Against Publishing Without Belief: Fake News, Misinformation, and Perverse Publishing Incentives

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Abstract: The problem of fake news and the spread of misinformation has garnered a lot of attention in recent years. The incentives and norms that give rise to the problem, however, are not unique to journalism. Insofar as academics and journalists are working towards the same goal, i.e., publication, they are both under pressures that pervert. This chapter has two aims. First, to integrate conversations in philosophy of science, epistemology, and metaphilosophy to draw out the publishing incentives that promote analogous problems of fake news and misinformation in academic research communities more broadly. Second, to argue for a (partial) solution. This chapter argues that research communities benefit when authors believe what they argue for in print and it warns against attempts to loosen our publication norms to permit publishing without belief.

Key words: belief, misinformation, fake news, publishing without belief, publishing ethics, metaphilosophy, social epistemology

The problem of fake news and the spread of misinformation has garnered a lot of attention in recent years. The incentives and norms that give rise to the problem, however, are not unique to journalism. Insofar as academics and journalists are working towards the same goal, i.e., publication, they are both under pressures that pervert. It has been widely documented that the publishing pressures that structure academic research incentivize plagiarism,[1] deception,[2] bad citation practices,[3] and simply poorly researched

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[1] For some examples in philosophy see the discussion at Retraction Watch on the work of Magali Roques (link: https://retractionwatch.com/2021/06/28/a-fig-leaf-that-doesnt-quite-cover-up-commission-says-philosopher-engaged-in-unacknowledged-borrowings-but-not-plagiarism/). As Retraction Watch notes, "Roques has had 11 papers retracted from seven different journals, most of which referred to plagiarism in their notices." However, an investigation demoted the accusations from plagiarism to "unacknowledged borrowings" as also discussed at this link: https://dailynous.com/2020/11/11/philosopher-revealed-serial-plagiarist/. See also the discussion of plagiarism found in Mahmoud Khatami's work at this link: https://dailynous.com/2014/11/05/a-case-of-extensive-plagiarism-guest-post/, and the discovery of several plagiarized articles at the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: https://dailynous.com/2022/02/10/plagiarized-articles-at-the-internet-encylopedia-of-philosophy/. Although not philosophy specific, see also this harrowing collection of stories from #PleaseDontStealMyWork, a campaign that records testimonies of academic fraud and research misconduct from researchers in Denmark: https://uniavisen.dk/en/pleasedontstealmywork-120-testimonies/

[2] In addition to fraud, there are also academic hoaxes. Most famously, Sokal, more recently the attempt by Pluckrose, Lindsay and Boghossian. For discussion of these hoaxes see Levy (2022) and Taylor (2022, chapter 8).

[3] For discussion of under-citation in philosophy, as it pertains to both poorly researched scholarship and bad citation practices more generally, see this blogpost which collects several discussions of poor citation practices in philosophy: https://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2014/02/on-citation-practices-in-philosophy.html. See also Moti Mizrahi's analysis at that same blog here: https://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2015/11/too-tight-to-cite-.html and Kieran Healy's analysis here: https://kieranhealy.org/blog/archives/2013/06/24/citation-networks-in-philosophy-some-followup/. For a more optimistic picture, see Eric Schwitzgebel's discussion here: https://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2022/10/how-often-are-philosophy-articles.html.

scholarship more generally, i.e., *scholarshit.*[4] Academics are under no less pressure than journalists to be the first to say something new or original. Reporters and researchers alike are afraid of being scooped. Advancement in both professions is subject to priority races that can lead to a loose relationship to the truth. As recent high-profile cases of academic fraud and research misconduct demonstrate, the spread of misinformation is a problem not just in journalism and mass media, but in academic publishing too.[5]

This chapter has two aims. First to integrate the explanations that have been offered of how these bad practices are both enabled and encouraged by identifying the similarities between the incentive structures that shape the work of both academics and journalists. Section 1 begins by taking each of the features O'Connor and Weatherall (2019) identify as responsible for the spread of fake news and misinformation—novelty bias, fairness, and a pre-established interest in something that is false—and show how each also applies in the case of philosophical inquiry and promotes research practices that we ought discourage for the good of our research communities.[6] The second goal is to take up the same task as other chapters in this volume: an answer to the attitude question, i.e., the question of what attitude(s), if any, are permissible towards what one argues for in print. My answer to that question is to give a (partial) defense of belief, or any attitude characterized with commitment as its key aspect, as that such attitude.

1. The Mechanisms of Misinformation

1.1. Novelty Bias

Novelty bias, simply put, is a bias towards covering events that are novel. There is, of course, nothing in principle problematic with focusing on events that are novel or unexpected. After all, novel and unexpected events, given their very nature, *are newsworthy*. However, there are contexts in which the focus on novel stories can become problematic and incentivize both misinformation and fake news. As O'Connor and Weatherall (2019, 156) note, "[w]hen journalists share what they take to be most interesting—or of greatest interest to their readers—they can bias what the public sees in ways that ultimately mislead, even if they report only on real events."

Novelty, as O'Connor and Weatherall (2019, 156) note, has a way of making things salient and in so doing it can structure our attention and make us pay attention to some

[4] I borrow the use of this term from Taylor (2022), who uses it to describe work wherein researchers fail to verify their sources and check that their sources actually say what it is that claim that they say. Regarding the term 'scholarshit' itself, Taylor demonstrates that the first use of it is itself an example of scholarshit. As Taylor (2022, 144) notes, Stanley Aronowitz claims that the term originates from Herbert Marcuse, but "Aronowitz provides no source for this claim, nor did he respond to an inquiry asking where this term appeared in Marcuse's work. The only recourse to check this claim was to read all of Marcuse's work—in English, French, and German." However, as Taylor (2022, 148) goes on to note, such "a careful reading of his corpus provides no evidence that [Marcuse] ever used it."

