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EVIDENTIALISM, TRANSPARENCY, AND COMMITMENTS

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1. Introduction

According to evidentialism, whether one is justified in believing something and whether, consequently, one ought to believe it, depends on one's evidence and on one's evidence alone. In this paper, I discuss two ideas that point into different directions when assessing evidentialism. According to the first idea, advanced amongst others by Sarah Stroud (2006), non-epistemic commitments, like the commitments inherent in friendship, play a legitimate role in the formation of our beliefs. The same evidence regarding a person's character will be handled differently, depending on whether the other person is one's friend. This influence of friendship, when legitimate, is not captured by differences in evidence. Thus, evidentialism, which reserves the exclusive right to influence justification for evidence, must be false. The second observation, advocated by Nishi Shah (2006), appeals to transparency: an agent can only find out about whether he or she should believe that p by considering p. Thus, only what relates to p, i.e. only what is evidence for or against believing p, will settle the agent's question whether he or she should and, consequently, is justified in believing that p. In this way, the only legitimate influence on belief-formation pertains to an agent's evidence, thus vindicating the evidentialist position.

I will argue that both ideas, the idea that commitments influence rational beliefs and the idea that all reasons for belief are truth-related, are correct. This will affect our understanding of evidentialism, which, in one sense, is wrong, as it neglects the influence of non-epistemic commitments, and which, in another sense, is right, as our focus in belief-formation regarding p will have to be on considerations relevant for the truth of p. The way I develop these points will make it easy to see that a consistent view emerges.

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The basic idea for maintaining consistency is to separate two levels of belief formation. Our reasons are evidential but the way we deal with these reasons is influenced, amongst other things, by our commitments.

After outlining evidentialism, I engage with Stroud's idea. I will be somewhat critical of how Stroud presents her point. However, after only slight modifications, I will endorse her general outlook. I then turn to transparency. Shah's argument, I will argue, is unconvincing. However, like in the section on Stroud, I endorse, for different reasons, the general outlook his argument aimed to establish. In the remainder of the paper, I will outline the ramifications of our discussion for what is and what is not right about evidentialism and I will discuss whatever opposing view may still be found. I start by distinguishing my concern about evidentialism from how it is being discussed in the current philosophical literature.

2. Evidentialism

Justification depends on evidence. We can ask: What is evidence? How does it support belief? What needs to be the case for someone to possess evidence? All these are legitimate questions which, depending on the answers they will receive, lead us deeper into the details of a variety of evidentialist views. The starting point, however, justification depends on evidence, has a platitudinous ring to it. Hume did not mean to offer a doctrine when, in his discussion of miracles, he said 'A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence'. In this passage, Hume simply urges us to be careful and to consider all sides in a debate, and who could object to such a maxim?

Debates about evidentialism are, it seems to me, debates about details. Is it too internalist, i.e. can facts about the reliability of a method create justification without an agent's being aware of it? Is it not internalist enough, for example when an agent, despite being in the possession of evidence, believes on other grounds? Can the evidentialist extend his view to cover conceptual and logical beliefs, and what does he or she say about the foundationalist's basic beliefs for which no further evidence can be provided and which are, nonetheless, justified?[1] In this paper I look at evidentialism from some distance. Its different shades and margins are not visible from up there. This is what it looks like: Evidence is whatever gives us reasons to believe. A justified response is whatever response is justified by these reasons. Thus, evidence and nothing but evidence, determines justification. Love and hate and other commitments (as long as they are not love of truth and hate of error) play no role in justification. Evidentialism, thus, leaves no room for non-epistemic commitments in its take on justification. Evidentialism seen from above looks like a platitude.

Philosophers, with varying success, dispute platitudes. Radical pragmatists dispute evidentialism.[2] In addition to evidence, these philosophers say,

we also need to consider the benefits which believing might bring with it. If the reward of daring to believe a religious doctrine is eternal life or, more mundanely, if the reward of believing in one's recovery is one's recovery, who's to say that these reasons which count for so much in all other matters of life should not carry any weight when it comes to what we ought to believe? They might draw encouragement from Stroud's observation. If loving one's friend makes a difference to what one ought to believe, loving oneself must justify all kinds of belief when one's life is at stake. Radical pragmatists tend to think of believing on the model of action. Justification, then, depends on the harms and benefits such believing may bring. With this background—the platitudinous nature of evidentialism and the kind of radical criticism which its opponents aim to launch at it—I turn to the two observations I want to discuss: transparency and the role of non-epistemic commitments. I start with the latter.

3. The Role of Non-Epistemic Commitments in Belief Formation

Sarah Stroud (2006, 504) introduces her point with the following example. You hear a story about a man who, after having slept with a woman, did not return her calls and, in this way, knowingly broke her heart. Not a nice man, you would, at least, think. But what if this episode features Sam, who, in this story, is a friend of yours? According to Stroud, you will react differently. You will stand up for your friend. Not only in what you say but in how and what you think. Initially you might doubt what's been told—the Sam you love and cherish would not do such a thing—and if this stance crumbles under the pressure of evidence you will assume that there were extenuating circumstances left unrevealed by the story which leave your view of Sam's good character more or less intact.

