Equal Treatment for Belief

Susanna Rinard
Harvard University

Abstract

This paper proposes that the question "What should I believe?" is to be answered in the same way as the question "What should I do?," a view I call *Equal Treatment*. After clarifying the relevant sense of "should," I point out advantages that Equal Treatment has over both simple and subtle evidentialist alternatives, including versions that distinguish what one should believe from what one should get oneself to believe. I then discuss views on which there is a distinctively epistemic sense of should. Next I reply to an objection which alleges that non-evidential considerations cannot serve as reasons for which one believes. I then situate Equal Treatment in a broader theoretical framework, discussing connections to rationality, justification, knowledge, and theoretical vs. practical reasoning. Finally, I show how Equal Treatment has important implications for a wide variety of issues, including the status of religious belief, philosophical skepticism, racial profiling and gender stereotyping, and certain issues in psychology, such as depressive realism and positive illusions.

0. Introduction

Many people, both inside and outside philosophy, agonize over what to believe. Should I believe in God? Should I trust that my accused friend is innocent? Should I think that acupuncture will help my aching shoulder? How confident should I be that the female professor I just met is in English rather than Math?

Some philosophers have thought they can advise individuals confronting such questions. Many endorse William Clifford's evidentialist view that "It is wrong….to believe on insufficient

evidence." (Clifford 1877) Others have followed William James, who defended the pragmatist view that believing beyond the evidence is sometimes acceptable, even advisable. (James 1896) My aim in this paper is to explore a view that is more pragmatist than evidentialist in spirit. On this view, which I'll call "Equal Treatment," the question "What should I believe?" is to be answered in the same way as the question "What should I do?"

It is not my goal to give an argument for Equal Treatment that should convince someone already committed to an alternative view. Rather, I aim to respond to some objections to Equal Treatment and point out advantages that it has over alternatives. Equal Treatment, I claim, deserves to be taken seriously.

In section 1 I give a more careful statement of Equal Treatment (ET), and clarify the sense of "should" to which it is meant to apply. I also discuss the nature of our control over belief. In section 2 I point out advantages that ET has over a simple version of evidentialism, as well as a more subtle version of evidentialism which distinguishes what one should believe from what one should get oneself to believe. In section 3 I consider views on which there is a distinctively epistemic sense of "should." Some such views are compatible with ET; others are not. I point out disadvantages of those incompatible with ET. In section 4 I consider the objection that beliefs can't be based on non-evidential considerations. I argue that they can. In section 5 I describe how ET could be situated within a broader theoretical framework by sketching connections with other notions, namely rationality, justification, knowledge, and the distinction between theoretical and practical reasoning. I conclude in section 6 by explaining how Equal Treatment has important implications for a range of issues, including the status of religious belief, philosophical skepticism, racial profiling and gender stereotyping, and a number

of issues in psychology, including research on depressive realism, positive illusions, and happiness and well-being.

This paper is programmatic and hence necessarily incomplete. Although I endeavor to discuss a number of the most common and most plausible alternatives and objections to ET, there are many important views and issues whose consideration must wait another occasion.

1. Equal Treatment

As a rough first pass, we can think of Equal Treatment (ET) as saying that the question "What should I believe?" is to be answered in the same way as the question "What should I do?" For example, suppose the answer to the latter is that you should perform whichever act, of your options, has highest expected value. Then, ET says you should have whichever belief, of your options, has highest expected value. Alternatively, suppose you should perform whichever act would be the best means to your ends. Then, ET says you should have whichever belief would be the best means to your ends.

More generally, Equal Treatment says that *whatever* general principles govern what one should do, these same general principles also govern what one should believe, and vice versa. Similarly, general principles governing whether something is a *reason* to do something also govern whether something is a reason to *believe* something, and vice versa.[1] These general principles may include mere sufficient or mere necessary conditions.

[1] David Papineau (2013) defends a somewhat similar view, as does Miriam McCormick (2015), although there are also important differences. Richard Foley (1987 and 1992) is also concerned to treat belief and action in the same way (though his focus is rationality, rather than should). Equal Treatment is similar in spirit to what Mark Schroeder (forthcoming) calls the practical priority thesis.

Good philosophical judgment and a sense of the spirit behind the view are needed to properly interpret Equal Treatment. For example, it is not in the spirit of ET to suppose that the following "general principle" applies to both action and belief: If φ-ing is an action, then one should φ just in case doing so has highest expected value, and if φ-ing is a belief, one should φ just in case the proposition fits one's evidence.

