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## *Can Beliefs Wrong?*

Rima Basu  
*University of Southern California*

**ABSTRACT.** We care what people think of us. The thesis that beliefs wrong, although compelling, can sound ridiculous. The norms that properly govern belief are plausibly epistemic norms such as truth, accuracy, and evidence. Moral and prudential norms seem to play no role in settling the question of whether to believe  $p$ , and they are irrelevant to answering the question of what you should believe. This leaves us with the question: can we wrong one another by virtue of what we believe about each other? Can beliefs wrong? In this introduction, I present a brief summary of the articles that make up this special issue. The aim is to direct readers to open avenues for future research by highlighting questions and challenges that are far from being settled. These papers shouldn't be taken as the last word on the subject. Rather, they mark the beginning of a serious exploration into a set of questions that concern the morality of belief, i.e., *doxastic morality*.

We care what people think of us. The thesis that beliefs wrong, although compelling, can sound ridiculous. However, the idea that we can wrong someone by what we believe reveals itself in many places. One common formulation of the Christian Eucharistic confession, “we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,” appeals to the idea that we can sin against God in thought, as well as in word and in deed. When loved ones believe the worst of us, it is tempting to think that we can demand an apology for the beliefs they hold, and not just their actions. Many people also think that we can wrong not only the living but also the dead when we believe

the worst of them. And at least one of the distinctive wrongs committed by a racist plausibly lies in what she believes about another human being. In all of these cases, there is *prima facie* evidence that at least one important part of the wrong lies in the belief and not merely the acts leading up to or the acts that follow from the belief.

On the flip side, this idea that beliefs can wrong is philosophically puzzling. The norms that properly govern belief are plausibly epistemic norms such as truth, accuracy, and evidence. Moral and prudential norms seem to play no role in settling the question of whether to believe *p*, and they are irrelevant to answering the question of what you should believe. It seems to follow that the person that believes of Barack Obama that he's more likely to be a valet than the President of the United States need only attend to the relevant statistical likelihoods before settling their belief. That they commit an injustice to Barack Obama when they mistake him for a valet ought to be irrelevant in assessing the belief itself (as opposed to, say, its consequences). This leaves us with several puzzling questions: can we wrong one another by virtue of what we believe about each other, i.e., can beliefs wrong? If not, why not? What then is going on in these cases? If so, how? What then does this tell us about the content and nature of the norms governing belief?

In this collection of papers we have invited the contributors to explore this perceived conflict between the intuitive idea that we can wrong one another by what we believe about each other, and the philosophically orthodox idea that the only norms that relate directly to belief concern truth-related factors such as evidence. In this collection, there is something for the sympathizer, the optimist, the pessimist, the skeptic, and the moderate. The purpose of this introduction is not simply to provide a summary of each article, though there will be a little of that. As with people, *no article is an island*. There will be familiar themes that get put forward in one paper, only to be taken up and expanded in another or challenged by someone else. For example, the questions of what constitutes the good of friendship and what we want from our friends will be a running theme throughout several contributions. So too will the questions of whether our beliefs should be grounded in evidence alone and whether moral considerations apply normative pressure on *belief* or only on our cognitive mechanisms and our epistemic practices.

In presenting a brief summary of each article and drawing out connections with other papers collected in this special issue, my overarching goal is to direct the reader to open avenues for future research by highlighting questions and challenges that are far from being settled. My hope is that these papers are not taken to be last word on the subject. Rather, they mark the beginning of a serious exploration into a set of questions that concern the morality of belief, i.e., *doxastic morality*.

## 1.

*I would like to think that you are reading this paper because you think it might be interesting and that the editors invited me to*

*write the paper because they think I might write something worth publishing.*

—Keller (20)

Simon Keller in “Belief for Someone Else’s Sake” defends the following claim: there can be good reasons to believe something for someone else’s sake. Further, within *some* friendships, we can have reason to form beliefs for the sake of our friends, even when those beliefs are not supported by the evidence. Keller starts from the observation that we care what beliefs others hold of us. For example, just as it is important to him that you believe well of his philosophical abilities while reading his paper, it is also important to me that you similarly believe well of my abilities while reading this introduction. But, the observation that we happen to care about what others believe of us still leaves open whether it *makes sense* to care about those beliefs.

Keller’s answer, unsurprisingly, is yes. What you believe of me (and what you believe of him) makes a difference to our well-being; it makes a difference to the value of our lives. What you think of us makes a difference to our reputations, our relationship to you, and the success of our projects (presently, this project of articulating whether beliefs can wrong). These are all things in which we have real and legitimate investments. From this line of thought emerges a tension with evidentialism: should you have beliefs that benefit me, beliefs that you owe to me, beliefs that treat me well, etc., or should you have beliefs that are grounded in the evidence?

