Rational epistemic akrasia for the ambivalent pragmatist

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Abstract: Epistemic akrasia can be rational. I consider a lonely pragmatist who believes that her imaginary friend doesn't exist, and also believes on pragmatic grounds that she should believe in him. She rationally believes that her imaginary friend doesn't exist, rationally follows various sources of evidence to the view that she should believe in him to end her loneliness, and rationally holds these attitudes simultaneously. Evidentialism suggests that her ambivalent epistemic state is rational, as considerations grounded in the value of truth justify her beliefs.

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The akratic pragmatist and her imaginary friend

Akratic agents ϕ when they judge that they shouldn't ϕ. Practical akrasia is performing an action despite judging it immoral or irrational. Epistemic akrasia is holding a belief despite judging it unjustified or irrational. Discussions of epistemic akrasia often treat justification and rationality as rising and falling together, as I will here.

Many philosophers claim that epistemic akrasia must involve irrationality.[1] They think one must be irrational in believing that one's belief is unjustified, in holding the belief itself, or in combining these attitudes. Practical akrasia is widely held to be irrational, and one might expect epistemic akrasia to be similarly irrational.[2] Moreover, epistemic akrasia involves conflicting beliefs. While having conflicting desires can constitute rationally permissible ambivalence, one might expect conflicting beliefs to be rationally forbidden. When one believes an inconsistent set of propositions, rationality requires drawing inferences that eliminate some of these beliefs. One might expect rational inference to similarly dispense with epistemic akrasia.

To show that epistemic akrasia can be rational, this paper offers a case in which eliminating one belief by inference isn't rationally required. It's called *Imaginary Friend*:

> Nevia is a pragmatist about epistemic justification. She is convinced that beliefs are justified insofar as they promote the satisfaction of one's desires. All the philosophers she knows are convinced of this view by a valid argument from premises one can rationally accept. Moreover, pragmatism just seems right to her.
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> Nevia is also very lonely. She feels a little less lonely when she pretends that her imaginary friend Alexius exists. She strongly desires that her loneliness end, and she knows that believing in Alexius' existence would end her loneliness. But since she has no evidence for Alexius' existence, she is certain that he doesn't really exist. Being a

pragmatist, she regards her belief in Alexius' nonexistence as unjustified, and thinks of herself as irrational for being unable to rid herself of it.[3]

Nevia's pragmatism is the key feature that makes *Imaginary Friend* a case of rational akrasia. Pragmatism disconnects her beliefs about epistemic justification from truth. This leaves her no way to escape akrasia by revising her beliefs through valid inferences from her evidence. Such an escape route is available to evidentialists, who reject pragmatism in favor of the standard view that justification is closely connected to truth. (There is a narrower sense of "evidentialism" opposed to externalist epistemological views like reliabilism. This paper uses "evidentialism" only in contrast to "pragmatism." Reliabilism is a form of evidentialism in this sense because it places importance on truth.) The connection to truth lets evidentialists go from believing a belief is unjustified to believing that it's unlikely to be true, and thus revising it. Nevia's pragmatism merely connects believing that a belief is unjustified to believing that it fails to satisfy one's desires, which doesn't lead to revising it.

For *Imaginary Friend* to be a genuine case of rational epistemic akrasia, three things must obtain. First, Nevia's belief that Alexius doesn't exist must be rational. Second, her belief that pragmatism is the right theory of epistemic justification must be rational. Third, combining these beliefs must not introduce any irrationality. I'll briefly explain why each of these propositions are true. While the first isn't especially controversial, the other two are controversial enough to require an extended defense, which I'll provide in the rest of this paper.

Most epistemologists will agree that it's rational for Nevia to believe that Alexius doesn't exist. This is what her evidence suggests. On standard evidentialist views, epistemic justification is grounded in truth or something closely related to truth like evidence, accuracy, knowledge, reliability, or certainty. These evidentialist views treat Nevia as justified in believing that Alexius doesn't exist. Her pragmatism doesn't prevent evidentialism from applying to her – the fundamental standards of epistemic justification don't depend on one's beliefs about them. Since most of my readers will likely share my commitment to evidentialism, I won't argue at length for evidentialism in this paper, or argue against pragmatism.

Whether Nevia can rationally accept pragmatism is more controversial. The first half of this paper clarifies the nature of pragmatism about epistemic justification and argues that one can rationally accept it. Pragmatism is false, but not necessarily irrational. Epistemic justification is one of the many topics about which rational false belief is possible. I'll present an argument for pragmatism that convinced a number of philosophers from different historical periods: the nature of justification is unified, and justification for some practical attitudes is a matter of desire-satisfaction, so epistemic justification must be a matter of desire-satisfaction. Nevia's belief in pragmatism is justified because she formed it on the basis of this argument, expert testimony favoring the argument, and her own intuition. While Mike Titelbaum (2015) argues that views including pragmatism must be irrational, the irrationality of akrasia is a premise of his argument, so demonstrating that akrasia can be rational will reveal his argument to be unsound.