Equal Treatment is not meant to apply to all the different senses of "should" that one might distinguish. To begin bringing into focus the sense to which ET does apply, consider the following, all of which are in the right neighborhood: (1) the all-things-considered should; (2) the ought of advice; (3) the sense in which it's irrational to believe that one should φ while failing to intend to φ; (4) the sense in which one should φ just in case φ-ing is the most choiceworthy of one's options; (5) the sense in which doing what one should do constitutes a regulative ideal to which one can coherently aspire. Though each of these characterizations may be intended to get at what I have in mind, I regard each, for reasons of detail I won't go into here, as problematic.

I'll call the sense of "should" relevant to ET the *guidance-giving* sense. I don't aim to give precise, non-circular necessary and sufficient conditions for the claim that one should, in this sense, φ. However, I will make some remarks intended to help direct the reader to what I have in mind.

Consider someone who is deliberating about what to do—for example, trying to decide whether or not to live in the country. One natural way to describe what they're doing makes use of the word "should." They might say, "I'm trying to figure out whether I should live in the country or not." For them, settling what they *should*, in this sense, do, properly settles *what to do*. I'll call a sense of should *guidance-giving* just in case, if one settles that they should, in this

sense, φ, that properly settles for them the answer to the question whether or not to φ (namely, it settles it in favor of φ-ing).

It is common to distinguish between an objective should and a subjective should.[2] The objective should—i.e., what one should do, given all the facts—is guidance-giving (at least for maximally specific options).[3] I will now briefly motivate the claim that we need to recognize a subjective sense of should, which is also guidance-giving.[4,5]

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[2] See, for example, Parfit 1984, Jackson and Pargetter 1986, and Gibbard 2005.

[3] Cases like the following may lead one to hold that the objective should is guidance-giving *only* for maximally specific options. You must choose between three treatment pills: A, B, and C. C will cure you with mild side effects. Of A and B, one will cure you with no side effects; the other will kill you. You have no idea which is which, and no way to find out. You know that either you should, objectively, take A, or you should, objectively, take B. Either way, you know that you should, objectively, (take A or take B). However, it's clear that there is no legitimate guidance-giving sense in which you should (take A or take B). You should, in the guidance-giving sense, take C. (An alternative to restricting to maximally specific options is to reject the principle that if one should, objectively, φ, then one should, objectively, (φ or ψ).)

[4] What if one settles that they should, in one guidance-giving sense, φ, but also settles that they should, in some other guidance-giving sense, not φ? First, note that such cases might be impossible. For example, there might be only two guidance-giving senses (objective and subjective), and it might be that the nature of the subjective should ensures that if one settles that they objectively should φ, then it cannot be that they also settle that they subjectively should not φ. However, if such cases are possible, our gloss of "guidance-giving" can be refined as follows: A sense of should is *guidance-giving* just in case, if one settles that they should, in this sense, φ—and it's not the case that there is some other guidance-giving sense in which they have settled that they should, in that sense, not φ—then that properly settles for them the answer to the question whether or not to φ (namely, it settles it in favor of φ-ing). (As I said in the main text, it is not my aim to give a non-circular analysis.) This revised version simply remains silent about cases in which one settles what one should do differently for different guidance-giving senses.

Consider the following case: You know that (1) an odorless poison gas has been released in either the city or the country, (2) if you live where the gas is, it will kill you, and (3) other things are equal, except it's much more pleasant to live in the country. You have no idea where the gas is, and no way to find out. Your inability to find out where the gas is makes for an inability to figure out what you *objectively* should do. But that is no barrier to your figuring out what you should, in the guidance-giving sense, do: clearly, you should live in the country.

It is natural to characterize this subjective should as what you should do, given what you believe. Some, however, prefer to characterize it as what you should do, given what your evidence supports; or, what you should do, given what you know; or, in some other way. I take no stand on this issue here. Equal Treatment should be understood as applying to whichever way of understanding the subjective should is best.

Just as there is a guidance-giving *should*, there is a guidance-giving sense of *normative reason*. In paradigm cases, what one should, in the guidance-giving sense, do, is a matter of the balance of guidance-giving reasons.

A final clarification is in order. Earlier in this section I spoke as if *acts* or *actions* are objects of the guidance-giving should. In general, though, it is best to think of *options* as the objects of this should. This is because the paradigm context for the guidance-giving should is deliberation, and in deliberation one is trying to choose between one's options. Although some particular option may be the same as some particular action, not all actions are options. For example, the action of raising one's arm is not an option for someone with no arms. Moreover,

[5] For ease of exposition I sometimes talk about *the* guidance-giving sense, but anything I say about it should be understood as applying to all genuine guidance-giving senses.

as we will see, not all options are actions—at least, this is so on what I take to be the most plausible account of options, and some accounts of what an action is.

