

A Permissivist Alternative to Encroachment¹

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1. Introduction

As a slew of recent work in epistemology has brought out, in a range of cases there's a strong temptation to say that prudential and (especially) moral considerations make a difference to what we ought to believe. For one kind of example, consider the following now-famous pair of cases:

Train Case 1. You're at the station in Boston preparing to take the commuter rail to Providence. You're going to see friends. It will be a relaxing vacation. You ask a man standing beside you, "Does this train make all those little stops, in Foxboro, Attleboro, etc?" It doesn't matter much to you whether the train is the Express (skipping all those little stops), though you'd mildly prefer it was. He answers, "Yeah, this one makes all those little stops. They told me when I bought the ticket."

Train Case 2. You absolutely need to be in Foxboro, the sooner the better. Your career depends on it. You overhear a conversation like that in Train Case 1 concerning the train that just rolled into the station and leaves in 15 minutes. (Adapted from Fantl and McGrath 2002: 67-68)

Many people think that you are justified in believing that the train will stop in Foxboro when nothing of much significance hangs on relying on your belief (in Train Case 1), but that you are not justified in believing when you risk incurring significant costs by relying on the belief (in Train Case 2). Generalizing, some philosophers argue that we need stronger evidence to be justified in believing when relying on one's belief risks incurring significant prudential or moral costs.

Moreover, many find it plausible that moral costs of beliefs (or suspension of judgment) themselves—independently of the risks incurred by reliance—can affect whether you should believe or suspend judgment. Here are three cases:

Wedding. Andrew is at the wedding of two college friends. The wedding is black-tie, so the waiters are dressed the same as the guests. Andrew knows these two college friends pretty well, and he knows that (unfortunately and for whatever reason) nearly all their friends are white. Andrew also knows that the wedding is taking place in a city where service-industry

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workers are, statistically, mostly black – and he has already interacted with several black servers at the wedding. Andrew sees a black man in a tuxedo (let’s call him John) walking past. On the basis of the fact that John is black (together with the background statistical information, just mentioned, that he has encoded), Andrew forms the belief that John is a waiter, and asks him to bring him a drink. In fact, John is not a waiter, but the wedding’s only black guest. (Worsnip 2021a: 540, adapted from Gendler 2011)

Wine Stain. Suppose that you have struggled with an alcohol problem for many years, but have been sober for eight months. Tonight you attend a departmental reception for a visiting colloquium speaker, and are proud of withstanding the temptation to have a drink. But when you get home, your spouse smells the wine that the colloquium speaker spilled on your sleeve while gesticulating to make a point, and you can see from her eyes that that she thinks you have fallen off of the wagon. (Basu and Schroeder 2019: 182)

PhD. Your close friend adopts a difficult, long-term goal: to obtain their PhD. You know that your friend is in every respect a typical PhD student: relative to other incoming PhD students in their field, their knowledge of the field, capacity to produce original research, writing ability, level of commitment, etc. are entirely average. Yet you also know that a significant proportion of students who begin doctoral work in your friend’s field—roughly 1 in 4—do not succeed in obtaining their PhD. In light of the difficulty of obtaining a PhD, you suspend judgment about whether your friend will succeed in achieving their goal. (Adapted from Morton and Paul 2018: 76)

Each of these cases has been taken to suggest that we can morally wrong others in virtue of our beliefs themselves (or lack thereof), independently of their upstream causes or downstream consequences. In Wedding, Andrew’s belief that John is a waiter—formed on the basis of merely statistical evidence regarding John’s race—seems racist and seems to wrong John. In Wine Stain, you may feel that your spouse owes you an apology, which indicates that her belief wrongs you. And in PhD, you plausibly wrong your friend if you doubt the sincerity of their commitment by suspending judgment about whether they will succeed in completing their PhD. If believing or suspending judgment constitutes (or risks constituting) a moral wrong, this plausibly bears on whether you ought to believe or suspend judgment.

In all the cases above, you have pretty strong but far from infallible evidence for the proposition in question. But some find it plausible that practical considerations can affect what you ought to believe even in cases in which you have little or no evidence for a proposition, such as:

Threat. A powerful evil demon credibly threatens to torture your family for eternity unless you believe that $2+2=5$.

You have no evidence supporting the proposition that $2+2=5$. Indeed, you have decisive evidence supporting the proposition that it’s not the case that $2+2=5$. Yet there’s nonetheless a strong

temptation to say that you ought to believe that $2+2=5$, as preventing your family from being tortured for eternity is far more important than avoiding a single false belief.

Two distinct accounts have been developed in the literature to explain *how* (some) practical considerations affect what we ought to believe. (We'll use the term "practical considerations" to refer to both prudential and moral considerations, in contrast with "epistemic considerations.") On the first, "reasons pragmatist" model, the relevant practical considerations constitute distinctively practical reasons for (or against) belief. On the second, "pragmatic encroachment" model, the relevant practical considerations affect what one is *epistemically* justified in believing. It's typically argued that they do this by shifting the threshold for how much evidence is required for epistemic justification.

As we'll see in §2, the pragmatic encroachment model appears to have several advantages over reasons pragmatism; this has led many philosophers to endorse the former. In this paper, however, we'll argue that reasons pragmatism can be largely saved from these purported disadvantages once paired with an independently plausible permissivism about epistemically justified outright belief.² This hybrid view—"permissivist pragmatism"—holds that when there's more than one epistemically permitted doxastic attitude, practical (including moral) considerations can come in to determine which epistemically permitted doxastic attitude one all-things-considered ought to have. Permissivist pragmatism allows us to say a great deal of what the pragmatic encroachment view wanted to say. In particular, it also makes use of the idea that pragmatic factors can or should shift a kind of threshold for belief, but in a subtly different way from the pragmatic encroachment model. At the same time, it avoids saying that practical considerations encroach on epistemic justification, and consequently, it also avoids other problems that distinctively attend this claim. The permissivist-pragmatist view thus has a strong claim to deliver the best of all possible worlds.

In §2, we will discuss the respective challenges that reasons pragmatism and pragmatic encroachment face. In §3, we will develop our hybrid permissivist-pragmatist view as an alternative to pragmatic encroachment. In §4, we will show how the permissivist-pragmatist view can handle each of the cases described above. In §5, we will argue that the permissivist-pragmatist view avoids the respective problems faced by impermissivist versions of reasons pragmatism and by pragmatic encroachment.

2. Reasons pragmatism vs. pragmatic encroachment

2.1 *Reasons pragmatism*

According to reasons pragmatism, practical considerations affect what we ought to believe by constituting distinctively practical (i.e., non-epistemic) reasons for or against belief. When a belief is

² Some others have appealed to something like permissivist pragmatism to explain how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe in specific cases, such as cases of epistemic partiality in friendship (Kawall 2013, Hawley 2014), Pascal's Wager (Jackson forthcoming), racist credences (Johnson King and Babic 2020), beliefs about success in accomplishing difficult, long-term goals (Morton & Paul 2018, 2019), and giving up beliefs that one has already formed (Soteriou 2013: sec. 15.4). However, to our knowledge, no-one has defended permissivist pragmatism as a general account, rivaling pragmatic encroachment, of how practical considerations affect what we all-things-considered ought to believe. Indeed, Morton & Paul (for example) seem to endorse *both* permissivist pragmatism and pragmatic encroachment, and do not clearly distinguish the two.

(or has the potential to be) practically valuable, this value provides a (*pro tanto*) reason for belief. Likewise, when a belief is (or has the potential to be) practically costly, this cost provides a (*pro tanto*) reason against belief. Reasons pragmatism has the merit of providing a simple, intuitive explanation of how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe.

While the core claim of reasons pragmatism is that (actual or potential) benefits and costs of believing provide practical reasons for or against belief, this is compatible with different views about the relationship between practical and epistemic reasons for belief. Berker (2018) provides a helpful taxonomy of three different versions of reasons pragmatism. “Austere pragmatism” (Rinard 2019a, Mantel 2019, Maguire and Woods 2020) holds that practical considerations constitute the only genuine (or “authoritative”) normative reasons for belief, so epistemic reasons are at best “formally” normative (like the rules of etiquette or chess). “Interactionist pragmatism” (Reisner 2008, Leary 2017, Howard 2020) holds that practical considerations and epistemic considerations both constitute genuine normative reasons for belief and that both contribute to determining what we all-things-considered ought to believe. “Separatist pragmatism” (Feldman 2000, Kauppinen forthcoming) holds that practical and epistemic considerations both constitute reasons for belief, but cannot be compared or weighed to determine an all-things-considered verdict about what we ought to believe.