The second half argues that Nevia can rationally remain in her akratic state. She has no valid inferential route from believing that she should believe something to actually believing it. Accepting evidentialism would create such a valid inferential route, as it creates an inferential link from judging a belief justified to judging it true. Pragmatists break this link by rejecting the

connection between justification and truth. Ambivalent states where our conflicting attitudes don't inferentially connect are rational, as there's no rational inference the believer could draw to resolve the conflict. Akratic states aren't constituted by attitudes that can inferentially connect with each other, and hence isn't necessarily irrational. It is irrational for evidentialists because accepting evidentialism connects these attitudes, as I'll explain in response to a case presented by Sophie Horowitz (2014).[4] But for a pragmatist like Nevia, akrasia can be rational.

Pragmatism about epistemic justification
Truth, or something closely related, is widely agreed to play a central role in justifying belief. Nearly everyone agrees that believing the true has more intrinsic epistemic value than believing the false. Parties to this broad evidentialist consensus include many epistemologists who understand epistemic justification in terms of things other than truth itself, like evidence, reliability, coherence, knowledge, or certainty. All of these things have some important conceptual connection to truth. Evidence indicates what is true; the reliability of a process is determined by the proportion of beliefs it produces that are true; incoherent beliefs can't all be true; knowledge entails truth; what's certain is clearly true. I'm inclined to see the value of truth as the fundamental epistemic good, in which all epistemic value is grounded.

"Epistemic" here means "related to belief" rather than "related to truth." Epistemic justification, then, is the justification of belief, and epistemic value is the sort of value that makes beliefs good. I won't use "epistemic" to indicate any direct connection to truth. This lets us describe pragmatism and evidentialism as contending views about epistemic justification. This usage makes evidentialism about epistemic value a synthetic truth rather than a conceptual truth.[5]

Pragmatism is a less popular theory of epistemic justification than evidentialism, though it has some defenders.[6] Pragmatists ground epistemic justification in things that they see as having practical value, such as pleasure or desire-satisfaction. These things lack such a close conceptual connection to truth. The pragmatist view I'll consider here treats one's beliefs as justified insofar as they promote the satisfaction of one's desires. Pragmatists see true belief as having instrumental value in promoting desire-satisfaction, because it helps one navigate the world so as to better satisfy one's desires. Furthermore, if one simply desires to believe the true, that gives true belief value independent of its future consequences. But in cases where false belief promotes desire-satisfaction more than true belief, pragmatism suggests believing the false. *Imaginary Friend* is such a case.

Pragmatism about epistemic justification should be distinguished from pragmatism about truth. A pragmatist about truth understands truth to be whatever has some sort of practical value. A simple version of pragmatism about truth might follow William James (1897) in defining truth as whatever maximizes everyone's desire-satisfaction. Pragmatists about epistemic justification need not accept pragmatism about truth. Their view is most distinctive if they reject pragmatism about truth while favoring a more orthodox view of truth like the correspondence theory. Then they will make the startling claim that it's sometimes right to believe the false rather than the true, when believing the false contributes to desire-satisfaction.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1886) seems to have combined pragmatism about epistemic justification and some fairly orthodox theory of truth in this way. It led him to make this startling claim: "The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment; in this respect our

new language may sound strangest. The question is to what extent it is life promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating" (*BGE* 4). I'll return to Nietzsche's argument for this position later, but here it's important to note that a pragmatist about epistemic justification who accepts the correspondence theory must say that we should sometimes believe the false. This is what Nevia thinks in *Imaginary Friend*. "Pragmatism" here will henceforth refer only to pragmatism about epistemic justification.

How pragmatism can be rational
Can one rationally accept pragmatism? As an evidentialist, I regard pragmatism as false. But I don't think accepting pragmatism is necessarily irrational. False beliefs can be rational if they're supported by sufficient evidence.

For *Imaginary Friend* to be a case of rational epistemic akrasia, Nevia needs to have strong evidence for pragmatism. That's why I stipulated three potential types of evidence for pragmatism in setting up the case – Nevia's acceptance of a valid argument from reasonable premises, the testimony of other epistemologists, and the fact that pragmatism itself seems plausible to her. Epistemologists may differ on how much justification each type of evidence gives her. That's why I presented three different types. Even if you don't think one or two of them do much to justify Nevia's belief in pragmatism, perhaps the third will strike you as sufficient. I'll elaborate on each of them further.

I'll begin with the argument for pragmatism that Nevia and her epistemologist friends accept. Something close to the Humean Unity Argument below has been offered by both historical and contemporary pragmatists. It's a simple argument, with two premises leading to a pragmatist conclusion:

[Humeanism] For some practical attitudes, justification consists in promoting desire-satisfaction.
[Unity] Justification consists in the same thing for all practical attitudes and beliefs.
[Conclusion] For beliefs, justification consists in promoting desire-satisfaction.

