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In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief

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ABSTRACT

Many meta-ethicists are *alethists*: they claim that practical considerations can constitute normative reasons for action, but not for belief. But the alethist owes us an account of the relevant difference between action and belief, which thereby explains this normative difference. Here, I argue that two salient strategies for discharging this burden fail. According to the first strategy, the relevant difference between action and belief is that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, but not for action, while according to the second strategy, it is that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for action, but not for belief. But the former claim only shifts the alethist's explanatory burden, and the latter claim is wrong—we can believe for practical reasons. Until the alethist can offer a better account, then, I argue that we should accept that there are practical reasons for belief.

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1. Introduction

Suppose that, if Joseph were to exercise regularly, it would make him a happier person. Intuitively, this is a *normative reason* for him to exercise: the fact that his exercising would make him happier *counts in favour* of him doing so. Now suppose that, if Mary were to believe that God exists, it would make her a happier person. Is this a normative reason for her to believe that God exists?

Many meta-ethicists and epistemologists alike say 'no' [Clifford 1877; Kelly 2002; Shah 2006; Thomson 2008; Parfit 2011; Whiting 2014]. They insist that the only normative reasons for or against believing any proposition are *epistemic* ones—reasons that are in some way relevant to getting at the truth and avoiding error. Let's call these folks *alethists*.[1] On the other hand, *pragmatists* [Pascal 1670; James 1897; Reisner 2009; Markovits 2014; Rinard 2015] say that the answer is 'yes'. They claim that, while practical considerations like the fact that believing in God would make one happier are obviously in no way connected to the goal of getting at the truth and

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[1] The alethist camp includes, but is not limited to, *evidentialists* (i.e. those who claim that all normative reasons for believing p are considerations that bear on the truth of p). An alethist may deny evidentialism, since there may be some epistemic reasons for or against believing p that do not bear on the truth of p, as Schroeder [2012] argues.

avoiding error, such considerations nonetheless genuinely *count in favour* of believing certain propositions.[2]

Given the similarities between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's, the alethist assumes the dialectical burden in this debate. After all, the very same benefit would be conferred by Joseph's exercising and by Mary's believing that God exists. But the alethist insists that, while this benefit does generate a normative reason for Joseph to exercise, it does not generate a normative reason for Mary to believe that God exists. The alethist thus owes us an account of what the relevant difference is between *action* and *belief*, which thereby explains the normative difference between these two cases. Without such an account, we should assume that there is no such difference, and thereby accept pragmatism as the default view.

My central aim in this paper is to defend pragmatism by showing that the two prominent alethist strategies for discharging this explanatory burden fail. According to the first strategy, the relevant difference between action and belief that explains the normative difference between the above two cases is that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, but not for action. And, according to the second strategy, the relevant difference between action and belief is that, while the fact that one's doing some act would be beneficial can be a *motivating* reason *for which* one performs that act, the fact that believing some proposition would be beneficial cannot be a motivating reason for which one believes that proposition. I argue here that the first strategy fails because it simply shifts the alethist's explanatory burden, and that the second strategy fails because practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief. My arguments thereby show that the alethist has not discharged her dialectical burden, and that we should accept pragmatism.

To be clear, though, I take pragmatism to be simply the existential claim that there are practical reasons for belief. Pragmatism, thus understood, encompasses a spectrum of views, and my argument is entirely neutral with respect to which particular pragmatist position we should adopt. For example, a very modest pragmatist might claim that practical reasons and epistemic reasons are not even comparable. On this view, there is what one *epistemically ought* to believe and what one *practically ought* to believe, but there is no such thing as what one ought *all things considered* to believe, where this all-things-considered-'ought' takes into account both practical and epistemic reasons. A more extreme pragmatist, though, may insist that practical and epistemic reasons are comparable, and claim that practical reasons *always* outweigh epistemic ones. And there are obviously intermediate options as well. So, while my aim here is to argue that we should accept pragmatism, this leaves open the question of how robust of a pragmatist view we should adopt.

2. The Standards of Correctness Strategy

The first alethist strategy for explaining the normative difference between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's begins with the quite common claim that truth is the *constitutive standard of correctness* for belief. That is, many philosophers claim that it follows from *what belief is* that belief has a certain correctness condition: since belief is a mental state that aims to represent the way the world is, what it is for a belief to be correct is for

[2] A third position that I set aside here is *nihilism*, the view that practical considerations are not normative reasons for belief because there are no normative reasons for belief at all—not even epistemic ones.

it to be true [Velleman 2000; Wedgwood 2002; Thomson 2008]. So, one difference between action and belief is that a belief, but not an act, is *constitutively correct*—that is, correct, *given the constitutive standards for things of that kind*—if and only if it is true.