What the evidentialist forgets, Keller argues, is that we are imperfect. As imperfect beings, we make mistakes and suffer from self-doubt. We can struggle with the demands of everyday life and seek pleasure in pointless and mindless activities. As imperfect beings, what we seek in our friendships is not the same as what a fully virtuous person seeks. Good friendship, Keller argues, need not be orientated to virtue. Good friendship, rather, is like good *palliative care*. The goal of friendship is not to turn an imperfect being into a virtuous being, but rather to make life bearable. As a result, if good friendship doesn’t always aim at virtue, then it’s not the case that good friendship will always fit smoothly into the good human life, nor must the beliefs characteristic of friendship be epistemically virtuous in the traditional evidentialist sense. If the demands of human life are varied and conflicting, so too must be the standards that apply to belief formation.

## 2.

*If you want to hear a reliable opinion on someone’s work, you do not ask his friends.*

—Arpaly and Brinkerhoff (37)

In “Why Epistemic Partiality Is Overrated,” Nomy Arpaly and Anna Brinkerhoff focus on various forms of epistemic partialism that we see defended in Keller’s

piece and elsewhere. Arpaly and Brinkerhoff argue that although there is something compelling to the idea that we ought overestimate our friends, it is not *constitutive* of good friendship that we do so. They argue for this thesis by going through the cases that are used to motivate partialism and asking: if there were a pill, a counter-evidence pill, that gave us the ability to believe better of our friends than the evidence suggests, is there a duty of friendship to take such a pill? As a skeptical voice in this collection of papers, they argue no.

Arpaly and Brinkerhoff's piece brings into focus a number of the underlying theoretical commitments that seem to stand in conflict with the thesis that beliefs can wrong: (i) no practical reasons for belief, (ii) doxastic involuntarism, and (iii) ought implies can. They note, however, that there is a watered-down version of epistemic partialism, call it *partialism-light*, that is compatible with (i) and (ii). According to partialism-light, we do not have doxastic duties toward our friends. Nonetheless, we have duties to take steps to *create in ourselves* dispositions to have certain beliefs about our friends (see Kate Nolfi's "Moral Agency in Believing" in this collection). However, (iii) remains an obstacle for partialism-light. Consider, they ask, the last time you were able to change a longstanding habit, or cultivate a disposition in any lasting way. Not only is it hard, in many cases it may well be impossible. If we accept ought implies can, then we have no duty to cultivate within ourselves these dispositions to have certain beliefs about our friends as suggested by partialism-light.

Following Crawford (forthcoming), Arpaly and Brinkerhoff suggest that what we want is not that our friends believe against the evidence. Rather, what we want is that they develop and maintain accurate views of us, *warts and all*. However, is that *all* that we seek in friendship? If we return to Keller's "Belief for Someone Else's Sake," he notes that friendships take many different forms and perform many different functions. As a result, friendships may manifest different and often mutually incompatible goods. Whereas some friends may stick up for you, others may comfort you, and others you turn to for their sarcastic wit to cut you down to size. When you are seeking comfort in a moment of self-doubt, the friend you turn to is not the brutally honest one. That is not to say, however, that we don't *also* want friends that see our warts. We would want *those* friends not to take a counter-evidence pill, but, we don't always seek the hard truth from *all* our friends. Often when I want the cold hard truth, it's better if it doesn't come from a friend.

### 3.

*... if accepting that belief is typically nonvoluntary, automatic, and reflexive forces us to conclude that believing is typically very much like flushing or sweating, then perhaps our beliefs cannot wrong after all.*

—Nolfi (60)

The key word is “if.” Kate Nolfi in “Moral Agency in Believing” argues that to vindicate the intuitively attractive idea that beliefs can wrong requires understanding belief as involving some sort of exercise of agency. To vindicate the intuitive idea that beliefs can wrong, Nolfi argues we must explain away the following seemingly inconsistent triad.

Claim 1: Our beliefs can (and sometimes do) wrong others.

Claim 2: If beliefs can wrong, then believing, itself, constitutes an expression of our moral agency; if beliefs can wrong, then our beliefs manifest our moral agency.