Humeanism has its share of defenders.[7] So does Unity.[8] Among contemporary philosophers, Susanna Rinard (2017) may come closest to defending both and deriving the pragmatist conclusion. She defends Unity, arguing that "the question 'What should I believe?' is to be answered in the same way as the question 'What should I do?'" While it's not clear whether her answer to 'What should I do?' is strictly Humean, she offers several cases in which desire-satisfaction contributes to the justification of action. Rinard (2015) is happy to accept pragmatist conclusions about epistemic justification.

Nietzsche also arrives at his pragmatism through a version of the Humean Unity Argument.[9] His sympathy for both Humeanism and Unity arise in part from a commitment to error theory about objective value. He sees his epistemological and metaphysical naturalism as leaving no room for objective value, just as it left no room for God. But naturalists can more easily accept a sort of subjective value grounded in our desires. Desires and their objects both fit comfortably within naturalistic metaphysics, and he reduced value to a relation between them.[10] Since we have some ways of knowing what we want, such value is accessible to naturalistic epistemology. These metaphysical and epistemological advantages led Nietzsche to embrace the positive normative claims of Humeanism. Since he saw his naturalistic commitments as permitting no other form of

value, he accepted Unity as well. This drove him to the pragmatist position quoted above, according to which the falsity of a judgment is not necessarily an objection to it.

One can rationally accept pragmatism about epistemic justification on the basis of something like the Humean Unity argument, as Rinard and Nietzsche do. When I disagree with premises of their reasoning, I regard their beliefs in these premises as rational but false, and not as irrational. Whether Humeanism and Unity are true or false, one can rationally accept each of them. Furthermore, accepting both at the same time isn't irrational in any obvious way. They aren't inconsistent or Moore-paradoxical.[11] If one accepts both, one is rationally permitted, if not required, to accept the pragmatism that they entail.[12]

I don't claim that the Humean Unity argument is sound. I accept Humeanism. But justification seems to come in too wide a variety of forms for Unity to be true.[13] This is why I reject Unity and remain unconvinced by the argument. You might reject one or both of these premises. But as long as it seems to you that it wouldn't necessarily be irrational to accept pragmatism on the basis of both premises, you agree with the point I'm using the argument to establish.

Many other valid arguments for pragmatism might be constructed. If one denies that pragmatism can be rationally accepted, one has the burden of explaining why it's irrational to accept the premises of any such argument and derive its conclusion. Even if you think there's something irrational about accepting the Humean Unity argument, do you really want to commit yourself to the irrationality of accepting any valid argument sharing its pragmatist conclusion?

Now I'll turn to the second source of evidence Nevia has – the testimony of a large number of philosophers who join Nietzsche and Rinard in accepting the Humean Unity argument. Of course, this argument and its conclusion aren't accepted by most philosophers we know. But this is merely a contingent matter. It's possible to be in a community of philosophers who regard some argument for pragmatism like the Humean Unity argument as sound. One might then accept its conclusion in part because of their testimony.

Much recent discussion concerns whether it's fishy to form moral beliefs through testimony.[14] Whatever one may think about that issue, it's hard to see any serious problem for forming beliefs about epistemic justification through testimony. If a reliable authority tells me "You should believe that p", it seems perfectly fine to accept this and believe that I should believe that p. It may be easier to follow the evidentialist's guidance than the pragmatist's, if they're open about their views of epistemic justification. The evidentialist thinks that I should believe that p because it is true; the pragmatist thinks I should believe that p because it'll satisfy my desires. If I believe that p is true, I'll believe that p; if I believe that believing that p will satisfy my desires, I still may not believe that p. So I'm disposed to more automatically follow the evidentialist's advice than the pragmatist's advice. But this difference doesn't bear on whether I can be justified in believing their advice. I can justifiably believe normative testimony that I'm unable to follow. Practical akrasia often takes this form – perhaps I'm justified in believing my doctor's testimony that I should exercise more, but I can't bring myself to exercise. So I linger in a divided sort of ambivalent state, with my normative judgment favoring exercise despite the fact that I'm not doing it. I'll explain why our psychological architecture allows this sort of ambivalence shortly. But what should be seen here is that there doesn't seem to be any problem with forming beliefs

about the nature of epistemic justification on the basis of testimony. This gives Nevia another sort of evidence for pragmatism.

A third potential source of justification for Nevia's belief in pragmatism is that it seems right to her. Phenomenal conservatives like Michael Huemer (2001) regard the fact that something seems true as providing some justification for believing it. They would regard the fact that pragmatism seems true to Nevia as contributing to the justification of Nevia's belief. Phenomenal conservativism provides an attractively unified conception of epistemic justification, and makes it easy for beliefs with normative content to be justified.

