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A PUZZLE ABOUT FICKLENESS*

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Abstract

In this paper, I motivate a puzzle about epistemic rationality. On the one hand, there seems to be something problematic about frequently changing your mind. On the other hand, changing your mind once is often permissible. Why do one-off changes of mind seem rationally permissible, even admirable, while constant changes seem quintessentially irrational? The puzzle of fickleness is to explain this asymmetry. To solve the puzzle, I propose and defend the *Ratifiable Reasoning Account*. According to this solution, as agents redeliberate, they gain two types of evidence. First, they gain inductive evidence that they will not stably settle their belief. Second, this inductive evidence affords higher-order evidence that they are unreliable at assessing the matter at hand. The fact that fickle agents gain this higher-order evidence explains why fickleness can be epistemically—not just practically—irrational. In addition to solving the puzzle, my account captures a wide range of contextual factors that are relevant for our judgments.

There is a tension in our thinking about changing one's mind. On the one hand, agents who are fickle seem less than fully rational. More specifically, there seems to be something odd about an agent who changes her mind frequently without gaining new evidence. On the other hand, one-off changes of mind

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based on redeliberation are far less problematic. More forcefully, we tend to regard agents who never redeliberate and change their minds as closed-minded or dogmatic. How and when can one-off changes of mind be rationally permissible, even admirable, when constant changes seem quintessentially irrational? What might our explanation of this asymmetry tell us about *epistemic* rationality?

In §1, I motivate this puzzle and clarify its scope. The puzzle is to explain why fickleness is often more problematic than its one-off counterparts. In §2, I argue that fickleness is not just practically problematic but also epistemically problematic, and thus an epistemic solution is desirable. I offer my positive proposal in §3. On my proposal, fickleness is often irrational because fickle agents typically gain second-order evidence that they are unreliable—and their resultant beliefs unstable—in the course of changing their minds multiple times. I call this the Ratifiable Reasoning account, since it claims that changes of mind are rational if they result in beliefs that the agent can rationally endorse. In §4, I canvas some alternative solutions to the puzzle and argue that they fail to adequately explain the asymmetry. In §5, I point to avenues for further research on epistemic norms on changing one’s mind. In particular, I consider how both time-slicing and process-oriented views in epistemology might explain the importance of redeliberation in our epistemic assessments of others.

1 A Puzzle About Fickleness

When we consider cases of changing one’s mind, we often find that frequent redeliberation is more problematic than one-off redeliberation. What explains this? While this is a complex phenomenon—involving a number of contextual factors—I attempt to isolate one important part of the explanation for why frequent redeliberation is problematic when it results in changes of mind.¹

To motivate the asymmetry, it will be helpful to contrast two agents, Fran and Tom:

Fran: Fran is a history buff, who has studied conflicting theories about how Amelia Earhart died. She thinks the most plausible theories are that she died in a plane crash or in Japanese captivity. On June 1, she is convinced that Earhart died in a plane crash. However, on June 2, she changes her mind: she now believes that Earhart died in captivity. On June 3, she changes her mind again, once

¹I am thankful to an anonymous referee for suggesting this framing.

again believing that she died in a plane crash. Fran continues to cycle through these theories, despite neither gaining nor losing—much less forgetting—any first-order evidence. Moreover, at a certain point, it's not the case that she changes her mind in virtue of noticing something new about the evidence. Nonetheless, she keeps changing her mind each day throughout the month, cycling back and forth between the theories.²

Tom: Tom, like Fran, is a history buff who has studied conflicting theories about how Amelia Earhart died, and he agrees with Fran's assessment about the two most plausible theories. From June 1–15, he believes that Earhart died in a plane crash. However, on June 16, he changes his mind, and for the remainder of the month, he believes that she died in Japanese captivity.

Let's suppose, for now, that Fran and Tom are similar in the following relevant respects. In addition to sharing the same first-order evidence bearing on how Amelia Earhart died, they are equally adept at assessing it. Furthermore, they do not gain or lose any evidence during this time. In addition, they both know their own track records, including how often they changed their mind and which views they held each day. Finally, they each change their mind as a result of reassessing the evidence, not merely because they (for example) bumped their heads. Intuitively, it seems like there is something defective about Fran's frequent mind-changing that is not present in Tom. Indeed, Fran seems paradigmatically fickle, frequently and frivolously changing her mind. This seems true even if we describe the agents as switching between weaker, probabilistic claims of the form 'Amelia Earhart died in such-and-such conditions.'

Of course, assessing changes of mind requires taking into account many contextual factors. For example, if Tom had changed his mind merely because he bumped his head, whereas Fran changed her mind each day as the result of

²For similar examples, see Titelbaum (2015) and Hedden (2015b). Both agree that there is intuitively something epistemically wrong with some cases of mind-changing without a change in evidence (though Hedden attempts to explain this intuition away). Nonetheless, the problem I'm focusing on here is different from ones previously considered. Titelbaum is focused on explaining what is epistemically wrong with what I call 'jumping,' where an agent jumps between beliefs without redeliberating; he is specifically concerned with cases where one forgets one's beliefs in between jumps. Hedden is focused on the difference between interpersonal disagreement and intrapersonal disagreement (in the form of changes of mind). By contrast, I am focused on the difference between redeliberating and changing one's mind once and doing so multiple times. I discuss Titelbaum and Hedden's views briefly in §5.

careful redeliberation, it would be more difficult to say which agent was doing worse—though both agents would arguably still seem far from ideal. Moreover, had Fran changed her mind once each week, rather than each day, it would be more difficult to offer any useful normative or evaluative comparisons between her and Tom absent further information. Although frequent redeliberation that results in changes of mind—i.e. *fickleness*—can look pathological or odd, it doesn't follow that more redeliberation is always all-things-considered worse. In other words, we cannot simply count the number of times an agent changes her mind and infer that the agent who engages in n changes is doing better—by some useful metric—than someone who engages in $n+1$ changes. As with other normative or evaluative assessments, the details matter.

One of the details that matters is whether the agent redeliberated in between changes. An agent *redeliberates* when she goes through a process of reasoning or reassessing the evidence. Redeliberation need not be conscious; it can happen 'under the surface,' so to speak.³ We can distinguish cases of redeliberation from cases of *jumping*. An agent *jumps* when she flips between doxastic responses as if by a flip of a coin, without going through any sort of reasoning process—subconscious or conscious. Had Fran and Tom merely *jumped* between responses, both would seem to be engaged in problematic behavior. Moreover, it's not clear we would judge Fran more harshly simply for jumping more. Thus, the asymmetry in question is one between cases of one-off and frequent redeliberation. For now, I set cases of jumping aside and will return to them in §5.