People, understandably, react differently to Stroud's example. What if Sam's behaviour was more or less in character? The Sams of this world have friends and friends might well know about their flaws and shortcomings. 'That's Sam for you', his friend might say, 'with me he is not at all like this'. In order to find a case that typically is out of character, we have to increase the intensity of the stain that, according to the story told, afflicts the friend's character. However, portraying your friend as a rapist, thief or murderer, chars not only with your friendship but also (given my readership) with the unlikeliness of such happening. What you know of your friend, your evidence gathered in friendship, might by itself sufficiently explain the incredulity with which you confront such a story. Stroud (2006, footnote 11) admits that no particular story will convince everyone. Her general point is that, when we look carefully at our own experience of friendship, we will notice its influence on our epistemic behaviour. It is left to the reader to find his or her own example which best illustrates Stroud's general point.

A small step takes us from the actual influence of friendship on our epistemic practices to its normative legitimacy. After all, friendship is an essential part of leading a good life. The epistemic aspect of friendship at work is to think well, as well as one can, of one's friend's character. Stroud (2006, 511) tells us that 'Friendship is in some important sense based on your friend's character and on esteem for his merits'. Stroud (2006, 512) says that 'to be someone's friend is to have cast your lot in with his and, indeed, with his good character'. According to Stroud, friendship places the epistemic obligation on us to think well of our friends.

Not everyone sees friendship in these terms. For me friendship is to a large extent a historical concept. There are people I've known for decades; our lives have touched in many places; we are bound together by our shared history. One's friends may exhibit all shades of character. I have not chosen them on merit nor do I expect to have been chosen by them on such basis. Friends can be annoying; their once attractive enthusiasm has given way to sarcasm or resignation; their political views may reach into what one sees as dark corners so that, in our encounters, we bracket as best we can any such topic. Of course, even such a friendship will retain many of its common features. One can rely on such friends—not always but in varying degrees and for varying domains. The historical foundation of friendship satisfies a desire for having roots in one's life; the current of events passes us by and doesn't simply carry us with it. Friendship, in my view, doesn't fully support Stroud's picture of placing us under this one-sided obligation to think well of our friend's characters. We might know better.

This said I endorse Stroud's observation on a general level. Social relationships and, in general, our evaluative commitments, shape our lives. Thus, it would be a surprise if the epistemic sphere were completely isolated from such influence. Such isolation would not even be plausible as an ideal for people like us who cannot but engage whole-heartedly with the world. Stroud (2006, 504) has me on her side, when she puts her point like this: 'You owe your friends something other than an impartial and disinterested review of the evidence'. Let me take this idea on board and apply it in different but closely related domain.

Some educational psychologists work as what we might call 'child assessors'. A school might seek advice on a pupil's behavioural difficulties and the problems they have with achieving set learning objectives. These psychologists form judgements about the child's abilities and achievements; they make projections about their educational development and assess their general behaviour with a view of diagnosing any underlying problems. As parents, we do very much the same. We think and talk a lot about our children; we are engaged in the same tasks of assessment and prognosis. It will, however, be no surprise if our view as parents diverges from that of the child assessor. Of course, we live with our children, so the evidential basis of the epistemic tasks we perform is different. But it would take a

cold heart if one thought that any disagreement would simply be due to differences in evidence and that the love for our children would play no role in how we see them. The child assessor might see underachievement, where we notice potential; we see the effects of constant examining and the stress this causes where they might diagnose disruptive and aggressive behaviour. We are thrilled by what they might classify as only slightly above average performance.

We expect divergences in how parents and professionals assess children. Not always and in all domains; parents are not blind, and no one would expect fundamental disagreement about everything. When times are difficult, however, we stand up for our children; we make their case, not by pretending but with conviction and whole-hearted optimism. If the perspective of the professional and trained child assessor were an epistemic ideal, we should all aspire to have the mind-set of the impartial assessor. If that were so, the parental perspective would be of little interest when a child is assessed. Their hard-wired bias could be studied and explored on its own terms but, when it comes to understanding children, parents would not need to be asked for their views. Reasonable epistemic practice, however, is different. The voice of parents is heard and their perspective is taken seriously; not because doing so is polite, rather because it promises to offer insights which are unavailable from an impartial point of view.

Echoing Stroud's slogan, I find much plausibility in the idea that parents owe their children more than an impartial and disinterested review of the evidence. This obligation is part of the fabric of the parent-child relationship. More importantly for our purposes, it looks implausible to deny the parental perspective any epistemic significance. Taking the parental perspective is morally demanded and, it seems to me, epistemically legitimate. If this is correct, non-epistemic commitments, which, in this case, manifest themselves in seeing our children with the love they demand, play a role in what looks like legitimate epistemic practices.[3]

Stroud (2006, 509) offers a useful summary of exactly how non-epistemic commitments influence our engagement with evidence for an unwelcome conclusion. Her summary relates to her own example; it could easily be adapted to the case I have put more weight on.

