

1

Getting Off the Wrong Track

Any account of the ethics of belief should fit tightly with the crucial fact that it is not possible to regard oneself as both holding a belief and holding that one's reasons for it are inadequate. This is illustrated by the ancient challenge to believe that:

The number of stars is even. (Burnyeat 1983: 132)

We cannot meet this challenge.

Evidentialism, an ethics of belief advocated by David Hume, John Locke, W. K. Clifford, and many others, coheres well with the impossibility of our meeting the ancient challenge. Stated in its traditional version, evidentialism is the thesis that *the strength of one's belief ought to be proportional to the strength of one's reasons*. Locke writes:

For he governs his Assent right, and places it as he should, who in any Case or Matter whatsoever, believes or disbelieves, according as Reason directs him. He that does otherwise, transgresses against his own Light, and misuses those Faculties, which were given him to no other end, but to search and follow the clearer Evidence, and greater Probability. (Locke 1975: 688)¹

Thus evidentialism explains the crucial fact that we cannot meet the ancient challenge. The explanation assumes that we grasp evidentialism's requirement of adequate reasons (or evidence) as a conceptual condition for believing properly. Since we know that we do not have adequate reasons for believing that the number of stars is even, then we cannot, in continuing awareness of that knowledge, believe that the number of stars is even. However, this version of evidentialism is stronger than the traditional version stated above. The traditional version is unable to explain why one *cannot* believe that the number of stars is even; it explains only why one ought not believe it.

In part I of this chapter I defend the stronger version of evidentialism by arguing that it follows from the concept of belief. This *intrinsic* approach is contrasted in part II with the dominant *extrinsic* approaches. Early in his influential essay attacking evidentialism, Alvin Plantinga writes, “Why should we think a theist must have evidence, or reason to think there is evidence, if he is not to be irrational? Why not suppose, instead, that he is entirely within his epistemic rights in believing in God’s existence even if he supposes he has no argument or evidence at all?” (Plantinga 1983: 30). In this brief passage, Plantinga implies both a blunt rejection of what I’ve been calling the crucial fact and his affirmation of rationality as the proper criterion for evaluating norms for belief.

In contrast to the intrinsic approach that I defend, Plantinga advances—or assumes—an extrinsic approach to the ethics of belief. Extrinsic approaches lead discussions of the ethics of belief onto the wrong track in their claim that answers to the question of what one ought to believe are determined by criteria external to belief, most prominently, rationality. In part II of this chapter, I examine four doctrines deriving from extrinsic approaches.

The right track, taken by intrinsic approaches, is to ask what the concept of belief itself demands. On an intrinsic approach the answer to Plantinga’s second question is that the theist simply cannot hold such a belief if he attends to it when affirming that “he has no argument or evidence at all.” The impossibility of holding such a belief, which is implied by the crucial fact cited above, is of primary importance because it is a *conceptual* impossibility. Only secondarily, if at all, is the belief irrational.

I The Intrinsic Ethics of Belief

1 From the Subjective Principle to Evidentialism

The crucial fact can be formulated as the *subjective principle of sufficient reason*:

When one attends to any of one’s beliefs, one must regard it as believed for sufficient or adequate reasons.

The “must,” which governs the whole statement, is essential. Without it, perhaps, our taking ourselves to have adequate reasons is merely a gratuitous, even if widespread, expectation.

The main reason to believe that the subjective principle of sufficient reason is a fact is that we find ourselves compelled to follow it. The compulsion is due to our recognition, when attending to any particular belief, that we are entitled to the belief only if it is well founded. That we do follow it is then a reflection of our grasping the demands of belief, not merely a curious psychological truth about us.

We also attribute acceptance of the subjective principle to others, at least for what they *assert*, and in setting out the grounds for that attribution we capture in brief the intuitive argument for evidentialism. If Sally (the speaker) asserts that p (e.g., “Hamlet is playing at Lincoln Center”) to Harry (the hearer), then, normally, Harry takes Sally to have good reasons to believe that p . For otherwise Harry will not accept that p as a result of Sally’s asserting it. Since Sally should not assert that p unless she has good reasons to believe it, Harry takes Sally to recognize that she has good reasons to believe p . The requirement that assertions be backed by good reasons, since they claim the truth of what is asserted, is just the analogue of the requirement that beliefs be backed by good reasons, since upon awareness they claim the truth of what is believed.

We would not impose the subjective principle on ourselves by inclination. We would surely prefer to avoid the burden of sufficient reasons or evidence—this is true especially of those who hold wild or paranoid beliefs, such as that the fluoridation of water is a Communist plot. But even they accept the burden, as is shown by their own (tortured) defenses of these beliefs.² They will gladly adduce evidence for their belief if questioned. Similarly, as already suggested, even those who reject either evidentialism or the subjective principle typically restrict their rejection to certain contents of belief (e.g., “There is life after death,” “Picasso is a greater artist than Duchamp”). For unproblematic contents, such as that the cat is on the mat or that there are tigers, either they do not reject, or they outright endorse, evidentialism or the subjective principle, correspondingly restricted.

Well-known experiments in social psychology reveal the workings of the subjective principle of sufficient reasons, despite their studying judgments whose underlying processes are inaccessible. For example, in one of a large number of studies, an array of identical stockings was set before subjects, and they were asked to select their favored pair.³ Subjects preferred 4 to 1 the pair that was right-most in the array. Typically, in these

studies, subjects explained their actions and presumed judgments (that this [right-most] stocking is preferable to that stocking) with what we regard as rationalizations, such as that the stockings selected “looked better.” Since their confabulated reason (that this pair looked best) claims adequacy, it explains their judgment. From their point of view, no further reasons are operative.

In general, across a wide spectrum of related psychological studies, subjects are influenced to form beliefs whose causes they deny or cannot know. Yet, they offer reasons for their relevant beliefs, and, though from our point of view these are rationalizations, subjects feel compelled to offer them. The felt need to rationalize is plausibly explained as reflecting the demands of the subjective principle.

As these studies also show, the reasons demanded by the subjective principle are *epistemic* reasons, rather than, say, reasons of advantage. In subsequent interviews, following the stocking-choice experiment, subjects dismissed as preposterous the suggestion that their reason could be that the preferred stocking was right-most. The suggestion was dismissed, presumably, not because it proposed a merely weak or bad reason, but because what it proposed could not be a reason at all—that is, an epistemic reason, one that can imply the truth of a person’s belief. We regularly employ a distinction between epistemic and nonepistemic reasons. One’s wanting to be a Hollywood star may induce the belief that one is a Hollywood star. But it is not a reason that can justify believing it true.

The subjective principle asks us to attend to our believing a proposition. The condition that we attend to our believing, or become fully aware of it, is for theoretical purposes, not a practical proposal that believing should be self-conscious. Most belief is, of course, acquired nonconsciously—think of the multitude of beliefs or updatings of old beliefs that are continuously formed as one navigates the world. A central way for a particular belief-state to become active is for its content to play a role in guiding action, and then, as observed earlier, it is not our believing that we attend to, but the proposition believed (the belief). In themselves our beliefs do not strictly enter claims of truth (or knowledge). A claim requires an active presentation, which believing, particularly if nonconscious, cannot accomplish. However, when we merely attend to our having a belief, such a claim is made, and that is the claim whose conditions of satisfaction are fundamental to the ethics of belief.