At this point, I merely hope the reader shares my intuition that there is *prima facie* something *more* problematic, defective, or odd about Fran's behavior compared to Tom's, once we stipulate that each redeliberated and did not lose or gain first-order evidence. We have not yet attempted to explain this intuition or capture the many contextual factors on which our assessment may depend. We can motivate this intuition further by considering the types of questions we would be inclined to ask these agents and the answers that would satisfy us.⁴ We might ask

³Compare work on the 'Deliberation-without-attention' effect by Dijksterhuis et al. (2006), who explicitly make room for the notion of unconscious deliberation. It also seems like our everyday notion of deliberation allows it to be unconscious; otherwise, 'conscious deliberation' would sound redundant. One difference between subconscious redeliberation and jumping is that an agent can be better equipped to offer a rationalizing explanation for why she changed her mind in the former case. Furthermore, in cases of redeliberation, one bases one's response on the evidence, while in cases of jumping one does not. (Thanks to Jane Friedman for suggesting this.) Of course, there are cases where it is hard in practice to distinguish between jumping and subconscious redeliberation; my point is that there is an important normative difference.

⁴This strategy draws inspiration from Titelbaum (2015).

each agent why they changed their minds. Suppose that Tom replies by saying that he changed his mind as a result of reassessing the evidence or the virtues of the competing theories. This has the shape of a satisfactory response, even if we want more details filled in. However, this answer is far from sufficient to assuage our worries about Fran. Merely telling us that she reassessed the evidence each time will not satisfy us; we will still want to know why she changed her mind so *much and so frequently*. Indeed, especially given the stipulation that she does not gain or lose first-order evidence, it's difficult to know what plausible explanation she could offer us.

This thought experiment suggests two upshots. First, if someone changes her mind frequently, this requires more explanation than if she merely changed her mind once or infrequently. Second, it is difficult to come up with a rationalizing story for Fran's frequent mind-changing, one that would render it fully intelligible and unproblematic. While a rationalizing explanation for Tom's change of mind is readily available, spelling out a rationalizing story for Fran is more challenging. This supports the contention that there is something at least *prima facie* more problematic about Fran's behavior compared to Tom's.

In short, there seems to be an asymmetry—at least one of degree—between Fran and Tom. This calls out for explanation. How could the mere frequency of deliberative changes make a difference to our assessment of agents, particularly if more redeliberation is not necessarily bad? The puzzle of fickleness is to explain this asymmetry. More generally, it is to explain what factors are relevant for determining whether an agent is problematically fickle. Importantly, the puzzle of fickleness arises not because occasional redeliberation is always rational and frequent redeliberation always irrational. Rather, the aim of this paper is to explain why there often seems to be some rational difference—at least one of degree—between infrequent and frequent changes of mind.

With some assumptions, we can render the asymmetry even starker. It seems that agents like Tom who occasionally redeliberate are not only doing less poorly than fickle agents. Rather, they are often positively praiseworthy. Indeed, we often think that careful redeliberation is a good thing, something that virtuous and thoughtful agents engage in. If this assumption is correct, then the asymmetry between infrequent and frequent redeliberation is not merely one of explaining why we are inclined to negatively evaluate Fran more than Tom. We also want to explain why we are inclined to positively appraise agents who occasionally redeliberate, and thereby change their minds. In other words, the asymmetry may be one not only of degree but category. I bolster these intuitions further in §2 and argue that it is a virtue of a solution if it can explain this starker asymmetry

as well.

My account will explain how and when the frequency of redeliberation matters. In particular, I'll argue in §3 that as one repeatedly redeliberates and thereby changes one's mind, one gains second-order evidence that one will not settle and that one is unreliable regarding the question at hand. Nonetheless, this second-order evidence can be defeated or outweighed in cases where one has good reason to think one is epistemically improving each time. This happens, for instance, when the evidence is particularly complicated or multi-faceted, and thus new things become salient to the agent each time she reassesses it or as new interpretations are offered. Moreover, how complicated the evidence is makes a difference to how frequently one can reassess it while still being fully rational; at a certain point, as in Fran's case, there cease to be new things one can notice without acquiring new evidence or cognitive skills. My account—the *Ratifiable Reasoning Account*—thus allows me to characterize why frequent deliberative changes are often problematic as well as what it takes for them to be permissible.

In the next section, I'll argue that a full solution to the puzzle of fickleness will explain why fickleness can be *epistemically* problematic, not just *practically* problematic.

2 Merely Practical vs. Epistemic Solutions

One natural reaction to fickleness is to argue that it is practically problematic. In support of this solution, it seems correct that agents who frequently change their minds are unlikely to achieve their goals. After all, we need to have some fixed points in order to engage in reasoning and planning.⁵ A fickle agent will also be more likely to face opportunity costs and sunk costs. She makes plans to go to a comedy show but then changes her mind; she now prefers the opera, but she missed out on the opportunity for those tickets days ago. Indeed, it is undeniable that fickleness can come with a price.

While I agree that fickleness is often practically problematic, it is not *merely*

⁵Hedden (2015b) n1: “Briggs (2009) argues along these lines for diachronic principles of rationality.” In a similar vein, Elga (2010) shows that an agent who frequently changes her mind may be subject to a variant of the Dutch Book Argument and thus will be in a position to surely lose money. Moss (2015a) replies that agents in these cases don't actually change their minds; they merely change what credence function they identify with. For a classic discussion of the Diachronic Book Argument for conditionalization, see Lewis (1999).

that. Here I aim to motivate the claim that fickleness is (also) epistemically deficient. First, I'll offer positive reasons for thinking that an epistemic solution is desirable. I'll then argue that a merely practical solution is incomplete.

First, there seem to be epistemic values that the fickle person cannot realize without difficulty. This is true both interpersonally and intrapersonally. Interpersonally, it would be difficult to fully rely on or trust fickle agents, either generally or about a particular matter.⁶ If we know someone has changed their mind several times about whether p , or that they have simply jumped between stances regarding p , we would hesitate to rely on them about p . Intrapersonally, there are values of consistency that fickleness makes it difficult to realize. We need stability in our beliefs in order to reason effectively, draw inferences, and to see what the evidence entails; frequent deliberative changes make this ground shaky. Moreover, it would be difficult for fickle agents to trust or rely on *themselves*, knowing that they have frequently changed their minds.⁷ Finally, consider someone who believes that p while also believing that if she were to reopen deliberation, she would not conclude that p . This person is making some epistemic mistake even if she is never going to act on her belief regarding p . My proposal in §3 defends this claim further and shows why it would be an epistemic mistake.