The alethist may take this difference to explain the normative difference between action and belief. Since truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, the only considerations that bear on whether believing a proposition would be correct are those considerations that bear on whether the proposition is true. And since practical considerations do not bear on whether a proposition is true, they do not bear on whether believing a proposition would be correct. The alethist may take this to explain why practical considerations cannot be normative reasons for belief, even though they can be normative reasons for action. Let's call this the *standards of correctness strategy*.[3]

This strategy relies on the assumption that all normative reasons for having some attitude A must bear on whether having A would be constitutively correct—that is, whether having A would be correct, given the constitutive standards for attitudes of A's kind. This is what licenses the alethist's inference from the claim that practical considerations do not bear on whether it would be constitutively correct to believe p to the conclusion that such considerations cannot constitute normative reasons for belief.

This alethist strategy thus assumes that there are no so-called *wrong-kind reasons*—genuine normative reasons for having some attitude that do not bear on whether it is constitutively correct to have that attitude. That is, the practical reasons literature abounds with intuitive examples of considerations that seem to count in favour of having some attitude, but that do not bear on whether having that attitude would be constitutively correct. For example, suppose that admiring your mother would increase your inheritance. This seems to count in favour of admiring your mother. But it seems to follow from what admiration is that admiring O is correct if and only if O is, in fact, admirable. And the fact that admiring your mother would increase your inheritance does not bear on whether your mother is admirable. So, this fact does not bear on whether it is constitutively correct to admire your mother. Some take considerations like these to be genuine normative reasons nonetheless, but others insist that the only genuine normative reasons there are for or against having an attitude are so-called *right-kind reasons*—considerations that do bear on whether it is constitutively correct to have the relevant attitude.[4]

Importantly, though, the pragmatist presumably admits that practical considerations do not bear on whether some belief would be constitutively correct (since they do not bear on whether the belief is true), but insists that such considerations are genuine normative reasons nonetheless. So, whether or not all normative reasons for having an attitude must bear on whether it would be constitutively correct to have that attitude is precisely what is at stake in the pragmatism vs alethism debate. The alethist who adopts the standards of correctness strategy thus cannot simply *assume* that there are no wrong-kind reasons; she must provide some argument.

The alethist might argue that the view that there are only right-kind reasons provides a more unified normative theory. After all, this view is compatible with claiming

[3] Thomson [2008: chs 7, 8] endorses something like this strategy, although her argument is more complicated.

[4] For example, Hieronymi [2005], Markovits [2014], and Olson [2004] take there to be an important difference between right-kind and wrong-kind reasons, but claim that both kinds are genuine normative reasons, whereas Parfit [2011] and Skorupski [2010] claim that only right kind reasons are really normative reasons. See Rabinowicz and Ronnow-Rasmussen [2004] and Schroeder [2010] for further discussion of the right-kind vs wrong-kind reason distinction.

that, in cases where it would be beneficial to believe that God exists or to admire one's mother, one has right-kind reasons to *want* to have those attitudes, and reasons to *cause* oneself to do so. The view that there are only right-kind reasons can thus validate our intuitions about these cases, while also providing a quite unified account of reasons for attitudes: all normative reasons for or against having an attitude are considerations that bear on whether it would be constitutively correct to have that attitude.

But the view that there are only right-kind reasons is actually not the more unified view of normative reasons overall. This is because not all normative reasons for performing a kind of *action* bear on the constitutive correctness of that action. For example, it follows from what it is to do a triple Salchow that a triple Salchow is correct if and only if the figure skater takes off from the back inside edge of her foot, spins three times in the air in the direction of her takeoff foot, and lands on the outside edge of the opposite foot. But most normative reasons for doing a triple Salchow do not bear on the constitutive correctness of one's triple Salchow—for example, the fact that it's fun or that it will earn one the gold medal.

