to actions, this still wouldn't entail that there is any single state – belief or otherwise – to which both senses of 'rationality' can be applied. So, Equal Treatment_{INT} would still be compatible with thinking that for any intentional mental state or action, there is a single, univocal verdict about whether or not it is rational.

These differences between Different Senses and the view I've sketched are of utmost importance. Rinard's objection to Different Senses is that it is incompatible with the guiding role of rationality because different senses of rationality that can apply to the same state can pull us in opposing directions. Equal Treatment_{INT} has no such implications, because it in no way countenances different senses of rationality that can apply to the very same state. Just like Rinard's view, it holds that

rationality “speaks in a single voice” (p. 128). Therefore, situating evidentialism within Equal Treatment_{INT} doesn’t subject it to the objection Rinard raises against Different Senses.²⁰

6. Evidentialists Aren’t Exceptionalists: A Case Study

The previous sections of this paper prove that evidentialists need not make an exception for belief, because evidentialism fits into a larger, unified account of rationality. Nevertheless, it’s possible that evidentialists have in fact made the avoidable mistake of formulating their theories as exceptionalist theories. In this section, I want to suggest that even this is not the case. Of course, I can’t show this by going through every extant formulation of evidentialism and arguing that it isn’t a form of exceptionalism. Instead, I’ll simply present a case study of a prominent evidentialist who I interpret as already having in mind the kind of unified account I’ve presented in this paper.

Thomas Kelly (2002) has given an influential argument for the conclusion that practical considerations do not rationalize beliefs:

Here, I think, is why practical considerations do not rationalize beliefs. Although practical considerations can make a difference to what one believes, they do not do so by constituting grounds on which beliefs are based. (Contrast the way in which practical considerations do constitute grounds on which actions are based, and epistemic considerations constitute grounds on which beliefs are based.) And rational beliefs, like rational actions, are rationalized by those considerations on which they are based (p. 174).

By ‘epistemic considerations,’ I take Kelly to mean something close to what I mean by ‘evidential considerations’: considerations that bear on the truth of beliefs. Kelly argues that because beliefs can be based only on evidential considerations, not on practical considerations, only the former can rationalize beliefs. It’s worth pointing out that Rinard discusses this argument in her paper, noting that on Kelly’s view, “in general, the rationality of one’s φ -ing is determined by the basis of one’s φ -ing” (Rinard, p. 137). She grants this part of his view for the sake of argument, but rejects Kelly’s premise that beliefs can be based only on evidential considerations. For my purposes, it won’t be necessary to

²⁰ Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to respond to this worry and, more generally, to take account of Rinard’s discussion of Different Senses.

adjudicate that disagreement. The important point is that Rinard assumes that Kelly's view must be a form of exceptionalism because she fails to recognize how his point about the relationship between basing and rationalizing can be generalized to other intentional mental states besides belief.

This becomes clear when we consider the latter part of Kelly's paper, where he discusses the rationality of other intentional mental states.²¹ His examples are regret, fear, and desire. For each of these states, Kelly gives a case where it would be correct but disadvantageous for the agent to be in that state. For example, he gives a case from Parfit where it would be desirable to fall asleep, but desiring to fall asleep would be disadvantageous because it would make it more difficult to fall asleep. Kelly argues that in this case, desires can only be based on considerations that bear on the desirability of their objects, not on considerations that show the desire to be advantageous. He makes analogous points with regard to regret and fear.

Kelly's remarks suggest the following general argument about the rationality of intentional mental states:

1. Only considerations that can serve as bases for an intentional mental state can rationalize that mental state.
2. Only considerations that bear on the correctness of an intentional mental state can serve as bases for that mental state.
3. Therefore, only considerations that bear on the correctness of an intentional mental state can rationalize that mental state.²²

Notice that the conclusion of this argument is almost equivalent to the general account of the rationality of intentional mental states sketched in §4. And as I've shown, evidentialism falls out of this general account on the assumption that belief's correctness condition is truth. So, it's reasonable

²¹ Kelly puts things in terms of propositional attitudes rather than intentional mental states, but I don't think this difference matters for the point I'm making here.