It is natural to think that φ-ing is an option for you just in case you have voluntary control, either direct or indirect, over whether you φ. Living in the country, being a member of the APA, raising my arm, visually imagining a red tomato, and directing my attention to the tree outside are all options for me. On some accounts of action, however, some of these—such as being a member of the APA, or living in the country—are not actions. Nonetheless, it's perfectly natural to take being a member of the APA, or living in the country, to be options; to deliberate about whether one should be a member of the APA, or whether one should live in the country; etc.

There is no in-principle barrier to beliefs being options in this sense. In some metaphysically possible scenarios we can exercise control over our beliefs by taking a pill or pressing a button. (Such cases are discussed in detail in section 4.) More realistically, we may have control over our beliefs by selective attention to evidence, or, as Pascal (1670) suggested, by spending time with certain people. Some metaphysically possible creatures (such as the Credamites described in Bennett 1990) have direct control over their beliefs, much the same way we have direct control over whether we visually imagine a red tomato. (I defend this claim at greater length in Rinard 2017.[6]) Perhaps actual humans can sometimes believe directly, at will; perhaps I can just choose to believe that my friend is innocent, or to believe that I will recover from a disease.

[6] Booth (2015) also argues for this claim.

Plausibly, though, many of our beliefs are not voluntary. When I perceive a chair, the belief that a chair is there may be involuntary.[7] In the face of overwhelming evidence that the butler did it, the belief that he did may be involuntary. The extent of our control over our beliefs (either direct or indirect) is a contingent matter. Most likely our indirect control over belief will expand as technology improves. The extent of our direct control over belief may also be malleable, perhaps via certain mental training techniques. Believing directly at will might be something we could learn to do, just as we can learn to ride a bike, or to raise one eyebrow at a time, or control our anger.

So, many (though not all) of the things we believe are believed involuntarily. Similarly, many (though not all) of the things we do are done involuntarily. If my mouse-clicking wakes you up, waking you up is something I did. And if, in running to pick up the phone, I knock over a glass of water, spilling the water is something I did. But neither was something I did voluntarily. Digesting lactase, falling asleep, and sneezing are all things I do, but not things I typically do voluntarily. So, on the account of options currently before us, just as some of the things we might do are genuine options for us, but many of them aren't, similarly, some of the things we might believe are genuine options for us, but many of them aren't.

Some philosophers prefer a more restricted account of options. On one such account, only bodily actions count as options. On another, only certain mental phenomena, such as deciding, intending, or trying, count as options.

What might motivate one to endorse a restricted account of options? After all, as noted above, the more inclusive account accords best with how we ordinarily talk and think. It is commonplace to regard living in the country, being a member of the APA, etc. as genuine

[7] Reisner (2013) makes a similar claim.

options that we have; to deliberate about whether or not to do so; to give reasons for and against; etc.

A primary motivation for moving away from the inclusive account of options comes from cases in which you are prevented from doing something by circumstances that are not up to you. For example, suppose you decide to become a member of the APA, and you submit the required forms. However, your forms get lost in the mail, and you do not become a member. Here, circumstances beyond your control prevented you from becoming a member of the APA. However, these circumstances did not prevent you from performing the bodily actions of filling out and submitting the forms. It might seem that, in general, if your control over something is indirect, then it is always possible that circumstances not up to you could interfere with your bringing about that thing. And bodily action might seem like the paradigm example of something over which you have direct control. So, it may seem, only bodily actions are genuine options.

While there is certainly some plausibility to this line of thought, in my view it is misguided. This is revealed by the fact that attempts to perform bodily actions are also vulnerable to interference by circumstances not up to you. Suppose I have decided to become a member of the APA, and am just about to fill out the membership form. Right before I do so, however, I become paralyzed – completely unable to move my limbs – and hence unable to fill out the form. If the possibility of interference by circumstances beyond my control prevents *becoming a member of the APA* from being an option for me, then it also prevents *filling out membership forms* from being an option for me.

These observations might lead one to count only mental phenomena, such as intending, or deciding, or trying, as options.[8] I'll focus on intending, but the same remarks apply to deciding or trying. It is natural to think that, while bad luck might get in the way of my carrying out my intentions, whether or not I intend to do something in the first place is entirely up to me. If so, then it can seem right to identify as a genuine option only the intention itself, and not the downstream consequences of it.

However, on reflection it becomes apparent that I *can* be prevented from having an intention by circumstances beyond my control. Suppose I'm deliberating about whether to become a member of the APA, and am just about to form the intention to do so. Unbeknownst to me, a neuroscientist has hooked up a device to my brain, and, right before I actually form the intention, they use this device to disable my intention-forming capabilities. So I don't form the intention, even though I would have done so, had the neuroscientist not interfered at the last minute.

