BOOK SYMPOSIUM

A range of replies

Daniel Whiting[1]

Abstract
This is a reply by the author to the contributors to a symposium on the book, *The Range of Reasons* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

1 Introduction

It is a great pleasure—and a daunting prospect!—that philosophers from whom I have learned so much about the topics in and at the intersection of ethics and epistemology that my book, *The Range of Reasons*, concerns should engage so thoughtfully with what I try to do there.[1] I am grateful to them for their contributions and to Davide Fassio, another philosopher whose work has informed my own, for organizing the symposium.[2]

As is customary, I will focus on addressing the more critical comments. Even with the focus so restricted, there is not space here to respond to all of the many points the contributors raise. My hope—perhaps, expectation—is that the exchange will continue elsewhere.

2 Reply to Field

Claire Field focuses on my account of rational belief. According to it, it is rational for a person to believe a proposition for some reason if and only if that proposition is true in all nearby epistemically possible worlds in which that reason obtains (§9).[3] An epistemically possible world is one that the person cannot rule out a priori

---

[1] All section references are to *The Range of Reasons* (2022).
[2] Thanks also to colleagues at Southampton for helpful comments on this material.
[3] Nearness is understood in the Lewisian (1979) sense.

✉ Daniel Whiting
  d.whiting@soton.ac.uk

[1] Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Southampton, Southampton SO171BJ, UK

(§5.6).[4] So, what it is rational for a person to believe partly depends on what is a priori for them.

As Field notes, I operate with a person-relative conception of aprioricity. The textbook definition is that a proposition is a priori just in case it is knowable independently of experience. But what is knowable in this way for one person might be unknowable in that way for another who differs in their capacities for reasoning, reflection, and the like.

Field asks "how, exactly" aprioricity might vary according to a person's capacities (2024: 5). This is a good question. But I am inclined to leave it open. My aim in the book is not to give an account of the a priori but to take advantage of that familiar entry in the philosophical vocabulary to give an account of rational belief (among other things). In general, an analysis might be illuminating in the absence of further analyses of its terms. That said, Field demonstrates that different proposals as to how aprioricity tracks capacities—and of how those capacities are individuated—will lead to different conceptions of what is epistemically possible. This in turn will lead to different conceptions of rationality that differ substantively in their verdicts on cases.

It is, however, a recurring theme of the book that there are multiple standards to which belief is subject, even multiple standards with equal claim to the title "rationality" (§9.10). What I offer is a way of articulating those standards in a way that reveals how they relate to reasons of various sorts and, thereby, to one another. In this spirit, one might think of my account of rational belief as a schema into which different conceptions of the a priori and its relation to a person's capacities might be plugged. The interesting issue is then which of those standards matter in which contexts of evaluation. In the same spirit, I do not object to a notion of aprioricity, hence, of epistemic possibility, that is non-person-relative, perhaps understood in terms of the capacities for reflection and reasoning of an idealized subject. That would simply deliver a more idealized—hence, more demanding—conception of rationality.

So, while my account of rational belief is to some extent underdetermined in the way Field draws out, I take this to be a virtue, not a vice. I turn now to a second issue Field raises.

Another way to state my proposal is that it is rational for a person to believe a proposition for some reason if and only if it is *right* for them to do so in the nearby epistemically possible worlds in which that reason obtains. This assumes (§7.3):

> TRUTH Necessarily, it is right for a person to believe a proposition if and only if that proposition is true.

Suppose that TRUTH is a priori for me and my readers. (Lucky us!) In that case, it is rational for us to believe TRUTH (§9.6) After all, if TRUTH is a priori, it is true in all epistemically possible worlds, hence, true in all such worlds *nearby*. But consider Alex, for whom TRUTH is not a priori. It might not be rational for Alex to

---

[4] This corresponds to what Chalmers (2011) calls *deep* epistemic possibility.

believe it. Indeed, given the testimony of their expert epistemologist friend, it might instead be rational for Alex to believe:

> UTILITY Necessarily, it is right for a person to believe a proposition if and only if that proposition maximizes epistemic utility.