To attend to the belief as the subjective condition requires demands more than awareness of the content, which is the usual way in which belief guides action. It is to be aware of the belief as believed, and to ask oneself “why” in regard to one’s believing.⁴ We respond by looking for reasons for the truth of what is believed. (Or, to speak more naturally, we look for reasons for believing that it is true.)

When we do attend to a particular belief, there is no guarantee of success. Sometimes, as when we become aware of a distant memory—for example, that in a local baseball game fifteen years ago I hit a game winning double—we do not take ourselves to have adequate reasons. It seems plausible that the memory could be the product of later suggestion or wishful thinking. What is crucial is that, once we are suspicious of the veracity of the memory, we cease to hold the belief (suspend judgment), even if we still regard it as probably correct.

The point of introducing the subjective principle is not to attempt any argument from our believing ourselves to have sufficient reasons to our actually having them. Obviously, one can wrongly take oneself to have adequate reasons. The purpose is to argue that we impose the demands of the subjective principle on ourselves because these correspond to the demands of belief. That the content of the belief is true is not settled by our believing it. There is a gap between our attitude that the world is a certain way and our position to secure the correctness of this attitude. This gap can be bridged only by evidence or reasons, which link the believer to what is believed.

2 The Incoherence Test

We take both the arguments from the subjective principle and the direct argument for evidentialism to stem from the conceptual nature of belief because overt denials of their conclusions are *incoherent* (a stark contradiction). The *incoherence test* says that p is incoherently believed by anyone X just in case p is believed by X , but, if X became fully aware of his epistemic position in regard to p (his believing that p is true, and his assessment of his evidence or reasons to believe it), X could not continue to believe that p (since the corresponding thought would be an overt contradiction).

The test draws on parallels with incoherences underlying *Moore’s Paradox*.⁵ One cannot assert statements of the form

p , but I do not believe that p .

For example,

It is raining, but I do not believe that it is raining.

The assertion is heard as contradictory, even though both conjuncts may be true. A rough account of the contradiction (to be improved on in chap. 7) is this: Assertion expresses belief, and belief is the holding true of a proposition. So the assertion would present the speaker as simultaneously holding both that p and that she does not believe it. But then she is believing p and also believing that she does not believe it. But if she is believing p and attending to it, then she must believe that she believes it.⁶ The whole thought in this single consciousness would now be that I both believe that p and that I do not believe that p . But no such belief is possible, since its content is an overt contradiction.

The unassertibility revealed in Moore's Paradox is explained by an underlying incoherence in thought (Shoemaker 1996). It is not explained pragmatically, by, say, conversational expectations, such as the conventional implication of "but" that a contrast is to follow. The incoherence derives from assertion as the conveyer of truth, as belief is the attitude that its content is true.

The necessarily failed attempt at belief in the opening example corresponds to the following Moore's Paradox-like thought or assertion:

The number of stars is even, but I lack sufficient evidence that the number of stars is even.

In detail, the incoherence is:

I believe that the number of stars is even. All that can secure for me the belief's claim of truth is adequate evidence (reason) of its truth. I lack adequate evidence. So I am not in a position to judge that the number of stars is even. So I do not judge it true. So I do not believe that the number of stars is even.

The incoherence takes the form of an explicit contradiction (between the opening and closing propositions).

The contradiction is not a further belief.⁷ The initial statement is implicitly rejected by the end of the reasoning. That there is no further belief is the lesson of ordinary cases of uncovering evidence that undermines a belief. The contrary evidence thereby erases the belief. There are not separate

stages—recognition (of undermining evidence), decision (to surrender the belief), and execution (by ceasing to believe).

My analysis depends only on the recognized lack of adequate evidence, not on the extreme lack that the opening example actually illustrates. In that example, we do not merely take ourselves to have less than adequate evidence to believe that the number of stars is even; we take ourselves to have no evidence at all. However, despite the egregious nature of this particular example, it still serves to make the general point. The same incoherence arises from recognition of less than adequate evidence as it does from cases where the evidence is recognized as starkly inadequate. Instances of the following are heard as Moore's Paradoxes as well:

p , but I lack (sufficient) evidence (reason) that p .

For example, Jeffrey's at camp, but I lack sufficient evidence that Jeffrey is at camp. The correlative explanation, in line with the subjective principle, is that one cannot believe both that one believes that p and that one believes that one lacks sufficient (or any) reasons that p . For consider an (enlarged) instance of this form of Moore's Paradox in a student's assertion:

I'll receive a grade of A in logic, but I lack adequate reasons that I will. Although I have received grades of A on all my tests and papers, I have not received a grade on the final exam.

We hear this assertion as a contradiction. If the student had just asserted that he will get an A, then if the hearer were to learn of his reasons, the hearer would no doubt have been critical: "You shouldn't have said that you will get an A, but only that you are very sure."

The incoherence test exposes not only what cannot be believed, but also what must be believed. We discern this necessity from the attempt *not* to believe that, for example, there are stars, and the failure is again conceptual:

I do not believe that there are stars. But the evidence that there are stars is overwhelming. No further inquiry is needed. So I judge that there are stars. There are stars. So then I believe that there are stars.

Assuming that full awareness is the right condition for grasping the demands of belief, we can roughly sum up: When that condition holds, what one "can" believe when attending to a proposition one "must" believe; and what one "cannot" believe is what is "impossible" to believe. Less

cryptically, combining what we learn from each of these incoherences in thought:

Necessarily, if in full awareness one regards one's evidence or reasons as adequate to the truth of p then one believes that p , and if in full awareness one attends to one's believing that p then one regards one's evidence or reasons as adequate to the truth of p .

The first conditional moves from one's judgment of the strength of one's evidence to belief; the second moves in the reverse direction, from awareness of one's belief to one's judgment of the strength of one's evidence.⁸ The consequent of the first conditional does not affirm merely that "... one *regards* oneself as believing . . .," but that one does believe. Once one judges that the evidence or reasons are adequate, one thereby does hold the belief, and that one does so is apparent. On this understanding, the antecedent of the second conditional is just a stylistic variant of that consequent (of the first conditional). The combined conditional is effectively an equivalence.

So we cannot recognize ourselves as believing p while believing that our reasons or evidence are not adequate to its truth and conversely. The "cannot" is a conceptual, not merely psychological, inability. The notions of higher orders of infinity or electrons shifting levels, with no intermediate position, boggle many minds. But the "cannot" or "unbelievability" that concerns us here is not rooted in (contingent) empirical or psychological barriers. By contrast, we hear familiar tales of, for example, those who have abandoned their fundamentalist religious upbringing, but who claim that they cannot believe, say, evolution by natural selection, despite now being persuaded by the evidence for it.⁹ Even if these cases do describe psychological impossibilities (inabilities), they remain conceptual possibilities, ones that can be (and are) overcome by others.