[5] For just some examples, see Lee (2021) on the retraction of Ariely's work on nudging, Piller (2022) on the fabrication of data in Lesné's Alzheimer's research, Mammola et al. (2020, 2022) on both sensationalized and fake research on spiders.

[6] A reader might wonder here why it is helpful to channel the discussion of the norms that incentivize bad research behavior through O'Connor and Weatherall's characterization of misinformation in news media. For example, many of the points to be discussed in Section 1, e.g., the credit economy of the sciences and priority races are well-studied on their own. In response to this skepticism, let me first say that I agree. Everything discussed in Section 1 is well-studied on its own. The purpose of channeling the discussion through O'Connor and Weatherall's framework for misinformation is to see how all the disparate discussions fit together under these broader categorizations. That is, O'Connor and Weatherall's framework provides a useful *structuring device* that can unite and integrate these otherwise disparate discussions. This is not necessarily the only way to see how it all fits together, but I choose this framing because the mere fact that there is this resemblance between what both journalists and academics are up to should be enough to give any serious academic pause. Although both journalists and academics are superficially aiming at the same goal, to publish their work, most academics would agree that they are *up to something different* than journalists. We, academics, are engaged in *research*. Research is different from reporting. By noting this analogy with regard to incentive structures, however, I want to put pressure on the question of just how different research is from reporting. This, however, is a much larger question than what I can take up in this chapter alone.

things and give those things an undue importance.[7] For example, consider Mammola et al.'s (2020, 2022) work on the spread of misinformation on spiders. As Mammola et al. note (2020. 1145), "[w]hile spider bites are statistically rare events, our perception is skewed towards the potential harm spiders can cause humans." That is, spider bites are rare, but when they happen they are newsworthy, and given widespread negative sentiments towards spiders, such reports spread quickly across social media. In the rush to print and tell such a story it is perhaps no surprise that Mammola et al. (2020, 1145) found that less than 10% of the bites reported in the media were reported accurately, and further that "two out of three casualties associated with a bite of the Mediterranean recluse were fake news, while the third was unverifiable." As these stories circulate on social media they distort the public's perception of the risk posed by spiders so that even those not already predisposed to fear spiders can come to have a bias against spiders. However, for most people, in most parts of the world, such a fear is unwarranted. This sensationalized and fake news about spiders is explainable by the effect of novelty bias on what kinds of stories reporters seek out and that the media chooses to run.

Novelty bias also has a distorting effect on academic research. To see how this is so, it is helpful to first step back and think about the purpose of academic journals. There is more philosophy being produced than you or I could ever hope to read our lifetimes. Even if we were to dedicate every workday to reading philosophy, we would not be able to read all that is published. Adding in weekends to our reading schedules would barely help. To stay informed about the major developments in our respective subfields, let alone the field more generally, we turn to journals. Journals are criticized frequently for acting as gatekeepers, but given the problem of how much work is produced, *this is in fact what we need journals to do*.[8] Journals function as sorting mechanisms, more precisely, they function as prioritization filters. That is, a journal system that is functioning well will select the papers that will hopefully be the most interesting, original, and more generally, worth the work and time and effort of reading.[9] We cannot hope to read all that's published in our subfields let alone in the field as a whole, but we can outsource the work of identifying what's worth reading to journals and thereby stay abreast of major developments. Without journals playing this role we'd retreat back to our networks of friends or use prestige as a proxy for what to read.[10] But, journals have come to serve two masters. Journals have come to serve a second function that undermines the valuable work they were set up to do as prioritization filters. Publications are now increasingly used as an arbiter for jobs, grants, and in general, the advancement of careers. To see how this second function undermines the first, it is helpful to consider an analogy with another prioritization filter that has been corrupted by a second function: search engines.

Google gate keeps. But Google, when it functions well, does so precisely because it gate keeps. Search engines are prioritization filters. Search engines quite literally rank results, aiming to show us only the most relevant and helpful results on the first page of results. They seek to solve a similar problem that journals seek to solve: there is too much

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[7] For more on additional harms of salience, see Munton (2021) and Whiteley (2022).

[8] For disagreement on this point, see Heesen and Bright (2021).

[9] Fo example, as Davis (forthcoming, 1) notes while also critiquing this novelty norm, "[n]ovelty—understood as the value of saying something new—appears to be a goodmaking feature of a philosophical argument." However, just as I also note in this section, there are a number of pitfalls for our pursuit of research that emerge if we value novelty too highly.

[10] Perhaps this is too pessimistic, perhaps there are alternative systems capable of breaking the chokehold that prestige has on philosophers. For example, Heesen and Bright (2021) suggest the model of arXiv instead. In addition, PhilPapers enables users to like and recommend papers. At one point in time David Faraci proposed a platform that would take things further: Populus, a curated archive that mixed together aspects of Reddit and PhilPapers by allowing users to upload papers and upvote and downvote their favorite ones (see Faraci 2016). You could imagine then the frontpage of Populus operating like a prioritization filter, displaying only the papers that have received the most upvotes from its users. I have my doubts, however, that philosophy's networks of prestige wouldn't simply be remade in any such system. For example, we rank departments and journals on the basis of perceived prestige rather than anything considered more "objective", e.g., citation count, number of publications of faculty members. See further De Cruz (2018) for a more detailed look into prestige bias in philosophy.

information. To sort through this information, Google's PageRank algorithm, inspired by academic citations where the number of citations a paper receives is taken as an indication of its importance, extends this logic to hyperlinks on the web as a way of measuring the importance of webpages. This enabled Google to sort search results with well-established sources appearing higher in the results than random blogs. This feature distinguished Google from other search engine algorithms because Google searches would be able to give order to the sheer amount of information on the web. Google, unlike its competitors, could better sort search results according to *importance*. The success of Google's search engine algorithm has made 'Google' synonymous with the process of searching itself and a default authority accompanies the rankings delivered by Google.[11]