How, on my account, might this bear on what it is rational for Alex to believe? More generally, Field asks, if it is rational for a person to believe a falsehood about what it is right for them to believe, might that make a difference to what else it is rational for them to believe?

Field anticipates that, on my view, "Being in the grip of a false view can change what it is rational for you to believe" (2024: 8). As I will now explain, that is not an implication of the view as it stands.

Suppose that, given the scientific consensus, the following proposition is true for Alex in all nearby epistemically possible worlds:

> CLIMATE Human activity is responsible for climate change.

However, Alex knows that, if they believe CLIMATE, it will prevent them from convincing an oil-industry-sponsored body to fund their research into the semantics of conditionals. So, in all nearby epistemically possible worlds, believing CLIMATE will not maximize the number of true beliefs Alex forms. In this situation, my account predicts that it is rational for Alex to believe CLIMATE, notwithstanding that it is rational for them to believe UTILITY, hence, notwithstanding that it is rational for Alex to believe that it is wrong for them to believe CLIMATE.

On my account, whether a belief is rational for a person depends on whether in nearby worlds that belief has what is *actually* a right-making feature, not what they believe to be a right-making feature. Since what it is actually right to believe is what is true, not what maximizes utility, then whether it is rational for a person to believe a proposition depends on whether it is true in nearby worlds, not whether it maximizes utility in such worlds. So, false beliefs about what it is right to believe, even when rational, do not change what it is rational to believe.[5]

This might seem an unhappy verdict. Surely, it is a problem if a person believes a proposition when, by their own lights, it is wrong for them to do so.

I agree that it is nonideal for a person to be fragmented or at odds with themselves. But the standard that delivers this verdict is not one of rationality, as I use the term.[6] Instead, it is a standard of *unity* (§10).[7] That is not to deny that the two standards stand in explanatory relations to one another. The point is just that, from the fact that a person falls short by one standard, one cannot infer that they do not meet another, at least not without further ado.

A recurring theme in this response is pluralism about the norms to which belief—and other attitudes—are subject. I hope that this reassures Field that my

---

[5] I do, however, indicate ways of developing the framework to capture the idea that what it is rational for a person to do depends on their normative beliefs (§6.7.2).

[6] Here, I agree with Field (2021).

[7] Alternatively, it is a standard of structural, not substantive, rationality (Scanlon 2007).

approach to rationality falls on the "admirable flexibility," not "distorting," end of the scale (2024, 8).

3 Reply to Kearns and Star

I defend a modal account of reasons (§4.2), which I reach via an interim account of reasons in terms of evidence (§2.6), one which is similar to but different from an account Stephen Kearns and Daniel Star have developed in a series of influential papers (beginning 2008; 2009). In their remarks, Kearns and Star first assess the case for my evidence-based account over theirs. Next, they challenge its modal successor.

I agree—again, provisionally—with Kearns and Star that some consideration is a reason for a person to do something if and only if it is evidence of some normatively relevant truth. Their (2008) suggestion is that the relevant truth concerns what the person ought to do. My alternative is that it concerns a respect in which it is right for the person to do something. The more general divide concerns whether the operative normative notion is *overall* or *contributory*. I argue (following Brunero, 2009) that there are cases in which there is a reason for a person to do something which is not evidence for an overall assessment (§2.5.2). Consider:

> A group of friends is deciding which film to watch. Blanca will enjoy a certain film. That is a reason for the group to pick it. However, whenever Blanca enjoys a film, everyone else suffers more. So, that Blanca will enjoy the film is not evidence that the group ought to pick it, but evidence that the group ought not to do so.

One reply Kearns and Star offer is to point out that, relative to some subset of the information about this case, one that excludes the correlation between Blanca's positive reaction and the others' negative reactions, that Blanca will enjoy the film is evidence that the group ought to pick it. So, on their view, it is a reason for the group to pick it.

However, the challenge is that, given *all* the information about the case as presented, there is a reason for the group to pick the film, a consideration that justifies doing so and is apt to guide deliberations as to whether to do so. The view of reasons as evidence that a person ought to do something predicts that, given that information, there is no such reason. That it predicts a reason given some *other* information does not speak to this.