The upshot of this discussion, in my view, is that the motivation we've been considering for moving away from the inclusive account of options ultimately rests on a mistake. It is tempting to think that, if we go back far enough in the causal chain, there is some point early on at which your control is perfectly direct and absolute, not vulnerable to interference by circumstances not up to you. But, as we have seen, this is an illusion. Whatever sorts of things we count as options, there will always be cases in which we're prevented from doing something of that sort purely by circumstances not up to us.[9] So we might as well stick with the inclusive conception of options.

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[8] Hedden 2015, among others, defends this view.
[9] Some arguments in the same spirit can be found in Lavin 2013.

There is doubtless more that can be said on this question. However, I hope to have convinced the reader that it is not unreasonable to proceed on the assumption that the inclusive account of options is correct. As pointed out earlier, it is this account that accords best with our ordinary thought and speech. Moreover, I have argued that what I see as the best motivation for moving away from this account turns out, on reflection, to rest on an illusion. Thus, in this paper I will presuppose that the inclusive account of options is correct.

Before moving on, I will briefly point out that, while the focus of this paper is belief, it is natural to suppose that the equal treatment thesis, if true, applies not only to options that are believings and doings, but to anything at all that is an option for one. For example, we wonder not only what we should (in the guidance-giving sense) do and believe, but also how we should react and feel: Should I be angry? Should I feel guilty? Should I be ashamed? Etc. It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed defense of the more general equal treatment thesis, but I will note that much of the dialectic to follow concerning belief applies to these other attitudes and emotions as well. For example, just as some opponents of Equal Treatment hold that the expected consequences of a belief are irrelevant to whether one should have that belief (but the expected consequences of an action are relevant to whether one should perform that action), some hold that the expected consequences of an attitude or emotion are irrelevant to whether one should have it. For example, some hold that one should always be angry in the face of injustice or wrongdoing; that one should feel guilty whenever one did something wrong; etc. A defender of the fully general equal treatment thesis would argue, against this, that sometimes anger should be avoided even when there was genuine injustice or wrongdoing (for example, when anger would be counterproductive, provoking even further injustice and causing deep psychological ill-being in the angry party). Similarly with guilt – it is best avoided, even if one did do wrong, if

the effects of guilt would be sufficiently toxic (e.g. triggering a slide into a debilitating morass of self-hatred and depression that benefits no one). Again, it is beyond the scope of this paper – which takes belief as its primary focus – to defend these claims, but the reader may want to consider, as the dialectic of the paper unfolds, whether and to what extent there is a parallel dialectic concerning other attitudes and emotions. (For example, I will argue that even according to Equal Treatment, it is usually (though not always) the case that evidence gives one a reason to believe, because true belief is so beneficial. The reader may consider whether, on the more general equal treatment thesis, injustice usually (though not always) gives one a reason to be angry (e.g. when it spurs one to act to prevent further injustice); whether having done wrong usually (though not always) gives one a reason to feel guilty (e.g. when it helps one to avoid acting wrongly in the future); etc.)

2. Evidentialism as an Alternative to Equal Treatment

One alternative to Equal Treatment is a view I'll call "evidentialism," which says that one should believe P just in case one's evidence adequately supports P, and that only evidence for P is a reason for believing it. In this section I will consider the version of evidentialism on which "should" and "reason" are interpreted as guidance-giving, as it is this version that is most clearly incompatible with Equal Treatment. (Some versions of evidentialism on which "should" and "reason" are understood differently are perfectly compatible with Equal Treatment. Examples are discussed in the following section.)[10]

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[10] The following authors, along with many others, have defended evidentialism of some variety or other: Clifford (1877), Adler (2002), Wood (2008), Shah (2006), Kelly (2002), Feldman and Conee (2004), and Way (forthcoming).

Defenders of evidentialism sometimes regard their view as the default, to be rejected only in the face of powerful arguments against it. However, I don't think this position can be plausibly maintained. Many ordinary people, and many academics who aren't philosophers, often simply presuppose that there are sometimes non-evidential reasons for belief. For example, many ordinary people think of faith as belief that goes beyond (or even against) one's evidence, and many think that we should have faith—faith in God, or faith in our friends, or faith in humanity (Preston-Roedder 2013). Proponents of cognitive-behavioral therapy, happiness researchers, and positive psychologists often recommend certain beliefs based on their prudential value to the believer—even when sufficient evidence is lacking.[11] So evidentialists cannot plausibly claim that their view has a special ordinary or default status, or pre-theoretical priority.