Of these versions of reasons pragmatism, only austere pragmatism requires denying that there are genuinely normative epistemic reasons for belief. We take austere pragmatism to be a highly revisionary view, and will assume here that the most plausible form of reasons pragmatism will accept that there are both practical and epistemic reasons for belief.³ We also reject strict versions of separatist pragmatism—according to which practical and epistemic reasons can *never* combine to determine what we all-things-considered ought to believe—for reasons that will become clear in §5.3.

Despite its simplicity and intuitive appeal, reasons pragmatism faces several significant challenges. The most prominent objection holds that, at least in many cases, it seems psychologically impossible to believe *on the basis of* practical considerations.⁴ Suppose someone offers you \$1,000,000 to believe that $2+2=5$. While this may motivate you to try to bring it about that you believe that $2+2=5$ (e.g., by taking a drug that will induce this belief), it cannot directly motivate you to believe that $2+2=5$. So, proponents of this objection conclude, the financial incentive cannot constitute your motivating reason for belief, i.e. the reason *for which* you believe. A plausible necessary condition on normative reasons for belief is that it has to be *possible* for them to serve as motivating reasons that directly figure in our deliberation about what to believe. Practical considerations like financial incentives seem not to satisfy this condition, which suggests that they cannot be normative reasons for belief. At most, proponents of this objection argue, practical considerations are reasons to bring it about that you have a certain belief.

Second, because interactionist and separatist versions of reasons pragmatism hold that both epistemic and practical considerations constitute genuine reasons for belief, they create the possibility of normative conflicts, whereby one epistemically ought to believe p , but practically ought not to, or vice versa. It may not be so objectionable or counterintuitive to countenance conflicts in exceptional

³ The view we defend in this paper may be logically compatible with forms of austere pragmatism that regard epistemic reasons as “formally normative” (Mantel 2019, Maguire and Woods 2020). But we’ll often write as if such views are false.

⁴ Adler (2002), Kelly (2002), Shah (2006).

circumstances in which holding a patently epistemically irrational belief would be extremely (dis)valuable (e.g., in Threat). But it would be more worrisome to accept a) routine, pervasive conflicts, and b) conflicts which seem counterintuitive and distinctively troubling (e.g., the verdict that epistemic rationality requires holding racist beliefs in cases like Wedding). Moreover, Basu and Schroeder (2019) argue that not only is it objectionable to posit *conflicts* between moral and epistemic norms—whereby, for example, epistemic norms *require* a belief that is morally prohibited—it’s likewise unpalatable to allow a lack of *coordination* between moral and epistemic norms—whereby epistemic norms even *permit* a belief that morality prohibits. It’s inappropriate, they claim, to apologize for holding an epistemically justified belief. So, they infer, epistemically justified beliefs cannot be morally wrong. Reasons pragmatism allows for conflicts—perhaps pervasive and especially troubling conflicts—and it certainly doesn’t guarantee coordination. This, for some, is a reason to reject this view.

A third (related) challenge—which arises primarily for interactionist versions of reasons pragmatism—is that it’s difficult to provide a satisfactory account of how practical and epistemic reasons for belief interact to determine what we all-things-considered ought to believe. Selim Berker (2018) has most forcefully articulated this challenge. Berker observes that practical and epistemic reasons exhibit different weighing behaviors. While equally balanced practical reasons in favor of two competing alternatives generate a permission to choose either alternative, equally balanced epistemic reasons (according to Berker) generate a requirement to suspend judgment. In light of this difference, it’s difficult to see how practical and epistemic reasons combine to render verdicts about what one all-things-considered ought to believe. Separatist pragmatism, of course, avoids this problem. But it faces a different worry:⁵ that by declining to offer a verdict about what we all-things-considered ought to believe in cases of conflict between practical and epistemic domains, in many cases it can offer no helpful guidance about what to believe.

2.2 *Pragmatic encroachment*

While responses to these challenges are available to proponents of reasons pragmatism,⁶ they’re significant enough to motivate exploration of alternative accounts of how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe. The most prominent such account is pragmatic encroachment.⁷ Whereas reasons pragmatism holds that practical considerations constitute *non-epistemic* reasons for or against belief, pragmatic encroachment holds that practical considerations bear on what we ought to believe by affecting *epistemic* justification. According to the most common version of encroachment, practical considerations shift the threshold for how much evidence is necessary to epistemically justify

⁵ Forcefully expressed in Rinard (2019a).

⁶ Responses to the first challenge include Reisner (2009), Leary (2017), and Rinard (2019b). Responses to the second challenge can be found in Fritz (2020). Responses to the third challenge include Reisner (2008), Howard (2020) and Meylan (2021).

⁷ In the cases originally used to motivate pragmatic encroachment, it’s prudential considerations that (allegedly) affect epistemic justification. Recently, attention has been directed towards cases in which moral considerations affect it. We’ll use the term “pragmatic encroachment” to refer to any view on which prudential and/or moral considerations affect epistemic justification. Important statements of pragmatic/moral encroachment include, among many others, Fantl & McGrath (2002), Pace (2011), Schroeder (2012), Ross & Schroeder (2014), Moss (2018), Basu (2019a), Basu & Schroeder (2019), and Bolinger (2020).

belief (or for a belief to constitute knowledge). In at least some cases where believing (or relying on one's belief) is actually or potentially practically costly, the evidential threshold for epistemic justification increases (i.e., more evidence is needed to epistemically justify belief). And according to some versions of pragmatic encroachment, in some cases where *not* believing is (actually or potentially) practically costly, the evidential threshold for epistemic justification decreases.⁸

Pragmatic encroachment has the advantage of avoiding each of the three problems facing reasons pragmatism. First, because it holds that practical considerations shift the threshold for much evidence is needed for epistemic justification rather than directly constituting practical reasons for or against belief, pragmatic encroachment provides a way for practical considerations to affect what we ought to believe without serving as the basis for belief. Second, by holding that epistemic norms are themselves sensitive to practical costs or risks, proponents of pragmatic encroachment can avoid the conclusion that there are pervasive and troubling conflicts between epistemic and practical norms. And third, pragmatic encroachment provides a straightforward account of the interaction between practical and epistemic considerations: instead of combining with epistemic reasons, practical considerations bear on what we ought to believe by affecting how strong the epistemic reasons must be to epistemically justify belief.

However, pragmatic encroachment faces problems of its own.⁹ First, Worsnip (2021a) argues that it is very difficult for proponents of encroachment to provide a principled explanation of *which* practical considerations encroach on epistemic justification. While proponents of encroachment have typically wanted to include the practical considerations in cases such as Train Case 2, Wedding, Wine Stain, and (perhaps) PhD as encroaching on epistemic justification, they have typically wanted to exclude bribes, threats, or Pascalian considerations about one's eternal salvation or damnation from encroaching on epistemic justification.¹⁰ But (Worsnip argues) none of the most promising principles to which proponents of encroachment have appealed successfully distinguish between those practical considerations that do encroach on epistemic justification and those that don't, excluding *all* types of bribes, threats, or Pascalian considerations. In the absence of such a principle, proponents of encroachment are arguably committed to the counterintuitive claim that sometimes bribes, threats, or Pascalian considerations affect the *epistemic* justification of our beliefs.

Relatedly, proponents of pragmatic encroachment have a difficult time explaining how certain moral costs of belief make a difference to *epistemic* justification. Fritz (2020) holds that traditional accounts of pragmatic encroachment can explain how (potential) moral costs of *relying* on one's belief affect epistemic justification. (He calls views on which only these moral costs make a difference “moderate moral encroachment.”) However, he contends that proponents of what he calls “radical moral encroachment”—which holds that moral costs of beliefs *themselves* affect epistemic justification—cannot explain why *these* costs affect epistemic justification rather than constituting practical reasons against belief.¹¹ One reason why this is particularly hard is that in many cases where a belief – say, a racist belief – is *itself* morally wrong, this doesn't seem to merely *raise the threshold* for

⁸ See Basu (2019a) and Crewe and Ichikawa (2021).

⁹ In addition to the two challenges discussed below, other notable objections to pragmatic encroachment are raised by Brown (2008), Reed (2010), and Jackson (2019), among others.

¹⁰ Benton (2018) is an exception.