Google, and search engines more generally, have come under a lot of criticism lately. There is criticism that search engines algorithms can be racist, there are privacy concerns about the amount of data that search engines collect.[12] The criticism I am interested in with regard to perverse publishing incentives concern how the results that search engines like Google have started to prioritize are *shit*.[13] The problem, if you have used Google lately, is that the first page of Google search results is frequently inundated with what's called SEO chum and promoted ads. 'SEO' stands for *search engine optimization*, and it refers to the assemblage of keywords repeated over and over again in order to game Google's algorithm to get one's site to appear higher up in the search results. The reason Google has become inundated with SEO chum is that the search engine is trying to serve two functions: Google is trying to function both as a prioritization filter and as a way to sell ads to generate revenue. This second function has created an incentive structure that undermines Google search's ability to effectively sort through all the information on the web and only deliver back to us what is most useful and important in response to our queries.[14] Returning to journals, journals no longer serve merely as prioritization filters. The second function of journals—publications as arbiters for jobs, grants, and in general, the advancement of careers— has created an incentive structure that undermines the ability of journals to perform their primary function as prioritization filters. Just as SEO chum games the metrics used by search engine algorithms, academics are incentivized to write in ways that are similarly designed towards what we might call *publication optimization*.

Publication optimization interacts with novelty bias as follows. A study of scientific abstracts published in PubMed from 1974 to 2015 reveals that the use of positive words, e.g., novel, unique, innovative, groundbreaking, has increased by 880% over those four decades (Vinkers, Tijdink, and Otte 2015). Notably, the researchers note that "the words 'robust,' 'novel,' 'innovative,' and 'unprecedented' increased in relative frequency from 2500% to 15000%" (2). There are a few explanations that could be offered for this, but the most likely explanation is the pressure to appear novel. As the researchers note,

> Although it is possible that researchers have adopted an increasingly optimistic writing approach and are ever more enthusiastic about their results, another explanation is more likely: scientists may assume that

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[11] For more on both search engines and the importance of priority for salience see Munton (2021, 2022).

[12] For example, see Nobel (2018), Zuboff (2018), and Veliz (forthcoming).

[13] For related issues about how publishing incentives encourage bullshit philosophy, see Levy (2023) and Basu (manuscript).

[14] The creators of Google themselves, Sergey Brin and Lawrence Page, also identified this problem in a paper where they introduced the algorithm:

> The goals of the advertising business model do not always correspond to providing quality search to users…we expect that advertising funded search engines will be inherently biased towards the advertisers and away from the needs of the consumers…Furthermore, advertising income often provides an incentive to provide poor quality search results. (Brin and Page 1998, Appendix A)

> results and their implications have to be exaggerated and overstated in order to get published. (3)

If authors know that journals will prioritize publications that are (or at least, seem) novel, then that encourages authors to hype up their findings in order to get published. However, there is at least one alternative explanation. Perhaps it is not that researchers are exaggerating but rather that our standards for novelty have slipped. Akin to grade inflation, a familiar complaint is that students expect to get As on papers that wouldn't have received As based on prior grading practices, our grading practices have slipped and now more students receive and expect As on their work.[15] Similarly, perhaps researchers expect their work to be treated as novel when prior standards for novelty were higher. Regardless of whether it is the standards of reviewers that have dropped to include more things as novel than were previously counted as novel, or whether it is researchers hyping up claims to seem more novel than they are, or the interaction of both, we can see the negative effects of the fact that work must be perceived as novel in order to be published.

Turn now to the negative effects. The first we can outline concerns the nature of academic research. If we agree that academic research involves the building upon the work of others, building a research community of joint inquiry, then that means that little work will be truly novel or original in the sense of never ever having been said before. The pursuit of novelty incentivizes researchers to present their work as novel and groundbreaking, as never ever discussed before in the literature, where a more honest presentation would involve more citations and caveats and work to show how their papers builds off of the work of others.[16] Furthermore, truly original and novel work takes time, but there is pressure to get one's ideas out there as quickly as possible in order to avoid being scooped, just as journalists are similarly under pressure to get the scoop first. This, together with low acceptance rates of journals encourages both spamming and ignoring the extant literature as rational policies. Prestigious publications play a role in hiring decisions and promotion cases. Given the chanciness of peer review, long review times, the importance of journal prestige for hiring and promotion, the rational policy an aspiring researcher should employ is to spam journals with as many papers as they can produce and send out, and to get away with not reading or engaging with the extant literature to whatever extent they can, i.e., before referees notice the absences. This policy then promotes practices of misrepresentation, practices which if we care about aiming at truth and understanding when engaging in research, we ought to discourage.

1.2. Fairness

Turning to fairness, O'Connor and Weatherall (2019, 158) note that "[f]airness sounds great in principle, but it is extremely disruptive to the public communication of complex issues." For example, fairness often requires journalists to share not just "a result supporting one view, [but also] one supporting the other view—by searching through the history of recent results to find one that reflects the 'other perspective'" (ibid). Now of course we should aim for our work to be fair, but as we'll see in this subsection it is incredibly difficult to define what kind of fairness we should be aiming for in our work. Just as in the case of journalism, in academic research the way this norm is frequently practiced invites the illusion of disagreement where there might otherwise not be real disagreement. For example, if we take fairness to mean engaging equally with both sides

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[15] For some recent reporting on this phenomena, see the report from Nierenberg (2023) in the New York Times on grade inflation at Yale, where 80% of all grades given to undergraduates were A or A-. Similarly, Hamid and Schisgall (2023) report in The Harvard Crimson that 79% of grades at Harvard in 2020-21 were in the A range.