At this point, the evidentialist may observe that it is very common for individuals, when asked for reasons for a particular belief, to respond by providing evidence for the proposition in question. This fact may seem to make trouble for Equal Treatment. After all, according to ET evidence for P is not automatically a reason to believe it.

However, the defender of ET may respond by pointing out that, on their view, evidence for P usually does provide one with a reason to believe it. After all, believing the truth is typically useful and beneficial – it helps us more successfully pursue our projects across many domains of life, from the mundane (getting to the grocery store, buying the right insurance policy, etc.) to the theoretical (proving new results in math or logic, discovering how coral reefs work, etc.). Since we're generally better off believing the truth, and since evidence for P indicates that P is true, evidence for P generally provides us with a reason to believe P, according to Equal Treatment. This is something about which the evidentialist and the defender of Equal

[11] See, for example, Lyubomirsky 2008 and Wilson 2011.

Treatment can agree. The disagreement concerns whether evidence is *inevitably* a reason for belief, and whether there can *ever* be non-evidential reasons for belief. With respect to this disagreement, I don't think the evidentialist can plausibly claim that their view is the default.

In "Against the New Evidentialists" (Rinard 2015) I argued that, in the philosophical literature, there is currently a dialectical stalemate between the evidentialist and their opponent. Neither, I claim, is in possession of a non-question-begging argument that should be persuasive to the other. It will not be my aim here to provide an argument for Equal Treatment that should be persuasive to a committed evidentialist. Ultimately, the move from evidentialism to Equal Treatment may require something more like a gestalt shift; an arational (though not irrational) leap. (I say this as a former evidentialist.)

That said, one thing I will do is point out some advantages of Equal Treatment. The first is that Equal Treatment has a kind of theoretical simplicity, or uniformity, that evidentialism lacks. On the evidentialist view, fundamentally different theories are required to account for what one should believe, on the one hand, and what one should do, on the other. This complication is avoided by Equal Treatment, which treats beliefs and non-beliefs uniformly.

The second advantage is that Equal Treatment gives the intuitively right verdicts in a number of cases on which evidentialism founders. Consider, for example, a patient whose chances of recovery will be significantly higher if she believes (against the evidence) that she'll recover. The evidentialist must counsel pessimism to such a patient, but the defender of Equal Treatment need not. Similarly, according to the evidentialist, if an athlete's evidence suggests she won't win, she shouldn't believe she will—even if doing so would significantly boost her performance. Or, imagine someone with terrible chronic pain, whose only source of relief is acupuncture treatments—which would cease to be effective, were she to give up her belief

(which, we can suppose, goes against her evidence) that acupuncture removes blockages that prevent the proper flow of energy through her body. In short, it is an advantage of Equal Treatment over evidentialism is that it gets the intuitively right verdict on these and other cases.[12] (I elaborate further on such cases in Rinard 2017.)

One evidentialist response to such observations involves distinguishing genuine belief from other closely-related states, such as acceptance, or supposition. In such cases, says the evidentialist, one should accept or suppose the proposition in question, even if one shouldn't believe it. The plausibility of this proposal depends entirely on the details of the case. It *may* be that merely accepting the proposition would be just as beneficial as believing it. But this need not be so. There are possible versions of these cases in which mere acceptance does nothing at all—only if one genuinely believes the proposition in question will one reap the benefits: greater chances of winning, or recovery; relief from chronic pain; etc. In these cases, distinguishing belief and acceptance does nothing to mitigate the counterintuitive consequences of evidentialism.

Another way of responding involves turning to more subtle views, in a broadly evidentialist spirit, with the resources to give more sophisticated treatments of cases of this kind. According to one such view—which I'll call "Different Objects"—we must carefully distinguish different objects to which the guidance-giving should can apply. In particular, we must distinguish the question of whether one should *act* so as to bring about the belief that P—that is, whether one should *get oneself* to believe P—from the question of whether one should *believe* P. In the former, the object of the guidance-giving should is an action; in the latter, it is a belief. Importantly, for a defender of Different Objects, these two questions can be answered differently. When it comes to what one should believe, they embrace evidentialism. As before,

[12] Berislav Marusic (2015) discusses other cases in which evidentialism gives the intuitively wrong answer.

this saddles them with the counterintuitive consequence that, no matter how beneficial these beliefs might be, the athlete should not believe she'll win; the patient with chronic pain should not believe that acupuncture removes energy blockages; etc. However, they hope to mitigate the counterintuitiveness of this consequence by giving a different answer to the question of what one should get oneself to believe. Here, whether the belief would be beneficial is highly relevant. So, they can insist that the athlete should act so as to bring about the belief that she'll win, and the patient should get herself to believe that acupuncture removes energy blockages, even though the athlete shouldn't believe that she'll win, and the patient shouldn't believe that acupuncture works that way. For example, if they have a pill that would give them the belief, they should take the pill—even though they shouldn't believe what the pill will make them believe. (Defenders of this view include Kelly (2002) and Shah (2006).)