Kearns and Star's alternative response is that the fact that Blanca will enjoy the film is evidence that the group ought to pick it *and* evidence that the group ought not to pick it. That is not the (problematic) idea that some consideration can be evidence for and against the truth of the same proposition. If there are dilemmas that a person ought not to do something does not entail that it is not the case that they ought to do it.

This point is well-taken, but I can revise the case so that it no longer applies:

A group of friends is deciding which film to watch. Blanca will enjoy a certain film. That is a reason for the group to pick it. However, on every previous occasion on which Blanca enjoyed a film, it turned out not to have been the case that the group ought to have picked it. Given this inductive evidence, that Blanca will enjoy the film on this occasion is evidence that it is not the case that the group ought to pick the film, hence, not evidence that the group ought to do so.

Reflecting their recent move toward a more liberal version of the evidence-based approach, Kearns and Star also object that my interim account of reasons as evidence of right-making features is unduly restrictive. Why not, for example, allow that evidence that doing something is *good* is a reason for doing it? More generally, why not allow that any evidence concerning the deontic or evaluative status of an act or attitude is a reason? After all, Kearns and Star add, normative evidence in general plays the roles characteristic of reasons, such as that of guiding deliberation and justifying its conclusions.

It is not clear that evidence of goodness really does play the guiding role, at least with respect to attitudes (Kelly, 2002; Shah, 2006). That it would help Alex to secure funding is evidence that it would be good to believe CLIMATE. But Alex cannot believe CLIMATE on that basis.

This is controversial. A more irenic observation is that my account allows that normative evidence in general is a reason. If Nishi tells Miyuki that she ought to go to the cinema, this is evidence that Miyuki ought to go. In many cases, it is also evidence of a respect in which it is right for Miyuki to go, say, that it is beneficial. So, on my interim account, the testimony is a reason for Miyuki to go (§2.6.4). More generally, evidence that doing something has some deontic or evaluative status is typically evidence of some respect in which it is (not) right. So, it is a reason for (against) it. My interim account is, then, more capacious than Kearns and Star suggest.

Another choice-point for proponents of evidence-based accounts of reasons is whether the relevant normative notion—in my case, that of a respect in which it is right to do something—figures *de re* or *de dicto*. I suggest that it figures *de re*. What makes a consideration a reason is not that it is evidence that doing something is right in some way, so conceived, but that there is some way in which doing something is right, say, that it is beneficial, and the consideration is evidence of that. One argument I give for this appeals to the idea of a virtuous, sophisticated agent—an agent who attends to reasons *as* characterized by the correct theory of reasons (§2.5.4). On a *de dicto* account, the virtuous, sophisticated agent attends to indications that their options are right in some way, so conceived. But a concern for doing what is right in some way—or for the normative status of one's options more generally—is not virtuous but "fetishistic" (cp. Smith, 1994). This counts against the *de dicto* version.

Kearns and Star do not accept the fetishism charge. Rather than substantiate it, I will draw attention to another point, which they overlook. On a *de re* account, the virtuous, sophisticated agent attends to indications that their options are beneficial, keep promises, and the like, so conceived. A concern for beneficence, fidelity, and the like is virtuous. So, even if attending to indications of ways in which options are

right, so conceived, is consistent with virtue, it is not necessary for it. That suggests that being an indication of some way in which an option is right, so conceived, is not necessary for being the thing to which the virtuous attends—namely, a reason. This point holds independently of the one about fetishism.

Again, the evidence-based account of reasons is not the destination but an important stop en route to the modal account. According to it, a consideration is a justifying reason to do something if and only if, in all possible worlds in which that consideration obtains, some way in which doing it is right obtains. A consideration is a demanding reason to do something if and only if, in some possible worlds in which that consideration obtains, some way in which not doing it is wrong obtains.[8] Kearns and Star present a challenge to this that rests on the assumption that respects in which it is wrong not to act can be so contingently.