Similarly, it seems to follow from what an assertion is that asserting that p is correct if and only if p is true. So, like belief, truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for assertion. But there are many reasons for asserting p that do not bear on whether p is true, and thus do not bear on whether asserting p is constitutively correct.[5] For example, the fact that asserting 'It's a lovely day outside' would alleviate an awkward silence is a normative reason to assert that it's a lovely day outside. And the fact that asserting 'Paulie isn't home' will save your brother's life when the Mafia comes knocking is a normative reason to assert that Paulie isn't home. But neither of these reasons bears on the truth of your assertion, and thus neither reason bears on whether your assertion is constitutively correct.

Denying that there are wrong-kind reasons for attitudes thus actually posits an important normative difference between action and attitudes: namely, that considerations that do not bear on whether an attitude is constitutively correct cannot be genuine normative reasons for having that attitude, but considerations that do not bear on whether an *action* is constitutively correct *can* be normative reasons for doing that act. On the other hand, accepting that there are both right-kind and wrong-kind reasons allows that normative reasons and constitutive standards of correctness come apart for actions and attitudes alike, and thus offers a more unified view of normative reasons overall.

More importantly, then, the standards of correctness strategy accounts for the normative difference between action and belief only by positing a further unexplained normative difference between action and attitudes, more generally: namely, that normative reasons for attitudes, but not normative reasons for action, are necessarily tied to constitutive standards of correctness. So, the problem with the standards of correctness strategy is that it merely shifts, rather than discharges, the alethist's explanatory burden.

The alethist might attempt to explain this further normative difference by claiming that normative reasons for some type of response, α, are determined by constitutive standards only if the most fundamental kind of response of which α is a type has a constitutive standard of correctness. After all, triple Salchows and assertions are, more fundamentally, *actions*. So, the alethist may argue that, while there are constitutive standards of correctness for triple Salchows and assertions, there are no constitutive standards of correctness for action, as a general kind. This would explain why

[5] Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this example.

normative reasons for doing triple Salchows or making assertions are not necessarily tied to constitutive standards of correctness.[6]

But this explanation actually undermines the standards of correctness strategy altogether. After all, belief, intention, and desires are, more fundamentally, *attitudes*, and there do not seem to be constitutive standards of correctness for attitudes, as a general kind. So, the above explanation for why normative reasons for action are not necessarily tied to constitutive standards of correctness, if true, would entail that normative reasons for attitudes, including belief, are not necessarily tied to constitutive standards of correctness either.

The alethist might argue, instead, that normative reasons for attitudes are necessarily tied to constitutive standards, unlike normative reasons for action, because only considerations that bear on the constitutive correctness of an attitude can *motivate* one to have that type of attitude, while considerations that do not bear on the constitutive correctness of an action can motivate one to perform that action. But this ultimately collapses the standards of correctness strategy into the second strategy that alethists use in order to discharge their explanatory burden. So, that is where we will now turn.

3. The Motivational Strategy

Another way that some alethists [Kelly 2002; Shah 2006; Parfit 2011: app. A] attempt to explain the normative difference between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's is by first claiming that normative reasons must be

> POSSIBLY MOTIVATING: R is a normative reason for S to φ only if R can be a *motivating reason* for which someone (with a normal human psychology) φs.

The alethist then claims that the relevant difference between action and belief is a

> MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE: Practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for which someone (with a normal human psychology) performs an act, but they cannot constitute motivating reasons for which someone (with a normal human psychology) believes a proposition.[7]

So, for example, according to this *motivational strategy*, while the fact that exercising will make one happier can be a motivating reason for which someone exercises, the fact that believing in God would make one happier cannot be a motivating reason for which someone believes that God exists. Given POSSIBLY MOTIVATING, this explains why the fact that exercising will make Joseph happier is a normative reason for Joseph to exercise, but the fact that believing in God would make Mary happier is not a normative reason for Mary to believe that God exists.

[6] Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this response.

[7] I assume that the relevant kind of possibility here is a general psychological possibility relativized to a normal human psychology because, if the motivational strategy involved a more local psychological possibility that is relativized to the agent's particular psychological features, POSSIBLY MOTIVATING would rule out too many reasons. For example, suppose that I have been brainwashed to believe that all scientists are frauds, so that I am psychologically incapable of believing anything on the basis of testimony from scientists. If POSSIBLY MOTIVATING involved a more local psychological possibility, it would imply that the fact that the majority of scientists claim that global warming is being caused by humans is not an epistemic reason for *me* to believe that global warming is being caused by humans. On the other hand, if the motivational strategy involved a broader sense of psychological possibility that is not relativized to creatures like *us*, then MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE would not be very plausible, since we can at least imagine creatures unlike us whose psychological features are such that they can believe for practical considerations. Reisner [2009] makes similar points.