> Characteristically, you might first try to discredit the evidence being presented and find a way not to believe your friend did this at all. If that isn't feasible, then you can accept those base facts and move to the interpretive level, where you try to put a different spin on what he did and file that action under some less damning label. If this proves impossible, then you can link the action to a different character trait than the obvious ones. If you can't in good conscience even do that, then you can seek to embed in a larger virtue the negative character trait you are forced to attribute to your friend: seeing his hot-headedness as part and parcel of his passionate nature, for example. As a last resort, if even this last stratagem fails, you can relegate your attribution of a character flaw to your

> friend to an obscure corner of your portrait of him, rather than making it the dominant element, like a prominent nose.

Stroud shows us a variety of levels at which we confront the evidence presented. We look for alternative explanations of the evidence to find a stable and coherent picture of the situation that leaves as much as possible of the view we started with intact. This conservative approach to incorporating new evidence goes hand in hand with our reactions at the level of interpretation—it is, to an extent, up to us how we describe and understand the evidence. We need to set weights of importance to assess the evaluative significance of the new finding and such weights will reflect what strikes us as salient within all the evidence we possess. All this activity falls under the heading of how we epistemically engage with the evidential situation.

To capture Stroud's point as one about engagement with the evidence leaves a sharp contrast between her view and the view I earlier introduced as radical pragmatism. Whereas the radical pragmatist sees the disruptive influence on our friendship of having to re-evaluate our friend's character as a reason to stick with one's old positive evaluations, on Stroud's view the harmful effects of believing that our friend acted badly are not themselves reasons against so believing. Our non-epistemic commitments shape and influence our engagement with the evidence; they are not reasons on a par with the reasons provided by evidence.

When we focus on non-evidential commitments, a picture of believing emerges in which such commitments have some legitimate influence. Consequently, any normative assessment of beliefs should make conceptual space for this influence of, for example, sincere parental optimism. Before I say more about this matter and its impact on our assessment of evidentialism, I will follow Hume's advice and look at evidentialism from the other side. The phenomenon of transparency, it has been argued, leads more or less directly to a vindication of full-fledged evidentialism: nothing but evidence, so this line of thought, can play a role in determining what one should believe.

4. Evidentialism and Transparency

In his article 'A New Argument for Evidentialism' Shah, unsurprisingly, offers a new argument for evidentialism. By evidentialism Shah means the view that only evidence can provide reasons for belief. In other words, there are no practical epistemic reasons, i.e. no reasons for believing which refer to its harms or benefits. (If there are such effects of believing these might be reasons for bringing such believing about but they are not reasons for believing.) The core principle on which his argument relies is transparency. Here is what, for him, transparency amounts to. 'To be clear, the feature I call *transparency* is this: the deliberative question *whether to believe p* inevitable

gives way to the factual question *whether p*, because the answer to the latter question will determine the answer to the former' (Shah 2006, 481).

According to transparency, one question—the question whether one should believe p—collapses (for the person asking the question) into the question whether p is the case. Only what relates to the truth of p, i.e. evidence, can be relevant to answering the question whether p is the case. Thus, only evidence will decide whether one should believe that p. This, in a nutshell, is Shah's argument. How will the radical pragmatist react to this simplified version of Shah's argument? For her, its potential benefits are reasons for believing. Assuming with Shah that the benefits of believing that p are, in the case of the particular p at issue, irrelevant for the question whether p is the case, the radical pragmatist will have to say that the first question, whether to believe that p, does not, after all, collapse into the world-directed question whether p. The existence of pragmatic reasons shows that transparency is false. Any argument for evidentialism that uses transparency as a premise is question-begging.[4]

Shah argues on the basis of transparency against the possibility of practical reasons for belief; the pragmatist argues on the basis of practical reasons for belief against transparency. How should we react to this apparent standoff between the radical pragmatist and Shah's evidentialist? My sympathies and concerns are evenly divided. I think Shah is right in his conclusion—there are only evidential reasons for beliefs—but wrong in his argument. I don't think that transparency as used in the debate about evidentialism is a valid principle. Thus, I think the radical pragmatists are correct when they reject transparency. However, they do so for the wrong reasons. Transparency should be rejected without any in itself contentious appeal to practical reasons for believing.

Let me start this discussion by looking at a different statement of transparency.

> In making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward—upon the world. If someone asks me 'Do you think there is going to be a third world war?', I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomenon as I would attend to if I were answering the question 'Will there be a third world war?' (Evans 1982, 225)

Shah's statement of transparency is normally understood in normative terms—should I believe that p? The pragmatist critics certainly understood Shah's question in this way. Evans, however, considers the question, do I believe that p? We are used to distinguishing between a psychological and, thus, factual question like Evans's and a normative question like Shah's. The phenomenon of being moved outwards, towards considering the world-directed question, may, however, arise in both cases: it may arise when we ask the normative and when we ask the descriptive question. We will turn outwards in

both cases if we consider these questions as invitations to make up our mind about whether p is the case. Richard Moran, whose work Shah draws on, distinguishes between a theoretical and a practical stance when we reflect on our own psychological states. The latter he also calls the deliberative stance.