[16] This author recalls being given publishing advice in graduate school that the sweet spot for a works cited is between 6-8 entries. That shows engagement with the literature without coming across amateurish and insecure. Graduate students, I was told, cite too much. Established senior philosophers only cite what is absolutely essential. So, if you want your paper to seem like it was written by an established senior philosopher you can now imagine what kind of misrepresentation one is encouraged to engage in.

of a debate, call this *fairness as equal weight*, we can see the disastrous effects this has had in journalism. According to fairness as equal weight, if one is to report on climate change then according to this notion of fairness it's not enough to quote experts that agree that climate change is real, but one must also include so-called experts from the other side. Similarly, in academic research, fairness as equal weight incentivizes one to engage with work or perspectives that may be peripheral at best, totally unconnected at worst, in order to give the impression of engaging with the other side. Thus, fairness as equal weight ends up unfairly putting a thumb on the scale for some other perspective, without regard for whether or not that other perspective is warranted.[17] Whereas novelty bias and publication optimization encouraged less engagement with other work, fairness as equal weight pushes the incentives in the other direction: confabulating engagement for the sake of engaging to appease some notion of fairness.

Perhaps fairness as equal weight is a bad view of how we should understand the call for fairness. However, it is common to see fairness appealed to in precisely this way. For example, in his review of different kinds of referees in philosophy, Lumer (2018) identifies one he calls the *devotee of the canon* who demonstrates what we might call *the unfairness of fairness as equal weight*. This kind of reviewer, Lumer (2018, 204) writes, "wants a discussion of a certain set of theories theses, or debates, because this is—allegedly—the state of the science. Whether this discussion is actually relevant to the topic of the article, or would undermine its theses, does not interest him." This unfairness is an unfair demand for engagement with what might seem like the reviewers own particular hobby horses. Relatedly, consider Dotson's (2012) critique of why some papers in philosophy get rejected for not being perceived as philosophy. As Dotson notes, philosophy is frequently done in response to previously staked out positions. However, when we ask who has staked out these positions that must be responded to we might begin to notice the absence of a certain group of philosophers (alternatively, we might also start to notice the overwhelming presence of only one sort of philosopher). This unfairness we might call an *unfair positioning* as it concerns how one is required to position one's work. These two kinds of unfairness demands incentivize different ways of misrepresenting one's work. One way is quite superficial—cite who the reviewer says to cite to appease them, what Easwaran calls "bullshit citations" (forthcoming, 14), the other much deeper, a misrepresentation of what concerns what gets counted as philosophy in the first place.

To make this second kind of unfairness clearer, first consider as Mills (2007, 13) has noted, how philosophical inquiry has historically been "blithely indifferent to the possible cognitive consequences of class, racial, or gender situatedness." More explicitly, as Mills (2007, 15) continues, "[a]s Linda Martín Alcoff has ironically observed, the 'society' about which these philosophers are writing often seems to be composed exclusively of white males." To do philosophy according to a standard notion of fairness then, i.e., to respond to previously staked out positions, means doing it according to the terms of a group of inquirers that has been almost exclusively white males. That is, as Jenkin's (2014, 266) has noted, feminist researchers have had to put their work into conversation with so-called "canonical texts" in philosophy, texts that, given the history of philosophy, are likely to "be either explicitly or implicitly anti-feminist, so that a feminist scholar is obliged to spend her time, space and energy going over old ground correcting the work of others rather than moving forward into a new arena, as she may well wish to do." This is *unfair positioning.*

Unfair positioning has some similarities with unfair demands for engagement. For example, notice how it resembles Lumer's critique of the devotee of the canon. That is,

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[17] Consider, for example, Deborah Lipstadt's (2016) refusal to appear in debates with holocaust deniers. See also Easwaran's (forthcoming, 14) discussion of bullshit citations where "a citation is included only to appease the referee, or to juice the statistics of oneself or a friend."

there is a way that one would like to conduct their inquiry, but one cannot because some invocation of a fairness norm—again, precisely what is meant by fairness is vague but something like fairness as equal weight appears to be being gestured at—requires that they must misshape and misrepresent their work in order to put it in conversation with inquirers that were never in conversation with the concerns motivating such inquiry. This invocation of something like a fairness doctrine not only puts those working on the margins of mainstream anglo-analytic philosophy on the back foot, at a disadvantage as Jenkin (2014) has noted, it also encourages researchers at the margins to misrepresent what they are up to. The inquirer who works on the margins but nonetheless wishes for their work to be published in the top journals for the prestige and advancement that comes with such publications cannot inquire *on their own terms*. Rather, they are forced to misrepresent themselves. For example, they might be required to put themselves into a conversation with so-called canonical texts where otherwise there is no such conversation.[18]

In addition, these vague calls for fairness encourage is a kind of adversarial stance towards other researchers and their work. There has been much written on competition in philosophy and how it can corrupt goods that are either internal to the practice or desirable goods more generally.[19] The norm of fairness introduces a different kind of competition. A competition that again specifically encourages a researcher to misrepresent what they are up to. If a referee is looking for any reason to reject your paper, it is not only in your best interests to present your work as novel (as discussed in Section 1.1), but also to either present your opponents in the worst light or introduce opponents where, if operating under a different set of less adversarial norms, those opponents would actually be your co-collaborators or co-inquirers. What fairness encourages is a lack of solidarity with other researchers, a lack of co-commitment towards some shared goal of knowledge. We are not working together, we are working against each other.[20] This is a bad state of affairs for a research community.

1.3. A pre-established interest in something that is false

Returning to journalism, O'Connor and Weatherall (2018, 167) note that when journalists respond to something there is a pre-established interest in, when that thing is false, journalists can be responsible for giving that false thing the veneer of *real news.* Consider now in the case of philosophical inquiry how this pre-established interest in something that is false interacts with novelty bias (Section 1.1), fairness (Section 1.2), and incentives such as prestige and credit to also give the veneer of something being there when it's not.