This view has the unfortunate consequence that it is impossible to both do and believe as one should.[13] If one acts as one should – and takes the pill – then one will end up with a belief they shouldn't have. And if one believes as one should, then it must be that they didn't act as they should – they didn't take the pill – because if they had, they would have believed otherwise. But, as I will now argue, there are good reasons to deny that diachronic dilemmas of this kind are possible, at least for the guidance-giving sense of should.

Consider a principle I'll call "Agglomeration," which says that if one ought to φ, and one ought to ψ, then one ought to (φ and ψ). For example, if I ought to walk my dog, and I ought to feed my dog, then I ought to both walk and feed my dog. Since, according to Different Objects, I ought to take the pill, and I ought not to have the resulting belief, it follows given Agglomeration that I ought to (take the pill and not have the resulting belief). But this is not an

[13] Reisner (2008) and Wright (2014) give similar objections.

option for me, since taking the pill causes the belief. As we saw above, the objects of the guidance-giving should are options: if φ-ing is not an option for me, then it can't be the case that I ought to φ. So, if Agglomeration is right, then Different Objects must be rejected. We must deny at least one of the following: (1) One should take the pill; (2) One shouldn't have the resulting belief.

Agglomeration is highly plausible. Moreover, it is entailed by some common and natural views about ought, such as the view that one ought to maximize expected utility (either overall utility for all creatures, or personal utility), and by consequentialism more generally. However, in the face of this objection, a defender of Different Objects may well reject it. And they may point out that this rejection fits with certain non-consequentialist views. For example, on some views, if I've promised Anna I'll attend the party, and I've promised Lisa that I won't attend the party, then it's true that I ought to attend the party, and it's true that I ought not attend the party. But (attending and not attending) is not an option for me, and so can't be something I ought to do; and so, Agglomeration is false.

As they say, one man's modus ponens is another man's modus tollens. In my view, what this case shows is not that Agglomeration is false, but that sometimes one ought to break a promise. (We shouldn't make conflicting promises in the first place, but if we do, we should just do whatever would be best under the circumstances, and that must involve breaking at least one promise.) However, a detailed defense of this claim is beyond the scope of this paper. What should be relatively uncontroversial is that, other things equal, a view that does not involve commitment to dilemmas is preferable to one that does—and, the more dilemmas to which one is committed, the heavier the cost. Dilemmas reduce the guidance value of ought statements. Being told that one ought to φ, and that one ought to ψ, where doing both is impossible, is of

limited help to one who is trying to figure out what to do. I began this paper by pointing out that we often agonize about what to believe, and that some philosophers have thought they can advise individuals confronting such situations. Telling individuals, as the defender of Different Objects must do, that they should get themselves to believe, but they should not believe (where doing both is impossible) is not particularly clear or useful advice. This is a significant cost of the view—a consequence of its unfortunate commitment to diachronic dilemmas—and one that Equal Treatment does not bear.

There are other versions of Different Objects that are not committed to diachronic dilemmas in these cases. On these views, one should try to believe, or intend to believe, or want to believe, but not believe.[14] Unlike getting yourself to believe, which implies success (anyone who gets themselves to believe does in fact believe), it is possible to try/intend/want to believe and then not believe. (Henceforth, for simplicity, I discuss only the trying version of the view, but similar remarks apply to intending and wanting.)

One may wonder whether a version of the above objection applies here as well. Is it really an option for one to (try to believe but not believe)? How would one go about doing it? While I think this line of objection has merit, I will pursue a different one here. Consider the following case. There are two mines that each contain hundreds of trapped miners, including, in each mine, the captain of that mining team. An eccentric billionaire has the power to rescue the miners, but he has one condition: he will rescue those in a mine only if the captain of that mine believes that the number of stars is even. Both captains share the same evidence, and it is neutral on whether the number of stars is even.

The version of Different Objects presently under consideration says that each captain should try to believe that the number of stars is even, but that he should not believe this. Captain

[14] Defenders of such views include Parfit (2011), Hieronymi (2005), and Howard (2016).

Merriweather tries to believe—and succeeds! He thereby saves the lives of all the hundreds on his team. Captain Bellwether, however, tries to believe and fails. The hundreds in his team die. How should we think about these two men? According to Different Objects, it seems we must think of Captain Bellwether, paradoxically, as the hero of the story—he did everything he should have done: he tried to believe, and then he did not believe. He is, it seems, beyond reproach. Captain Merriweather, however, only did one of the things he should have done. He did, as he should have, try to believe—but then, rather than not believing, as he (according to Different Objects) should have, he ended up believing.