¹¹ See also Leary (2022).

how much evidence one needs in order to permissibly believe, but rather to make the belief prohibited *no matter how much* evidence one has.¹² But if a belief is prohibited no matter how much evidence one has for it, it's hard to see how the relevant prohibition counts as epistemic.¹³

3. A permissivist pragmatism

Given the difficulties facing both pragmatic encroachment and simple versions of reasons pragmatism, there's good reason to seek a new account of how practical considerations affect what we all-things-considered ought to believe. In this section, we'll introduce a view that combines a reasons pragmatist picture with permissivism about epistemically justified outright belief.

3.1 *Permissivism about outright belief*

Roughly, permissivist views in epistemology claim that in some cases, one's evidence is such that more than one of a range of incompatible doxastic attitudes toward a proposition would be epistemically justified (i.e. epistemically permissible) to hold. So, a permissivist about credence might hold that one's evidence can be such that *either* a 0.7 credence in p or a 0.8 credence in p would be epistemically justified to hold. The version of permissivism we will be making use of here, however, applies to coarse-grained doxastic attitudes toward a proposition p : believing p (i.e. having an "outright" belief in p), suspending judgment about p , and disbelieving p (i.e., having an outright belief in its negation). The claim is that there are situations where one's evidence is such that more than one of these attitudes would be epistemically justified (i.e. epistemically permissible) to hold.

For our purposes, we won't have to take a stand on whether one's evidence is ever such that believing p and disbelieving p would each be epistemically justified attitudes to adopt. Rather, we aim to motivate only the claim that that there are cases where believing p and suspending judgment about p would each be epistemically justified attitudes to adopt.¹⁴ Moreover, the version of permissivism we aim to motivate is both "intrapersonal" – holding that a *single agent* can be epistemically justified either in believing p or in suspending judgment about p – and "synchronic" – holding that this agent can be epistemically justified either in believing p at time t or in suspending judgment about p at a single time t .¹⁵ Thus, the view is as follows:

Intrapersonal, Synchronic Permissivism about Outright Belief. There are cases where an agent's evidence is such that (i) they would be epistemically justified in believing p at t ; and (ii) they would be epistemically justified in suspending judgment about p at t .

¹² This is particularly evident if one thinks, as Basu (2019b) does, that beliefs can morally wrong *even when true*. If this is so, it's hard to see why any amount of additional evidence (of truth) would suffice to make such beliefs permissible.

¹³ In light of this, one could accept pragmatic encroachment for some cases and reasons pragmatism for others. (This seems to be Fritz's own view.) But once we've admitted that reasons pragmatism is true after all, a central motivation for accepting pragmatic encroachment – its ability to say that practical considerations make a difference to what one ought to believe *without* endorsing reasons pragmatism – dissipates.

¹⁴ Horowitz (2014) calls this view "moderate permissivism."

¹⁵ Cf. also Jackson (2021).

3.2 *Motivating permissivism*

There is a range of motivations for accepting permissivist views. Permissivism about credence is often motivated via appeal to the intuitive implausibility of the claim that one's evidence makes only one precise point-valued credence permissible. For example, it may seem absurd to say that one's evidence makes credence 0.8136 permissible, but neither credence 0.8137 nor credence 0.8135. The facts about evidential support, it may be thought, are (at least typically) just not that fine-grained. And both permissivism about credence and permissivism about outright belief are sometimes motivated via appeal to the thought that there is sometimes more than one reasonable way to evaluate a particular body of evidence: when one's evidence is complex and involves many different considerations, there's no uniquely correct way to weigh all those different considerations.

Here, however, we want to focus on a different way of motivating permissivism, one specific to permissivism about outright belief which will be of particular use for the permissivist-pragmatist hybrid that we defend.¹⁶ Suppose that the probability of p on your evidence is exactly 0.9, and suppose that you have correctly determined this, and correspondingly, formed a credence of 0.9 in p . You still face a further question about whether to (outright) believe p or not.¹⁷ Our claim is this: often, in this kind of situation, neither believing p nor suspending judgment about p would constitute an epistemic mistake.

To bring this out, let's begin with an interpersonal case. Suppose that Manchester City, the top-ranked team in the English Premier League, are scheduled to play Norwich City, the bottom-ranked team.¹⁸ Liam and Noel are both rabid Manchester City fans. Together, they have built a complex regression model that draws on a huge amount of data to assign probabilities to different outcomes of football (soccer) games. And Liam and Noel (rationally, let's suppose) base their credences in the different outcomes solely on the outputs of their model. Their model assigns a Manchester City win a probability of 0.9 in their game against Norwich City, so they both have a rational credence 0.9 that Manchester City will win.

But now, suppose, Liam and Noel differ in their attitudes to *epistemic risk*. At least when it comes to football games, Liam is relatively *risk-seeking* in his (outright) belief-forming practices. This doesn't involve being overconfident in the sense of overestimating the probabilities of Manchester City wins; his credences in the probabilities of Manchester City wins are perfectly epistemically rational. Rather, it involves being inclined to (outright) believe a proposition about who will win a football game where there's fairly strong, but far from completely infallible, evidence in its favor: evidence that would make, for example, a 0.9 credence rational. Consequently, Liam (outright) believes that Manchester City will win their game against Norwich City. By contrast, Noel is relatively *risk-averse* in his (outright) belief-forming practices. He is not generally inclined to believe a proposition about who will win a football game on the basis of evidence that would make a 0.9 credence rational.

¹⁶ This argument for permissivism about outright belief takes no stand on whether permissivism about credence is true.

¹⁷ We assume here that outright belief is not metaphysically reducible to credence above some fixed threshold, such that for an agent to have credence 0.9 is thereby automatically for that agent to already believe p (or to lack belief in it).

¹⁸ As of May 2022.

Consequently, Noel does not (outright) believe that Manchester City will win their game against Norwich City but instead suspends judgment.

Here is our judgment, which we invite you to share: neither Liam or Noel is making an epistemic mistake. There is a range of different permissible attitudes to epistemic risk,¹⁹ and neither Liam nor Noel is outside the permissible range.²⁰ We can think of this in terms of the twin “Jamesian” epistemic goals of believing the truth and avoiding error.²¹ As many epistemologists have emphasized, when it comes to propositions for which one has strong but not infallible evidence, these goals trade off against each other: believing gives one a good shot at believing the truth, but carries a risk of error; whereas suspending judgment guarantees the avoidance of error, but precludes one from believing the truth. (Relatively) risk-seeking epistemic agents like Liam and (relatively) risk-averse epistemic agents like Noel put different weights on believing the truth as opposed to avoiding error. Liam puts more weight on believing the truth than Noel does, and Noel puts a greater weight on avoiding error than Liam does. We find it extremely plausible that there’s no uniquely correct way, at least from an epistemic point of view, to weigh the value of believing truth versus that of avoiding error. If this is right, it helps to explain why Liam and Noel are both epistemically justified in their doxastic attitudes.

As we said, this is an interpersonal case, and it might be objected that it does not support intrapersonal permissivism. Given Liam’s attitude to epistemic risk, it might be said, he is epistemically justified *only* in believing that Manchester City will win; and given Noel’s attitude to epistemic risk, he is epistemically justified *only* in suspending judgment.²² Thus, while this is a case where the same evidence makes different attitudes permissible for *different* agents, it isn’t a case where a body of evidence makes more than one attitude permissible for the *same* agent. But we think this is the wrong way to think about things. It would be entirely permissible for Liam to have Noel’s attitude to epistemic risk (and correspondingly, suspend judgment); similarly, it would be entirely permissible for Liam to have Noel’s attitude to epistemic risk (and correspondingly, believe). Thus, Liam *is* permitted either to believe or suspend judgment. It’s just that he would need to do the latter in concert with having a different attitude to risk.²³ Thus, we think the case for interpersonal permissivism here plausibly extends to intrapersonal permissivism.

It might now be worried that since it takes time to revise one’s attitude to risk, Liam is only permitted to suspend *once he’s revised that attitude*, and consequently, the case supports only diachronic and not synchronic permissivism.²⁴ But this too is misguided. First, the claim that Liam is only

¹⁹ Cf. Buchak’s (2013) analogous view that practical rationality permits different attitudes towards risk.

²⁰ There may be limits on this permissible range, of course. In particular, we are inclined to think that it’s not permissible to be so epistemically risk-seeking as to believe propositions for which one has a credence of 0.5 or below.

²¹ James (1896). The twin Jamesian goals have been invoked to motivate permissivism about belief (Kelly 2013; Pettigrew 2022), permissivism about credence (Johnson King and Babic 2020), and encroachment (Pace 2011).