To make this case, we must first zoom out. Scientists and scientific research has been well-studied, and it is worth drawing on that work to understand our own positioning as philosophical researchers rather than reinvent the wheel. Assuming that in the modern university setting the same kind of social organization can be found in other fields too, namely philosophy, what I will say will carry over to our own inquiries and research pursuits as well. For example, we have already seen reasons to think that philosophical

[18] Now of course we can easily imagine cases where a call to engage with some literature is legitimate, that is, where it is right for a reviewer to note that a paper doesn't engage in literature that is relevant to the topic. We would of course expect to see this because these norms that promote fake news and misinformation also promote good inquiry and good journalistic practices too. All I've tried to do here is demonstrate that sometimes calls for fairness can produce bullshit inquiry in addition to good inquiry. There is a lot more work to do to determine the bad cases of calls for fairness from the good cases of the calls for fairness.

[19] See Drissen (2022) for an overview.

[20] See Hussain's (2020) criticism of this kind of lack of solidarity, of this estrangement. See also Buckwalter (forthcoming) on how certain adversarial ways of doing philosophy can simply make us into jerks and how that is bad for the progress of knowledge.

research is not immune to the kind of priority races, i.e., the pursuit for novelty, that characterize the research practices of scientists.

Strevens (2003) notes that there are two kinds of races that structure the social organization of science: a benefits race and a rewards race. To understand the first, compare the goods that the discoveries of a scientific research program provides as opposed to the other sorts of goods, e.g., a nice pair of boots. The latter, Strevens (2003, 55) notes, "can be realized over and over again to society's benefit", whereas "the goal of a scientific research program needs to be realized just once for society to benefit maximally." The rewards race on the other hand emerges from what Strevens dubs *the priority rule*. According to the priority rule, "all credit, and so all the personal benefits that go along with credit [go] to the first research program to discover a particular fact or procedure, and none to other programs pursuing the same goal" (56).[21] According to Strevens, the rewards race and the benefits race are intertwined and their operation as a whole benefits society. However, as Bright (2017, 117) has noted, although this kind of organization may "enable science to be such a successful endeavor all things considered, [it may] also abet and encourage fraud."

Combining the benefits race and the rewards race, let us simplify both to what Bright (2017, 2021) calls *the credit economy of science.* The credit economy of science makes sense of the following puzzling aspect of academic fraud: academics are not paid much, the material gains of engaging in fraud are miniscule. This is more puzzling with respect to the sciences because scientists could potentially earn much more by going into private industry. As a result, in the sciences it is especially perplexing why one would choose a career path worth tens of thousands of dollars less if not for the pursuit of truth. And if one chooses the poorly paid path out of love for truth, then why is scientific fraud so rampant? The answer to this question is that as academics, scientists are not (primarily) seeking money. Although scientists are partially in the pursuit of grants, the money from grants is secondary to the main function of the grant, i.e., credit, honor, and glory. That is, academic scientists are seeking *prestige*, to be thought of highly. As Bright (2021, 120) notes, "science comes with a steep prestige and status hierarchy […] and scientists tend to want to climb that hierarchy." Furthermore, even if you don't care about the prestige hierarchy, you have to gain acclaim and prestige to do the science that you're interested in in the first place. Now, how do you win points in this credit seeking game? As Bright (2021, 121) continues, a familiar story emerges: "scientists win credit by establishing priority on new claims."[22]

As we saw from the discussion on novelty bias earlier, one must produce as much as possible as quickly as possible, or as it is commonly known, *publish or perish*. This incentive to publish or perish interacts with a pre-established interest in something that is false to encourage the proliferation of false views that continue to be cited despite being false. For example, as Smaldino and McElreath (2016, 4) have noted in their work on how bad science proliferates, "even firmly discredited research is often cited by scholars unaware of the discreditation. Thus, once a false discovery is published, it can permanently contribute to the metrics used to assess the researchers who produced it."[23]

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[21] cf. Davis's (forthcoming) discussion of novelty as ingenuity vs. novelty as priority.

[22] Similarly, Remco Heesen (2018, 661) has argued that the reproducibility crisis faced in the sciences is directly the result of a reward structure that gives "scientists an incentive to rush into print, which plausibly contributes to reproducibility problems."

[23] cf. Campanario (2000).

In the rush to publish what can easily get lost is whether the work has been, whether it has been shown to be false.[24]

Perhaps things aren't as bad for philosophy for two reasons. First, unlike the sciences, philosophical research is not primarily driven by the acquisition of grants. Second, falsity isn't as apparent in philosophy. A well-known compliment for a philosophy paper is for it to be interestingly wrong, and it would take a certain kind of arrogance to think that one's published work gets everything right. In fact, the kind of skepticism it's recommended we should have towards our own work gives rise to well-known paradoxes, e.g., the preface paradox, and has generated the motivation for many of the other chapters in this volume. These differences between the sciences and philosophy may also explain why there aren't as many high profile examples of academic fraud and misconduct in philosophy.[25] That is, there is less incentive for plagiarism and deception because the acquisition of grants aren't as necessary for both getting recognition from your peers or having the resources to conduct inquiry. However, if you spend enough time talking with philosophers you'll likely hear a story of being scooped—of a paper with similar ideas being published first—if not also stories of outright plagiarism and other kinds of academic misconduct (and scholarshit more generally). Philosophy may have fewer priority races with regard to grant funding, but publications remain the key to access, success, and prestige. Further, given the low acceptance rates, publications are a scarce resource and that motivates competition and erodes much of the trust and sincerity that our research communities need to thrive. It is in the context of this kind of competition over scarce resources that these incentives encourage so much bad behavior and risk undermining goods that are central to our research community. I turn to this point next.