3 Who Am I to Say What You Can Believe?

As I interpret the results of the incoherence test, just as you cannot assert, you cannot think that you have the belief corresponding to any of the following:

It's 3:25, though it's obvious that it is not 3:25.

Or, . . . , though I'm just guessing.

Or, . . . , though I have evidence that it is not 3:25.

Or, . . . , though I vaguely recall setting my watch ahead ten minutes.

But who am I to say what you can believe? If the implication of this question is that I exercise neither control of your beliefs nor know them intimately, then the implication is irrelevant. If my reasoning is right, then the corresponding thoughts would be contradictions. But no thought corresponds to a contradiction, any more than there can be a contradictory fact.

But the pointed question may be read another way: If the incoherence test is a genuine test, how can I (JA) know (a priori) that it will turn out that all instances that express avowed deviations from evidentialism generate a contradiction? The answer is that the incoherence test is a vivid way to present the conceptual argument for evidentialism. However, the argument must stand on its own. The test simply builds confidence in that argument through applications whose findings rule out explicit violations of evidentialism. On a large range of ordinary cases like those above, there is agreement that the assertions are heard as contradictory. The heard contradiction is most naturally explained as due to what would be a contradiction in the implied thought. Since the contradiction is expressible by appeal to variable “*p*,” the contradiction is not restricted to certain contents of belief.

Actually, though, the cases usually raised against evidentialism are not the dull ones like “It’s 3:25,” but the interesting ones like “The spoon was bent by psychokinetic powers,” “People are basically good,” and “The comet-impact account of the extinction of the dinosaurs is correct.” These are the cases in which something important is at stake, yet, let us suppose, evidential indeterminacy is unavoidable, at least for the foreseeable future. It is in these cases that persons want to insist that avowed deviation from evidentialism is possible.

To respond to the implied objection, I need to clarify the role of the incoherence test in the argument for evidentialism. The large range of cases in which there is intuitive agreement on the outcome of the incoherence test neutralizes the incredulity that attaches to our strong form of evidentialism. Beyond this, the test cannot advance the argument for evidentialism. The argument for evidentialism is a conceptual one, to which empirical evidence is inappropriate.

If the conceptual argument is secured, then we can return to the recalcitrant cases, many of which we can explain away without resorting either to dismissal as borderline cases or to blunt denial of sincerity. Rather, we can question whether the exact conditions for the incoherence test are met, especially the condition of full awareness, as contrasted with the merely informal conditions governing the various cases that I presented.

Even though the full awareness condition requires an abstraction from psychological reality, it does not prevent us from addressing the concept of belief. The ongoing parallel with assertion is crucial here, for asserting presupposes full awareness of one's act and epistemic position.

The failure to impose the full awareness condition explains why the claim as to the incoherence, and so unbelievability, of many beliefs is so hard to take literally. Here is reasoning that suggests the stark implausibility of our incoherence claim: "If the idea that all bees die in the winter is incredible, this means not that such an idea cannot be believed, but that it ought not to be. It cannot mean the first, because some people do believe it. They believe it, but they ought not to" (Helm 1994: 16–17). But this is a fateful misstep, however well motivated. It is the misstep of Locke, Hume, Clifford, and other traditional evidentialists, as well. Given how much divergence and conflicts there are among beliefs of different persons under conditions of shared information, it is reasonable to infer that there is a large element of choice in believing. So traditional evidentialists resign themselves only to offering advice as to how to render those choices more rational or moral or intellectually honest.

But taking the observations of believing in defiance of evidentialism at face value is the analogue of taking as a basic datum for testing theories of motion that heavier objects do fall faster (in free fall) than light ones when dropped from equal heights. The normal condition is not the right—ideal—condition. The normal condition of believing is that of nonconscious influences and distraction. But when we want to discern what belief demands we should look at it without these interferences, which is accomplished by imposing the full awareness condition.

Am I stacking the deck? In a class I taught on writing, a young woman wrote that she had suffered from anorexia nervosa. She would practically starve herself to lose weight for the purposes of appearing more attractive. Yet, she was then, as now, visibly thin, as was evident to her as to anyone

who knew her. We can reconstruct one central thought of hers so as to pose a challenge—a putative counterexample—to our coherence test for evidentialism: “I believe I’m overweight, but I can see that I am not.”

Waive the difficulty that qualification by the “I believe . . .” rather than the flat-out assertion “I’m overweight” signals, as already noted, not full belief, but only a weak, partial degree of belief. The pertinent observation here is that the condition reported is of a person who is suffering a mental disturbance. Despite the single assertion reporting on her own attitude, it is credible that the disparate thoughts are not held in a single consciousness—that, in short, the assertion does not represent the recognition in full awareness of a belief and her having opposed evidence to it.

But the attempt to block such counterexamples by emphasizing this difficulty may still be held to stack the deck. Have I not granted to myself a maneuver to evade any alleged counterexample by simply denying requisite awareness, and thereby rendering claims of incoherence untestable? But this pointed question is unfair. My basic claim could hardly be more testable as philosophical claims go: There are no cases in which a person in full awareness (as in assertion) both acknowledges that they hold a belief and that their evidence is insufficient for its justification. Given the boldness of this claim, if it is false, it should be easy to bluntly refute.

Consequently, I want to repel the previous pointed question by one of my own: If the basic claim is false, why is it so hard to show its falsity through simple cases like “Our car is in the driveway, but I do not have evidence that it is in the driveway”? The question gestures at my suspicions that the very need to search for esoteric cases, like those afforded by thoughts of the mentally disturbed, tacitly concedes the main claims. If there is no compelling connection between the concepts of belief, truth, and evidence, then counterexamples to the basic claim should be plentiful. The need to search beyond the simple, blunt cases concedes the connection even as it tries to refute it.

What occurs with mental disturbance is an obscuring of the concept of belief. We abstract away from these interferences by imposing the full awareness condition. The rationale for the first-person methodology follows: Once we clear away interferences, what is apparent is the concept of belief and our belief-practices, and then one’s believing in recognized deviation from evidentialism vanishes as data and even possibility.

4 Adequate Reasons

In the various formulations of evidentialism and the arguments for it, there has been an unfortunate vagueness in the phrase “adequate reasons” and its kin. A number of times I have hinted at an interpretation in which the adequacy is adequacy to justify or warrant the belief, so that if other conditions are satisfied, the belief amounts to *knowledge*. However, that interpretation goes out much further on a limb than is necessary for the basic issues of the ethics of belief, and so I argue for it only briefly.