Claim 3: At least in typical cases, it seems that belief is not (and cannot be) voluntary. Indeed, believing is often completely automatic and reflexive. Often, belief is a kind of immediate, subconscious, spontaneous, and unchosen cognitive response to one’s circumstances: one often finds oneself believing that *p*. (60)

Nolfi’s suggestion is that we need not choose between these three claims, rather, we can consistently embrace them all. To see how this is so, we must reflect on the kinds of agency we can exercise with regard to our beliefs. To this point, Nolfi offers two exercises of agency that can ground the intuitive idea that beliefs can wrong: the environmental regulation account and the dispositional account. These exercises in agency can simultaneously respect the philosophically orthodox view that beliefs are nonvoluntary, automatic, and spontaneous responses to inputs while *also* being genuine exercises in agency. To see these exercises of agency, Nolfi invites us to look in two places: (i) our beliefs are the output of a cognitive system that can manifest our agency given that we can shape the inputs to the system (the environmental regulation account) and (ii) we can determine which belief-regulating dispositions are triggered by inputs to the system (the dispositional account).

On the first account, consider our practice of anonymizing exams before grading to prevent biased beliefs triggered by certain names. In manipulating our environment, we have control over the inputs in response to which our cognitive systems produce belief. This environmental regulation is a kind of agency we can exercise over our beliefs. On the second account, the dispositional account, consider the belief-regulating dispositions of our cognitive systems. Nolfi argues that there is also a kind of agency that can be exercised here. We can, she says, direct our own cognitive thinking. We are, in a sense, responsible for the cultivation of our cognitive character and over time we can shape the way in which our cognitive systems move from input to doxastic output.

One challenge for this account is that at least one of these exercises of agency, the environmental regulation account, requires taking what Paul and Morton in “Believing in Others” call *the diagnostic stance* toward ourselves. Thus, a troubling consequence of Nolfi’s account is that the moral considerations operating on our belief-forming practices require us to step back from seeing ourselves as agents. Now, Nolfi is not unaware of this alienation worry. She, however, bites this bullet and accepts that sometimes we are required to take up this sort of alienated stance

toward our own cognitive processing. We might counter, however, that surely we *ought* identify with our cognitive system? How can we be agents with regard to belief if we don't even identify with our beliefs? In short, whatever reasons we have for belief should be reasons that we take to be *our own*. As a result, an account of doxastic morality not only has an inconsistent triad to tackle, but rather an inconsistent tetrad. Unsurprisingly, Nolfi also has the resources to explain away this inconsistent tetrad, but I'll leave that as something the reader can look forward to.

4.

*We do not generally wrong our friends, mentees, colleagues, patients, or children by drawing more pessimistic conclusions from the evidence than they do, or than we are epistemically permitted to do. The exception to this concerns the sincerity of their commitments . . .*

—Paul and Morton (94)

Sarah Paul and Jennifer Morton in “Believing in Others” ask us to consider a person who adopts the goal of finishing a doctoral dissertation. As I find myself in the same position, let's just consider the question of whether *I* will succeed in finishing my doctoral dissertation. What should you believe about whether I'll succeed? The seemingly obvious answer is whatever the total accessible evidence supports. The *unobvious* answer is that it depends on your relationship to me.

Normally, when beliefs are influenced by personal relationships, those beliefs are our paradigmatic cases of epistemic irrationality. After all, reasons arising from our relationships are irrelevant to the truth of those beliefs. Perhaps we have reasons arising from our relationships to *act as though* we're more confident in our loved one's ability to succeed, but we shouldn't *believe* that they are more likely to succeed. The motivation for this philosophically orthodox line comes from a theoretical commitment we saw expressed in Arpaly and Brinkerhoff: there cannot be practical or ethical reasons that bear directly on the question of what to believe. Paul and Morton agree. However, they argue that although there are not practical or ethical reasons for belief, there are practical or ethical influences on the *standards by which we reason* about what to believe.

To establish this claim, Paul and Morton note that evidential policies govern the way we adjust our evidential thresholds in different contexts. However, there is no *uniquely* best evidential policy to have. There are multiple evidential policies that are rationally permissible for a given thinker to have from the point of view of purely epistemic considerations. Further, if that's the case, then practical and ethical considerations can and should play a role in deciding between epistemically permissible policies. For example, a capacity for grit can be advantageous for an agent. Further, that it would be advantageous to be resilient to incoming evidence that one will likely fail can bear on the question of which evidential policies

one should reason with. A gritty agent requires more evidence before she believes she'll fail than a non-gritty agent; that is, evidential threshold for the question "will I succeed at  $\phi$ -ing if I continue to try?" is higher.

Turning from beliefs about ourselves and our commitments, Paul and Morton argue that our evidential policies can also be shaped by our relationships with others. Within the context of significant relationships, Paul and Morton argue that the default perspective we should take toward one another is *the rational perspective*. This perspective is contrasted with the *diagnostic stance* in which you view another person as an object whose behavior can be explained and predicted like a mechanism. The rational perspective, on the other hand, requires viewing others as rational beings to be engaged with on rational terms.<sup>1</sup> When we doubt our loved ones, we can wrong them if that doubt is the product of an overly low evidential threshold for adopting the diagnostic perspective. Paul and Morton conclude that there is an ethical requirement, a presumption against doubting the reality of our loved one's practical commitments. As Marušić and White will put it in "How Can Beliefs Wrong?—A Strawsonian Epistemology" there is a default entitlement to believe others.