²² Cf. Schoenfield’s (2014) defense of interpersonal permissivism, on which an agent’s “epistemic standards” determine what they ought to believe (given their evidence). Schoenfield’s notion of “epistemic standards” might be taken to include the agent’s attitude towards epistemic risk.

²³ The point can be expressed more precisely by saying that the requirement to align one’s doxastic attitudes with one’s attitudes to epistemic risk is “wide-scope” (cf. Worsnip 2021b: sec. 9.5). Put into disjunctive form, it says that Liam is required *either* to have the risk-seeking attitude and believe, *or* to have the risk-averse attitude and suspend judgment. The requirement is to satisfy at least one of the disjuncts, but either is a permissible way to satisfy it. It may not be permissible for Liam for have his current risk-seeking attitude and yet suspend. But it doesn’t follow that it’s impermissible for him to suspend: [impermissible to (Φ & Ψ)] doesn’t entail [impermissible to Ψ].

²⁴ Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this objection.

permitted to suspend *once he's revised his attitude to risk* is, we think, mistaken. Rather, our view is that at the very time t that Liam has a risk-seeking attitude, he is permitted to either {have a risk-seeking attitude, believe} *or* {have a risk-averse attitude, suspend}.²⁵ That he has the former combination of attitudes at t does not render the latter combination impermissible at t (even if it means that he can feasibly adopt it only at a time after t).²⁶ Second, even if one finds the first response unpersuasive, the case still establishes synchronic permissivism. Again, let t be a time at which Liam has the risk-seeking attitude. Let t_1 be a time far enough after t that Liam has had time to revise his attitude to risk by t_1 . Since it would also be permissible for Liam *not* to revise his attitude to risk by t_1 , there's a time $-t_1$ – at which it would be permissible for Liam to either {have a risk-seeking attitude, believe} *or* {have a risk-averse attitude, suspend}. But then synchronic permissivism is true, for this is true if there is *any* single time such that more than one outright doxastic attitude would be permissible to have at that time.

The case of Liam and Noel brings out the plausibility of the claim that often, when one has strong but not infallible evidence for a proposition, one's evidence permits either believing or suspending judgment. As the case illustrates, one thing that influences whether one believes or suspends judgment in such a case is one's attitude toward epistemic risk. But this general attitude toward epistemic risk may not be the *only* thing that might properly influence whether one believes in permissive cases. We now turn to the suggestion that considerations concerning the practical costs and benefits of believing might do so. This will introduce the reasons-pragmatist aspect of our permissivist-pragmatist view, and allow us to contrast it with the pragmatic encroachment view.

3.3 *How permissivism makes room for pragmatism*

The idea of the permissivist-pragmatist view is simple: when there is more than one epistemically permitted doxastic attitude, practical (including moral) considerations can come in to determine which of these epistemically permitted doxastic attitudes one all-things-considered ought to have. It's vital to distinguish this from the pragmatic encroachment view. On the pragmatic encroachment view, practical considerations affect what one is *epistemically* justified in believing or what one knows. This is not so on the permissivist-pragmatist view. On the latter view, practical considerations make no difference to what one is *epistemically* justified in believing or what one knows; they only influence what one *all-things-considered* ought to believe.²⁷ However – crucially – at least in permissive cases, they can

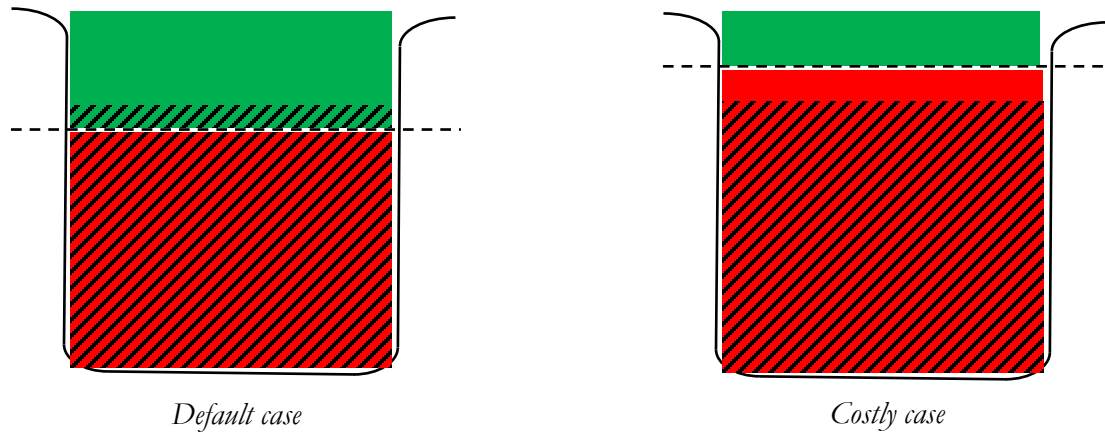
²⁵ Again (cf. n. 23), the “wide-scope” nature of the requirement that relates attitudes to epistemic risk and first-order doxastic states is important here. It is not that Liam's attitude to risk at t fixes what first-order doxastic state is rational for him at t . Rather, there are constraints on which *combinations* of attitudes to epistemic risk and first-order states are permissible for him at t , with multiple combinations being permissible and multiple combinations being prohibited.

²⁶ Quite generally, the fact that one is Φ -ing at t does not render every action or state incompatible with Φ -ing at t impermissible. For example, the fact that I am currently murdering my cousin at t doesn't render *refraining from murdering my cousin* impermissible at t (even if I cannot cease murdering my cousin until some later time t_1). Whatever follows from the correct statement (if any) of “ought implies can,” it isn't that.

²⁷ As an anonymous referee pointed out, one might wonder whether pragmatic encroachment's and permissivist pragmatism's different conceptions of the sense in which practical considerations affect a belief's justification reflect substantive disagreement or merely amount to a verbal dispute. This might be so if the two views use the term ‘epistemic’ differently – though that difference in usage could itself reflect a substantive, non-terminological disagreement about the nature and boundaries of the epistemic domain. This is a subtle issue that we cannot fully address here (see, e.g., Cohen

do this without making it the case that one all-things-considered ought to believe something that one is epistemically unjustified in believing, since they select *between* the epistemically permitted options.

We can model all this a bit more precisely. As we saw in §2, on the most popular version of the pragmatic encroachment view, at least some (actual or potential) practical costs of believing p make it the case that one needs more evidence for epistemically justified belief in p than one would otherwise need, were those costs not present. Suppose one has strong, but far from infallible evidence for p . Let the “default case” be the case where there are no special practical costs of believing p , and the “costly case” be the case where there *are* (actual or potential) costs (of the kind that the pragmatic encroacher thinks makes a difference). The pragmatic encroachment view (simplifying somewhat²⁸) can now be represented pictorially as below:

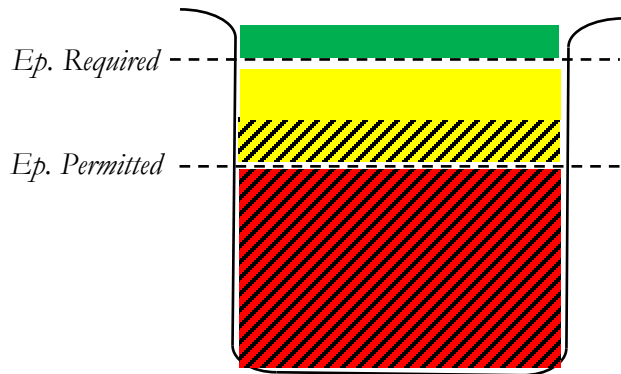


The diagonal black shading represents the extent to which one’s evidence probabilifies p (if it were filled up to the top of the cup, this would represent its giving p probability 1). The dotted line is the threshold for epistemically justified belief. Below it, the background is colored red to indicate that any amount of evidence below this threshold would not suffice for epistemically justified belief; above it, it is colored green to indicate that any amount of evidence above this threshold suffices for epistemically justified belief. According to the pragmatic encroachment view, the threshold goes up in the costly case as compared with the default case. This means that although one’s evidence

2016; Friedman 2020 for recent discussions). However, we will briefly suggest two ways that the dispute between permissivist pragmatism and standard versions of pragmatic encroachment can be anchored in something non-terminological. First, the two views appear to disagree about whether practical considerations can affect *the type of justification necessary for knowledge*. Second, pragmatic encroachers typically claim that practical considerations either a) do not constitute *reasons* for belief at all or b) constitute *right-kind* reasons for or against withholding belief (e.g., Schroeder 2012, 2018, 2021). By contrast, on our permissivist-pragmatist view practical considerations constitute *wrong-kind* reasons for belief, in a technical sense on which right-kind reasons for belief are connected with the fittingness of a belief and wrong-kind reasons are not (Howard 2019; see also Leary 2022 for this way of drawing the pragmatic encroachment/reasons pragmatism distinction).