The interpretation is supported if instances of the following count as versions of Moore’s Paradox, as our response to them indicates:

p, but I do not know that *p*.¹⁰

For example, the cat is in the yard, but I do not know that the cat is in the yard. Since Moore’s Paradox is taken as implying that one should assert *p* only if one believes *p*, then, by parity of reasoning, one should assert *p* only if one knows *p*. Earlier we offered corroborative evidence: The standard form of challenge (or query) to a speaker’s assertion that *p* (e.g., the cat is in the yard) is for the hearer to ask “How do you know that *p*?” There is a tight connection between the requirement of knowledge and the mutual expectation (of speaker and hearer) that what is asserted is backed by adequate reasons.¹¹ (The expectation will be suspended when, for example, the assertion is mutually recognized as controversial.) The tight connection that I conjecture is that satisfaction of the expectation of adequate reasons is taken as satisfaction of the condition of knowledge. In recognizing myself as believing that *p*, the sufficient reasons I take myself to have for believing it are sufficient for knowing it. It is only from such a position that one can look through one’s believing to the proposition believed, that is, *transparently*. Any weaker set of reasons warrant only a weaker attitude than full belief, and thus one can look only to the partially believed proposition via one’s attitude, that is, not transparently.

Another consideration favoring this construal of adequacy, though also going further, is that it accords with our first-person view. That is, we take ourselves to have adequate reasons or evidence to believe that *p*, rather than merely believing it strongly or to a high degree, just when we treat it as what we know. The first-person view leads us to the more tendentious claim that the relation of reasons or evidence and the truth of the belief in question is one of necessity. Given our reasons or evidence, it must be the case that *p* is true. The reasons are conclusive.¹²

Consider the following ordinary exchange:

Joey (6 years old): Dad's home.

Mary (his 8-year-old sister): No, he's not. Why do you say that?

Joey: The Olds just pulled into the driveway, Dad must be going through the basement.

Mary: No. Mom just came home. Dad took the train to his office. He brought his car into the mechanic earlier, and then after work, Mom picked it up.

Joey is taken aback at Mary's denial. Had he allowed for the serious possibility that his reasons held, but that his dad had not returned home, he would neither have drawn his conclusion ("Dad's home"), as contrasted with "Dad is almost certainly home," nor would he have been taken aback. Since Mary turns out to be right, Joey learns that his judgment of the adequacy of his reasons is mistaken. But there would be no cause for correction if his mother's being home, rather than his dad, was only highly unexpected or a serious possibility. So the original thought I ascribe to Joey is that it *must* be the case, given his evidence, that his father is home.

Although Joey's "must" is genuine, it is not only relative to his evidence but expresses a restricted necessity (Lycan 1994: chap. 8). Joey takes his evidence to exclude such possibilities as that his father took a walk around the block after pulling his car into the driveway, not such unlikely possibilities as that his father sold his car to a stranger, who just happened to pull the car into the family's driveway.

The ordinary first-person judgments in this and previous cases will be appreciated as support for my position if we bracket our theoretical musings on knowledge (or conclusive reasons). For one thing, we are coached to understand knowledge as a difficult achievement. In bracketing these understandings, to borrow from our methodological discussion in the introduction, we assume that the requirements of knowledge are those requirements that accord with the roles that the concept of knowledge plays in our practices. These roles, especially in backing assertions, are easily missed in abstract reflections. The same bracketing is required for getting to the nature of belief. Our reflective grasp of the concept of belief is subject to conflation with related concepts (belief in, inclined to believe, faith, opinion, assent), as well as to overintellectualization, by salient, but problematic, content (e.g., "The universe did not exist before the Big Bang," "Pederasty is unnatural," "Psychic healing helps cure persons of disease").

But it is within our ongoing epistemic practices or activities that our actual view of knowledge, conclusive reasons, or belief is revealed. In abstract reflection, our basic claims are defeated from the start—the standards for knowledge are too high to be commonly satisfied, and belief is too common a phenomenon to be subject to high standards. By contrast, our ordinary understanding and practices treat knowledge as easy to achieve, and so it can realistically serve as the aim of the ordinary phenomena of belief.¹³

It turns out, as a final reason favoring this construal, that if knowledge is analyzed via justification, then the simplest account is one in which those reasons or evidence are conclusive. The account yields a neat resolution of the much discussed *Gettier problem* (Gettier 1970). This problem is that, however strong a person's justification that a proposition holds, it leaves open, on the usual analyses, the possibility that the proposition is false. But from a false proposition, a further one can be deduced, which is only accidentally true for that person. It is then alleged that there is justified true belief but not knowledge of the proposition deduced. However, if justification is conclusive, then it is impossible for a belief to be justified but false. (Recall, however, from our discussion of the case of Joey, that this impossibility is restricted and relative.)

Analyses of knowledge or justification that require conclusive reasons are usually dismissed because, with inductive reasons especially, the evidence cannot entail the conclusion. No amount or variety of finite evidence for the proposition that “all swans are white” entails that proposition. But the fallacy is to assume that the only necessity is logical or analytical necessity (and so, correspondingly, that the only possibility is the broadest kind of possibility—logical possibility or self-consistency).

What I find particularly attractive about the conclusive reasons account is that it conceives knowledge as an ordinary and common achievement and yet acknowledges that what is achieved meets high standards. As previously indicated, this is the basic claim for full belief that I will defend throughout—that it is ordinary and common, yet the standards to be met are high.

It should be evident why, in adopting this position, I go much further out on a limb than is required. Anti-evidentialists of various stripes do not just deny evidentialism. They affirm that belief is proper without any reasons or evidence, or in the absence of undermining reasons or evidence, or with reasons or evidence adequate only for a probability greater than half. The

denial of any of these theses does not require that evidence or reasons be adequate for knowledge, let alone that reasons be conclusive. To deny any of these positions, it would be enough to require that one properly believes that p only if one's evidence or reasons very strongly support the truth of p .

In defending evidentialism on the strongest construal, I obviously present it with the greatest challenge. If it goes through on this construal, it certainly works on the weaker, more popular, construals. Those with doubts about the centrality of knowledge can still adopt my arguments against anti-evidentialist theses by substituting their own weaker readings of the demand for reasons or evidence. (I will, in fact, use the crucial term "justification" in the standard way as requiring reasons adequate for knowledge, though without commitment to the claim that such adequacy amounts to conclusiveness.)

However, I do not want to end this section on the suggestion that the adequacy of reasons for full belief as adequacy for knowledge or conclusive reasons is merely a position adopted for the sake of argument—to set the highest challenge to evidentialism. The position dovetails nicely with crucial claims, particularly the connection to assertion cited above and that when one attends to one's full belief that p one looks through one's attitude to the proposition believed. This transparency feature mirrors the central *factivity* of knowledge: If X knows that p , p is true. Correspondingly, in attending to one's belief that p , one treats it as the case that p .

In this section, I have largely, but not fully, allayed the complaint that my use of "adequate reasons (or evidence)" is a kind of persuasive definition, forcing dissenters to the unenviable position of defending belief on *inadequate* reasons. But in understanding "adequate reasons" as "adequate for knowledge or something close to it," I have offered a substitute that answers the complaint, though not fully.

The phrase will still rankle those who argue that we have good reasons to hold some beliefs without evidence, even when the beliefs are empirical. These theorists hold that we each believe, for example, that perception or induction is reliable, but that we have no evidence for these beliefs.