Opponents of phenomenal conservatism might argue that it overgenerates justification for beliefs. Does one gain justification for believing any old thing, just because it seems true? As an unsympathetic evidentialist might ask, can Nevia be justified in a theory of epistemic justification as implausible as pragmatism just because it seems true? If such concerns convince you that Nevia doesn't gain any justification for believing pragmatism simply because it seems true to her, I'm happy to grant the point and rely only on the other two sources of justification – her acceptance of the Humean Unity argument and philosophical testimony in its favor.

This concludes my consideration of the sources of justification for Nevia's belief in pragmatism. She accepts it on the basis of an argument from reasonable premises, philosophical testimony, and the fact that it seems right to her. Unless there's some deep reason why belief in pragmatism has to be unjustified, Nevia will be justified in accepting it on some or all of these grounds.

Titelbaum versus pragmatism

Titelbaum defends a view entailing that pragmatism is irrational. This is the Fixed Point thesis: "Mistakes *about* the requirements of rationality are mistakes *of* rationality" (253). Those who regard epistemic rationality as having broadly evidentialist foundations regard pragmatism as mistaken. The Fixed Point Thesis requires them to also see pragmatism as irrational.

Titelbaum derives the Fixed Point Thesis from a version of the enkratic principle: "No situation rationally permits any overall state containing both an attitude A and the belief that A is rationally forbidden in one's current situation" (261). This means that Titelbaum derives the irrationality of pragmatism ultimately from the necessary irrationality of akrasia. And the necessary irrationality of akrasia is exactly what I'm concerned to deny. So if it can be shown that rational akrasia is possible – the goal of this paper – Titelbaum's argument for the irrationality of pragmatism fails. One philosopher's modus ponens is another's modus tollens, and that's how things are with Titelbaum's view and mine. I invoke the rationality of pragmatism in arguing that epistemic akrasia can be rational; Titelbaum invokes the irrationality of epistemic akrasia in arguing for the irrationality of views including pragmatism.

To understand how the enkratic principle supports the Fixed Point Thesis, consider how a false belief about rationality becomes part of an irrational overall state under the enkratic principle. Suppose I believe that rationality forbids attitude A in my situation. But my belief is false – attitude A is in fact rationally required in my situation! Then I'm irrational whether or not I have attitude A. If I don't have attitude A, I'm irrational because I lack an attitude that I'm rationally required to have. If I do have attitude A, I satisfy that requirement of rationality, but I violate the

enkratic principle by having attitude *A* while believing that it's forbidden. This is how Titelbaum would characterize Nevia's situation. She's rationally required to form beliefs according to her evidence, but she thinks she's forbidden to. Since she actually forms beliefs according to her evidence, she violates the enkratic principle.

I hope the preceding arguments have convinced you that Titelbaum's view entails something implausible: that pragmatism is necessarily irrational. Claire Field (2017) points out what an extreme commitment this is. In claiming that mistakes about rational requirements are necessarily irrational, Titelbaum assumes indefeasible justification for true beliefs about rational requirements. You might have thought that the Humean Unity argument, testimony, intuition, or at least all of them together would justify Nevia in accepting pragmatism. But according to Titelbaum, Nevia is still justified in accepting evidentialism, and none of her evidence for pragmatism can defeat this justification. Field points out that Titelbaum has no explanation of why principles of rationality have this extraordinary level of indefeasibility. Few if any other beliefs are indefeasible in this way, and systematic epistemological theories do little to explain it.

Of course, you might think that my conclusion is implausible as well, if it seems intuitive to you that akrasia is necessarily irrational. While I've argued that the beliefs constituting Nevia's akrasia can each be rationally held, that doesn't entail that it's rational to hold them together. If one part of my evidence supports p, and another part of my evidence supports ¬p, it would be irrational for me to infer p from the first part of my evidence, infer ¬p from the second part of my evidence, and hold both at the same time. Defenders of the enkratic principle may claim that akrasia constitutes a similarly irrational combination, even if one could rationally hold each belief constituting it.

The rest of this paper examines akrasia itself, explaining how it can be rational – especially if evidentialism is true. Nevia's belief that Alexius doesn't exist and her belief that she is unjustified in believing this both are formed on the basis of her evidence. As I'll argue, there is no good evidentialist story about why akrasia is irrational when both of the beliefs constituting it are supported by the agent's evidence. Akrasia may be irrational when evidentialists undergo it, because they accept a connection between justification and truth that takes them from believing that one of their beliefs is unjustified to believing that it is untrue. But pragmatists like Nevia don't accept this connection and don't have the evidence it provides. Wholehearted evidentialists should therefore regard pragmatists as exempt from the enkratic principle. Akratic beliefs may seem weird, but one can rationally hold many a variety of weird beliefs on the basis of sufficiently weird evidence. Epistemic akrasia is just another instance of this familiar phenomenon.