Indeed, similar considerations help us motivate the stronger asymmetry, namely that one-off deliberative changes can sometimes be unproblematic and even praiseworthy. First, observe our practices: we don't typically think that agents who occasionally redeliberate and, as a result, change their minds are untrustworthy or unreliable, so long as other conditions for being a good epistemic agent are met. On the contrary, we tend to regard agents who carefully redeliberate and change their opinions as particularly thoughtful, open-minded,

⁶Similarly, Kauppinen (2018) argues that we hold agents epistemically accountable by reducing trust in them. If I am correct that we would generally be more hesitant to trust fickle agents, and reducing trust is a distinctive way of holding someone epistemically accountable, then this would further support my claim that we epistemically assess fickle agents. My proposal in §3 will offer one explanation of this. For now, the point is that: intuitively, it seems we would be more wary of deferring to someone who is fickle.

⁷There's an interesting question here about someone who changes their mind multiple times but forgets their own track record. On my preferred take, whether this person is irrational or merely unfortunate depends in part on whether they *should* have evidence of their track record. If the forgetting is a result of their own mismanagement of beliefs, I'd be disposed to judge their fickleness as epistemically problematic. However, if they were given a drug that makes them forget about their track record, it seems that they are merely unfortunate. Thanks to Maria Lasonen-Aarnio and Brian Weatherson for discussion.

and responsible epistemic agents. Indeed, we will often see such agents as *more* reliable than agents who never change their minds, for they examine their beliefs carefully and reflect on the relevant epistemic considerations. By contrast, agents who never redeliberate and are never willing to change their minds seem dogmatic and less trustworthy, especially given that we often epistemically improve by undergoing deliberative changes. Second, these practices seem justified. As Jane Friedman emphasizes, it seems like double-checking our beliefs is an important part of belief maintenance; redeliberating is just one way to double check (Friedman, 2019a).⁸ If we genuinely double-check, we will at least sometimes be willing to change our minds. Finally, even if no one is relying on the one-off redeliberator, the one-off redeliberator seems better equipped to realize other epistemic values, such as understanding and justification, than someone who never redeliberates. These points help bolster intuitions in favor of the stronger asymmetry suggested in §1, and thus it's a virtue of any account that can explain this contrast as well.

In addition to these positive reasons for thinking that fickleness is epistemically defective, there are further reasons for thinking that the *merely practical* solution is incomplete. The latter solution fails to explain the puzzle of fickleness in cases where nothing practical is at stake. For example, it's far from obvious that fickle agents always fail to satisfy some practical goal, or that the problem with fickleness lies in resulting actions. This is particularly clear in cases where one changes one's mind frequently about purely theoretical questions that one will never act on and is not obligated to pursue. Indeed, Fran may fall in this category: despite the fact that she is a historian, suppose her interest in Amelia Earhart's death is merely a leisurely side interest. There is still something problematic about Fran frequently changing her mind, at least compared to Tom. Yet it is far from obvious that there is anything practically problematic with Fran's fickleness. Rather, the problem with Fran's fickleness is partly cognitive or epistemic. The burden is on the person who believes otherwise to offer a compelling reason to think that fickleness always and only involves practical irrationality or imprudence.

We can strengthen this argument by prying the epistemic and practical further apart. For example, there can be cases where fickleness is practically rational yet seems epistemically problematic. Imagine Anya, who is offered \$100 every time she genuinely and truly changes her mind on an issue that doesn't directly affect her livelihood, such as some purely theoretical beliefs. Setting aside wor-

⁸Thanks also to Adam Lovett for discussion on this topic.

ries about doxastic voluntarism, it is in her practical interest to change her mind as much as possible! However, the more money she makes, the more epistemically impoverished she'd become.

A defender of the practical solution might object to the use of money in an intuition pump. However, it is far from uncommon to appeal to the role of financial considerations in determining practical costs and practical irrationality—just turn to the literature on Dutch Book Arguments or practical reasons for beliefs and intentions! Alternatively, they might argue that someone who changes her mind so frequently would still be practically unfortunate even if she ended up rich. For instance, she would be ill-equipped to make plans.

It's not obvious, though, that fickleness on this matter will affect her ability to make plans more generally. Moreover, it seems possible that Anya would maximize expected utility by changing her beliefs as much as possible, the monetary gain being worth the loss in planning currency. Thus, the practical solution is particularly poorly situated to explain the intuitive problem with fickleness in such cases. This is a significant limitation. It is true that fickle agents will have difficulty achieving some of their goals. They can also arguably be exploited via Dutch Books. What the *merely practical* solution gets wrong is that these are the *only* problems with fickleness.

I take these arguments to have motivated the claim that an epistemic solution is desirable, not to have decisively established it. That claim will become more plausible as we assess both my solution and the alternatives that deny it. Before turning to my proposal, I want to flag a terminological choice: I will frame my solution as one regarding epistemic *irrationality*. This is partly for ease of expression and familiarity.⁹ Those who are skeptical that this is genuinely a matter of rationality can instead read my solution as explaining why there is something epistemically defective about fickleness. With this, I turn to my proposal.

3 My Solution: The Ratifiable Reasoning Account

Changes of mind are a complex phenomenon, and many factors are relevant to determining whether an agent is irrationally fickle. Here I will isolate several

⁹That said, I think a further way to motivate this framing is by appealing to the functions of rationality ascriptions. For example, rationality ascriptions play an important role in helping us determine whom we can trust or rely on for our beliefs and other doxastic attitudes. (See, for example, Dogramaci (2016).) Conversely, by calling fickle agents irrational, we appropriately signal that they are more difficult to trust or rely on.

important and overlooked reasons why frequent redeliberation is often more irrational than its infrequent counterparts. I then consider what other factors are relevant for determining whether any particular case is all-things-considered irrational.

To solve the puzzle of fickleness, I will propose and defend the *Ratifiable Reasoning Account*. According to this solution, as agents redeliberate, they gain inductive evidence that they will not settle. This inductive evidence has both practical and, more importantly, epistemic implications. On the practical side, redeliberation takes time and is cognitively costly. Thus, if an agent has evidence that further redeliberation won't lead her to settle, then it can be practically irrational to continue.¹⁰ On the epistemic side, this inductive evidence affords her higher-order evidence that she is unreliable about the matter at hand: she has repeatedly arrived at beliefs that are incompatible with the results of previous deliberations. Since she has done this many times before, she has increasingly good evidence that she's unreliable about whether *p*.

This higher-order evidence explains the epistemic irrationality of fickleness in two distinct ways. First, it is epistemically problematic to believe that *p* while also believing that one is unreliable about whether *p*. Second, it is epistemically problematic to believe that *p* while thinking that said belief would not survive further redeliberation. In other words, it is problematic to believe that *p* if you have evidence that your belief is non-ratifiable, i.e. one you do not expect to endorse in the future.¹¹

In short, from an epistemic perspective, you shouldn't believe that *p* if you either gain evidence that you are unreliable about whether *p* or if your belief that *p* is non-ratifiable. The fickle agent, but not the one-off redeliberator, typically violates one or both of these constraints on epistemic rationality.