Many meta-ethicists accept POSSIBLY MOTIVATING [Williams 1979; Dancy 2000; Shah 2006; Parfit 2011] because the essential role of normative reasons is to *guide* our actions and attitudes. If it is impossible for anyone with a normal human psychology to perform some act (or have some attitude) for some consideration R, then R cannot play the essential guiding role of a normative reason.

And while many meta-ethicists find MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE plausible simply on the basis of introspection [Raz 2009; Parfit 2011: app. A; Markovits 2014; Whiting 2014], Shah [2006] has also offered a powerful argument in its favour. First, Shah [2003] makes the observation that, when consciously deliberating about whether to believe p, we cannot arrive at the belief that p *solely* by recognizing that it would be advantageous do so: we must deliberate about whether p. This is what Shah calls the *transparency of belief*, which cries out for explanation. Shah [2006] then argues that one explanation for this psychological phenomenon is that practical considerations simply cannot constitute motivating reasons for belief. If practical considerations cannot motivate us to believe *at all*, this would explain why we cannot come to believe p on the basis of recognizing practical considerations *alone*.[8]

On the other hand, if practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief, transparency is quite mysterious. In fact, the claim that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief seems to be in tension with the very phenomenon of transparency itself. This is because the degree to which one is motivated to φ on the basis of some reason R often corresponds with how strong a reason one takes R to be. So, if practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief, then one should be able to believe p solely on the basis of some practical consideration R, provided that one takes R to be a sufficiently strong reason to do so. But this is not the case: even if believing that I am immortal would relieve me from a lifetime of anxiety, and I believe that this is a *decisive* reason to believe that I am immortal, I still cannot come to believe it purely on that basis.

So, the motivational strategy seems plausible. I ultimately argue in section 5, however, that this strategy fails because MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE is false: practical considerations *can* constitute motivating reasons for belief. Moreover, as I explain in section 6, my argument that we can believe for practical reasons is compatible with not only the phenomenon of transparency, but a plausible explanation of it as well. But first, in the following section, I defend a particular account of motivating reasons on which my argument relies.

4. Motivating Reasons

Let's first distinguish *motivating* reasons from *normative* and *merely explanatory* reasons. While normative reasons are facts that *count in favour* of an agent's φing, motivating reasons are facts *for which* an agent φs, and merely explanatory reasons are facts that are involved in the explanation of *why* an agent φed, but that are not facts for which the agent φed.[9] To illustrate, consider the following case:

[8] Shah [2003, 2006] actually gives a fuller explanation for transparency, which I discuss in section 6.

[9] These distinctions originate in Smith [1994] and Schroeder [2007]. I assume here that normative, motivating, and explanatory reasons are all facts (that may or may not obtain), along the lines of Dancy [2000]. But everything that I say here is also compatible with taking them to be propositions, as Schroeder [2007] does.

(*Snakes that are Plain*) Samuel has been hypnotized to believe falsely that all snakes without any markings are poisonous. One day, while walking in the woods, he encounters a plain snake, and runs away in fear. In fact, the snake that Samuel encountered was poisonous, which was evident by the rattle on its tail.

The fact that the snake has a rattle is a normative reason for Samuel to run away—it genuinely *counts in favour* of him doing so. But the fact that the snake has a rattle is not the reason *for which* he runs away—it's not his motivating reason. Rather, the reason for which Samuel runs away is that the snake has no markings. And the fact that Samuel was hypnotized is part of the explanation for why he ran away, but it's not a reason *for which* he ran away—it's a merely explanatory reason.

Importantly, then, MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE does not imply that non-epistemic considerations cannot be involved in the causal explanation for why people hold certain beliefs. For example, it allows that some people believe that God exists because they were raised in a religious household or because they want God to exist. MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE only implies that facts like these are always merely explanatory reasons (or *mere causes*) of one's belief, rather than motivating reasons (that is, considerations on which an agent's belief is *based*).

In order to determine whether MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE is true, then, we need to know what makes some consideration a motivating reason, rather than a merely explanatory one. While the details may be controversial, I take the following general account of motivating reasons to be on the right track:

R is a motivating reason *for which* S φed if and only if

(i) S *conceives* of R as a normative reason to φ in some way

(ii) (i) disposes S to φ, and

(iii) (ii) causes S to φ (in the right way).[10]

I explain each of these necessary conditions below.