> What we're calling a theoretical question about oneself, then, is one answered by discovery of the fact of which one was ignorant, whereas a practical or deliberative question is answered by a decision or commitment of some sort, and is not a response to ignorance of some antecedent fact about oneself (Moran 2001, 58).

Taking Moran's deliberative stance seriously, we should distinguish between the following three questions. First, the psychological question 'Do I believe that p?' which addresses a factual issue about one's mental state. Secondly, the normative question 'Should I believe that p?' or, equivalently, 'Am I or would I be justified in believing that p?' which ask for a normative assessment of one's mental state or of a state one could be in. And, thirdly, the deliberative question, formulated in psychological or in normative terms, which invites us to consider the matter of whether p anew. For Moran, we only encounter transparency when we take the deliberative stance. This stance is essential first-personal. In contrast, the psychological as well as the normative question arise, in the same way, for one's present and past beliefs as well as for the beliefs of others.

The effect of transparency, on Shah's understanding, is that one question collapses into another. (This collapse then allows us to restrict the considerations which are relevant for the normative question, which has collapsed into the world-directed question, and, thereby, we learn something about the nature of what is relevant for the normative assessment of beliefs.) However, in my view neither the normative nor the psychological question need to collapse into the world-directed question whether p.

Take the psychological question first. Am I vain, i.e. do I have an excessively high opinion of my appearance and abilities? I'm inclined to deny it but in order to disarm any such suggestion I will also need to look carefully at how I behave. I don't turn outwards and consider whether I'm indeed much better looking and more able than most others; I will scrutinise my behaviour to find out whether I have the attitudes characteristic of vanity. The psychological question, in this case, is answered independently of the world-directed question. Although vanity is a special case, it counters any idea that such a collapse is part of the nature of asking such questions.

We reach the same result—no collapse of questions—when we consider whether the normative question collapses into the world-directed question. These questions have a different subject matter. The normative question is about standards of assessment and their application to the issue at hand. True, when I consider whether p I will also rely on standards. However,

these standards guide me but are not the object of my world-directed concern. Take the question whether the standards I applied in my believing that p were appropriate. This question will only come up when we consider the normative question; it won't be part of our attempt to answer the world-directed question. Thus, if by transparency we mean that asking the normative question is the same as asking the world-directed question, we should reject transparency.

There are other ways to show that the normative and the world-directed question are indeed different. Take the example of a football fan. He is aware that with two minutes to play it is almost impossible for his team to score the goals necessary for a win. On this basis, he thinks that he should admit that they won't win. However, as a loyal supporter his attitude is 'It is only over when it's over'. He doesn't yet accept that his team won't win, though, he admits, he'd be justified in doing so. This reluctance to accept defeat might violate normal standards of rational belief. If aware of such a violation, the football fan will answer the normative question differently from the world-directed question: he believes what he thinks he shouldn't believe. Thus, the two questions need not collapse into each other.

So far I have raised two objections against transparency understood as the idea that the normative question collapses into the world-directed question. First, the normative and the world-directed question have a different subject matter. Secondly, one will answer the questions differently on realising that one's belief, though firmly held, lacks justification. I want to add a third observation. Sometimes when one considers, by taking the deliberative stance, whether one should believe that p, one's deliberation will be guided by the world-directed question. At other times, however, any world-directed concern will be guided by the normative question. Here is an example. I ask for directions in an unknown city and I'm told that I have to turn left in order to get to the station. Should I believe that the station is to my left? Being unfamiliar with the city I am unable to focus directly on the question whether the station is to the left. I will only get an answer by addressing the question whether I should believe the person who told me so. If I deem him sufficiently reliable and trustworthy, my standards of when to believe will be met. Thereby I judge that I should believe him and, once I do, I can now answer the world-directed question. I am able to answer it by having answered the normative question first. I think the station is to the left because I believe that I should believe what I've been told and believe accordingly.

What remains of transparency? One lesson we can draw is that it is a more limited phenomenon than often assumed. The normative question has its own legitimacy and its own subject matter. Only when, in asking this question, we express an invitation to make up our minds does transparency come into play.[5] And even then it is not true that our attention immediately turns outwards. When we rely on testimony we simply don't have enough to go on to turn towards the world. So, what remains? There are three ways in

which we can invite ourselves to make up our minds about whether p is the case. We can ask, 'Do I believe that p?' or 'Do I really believe that p?' We can ask whether we should believe that p, and, finally, we can ask whether p is the case. These are three invitations to do the same thing, namely to consider whether p is the case.

I said that my sympathies between Shah and the radical pragmatists are divided. They are right, I said, to disagree with Shah's argument. They think that his argument is question-begging, whereas I argued that transparency is not a general phenomenon on the basis of which we could argue for evidentialism. My opposition to transparency as an argument for evidentialism, in contrast to theirs, does not rely on accepting practical reason for beliefs. I also said that, despite disagreeing with Shah's argument, I agree with his conclusion. Let me offer my own argument, which is something like the little brother of Shah's argument for why there are no practical reasons for beliefs.