Collectively, we can refer to the inductive and higher-order evidence the agent gains as second-order evidence: it does not bear directly on whether *p* is true but rather whether the agent should trust her judgment that *p* or view it as rational. Once this agent has acquired sufficient second-order evidence, I'll argue that she should stop redeliberating and suspend judgment. Importantly,

¹⁰Similarly, if an agent has evidence that she's redeliberated multiple times before and always arrives at the same view, it can also be practically irrational to continue redeliberate, whether or not one has changed her mind. I discuss this in §4.1.

¹¹I focus here on the fickle agent's *beliefs* as the locus of their irrationality, rather than their process of redeliberation. However, the problems mentioned here might also suggest that it is irrational for fickle agents to not only *believe* that *p* but also to continue to *redeliberate* about whether *p*.

this second-order evidence can be outweighed in cases where one has good reason to think one is epistemically improving each time. Alternatively, one may not have this second-order evidence at all if one is in an epistemic position that is sufficiently unlike the previous times one has redeliberated. I will defend each part of the Ratifiable Reasoning Account in turn before applying my solution to the example with which we started.

First, the inductive evidence component works as follows: as an agent continues to redeliberate, changing her mind each time, she gains inductive evidence that her new response will likely not be one on which she'll settle, and thus she'll redeliberate once again. For instance, if I know that I've changed my mind five times regarding p in a short time frame despite gaining no new evidence, then I ought to begin to doubt that the next time I change my mind, I'll stick with my judgment. But as others have argued, one of the points of forming beliefs in the first place is to settle.¹² Moreover, redeliberation typically takes time and is often both cognitively and practically costly. Given the aims and costs of redeliberation, one ought not do it if she has enough inductive evidence that it won't result in a stable epistemic position.

The fact that agents gain inductive evidence that they won't settle helps explain why agents who redeliberate multiple times are practically irrational: they engage in a costly process offset by no clear epistemic gain. It is controversial whether these practical and cognitive costs of redeliberation also explain why fickleness is epistemically irrational. This would depend on whether the costs of redeliberation alone impose an epistemic constraint on further redeliberation.¹³

Fortunately, the second part of my proposal imposes a squarely epistemic constraint that explain why fickleness can be *epistemically* irrational. As agents redeliberate, they also gain higher-order evidence that they are—or ought to view themselves as—unreliable with respect to the matter at hand. The more an agent changes her mind, the more skeptical she should be that she's been in tune with, properly weighed, or even has the capacity to assess all of the epistemically relevant considerations regarding p . Alternatively, she might think her previous

¹²For views that emphasize the importance of settling, see, for instance: Dallmann (2017), Friedman (2019b), Holton (2014), and Lawlor (2014). For example, Lawlor writes: "A functional role of belief is to permit action without further inquiry. Filling this role requires the anticipation of constancy, which, if rational, is in turn based on sufficiently resilient credence" (Lawlor, 2014, p. 4). For most of these authors, settledness is important largely because it affords stability. An exception is Friedman, who argues that settledness does not imply stability (pp. 309–10).

¹³See Dallmann (2017) for an apparent defense of this type of picture as well as discussion of related literature.

response was, strictly speaking, epistemically permissible but reflected a ranking of epistemic values that she no longer endorses. If an agent did not see her previous response as lacking in some respect, then it is unclear why she changed her mind in the first place. And if she has changed her mind multiple times, each time coming to repudiate her previous view, she eventually ought to view herself as unreliable at assessing and adjudicating the relevant epistemic considerations and values. For this reason, she should see herself as unreliable about the matter at hand.

If an agent learns that she is unreliable in assessing whether p , then there is something epistemically problematic about her making up her mind about whether p . For instance, if an agent learns that she is unreliable in assessing whether A or B is the best explanation for an event, then she ought not commit herself to either explanation. It is relatively uncontroversial that an agent should not continue to believe that p if she has higher-evidence that she is unreliable about whether p . However, there is disagreement about how best to capture this judgment. For example, some have argued that higher-order evidence is rationally toxic in the following sense: even if one's original evidence in fact supports believing that p , the higher-order evidence can defeat the rationality of having this belief. Some, by contrast, have denied the putative phenomenon of higher-order defeat.¹⁴ On these views, even if higher-order defeat doesn't occur, agents can still commit an epistemic error by continuing to believe that p . For example, they may exhibit an epistemic character defect or an epistemically problematic disposition.¹⁵ For our purposes, we can be neutral regarding these debates. As long as there is some coherent way to make sense of the epistemic import of higher-order evidence, then we have an explanation for why fickleness is epistemically defective, if not irrational.

How should the agent respond to the higher-order evidence that she is unreliable? On my view, she ought to suspend judgment about whether p . This judgment suspension is rationalized by the new second-order evidence she has gained. The verdict to suspend judgment follows from a general, plausible prin-

¹⁴Proponents of the reality of higher-order defeat include Christensen (2010), Elga (2013), Feldman (2005), and Huemer (2011). Opponents of the notion of higher-order defeat include Coates (2012), Lasonen-Aarnio (2010, 2014), and Williamson (2011). I am thankful to Maria Lasonen-Aarnio for pressing me to discuss the impact that the higher-order evidence has according to my proposal.

¹⁵For example, Lasonen-Aarnio (forthcoming) has recently argued that we can explain intuitions about putative higher-order defeat (and other phenomena) in terms of such agents manifesting bad epistemic dispositions instead.

ciple that one ought to suspend judgment in cases where one begins to think the evidence is not conclusive enough, or one's sensitivity to epistemic considerations not thorough enough, to make one confident in one's judgment. While my account is compatible with alternative answers to how the agent should respond, judgment-suspension seems like the most plausible recommendation.¹⁶

We are now in a position to consider a second epistemic problem with fickleness, which builds on the first. Given her second-order evidence, the fickle agent should expect a mismatch between her current belief and her future belief. If she thinks that her current belief that p will not survive further redeliberation, then she should not believe that p now. For if she does continue to believe that p , then her belief is non-ratifiable: given that she chose it, she'll later come to regret or repudiate it.¹⁷ These considerations motivate a Ratifiability Norm on belief: if you expect that you will *not* believe that p in the future despite not losing or gaining (first-order) evidence, then you ought not believe that p now.¹⁸ Agents who violate this Ratifiability Norm seem to arbitrarily privilege their current doxastic state over a future state with identical evidence and values. This is one respect in which the instability of beliefs may be not just practically costly but also epistemically defective. Indeed, failing to have ratifiable beliefs can be a further respect in which an agent ought to view herself as unreliable on the matter at hand.