²⁸ The simplification is that this picture, and the ones that follow, assume that a belief’s being epistemically justified is a matter of its being sufficiently supported by the evidence, where this means exceeding some (perhaps variable) threshold of evidential probability. (Note that this isn’t the same as the metaphysical reduction of belief to credence we set aside in fn. 17, on which what it *is* to believe p just is to have credence above some threshold.) This assumption isn’t essential to any of the views under discussion, but it makes them easier to represent pictorially.

probabilifies p to the same extent, one is no longer justified in believing p in the costly case. By contrast, our view (again, simplifying somewhat) can be represented as follows:



Default and costly cases

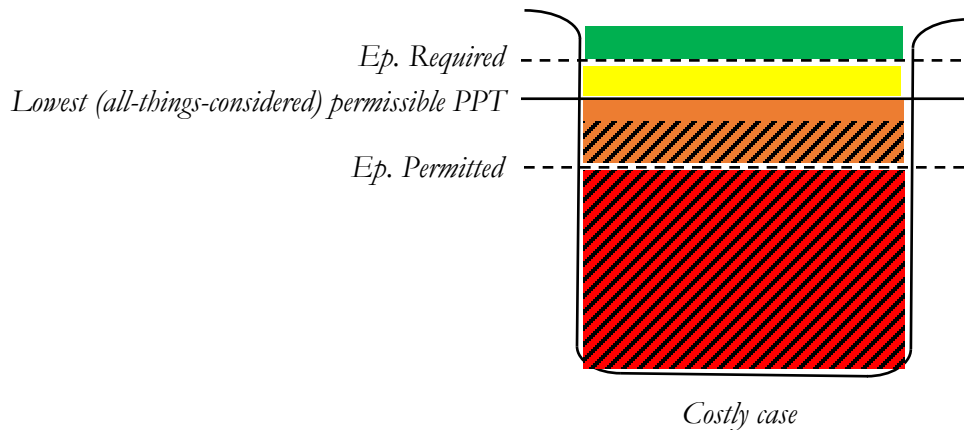
Here there's a zone of epistemic permission (shaded yellow) between the threshold for permitted belief and that for required belief. Pretty strong but far from infallible evidence (as in the case depicted here) will exceed the former threshold, but not the latter. The epistemic status of belief in p does not change between the default and costly case: in both cases, it is epistemically permitted, but not required, and in both cases the thresholds for both epistemically permitted and epistemically required belief stay the same. So there is no pragmatic encroachment on epistemic justification.

However, let's now introduce a *different* kind of threshold, which we'll call one's "personal psychological threshold" (PPT) for belief in a proposition.²⁹ One's personal psychological threshold is the threshold of apparent evidence above which one will *actually believe* the proposition in question. Now, on a non-permissivist view, one epistemically ought to match one's personal psychological threshold to the threshold for epistemically justified belief. By contrast, given permissivism, it's epistemically permissible to set one's personal psychological threshold *anywhere* between that for epistemically permitted belief and that for epistemically required belief (inclusive of the thresholds): that is, anywhere in the yellow zone above. However, it does not follow that it's (always) *all-things-considered* permissible to set one's personal psychological threshold anywhere in this zone. Rather, practical considerations might make it the case that one all-things-considered ought to set the threshold at a relatively high (or low) level within this zone.³⁰

Thus, there is *a* difference – albeit not one in epistemic status! – between the default and costly cases. In the latter case, one (all-things-considered) ought to set one's personal psychological threshold at a relatively high level within the yellow zone. We can thus specify our view of the costly case in more detail:

²⁹ This closely resembles Morton and Paul's (2018, 2019) notion of an "evidential threshold."

³⁰ We don't say that the way the practical considerations make a difference to what one ought to believe is *always* best modeled in terms of adjusting one's personal psychological threshold. See §4.2 (final paragraph).

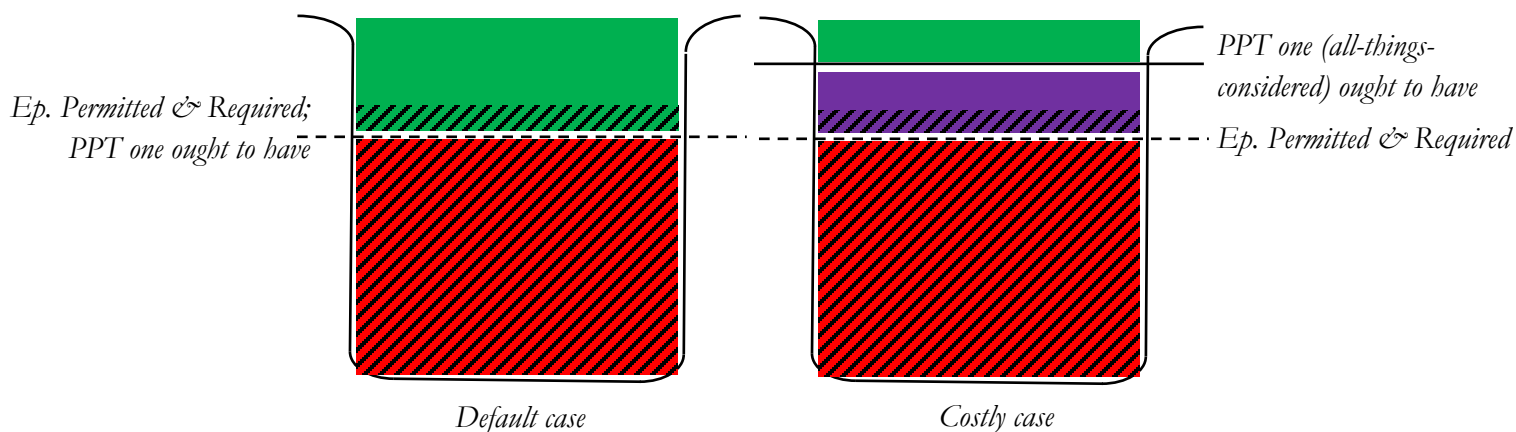


Here, the orange-colored area represents the zone within which belief is epistemically permissible, but all-things-considered prohibited – and given the amount of evidence in this case, that is the status which believing p has. By contrast, in the default case, one is (all-things-considered) permitted to set one’s personal psychological threshold lower within the epistemically permitted zone.

This means that the permissivist-pragmatist view has some important similarities with the pragmatic encroachment view. Both views agree that purely evidential considerations underdetermine where to set one’s personal psychological threshold.³¹ And both views say that practical considerations can help to determine where one’s personal psychological threshold should be. However, our view demonstrates that by accepting epistemic permissivism, it’s *possible* to embrace both of those claims without allowing any pragmatic encroachment on the epistemic: that is, without allowing that practical considerations make any difference to the epistemic status of one’s beliefs.

Finally, let’s compare our view with one that combines reasons pragmatism with a non-permissivist view of epistemic justification. On a non-permissivist view, the thresholds for epistemically permitted and epistemically required belief are the same: below this threshold, one is epistemically prohibited from believing, and above it, one is epistemically required to believe. Thus, if practical considerations can shift the personal psychological threshold that one all-things-considered ought to have, they must move it away from this threshold:

³¹ Pragmatic encroachers often appeal to this to motivate the view: cf. esp. Owens (2000).



The divergence of the personal psychological threshold one all-things-considered ought to have from the threshold for epistemically permitted and required belief opens up a zone (colored purple) in which belief is epistemically *required* and yet all-things-considered forbidden. Indeed, on this view, *any* case in which practical considerations make a difference to what one all-things-considered ought to believe must be one where they either make it all-things-considered prohibited to have an epistemically required belief or make it all-things-considered required to have an epistemically prohibited belief. By contrast, while our view doesn't definitively rule *some* such cases out (see §5.2), it opens up the way for practical considerations to influence what one all-things-considered ought to believe *without* doing this (and, as we've already shown, without encroaching on the epistemic).