Why epistemic akrasia is stable and rational
I'll begin by considering how the causal profile of belief allows Nevia's akratic state to remain stable. This causal profile nicely matches the epistemic norms evidentialists apply to belief, correlating belief's psychological stability with evidentialists assessments of its rationality. No valid inferential routes grounded in evidentialism let Nevia escape akrasia.

Functionalists generally treat these three properties of belief as essential to its nature:[15]

    1. Attending to an experience that p disposes one to believe that p.

2. Attending to logically related belief-contents disposes one to form the entailed beliefs or revise away inconsistencies. For example, if one believes p and p→q, attending to these contents disposes one to believe that q. If one believes p and ¬p, attending to these contents disposes one to revise away one of these beliefs.

3. If one believes that doing A will raise the probability of E, attending to this proposition in the light of desire for E disposes one to A.

These causal properties correspond to an evidentialist-friendly account of the norms governing belief. It's natural for an evidentialist to hold that beliefs can be justified by experience (1) or other logically related beliefs (2). Experience and belief represent propositions as true, and evidentialists care about truth, so evidentialists can naturally treat them as justifying changes in belief. Bayesian approaches to epistemology treat (1) and (2) as the sorts of things that rationally change belief, while broadly Humean decision-theoretic views treat (3) as describing belief's role in motivating rational action. As my focus is on epistemology, I'll focus on (1) and especially (2).

The stability of Nevia's akratic state can be understood in terms of (2). Beliefs cause each other to go in and out of existence because of logical relations between their contents. The beliefs constitutive of Nevia's akratic state don't have the right logical relations to interact inferentially. Nevia believes that she should believe that Alexius exists. She also believes that Alexius doesn't exist. These beliefs are consistent with each other, and there are no further beliefs she holds that make up an inconsistent set.

Because of Nevia's pragmatism, her belief that she would be justified in believing that Alexius exists can't cause her to believe that he exists. If there was some way to go from "I would be justified in believing that Alexius exists" to "Alexius exists", she might be able to do so. Evidentialists can make a psychological transition from believing that p is justified to believing that p is true. This belief connects "I would be justified in believing that p" to "It's probably true that p." From there, evidentialists can go to having some high credence that p which might be sufficient for belief. But the path from justification to truth to belief that we would follow is closed to Nevia. Her pragmatism connects justification to desire-satisfaction rather than truth. "My desires would be better satisfied if I believed that p" doesn't lead one to the belief that it's probably true that p, or to a high credence in p. Someone might make this transition through wishful thinking. Strange that escaping akrasia might require an irrational process rather than a rational one!

You might think of another way for Nevia to escape akrasia: by following the enkratic principle, according to which one should φ if one believes that one should φ. The enkratic principle is often applied to practical rationality, where φing is intending or doing something. But it also can be applied to epistemic rationality, where φing is believing a proposition. If humans had a psychological process that would automatically implement the enkratic principle, Nevia's belief that she should believe that Alexius exists would cause her to believe that Alexius exists.

Practical akrasia is evidence that human motivational psychology includes no such process. Believing that one should φ can't cause φing by itself, and always requires help from another psychological state. Believing that one should φ, or that one has a reason to φ, doesn't cause the action unless one desires to do what one should or what one has reason to do. As I argue in

Humean Nature (2017), "the concept of a reason is no more psychologically significant than the concept of a raisin. If you desire raisins, your beliefs about how to act for raisins will play the motivational role of means–end beliefs. The same is true for beliefs about how to act for reasons… All beliefs, including beliefs about reasons, get their motivational and deliberative significance from contingent relations to what is desired" (164).

Believing a proposition, like performing an action, isn't something we can do just because we believe we should do it. This was recognized even by Blaise Pascal (1670), who famously argues that belief in God is justified for the pragmatic reason that it improves the expected value of one's afterlife. Pascal accepts that recognizing this pragmatic reason won't be sufficient to cause belief in God. After laying out his pragmatic argument for believing in God, he considers an interlocutor who says, "I am not released, and am so made that I cannot believe. What, then, would you have me do?" As Pascal recognizes, the interlocutor can't just infer that God exists from the belief that one should believe that God exists. So Pascal suggests immersion in religious society: "These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said…"

A parallel course of action might be available to Nevia. She might join a supportive Facebook group for people with imaginary friends, and let this social environment irrationally influence her. Here again we confront the irony that pragmatists might require arational or irrational means to escape akrasia. The human mind doesn't seem to include any general inferential process by which believing that one should ϕ makes one ϕ. This is why functionalist characterizations of belief include no such process, and why pragmatists require more roundabout methods.