Suppose that Miyuki promised to meet Nishi and gets a text according to which he is at the cinema. In this world, that going keeps a promise is a respect in which it is wrong for Miyuki not to go to the cinema. But there are nearby worlds in which Miyuki receives the text but cannot go to the cinema. In such worlds, that going keeps a promise is not a respect in which it is wrong for Miyuki not to go. On my account, assuming contingency, the text is a reason that demands Miyuki go to the cinema. This might seem an acceptable verdict, but, as Kearns and Star stress, the explanation is surely wrong. If the text is a reason for Miyuki to go, it is not because failing to do so could easily break a promise *that she cannot keep*.

This is just an example, but it illustrates a problem that Kearns and Star capture as follows:

> Whiting's modal account tracks actual respects in which it is wrong to act across nearby worlds, but it does *not* track whether these respects remain respects in which it is wrong to act in these nearby worlds (2024, 11).

I did not explicitly address whether the respects in which acting is right that figure in my account are contingently so, and I suspect that some of my examples suggested that I take them to be. However, my position is that the ways in which it is right to act that my analyses refer to are necessarily so.[9] This was implicit in the way I introduce the idea of right-making features as what first-order, substantive theorizing seeks to identify (§2.5.1). In view of this, I can reformulate the official definition of a demanding reason (§4.2.3):

> Necessarily, a fact, F, is a demanding reason for a person to do something if and only if:
>
> 1. *in all metaphysically possible worlds,* W is a respect in which it is wrong for them not to do it;
> 2. in some nearby metaphysically possible world in which F obtains, W obtains.

---

[8] On the justifying/demanding distinction, see §3.

[9] This assumes that right-making features are not holistic. On this point, I am in good company (Star 2015, 31–35).

This is not very different from the fix that Kearns and Star themselves propose. Does the addition of the italicized clause make the account *de dicto*? Not in the way I object to. The modal relation—the successor to the evidential relation—still holds between the reason and the way in which the omission is wrong, not between the reason and its being the case that the omission is wrong, so conceived.[10]

Finally, Kearns and Star object to my analysis of *ought* (§3.6.2), or, rather, an implication of that analysis in combination with the modal account of reasons. My suggestion is that a person ought to do something just in case there is a demanding reason for them to do it and none as weighty for them not to do it. Suppose that the right-hand side of this biconditional is satisfied. Suppose also that there is only one demanding reason. It follows, given my account of reasons, that there is a nearby world in which the reason obtains and not doing the thing is wrong in some respect. But that respect need not obtain in the actual world. In that case, the person ought to do something, even though it is not actually wrong in any way for them to fail to do it. According to Kearns and Star, this consequence is "at the very least, odd" (2024, 15).

There need be no oddness here. As I use the terms, what it is right (fitting, correct) for a person to do and what they ought to do are different normative statuses.[11] It is instructive here to return to rationality. It is commonplace that what it is right for a person to do and what it is rational for them to do can come apart. Likewise, what it is right for a person to do and what they are praiseworthy for doing can come apart. Here again, then, a commitment to pluralism plays a role.

I take these disagreements with Kearns and Star to be internal. While I criticize their version of the evidence-based account of reasons, and while I present my modal account as a successor, our approaches are kindred and have more in common with one another than with, say, explanation-based approaches. Of course, family disputes can be the most difficult to resolve!

4 Reply to Littlejohn

In his contribution, Clayton Littlejohn presents three challenges—corresponding to each of the different senses of "ought" and its cognates that I discuss in the book. His first concern relates to the *objective* ought, which takes account of all the facts without restriction. The only thing that is relevant to the determination of what a person ought in this sense to do, Littlejohn suggests, is the actual respects in which it is right or wrong to do it. Other considerations, which I call reasons, that correlate with right- or wrong-making features across modal space do not matter.

To illustrate, suppose that Lily has the opportunity to accept at no cost 999 tickets in a lottery with 1000 tickets (§4.2.1). If one of Lily's tickets is drawn, no one is harmed. If the remaining ticket is drawn, someone is harmed. The lottery only goes ahead if Lily plays. As it happens, one of Lily's tickets will win. So, accepting the

---

[10] This speaks to some of the concerns Kearns and Star raise regarding the weights of reasons.