## 5.

*The crucial thought is that if there is more than one epistemically legitimate route to belief, there is space for morality to do some work.*

—Marušić and White (112)

The beliefs that others hold of us can do us justice, and sometimes injustice. For better or worse, our self-esteem and self-love depend on the judgments and beliefs of others, and these beliefs seem to have ethical significance; we can feel *wronged* by what others believe of us. But, how do we make sense of this puzzling idea? For Berislav Marušić and Stephen White in "How Can Beliefs Wrong?—A Strawsonian Epistemology" the answer will come from (i) extending some Strawsonian thoughts in moral philosophy to the realm of epistemology, and (ii) some Burgean apparatus.

Marušić and White begin by noting that the main source of resistance to the idea is one we've seen before: an assumption about reasons for belief. That you have a moral obligation to believe  $p$  is not the *right kind of reason* to believe  $p$  because the moral obligation does not bear on the truth or falsity of  $p$ . Out of this first-line resistance—the wrong-kind-of-reasons problem—emerges a second: *the*

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1. This distinction also tracks the participant vs. objective stance that one finds in Strawson (1962/2008) and Marušić and White's (2018) discussion of treating others as informants vs. sources of information. Further discussion of how our close relationships (and in general our duties toward others) can change what orientations one should take toward the evidence can also be found in Basu (2018, ch. 2), Schroeder (forthcoming), and Basu and Schroeder (forthcoming).



*redundancy problem*. On many accounts responding to the first problem, whatever moral obligation there is to not believe  $p$  does not *by itself* do any normative work in determining whether one should or should not believe  $p$ . The moral obligation, then, becomes redundant. If this is so, then what normative work is there left for morality to do? In what sense, then, does it even *matter* that the belief is morally wrong if everything can be handled by a story about the evidence and epistemic considerations alone?

To illustrate this redundancy problem, Marušić and White ask us to reconsider one of Miranda Fricker's (2007) primary examples of epistemic injustice: Greenleaf's sexist dismissal of Marge's testimony in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. Fricker argues that the wrong done in this case concerns a failure to accord Marge the credibility that would be epistemically warranted under the circumstances. Marušić and White note, however, that *that* is not where the wrong should be located. There is a wrong done to Marge, but it is a wrong that is *more* than just an epistemically faulty response to the evidence. However, they also note, Fricker has the resources to articulate this deeper harm. What she draws on, and what in turn Marušić and White draw on, is Craig's (1990) distinction between treating a person as an *informant* and treating a person as a *source of information*. This distinction maps onto the Strawsonian distinction between the *participant stance* and the *objective stance*, and the distinction we saw earlier in Paul and Morton between the *rational perspective* and the *diagnostic stance*. The wrong Greenleaf commits against Marge, then, is that he does not view her assertions as the contributions of an *informant* in a distinctively interpersonal form of exchange. In refusing to reason with Marge, Greenleaf takes an *objective attitude* toward her. The wrong involved in doxastic wronging (at least sometimes) is a wrong that stems from our failure to engage with others as informants, as fellow reasoners, as opposed to merely sources of information.

We now also have the resources to understand Marušić and White's claim that we wrong in belief the same way we wrong in action. We wrong, in both cases, when we fall short of justified normative expectations, for example, when we fail to be genuinely cooperative. Where Mark Schroeder in "When Beliefs Wrong" will cash this idea out in terms of the *interpretative theory of persons*, Marušić and White suggest a *Strawsonian Epistemology*. That is, the recognition that belief is part of the participant stance. Instead of adopting evidential policies or adjusting our thresholds, what is required of us within our relationships and our shared activities of reasoning is an *epistemic permission* or a *default entitlement* to believe others (see Burge 1993).

This picture offered by Marušić and White also presents us with a picture of philosophical inquiry that ought appeal to most. When I am engaged in this project of writing philosophy, and you are engaged in this project of reading philosophy, we are reasoning together. It would be improper of me to try to manipulate you into accepting my arguments as true, just as it would be inappropriate for you to take yourself to have a debunking explanation for why I argue what I do (see

also Schroeder, Forthcoming). When we do that, we fail to engage in this shared project of reasoning, we fail to take each other seriously, and we fail to meet the standard of mutual answerability. When doing philosophy with one another, we ought adopt the participant stance.

6.