One final clarification about our view. We have talked of practical considerations making a difference to what one ought to believe. Do they do so by constituting *reasons* for (or against) belief? One might suggest that they don't. As we've suggested, we can think of practical considerations as influencing the personal psychological threshold that one ought to have. So perhaps, it might be suggested, they are (directly) reasons for *adopting a particular personal psychological threshold* rather than for (or against) belief as such. This suggestion *may* be right. However, there are grounds to doubt the metaphysical distance between adopting a personal psychological threshold and believing (or suspending). Most ordinary people do not explicitly think of themselves as having a threshold of probability above which they are willing to believe a proposition. Consequently, a personal psychological threshold is best-understood dispositionally or counterfactually in terms of what one *would* believe (or not) given different (perceived) amounts of evidence. Thus, in adopting a personal psychological threshold such that one's (perceived) evidence for p exceeds that threshold, one arguably *thereby* believes p : if one doesn't believe p , one hasn't really adopted the threshold in question. Thus, plausibly, at least in some cases practical considerations constitute reasons to adopt a particular personal psychological threshold and *thereby* believe (or suspend).

4. How the permissivist-pragmatist account handles the cases

4.1 Train Cases 1 and 2

We'll now demonstrate how the permissivist-pragmatist account can handle the cases described in §1. Let's start with the Train Cases, in which the potential costs of *relying* on a belief intuitively affect what you ought to believe. Fantl and McGrath originally employed these cases to argue for pragmatic encroachment. And pragmatic encroachment provides a straightforward explanation of the difference between these two cases: while you're justified in believing that the train will stop in Foxboro in Train Case 1, in Train Case 2 the practical risks of relying on that proposition render belief epistemically unjustified. Proponents of pragmatic encroachment typically explain this by positing something like the following principle:

Epistemic justification-reliance link: If S is epistemically justified in believing *p*, then S is justified in relying on *p* in S's reasoning.

Applying **epistemic justification-reliance link** to Train Case 2 generates the following explanation: since you're not justified in relying on the proposition that the train will stop in Foxboro, by modus tollens you're not epistemically justified in believing that the train will stop in Foxboro. Though **epistemic justification-reliance link** is a normative principle articulating a sufficient condition for being *justified* in relying on a proposition, it is often defended by appeal to a descriptive view on which believing that *p* involves relying on *p* in one's reasoning, or being disposed to.³² If this is right, costs of relying on *p* are *ipso facto* costs of believing *p*.

Because the permissivist-pragmatist view denies that practical considerations affect *epistemic* justification, and because practical considerations obviously do affect which propositions one is justified in relying on, proponents of permissivist pragmatism cannot accept **epistemic justification-reliance link**. However, they can (if desired) accept the following alternative:

All-things-considered permission-reliance link: If S is all-things-considered permitted to believe *p*, then S is justified in relying on *p* in S's reasoning.

Notice that appeal to a descriptive connection between belief and reliance does not favor **epistemic justification-reliance link** over **all-things-considered permission-reliance link**. Even if costs of reliance are *ipso facto* costs of believing, this doesn't show that they are costs of believing that affect one's *epistemic* justification, as opposed to affecting whether one is all-things-considered permitted to believe *p* by constituting non-epistemic reasons against believing). And by appealing to **all-things-considered permission-reliance link**, the permissivist pragmatist can explain why you ought not to believe that the train will stop in Foxboro in Train Case 2: since you are not justified in relying on the proposition that the train will stop in Foxboro, by modus tollens you are not all-things-considered permitted to believe this proposition.

But it doesn't follow from this that you aren't *epistemically* permitted to believe that the train will stop in Foxboro. Rather, the permissivist pragmatist can diagnose the case—and other similar

³² Cf. Weatherson 2005; Ganson 2008; Fantl and McGrath 2009: ch. 5; Ross and Schroeder 2014.

cases used to motivate pragmatic encroachment—as an epistemically permissive one: that is, one where you are epistemically permitted to either believe p or suspend judgment. Like the case of Liam and Noel from §3.2, Train Cases 1 and 2 are scenarios in which you have pretty strong but far from infallible evidence that justifies a reasonably high credence in the proposition that the train will stop in Foxboro. While we share Fantl & McGrath’s intuition that it’s *permissible* to believe in Train Case 1, it seems to us that you also don’t make an epistemic mistake if you, more cautiously, suspend judgment. That is, the evidence seems to permit either doxastic attitude. The permissivist pragmatist says that likewise, neither believing nor suspending judgment constitutes an epistemic mistake in Train Case 2; rather, believing constitutes a *prudential* mistake.

Thus, the permissivist pragmatist can provide the following overall verdicts about the cases. In Train Case 1 (the low-stakes version), either believing or suspending is epistemically permissible, *and* either believing or suspending is practically permissible. Thus, all-things-considered, belief is permitted (but not required). To put things in terms of our model from §3.3, you are practically permitted to adopt a personal psychological threshold anywhere within the epistemically permitted zone, and thereby either believe or suspend judgment. In Train Case 2 (the high-stakes version), it’s still the case that either believing or suspending is epistemically permissible, but, due to the potential cost of believing falsely, believing is practically impermissible (whereas suspending judgment is practically permissible). Thus, belief is all-things-considered impermissible, and suspending judgment is all-things-considered required. To put things in terms of the model, you practically ought to adopt a relatively high personal psychological threshold, near the “top” of the epistemically permitted zone. Given that you have pretty strong but far from infallible evidence for the proposition that the train will stop in Foxboro, the evidence probabilifies this proposition to a degree below the high personal psychological threshold that you all-things-considered ought to adopt. You therefore all-things-considered ought to suspend judgment.

Whether this permissivist-pragmatist diagnosis of the case is at a disadvantage compared with the pragmatic encroachment diagnosis depends on whether there’s a clear, pretheoretical intuition not just in favor of the coarse-grained verdict that you *ought not* to believe in Train Case 2, but in favor of the finer-grained verdict that you ought not to believe because you’re *epistemically* unjustified in believing. For our part, we do not have the latter, fine-grained intuition. Since the intuition that belief is impermissible is driven by the potential practical costs of relying on one’s belief, we think it is at best unclear whether the prohibition in question is epistemic, and we are suspicious of claims to be able to intuit that it is.³³ The link between belief and reliance to which pragmatic encroachers appeal is intended to provide a powerful theoretical case for pragmatic encroachment beyond appeal to intuitions about cases. Yet it’s only if this link is developed in terms of *epistemic* justification that it supports pragmatic encroachment over the permissivist-pragmatist view. And it’s not clear what, beyond a similar appeal to questionable fine-grained intuitions about cases, justifies developing the link between belief and reliance in terms of epistemic justification rather than all-things-considered

³³ Cf. Leary (2022).

permissibility.³⁴ In the absence of such a justification, the pragmatic encroacher's diagnosis of Train Case 2 does not have an advantage over the permissivist pragmatist's diagnosis.

Of course, one might not have *either* the coarse-grained or fine-grained intuition – particularly if one sees belief and reliance as not being all that tightly connected, so that one could believe *without* incurring the risks of reliance.³⁵ For the sake of argument, we've been granting to the pragmatic encroacher that there is such a link, and thus that we want to accommodate the verdict that you (at least all-things-considered) shouldn't believe in Train Case 2. But the permissivist-pragmatist view is also entirely compatible with a view on which there isn't such a link, and Train Case 2 thus isn't a case where significant practical costs or reasons come into play: in such a case, you are (all-things-considered) permitted to believe, but shouldn't rely on your belief if you do so. By contrast, pragmatic encroachers *need* a principle like **epistemic justification-reliance link** to explain why there's a difference in justification for belief between Train Case 1 and Train Case 2, and hence to establish that pragmatic encroachment occurs. We take this difference to be a point in favor of the permissivist-pragmatist view: it is consistent with but doesn't *depend* on accepting a normative link between belief and reliance.

4.2 *Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD*

Let's turn to how permissivist pragmatism addresses cases like Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD, in which moral costs associated with belief or suspension *themselves*—independently of the costs of relying on a belief—plausibly affect what we ought to believe. Proponents of pragmatic encroachment can say that the fact that holding a belief will (actually or potentially) wrong someone makes it such that more evidence is needed to epistemically justify belief, and that the fact that suspending judgment will (actually or potentially) wrong someone makes it such that less evidence is needed to epistemically justify belief. Some proponents of pragmatic encroachment claim that their view provides the best way to handle these cases since (as discussed in §2.1) it avoids positing a conflict between epistemic and moral norms in these cases.