Even if evidentialists are open to accepting norms on belief that aren't grounded in its causal properties, the enkratic principle shouldn't be among them. Revising a belief to make it consistent with the contents of experience or other beliefs is in the spirit of evidentialism, because experience and belief represent their contents as true. While experience and belief can be false, they're at least representations of things as true that the agent has accepted. But revising a belief in accordance with one's judgments of what one should believe has no necessary connection to the truth. Of course, if one accepts an evidentialist norm, revising beliefs in accordance with the enkratic principle would have an important connection to truth. But like Nevia, one might accept other norms that have nothing to do with truth. If one accepts a pragmatist norm, or a norm of believing the false, or a norm of having the number four in belief-contents whenever possible, the enkratic principle will drive belief-revisions that have no important connection to truth. This is why the enkratic principle can't be grounded in evidentialism, and thoroughgoing evidentialists should regard it with suspicion.

For pragmatists, akrasia is an instance of disconnected ambivalence

Nevia, Pascal, and others who believe that they should believe that p for pragmatic reasons can find themselves in an irresolvably ambivalent epistemic state regarding p. They may be certain that ¬p, while being equally certain that they should believe that p. The causal properties of belief don't allow high levels of confidence in these two propositions to directly moderate each other. "Alexius doesn't exist" and "I should believe that Alexius exists" are consistent with each other, so epistemic pressures against inconsistent belief don't lead us to revise them. Creating

inconsistency requires a further belief, like the evidentialist's belief that one shouldn't believe false propositions. This belief takes evidentialists from "Alexius does not exist" to "I should not believe that Alexius exists", which is inconsistent with "I should believe that Alexius exists." This is why rational evidentialists won't continue being certain in both "Alexius doesn't exist" and "I should believe that Alexius exists" and will retreat from certainty regarding at least one of these propositions. Meanwhile, rational pragmatists need not retreat from certainty on any particular proposition. They can remain in their ambivalent and akratic state.

Rational evidentialists and rational pragmatists who start out in epistemic akrasia will thus end up in different forms of epistemic ambivalence. As we've seen, evidentialism itself is a premise of reasoning by which its adherents can revise away one of the beliefs constituting their akrasia. The psychological states constituting evidentialists' ambivalence are connected by inferential relations that allow them to interact inferentially with each other. This makes evidentialists' akrasia an example of *connected ambivalence*, where rational inferences allow revising away one of the mental states constituting one's ambivalence. Connected ambivalence is more easily mitigated or resolved, because the attitudes constituting ambivalence can interact inferentially with each other to bring one's mind into harmony.

Pragmatists, meanwhile, don't have the connection between their epistemic value judgments and their first-order beliefs that evidentialists do. This makes pragmatists' akrasia an example of *disconnected ambivalence*. The attitudes constituting their ambivalence aren't connected to each other by inferential relations. This is why they can't rationally revise their way out of akrasia. "I should believe that p" and "¬p" aren't themselves connected by any inferential relations proper to belief. Without the connection provided by something like a belief in evidentialism, both will remain.

Connected and disconnected ambivalence appear among practical attitudes as well as epistemic attitudes. Philosophical disagreement about moral psychology includes disagreements about whether particular forms of ambivalence are connected or disconnected. Some anti-Humean psychological theories include an inferential process by which belief that one should not desire some end E eliminates one's desire for E. Such anti-Humean theories treat ambivalence constituted by such a belief and desire as connected. Humeans reject these inferential processes, and regard such ambivalence as disconnected. A consideration favoring the Humean view is that it explains why one can't change one's sexual orientation to match one's beliefs about what sort of sexual activity one should desire. The failure of conversion therapy demonstrates that this isn't something human beings can actually do.

The varieties of connected and disconnected ambivalence go beyond akrasia. Having contradictory beliefs can be seen as a type of connected ambivalence regarding a proposition. Believing that p and believing that ¬p is a way of being epistemically ambivalent towards p. It's also irrational. Fortunately, it can be resolved by bringing together the total evidence regarding p and abandoning at least one of the beliefs on the basis of this evidence. Conflicting desires about an option often constitute disconnected ambivalence. You might be ambivalent about going to graduate school because you desire to do philosophy, while also desiring more job security than academia offers. There's no inferential process by which your desire to do philosophy will reduce your desire for job security, or vice versa. This is what makes such ambivalence disconnected.

Whether instances of ambivalence are connected or disconnected will depend both on the general psychological laws governing human mental states and on the specific mental states that the person in question has. The debate between Humeans and anti-Humeans about motivation concerns general laws. The differences between how evidentialists and pragmatists can rationally find their way out of epistemic akrasia concerns specific differences in what they believe.

It's easy to see how connected ambivalence can be irrational. It can be mitigated or resolved by a further rational inference. If rationality requires drawing this inference, it's irrational not to draw it. Believers in contradictory propositions can abandon one belief or the other by inference from their total evidence. If the anti-Humeans were right, we'd be able to change our desires by inference from our beliefs about what we should desire. Evidentialists can revise away one of the beliefs constitutive of epistemic akrasia – either the normative judgment or the first-order belief – by means of an inference that involves their belief in evidentialism itself.