*I would like to suggest that beliefs wrong you only when they diminish you, in a sense that I will try to explain—only when they bring you down.*

—Schroeder (124)

As the title of his paper suggests, in “When Beliefs Wrong” Mark Schroeder takes for granted that beliefs can wrong and turns his focus to the question of *when* beliefs wrong: beliefs wrong when they *falsely diminish*. At the root of Schroeder’s argument are three moving parts, and I will take each in turn: (i) moral encroachment on epistemic rationality, (ii) an account of diminishment, and (iii) the interpretative theory of persons.

Starting with moral encroachment, Schroeder argues that moral encroachment is just a special case of what has generally been called *pragmatic encroachment*. Moral considerations raise the stakes for how much evidence is required to *epistemically* justify one’s belief. These stakes-related reasons arise from the cost of error. Whereas traditional accounts of pragmatic encroachment have focused on *practical* costs, an insight of accounts of moral encroachment is that moral costs of error are a special case of costs that aren’t tied directly to action. In the standard diet of cases offered for pragmatic encroachment, the costs of error that count against belief are the consequences of what you will do if you *rely* on the belief. For example, if you have a severe peanut allergy and rely on the belief that your sandwich is almond butter on the basis of insufficient evidence, you risk a terrible turn of events. In these cases, the primary wrong is one of *action*. However, there can be some moral costs that beliefs carry in and of themselves, i.e., independently of their actual or risked consequences. The argument for the way moral considerations raise the stakes stems from a familiar observation articulated in other contributions to this volume: our interpersonal relationships are constituted, in part, by what we believe of each other. The effects our beliefs can have on our relationships is not mediated by the effects of our beliefs on our actions. Take, for example, my relationship to myself. The wrong I commit to myself when I believe I won’t succeed at a task concerns a way of relating to myself.

Turning to diminishment, Schroeder argues that beliefs wrong only when they *diminish* you, i.e., when they *bring you down*. To bring someone down, Schroeder argues, is to interpret them in a way that makes their contribution out to be less. To be diminished, then, is to be seen as *less than*, to not be seen as a full agent.

Consider, for example, the positive stereotype that South Asians excel academically. I may have benefited from this stereotype, but there is also a sense in which when people believe that I will excel academically *because of* my ethnicity, my successes are *diminished*. My successes are no longer a reflection of *me*.

This brings us now to what Schroeder calls *the interpretative theory of persons*. Schroeder argues for the following norm governing our relations with one another: you do not relate to someone as a person unless you are relating to the best interpretation of their behavior. We can consider this something like a *participating stance* or the *rational perspective*, but with more partiality toward the other person. When you fail to relate to the best interpretation of another person's behavior, this is a failure of interpersonal relations. Instead of standing in relation to a person, you stand in a relation to their body or their behavior. This way of relating to others is deeply *depersonalizing*. This, Schroeder argues, explains why when partiality is understood as applying charity when interpreting others, this is *not* epistemically irresponsible.

One challenge for Schroeder's account stems from Arpaly and Brinkerhoff's argument that we want our friends to see us as *we are*, to not *always* interpret us in the *best* light, but rather in an *accurate* light. Other challenges emerge from Begby's contribution. Instead of repeating those challenges, here I want to briefly focus on a related challenge and I should warn that the following discussion concerns torture.

We can imagine cases in which, for reasons of self-protection, perhaps we ought not relate to the best interpretation of another's behavior. For example, during traumatic events, depersonalizing the other (or even oneself) might be a matter of self-preservation. For a less-morally-laden example, imagine that going to the dentist is an anxiety-inducing prospect. In such a case, it can be helpful to not think of the dentist as another person or to even consider yourself as a person. Rather, you are an object being operated on. In cases where a much deeper *moral* wrong is being committed to you or against you, e.g., cases of torture and similar betrayals, relating to the other as suggested by the interpretative theory of persons would compound the wrong.

As David Sussman (2005) has argued, part of what makes torture a distinctive moral wrong concerns the interpersonal relationship it enacts. Effective torture pits the victim against herself. The victim, Sussman argues, "is forced into a position where she must try to anticipate and understand every little mood and quirk of her torturers. Despite herself, she finds herself trying to grasp her torturer's interests, anticipate his demands, and present herself in a way that might evoke pity or satisfaction from him" (25). Such a case can be taken in two ways. First, it could provide more evidence for the interpretative theory of persons, i.e., we wouldn't be able to explain this way in which torture is a distinctive kind of moral wrong without it. But, it also suggests that there may be times when it is morally required not to take such a stance toward others. After all, if a moral theory requires that I relate to my torturers and believe the best of them, that is a strike against the moral theory.