I invite the reader to agree with me that this assessment of the two men gets things backwards. It is Captain Merriweather who is the hero, and beyond reproach—he succeeded in a difficult task (believing beyond his evidence), thereby saving the lives of hundreds! Captain Bellwether, on the other hand, failed in what really mattered—actually believing that the number of stars is even—and thereby caused the death of hundreds. Equal Treatment can do justice to these reactions to the case. According to ET, in believing, Merriweather did as he should; in failing to believe, Bellwether failed to do as he should. However, it is hard to see how Different Objects could accommodate our reactions. It is saddled with the consequence that Merriweather's conduct was flawed—he did something he should not have done, namely, believe that the number of stars was even—while Bellwether's was not (for every φ such that Bellwether should have φ'd, he did φ). This is a substantial cost of this version of Different Objects, which Equal Treatment does not have.

At this point, it may seem that the way forward for one with evidentialist sympathies is not to distinguish different objects to which the guidance-giving should may give different verdicts, but rather to distinguish different senses of should (e.g. epistemic, moral, prudential,

etc.), which might give different verdicts to the same object (such as the same belief). I consider such views in the following section.

3. The Epistemic Should

We saw in the previous section that evidentialism about the guidance-giving should is incompatible with Equal Treatment. But what about evidentialism about the *epistemic* should—or, for that matter, other theses about the epistemic should?[15] In this section I distinguish a variety of theses about the epistemic should, explain how some are compatible with Equal Treatment while others are not, and present problems for those incompatible with ET.

Those who recognize an epistemic should typically recognize others as well: moral, prudential, aesthetic, legal, etc. On a maximally inclusive conception of these indexed shoulds, every possible rule generates an indexed should. For example, there is *some* sense in which one should φ just in case φ-ing would maximize the expected number of Wild Turkey chicks born next year; there is *some* sense in which one should PHI just in case doing so is recommended in *Possum Living*; etc.

The first view I'll consider is an extreme one that combines two ideas: first, a maximally inclusive conception of the indexed shoulds, as just described; second, that there is no such thing as the guidance-giving should—that is, in no case is there a fact of the matter about what one should, in the guidance-giving sense, do. This view is incompatible with Equal Treatment,

[15] Stewart Cohen (forthcoming) has recently argued that "epistemic" is an undefined technical term, and, consequently, many debates regarding so-called epistemic notions are not in good standing. I am very sympathetic with these concerns. However, for the sake of argument, I set them aside here.

which presupposes that there is a fact of the matter about the guidance-giving should in at least some cases.

One problem for this view is that it cannot do justice to our sense that there is a deep, important, objective difference between the moral should and, say, the should of etiquette or grammar (or, to give a more extreme example, the attack-anyone-who-approaches-within-ten-feet should). A natural way to account for this difference would be to say that the moral should, but not the etiquette should, makes a difference to the guidance-giving should. But a defender of this view can't say this.

In conversation, some defenders of this view have replied that they can account for this difference by pointing out that we *care* about morality—we care about being moral—but we don't care about etiquette (or at least, not as much). However, this does not account for the objectivity of the difference. Consider someone whose attitudes toward morality and etiquette were precisely the reverse of ours. They care deeply about etiquette, but not so much about morality. There's no objective sense, on the view in question, in which they are making a mistake but we are not.

One might point out that we *care* about others' attitudes toward morality and etiquette—in particular, we care that they match ours. But, we can suppose that the reverse is also true: they care that our attitudes match theirs. In short, this view suffers from a problematic fundamental symmetry between the different indexed shoulds.

Any alternative to this view must involve rejecting at least one of the two ideas that comprise it. That is, one must either reject the expansive conception of the indexed shoulds, holding instead that there is only a limited number of indexed shoulds; or, one must hold that there is a fact of the matter about the guidance-giving should in at least some cases.

Plausible versions of the former also involve allowing that there is sometimes a fact of the matter about the guidance-giving should. Consider a case in which all of the (limited number of) indexed shoulds have the same verdict. In every such sense—moral, prudential, epistemic, whatever—one should φ. In such a case, it seems mad to deny that there is a fact of the matter about what one should, in the guidance-giving sense, do—even if one wants to deny a fact of the matter in other cases, such as cases of conflict between the different indexed shoulds. If, according to *every* indexed should, one should φ, then clearly one should, in the guidance-giving sense, φ. So, any plausible alternative to the extreme view allows that there is a fact of the matter about the guidance-giving should in some cases.