First, motivating reasons obviously must be motivating, and so, in order for R to be a motivating reason for which S φs, R must make S disposed toward φing. But not all facts that make S disposed to φ are motivating reasons. For example, in *Snakes that are Plain*, Samuel's being hypnotized did dispose him to run away from the plain snake, but this is not a motivating reason for which he ran away. What seems to be missing here is something cognitive: Samuel did not recognize the fact that he was hypnotized as a reason to run away from the plain snake in any way. Likewise for the fact that the snake has a rattle: while Samuel recognizes that the snake has a rattle, he does not recognize it *as a reason* to run away. This case thus illustrates that there is some cognitive component involved in φing for a reason, in addition to a motivational one.

But what exactly this cognitive component amounts to is controversial. One might think that one must *believe* that R is a reason to φ. This would imply that animals and small children cannot act for reasons, since they have neither beliefs about reasons nor

[10] On this account, S must conceive of R as a reason to φ up until the time at which S φs. So, if S conceived of R as a reason to φ at some point in the past, which caused S to be disposed to φ, but then S forgets that R is a reason to φ, even if S's disposition to φ lingers and causes S to φ, then R is not a motivating reason for S's φing.

even the concept of a reason itself. If one thinks that animals and small children can act for reasons, then, one might endorse a weaker requirement—for example, that one must believe that R with a certain kind of (*reason-to-φ-ish*) mode of presentation, or experience R as 'calling out for *φ*ing'. But my argument in section 5 does not depend on these details. So, let's use the phrase *conceiving of R as a reason to* φ as a stipulative term that refers to whatever cognitive element is involved in *φ*ing for a reason, and simply claim that in order for R to be a reason for which one *φ*s one must be disposed to *φ* because one conceives of R as a reason to *φ* (that is, (i) and (ii) above). And I will assume here that believing that R is a reason to *φ* is sufficient, but may not be necessary, for conceiving of R as a reason to *φ*.

Finally, in order for R to be a motivating reason for which one *φ*s, one's disposition to *φ* (that results from one's conceiving of R as a reason to *φ*) must actually cause one to *φ*. After all, if Joseph believes that the fact that exercising will make him happier is a reason to do so, and he is thereby disposed to exercise, but he is then kidnapped and forced to run laps, the reason for which he exercises is not that exercising will make him happier. Moreover, one's disposition to *φ* must cause one to *φ in the right way*. To illustrate, consider this slightly reworded version of Davidson's [1973: 79] climber case:

> (*Guilty Climber*) You're climbing a cliff while holding the rope that your climbing partner is attached to. You recognize that, if you drop the rope, it will be easier for you to climb to the top. You believe that this is *some* reason to drop the rope, and are thereby slightly motivated to do so. But upon noticing your thoughts and motivations, you begin to feel extremely guilty, which causes you to tremble and drop the rope.

In this case, (i) you conceive of the fact that dropping the rope would make it easier for you to climb to the top as a reason to drop the rope, (ii) doing so disposes you to drop the rope, and that disposition causes you to drop the rope. But, intuitively, you do not drop the rope *for* the reason that doing so would make it easier to climb to the top. Presumably, this is because there's something deviant about the causal chain in this case: your disposition to drop the rope doesn't cause you to do so *in the right way* (requirement (iii)).

Specifying what causing-in-the-right-way amounts to, though, is notoriously difficult and I will not offer a proposal here. But notice that causing in the right way cannot amount to direct causation. This is because, in most cases of motivating reasons, one's disposition to *φ* only indirectly causes one to *φ*. For example, even in the ordinary case in which Joseph exercises for the reason that doing so will make him happier, his being disposed to exercise does not directly cause him to exercise; it first causes him to form an intention to exercise, to make a plan about when and how to do so, to put his shoes on, and so forth.[11]

So, this account of motivating reasons leaves unresolved some questions about motivating reasons. But it nonetheless seems to be on the right track, and my argument in the following section does not depend on these details.

[11] Rinard [2015] argues that cases like these show that motivating reasons for belief need not directly cause one to have that belief, and that this undermines Shah's [2006] argument for alethism. But, unlike Rinard, I take Shah's requirement on normative reasons not to be that normative reasons must be capable of directly *causing* one to have some belief, but instead to be that normative reasons must be capable of directly *motivating* one to have some belief. And these cases do not show that normative reasons for *φ*ing need not be capable of directly motivating one to *φ*.