[11] In fact, I take "ought" itself to pick out different statuses in different contexts (§4.3).

ticket is harmless. However, there are nearby worlds in which the lottery is set up in the same way, and ticket 999 is drawn; hence, someone is harmed. On my account, the facts about the lottery do not justify Lily in playing. Instead, those facts demand that she not play. So, objectively, Lily ought not to play.

According to Littlejohn, "it is not obvious […] that this verdict is correct" (2023: 4). After all, it is stipulated that playing is harmless. Surely, then, from the objective perspective, Lily may play. The thought here is that objective verdicts are determined only by what is actually the case, not by what could be the case.

To some extent, this disagreement is terminological. I agree that there is a status that tracks only what right-making features actually obtain—my word for that status is, precisely, "rightness." However, I hold that there is another status determined by what right-making features obtain in worlds nearby the actual world, which I express in terms of what a person objectively ought to do. If those terms are a better fit for (what I call) rightness, I can use others.

Moreover, Littlejohn does not claim that the notion of the objective ought—as I construe it—is somehow incoherent. Instead, he denies that it is important, presumably, in that it does not play a significant role in our normative thought and talk. I am not sure about that. One suggestion I make (following Ross, 1930) is that the notion figures in retrospection (§4.3). If Lily plays the lottery and one her tickets is drawn, she might think to herself in full awareness of the facts, "It was harmless to do so, but I ought not to have accepted the tickets—I could easily have harmed someone."

If it is true that the obtaining or otherwise of modal relations between facts and ways in which it is right to act do not matter to objective assessments, as Littlejohn suggests, this does not threaten the general framework that I advance. Those modal relations will still be important when it comes to assessments that are less than fully objective—those relativized to what a person knows, for example, or to what they believe. I turn to them now.

It is commonplace to distinguish the objective ought and the deliberative ought, and to do so by appeal to three-option cases, such as (from Regan, 1980):

> 10 miners are trapped in one of two mineshafts, A and B. The floodwater is rising. Blocking A will save everyone in it but kill everyone in B. Blocking B will do the opposite. Partially blocking A and B will save nine and kill one, whichever shaft they are in. Martha knows all of this. What Martha does not know is that the miners are in A.

Objectively, Martha ought to block A. But, given only what she knows, Martha ought to partially block A and B. If she deliberates as to what to do, that is the conclusion to draw.

I suggest (tentatively) that the deliberative ought is determined by the objective reasons a person *possesses*. To possess a reason, a person must know it.[12] In addition, the reason must correlate with right- or wrong-making features in nearby metaphysically possible worlds *and* in nearby epistemically possible worlds. This ensures

---

[12] They must also be able to respond to it (§5.4). I set that aside here.

that what is known is a reason from the perspective of the world *and* from the perspective of the person (§5.5).

So, on my account, if Martha deliberatively ought to partially flood, she must possess a demanding reason to do so. Littlejohn asks what that could be. One candidate is the known fact that partially flooding will save nine. In nearby worlds in which this is the case, not partially flooding is wrong in a respect, namely, it allows people to die.[13] Of course, in nearby worlds, partially flooding is also wrong in a respect, namely, that it kills a person. But, if killing one is worse than allowing nine to die, the reason to partially flood is weightier than the reason not to do so. So, Martha ought to do that.

I say more about this in the book (§5.8). My aim here is just to reassure that my accounts of possessed reasons and of their relation to the deliberative ought has application to three-option cases. I turn now to Littlejohn's final concern, which relates to my account of what a person *rationally* ought to do.

Littlejohn worries that the account of rationality I defend clashes with a norm of *dominance*, according to which it is irrational to choose a dominated option when an alternative is available. One option dominates another if it is at least as good in every possible world and better in some.[14]

Consider a simplified version of Littlejohn's example: It is rational for me to believe that Clayton drinks tea every day. So, given my account of rational belief, Clayton drinks tea every day in all nearby epistemically possible worlds. I have the chance to take one of two bets for a penny:

(a)   Clayton drinks tea on Monday.
(b)   Clayton drinks tea on Monday and Tuesday.

If I win, I receive £10. Otherwise, I lose the penny.