¹⁶One alternative is to say that one ought to believe whatever the first-order evidence supports while also believing that whatever belief one has is unreliable. (For defenses of 'level-splitting' between the first- and second-order levels in the context of debates about epistemic akrasia, see Lasonen-Aarnio (2020) and Weatherson (2019).) Another is to say that you should have an imprecise credence or believe a disjunction, such as "Either View A or View B is true." My use of 'suspension' is compatible with this latter set of recommendations. Thanks to Josh Hunt, Claire Field, and Kevin Blackwell for discussion.

¹⁷Readers familiar with decision theory may notice the similarity between this idea (both in name and in content) to Richard Jeffrey's principle of ratifiability. Jeffrey introduces the notion of ratifiability in Jeffrey (1983). An act is *ratifiable* if and only if it maximizes expected utility in light of the evidence that it is chosen. Joyce (2018) extends the notion of ratification to choices of credal states, which he calls *epistemic ratifiability*. Here I am using the term slightly differently than both Jeffrey and Joyce and extending it to beliefs, though the structure is largely analogous. Thanks to Calum McNamara for discussion.

¹⁸Compare discussion of Reflection as a norm of rationality in, for instance, van Fraassen (1984) and Briggs (2009). Reflection is a related principle about how one's attitudes ought to align across time. Roughly, Reflection states that if you expect that in the future that you will have an attitude A toward p , without loss of information, you ought to have A now. (See Schoenfeld (2014) for a weaker, permissivist-friendly version and Briggs (2009) for precisifications; for example, it's important that you view your future self as having undergone a learning experience.) My suggestion here is related but different. Thanks to Jim Joyce for discussion.

It is possible for an agent to satisfy the Ratifiability Norm while still being unreliable about whether p . For example, imagine Nat, who is deliberating about whether God exists. Nat has wavered on this question many times before. However, this time is different. He has decided that if he comes to believe that God exists, then he will join a monastery. Moreover, he knows that after joining a monastery, although his evidential situation will not change, he will have sufficient practical incentives to never change his mind about God again.¹⁹ His belief in God would thereby be ratifiable. However, these practical incentives would not defeat the higher-order evidence that he is unreliable. Thus, from an epistemic perspective, Nat should continue to believe that he is unreliable about whether God exists.²⁰ However, this is an extreme case, and in many cases of fickleness, we'll observe both epistemic flaws.

Having developed the details of my proposal, we can now consider exactly how it explains the example with which we started. First, it explains why Fran's fickleness is irrational as follows. Once Fran has redeliberated a sufficient number of times about how Amelia Earhart died, she has reason to doubt that she'll settle on a view. The fact that she has changed her mind many times before then gives her reason to believe that she is unreliable at assessing the main competing theories. She thus ought to suspend judgment about how Amelia Earhart died; at the very least, she should suspend judgment about which of the two explanations is best. If she does not suspend, she should expect a mismatch between her current view and 50% of her future views (indeed, each day, she should expect to this mismatch to occur tomorrow!). Given this, she cannot regard her current view as ratifiable, one that she will continue to endorse.

The asymmetry between agents like Fran and Tom is then explained by the fact that Tom does not have sufficient evidence that he is unreliable. The mere fact that he redeliberated and changed his mind once before does not render him unreliable. (By analogy, if someone got one of two NBA trivia questions wrong, we don't yet have enough evidence that they are unreliable about NBA trivia.) As I explain in §3.1, when we redeliberate, we typically have good reason to think we're epistemically improving. Redeliberating once or a few times can be rationalized by the potential epistemic gains. However, as we saw with Fran, this justification for continuing to redeliberate can eventually give out. At a

¹⁹Alternatively, we can imagine that Nat knows that the monastery will reinforce his faith by systematically concealing any evidence against the existence of God, frequently reminding him of the best arguments for theism without changing his first-order evidence at all. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this possibility.

²⁰Thanks very much to Adam Waggoner for this example and to Josh Hunt for discussion.

certain point, it becomes difficult—though not impossible—to rationalize further redeliberation. As I will argue in §3.2, my Ratifiable Reasoning Account not only characterizes why frequent redeliberation is often problematic but also identifies contextual factors that can render it permissible. My account thus also predicts a range of nuanced judgments in cases of mind-changing.

3.1 Why One-Off Redeliberation Is Often Rational

In §1, I suggested that it is a virtue of a view if it not only explains why frequent redeliberation is more problematic than one-off redeliberation but also why one-off redeliberation can be perfectly fine, and indeed rational. In this section, I'll explain how my view captures that stronger judgment. This discussion foregrounds the more general question: how much redeliberation is enough to impugn one's rationality? Answering this question will put us in a position to explain why frequent redeliberation, too, can sometimes be rational. As we'll see, my view has the resources to explain a variety of nuanced judgments regarding the permissibility of mind-changing.

It is true that when an agent redeliberates and subsequently changes her mind, she should come to view her past self as having been mistaken in some respect—if not with respect to whether p , at least with respect to her epistemic value ranking. However, the mere fact that she has changed her mind once before does not entail that she should thereby come to believe that she is systematically *unreliable* about whether p and thus that her second response will later be viewed as mistaken, at least so long as plausible assumptions are met. Typically, when we redeliberate for the first time, we tend to be more careful, taking into account all of the considerations we took into account initially and then some. Additionally, we may gain a new cognitive skill or be more aware of our biases since we initially formed a belief; this would give us good reason to think that we'll be more likely to get it right on the second try. Finally, when someone initiates redeliberation for the first time, she typically has not yet gained any inductive evidence that her new response will not be one where she can settle. She may have good reason to think her new response will be superior to her previous one, and this outweighs the cognitive and practical costs of redeliberation.

More forcefully, the possibility of gaining evidence that we were initially mistaken about p is not a good reason to avoid redeliberating about it. We're either already mistaken about p now or we're not. If we're mistaken about p , we ought to redeliberate. If we're not, redeliberation is often a permissible form of epistemic hygiene, even if we shouldn't change our mind if we got things right.

Moreover, we already know that we're mistaken about a lot of things, so the mere fact that we might learn that we were mistaken about p should not dissuade us from reconsidering. If anything, it should make us more inclined to reconsider.²¹

Nonetheless, there may be cases where an agent has good reason to think that even if she changes her mind once about p , she'll change her mind again. Perhaps there are cases where one shouldn't even redeliberate once, e.g. if she knows she'll end up with the wrong answer, or an unstable one, given her track record on related questions. That said, I'm inclined to generally be permissive and grant agents 'one free pass.'²² There is often *something* to be gained epistemically by doing so, even though there are diminishing marginal returns.