*When there is significant civil unrest around a controversial issue (like race and police violence in the United States), one can suspect that one is in for quite a ride when an interlocutor begins with “I’m sorry, but the truth is . . .”*

—Dotson (134)

There is something rotten in epistemology. Kristie Dotson’s “Accumulating Epistemic Power: A Problem with Epistemology” is an attempt to articulate the problems within epistemology that emerge in the face of oppressive structural problems. In so doing, Dotson not only offers us an account of how beliefs can wrong, but also provides a new way of looking at what we are doing when we engage in epistemological inquiry. According to Dotson, the way beliefs can wrong is as follows. Through the accumulation and deployment of epistemic power, the beliefs one holds (and in turn one’s epistemic conduct) can protect an oppressive status quo by recasting these oppressive structures as reasonable, say by recasting police slayings of Black people as warranted.

The primary example at the heart of Dotson’s paper is Joe Scarborough’s comments (more accurately, his rant) on Michael Brown’s death and the civil unrest in Ferguson that followed the slaying of Michael Brown at the hands of Darren Wilson. Dissecting his comments and the assumptions underlying his casting of Michael Brown as a “problematic” victim, Dotson carefully illustrates the way in which Joe Scarborough, from a position of epistemic power, is able to remain oblivious to how he contributes to a terrifying epistemological reality for Black people: the devaluing of their deaths.

To see this, let us turn to Dotson’s stalking horse: Joe Scarborough’s claim that Michael Brown is a problematic victim. Joe Scarborough grounds this claim by pointing to “evidence” that any “reasonable” person would take to support his claim. This move made by Joe Scarborough, to appeal to “the evidence” that “any reasonable person” would take to support his claim is, Dotson argues, his first seizure of epistemic power. The appeal to the evidence is a claim to an *epistemological high ground*, and it is the first step to a “reasoned” devaluation of Michael Brown’s death.

The second step is twofold: (i) to make demands on others to meet (or exceed) his so-called evidence-based reasonable stance and (ii) to *epistemically contain* what evidence can be appealed to in order to meet these higher epistemic standards. By centering the conversation on Michael Brown’s “problematic” victim status, Dotson notes that Joe Scarborough can both skew the conversational context away from and restrict the evidence he’ll consider. As a result, this works to exclude the strongest evidence one can marshal for the injustice of Michael Brown’s death: the structural and systemic nature of threats to Black lives in a US context.

This epistemic power exercised by Joe Scarborough, i.e., the ability to raise and contour epistemic standards, allows him to manipulate knowledge contexts so that only claims that will meet his standards will be seen as legitimate. Further, this

epistemic manipulation also works to thwart genuine exchanges between people with opposing positions. As a result, one enters a state of *resilient oblivion*. Joe Scarborough, through his exercises of epistemic power and status, has ensured that he need not consider positions that challenge his own. He has ensured that he can remain oblivious to the state of Black America and state-sanctioned violence.

The phenomenon that Dotson presents is much more general than the case of Joe Scarborough. A challenge for accounts of norms on belief (or the epistemic processes that lead to the production of particular beliefs) is precisely this way in which standardly accepted norms of reasoning can be manipulated to wrong others. There is a phenomenon here that requires more attention: *epistemic manipulation*. For example, emotional abusers make use of norms that are part of a healthy relationship, and they use those norms to manipulate their partners. Part of why it is so difficult to recognize emotional manipulation as a form of abuse is how closely it resembles healthy behavior. As the counterpart to emotional abuse and emotional manipulation, it can be similarly difficult to identify epistemic manipulation because of how closely it resembles epistemic norms we standardly accept as good epistemic norms. Dotson's paper, however, provides a useful conceptual framework to begin understanding what epistemic manipulation might look like.

## 8.

*... the idea that beliefs can constitute wrongs in their own right, as opposed to merely causing us to act wrongly, risks overshooting its goal, even as the goal is perfectly legitimate and indeed philosophically laudable.*

—Begby (169)

The second voice of skepticism and moderation comes from Endre Begby, in “Doxastic Morality: A Moderately Skeptical Perspective.” Begby's skepticism is directed at the question of whether there are moral norms which operate directly on belief *independently* of epistemic norms also operating on belief, i.e., whether beliefs can *constitute* moral wrongs in their own right. Ultimately, Begby's skepticism is moderate in nature. Begby grants that the motivations underlying accounts of doxastic morality cannot be dismissed lightly. However, as a voice of caution, he warns that these motivations needn't require radical changes to our traditional understanding of the domains of epistemology and morality.

Begby's paper covers a range of topics from the nature of prejudice to moral responsibility and epistemically blameless wrongdoing. Here, I focus on four challenges that Begby raises for accounts of doxastic morality: (i) the incompleteness of encroachment, (ii) the legitimacy of moral claims on belief, (iii) the nature of relational wrongs, and (iv) the perverse consequences of doxastic morality.