This position I have argued against via assertion, intellectual responsibility, the connection with knowledge, and its lack of intuitive acceptability. These theorists will claim that the fact that a person cannot believe that p while recognizing that her evidence is inadequate does not imply that a person cannot believe that p while recognizing that she has no evidence.

But this claim is not first-personally endorsed: we take ourselves to have, and to need to have, good evidence or reasons for taking perception or induction to be reliable. The no-evidence theorists feel compelled to take their position as the only way to respond to the *regress problem* for justification. In chapter 6 I attempt to liberate them from the regress problem and so the felt compulsion to exempt certain beliefs from the demand for reasons or evidence.

5 Full and Partial Belief

In arguing for evidentialism I have partly acquiesced to a widespread indifference to the distinction between full belief, the all-out acceptance of a proposition, and only partial or qualified belief (e.g., “almost sure”). But doing so forecloses some natural lines of reasoning favoring evidentialism. In the case of partial (or degrees of) belief, evidentialism is virtually self-evident. If one’s degree of belief that p is greater than half, one’s (subjective) probability of p on one’s evidence is greater than half, and conversely.¹⁴ Traditional evidentialism, at its most general, claims:

One ought to have a degree of belief n that p if and only if one’s reasons or evidence support the truth of p to degree n .

We almost imperceptibly conflate the two sides of this equivalence (the left side concerned with the strength of our attitude and the right side with the extent of evidential support). We read smoothly the following declaration by Hume, just preceding his pithy expression of evidentialism (“a wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence”): “in our reasonings concerning matter of fact, there are all imaginable degrees of assurance, from the highest *certainty* to the lowest species of moral *evidence*” (Hume 1977: 73; my emphasis).¹⁵

By ignoring partial belief in arguments for evidentialism, we put aside how the strong demands of full belief are an extension of demands hardly contestable for partial belief. We also put aside challenges both to evidentialism and to anti-evidentialism. The evidentialist has the challenge to explain how an argument rooted in proportionality can allow for a threshold to the all-or-nothing concept of belief beyond which further (positive) evidence or reasons cease to have an impact on the strength of belief. (The discussion below partly answers this challenge, although the distinction between full and partial belief is addressed mainly in chap. 9.)

But the anti-evidentialist faces a much more serious challenge. What account of full belief will allow for the sharp discontinuity he posits, if he accepts evidentialism for partial belief and full belief as the end-point of degrees of belief? The anti-evidentialist assumes that, when we get to the highest strength, we do not require correspondingly greater evidential strength, if we need evidence at all. Yet, in that case, the claim of truth is greater (than for any degrees of belief), and it is that claim which is the source of evidentialism's proportionality demand.

This final observation deserves explicit formulation:

(I) If the belief-like attitude A toward p is (epistemically) stronger than A' in the same situation, then, if the available reasons are insufficient to justify A' , then they are insufficient to justify A .¹⁶

Principle (I) formulates the common-sense idea that as one's claim of the truth of p is more forceful, then, correspondingly, one is committed to stronger reasons or evidence in its favor. By reference to (I), I indicate the free ride that anti-evidentialists extend to themselves when they fail to specify whether their theses are meant to hold for full or degrees of belief.

For illustrative purposes consider two related extrinsic doctrines, the first of which is treated below:

- (1) We are permitted to *believe* that p (e.g., John is in Alaska) unless we have adequate reason for supposing it false. (Alston 1983: 116, 119)
- (2) If a *belief* (e.g., The red button flashed on the camera) arises immediately (non-inferentially) from perception (memory, testimony) under normal conditions then we are entitled to hold it (i.e., the belief is justified or warranted or is knowledge).

Both of these are so-called Reidian views, which treat belief acquisition or maintenance as a *default*—we are entitled to it unless there is special reason to object. Each has as the implied contrast, “We do not need reasons for believing it.”

Principle (I) suggests a test of these doctrines. Substitute within them explicit reference both to degrees of belief and to the contrast clause:

- (1') We are permitted to have a *high degree of belief* that p (John is in Alaska) unless we have adequate reason for supposing it (probably) false. We do not need reasons that support p to that high degree.
- (2') If a *high degree of belief* (e.g., that the red button flashed on the camera) arose immediately (non-inferentially) from perception (memory,

testimony) under normal conditions then we are entitled to that high degree of belief. We do not need reasons that support it to that high degree.

In each case, the degree of belief selected is the purposely vague “a high degree of belief” (e.g., “almost certain”). My objection turns neither on difficulties of specifying a precise degree of belief nor on demands for commensurate evidence that follow were one to form a precise degree of belief. Theses (1′) and (2′) are just on their surface less natural and less plausible than (1) and (2). (1′) and (2′) violate the thesis that strength of conviction of a claim can be satisfied only by a matching strength of evidence, which underlies (I). But, following (I), if the lack of reasons proportionate to a high degree of belief implies that the actual degree of belief is unjustified, this lack will likewise imply that the corresponding full belief is unjustified.

Still, this objection to (1) and (2) will not be persuasive without some account of why instances of (1) and (2) do strike us as plausible, whereas (1′) and (2′) do not. The explanation, or a good part of it, is a *pragmatic asymmetry*. Expressions for full belief are unqualified assertions, but expressions for partial belief are explicitly introduced by *epistemic qualifiers* like “I am almost sure that . . .”¹⁷ or “On the evidence, it is probable that . . .” Because of their *marked* or burdensome nature, qualified assertions call for the articulation of reasons. Those for unqualified—normal, unmarked—assertion do not.

The pragmatic asymmetry proposed is that expressions for full belief may be (default) asserted without asserting one’s reasons, whereas expressions for partial belief cannot. The pragmatic asymmetry does not violate (I), since the pragmatic asymmetry is over the demand to *present* one’s reasons, not over their strength. In fact, in accord with (I), the assertion of *p* presumes backing by reasons adequate for knowledge that *p*. These reasons will then be stronger than the reasons demanded to explain one’s qualified attitude.

The conclusion I reach is that the intuitive plausibility of (1) and (2) in contrast to their analogues for partial belief gain from this asymmetry and that it is an unearned gain. For, in accord with (I), the demand to justify a full belief is greater than the demand to justify any degree of belief in the same content. Since we cannot hold any of the parallel default theses—no reasons required—for partial belief, then by (I) we shouldn’t hold them for full belief. Those who have promoted the above default theses, under the

sway of this pragmatic asymmetry, have confused, I think, not gathering or not showing reasons with not having them. I follow up on this theme in chapter 6.

Extrinsic approaches, which are taken for granted by anti-evidentialists (and many evidentialists), have an uneasy relation to the full/partial (belief) distinction. The unease explains why they rarely treat it directly. Anti-evidentialists are in a bind. On one hand, if they construe belief as a matter of degree, then it is extremely difficult to deny evidentialism for degrees of belief.¹⁸ On the other hand, if they construe belief as full belief, they will need to borrow from the arguments that enforce a distinction between full and partial belief. That distinction is compatible with principle (I); but, as we just observed, anti-evidentialist default theses, like (1) and (2), violate (I).