3.2 When Frequent Changes of Mind Are Fine

This discussion can help us start to see why more redeliberation is not necessarily more irrational, all-things-considered. More generally, the fact that you gain higher-order evidence that you are unreliable, and inductive evidence that you will not settle, needs to be weighed against other factors and evidence. For example, you might have evidence that you are improving as you redeliberate. Alternatively, you might become better or more skilled at assessing the evidence as you redeliberate. This happens, for instance, in cases where the evidence one has is particularly complicated or multi-faceted, and thus new things become salient to the agent each time she reassesses it or as new interpretations are offered. Moreover, how complicated the evidence is makes a difference to how frequently one can reassess it while still being fully rational; at a certain point, as in Fran's case, there cease to be new things one can notice without new evidence or acquiring new cognitive skills. Indeed, I take it there are many everyday cases where the evidence is multi-faceted: this is why many of us enjoy listening to murder mystery podcasts multiple times, or reassessing the evidence for whether our favorite sports team will make it to the playoffs by (for instance) reviewing

²¹Consider an analogy: playing video games might give me evidence that I have an addictive personality. However, causal decision theorists think that the mere fact that I'd gain 'bad news' that p if I ϕ doesn't give me a reason not to ϕ in cases where my ϕ -ing is causally independent from whether p . In the case of video games, I either already have an addictive personality or I don't. Thanks to Daniel Pallies for the analogy and discussion.

²²There are difficult questions here about how to individuate questions about which one redeliberates and about the evidence one gains in doing so. For instance, does Fran gain evidence just that she is fickle and unreliable about matters regarding Amelia Earhart's death, or about historical theories in general? For the purposes of this paper, I set such difficulties aside. The answer depends in part on how finely we should grain the questions about which Fran redeliberates.

previous clips. There is a limit, though: you can only review these episodes or clips so many times before running out of new insights. At this point, further redeliberation will start to look irrational.

As suggested above, agents can also have special information about their track records. Just as such information can render even one-off redeliberation irrational, it can also make frequent redeliberation fine, all-things-considered. For example, if a perfectly reliable god informed you that you always arrive at the correct belief after ten rounds of deliberative changes, then it would seem far less irrational for you to redeliberate and change your mind ten times—at least for issues that it is important to have true beliefs about. This is evidence about your track record that you intuitively ought to take into account when deciding whether to keep redeliberating and changing your mind.

While this example is extreme, I take it that we all have some evidence about our track records within certain domains. For instance, as philosophers, we might know that we need to change our minds multiple times while working on a topic before we can arrive at a view we can fully defend or settle on; this makes sense, particularly given the difficulty of the subject matter.²³ In testing environments, we have evidence that people tend to do better when they redeliberate and change their answers, *pace* advice to the contrary.²⁴ By contrast, there are some domains where we—or at least those properly trained or experienced—ought to ‘stick with our gut.’²⁵ In contexts where redeliberating multiple times is essential for epistemic improvement, we ought not be so quick to chastise the appearance of fickleness.

This way of justifying further redeliberation has a limit, though. If an agent keeps redeliberating, each time convinced that she’ll do better next time, it starts

²³I’m thankful to an anonymous referee for prompting me to consider a wider range of cases where frequent deliberative changes may be fine. Of course, it’s controversial whether we typically believe our own philosophical theories. However, it seems that we do sometimes change our minds about our philosophical views (consider, for example, Hilary Putnam, who famously changed his views multiple times).

²⁴Though we often hear advice to never change one’s answer on a test and to instead stick with one’s initial instinct, this advice is more myth than fact. Most studies have shown that agents are more likely to get the correct answer when they redeliberate and change their initial response. (See, for instance, Benjamin et al. (1984), Kruger et al. (2005) and <http://theconversation.com/should-you-rely-on-first-instincts-when-answering-a-multiple-choice-exam-43313>.) Psychologists argue that the reason we prefer to rely on our first instincts, despite their unreliability, is that we experience more regret when we find out they were correct but we changed our answer. See also Kirkebøen et al. (2013) and references therein.

²⁵See, for example, Gigerenzer (2007) and related work.

to look like she's deceiving herself; at least, she is failing to respond to the evidence against this. If she thinks the next time she changes her mind will be one on which she'll settle and continue to endorse, she seems at least as naive as the gambler who, having lost multiple times before, thinks that the next slot machine pull will be the winner.²⁶ As noted, there may be cases where an agent is justified in thinking that the tenth change will be 'the one,' but barring such cases, the agent is irrationally self-deceiving, overlooking or failing to properly weigh all the evidence she has to the contrary.

Thus, the problem with Fran is not that she redeliberates more than once. Indeed, it may be vague on what day of the week she starts to look irrational. The problem is partly that given she does so several times in a short time frame, it is implausible that she has reasons to think she'll improve or settle, which would override or outweigh the second-order evidence she receives. For instance, it is implausible that she's gained a new cognitive skill in between, that her epistemic values changed in a relevant way, or that all of her redeliberations were particularly careful.

However, as we saw, it's not impossible. One virtue of my account is that it tells us how we can fill in the details to understand frequent changes of mind as rational. That is, we might note how carefully these agents redeliberated, or if they had special (even if non-evidential) reason to think they'd get things right and settle on the next try. Moreover, if we lengthen the time in between each change, it becomes even more plausible that these agents have gained relevant new evidence, thus rationalizing a change in mind. Thus, length of time between redeliberations doesn't matter *per se*; it is rather a proxy for other relevant factors.

In short, the Ratifiable Reasoning Account has a number of virtues. In addition to capturing the asymmetry with which we started, it also explains more nuanced judgments. First, as we saw, it explains how we can fill in details of various cases to change our initial verdicts, and it explains the relevance of time in between changes and the number of redeliberations. Specifically time is relevant to whether the agent plausibly gained or lost first-order evidence in between deliberations and number is relevant to the quality of deliberations. It also explains a further way in which we could fill in the details of Fran's story to make her seem less irrational, e.g. if she had some special reason to think that the next switch was relevantly different from the last. Second, the proposal does not posit a sharp cut-off point between when redeliberating further is permissible

²⁶Thanks to Jane Friedman for this analogy.

and when it is not. Finally, it explains why more redeliberation is typically more irrational: one has more evidence that she is failing to abide by and cannot easily rebut with reasons to think she'll improve or settle.

4 Competing Explanations

In this section, I'll consider alternative attempts to solve the puzzle of fickleness. According to the first, the puzzle reduces to the broader problem of why it's irrational to constantly reopen deliberation, irrespective of changes of mind. According to the second, the puzzle reduces to facts about whether evidence is permissive, allowing multiple different responses. I argue that neither approach is sufficient for explaining the asymmetry between one-off and frequent deliberative changes.

4.1 The Self-Binding Approach

The puzzle about fickleness, I've argued, is to explain the apparent asymmetry between one-off deliberative changes and frequent deliberative changes, i.e. fickleness. However, one might think that the puzzle really has nothing to do with changes of mind *per se*. Rather, the problem might be that one shouldn't repeatedly re-open deliberation in the first place, whether or not it results in a change of mind. According to this alternative, the puzzle of fickleness can be reduced to the problem of explaining why frequently reopening deliberation is problematic, whether or not it results in a change of mind.