It's harder to see how disconnected ambivalence could be irrational. There's no further rational inference that an agent can make to escape it. If you're ambivalent about graduate school because it'll satisfy your desire to think about philosophy but frustrate your desire for job security, there's no inference you can draw to make one of these desires go away. On Humean views, inferences from normative beliefs alone can't change our desires either. And akratic pragmatists who disconnect justification from truth are left with no inferential relation between the normative judgments and first-order beliefs constituting their akrasia.

The problem with calling disconnected ambivalence irrational is that there's no way to resolve it by rational inference. I take it that rational inferences involve types of mental state transitions that humans at their best are able to make. We can be irrational if some sort of impairment leaves us not at our best, and we fail to make an inference that we could have made. But it's hard to see how we could be irrational for failing to draw inferences of types that our minds are simply unable to perform. And since disconnected ambivalence is a condition that no rational inference can cure, it's hard to see how it could be an irrational condition.

As mentioned before, evidentialists who are willing to accept norms of rationality that human psychology can't implement should still reject the enkratic principle. *Imaginary Friend* illustrates this. Rational norms grounded in evidentialism won't create any connection between Nevia's belief that she should believe that Alexius exists and her belief that Alexius doesn't exist.

Why evidentialists shouldn't apply the enkratic principle to pragmatists

Now we're in position to directly address the enkratic principle. In its most general form, this is simply the requirement not to be akratic. Applied specifically to epistemology, it rules out believing things when one believes one shouldn't believe them. It entails that Nevia is irrational for believing that Alexius doesn't exist while believing that she shouldn't believe this. As I'll argue, the enkratic principle is not a genuine requirement of rationality. It appears to be one only if we assume that akratic agents accept something like evidentialism.[16]

The enkratic principle fails as a requirement of rationality because akrasia can be an instance of disconnected ambivalence. "I should believe that Alexius exists" and "Alexius doesn't exist" are consistent with each other. They form an inconsistent set only with the addition of further

propositions like the evidentialist claim that one should believe the truth. Without adding a belief in evidentialism or some other belief that connects them, there is no way to eliminate one by a valid chain of reasoning from the other.

Why does the enkratic principle seem like a requirement of epistemic rationality? How could it be irrational to have these two beliefs that are perfectly consistent with each other? Part of the explanation may be that we tend to assume that believers accept evidentialism. Such assumptions are implicit in the formulations of many cases of epistemic akrasia in the literature. Accepting evidentialism makes epistemic akrasia into an instance of connected ambivalence, which can be resolved through inferences that accord with evidentialist norms and that humans can actually make.

For an example of how accepting evidentialism allows for rational resolutions to akrasia, let's consider one of the most prominent purported cases of rational epistemic akrasia: Sophie Horowitz' dartboard case.[17] Suppose Eve throws a dart at a 5x5 grid. Though the intersections of the grid aren't well-marked, they are magnetized within the dartboard, so the metal tip of the dart will land precisely at some intersection. Eve looks at her dart, which has landed somewhere in the middle of the dartboard. From a distance, she can't see clearly whether it hit <3,3> or one of what I'll call the four "adjacent intersections": <2,3>, <3,2>, <3,4>, or <4,3>. She divides her credence evenly among each of these five intersections, assigning them a credence of 0.2 each. This produces an 0.8 credence that the dart hit one of the four adjacent intersections. But as Horowitz notes, this distribution is rational only if the dart hit <3,3>. Otherwise, why would she assign positive credences only to <3,3> and the four adjacent intersections, while assigning zero credence to all other intersections? So she has 0.8 credence that it hit an adjacent intersection, and 0.2 credence that she should have 0.8 credence that it hit an adjacent intersection. While it's hard to identify the threshold at which high credence becomes belief, this can plausibly be seen as a case of believing that it hit an adjacent intersection, and believing that she shouldn't believe that it hit an adjacent intersection. So as Horowitz says, this is a case of epistemic akrasia.

Horowitz also claims that Eve's assignment of credences is rational. Here I disagree. Eve has applied some evidence to her higher-order credences that she hasn't applied to her lower-order credences. She recognizes that her distribution of credences to the adjacent intersections is rational only if the dart is most likely to have hit <3,3>. That produced her 0.2 credence that she should have an 0.8 credence that the dart hit an adjacent intersection. As Horowitz recognizes in calling this a case of epistemic akrasia, that 0.2 higher-order credence casts doubt on her 0.8 credence. So the next step for Eve is to reconsider her 0.8 credence. When she does, she'll notice that her lower-order distribution of credences to intersections doesn't make much sense. <3,3> must be more likely than each of the adjacent intersections. Otherwise, why is it the only intersection all of whose adjacent intersections she assigns positive credences to? This is the same insight that shaped her higher-order credences, and it deserves application to her lower-order credences as well. She might then revise her credence that the dart hit <3,3> up to 0.6, and revise down to 0.1 in each adjacent intersection. That would leave her with an 0.4 credence that the dart hit some adjacent intersection, and (again copying her credence in <3,3>) an 0.6 credence that her credence in its hitting an adjacent intersection should be 0.4. And with that, she has rationally revised her beliefs so as to avoid epistemic akrasia.