II Extrinsic Ethics of Belief

6 Critique of Four Extrinsic Doctrines

I shall set out for critical examination four widely accepted doctrines characteristic of extrinsic ethics of belief:

1. The ethics of belief, and evidentialism, specifically, are committed to substantive views of rationality and enter substantive claims on issues in epistemology and moral theory.
2. The ethics of belief is lax. The requirement of adequate reasons or evidence is diminished or abandoned. Characteristically, those who find evidentialism too demanding advocate Reidian views, in which beliefs are “innocent until proven guilty” (Wolterstorff 1983: 164). William Alston advances the view (cited above) that “we are permitted to believe that p unless we have adequate reason for supposing it false” (1983: 116).¹⁹ Variations on this theme allow that it is right or permissible to believe that p if p is not demonstrably false or if p is not shown to be false or in the absence of any specific reason to oppose p . The burden of proof is on those who would deny entitlement to believe, not on the believer. If my belief cannot be refuted in any of these ways, I am entitled to it.²⁰
3. The “ought” of what it is right to believe is the “ought” of what it is right or best for a believer to do. The ethics of belief is a branch of practical or prudential ethics.
4. Methodology for the ethics of belief is either normative, and hence can be indifferent to the facts of actual believing, or else descriptive, its prescriptions bounded by the facts about us as believers, particularly our finitude or limits.

In addition to these four doctrines, two further ones are closely associated with extrinsic approaches. Under the first doctrine, it is claimed that evidentialism implies or requires *foundationalism*.²¹ (“Almost always when you lift an evidentialist you find a foundationalist,” Wolterstorff 1983: 142.) Foundationalism holds that any corpus of beliefs is essentially structured into basic (foundational) and nonbasic (inferred, derived) beliefs. Basic beliefs provide grounds for the nonbasic ones but do not themselves require evidence. Although this fifth doctrine is an instance of the first, it requires separate treatment, which it receives in chapter 6.

A sixth doctrine is *voluntarism*—belief is subject to choice or to the will. This doctrine goes along with the third and fourth. If the ethics of belief allows for “permission” to believe, and its “ought” is that of moral action, then we require the ability to exercise that permission and to comply with the prescriptions. Contrary to this ascription to evidentialism,²² the basic argument for it is incompatible with voluntarism, though discussion is deferred until chapter 2.

The first doctrine—that the ethics of belief presupposes substantive views of rationality and views on issues in epistemology and moral theory, e.g., foundationalism—ignores the innocent reflections that issue in evidentialism.²³ Evidentialism is arrived at by generalizing on so unremarkable a practice as asking “Why?” when someone affirms belief in a proposition. The expectation is that, in response to the why-question, reasons or evidence will be provided.

Nevertheless, there are many routes to this first extrinsic doctrine. The most obvious is that discussions in the ethics of belief are dominated by the familiar terms of ethics: “ought,” “should,” “permissible,” “wrong,” “justified.” These terms are incorporated into talk of epistemic duties, obligations, and responsibilities. Criticism of belief is expressed in the terms of immorality (“blameworthy”) or irrationality.²⁴

However, as just observed, this first doctrine is suspect on its surface. The common formulation of evidentialism, as the view that the strength of belief should be proportioned to the evidence, stands on its own. From the mere presentation of the position, we immediately grasp its rationale. The presentation does not dangle, waiting on an elaborate defense. In section 1, I argued for evidentialism on conceptual grounds, explicitly assuming no substantive views of rationality, epistemology, or ethics. The dominance of the above ethical terms in discussions within the ethics of belief is

partly a product of the wrong methodology and starting point I criticized in part I. But it is also a product of the limited normative vocabulary available. We are hard pressed to select simple terms to enter normative claims other than the standard ones of ethics. In contrast, the intrinsic approach takes the basic evaluative terms for the ethics of belief to be “cannot” and “must,” as in the incoherence test. The place for terms like “right” or “proper” is derivative, and, more so, terms like “ought” or “irrational.”

The second doctrine (the ethics of belief is lax) as well as the third (the “ought” of the ethics of belief is the practical “ought” of action) follow from taking the ethics of belief to be determined by what it is rational to believe. Thus the “ought” of the ethics of belief is taken as based on practical, ethical, or prudential considerations.²⁵

The second doctrine reflects weak demands for reasons or evidence. Recall the view that

we are permitted to believe that p unless we have adequate reason for supposing it false. (Alston 1983: 116)

According to this view, if you find yourself, for whatever reason, with the belief that the number of stars is even, you are entitled to continue to believe it. For you will surely not find adequate reason for “supposing it false.” (That the evidence is roughly 50/50 or, effectively, null is adequate reason not to believe it. But it is not adequate at all for believing that it is false, i.e., believing that the number of stars is not even.)

But counterexamples are to be found in more moderate examples, such as the earlier one of the student who, let us assume, is convinced that he will receive a grade of A. Given his strong performance in the class, he has no reason to suppose that he will not receive an A. Nevertheless, once he comes to appreciate that he might not do extremely well on the final, he ceases to hold the belief. His response is mandated: It is not just wrong or impermissible for him to hold the belief; in full awareness, it is not possible.

Another form taken by a lax ethics of belief is to propose weak conceptions of belief. Richard Swinburne holds that:

normally to believe that p is to believe that p is probable. (Swinburne 1981: 4)

If this is a proposal about the meaning or analysis of “belief,” then, for reasons already canvassed, it amounts merely to stipulation. If you judge it only probable (more likely true than false) that the bus leaves at 7:40, then

that is your degree of belief, and you would deceive or lie if you asserted “The bus leaves at 7:40” rather than “Probably, the bus leaves at 7:40.” You cannot think “ p , but there is a strong probability that not- p .”

Admittedly, ordinary expressions sometimes do support this path toward a lax ethics of belief. An amateur investigator might claim to believe the comet-impact hypothesis of the extinction of the dinosaurs based on very forceful evidence. Yet, he still regards the evidence as inconclusive, and he freely admits that there remain some troubling data for his hypothesis. Without disputing that the use here of “belief” is natural, I propose that the investigator really only believes the hypothesis to a very high degree. His attitude here is not akin to the unqualified way he fully believes that, say, the dinosaurs are extinct. The assertion that

The comet-impact hypothesis is true, but the evidence so far is inconclusive.

seems to use the second conjunct to actually withdraw the unqualified assertion of the antecedent. The more accurate assertion is the qualified

The comet-impact hypothesis is almost certainly true because the evidence so far is strongly supportive, but not conclusive.

This investigator’s own practices favor the latter reading. The investigator pursues further studies of the hypothesis with the question of its truth left open.

The appeal of a lax ethics of belief depends on a stubborn conflation of the extent to which the evidence supports a belief with the strength of that belief on the evidence. It is a conflation of an epistemic relation with a psychological state or attitude. One instance of this is to confuse the evidence’s being “inconclusive” for the proposition believed with its failing to be determinative in regard to one’s attitude. But if it is inconclusive in the former way, it remains decisive that one must withhold belief.