Option (a) dominates (b). All worlds in which betting (a) loses are ones in which betting (b) loses, but the converse does not hold. So, according to the dominance norm, it is irrational to choose (b) over (a). Littlejohn argues that my account will not deliver that result, since the worlds in which either bet loses are remote. Hence, they do not make a difference to what reasons there are in this case. Hence, they do not make a difference to what it is rational to do.

I agree that my view does not deliver dominance. But I do not aim in the book to vindicate every putative principle of rationality.[15] Nevertheless, I can accept a revised version of the norm by introducing a weaker conception of dominance: One option *safely* dominates another if it is at least as good in every *nearby* possible world and better in some. A norm of dominance so understood strikes me as plausible. If things would have to be very different—if the laws that govern the world would have to be violated, say, or large expanses of it altered—for (a) and (b) to differ in their choiceworthiness, it is not irrational to be indifferent between them.

---

[13] I make first-order assumptions here for illustrative purposes only.

[14] More carefully, this corresponds to *weak* dominance (Pettigrew 2023).

[15] Indeed, as Field notes, I explicitly reject some popular candidates (§9.5.2).

Littlejohn's positive proposal is that accounts of what a person deliberatively or rationally ought to do need to appeal to *credences*. In the book, I indicate briefly how the framework I defend might be developed to accommodate the role of credences (§6.7.1). Roughly, I suggest that possessed or subjective reasons might be provided by propositions in which a person gives credence.[16] I analyze those reasons in the usual (modal) way with the addition that the degree of credence modifies the weight of the reason.

It remains to be seen whether this extension delivers the results Littlejohn seeks. The point for now is that the framework I offer is available to someone who thinks that things other than outright beliefs bear on the question of what to do in situations of uncertainty.

5 Reply to McCormick

When I discuss the norms governing belief, I restrict my focus to those that are *epistemic*.[17] The epistemic contrasts with the moral, prudential, etc. I think of these domains as individuated by the concerns fundamental to them (§1.4). What fundamentally matters in the epistemic domain is truth, in contrast to autonomy, say, or self-interest. I take no stand in the book on whether belief is subject to non-epistemic norms. While I defend structural parallels between the epistemic and non-epistemic domains—parallels in how notions of reasons, rightness, rationality, and the like relate in each case—I do not consider how moral or prudential concerns might bear on the question of what to believe.[18]

The main thrust of Miriam McCormick's contribution is to question this restricted focus. As McCormick puts it, "My worry is that treating practical and epistemic rationality as completely distinct leads to an impoverished view of what it is to be a believer" (2024, 1). I will discuss specific instances of this worry below, but here is an initial response. *The Range of Reasons* does not aspire at completeness. As I remark in a different context, "I try to do a lot in this book, but I do not try to do everything" (7). I agree with McCormick that attending to other dimensions of assessment for belief—or ways of managing belief—will yield a more comprehensive account of intellectual life. The ideas and arguments that I develop are not in competition with such a project;[19] indeed, they should contribute to it.

To appreciate this, consider a point that McCormick makes in passing regarding the conditions under which it is right to act. I remain neutral on the

---

[16] In the case of possessed reasons, the credence would have to be understood as a kind of probabilistic knowledge (Moss 2018).

[17] I also restrict my attention to belief as opposed to other attitudes—for example, suspension, faith, or supposition—that one might think of as subject to epistemic—or, for that matter, non-epistemic—assessment.

[18] I do briefly indicate how my account might explain *pragmatic encroachment* on knowledge and rational belief (§§8.4, 9.5).

[19] A starting-point for which is surely (McCormick 2015).

substantive, first-order issue of what they are. However, McCormick wonders whether my account "would tolerate a first order ethics of pure egoism" (2024, 3). It would.

Suppose that the only respect in which it is right for a person to act is that it serves their interests. By plugging this into my theory of reasons for acting, I get the result that a consideration is a reason for a person to act only if so acting serves their interests in some way in some nearby worlds in which it obtains. Now suppose that beliefs are subject to an ethical standard of rightness, of which egoism is true. By plugging this into my theory of reasons for believing, I get the result that a consideration is a reason for a person to believe a proposition only if believing it serves their interests in some way in some nearby worlds in which it obtains. If these results are implausible, that is because egoism is implausible. The point for now is that egoism can be inserted into the framework I advance. More generally, that framework allows for—and in combination with suitable first-order commitments generates—a range of non-epistemic norms governing belief (§7.3).