5. Denying Motivational Difference

An important feature of the above account of motivating reasons is that it implies that, if S's conceiving of R as a reason to φ causes S to φ by causing S to be more responsive to *other* apparent normative reasons for φing, then R is one of S's motivating reasons for φing. For example, consider the following case:

> (*Scully*) Scully comes across an old X-file that states that a suspect's tissue sample had non-human DNA. She believes that this is *some* reason to believe that the suspect isn't human, but, given her sceptical nature, this by itself does not cause her to raise her credence in that proposition. But, at Mulder's behest, she re-tests the sample tissue and the results suggest that it's 80% likely that the tissue has non-human DNA. Ordinarily, this test result would not be enough to convince Scully, but, because of the earlier X-file report, she takes this result to be sufficient reason to believe that the suspect isn't human, and then she does so.

According to the account in section 4, the fact that the old X-file states that the tissue sample has non-human DNA is one of Scully's motivating reasons for believing that the suspect isn't human.

First, Scully conceives of the old X-file report as a reason to believe that the suspect isn't human. Second, this disposes her to believe it. Conceiving of R as a reason to φ disposes one to φ just in case it makes one such that, if certain manifestation conditions obtain, one will φ.[12] And Scully's conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason to believe that the suspect isn't human makes her such that, if it appears to her that there are other epistemic reasons (of a certain strength) for believing that the suspect isn't human, she will do so. The relevant manifestation conditions for Scully's disposition to believe that the suspect isn't human are thus simply the appearance of other reasons.

Finally, that disposition to believe that the suspect isn't human causes Scully to believe it: after she forms that disposition, she performs the new experiment, and her recognizing the new test result as a reason (of a certain strength) manifests her disposition to believe that the suspect isn't human. And although this causal process is indirect, that does not suggest that it is a deviant one, since the causal process between Joseph's forming the disposition to exercise and his exercising is equally indirect. So, the old X-file report meets all of the criteria for being a motivating reason.

I take it to be a virtue of my account of motivating reasons that it has this result because I think that this is the right and intuitive verdict about Scully's case. But since one might doubt that the old X-file report really is one of Scully's motivating reasons, and my argument here depends on this claim, let me first respond to a couple objections before moving on.

One might think that the old X-file report (by itself) does not actually move Scully to believe that the suspect isn't human, because her conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason does not cause her to raise her credence that the suspect isn't human. This objection rejects my assumption that S's being *moved* to believe p amounts to S's being *disposed* to believe p and insists, instead, that x moves S toward believing p if and only if x causes S to *raise her credence in p*.

Importantly, though, an account of what being moved toward believing p amounts to should also provide a good account of what it is to be moved to raise one's credence

[12] This assumes an admittedly naïve account of dispositions. But none of the problems for this account of dispositions bears on anything that I say here.

in p. After all, it is plausible that believing p just is raising one's credence in p above a certain threshold. And one can have motivating reasons for raising or for lowering one's credences at levels below the threshold for belief, just as one can have motivating reasons for believing or for not believing p. The problem with the above objection, then, is that being moved to raise one's credence in p cannot require raising one's credence in p, since one can be moved toward φing without actually φing. On the other hand, since one can be disposed to raise one's credence in p without actually raising one's credence, being moved to raise one's credence in p may require being disposed to do so. So, it's much more plausible that x's moving S to believe p amounts to x's making S disposed to believe p, rather than to x's causing S to raise her credence in p. And, as I argued above, Scully's conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason (by itself) does dispose, and thus does move, her to believe that the suspect isn't human.

Instead, though, one might think that the old X-file report is not one of Scully's motivating reasons because there is something deviant about the way in which her conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason disposes her to believe it. Namely, it might seem deviant because the manifestation conditions for this disposition involve the appearance of *other reasons*.