Whenever someone believes that p he or she has thereby answered the question whether p is true. When I believe that Brexit will be bad for Britain's economy, I have answered the question whether Brexit will be bad for Britain's economy. Lots of facts, social, political, and more narrowly economical, are relevant for coming up with this answer. Of course, there are also vast areas which are irrelevant for my answer. Astronomy, for example, and the facts studied there bear, as far as I can see, no relevance on the badness of Brexit. (They could be relevant, if, for example, a meteor would hit the British Isles and thus prevent Brexit from having any bad effects.) The fact that believing in these bad effects fills me with me sadness is another irrelevant fact. (Though people's sadness could have a negative effect I will, like in the astronomical example above, bracket any such effects.) Only what I deem to be relevant for whether Brexit means economic harm will influence how I answer the question whether it does mean harm. If, as I said at the start, answering a question is or amounts to having a relevant belief, only what is relevant for the answer will be relevant for my believing. Consequently, all reasons for beliefs are evidential reasons.

Let me illustrate this argument with another example which will play a further role later on. Sometimes I wonder whether I have locked the door. I think I have but I'd better double-check. Depending on the circumstances such behaviour can cover the whole range from the wise to the neurotic. The more important it is to have locked the door—I promised a friend to look after his house and will myself be away for a couple of days—the more speaks in favour of double-checking. That is as long as there is a point in doing so. If I've already checked seven times, clearly remembering my repeated rattling the door handle and being unable to open the door—it must be locked—checking again does hardly increase the evidence I already have, so there is really no need for checking again. I simply wonder whether the door is locked. (I rarely, if ever, wonder whether I should believe that the door is locked.) Reflecting on this familiar question should make it clear

what is relevant for answering it. It will be equally clear that how pleased I would feel when believing that I've done a good job and locked the door is irrelevant for how and when to conclude my wondering whether I have locked it.[6]

Shah's argument was different. In contrast to his, I don't appeal to transparency; I start with world-directed questions. Believing that p is answering the question whether p. I have presented a simplified version of Shah's argument. In his article he seeks an explanation of transparency. Shah thinks that transparency is explained by the idea that beliefs are guided by the norm to believe truly. No such norm is in play in the argument I have offered. Our beliefs are answers to our questions, no matter whether we are driven by a desire to answer them correctly or not.

I foresee two kinds of objections from the radical pragmatists. First, they will admit that believing p is answering the question whether p. However, believing, they will say, is much more than that. Some beliefs are part of our identity; some beliefs no one could do without; some beliefs might make one healthy and successful. These are important features of beliefs. Promoting health is important; so why should it not be important when it comes to health-promoting beliefs? I simply exclude such benefits and, thereby, like Shah, beg the question against the radical pragmatist.

I don't deny that some views of the world, e.g. solipsism, are unhealthy. If I ask myself 'Is there anybody out there?' and, looking at a passer-by, I say 'Yes! There are millions and millions of other people', only what is relevant for answering the question will be relevant for my believing, which, after all, is my answering this question. There are other questions for which the harmful and beneficial effects of believing are relevant. 'Is there anybody out there?', and all other world-directed questions, are not of this kind.

The second objection is harder to fend off. It asks, in which sense is believing answering a question? Do you have to ask yourself the question in order to answer it? I've never asked myself, who are the people in this picture? I know and always knew these are my children. Beliefs can be answers to questions one has never and will never ask. Furthermore, what is it to answer a question? You don't need to write down your answer, say it out loud or mutter it to yourself. Answering a question is simply believing. According to this objection, once we probe the analysis—what is it to answer a question—we end up saying that believing is believing; such triviality won't have any interesting consequence about what could be a reason for what.

I remain unconvinced by these objections to my argument for evidentialism. We can try to play off the first objection against the second. If believing is much more than answering a question, the main claim of my argument—believing is answering a question—must pick out an important feature of what believing is. The apparent triviality of this claim fits well with my impression that evidentialism, in the way I have described it, has a trivial ring to it. I admit that this argument for evidentialism moves in a very tight space.

It moves from believing to answering a question. The space is tight but it strikes me as uncharitable to claim that it moves from believing to believing and, thus, doesn't move at all. When arguing for what seems obvious, we often cannot expect much.

5. Putting Things Together

I have argued for two claims. The first I take from Stroud. Our non-epistemic commitments exert a legitimate influence on our epistemic behaviour. A parent's perspective will be permeated by the love for her child. This shapes her engagement with relevant evidence at various levels. She actively looks for defeaters; she weighs and interprets the various facets of the situation in her own way; she integrates what she finds around points of salience and she constructs a coherent picture that does as little damage as possible to her cherished convictions. To say that a parent might, in the end, admit that her child did wrong, but insist that her child is not a bad person, provides an accurate yet superficial characterisation of a task that, on occasion, will be complex and multi-layered.