However, the conflation shows how readily we slide between the two, and that their affinity is at one with the subjective principle of sufficient reasons. The natural phrase “reasons (evidence) for belief” embeds the conflation. One’s reasons or evidence are of the content of one’s belief, and it is only by virtue of the evidentialist proportionality claim, which is taken for granted, that these are thereby reasons for belief. The subjective principle is sufficiently second nature that our strength of belief, which follows only on the judged strength of evidential support, comes to be identified

with it. Evidentialism claims that these are conceptually connected, not one and the same.

The third doctrine holds that what one ought to believe is determined by the full range of practical considerations bearing on how one will act guided by that belief. A recent article sounds this standard theme:

there are occasions in which it is permissible, morally and rationally, to form beliefs not on the basis of evidence, but on the basis of pragmatic reasons. (Jordan 1996: 409)

One reaches the third doctrine by mistakenly reasoning from the fact that belief is always the belief of some agent (some doer) to the conclusion that what one ought to believe is derivative from what is right (best, optimal, rational) for one to do, all things considered.²⁶

If what is meant is that the “oughts” of the ethics of belief can be overridden or outweighed by the demands of morality or prudence, then it is just a truism. You ought to speak civilly, though not if someone threatens to kill you if you do.²⁷ But it becomes nontruistic when the “ought” and related ethical terms (“permissible”) are taken as directed at belief, not primarily at the individual who holds the belief. On certain occasions, morality or rationality require or allow pragmatic reasons to take precedence over evidence.

The oft-repeated example that is supposed to favor this doctrine is of a wife who overlooks weak evidence of her husband’s infidelity. She expects that if such evidence were to undermine her belief in his faithfulness, it would destroy their marriage. She judges that the expected value of keeping her marriage together, if the evidence is misleading, well outweighs that for ending the marriage, if the evidence is correct. The verdict is that it can be rational for the wife to continue to believe that her husband is faithful in defiance of the evidence. From these and related examples, it is concluded that if there is behavior

which one ought to prevent oneself from engaging in, and if one can . . . prevent this behavior by adopting a certain belief, then one ought to adopt that belief, apart from the epistemic warrant or lack thereof for that belief. (Meiland 1993: 520)

Thus the relation of evidence to what one ought to believe “needs to be justified by a practical argument” (524).

A telling concession of those who advocate the third doctrine is that the justifiably suspicious wife might have to deceive herself in order to maintain the belief in her husband’s fidelity. But advocates respond: “this only

shifts the question—from whether it is wrong to believe on the basis of insufficient evidence to the question of whether self-deception is always wrong” (516). But why should self-deception be required at all unless the agent recognizes her prospective beliefs as violating their own claims? The answer is that it should not. When we imagine self-deception lifted, the person can no longer maintain the belief, since she has now exposed an incoherence, of the kind set out above. (Briefly, for the wife, the incoherence is “My husband is faithful, but I have evidence that he has been unfaithful.”)

The rationality that I have focused on is rationality of action. Some, however, would introduce as more pertinent the notion of *epistemic rationality*, taking the best means to the end of gaining truth. This notion is much less natural and much less studied than rationality of action (taking the best means for reaching a given end).²⁸ Still, I expect that some understandings of epistemic rationality would favor evidentialism as well. But this is true neither of dominant views of epistemic rationality nor of those that give comfort to extrinsic approaches.

The thesis that draws the sharpest break with evidentialism claims that *consistency*, although an important advantage of a set of beliefs, is only one virtue among others. Here is a recent expression of this broadly pragmatist theme: “there are criteria for rationality other than consistency, and that some of these are even more powerful than consistency. . . . These criteria are all independent . . . pulling in opposite directions. Now, what should one do if, for a certain belief, all of the criteria pull toward acceptance, except consistency—which pulls the other way? . . . it seems natural to suppose that the combined force of the other criteria may trump inconsistency. In such a case, then it is rational to have an inconsistent belief” (Priest 1998: 420). If this is correct, then, here, as elsewhere, I insist that it should be possible to engage in the reasoning advocated openly. But it isn’t. From the first-person point of view there is no coherent thought of the form: “p, q, r . . . are each true. However they are inconsistent. That is, at least one of them is not true. But that’s OK because the collection has compensating cognitive benefits, and it would be foolish to sacrifice all the rest of these, merely for consistency. So ‘Yes,’ each of these is true and yet one of them is not true.”²⁹ Overlooking this incoherence is a product of abstracting consistency from its centrality as a constraint on belief. Consistency is not just a “virtue” of a set of beliefs. Each of a set of beliefs makes a claim to truth, not to simplicity, fruitfulness, or other cognitive virtues.

That claim can be satisfied only if the joint truth of those beliefs is possible; that is, only if the set of beliefs is consistent.³⁰

The fourth doctrine assumes that the methodology of the ethics of belief is either descriptive or else normative. Either you infer the norms of belief from what human agents are capable of following, or else norms for belief dictate what it is right or wrong to believe, regardless of what believers actually do. The intrinsic ethics of belief rejects this dichotomy.³¹

Appeal to the “is/ought” distinction, or to the “naturalistic fallacy,” in order to argue for purely normative approaches ignores relevant modal facts. It erroneously assumes that the facts (“is”) to which normative claims can be indifferent are mere contingencies. But when the “cannot” is conceptual, this reasoning fails. Similarly, contrary arguments for naturalistic approaches assume that the “cannot” in the contrapositive form (“‘cannot’ implies not ‘ought’”) is that of inability. The result is an approach to the ethics of belief that is hopelessly dependent on peculiarities of human psychology, rather than applicable to any (potential) believers.

The “cannot” of the intrinsic ethics of belief is conceptual; it derives from the incoherence of recognizing both that one holds a belief and that one’s reasons for that belief are inadequate. The incoherence is a contradiction, so the point is that there is no such thought, not merely that such thoughts are irrational. The “cannot” is strongly normative, generating not simply “not ought”s, as entailed by the “‘ought’ implies ‘can’” thesis. Not only is it not the case that one ought to believe that the number of stars is even, but one *ought not* to believe it. The restriction governs any believing creatures, not merely humans, for underlying the incoherence is a conflict between the conceptual nature of belief and one’s epistemic position.

7 Assertion and an Everyday Bridge between First- and Second-Order Judgments

You cannot believe that there is an even number of stars, when you recognize that it is belief that you are aiming at, as required by the full awareness condition. One lingering worry over the full awareness condition is that it is arduous to realize idealization; a deeper worry is that the incoherence test and the argument that inspires it confuse *second-order* with *first-order* incoherence. If it is incoherent to believe that *p*, recognizing *p* as what I believe, that is a second-order incoherence. How is it supposed to follow that

the belief that *p* itself—the first-order belief—is incoherent? I hope to relieve both worries by recalling our ongoing parallel with assertion.