But consider cases involving small reasons. For example, suppose that I believe that my donating to Oxfam would slightly increase my own happiness, and that this is a small reason to donate, which makes me somewhat, but not fully, motivated to do so. And suppose that I then come to believe that my donating to Oxfam would save lives, and that this is a decisive reason to donate, which makes me fully motivated to do so. In this case, one of my reasons for donating to Oxfam is that it will increase my own happiness, but my recognizing this reason only disposes me to donate by making me such that, if it appears to me that there are other reasons (of a certain strength) for donating, I will do so. Contrary to the above objection, then, motivating reasons may only dispose one to φ in such a way that the manifestation conditions for one's disposition to φ involve the appearance of other reasons to φ.[13]

In order for the pragmatist to show that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief, then, she may simply show that conceiving of *practical considerations* as reasons for having some belief can cause one to have that belief by causing one to be more responsive to *epistemic* reasons for that belief. To that end, consider the following:

> (*Mary*) Mary is usually sceptical of other people's testimony and arguments. She didn't give religion much thought growing up, but at college Mary comes to believe that she would be happier if she were to believe that God exists, and that this is a strong reason to do so. While taking a philosophy class, she reads Aquinas's and Anselm's arguments for the existence of God and she befriends a student who tells her about his experiences of divine revelation. While this would usually not be enough to convince Mary (given her sceptical nature), because she recognizes the practical benefit of believing in God as a reason to do so, this causes her to be more swayed by those arguments, and she ends up believing that God exists.

[13] Both Scully's case and the Oxfam case involve over-determination of motivating reasons. In the Oxfam case, though, my conceiving of the fact that donating to Oxfam would increase my happiness as a reason to donate does not causally influence how strongly I respond to my other reason to donate (i.e. that it would save lives). But, in Scully's case, her conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason to believe that the suspect is not human does causally influence how strongly she responds to the other reason to believe that the suspect is not human (i.e. the new test result).

The fact that believing in God would make Mary happier is one of Mary's motivating reasons for believing that God exists, in the very same way that the old X-file report constitutes one of Scully's motivating reasons for believing that the suspect isn't human.

First, it's a stipulation within the case that Mary believes that the fact that believing in God would make her happier is a normative reason to believe that God exists, which entails that she conceives of this fact as a reason. I take this stipulation to be unproblematic because, while the alethist insists that the pragmatist is wrong in believing that certain practical considerations are normative reasons for belief, surely the alethist does not think that the pragmatist is so conceptually confused that her thesis cannot even be coherently believed.

Second, Mary's conceiving of the fact that believing in God would make her happier as a reason to believe that God exists does dispose her to believe that God exists: it makes her such that, if it appears to her that there are epistemic reasons for believing that God exists (of a certain strength), she will do so. Finally, this disposition causes Mary to believe that God exists in the very same (right) way as Scully's disposition to believe that the suspect isn't human causes her to believe that the suspect isn't human: Mary comes to recognize other apparent epistemic reasons (of a certain strength) to believe that God exists, which manifests her disposition to believe it. The fact that believing in God would make Mary happier thus meets all of the criteria for being a motivating reason for Mary's belief that God exists.

Mary's case thus shows that MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE is false: practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief. Of course, one might worry that the alethist may simply adopt a stronger motivational requirement for normative reasons and a weaker psychological claim:

> POSSIBLY SUFFICIENTLY MOTIVATING: R is a normative reason for S to φ only if it's possible for R to be the *sole* motivating reason for which someone (with a normal human psychology) φs.

> MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE*: A practical consideration can be the *sole* motivating reason for which someone (with a normal human psychology) performs some action, but not the *sole* motivating reason for which someone believes a proposition.

Since Mary's case does not show that practical considerations can be the sole motivating reason for which one believes a proposition, it does not undermine this version of the motivational strategy.

But POSSIBLY SUFFICIENTLY MOTIVATING is not a plausible requirement for normative reasons. First, the fact that the essential role of normative reasons is to guide our actions and attitudes does not suggest that each normative reason for φing must be capable of being the sole guiding force behind one's φing. For example, even if it were a contingent psychological fact that recognizing other-regarding moral considerations as reasons cannot sufficiently motivate us, so that we can only act for such reasons so long as we also recognize self-regarding prudential reasons for doing that action, this would not imply that other-regarding moral considerations are not genuine normative reasons for us to act in certain ways. After all, such considerations could nonetheless play a significant role in guiding our deliberation and our behaviour.

Second, POSSIBLY SUFFICIENTLY MOTIVATING seems plain false in light of cases involving very small reasons. For example, we can imagine that the psychological benefit that I would experience from my donating to Oxfam is so miniscule that no one

with a normal human psychology could ever be fully motivated by such a minor benefit alone to donate his or her money. Nonetheless, the fact that donating would provide this very small benefit seems to be a very small normative reason to do so.