However, another way to avoid positing a conflict between epistemic and moral norms in these cases is to hold that—like the pair of train cases—Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD are all permissive cases.³⁶ Again, we find it very plausible that all of these cases are permissive: in each case, you have pretty strong but far from infallible evidence, and you do not seem to make an epistemic mistake either by believing or by suspending judgment. We thus disagree with Gendler (2011), who seems to imply that refraining from believing in cases like Wedding constitutes ignoring base rates about the proportion of service-industry workers who are black and thus involves epistemic

³⁴ It might be objected that we have the intuition that one cannot *know* in Train Case 2, and this can only be accommodated by pragmatic encroachers. However, first, experimental philosophy studies (Buckwalter 2010, May *et al.* 2010, Feltz and Zarpentine 2010) have indicated that the effect of high stakes on intuitions about knowledge is weak to negligible. And second, to the extent that this intuition does exist, it can also be explained by a contextualist semantics for knowledge attributions that denies pragmatic encroachment (DeRose 2009: esp. chs. 6-7).

³⁵ Cf. Jackson (2019); Singh (ms.).

³⁶ Cf. also Morton and Paul (2018)'s argument that the case on which PhD is based is permissive.

irrationality. While base rates should be encoded in Andrew's credence,³⁷ having a rational high credence while also suspending judgment does not constitute ignoring base rates in any good sense. Hence, the base rate information does not epistemically require Andrew to outright believe that John is a waiter.³⁸

If Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD are permissive cases, our permissivist-pragmatist view applies straightforwardly. In Wedding and Wine Stain, belief is epistemically permitted but morally prohibited, whereas suspension of judgment is the only attitude both epistemically and morally permitted; hence, one all-things-considered ought to suspend judgment. In PhD, belief is epistemically permitted but morally required, whereas suspension of judgment is epistemically permitted but morally prohibited; hence, one all-things-considered ought to believe. Notably, in each case, there is an option that is both epistemically permitted and morally permitted (or required). Consequently, we can avoid a conflict between epistemic and moral norms in these cases without appealing to pragmatic encroachment.

Whether the more specific personal psychological threshold model developed in §3.3 can be applied in these cases may depend on whether beliefs can morally wrong only when false (Schroeder 2018, 2021) or even when true (Basu 2019b, Fabre 2022). If beliefs can wrong only when false, then the risk of doxastic wronging can affect what one ought to believe by shifting the personal psychological threshold one all-things-considered ought to adopt. But if beliefs can wrong even when true, such beliefs are plausibly morally impermissible *no matter how much* evidence one has. Then, it may be misleading to say that one should raise one's personal psychological threshold in such a case: rather, one shouldn't believe no matter how much evidence one has.

However, the permissivist pragmatist might reply that in cases where a belief wrongs even if it's true, one should simply adjust one's personal psychological threshold to whatever level is required (given one's evidence) to preclude belief. Since a personal psychological threshold is not a threshold for *epistemic* justification, this does not seem obviously unprincipled to us.³⁹ In any case, regardless of whether the personal psychological threshold model applies here, we can still preserve the core of the permissivist-pragmatist view in these cases: namely that when two different doxastic attitudes are both epistemically permissible, moral considerations can come in to determine which of the two one should all-things-considered have.

4.3 Threat

Thus far, we've diagnosed the cases in which practical considerations intuitively bear on what we ought to believe as plausibly epistemically permissive. Yet there are other cases in which practical

³⁷ Though see Johnson King and Babic (2020) for a *credal* permissivist view on which the evidence in this case may not even require an extremely high credence.

³⁸ Some philosophers (such as Gardiner 2018 and Munton 2019) have defended views on which believing that John is a waiter (on the basis of merely statistical evidence) is outright impermissible on purely epistemic grounds. While this is compatible with our view, we don't need to assume it: it's enough that belief is not epistemically *required*, which opens the way for morality to make it all-things-considered impermissible.

³⁹ Admittedly, there might in principle be cases where the personal psychological threshold required to preclude belief exceeds that for epistemically *required* belief. If so, this would be a conflict case. This isn't obvious, though, since some (e.g. Nelson 2010) maintain that no amount of evidence can epistemically require belief.

considerations may bear on what we ought to believe—such as Threat—in which belief is clearly epistemically impermissible.

Since permissivist pragmatism is an account of how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe in epistemically permissive cases, permissivist pragmatists are not committed to accepting or denying any particular view of how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe in cases like Threat in which belief is epistemically prohibited. It's consistent with permissivist pragmatism to hold that there is a genuine normative conflict, which can either be left unresolved, resolved in favor of the practical norms, or resolved in favor of the epistemic norms. But it's also consistent with permissivist pragmatism to adopt a more restricted form of reasons pragmatism on which practical considerations don't constitute reasons for belief when belief is epistemically prohibited. This would preclude conflicts between moral and epistemic norms.

5. Solving the problems for reasons pragmatism (and pragmatic encroachment)

We'll now illustrate how our view overcomes the problems for reasons pragmatism (and, more briefly, those for pragmatic encroachment) that we outlined in §2.

5.1 *Psychological impossibility*

As mentioned in §2.1, those who want to bring out the purported psychological impossibility of believing on the basis of pragmatic considerations usually appeal to cases like being offered \$1,000,000 to believe that $2+2=5$, or that the sky is green. These cases have a striking feature: they involve being offered an incentive to believe something for which one obviously has inadequate evidence. It's quite plausible that practical incentives can't motivate one to believe something that one judges oneself to have inadequate evidence for. And it's tempting to infer from this that practical considerations can never motivate one to believe and thus can never constitute *normative* reasons for belief.

However, this line of thought overlooks the possibility of permissive cases. It is far from obvious that practical considerations can't motivate us to believe (or suspend) in cases where we take the evidence to merely *permit*, but not *require*, believing. In fact, numerous philosophers have argued that we do have voluntary control over our beliefs in such cases.⁴⁰ Suppose, again, that one judges oneself to have pretty strong but not completely infallible evidence for p , and that one judges that either believing or suspending on p would be epistemically permissible. One nevertheless faces the question of whether to believe p or suspend judgment about whether p . We think it's quite plausible that in such a case, one can choose to believe p or suspend judgment about whether p on the basis of practical considerations.

Indeed, this must be so if it's possible to respond to pragmatic and moral considerations in cases like Train Case 2, Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD – and this does indeed seem possible. For instance, it's very natural to say that one can choose to suspend judgment on whether one's alcoholic spouse has relapsed – as opposed to settling on the belief that they have done so. This is particularly natural if one thinks that belief is tightly connected to closing inquiry, and suspension of judgment to

⁴⁰ See Roeber (2019), who also gives references to other philosophers who have defended this view.

keeping inquiry open.⁴¹ One can choose to inquire into the matter more *rather than* making up one's mind and believing now. Similarly, we think that when one already has a pretty high credence that one's friend will complete their PhD, and judges that this is at least epistemically permissible to believe, one can choose to make up one's mind and believe that one's friend will successfully complete their PhD rather than continuing to entertain doubts and inquire further.⁴² In our view, what explains the possibility of doing these things – as compared with cases whereby one is, say, bribed to believe something absurd – is that the former cases are (at least implicitly) recognized by the agent to be permissive.⁴³

5.2 *Conflicts and coordination*

As we've already observed, going permissivist about epistemic norms at least reduces the prevalence of conflicts between epistemic and moral norms. For example, it allows us to say that there is no conflict in cases like Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD. In all these cases, there is a way to satisfy both the epistemic and moral norms.⁴⁴

However, permissivist pragmatism does not deliver *coordination* between epistemic and moral norms in these cases: in all of them, there is an attitude that is epistemically permissible but morally impermissible. For example, in Wedding, believing is epistemically permissible but morally impermissible. How troubling should that be? In our view, not very, given that believing *p* is not epistemically *required*, and that there is an alternative – viz., suspending – that is both morally and epistemically permissible. The phenomenon of an option being *permitted* by one set of norms but prohibited by another is perfectly familiar. It arises whenever one set of norms leaves some choice between multiple options open, and another set of norms narrows that choice down. For example, it occurs whenever there are two morally permissible options, one of which is required of you given prudential considerations – or two prudentially permissible options, one of which is morally required of you. This is simply not as troubling as outright conflict.

What, then, of Basu & Schroeder's argument for coordination? Their key premise is that it's inappropriate to apologize for holding an epistemically justified belief. But if 'justified' means *permissible*, we think this is too strong. It's plausible that it's inappropriate to apologize for holding an epistemically *required* belief. For if a belief is epistemically required, a conscientious follower of the evidence has, in effect, no choice but to hold it. But it's much less plausible that it's (always) inappropriate to apologize for a belief that is merely epistemically *permitted*. For here it's not as if a

⁴¹ See Friedman (2019), Kelp (2021), and Fraser (forthcoming) for views on which belief is closely connected with closing inquiry. Fraser, in particular, holds that resolving to close inquiry (and thereby believe) involves the will.