2. The Case For and Against Belief

To thrive, our research communities are dependent on trust and sincerity. As Buckwalter (forthcoming, 9) has noted:

> An incredible amount of academic research depends on sincerity and trust. We trust that researchers share the goal of inquiry to discover the truth and pursue this goal in good faith. We trust that researchers are motivated to apply terms, describe their evidence, and represent others as accurately as possible. And we trust that journals are committed to these norms and uphold them judiciously when they select articles for publication. We trust researchers because disseminating findings would be difficult or impossible without this foundation.

Not only do we generally take people at their word, our research communities are especially dependent on trust and sincerity and this kind of deference we demonstrate to others is a costly thing to give up as much of the work on testimonial injustice as demonstrated. The kinds of misrepresentations encouraged by the incentives discussed in Section 1 undermine trust in our fellow researchers. For these reasons, and more that I will explain, it's especially troubling to see recent arguments for there being no important moral or epistemic difference between authors who believe what they argue for those that

[24] Furthermore, a recent report in Science (Brainard 2023) calls attention to fraud detector identifying approximately 34% of neuroscience papers published in 2020 as fraudulent. As Brainard reports: "Such manuscripts threaten to corrupt the scientific literature, misleading readers and potentially distorting systematic reviews." New concerns also arise with respect to authors farming out the work of research and writing to a paper mill or, as has now become a growing concerning, a machine learning program like ChatGPT, and then attempting to pass off that work as their own. Research communities rely on trust. As the author of the fraud detector notes, the results of his detection were like someone telling him that "30% of what you eat is toxic". However, even this report should be taken with a grain of salt. In a letter to the editors Bergstrom and Brandon Ogbunugafor (2023) argue that "story sensationalizes the study's findings while downplaying its substantial flaws."

[25] This is not to say that there aren't any, see fn 1.

don't. I turn now, in Section 2.1, to discussing the case for publishing without belief, ultimately arguing that such an approach makes all the problems identified in the previous section worse. In Section 2.2 I then make my case for why it is better for our research communities when authors believe what they argue for in print and I consider a proposal that makes it easier for authors to indicate the degree to which they are committed to their views.[26]

2.1 Against Belief

A familiar problem that most philosophers face at one point in their lives is the problem of systemic disagreement in philosophy.[27] How confident can any of us be in our views given that the history of philosophy has proven so many of us to be wrong? The presence of this widespread disagreement has prompted some philosophers to argue against the view that we are required to believe what we publish. As Plakias (2019, 640) notes in defense of publishing without belief (PWB): if we were only permitted to publish what is true—and in turn, what we believe or take ourselves to be in a position to know—then that would advantage "philosophers with more permissive standards for knowledge or truth, while disadvantaging those with higher standards." However, as I'll demonstrate in this section, PWB licenses not only a problematically loose relationship with truth, it also incentivizes one to misrepresent what they are up to. This is because PWB does little to address the fact that we are still operating in an environment where sincerity is assumed. As a result, someone adhering to PWB must present themselves as sincere, even if they are not, thus worsening the incentives to misrepresent what one is up to.

But before turning to criticisms, let us first see what case can be made for PWB. To make her argument, Plakias (2019, 638-9) asks us to consider three inquirers. The first, *Malicious Deceiver*, submits a hoax paper to expose a journal's lax standards. The second, *Repentant (non)Realist* writes a paper defending a view he ultimately thinks is false, and importantly, "nowhere in the paper does he say this." The third, *Doubtful Graduate* defends a view that depends, crucially, on the results of some empirical research that she's grown increasingly doubtful of. All three papers are accepted and published. None of these three believe what they argue for, and according to the consensus view in the literature, none appear to do anything wrong with regard to how they engage in inquiry. As a result, these intuitions are taken to suggest that we are permitted to publish without belief (PWB).[28] For example, as Fleisher (2020) notes about these three cases, although none believe what they argue for, by publishing their papers each of these authors is doing something beneficial for philosophical inquiry. That is, according to Fleisher (2020, 238-9):

> They are making important new arguments available, avoiding inappropriate deference, and perhaps even promoting diverse perspectives. Furthermore, I would add that they are contributing to an appropriate division of cognitive labor […], helping to avoid premature consensus …, and being appropriately sensitive to considerations of collective inquiry… For these reasons, I agree that [Malicious Deceiver, Repentant (non)Realist, and Doubtful Graduate] are acting epistemically and philosophically appropriately in publishing these claims.

[26] For the moral and epistemic case for sincere inquiry, see Basu (manuscript). For space, discussion of this argument has been cut from this chapter.

[27] See Goldberg (2013), Kornblith (2013), Beebee (2018), Carter (2018), Barnett (2019), Fleisher (2020), Plakias (2019, 2022) et al.

[28] There is less agreement with regard to Malicious Deceiver as we might think there's something particularly epistemically and morally objectionable about hoax papers. See again Taylor (2022, chapter 8) and Levy (2022) for such arguments.

However, this is not to say we are *always* permitted to publish without belief. That is, there may be some contexts where belief is required even if there are some contexts where belief is not required. So, how do we determine which claims are such that we may publish them without belief?

A suggestion from Fleisher (2020) is to make a distinction between two kinds of claims we could be making in our papers: *advocacy role claims* and *evidential role claims*. First, with regard to advocacy role claims, when we publish our work we are often presenting arguments to advocate for a position. We can advocate for a position without believing that the position is correct. However, with regard to evidential role claims, that is, "[c]laims that aim or function to increase the common stock of evidence available to inquirers" (243), things are different. When we present arguments as evidence for a position we are required to believe what we argue for.[29] In short, when you're presenting evidence you should believe because if you did not believe the evidential claims in your paper you would be criticizable for leading readers astray.