Since this stronger motivational requirement is not plausible, then, showing that practical considerations can constitute *one* of an agent's motivating reasons for having some belief does suffice to undermine the motivational strategy.

One might worry instead, though, that my argument here over-generates motivating reasons. This is because there are lots of things that make us more responsive to certain epistemic reasons, but that are obviously *not* motivating reasons. For example, being hungry may cause you to be more responsive to apparent epistemic reasons to believe that the driver in front of you is a jerk; and your falling for Jane may cause you to be more responsive to apparent epistemic reasons to believe that she will eventually return your phone call. But your hunger and your falling for Jane are merely explanatory reasons, not motivating reasons, for these beliefs.[14]

Importantly, though, my argument does not imply that *anything* that causes someone to believe p by causing her to be more responsive to epistemic reasons for believing p is one of her motivating reasons. According to my account in section 4, in order for R to be a motivating reason for which S φed, S must have φed because S was disposed to φ *by conceiving of R as a reason to* φ. So, your hunger is not a motivating reason for your belief that the driver is a jerk because, while your hunger may make you disposed to believe that the driver is a jerk, you're not disposed to believe that the driver is a jerk *because you conceive of your hunger as a reason to believe that the driver is a jerk*. Likewise, the fact that you're falling for Jane may make you disposed to believe that Jane will call you back, but not because you conceive of your falling for Jane as a reason to believe it. So, my argument does not over-generate motivating reasons. It draws the line between motivating and merely explanatory reasons in exactly the right place.

6. Explaining Transparency

Recall from section 3 that what made MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE so plausible, though, was that it explained the transparency of belief—that, during conscious deliberation, we cannot come to believe p by recognizing practical considerations *alone*, and must consider whether p. Indeed, it seemed that denying MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE was in tension with the very phenomenon of transparency itself.

My argument shows, though, that denying MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE is compatible with transparency. After all, I have argued that recognizing practical considerations as reasons to believe p can cause one to believe p by causing one to respond to epistemic reasons to believe p. While this shows that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief, it does not imply that one can believe a proposition for practical considerations alone, and is thus compatible with transparency. But since I have not argued that this is the *only* way that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief, my argument also does not entail that one's belief cannot be motivated by practical considerations alone, and thus does not *explain* transparency.

[14]Thanks to Jonathan Schaffer for bringing this objection to my attention.

But the pragmatist may offer a similar explanation to the one endorsed by Shah [2003]. Shah claims that it's constitutive of our *concept* of belief (rather than the mental state itself) that a belief is correct if and only if it is true. So, according to Shah, when we consciously consider the question of whether to believe p, our concept of belief, and thereby the truth-norm, is explicitly operative while deliberating about this question and thereby frames our deliberation in such a way that the only considerations that we may take to be relevant to whether to believe p are considerations that appear to bear on whether p is true.

But this explanation is too strong. It implies that one cannot even believe that certain practical considerations are normative reasons for believing certain propositions when consciously deliberating about whether to believe p. So, Shah's explanation implies that the pragmatist is not only wrong, but conceptually confused. A more plausible explanation is that, when consciously deliberating about whether to believe p, our concept of belief, and thereby the truth-norm, frames our deliberation so that we must consider *at least some* considerations that bear on whether p is true. This suffices to explain transparency, but it also allows that practical considerations may constitute motivating reasons for belief in the way that I have suggested here, even during conscious deliberation.[15] So, my argument against MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE is not only compatible with the phenomenon of transparency; it is also compatible with a good explanation for it.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, both of the popular alethist strategies for explaining the alleged normative difference between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's fail. The alethist cannot explain the difference simply by claiming that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief but not for action. This merely posits a further unexplained normative difference between action and attitudes, more generally—namely, that all normative reasons for attitudes must bear on the constitutive correctness of that attitude, but that not all normative reasons for action must bear on the constitutive correctness of that action. Nor can the alethist claim that the normative difference between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's is a motivational difference, since practical considerations *can* constitute motivating reasons for belief as well as for action. In the absence of any good explanation of the alleged normative difference between these two cases, then, we should accept that there is no such difference, and thus that there are, indeed, practical reasons for belief.[16]

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[15] This leaves open the possibility that we can believe for practical reasons alone in *unconscious*, *non-deliberative* contexts. I do not take a stand here on whether this is a genuine psychological possibility.

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