This solution attempts to capture the irrationality of fickleness by positing norms against reopening deliberation in the first place. On this view, each time one redeliberates on a question she has settled on, she violates one of her epistemic commitments. Call this the *Self-Binding Approach*. One virtue of it is that it offers a clean and continuous explanation of what's wrong with frequent redeliberation. Specifically, the agent does something slightly epistemically irrational each time she redeliberates, and these misdemeanors add up. This also explains why the more frequently redeliberation occurs, the more irrational the agent seems. In addition, this view explains why it seems odd for an agent to continuously reopen deliberation, even if they end up at the same view each time.

There are multiple ways to flesh out this proposal. Here is one such story, which strings together various threads in epistemology and elsewhere. First, as suggested in §3, one of the primary points of forming beliefs is to settle inquiry.

Once we settle on a belief that p , this belief ought to be resistant to reconsideration. By settling, our beliefs are afforded some stability. This stability is necessary in order for beliefs to play some of their central functions, such as serving as premises in reasoning, coordinating our beliefs intrapersonally, and allowing us to act without inquiring further (Dallmann, 2017; Holton, 2014; Lawlor, 2014). Thus, one might think there are norms against reopening deliberation on questions on which one has settled, even if one will not, and has never previously, changed her mind on the topic. Often, views of this sort even claim that one ought to be resistant to redeliberating even in light of some new evidence (Holton, 2014). This is not to say that dogmatism is justified, but rather that one must find a balance between stability and flexibility.

While a picture along these lines has been defended about practical rationality,²⁷ its plausibility in the case of epistemic rationality is less clear. Specifically, it is unlikely that someone who merely re-opens deliberation once is even slightly irrational or violating an epistemic norm, even a *pro tanto* one. Indeed, as suggested in §2, double-checking our beliefs is an important part of belief maintenance, and redeliberating is just one way to double-check (Friedman, 2019a). If Fran had arrived at the same view each day, it's far from clear that her behavior would be *epistemically* amiss. Again, it's far more obvious that it would be at worst practically problematic, a waste of resources. Fickleness is different: when an agent changes her mind frequently, we would start to trust and rely on her judgment less. Thus, the problem with fickleness does not reduce to the problem of why reopening deliberation is sometimes problematic.

While there has recently been important work by Jane Friedman defending the claim that 'checking again' can be epistemically problematic, her explanation for this will not transfer over to our cases (Friedman, 2019a). Her explanation appeals to the fact that when we double-check our beliefs, we often lose or gain new first-order evidence. This change can render further checking irrational, depending on the details. Unfortunately, this explanation, though illuminating, does not solve our question here, which is to explain when changing one's mind is rational even when one's first-order evidence remains the same. Yet even if reopening deliberation *itself* can be epistemically problematic, the puzzle of fickleness does not reduce to problems stemming from merely reopening deliberation.

²⁷See, for instance, literature on Resolute Choice Theory. The type of view I have in mind is not always framed in terms of norms; sometimes, it is framed in terms of rational tendencies (Holton, 1999) or reasons (Ferrero, 2010). The spirit is essentially the same.

4.2 Permissivism vs. Uniqueness

One might think that the puzzle of fickleness could have been solved by appealing solely to the existing literature on synchronic norms on responding to one's evidence. More specifically, one might think that the puzzle only arises if we assume that Permissivism is true and, in response, attempt to deny this assumption. In this section, I'll show why denying Permissivism alone cannot solve the problem.

First, let's examine why the problem of explaining why fickleness is often irrational appears particularly pressing for the permissivist. According to Permissivism, there can be more than one rational response to a single body of evidence.²⁸ Suppose that Fran is in a permissive context, and thus each of her responses is rationally permissible given the evidence. The problem then is to explain why it seems odd for her to switch between these states multiple times assuming each state is permissible.²⁹ It can't be that one's earlier doxastic response *itself* gives one a reason to continue believing now. If it were, this would appear to be an illicit form of bootstrapping (Broome, 2007; Christensen, 2000; Titelbaum, 2015).

By denying Permissivism and instead opting for Uniqueness, one might think that we can solve the puzzle of fickleness. According to Uniqueness, there is at most one rational doxastic response to a single body of evidence.³⁰ Thus, if two agents (or two time-slices of a single agent) have the same evidence yet disagree, at least one of them is not responding rationally. In other words, Uniqueness implies that when someone changes her mind without a change in her evidence, at least one of her beliefs was irrational in the first place. The problem is then not with Fran's fickleness *per se* but with the fact that at least one of her doxastic responses was irrational, since evidence cannot point in two conflicting directions.

For our purposes, the most pressing problem with this response is that it cannot capture the rational difference between one-off deliberative changes and fickleness. This is easiest to see if we assume that given their first-order evidence, the uniquely rational response for Fran and Tom was to suspend judgment about how Amelia Earhart died because, for instance, the evidence for each theory was comparable. In this case, each of both Fran's and Tom's time-slices does some-

²⁸For defenses of Permissivism, see Schoenfield (2014) and Kelly (2015). For an overview of arguments for and some challenges to Uniqueness, see Kopec and Titelbaum (2016).

²⁹See, for instance, §2.4 of White (2014).

³⁰For some defences of Uniqueness, see White (2005), White (2014), Greco and Hedden (2016), and Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016).

thing epistemically irrational by failing to suspend judgment. Nonetheless, it seems like Fran is doing *worse*, from the perspective of rationality, than someone who changes her mind only once. Uniqueness alone cannot explain this. My account, by contrast, is able to explain why judgment suspension is often the most rational response in cases like Fran and Tom's while still explaining the rational difference between these two cases.

There is a further reason to think that the debate between Permissivism and Uniqueness is orthogonal to my concerns here. Typically, norms on responding to your evidence appeal to one's *total evidence*, which includes higher-order evidence.³¹ My account could be coupled with either Permissivism or Uniqueness to offer an explanation for why fickleness is irrational. The insight offered by my account is that deliberative changes *themselves* can afford us relevant second-order evidence that can render fickleness irrational. That said, whether we opt for Permissivism or Uniqueness will have implications for how often changes of mind are rational, with Permissivism likely licensing more and more frequent changes of mind.

5 Future Work on Changes of Mind: The Role of Redeliberation

When we consider cases of changing one's mind, we observe that frequent redeliberation often seems more problematic than one-off changes. However, it is difficult to explain why. In this paper, I've offered an account that captures our intuitive verdicts in a wide range of cases. Specifically, fickleness is problematic because when an agent redeliberates, she gains inductive evidence that she will not settle, and higher-order evidence that she is unreliable, which can further render her beliefs unratifiable. She then ought to suspend judgment. While changing one's mind is often unproblematic, one ought not indulge too frequently at risk of implicating one's rationality.