An evidentialist who claims that any normative assessment of beliefs is purely a matter of evidence denies this first claim and anyone, like me, who has taken Stroud's point on board will deny evidentialism, thus understood. It would be a difficult task to outline the limits of the legitimate influence of our commitments. About an earlier example I said that, depending on the circumstances, it can be wise or neurotic to check whether the door has been locked. The influence of non-epistemic commitments will, similarly, range from unreasonable dogmatic denial to sensible caution. Like in so many other things, we find here a too much and a too little. My aim is to create the conceptual space that allows for such influence in a theory of rational belief; my aim is not to draw the precise borders of this influence.

The second claim that has emerged was that in believing that p one is answering the question whether p. Only considerations relevant for whether p is the case will influence one's answer. Consequently, there are no practical reasons for beliefs. This holds as long as one's believing that p is deemed to be irrelevant for whether p is the case. An evidentialist who claims that any normative assessment of beliefs builds only upon evidence is thereby vindicated.[7]

For both of these claims to be true, we have to accept that rational belief formation is not simply a response to the evidence. Our capacity of reflection mediates our responses. When I outlined all the layers of influence Stroud ascribes to our commitments—interpretation, weighing, setting saliences, establishing commitment-guided coherent equilibria—I put them all under the label of different ways of engaging with the evidence. So there is a level of evidence and there is a level of active engagement with the evidence.

The distinction between these two aspects of rational belief formation is simply our recognition of the fact that we are reflective beings. Different philosophers have spelled out this idea of reflectivity in different ways.[8]

Our response to the evidence is mediated epistemically, by our background beliefs, and, more importantly in our context, non-epistemically, by our practical concerns and commitments. In what follows I will, for simplicity's sake, focus on only one aspect of Stroud's view. She compares the friend to a defence lawyer who consistently advocates the more charitable hypothesis (Stroud 2006, 523). The friend sets his standards of acceptance comparatively high before he is convinced of the unwelcome hypothesis concerning the friend's blemished character. The setting of such standards is a well-known and common example of how commitments influence what we believe.

Suppose your doctor has done the tests and, on this basis, recommends a treatment with serious side-effects. Suffering these side-effects is only worth it if you indeed have the condition for which the treatment is recommended. The question whether you have this condition is answered affirmatively by your doctor. However, it is much worse for you to have this condition and to suffer the treatment's side-effects than it is for the doctor. Thus, it seems only sensible if you suggest to seek a second opinion. You are not yet sufficiently convinced that you need this treatment and so you ask a different specialist for more tests. The evidence, it seems to me, supports the hypothesis that you suffer from this condition in more or less the same way and to the same extent whether we consider you or the doctor. The standard that needs to be reached to accept the bad news is higher for you than it is for him because you are more strongly affected. Our commitments influence what we believe by influencing these standards.

The more plausible a position is made to look the less interesting it may seem. Stroud (2006, 518) takes her view to have quite dramatic consequences: 'Friendship requires epistemic irrationality'. However, in my view there is nothing irrational in seeking a second opinion and nothing irrational in remaining sceptical until more evidence emerges. An evidentialist, according to Stroud, will be unable to accept the influence of friendship. 'I did not believe the allegations', someone might say, 'because he is my friend'. Commenting on this case, Stroud (2006, 513) adds, 'But that someone is your friend is not itself a relevant epistemic reason (as we might put it) to form different beliefs about him than you would about anyone else.' Thus, she concludes, that friendship requires us to accept reasons that are not captured by a traditional evidentialist picture of rational belief.

The two-level account of epistemic rationality I have offered here should reconcile Stroud with the kind of evidentialism I find plausible. We are evidentialist on the level of reasons, but we allow commitments to influence our engagement with the evidence. The appeal expressed by 'He is my friend' when offered as an explanation of one's epistemic reaction continues to

work perfectly well even if friendship cannot offer ground-level reasons yet influences our engagement with reasons as, for example, in the setting of standards that need to be reached to move us out of doubt and uncertainty.[9]

Loyalty to one's family and friends or loyalty to the football club one supports influences one's standards. They are set high when it comes to unwelcome news and low for things which support our optimism. Two sets of football supporters can both walk to the ground with shining optimism. They focus on different evidential reasons. Whereas the new signing by the one club inspires its supporters, the others focus on their club's past achievements. Their reasons are evidential; their standards are expressions of their loyalty.[10]

The conciliatory spirit of this essay leaves us with just one opponent, namely the radical pragmatist who sees the benefits of believing as reasons to believe. My argument in section 2 already excludes this view. I want to end by engaging with the radical pragmatist's motivation and show why people have been drawn to the position that benefits of believing must matter. This explanation adds to my argument from section 2; its aim is to uncover a mistake in the pragmatist's view.

6. The Radical Pragmatists' Mistake

Radical pragmatists are inspired by the following thought. Anything that is really important, like health and happiness, can be a consequence or a feature of being in the epistemic state of believing that p (for some appropriate p). If health and happiness are of paramount importance for how we guide our lives, they cannot lack influence and be void of all normative significance when it comes to believing. Thus, there have to be practical reasons for beliefs.