⁴² Our argument here implies that "transparency" – the claim that the deliberative question of *whether to believe p* reduces to the question *whether p* – is false. When considering *whether p*, one will often be uncertain either of the answer *p* or of the answer *not-p*. In such cases, one still faces the *further* question of whether to believe *p* (or suspend judgment), which has *not* been fully resolved by the considerations bearing on the question of *whether p*.

⁴³ Those who still find it unintuitive that we can decide to believe in (apparently) permissive cases may prefer the idea that we control our beliefs in such cases *via* setting a particular personal psychological threshold. Plausibly, a personal psychological threshold *is* something that one can decide to adopt on the basis of practical considerations.

⁴⁴ Interestingly, Basu and Schroeder themselves implicitly concede that cases of doxastic wronging seem to be epistemically permissive (Basu and Schroeder 2019: 196; Schroeder 2021: 190), which entails that there is no conflict between moral and epistemic norms.

conscientious follower of the evidence has no choice but to hold the belief: it's open to them to suspend, and if the moral considerations favor doing so, that is what they should do.

So far in this subsection, we've been discussing only epistemically permissive cases in which the moral norms require one of the epistemically permitted options (and prohibit the others). But we must acknowledge that our view doesn't demonstrate that all cases will be like this. It does not rule out the possibility of outright conflicts between epistemic and practical (including moral) norms in *non*-permissive cases, or in permissive cases where moral considerations favor an option that is not among the permitted options.

However, we don't think this constitutes a severe problem for our view in particular, for two reasons. First, the onus is on the opponent of our view to provide a case where (a) our view is committed to saying that morality prohibits a doxastic attitude that is categorically epistemically required *and* (b) the verdict that epistemic and practical norms conflict is not intuitively plausible. We submit that such cases have not been forthcoming in the literature so far. Examples such as *Wedding* and *Wine Stain* involve morality prohibiting a doxastic attitude that is epistemically *permitted*, but not required, and so fail to satisfy (a). On the other hand, cases such as *Threat* more plausibly satisfy (a),⁴⁵ but in our view *are* very plausibly viewed as cases of conflict between moral and epistemic norms, and thus don't satisfy (b).

Second, pragmatic encroachment *also* doesn't categorically rule out conflicts between practical (including moral) and epistemic considerations.⁴⁶ This is because there are plausibly limits on how low the threshold for epistemically justified belief can go, even given encroachment. If one's evidence for a proposition is too weak to meet even the lowest possible threshold, even the encroacher will have to say belief is epistemically unjustified no matter how strong the moral reasons are. That opens the way for conflicts. In fact, it's not obvious to us that there are *any* cases where we're committed to a conflict but the pragmatic encroacher isn't. This is because, we suspect, whenever the evidential situation makes it plausible for the pragmatic encroacher to claim that a morally required attitude is epistemically justified given the moral considerations, it likewise makes it plausible for the permissivist to claim that the morally required attitude is *among* the epistemically permitted options (even if it isn't the *only* epistemically permitted one). Thus, this purported advantage of pragmatic encroachment over reasons pragmatism has been neutralized.

5.3 *Interaction*

Next, let's turn to the closely related issue of how epistemic and practical considerations interact (or don't). Recall that "interactionist pragmatists" hold that epistemic and practical reasons combine to produce verdicts about what one all-things-considered ought to believe, while "separatist pragmatists" hold that they do not. Both views have their problems: interactionist pragmatists face the difficult task of explaining how seemingly incommensurable considerations weigh against one another, while separatist pragmatists fail to issue clear guidance about what one ought to believe.

⁴⁵ Though this still isn't obvious. Perhaps in light of your inability to believe that $2+2=5$ given how obviously ill-supported by the evidence this is, morality doesn't require it of you.

⁴⁶ Cf. Traldi (forthcoming).

With permissivism on the table, a *strict* separatist view, on which epistemic and practical considerations *never* interact to produce all-things-considered verdicts, becomes implausible. Suppose that two doxastic attitudes are each epistemically permitted, but only one is morally permitted.⁴⁷ It's incredibly natural to say that you all-things-considered ought to have the attitude that is both epistemically and morally permitted. Similarly, if two doxastic attitudes are both morally permitted but only one is epistemically permitted, it's incredibly natural to say that you all-things-considered ought to have the attitude that is both epistemically and morally permitted. Thus, there are at least some verdicts about what one all-things-considered ought to believe. Moreover, there's no mystery about how the moral and epistemic considerations combine to produce these all-things-considered (ATC) verdicts. We can map the way they do so, on our view as specified so far:

	<i>Morally prohibited</i>	<i>(Merely) morally permitted</i>	<i>Morally required</i>
<i>Epistemically prohibited</i>	ATC prohibited	ATC prohibited	??
<i>(Merely) epistemically permitted</i>	ATC prohibited	ATC permitted or required ⁴⁸	ATC required
<i>Epistemically required</i>	??	ATC required	ATC required

The highlighted boxes are those that open up only once we recognize the possibility of (epistemically and/or morally) permissive cases. If we ignore this possibility, it looks like we only get clear all-things-considered verdicts when the moral and epistemic considerations happen to yield the same verdict. Given this, one might hold that moral and epistemic considerations never interact in any significant way: they either happen to concur, or conflict. But once we acknowledge the possibility of permissive cases, we get more substantive interaction, whereby the moral and epistemic statuses of a belief are not the same, yet the doxastic state has an all-things-considered status. This suffices, we think, to render strict separatist pragmatism very unattractive.

Of course, we're still left with the question of what to say in the boxes marked with '??'. These are cases in which there are conflicts between epistemic and moral norms. We take no stand about whether or how epistemic and moral norms interact in such cases. One of us is inclined to embrace a kind of *restricted* separatism which says that there is no all-things-considered verdict about these cases – while noting that such cases will be significantly rarer on our view than on a non-permissivist view, and that moral and epistemic considerations *do* interact in permissive cases. (Such a view is intermediate between the separatist and interactionist views.) But one could also marry our account with one of the existing accounts of how epistemic and practical considerations weigh against each other (Reisner 2008, Howard 2020), or with a view on which, in conflict cases, practical considerations always take precedence, or epistemic considerations always take precedence. In any case, attention to permissive cases at least opens up a way for epistemic and practical considerations to interact in a non-mysterious, utterly unproblematic way in a range of cases.

⁴⁷ In this section, we'll speak specifically of *moral*—rather than generically of *practical*—prohibitions, permissions, and requirements. But everything we say likewise applies to the interaction between prudential and epistemic norms.

⁴⁸ More precisely: all-things-considered required if the attitude is the *only* one that is both epistemically and morally permitted; all-things-considered permitted if there are other attitudes that are both epistemically and morally permitted.

5.4 *The problems for pragmatic encroachment*

While our view is in a good sense a version of reasons pragmatism, it's *not* a version of pragmatic encroachment, since it denies that practical factors affect epistemic justification. Thus, it avoids both of the problems raised for pragmatic encroachment. First, there's no need to delimit *which* practical considerations can make a difference to what one ought to believe. For while it doesn't seem like bribes, threats, or Pascalian considerations are the right kind of thing to make a difference to *epistemic* justification, it's far less obvious that they can't (in principle) make a difference to what one *all-things-considered* ought to believe. Thus, we can allow that, at least within the range of epistemically permissible options, *any* kind of practical considerations can help to determine which of the epistemically permissible options one all-things-considered ought to adopt. Second, we don't need to explain why the wrongness of a belief *itself*, independently of the costs of relying on it, makes a difference to *epistemic* justification since we deny that practical considerations affect epistemic justification. Rather, we say that the wrongness of a belief itself makes a difference to what one all-things-considered ought to believe, within the range of epistemically permitted options.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we've articulated and defended a new account of how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe that combines reasons pragmatism with intrapersonal, synchronic permissivism about outright belief. In addition to ameliorating classic problems for simple, impermissivist versions of reasons pragmatism, permissivist pragmatism nicely handles cases traditionally used to motivate pragmatic encroachment while avoiding the central challenges it faces. Thus, we hope to have shown that permissivist pragmatism is a compelling alternative to pragmatic encroachment, deserving serious philosophical consideration.

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