Here I have focused on the asymmetry between one-off deliberative changes of mind and fickleness. My account explains one of the roles that redeliberation plays by noting that it affords further evidence. However, this is not the only role that it plays. In order to get a fuller picture of when it's rational to change one's mind, we need to return to the contrast between changes of mind based on redeliberation and those that result from jumping. By turning to this second

³¹See, for example, Feldman (2005, 2009).

asymmetry, we can get a better picture of the roles that redeliberation plays in a theory of epistemic assessments.

As flagged in §1, the puzzle of fickleness arises once we stipulate that the agents redeliberate each time. If they had merely jumped to a new view—as if they had just bumped their heads—then both would’ve seemed engaged in problematic behavior. Agents who jump seem to believe erratically and randomly. Indeed, people who jump between responses seem so irrational to us that, out of charity considerations, we may be inclined to assume that Tom and Fran redeliberate, at least subconsciously, in between changes.³²

Given the problems with jumping, it seems that a necessary—though not sufficient—condition for a change of mind to be fully rational is for it to be based on a process of redeliberation. More precisely, redeliberation seems necessary for a change of mind to be *doxastically* rational, i.e. based on or responsive to the evidence, rather than merely corresponding to it.³³ This raises the question: what further roles does redeliberation play for the rationality of mind-changing? In the remainder of this section, I’ll sketch some choice-points with the aim of pointing toward further avenues for research on the epistemology of changing one’s mind.

I am far from the first person to note that norms on reasoning and redeliberation may be relevant for epistemic rationality. For example, Michael Titelbaum appeals to process-oriented norms on reasoning to explain why cases of *jumping* are irrational (Titelbaum, 2015). His explanation starts with the (mostly uncontroversial) observation that there is a synchronic requirement to have consistent beliefs. Importantly, an agent puts herself in a position to satisfy this requirement by reasoning, which is a causal process that extends over time. An agent who jumps does not go through any process of reasoning—subconscious or conscious—in changing her beliefs. This makes it unlikely that she would satisfy the synchronic norm of consistency. In a similar vein, Abelard Podgorski argues that rationality fundamentally governs reasoning and redeliberation; on his view, all norms of rationality are diachronic process-oriented norms (Podgorski, 2017).³⁴

Some, however, have denied that norms on reasoning are norms of rationality. For example, according to Time-Slice Epistemology, there are no fundamen-

³²Cf. Titelbaum (2015) on charity considerations in similar cases.

³³For discussion of the distinction between doxastic and propositional rationality and citations, see Staffel (2020, pp. 153–6).

³⁴Dogramaci (2018) defends the claim that whether *credences* are doxastically rational depends on whether they are based on correct reasoning.

tally diachronic norms of rationality; that is, there are no irreducible norms that govern agents across time (Hedden, 2015b; Moss, 2015b). This entails that there are no irreducibly process-oriented norms, since processes take place over time. One proponent of this view, Brian Hedden, has embraced this consequence, arguing that (for instance) norms of reasoning are not norms of ideal rationality, since the ideal rational agent does not need to reason; they simply arrive at the best epistemic state (Hedden, 2016). On this picture, jumping *itself* cannot be irrational; at worse, it is unfortunate or a symptom of a different epistemic problem (Hedden, 2015b; Moss, 2015a).³⁵

Thus, a *prima facie* challenge for the Time-Slicer is to explain—or explain away—the intuition that jumping seems problematic. Indeed, Time-Slicers who also accept Uniqueness face the further challenge of explaining why jumping seems *worse* than one-off redeliberation. For example, we can imagine Whimsical Wendy who, by jumping, luckily arrives at the uniquely rational doxastic state. Compare Wendy to Careful Cal, who thoughtfully goes through a process of reasoning yet ends up in an impermissible state. When we assess each of their time-slices, we’ll say that Wendy is fully rational yet Cal irrational.³⁶ This seems to get things the wrong way around. Time-Slicing plus Uniqueness makes intuitively irrational agents look epistemically ideal, at least from the perspective of rationality.³⁷

There are several ways that the Time-Slicer could respond to this challenge. One is to appeal to derivative epistemic norms. For instance, Brian Hedden responds to objections like this by claiming that even though the primary and most fundamental norms in epistemology are time-slice-centric, there may be other, derivative norms. On this point, he follows Williamson ([forthcoming](#)). For instance, it might be that Cal complies with the secondary norm of ‘having a general disposition to comply with the [synchronic] norm’ of believing in accordance with the evidence, and this constitutes an excuse for his failure to comply

³⁵In a similar vein, Christensen (2000) argues that diachronic coherence is not valuable except insofar as it helps one realize the chief epistemic goal of accuracy; its value is merely parasitic on this goal.

³⁶Hedden is clear that his focus is on an agent’s *propositional* justification, not their *doxastic* justification: “Time-Slice Rationality is strictly speaking only a theory about propositional justification (and its analogs for preferences and actions)” (Hedden, 2015a, p. 178). This gives the result that Wendy’s belief is fully justified in the sense necessary for rationality. Yet, intuitively, it seems like being doxastically justified is also relevant for whether an agent is fully rational.

³⁷Carr (2015) also objects that Time-Slicing makes intuitively irrational agents look epistemically ideal. She is focused on agents who throw away evidence, whereas I am focused on agents changing their mind on an inadequate basis.

with the primary norm.³⁸ By contrast, perhaps Wendy (and fickle redeliberators more generally) don't have this disposition, and thus they are blameworthy even when they do comply with the primary norm.

Assessing whether this strategy succeeds in general, and in these cases in particular, would take us too far afield.³⁹ Indeed, one might think that as long as we can capture our judgments about fickleness and jumping in terms of some *epistemic defect*, that is sufficient for capturing our intuitions about changes of mind. Since it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore these various choice points, my point here is that more work needs to be done on the roles of reasoning, and how reasoning bears on the epistemic status of changing one's mind.⁴⁰ I hope that this is a starting point for filling in gaps in the literature on epistemic norms on changing one's mind.

³⁸Hedden (2015a, p. 179), quoting Williamson (forthcoming). Agents can also fail to follow a tertiary norm of "doing what someone who complied with the [secondary norm] would do in the situation at issue" (Williamson, forthcoming, p. 6).

³⁹For some worries about the 'excuse maneuver' more generally, see Brown (2018), Greco (forthcoming), and Schechter (2017). See Lenman (2017) and Snedegar (2017) for similar concerns about untintuitive verdicts about reasoning and deliberation, respectively.

⁴⁰For instance, Julia Staffel has recent work on transitional attitudes and how they bear on what she calls *pro tem* rationality, which is distinct from both doxastic and propositional rationality. See, for example, Staffel (2019, forthcoming).

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