Radical pragmatists, in my view, fail to distinguish between the following two issues. The first concerns epistemology and its theories of justification. Put in normative terms, epistemology issues directives like the following: Don't believe contractions! Believe only what comes from reliable methods! Proportion your beliefs to the evidence! The second issue concerns what, if anything, makes these norms binding. This is the issue of epistemic normativity. It's important to keep these two issues separate. Such separation doesn't mean that one issue will have no influence on the other. Depending on which rules we subscribe to will affect the explanation of their normative status.

The same separation is helpful in other normative domains. 'What are the laws of this land?' is one question, 'What makes these laws binding?' is another. Similarly, investigating the codes of politeness or of morality in a society is one issue, assessing their normative significance is another issue. Suppose the starting point of the radical pragmatist's thought is correct. In the end, all normativity has to relate to our interests and to what we care

about (or, alternatively, to what is, in some sense, good). This is an intuition about the sources of normativity; it does not mean that each normative domain needs to contain these sources as part of the considerations that determine its content. Being polite can be hard. You really wanted to let the person you were talking to know what you thought about his behaviour. However, in the social situation you found yourself, it would have been rude to do so and so you refrained from speaking your mind. What is polite and what is not is not determined by what suits your interests best, even if your interests are all or part of why politeness rules have a hold on you.

In their way of thinking, radical pragmatists, it seems to me, fail to separate these two sets of issues. They think that, because our interests and concerns are important, our interests and concerns are part of the reasons that determine epistemological rules. When we recognise the difference between questions of content, i.e. what are the right epistemic rules, and questions of normativity, which aim at explaining why we should follow the right rules, we should not be tempted by the pragmatist's move anymore to put everything relevant into the set of domain-specific reasons.

7. Conclusion

Our commitments exert legitimate influence on what we believe. It is well known that people often use higher evidential standards for accepting unwelcome results than they would were the results indifferent to them. This undermines the evidentialist claim that our commitments and concerns play no role in what the appropriate epistemic response in a situation is. However, this doesn't affect the evidentialist claim that only truth-related considerations can be reasons for or against believing that p. How and what we should believe, I have argued, depends on evidence as well as on how we, as reflective beings, engage with this evidence. Although this essay parted company at various points with what is to be found in the philosophical literature, I cannot help feeling that, on this occasion, philosophy, in the end, leaves things pretty much as it found them in the first place.[11]

Notes

1. For discussions of evidentialism along such lines, see the contributions collected in Dougherty (2011).
2. See Rinard (2015), McCormick (2014), and the work of Andrew Reisner, in particular Reisner (forthcoming). William James is not on this list of radical pragmatists. His view is much more like Stroud's and, although I won't be able to argue this point here, it is compatible, in the same way as we will learn Stroud's is, with a form of evidentialism.

3. I have focussed on parental love as a paradigmatic example of a set of commitments that will influence how we structure and see our world. Within this set of commitments I have emphasized the positive light in which parents usually see their children. Love, however, has other sides as well. For example, parents worry about their children. They are often highly sensitive to the risks inherent in their children's choices. They see dangers where others might assure them not to worry. The opposite of love, for example seeing someone as one's enemy, will also influence our epistemic behaviour.
4. Rinard (2015, 15) asserts that, when the benefits of doing so are substantial, we ought to believe what we know to be false. McCormick's view is less extreme. McCormick (2014, 60) says that 'it is permissible to violate evidentialist rules if they require us to give up beliefs that seem essential to our lives'. They both regard Shah's argument as question-begging.
5. Moran (2001, 64) emphasises some of the limitations of transparency outlined above. 'Conforming to the idea of transparency between self-directed and world-directed inquiry thus appears to be less a matter of the logic of self-reference and more a matter of assuming a certain stance toward oneself and one's attitude'. In contrast to Shah, Moran (2001, 63.f) denies that one question collapses or reduces to another. Shah, however, insists that the collapse of the normative question into the world-directed question is 'quite plausible'. (See his discussion of Moran in Shah 2003, footnote 1.) I have argued, on various levels, against the idea of these questions collapsing into one. I said that Moran is aware of the limitations of transparency. This caution has not been absorbed in the debates about evidentialism where transparency plays a role. Compare, for example, how Rinard (2015, 15) introduces the topic. 'In order to evaluate Transparency, we need to know what "the deliberative question whether to believe that P" is. On the most natural interpretation, this is the question "Should I believe P?". If so, what Transparency says is that the question "Should I believe P?" inevitably gives way to the question "Is P true?" because the answer to the latter will determine the answer to the former'. The same understanding, namely that the normative question collapses into the world-directed question, is in play when McCormick (2014, 26), another radical pragmatist critic, discusses Shah's argument.
6. Hieronymi (2005) uses the same idea in her attempt to distinguish (in a sense) 'proper' content-related reasons from attitude-related reasons. I use the claim that believing that p is one's answer to the question whether p to argue against the idea that its potential benefits are reasons for believing (as long as whichever attitude towards p one adopts does not affect the truth of the proposition p in question). In Piller (2006) I have argued that the benefits of preferring are reasons for preferring. It was important to me in that paper to point out that the arguments in favour of attitude-related reasons for preferring do not transfer to the case of believing. Preferring A over B is, in my view, not an answer to the question which of A and B is better (or better for me). I might prefer what I know to be worse over what I know to be better because preferring in this way is, for example, polite. In contrast, I cannot believe what I know to be false on the grounds that such believing would be polite. The existence of attitude-related reasons in the practical domain marks a sharp contrast between believing and other attitudes. Other philosophers disagree and seek a unified approach to these issues. See, e.g., Comesaña (2015).