First, encroachment-style views are premised on the idea that we can *resolve* this conflict between epistemic and moral considerations by showing how moral considerations can affect an agent's evidential policies. However, even if the moral stakes or practical considerations determine the evidential threshold a belief must meet, that is a constraint on *epistemic processing*, not a constraint that operates directly on belief itself. As a result, an agent could adopt the morally required evidential policy, adjust their threshold to meet the moral stakes of their situation appropriately, and upon receiving enough evidence, be justified in forming the problematic prejudiced beliefs. In that case, the encroachment theorist must either say that the morally objectionable belief is no longer morally objectionable or, if it is still morally objectionable, it doesn't matter because the threshold has been surpassed. Further, as Marušić and White have also noted, there is a redundancy problem here. If the belief is genuinely wrong, then the moral questions should remain on the table after the epistemic questions have been settled. Encroachment-style views, then, are incomplete accounts of doxastic wronging.

Second, Begby grants that beliefs can cause wrongs. That is not up for debate. It is natural, however, to think it is the actions that follow from belief that wrong, not the belief itself. What is radical, then, about accounts of doxastic morality is the idea that I can wrong you simply in virtue of the beliefs I hold about you, regardless of how or even whether those beliefs manifest in actions toward you. To what extent, however, can I legitimately place a claim on you to believe a particular thing about me? As Begby rightly notes, a challenge for several accounts that we've seen presented in this collection of papers is to explain what we can *legitimately* require of others' beliefs about us. For example, Keller and I may want you to believe well of our philosophical ability, but what *right* do we have to claim that of you? Do we really have a *moral claim* upon you to believe that we are excellent philosophers? For a more troubling example, consider Srinivasan's (2018) discussion of Elliot Rodger. Quoting from his manifesto, she notes that he claims to have been "cast out and rejected, forced to endure an existence of loneliness and insignificance, all because the females of the human species were incapable of seeing the *value* in [him]." What right does Elliot Rodger have to demand that the females he interacts with see *value* in him? In particular, notice that where Elliot Rodger speaks of value, what he means is being sexually desired by "hot, beautiful blonde girls." Certainly he has no right to that. In short, when do we make *morally permissible* demands on the cognitive lives of others?

Third, who is it that we wrong and what kind of relationship do we need to stand in with them? Begby asks us to imagine an alien species arriving on Earth long after human beings have moved on to another planet. These aliens find extensive historical records and somehow they come to abhor red-haired people. Now, imagine the red-haired people living elsewhere in the universe: are they wronged by the beliefs of this alien species? I share this worry with Begby, and we do not need distant aliens to feel the force of it. Consider, for example, our beliefs about people in our distant past. When I see images of Roman graffiti and come to believe

that whoever drew that was childish, have I come to wrong that Roman? Must I take the participant stance to that Roman? The answer is clear in the case of deep personal relationships to each other, but when the relationship is thinner, indirect, or nonexistent, to what extent can others have moral claims on our cognitive lives? Further, even within our close relationships, sometimes we ought take the objective stance. I grant that the defenders of doxastic morality, myself included, have yet to provide satisfactory answers to these questions.

Fourth, Begby argues those defending doxastic morality must make room in our accounts for respecting the sense in which people who grow up in deeply prejudiced social settings with no access to contrary evidence should also be counted as *victims*. If you had the bad luck of growing up in a severely constrained socio-epistemic environment, then holding you responsible and morally blameworthy for the predictable consequences of your limited epistemic opportunities would be perverse. It would compound your plight.

This challenge is a serious one, but I think it brings to light a promising feature of accounts of doxastic morality. To see this, let me start with a biographic note. I did not learn about residential schools until I attended university. In no history textbook, in no class or conversation was the fact that First Nation, Inuit, and Métis children were removed from their homes and communities in the name of “assimilation” ever taught to me. The way in which I was taught, the way in which all Canadian children were taught, was (and continues to be) constrained by a socio-epistemic environment that deeply *wrongs* First Nation, Inuit, and Métis peoples (see Mills (2007) on “White Ignorance”). An account of doxastic morality that holds people responsible and morally blameworthy for the predictable consequences of our limited epistemic opportunities might be perverse. But, these wrongs at the level of the believer must be balanced against the fact that we must also do justice to this ongoing wrong that occurs when history is erased or forgotten. The wrong to First Nation, Inuit, and Métis children is not just a wrong in how the Canadian government *acted*. Here, Kristie Dotson’s point about how oppressive structures are problems of epistemology will be helpful. If we do not accept responsibility and blame for our belief that are the result of forgetting or miseducation, we continue to contribute to a terrifying epistemological reality for the First Nation, Inuit, and Métis peoples: we devalue their lives and experiences.