Assertion presupposes full awareness of one's act and epistemic position. Assertion is that speech act in which the speaker presents the hearer with the content *p*, not the speaker's attitude toward it. However, the hearer recognizes not just the content of the assertion, but that of the speech act as that of an assertion. Analogously, the background condition satisfied when one attends to one's belief is that the content is held as true, not merely that the content is thought or entertained.³²

The parallel supports the deaf ear we seem to be turning to those who insist that they do hold full beliefs in avowed defiance of evidentialism. A hearer, Harry, will accept a speaker Sally's assertion that *p* (e.g., The #2 express stops at Franklin Ave.) because Harry takes Sally to believe *p*. The backing of the assertion by the speaker's belief is a backing of *p*, not the speaker's attitude. If Harry challenges Sally with the question "how do you know?" Sally successfully meets the challenge by offering her reasons that *p*, not reasons about the nature of asserting (or believing).

What happens if the speaker's reasons and attitude pull apart? Harry believes that if Sally lacks the attitude but satisfies the epistemic condition then he will still accept Sally's assertion. But not conversely. For it is only the reasons that provide the guarantee that Harry seeks.

Assertion provides us with a model of a pervasive epistemic practice where the full awareness condition is presumed to be met. The hearer accepts the speaker's assertion because the hearer takes it as what the speaker believes. So in the common and ordinary speaker-hearer relation, a necessary bridge for the hearer to accept the speaker's word is a second-order one. That bridge is generated virtually automatically, requiring no notice or cogitation.

Our model for the ethics or epistemics of belief is that of the ethics or epistemics of assertion. When one attends to a belief, one regards it as asserted by (and to) oneself. (We thereby abstract away from social obstacles to assertion such as those due to matters of privacy, as our parallel requires that we abstract away from conversational expectations like politeness.) In asserting to oneself, one simultaneously occupies the role of speaker and of hearer. In these dual roles, the anti-evidentialist cannot assert to himself that his alleged requirements or conditions for belief are satisfied. The evidentialist can. But I have argued that, under the idealization of full aware-

ness, if (and only if) one's ethics of belief is correct, one can state explicitly—assert—that its requirements are fulfilled. So I infer from the incoherence of the second-order position in overt defiance of evidentialism that the first-order beliefs, which yield that incoherence, are wrong or improper.

8 Summary: The Traditional and the Conceptual Approaches to Evidentialism

Traditional evidentialism implies that when one's belief is not in accord with the evidence then one is engaged in believing unwisely or irrationally. More simply, one is not believing as one ought. But, of course, one can deliberately act unwisely, irrationally, or against what one ought. Indeed, it seems senseless to recommend wise or rational behavior, unless there is an option of not complying with the recommendation. Yet, as we have observed, anti-evidentialists thrive on this approach, even if they dissent from what the tradition regards as wise or rational or one's duty.

The evidentialism I am defending rejects not only or not primarily the implication, pursued in chapter 2, that belief is a matter of choice or the will. Rather, I am concerned to reject the implication—more detrimental in large part because it is taken for granted—that the relation between belief and evidence is a contingent one, which requires shoring up from tendentious doctrines of ethics, epistemology, or rationality. In particular, we do not specify the basic doctrines of the ethics of belief in “deontological” terms of “ought”s and duties. The objective version of evidentialism for full belief is not one about how one ought to believe (rationally, wisely, or ethically). Rather,

One's believing that p is proper (i.e., in accord with the concept of belief) if and only if one's evidence establishes that p is true.

On the conceptual or intrinsic approach, normative judgments (“ought”s) are not directed to belief as they are on extrinsic approaches including that of traditional evidentialism. If, under ideal conditions, I cannot help but believe (not believe) when I recognize that the evidence establishes (fails to establish) that p , it makes no strict sense to say that I ought (or that it is not the case that I ought) to believe p .

Because judgments of what one cannot believe are conceptually grounded, they are simultaneously normative and descriptive. The main

doctrines in the ethics of belief are testable. We test them against the data of what we do (and so can) actually believe when we focus on the claims inherent in our believing a proposition and whether our epistemic position fulfills those claims. As previously noted, what we cannot possibly believe, we cannot actually believe. So evidentialism corresponds to the facts. When we attend to any belief in clear light, it describes how we judge.

The argument from the subjective principle to evidentialism is both normative and descriptive because it is conceptual. In reconstruction that argument is this:

1. Necessarily, if in full awareness one attends to one's believing that p , one regards it as believed for adequate reasons.
- So, 2. One cannot recognize oneself as fully believing that p (rather than believing p to a high degree) and that one's reasons for belief are inadequate (yielding less than full support).
3. The reason that one cannot so recognize oneself is that the thought would be a stark contradiction.
- So, 4. The "cannot" is conceptual, not merely an inability, and the concept that generates the contradiction is belief.
5. The impossibility of believing implies that in first-person awareness we recognize the demands of belief, and that those demands are for adequate reasons of the truth of what is believed.
- So, 6. One believes that p in accord with the concept of belief only if one has adequate reasons that p .
- So, 7. One ought to believe that p only if one has adequate reasons that p .

The reconstruction makes it plain that our argument does not move from an "is" (of the subjective principle) to an "ought" (of evidentialism). First, it simply could not move from an "is" to an "ought" (licit or illicit) because the premises are avowedly not purely factual and the main conclusion (6) is not a prescription or "ought" judgment. Premises (1) and (2) are not mere descriptive truths. They do not claim merely that we do, in fact, think of ourselves as having adequate reasons. Rather, they claim that we cannot (in full awareness) believe otherwise. The main conclusion of our argument (6) is a version of the primary form of evidentialism. It does not contain "ought" and it is not a directive to action. The prescription for action (7) is derivative, and even then, as observed earlier, it must be understood as subject to qualification and overriding by further "ought"s. Second, the subjective principle leads us to evidentialism only by way of

exposing demands of the concept of belief. The concept of belief explains the modal character of the subjective principle. The subjective principle does not directly ground evidentialism; the concept of belief does that.

The epigram of this book provides an illustration of these interconnected claims. It comes from the *Apology*, when, during cross-examination, Socrates in exasperation censures his chief accuser: “You cannot be believed, Meletus, even, I think, by yourself” (Plato 1981: 26e). Meletus has charged Socrates with “corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new divinities” (Plato 1981: 24b). Socrates prods Meletus, in front of the jury, into admitting that one of the accusations is that of atheism: “you do not believe in the gods at all.”

The unbelievability that Socrates ascribes to Meletus is on conceptual grounds. Attribution of incoherence to Meletus’s beliefs follows on the beliefs he attributes to Socrates. Meletus ascribes to Socrates beliefs that contradict each other—that there are gods and that there are no gods. The impossibility of holding those beliefs reflects back on Meletus, denying believability in his own attribution to Socrates. The ascription is normative: Meletus is “guilty of dealing frivolously with serious matters” (Plato 1981: 24c). But the accusation is also descriptive. Once Meletus’s commitments are brought to his attention, he cannot, and now does not, maintain them.³³