I turn now to McCormick's comments on my treatment of Moorean propositions (§9.9), such as:

> MOORE I believe that it is raining, but it is not raining.

It is orthodoxy that it is irrational for a person to believe propositions of this form (de Almeida, 2001; Fernández, 2005). A consequence of my theory of rational belief is that it need not be. That is not to deny that it is problematic in some way to do so, but, I suggest, the standard that delivers this verdict is, once again, one of unity, not rationality.

I will not explain here why my account allows believing MOORE to be rational. What matters for present purposes is that McCormick agrees. However, she adds, "When we deem such beliefs rational […] part of what is doing the rationalizing are non-epistemic considerations" (2024, 4).

I do not deny this. Indeed, it is consistent with the pluralistic outlook of the book that there are further dimensions of assessment relevant to Moorean proposition than those I explore. In some cases, prudential considerations—in addition to or instead of epistemic ones—might make it prudentially rational for a person to believe MOORE (or to take actions that result in doing so). In others, there might be non-rationalizing explanations that are nonetheless exculpating. My treatment of belief in Moorean propositions is partial, but not, so far as I can tell, in a way that is distorting.

McCormick develops her concerns in relation to my account of subjective reasons for believing, roughly, those things that a person believes or experiences that determine what else it is rational for them to believe (§9.3). On my account, McCormick says, a subjective reason for believing "relates to the likelihood of the proposition being true":

> But once in the realm of subjective reasons, how can he dictate what will make it seem, from the subject's perspective what is more likely to be true? And how can bracket all the 'non-epistemic' considerations that might show up in deliberation? (2024, 5)

There are several things to say here. First, my proposal is that reasons to believe a proposition are considerations that safely indicate its truth, which is a matter of their correlating with its truth in nearby possible worlds. On this account, it is neither necessary nor sufficient for a consideration to be an epistemic reason that it make the truth of a proposition likely (§§9.7–9.8).

Second, whether a person has a subjective reason to believe a proposition, hence, whether it is rational for them to do so, does not depend on whether it seems from their perspective that the proposition is true in nearby worlds in which that reason obtains (*de dicto*). Instead, it depends on whether, relative to their perspective, the proposition is in fact true in nearby worlds (*de re*).

The third point bears on the main theme of McCormick's contribution. When the focus is on rational belief, rather than rational action, I "bracket" the non-epistemic considerations that might otherwise figure in deliberation by stipulation—just by deciding that my attention is only on those reasons for believing that stand in the relevant relation to the truth of a proposition, as opposed to, say, self-interest. Again, however, I do not deny that non-epistemic considerations can serve as premises or play some other role in deliberation as to what to believe. That is just not the focus—instead, I focus on developing an account of epistemic rationality that has non-trivial implications for (among other things) principles of closure, level-bridging principles, Moorean propositions, the lottery paradox, and the preface paradox (§§9.5–9.9).

McCormick's underlying concern, I think, is not so much that my account of the norms governing belief is incomplete, but that it does not reveal them to be *authoritative*.[20] While I insist that there are various standards to which belief is subject, what unites them is their relation to the more fundamental standard of rightness, namely, TRUTH. But, McCormick says, standards of rightness—fittingness or correctness—need not have "substantial normative force" (2024, 5). The objection is that, by treating epistemic norms in isolation from non-epistemic concerns, I do not reveal them to be anything other than formal, akin to rules of etiquette.

If there is a problem here, it is not with the privileged explanatory role I accord to rightness. The same issues arise with respect to norms expressed in other terms (§1.1). According to etiquette, a person *ought* to remove their hat for meals. According to etiquette, that a person enters the room is a *reason* to stand. Does this matter? Are these things to take seriously?

This might only compound McCormick's worry. Unless I explain how epistemic norms of any sort engage with non-epistemic concerns, I do not demonstrate their authority.