In the interests of not making a long introduction even longer, let me end by noting that there is a question here of what *doing justice to the wrong* requires. We can accept the thesis that beliefs can wrong, but disagree about issues concerning responsibility and blame that accompany the wrong. Begby argues that we can make sense of the ways we could be morally and epistemically blameless in wronging someone and that the people thereby wronged shouldn’t be tasked with making the case that their wrongdoers are morally bad. But, there remains a sense in which such an account would seem to let wrongdoers off the hook too easily for the ways in which they wrong. This not only reflects a clash of intuitions, but points to deeper issues concerning the nature of wronging that require more

attention than can be given here or in this collection. My hope is that the reader who makes it this far heeds this recurring theme: there is much more to be said.

9.

*... once we view epistemic partiality toward people we care about as an aspect of faith in these people, we can better grasp the role that such partiality occupies in a good life.*

—Preston-Roedder (190)

Faith has often been dismissed as an objectionable form of epistemic irrationality. In “Three Varieties of Faith,” Ryan Preston-Roedder argues that in dismissing faith in this way philosophers have neglected dimensions of moral life and human flourishing that discussions of faith can help illuminate. Accounting for the significance of faith also helps us clarify the relationship between our epistemic and practical ideals that is driving much of the work on doxastic wrongdoing.

As the title of his paper suggests, Preston-Roedder distinguishes between three varieties of faith: (i) faith in oneself, (ii) faith in your friends, children, and others to whom you bear certain personal relationships, and (iii) faith in humanity. These three varieties share a similar structure: a cognitive element, a volitional element, and an emotional element. Focusing on the cognitive element, where Paul and Morton argue that there are multiple evidential policies that are rationally permissible for a given thinker to have from the point of view of purely epistemic considerations, Preston-Roedder argues that because people are *opaque* and the evidence we have about them is at best *partial* and *ambiguous*, there are many epistemically permissible responses to evidence. Thus, we are permitted to form judgments about others that cast them in a more or less favorable light.

Faith in oneself is a limited form of optimism about your own capacity to adopt and carry out worthwhile projects. This form of faith is forward-looking and in some sense, then, a virtuous person’s faith in herself is much like Paul and Morton’s gritty agent, i.e., she does not yield readily to doubts about her capacity to succeed in her projects. The importance and significance of the second variety of faith—faith in our friends, children, and to those to whom we bear certain personal relationships—stems from three considerations. First, it plays an instrumental role in enabling our personal relationships to flourish. Second, it can prompt our loved ones to adopt morally decent actions and attitudes or to perform well in certain nonmoral respects. And third, through this kind of faith you stand in a kind of solidarity with your loved ones. When you lack this faith in others, it can feel like a grave form of betrayal. Epistemic partiality, then, is a form of this second variety of faith.

Faith in humanity, Preston-Roedder argues, is fundamentally a *moral* virtue. Whereas other varieties of faith dispose you to make both moral and nonmoral



judgments, faith in humanity mainly disposes you to make moral judgments. When you have faith in humanity, you stand in a form of *solidarity* with humanity; you, in a sense, cast your lot in with theirs. Faith in humanity, he argues, presents us with an ideal of a moral community. We can recognize our obligations to our closest loved ones, and how when we interact with them, proper moral treatment is not just a matter of what outward behavior we adopt toward them, but also adopting certain attitudes toward them. Here we see echoes of both the Strawsonian Epistemology defended by Marušić and White and the interpretative theory of persons defended by Schroeder. Ideally, we ought relate to members of our moral community in the same way we relate to those with whom we stand in these deep personal relationships. In so doing, we stand in solidarity with one another and help make everyone's lives worthwhile. This, we see, is the strongest form of partialism that has been argued for so far.

10.

*"No," said Wittgenstein. "Say what you want to say. Be crude and then we shall get on." The suggestion that in doing philosophy one should not try to banish or tidy up a ludicrously crude but troubling thought, but rather give it its day, its week, its month, in court, seems to me very helpful.*

—Philippa Foot (2001, 1)

As I noted at the start of this paper, the thesis that beliefs wrong, although compelling, can sound ridiculous. Not only does it sound ridiculous, it also has troubling consequences that we must grapple with if we want to do justice to the intuition. Regardless of where you stand on this question of "Can beliefs wrong?" my hope is that this introduction and the articles collected in this special issue convince you that this is a thesis that deserves a day, a week, a month (or more) in court. There are still many open questions, and a lot more remains to be said. To paraphrase Nozick (1974, xii), there is room in philosophy for words other than last words.

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