Nevia wouldn't be able to do as Eve did. Nevia's credences regarding what she should believe depend on what would satisfy her desires. If it's stipulated that she has to bet lots of money on where the dart landed, she might mimic Eve's pattern of reasoning. Pragmatists mimic evidentialists when they're gambling, because believing the truth promotes gamblers' desire-satisfaction. But if for some reason she thinks that believing the dart landed on <5,5> would best satisfy her desires, she'll form a high credence that she should believe the dart landed on <5,5>. Maybe she imagines that Alexius believes the dart landed on <5,5>, and she desires to share the credences that she imagines he has. Then she'll find herself in another case of rational epistemic akrasia. She won't believe that the dart landed on <5,5>, much like the interlocutor who couldn't get himself to believe in God on the basis of Pascal's Wager. She'll just fail to believe what she thinks she should believe.

Horowitz implicitly stipulates that her protagonist (whom I'm calling Eve) is an evidentialist. Why else would Eve form higher-order credences about some topic that have any grounding in her lower-order credences about that topic? Pragmatists need not do this. They form higher-order credences about topics on the basis of lower-order credences about desire-satisfaction.

Many views about epistemic justification that are worse than pragmatism similarly block the inferences that would resolve akrasia. Suppose Quadry accepts a fourist epistemic norm: his belief-contents should have as many fours in them as possible. Then he might believe with a credence near certainty that he should believe that the dart landed on <4,4>, while having credences like Eve's about where the dart actually hit. Quadry has no path out of epistemic akrasia, as he can't connect his higher-order credences and his lower-order credences.

If pragmatism can be rational, the enkratic principle can give bad advice. It tells pragmatists that they're rationally required to give up either pragmatism or the first-order beliefs that don't conform to it. Assuming that their pragmatism is rationally held, the only remaining option is to abandon first-order beliefs that were formed by properly considering the evidence.

This is why the enkratic principle rises and falls with the dubious view that evidentialism is the only rational theory of epistemic justification. Evidentialists can escape epistemic akrasia through a form of enkratic reasoning that uses evidentialism itself as a premise. But if pragmatism can be rationally held, its adherents can find themselves in a state of disconnected ambivalence between it and their first-order beliefs. Any evidentialist spectators will then watch with horror as the enkratic principle tells pragmatists to give up their true beliefs. To an evidentialist like myself, mere akrasia seems like a less gruesome fate.

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[1] Feldman (2005), Kolodny (2005), Greco (2014), Titelbaum (2015). Littlejohn (2015) draws a particularly strong anti-evidentialist conclusion.

[2] I agree with Arpaly (2003) that practical akrasia can be rational.

[3] I thank Nevia Dolcini for naming Alexius and lending her name to my pragmatist.

[4] Perceptive epistemologists have noted tensions between evidentialism and the enkratic requirement. See Lasonsen-Aarnio (forthcoming), Littlejohn (2015), and Worsnip (2015).

[5] I'm inclined towards Railton's (1986, 1989) naturalistic realism, which identifies evaluative properties with natural properties via synthetic *a posteriori* identities. On this view, truth would be identical to epistemic value.

[6] Nietzsche (1886), James (1907), Reisner (2009), Marusic (2013), Rinard (2015), Floweree (2019).

[7] Sobel (2001), Schroeder (2007), Sinhababu (2011).

[8] Kearns and Star (2009), Skorupski (2010), Forcehimes (2015).

[9] Sinhababu (2017)

[10] Sinhababu (2015).

[11] Chislenko (2016).

[12] We can also stipulate that Nevia knows that accepting each premise and the conclusion promotes her desire-satisfaction. Then accepting the argument is pragmatically justified.

[13] I agree with Qu (2014) that David Hume (1739) would also have rejected the argument for this reason – he famously distinguishes the truth-based norms governing belief from whatever norms might govern desire. Ridge (2003) and Schafer (2014) interpret Hume as more friendly to Unity.

[14] Hills (2009), Fletcher (2016).

[15] Schwitzgebel (2019)

[16] Most discussions of epistemic akrasia in the literature concern higher-order evidence that suggests the truth of a different proposition than lower-order evidence, like Alexander (2013) and Daoust (2018). In *Imaginary Friend*, akrasia is instead generated by the agent's acceptance of an unusual normative theory. This generates disconnected rather than connected ambivalence.

[17] Williamson (2000), Feldman (2005), and Christensen (2018) suggest broadly similar cases.