A challenge here is that these two roles cannot be so cleanly distinguished. For example, in advocating your advocacy will also function as evidence for a view and thereby increase the common stock of evidence available to inquirers. Sarıhan (2022) similarly makes this argument that advocacy claims can't be cleanly distinguished from evidential role claims. If one can advocate while being indifferent to the truth, then one is in fact withholding important evidence against the view one's advocating. That is, if one doesn't really believe what they're advocating for then their reasons for doubt are relevant reasons that are being impermissibly withheld in the service of advocating. To see this, consider the fact that we normally take people at their word. By not being forthcoming about their doubts, Repentant (non)Realist is withholding whatever substantive reasons they have for why even the argument they advocate for isn't sufficient for them to believe that the view is right. So, in Repentant (non)Realist's paper there is important evidence that's being withheld *because* Repentant non(Realist) is misrepresenting themselves.[30]

Thus, when we reflect on the reasons why one would publish something they didn't believe the simplest answer isn't some high-minded concern of being responsible in the face of widespread disagreement (as is used to motivate PWB), but rather, as Sarıhan (2022, 7) notes, some "mixture of time constraints and careeristic motivations […] Indeed, it is hard to see why an author would omit relevant evidence from publications if not pressured by such extra-philosophical factors." The social pressures of academia incentivize deception. And as we've seen, these pressures incentivize people to not only publish things they don't believe, but also it encourages people to exaggerate the novelty of their views, it discourages epistemic humility, and more. We thus seem to be in a worse position than journalists. Journalists are at least reporting on purported events in the world. If we don't believe what we are arguing for, then in what way are we different from peddlers of misinformation, propaganda, or writers of fiction?

However, returning to the point about sincerity being costly to give up, perhaps we were too quick to dismiss the different kinds of advocacy that authors can engage in which presenting their views. That is, there might still be an important role for both kinds of advocacy, i.e., advocacy-with-belief and advocacy-without-belief. That is, if we draw a careful distinction between the different kinds of roles the author of a piece of research could play and offer an opportunity for authors to signal which role they are playing, *we*

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[29] Similarly, Dang and Bright (2021) distinguish between (i) central claim/s of the paper and (ii) claims meant to provide evidence for the central claim/s. The first plays a similar role to advocacy role claims, you are permitted not to believe the central claims/what you advocate for. The second plays a similar role to evidential role claims. Where evidence is concerned, you are required to believe.

[30] In a recent response, Plakias (2022) also criticizes this distinction between advocacy role claims and evidential role claims. See also Buckwalter (forthcoming) for even more reasons why advocacy claims would be better if accompanied by belief.

can preserve sincerity and a belief norm for some claims, while also allowing authors to advance knowledge by advocating for views they might still harbor doubts about. I turn to that now.

2.2 For Belief

To make this argument, let me first start by noting that there are multiple things one can be doing when writing a paper, and not all of them require a strong notion of belief.[31] Habgood-Coote (2021), for example, distinguishes between the following four authorial roles: Contributor, Spokesperson, Writer, and Guarantor. A contributor is simply someone who has contributed to a project, as a result they are "either fully or partially creditworthy for the achievement associated with the project" (27). The spokesperson, on the other hand, is the one "who takes responsibility for co-ordinating responses to criticisms of the paper, and retraction decisions" (ibid). Contributors aren't expected to be spokespersons for a paper, once their contribution is made they've fulfilled their role. As a result, the contributor role is a backwards-looking one, and the spokesperson role is a forward-looking one. The writer, as the name suggests, is the one who writes the paper. And then the guarantor is the person/s "who gives their word that all the claims made in the paper are true" (ibid). In Habgood-Coote's proposal, the guarantor is the only one who must fully *believe* all the central claims of the paper. That is, the purpose of the guarantor is to have someone who can *guarantee* the claims in the paper. Thus, if you have doubts about a paper, or if you are advocating a view because you think there is something to it but you don't fully believe in the central claims, your role as author is that of a contributor or perhaps even a spokesperson—depending on the degree to which you are willing to go to bat for the claim—but, importantly, your role is *not* that of a guarantor. The author that seeks to avoid accountability for their arguments thus has a route for mere exploration: they can be a writer or contributor without being a guarantor. Requiring that one guarantee that they say, or being forthright about not being able to guarantee what one says, works to establish a level of responsibility and accountability that combats the misrepresentation that threatens the trust and sincerity that underlie our research communities.

This proposal works well in fields with lots of collaboration, as it can make clear each person's specific contribution and their respective degree of confidence in the central claims of the paper. In philosophy, however, the single-authored paper is still the norm. That the single-author paper is still the norm in philosophy may also be part of the explanation of why we see the messiness of this discussion about when an author should believe what they publish. That is, the messiness of this discussion is perhaps a result of how in philosophical research it is often one person playing all four roles. However, if an author can be forthright about their role and draw these careful distinctions about what kind of contribution they are making, then we can avoid the incentives that encourage deception and misrepresentation.

There are three related worries that might emerge now at this point. First, perhaps here we will see a version of Plakias's (2019, 2022) worry that it'll be easier for people with lower standards to be guarantors resurface. However, if one takes the long view then

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[31] An immediate reaction one might have is that we do not need to preserve sincerity and a belief norm for some claims while also allowing authors to advance knowledge by advocating for views they might still harbor doubts about because belief does not require certainty. This reaction, however, stems from the fact that 'belief' itself is vague and admits of multiple interpretations. For example, as recent work by Van Leeuwen and Lomobrozo (2023, 1) has noted, sometimes when people talk of belief they mean something quite weak, an attitude that is compatible with a significant amount of doubt, but we use the very same word, 'belief', for much stronger attitudes, e.g., religious belief and commitment, attitudes that are not compatible with any level of doubt. Van Leeuwen and Lombrozo use this to argue for a pluralistic definition of belief, and I take the proposal to be discussed (Habgood-Coote's proposal to distinguish authorial roles) to be compatible with recognizing these different ways we use belief, i.e., sometimes in a guarantor sense and sometimes in a contributor sense. Sometimes we really want someone to outright believe what they argue for, sometimes weaker belief is permissible and we should encourage and enable ways for authors to signal these differences.