7. Let me add here that I don't share the radical pragmatist's fascination with self-fulfilling beliefs. In their purest form they are no obstacle to evidentialism; they do not support the idea of practical reasons for beliefs. Suppose I offer you the following gamble. For any amount between £1 and £10 I will give you exactly this amount if you believe that I will give it to you. If, for example, you think I'll give you £10, I will give you £10 and so for all other amounts between 1 and 10. It will be hard to form a belief without evidence. So let us assume that you've seen me play this game with others and I've always kept my promise. As soon as you are convinced that you can trust my offer we have a situation in which believing will indeed make it so. What should you believe? A better question to start with is what should you wish for? Wishing for £10 might seem greedy, so you settle on £9. Once you want to receive £9 and you trust me, you will believe on purely evidential grounds that you will get £9. Wishful thinking is, in the context of this game, entirely appropriate. You decide what you wish for and, thinking you are in an environment in which your wishes will come true, you will believe that you will get what you wanted. In scenarios like this one, we find practical reasons for wishes but not for beliefs.
8. For Korsgaard (2009, 32), our reflectivity sets the problem and contains the answers for all normative questions. 'We are aware not only of our perception but also of the way they operate on us . . . . Once the space of reflective awareness—reflective distance, as I like to call it—opens up between the potential ground of a belief or action and the belief or action itself, we must step across the distance, and so must be able to endorse the operation of that ground, before we can act or believe'. Our endorsements operate on the level of evidence and reflect our full nature, including our commitments. Ernest Sosa's move from apt belief and animal knowledge to reflective knowledge needs an assessment of the risks that any engagement with the world contains. These risks are not purely epistemic; they are the risks we face when acting in the light of our view of the world. 'For a shot to have the property of being apt is for its success to manifest a competence seated in the agent. The whole arrangement is itself something that the agent might be able to arrange (or not), and not simply by exercising the first-order competences seated in him. The agent might be able to choose when and where to exercise that competence, for one thing, and might manifest more or less competence in such a choice' (Sosa 2009, 13). Evidence guides our first-order responses. We guide ourselves in how to understand and respond to this evidence. Whether we should accept an answer suggested by the evidence or rather withhold depends on the risks involved in such choices. Both philosophers, notwithstanding the differences in their approach, endorse the distinction between the evidence itself and our engagement with evidence. This opens up the conceptual space in which commitments can play a role in rational belief-formation.
9. Stroud has been criticised by others for overstating her case. Kawall (2013), Hawley (2014) and Efird and Warman (ms.) all move towards the reconciliatory position I have described above. Hawley (2014), as well as Efird and Warman, refer to permissivism, the idea that evidence allows for more than one rational response, as a basis for such reconciliation. If permissivism is built on the ground-level idea that evidence underdetermines support and, thus, offers a range of permissible responses, I am sceptical. The influence of commitments, on my

view, needs to be kept separate from the role of evidence. If, however, we locate the source of permissivism in the adoption of varying standards of acceptance (see, e.g. Schoenfield 2014), permissivism does reconcile, in the way described above, Stroud's view with the restricted form of evidentialism advocated here. The very same issues are raised when it comes to the debate about knowledge and pragmatic encroachment. Stanley (2005) sees his project as a challenge to the intellectualist component of orthodox epistemology; Grimm (2011) offers what in my view is a plausible reconciliatory reply. McHugh (2015, 1127), another opponent of evidentialism, says that it would be deeply puzzling if our commitments were able to influence our rational epistemic responses—for example whether we believe or withhold—without admitting that these commitments are reasons. The distinction between evidence and our engagement with evidence should help to dissolve any such puzzlement.

10. Would it really be plausible to claim that we have to convict one or, possibly, both sets of supporters of epistemic irrationality? I think there will be a range of cases reaching from cases of legitimate optimism to irrational forms of enthusiasm. On a moral level, many people endorse some forms of partiality whilst condemning others. We endorse the special status children are given by their parents and we restrict the partiality one can show to one's country, race or gender. If commitments have legitimate influence on our epistemic practices—and I have argued that they do have such influence—the fight against racism and sexism is a fight on the level of commitments and not primarily a fight on the level of epistemology. This is not to say that epistemology has no political role to play in these matters.
11. I have presented this material at the University of York and at the European Epistemology Network Conference in Paris. On both occasions I have received helpful comments for which I am grateful. For helpful conversations and comments I would like to thank David Efird, Arnon Keren, Naomi Kloosterboer, Barry Lee, Rene van Woudenberg, and a referee for this journal. Thanks to Steven Warden, Franziska Poprawe and all my other students in York and Bayreuth who took my course on Epistemic Normativity for their input.

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