²² I should note that Kelly doesn't explicitly commit himself to such an argument. He only explicitly commits himself to the more modest claim that practical considerations about the value or utility of being in some intentional mental state can't serve as bases for that state. A correspondingly more modest version of the argument I've given could be formulated using that more modest claim as a premise. But I think Kelly's remarks at least hint at the more ambitious version. Either way, his remarks strongly suggest that he has a unified account in mind.

to interpret Kelly as an evidentialist who, far from being an exceptionalist about belief, accepts a general account of the rationality of intentional mental states akin to the one I've offered in this paper.²³

While this is just one example of an evidentialist who is not an exceptionalist, my guess is that many, if not most, evidentialists would reject exceptionalism and argue that their preferred form of evidentialism can be situated within a broader account of rationality. One bit of evidence for this claim can be gleaned from the literature on the right/wrong kind of reasons distinction. Many in this literature hold that an earmark of the right kind of reasons is that only they can rationalize the states for which they are reasons.²⁴ And since it's widely accepted that only evidential considerations can be the right kind of reasons for belief, this naturally suggests a commitment to evidentialism.²⁵ Those who arrive at a commitment to evidentialism in this way should also be interpreted as rejecting exceptionalism and instead situating evidentialism within a broader account of rationality akin to the one I've sketched in this paper.

If I'm right, then it's not just *possible* to be an evidentialist without making an exception for belief – it's a perfectly standard way of being an evidentialist.

²³ Of course, there are objections to the kind of argument Kelly gives for evidentialism. As mentioned before, Rinard argues briefly against the basing constraint Kelly defends. See also Leary (2017) and Reisner (2018) for further criticism of Kelly's strategy. My goal here is not to defend Kelly's argument but rather to note that, whatever problems it has, making an exception for belief is not one of them. This is particularly worth noting given that Kelly is one of Rinard's primary evidentialist foils. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I clarify the point of discussing Kelly here.

²⁴ For example, see Schroeder (2012) and Sharadin (2016). Some remarks made by Parfit (2001) suggest a similar view. Hieronymi's (2005) view is slightly more complicated. While she claims that reasons of the right and wrong kinds cannot be distinguished on the basis of whether they bear on rationality, she does not deny that only the right kinds of reasons bear on rationality. Instead, she holds that "For an appeal to justification or rationality to be satisfactory, we would need an independent account of why only some of the reasons that count in favor of an attitude justify or rationalize it—which is just to say, we would need an answer to the wrong kind of reasons problem" (p. 443). I think that independent account is just what is provided by the identification of the right kinds of reasons with ones that bear on states' correctness. But other plausible accounts of the right/wrong kind of reasons distinction can also explain this.

²⁵ It's worth reiterating that in this paper, I understand evidentialism as the claim that only evidential considerations can rationalize belief. It would be compatible with the kind of view I've described here to concede that non-evidential considerations can be reasons for belief (in other words, to deny skepticism about wrong-kind reasons). This is because I'm not understanding evidentialism as a view about what can be a reason (of any kind) for belief.

6. Conclusion

Rinard argues that evidentialism leads to an objectionably disunified theory of rationality, and that we should instead accept Equal Treatment, which gives us a unified pragmatism about the rationality of all states. I've shown that this is not so. Equal Treatment is no better than Equal Treatment*, which uses intentional mental states instead of action-constituted states to illustrate the relevant comparison class for belief. And Equal Treatment* is perfectly compatible with a unified account of intentional mental states that entails evidentialism.

I've argued further that both principles are likely false, because they obscure important differences between action-constituted states like Rinard's (A)-(E) and intentional mental states like belief. As such, they fail to unify only like with like. But this poses no problem for evidentialists, because all they need to show that evidentialism doesn't make an exception for belief is that it fits in with a unified account of the rationality of intentional mental states. Such an account not only unifies the rationality of belief with the rationality of other relevantly similar states, but also leaves room to capture nuances and complexities that Rinard's pragmatism cannot.

The account I've sketched remains quite unified without flattening the nuanced and complex landscape of rationality. As such, it's arguably *more* theoretically virtuous than the pragmatist account. Finally, the fact that the sort of account I've sketched is already suggested by existing defenses of evidentialism refutes the claim that evidentialism makes an exception for belief. Of course, this doesn't prove that evidentialism is true and pragmatism is false. But it does prove that, despite what Rinard claims, evidentialism can be (and often is) situated within a general account of rationality that is at least as theoretically virtuous as pragmatism, if not more so.

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