one's longterm track record with respect to being a guarantor is an important consideration to take on board. Thus, I think an added benefit of this proposal is that injects some needed epistemic humility back into our research practices because guaranteeing the claims of a paper is a high stakes gamble. Less risk-averse researchers may take that gamble, but if they have a track record of frequently losing such gambles that'll be a costly hit to their reputations. As Buckwalter (forthcoming, 18) similarly notes, "researchers will need to decide for themselves what status and promotion is worth." Second, there might be pressure to publish guarantor papers rather than contributor papers. That is, if the most prestigious institutions only hire guarantors and never contributors, then there will be pressure on researchers to pretend to guarantee their views rather than being more honest. Thus, as with the first worry, the most hubristic, the least epistemically humble, the one's with the lowest standards, will be the best players in this publishing game. Here again I push back that the track record function that distinguishing guarantor vs. contributor could have a mollifying effect. But I grant that my reasons for optimism here are on shakier grounds. Finally, this proposal may cause some to lie about their degree of belief in their view in another direction: those who really believe something controversial may claim to only writing as a contributor in order to deflect criticism. However, I do not think one can really deflect criticism for controversial views merely by saying they're writing a contributor piece and that they don't really believe it. One cannot deflect all moral criticism by claiming to only contribute because even mere contributions carry moral and epistemic risks for which one can be criticizable (see Basu 2023).

Let me also be forthright about some more limitations of this view that has been put forward. The problems with academic publishing are vast and are not going to solved by simply requiring the authors believe what they argue for in print. But a certain kind of dishonesty is abated with this recommendation, and incremental change is at least better than none. The problems in publishing will continue as long as publishing continues to persist in its current form, but I think this proposal is worth trying out rather than continuing with publishing in its current form.

Now, how would this proposal work in actual practice? In fields where single-author publishing is still the norm, like in philosophy, journals should make space for not only distinguishing between original articles and book reviews in what they publish, but also for contributor papers, i.e., papers that seek to advocate for a claim but where the author does not necessarily believe the central claims of the paper, and spokesperson and guarantor papers, thus distinguishing between when the author perhaps endorses[32] or accepts[33] a view—something short of belief—and where an author really believes the view for which they advocate. This would be an important service in two ways. First, it would make clear to the reader the author's intentions, which under the current system it is both hard to do and the incentives encourage authors to misrepresent their intentions. Second, in providing a clear way to signal one's degree of confidence in a view, either as a contributor, spokesperson, or guarantor, this would be help future researchers to adjust how they report on the central claims of a contributor paper as opposed to a guarantor paper.

Perhaps, despite all that's been said thus far, you still worry that belief is still too strong an attitude for publishing, even in the role of a guarantor. For example, Fleisher (2018, 2652) argues for that the attitude we ought take towards our published work is that of endorsement, where:

> S endorses p in a research domain d only if:

[32] See Fleisher (2018) for discussion of endorsement.

[33] See van Fraassen (1980) for discussion of acceptance.

1. S is disposed to assert that p, or otherwise express commitment to p (in d).
2. S takes herself to be obligated to defend p (in d).
3. S treats p as a premise in her further reasoning (in d).
4. S shapes her research program in d (in part) based on p.
5. S is resiliently committed to p (in d).
6. S takes p to be a live option (i.e., she does not know p is false).
7. In endorsing p, S aims to promote healthy inquiry.

Similarly, van Fraassen (1980, 12-13) argues that the attitude scientists should take towards their views is one of *accepting* a theory. However, importantly for van Fraassen (1980, 12-13) acceptance "involves not only belief [in empirical adequacy] but a certain commitment." We see the importance of commitment in Fleisher's account of endorsement as well. Furthermore, similar to distinguishing the kinds of roles an author takes on, van Fraassen (ibid.) goes on to note that "[i]f the acceptance is at all strong, it is exhibited in the person's assumption of the role of explainer, in his willingness to answer questions *ex cathedra*. Even if you do not accept a theory, you can engage in discourse in a context in which language use is guided by that theory." Thus, in response, I will just say that I am happy to endorse or accept either of these alternatives because as far as I can see there is no major difference between the proposals other than *what we call the attitude in question*. Functionally and behaviorally, both are similar, both importantly have that kind of commitment to one's view that I take to be central to belief. For the time being at least, an attitude that commits the author to the their claims is the main thing I am interested in.[34]

3. Conclusion

In closing, let me recap the main argument of this chapter. I have argued that the publishing pressures and norms governing what counts as publishable work in academia and in journalism—novelty bias, fairness, and a pre-established interest in something that is false—incentivize morally and epistemically questionable practices, practices that are worsened if publications norms are loosened further to encourage authors to publish views they don't believe. That said, although I have argued that it is better when authors believe their views, I have left room open for some arguments to be put forward without such a strong commitment from their authors. Following, Habgood-Coote (2021), if we can distinguish the different kinds of roles an author takes on, thereby making clear which roles come with an accompanying requirement to believe the central claims of a paper, then we can allow a circumscribed way to publish without belief. However circumscribed this manner, we have the benefit now of enabling an author to make it clear their authorial role and accompanying responsibilities and levels of accountability that accompany that role. A major upshot of this proposal is that it does not undermine sincerity in the way that other arguments for publishing without belief do. This is because it preserves an important place for belief in philosophical inquiry.

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[34] Although I am happy to endorse endorsement and acceptance to the degree they resemble the attitude of belief in the respects that matter, I am not happy to endorse even weaker attitudes that bear less resemblance to belief, examples include Goldberg's (2013) attitude of "attitudinal speculation" (see Barnett 2019 for that language), or Carter's (2018) attitude of suspecting-that-p.

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