It remains to be seen whether epistemic normativity needs vindication from without, as it were, rather than within. This is an issue I explicitly set it aside (§1.1). That is not because I consider it a non-issue. It is only that vindicating the authority of epistemic norms—or, for that matter, moral or prudential norms—is a different project to the one I undertake in the book.[21] Again, the important thing is that the

---

[20] In the sense discussed in, for example, McPherson (2018).

[21] A theorist who denies that epistemic normativity is authoritative might still accept what I offer as an account of the formal structure of the domain.

project I do pursue is compatible with the one that McCormick is most interested in. Indeed, insofar as the framework I develop is designed to hold across different domains of normativity—epistemic, moral, prudential, etc.—and across different items of assessment—beliefs, actions, feelings, etc.—it is especially conducive to that project.

6 Conclusion

Three related themes run through these replies. First, there is a plurality of norms that vary by what they govern (action, belief, feeling, etc.), by the domain in which they operate (epistemic, moral, prudential, etc.), by their perspective-dependence (not at all, totally, etc.), and so on. Second, what I offer in the book is first and foremost a framework for articulating those norms and understanding the relations in which they stand to one another. Third, I do not pretend that that framework is complete. On the contrary, I take there to be—and have gestured toward—various ways to supplement or adjust it so as capture norms other than those I had the opportunity—or the strength!—to explore in the book. Once again, I am grateful to the contributors for giving me the chance—forcing me, even—to highlight these themes here.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author declares no competing interests.

References

Brunero, J. (2009). Reasons and evidence one ought. *Ethics, 119*(3), 538–545.

Chalmers, D. (2011). The nature of epistemic space. In A. Egan & B. Weatherson (Eds.), *Epistemic Modality*. Oxford University Press.

de Almeida, C. (2001). What Moore's paradox is about. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 62*(1), 33–58.

Fernández, J. (2005). Self-knowledge, rationality and Moore's paradox. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 71*(3), 533–556.

Field, C. (2021). Giving up the Enkratic principle. *Logos & Episteme, 12*(1), 7–28.

Field, C. (2024). Rational belief, epistemic possibility, and the a priori. *Asian Journal of Philosophy, 3*(5), 1–9.

Kearns, S., & Star, D. (2008). Reasons: Explanations or evidence? *Ethics, 119*(1), 31–56.

Kearns, S., & Star, D. (2009). Reasons as Evidence. In R. Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* (Vol. 4, pp. 215–242). Oxford University Press.

Kearns, S., & Star, D. (2024). A range of reasons. *Asian Journal of Philosophy, 3*(7), 1–16.

Kelly, T. (2002). The rationality of belief and other propositional attitudes. *Philosophical Studies, 110*(2), 163–196.

Lewis, D. (1979). Counterfactual dependence and time's arrow. *Noûs, 13*(4), 455–476.

Littlejohn, C. (2023). The ranges of reasons and creasons. *Asian Journal of Philosophy, 75*(2), 1–10.

McCormick, M. (2015). *Believing against the evidence*. Routledge.

McCormick, M. (2024). Comments on Daniel Whiting's The Range of Reasons. *Asian Journal of Philosophy, 3*(11), 1–6.

McPherson, T. (2018). Authoritatively normative concepts. In R. Shafer-Landau (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* (Vol. 13, pp. 252–277). Oxford University Press.

Moss, S. (2018). *Probabilistic Knowledge*. Oxford University Press.

Pettigrew, R. (2023). Epistemic utility arguments for epistemic norms. In Zalta EN, Nodelman U (eds). *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemic-utility/. Accessed 16 Jan 2024.

Regan, D. (1980). *Utilitarianism and co-operation*. Oxford University Press.

Ross, D. (1930). *The right and the good*. Oxford University Press.

Scanlon, T. M. (2007). Structural irrationality. In G. Brennan, R. Goodin, F. Jackson, & M. Smith (Eds.), *Common Minds* (pp. 84–103). Oxford University Press.

Shah, N. (2006). A new argument for evidentialism. *Philosophical Quarterly, 56*(225), 481–491.

Smith, M. (1994). *The moral problem*. Blackwell.

Star, D. (2015). *Knowing better*. Oxford University Press.

Whiting, D. (2022). *The range of reasons in ethics and epistemology*. Oxford University Press.