Moreover, even on alternatives to the extreme view that hold on to the maximally inclusive conception of the indexed shoulds, we can distinguish a privileged subgroup of *relevant* indexed shoulds, where a sense of should counts as relevant just in case it sometimes matters, in and of itself, to what one should, in the guidance-giving sense, do. For example, consider the view that whenever the moral, prudential, and epistemic shoulds agree that one should φ, then there's a fact of the matter about the guidance-giving should, namely, that one should φ; but, whenever there's any disagreement between these three, there's no fact of the matter about what one should, in the guidance-giving sense, do. Then, each of these three senses counts as relevant, and all other indexed shoulds (such as etiquette and grammar) do not.

In sum, plausible alternatives to the extreme view agree both that there is a fact of the matter about the guidance-giving should in some cases, and there is a limited number of relevant indexed shoulds (either because only some of the many indexed shoulds are relevant, or because there is a limited number of indexed shoulds, all of which are relevant).

In determining whether a view of this sort is compatible with Equal Treatment, one crucial matter is the nature and status of the epistemic should. Many different conceptions of the epistemic can be found in the literature. (Cohen forthcoming contains a survey.) Some of them fit naturally with what I'll call "Only Beliefs," the view that only beliefs can be the objects of epistemic reasons. Others fit more naturally with what I'll call "Not Only Beliefs," the view that there can be epistemic reasons for non-beliefs as well. One view that fits well with Not Only Beliefs is the view that R is an epistemic reason for φ-ing just in case R indicates that φ-ing would be conducive to one's having true beliefs, or knowledge. On such a view it makes good sense to identify epistemic reasons for non-beliefs. After all, a non-belief option can be assessed for how well it conduces to true belief, or knowledge. Some views that fit well with Only Beliefs are (a) the view that R is an epistemic reason for believing P just in case R is evidence for P, and (b) the view that an epistemic reason is the kind of reason that contributes to epistemic justification, which is the kind of justification that's required for a belief to constitute knowledge. In neither case does it make much sense to talk of epistemic reasons for non-beliefs.

Not Only Beliefs is compatible with Equal Treatment. Whether Only Beliefs is compatible depends on whether the epistemic should is a *relevant* indexed should. If not, then it is compatible. (It follows that evidentialism about the epistemic should, when combined with the view that the epistemic should is not relevant, is compatible with Equal Treatment.)

However, the combination of Only Beliefs and Epistemic Relevance (the claim that the epistemic should is among the relevant indexed shoulds) is not compatible with Equal Treatment. This is because, on this combination of views, there is an important difference between how the guidance-giving should is determined for belief and non-belief options, namely, considerations of a distinctively epistemic variety can make a difference to the former, but not the latter.

One advantage that Equal Treatment has over the combination of Only Beliefs and Epistemic Relevance is the advantage that it has over every alternative view: ET exhibits a kind of simplicity and theoretical unification that this view lacks. I'll argue that this combination of views faces two additional problems. First, it faces a problem similar to one presented above for Different Objects. Second, it makes the category "reasons for belief" disjunctive, not a natural kind.

As pointed out above, if one has indirect control over a state S* via one's control over S, such that being in S causes one to be in S*, then it doesn't make sense to hold that S and S* are both options, but that they can receive different verdicts from the guidance-giving should. But, it was observed, Different Objects has exactly this consequence. For example, there are cases in which Different Objects says that one should take a pill that will make one believe P, but one shouldn't believe P.

A similar problem arises for the combination of Only Beliefs and Epistemic Relevance. On this view, there will be possible cases in which one should, in the guidance-giving sense, take the pill that causes belief in P; but, either one shouldn't, in the guidance-giving sense, believe P; or there's no fact of the matter about whether one should, in the guidance-giving sense, believe P. To construct such a case, we can first suppose that the non-epistemic considerations tell in favor of taking the pill, but only slightly. For example, suppose that all relevant considerations other than prudential ones (such as moral considerations) are neutral between taking the pill and not taking it; but, the prudential considerations tell slightly in favor of taking it. For example, perhaps someone will give you $5 if you believe P, and taking the pill is the only way for you to end up believing P. On this view, epistemic considerations don't apply to non-beliefs, so they

are irrelevant to whether you should, in the guidance-giving sense, take the pill. So, on balance, it's true that one should take the pill.

However, when it comes to the question of whether one should, in the guidance-giving sense, believe P, the epistemic considerations are, on this view, relevant. Moreover, we can suppose that they tell strongly in favor of believing not-P. For example, suppose the evidence strongly favors not-P over P. We can suppose that, when it comes to non-epistemic considerations, once again the prudential reasons tell slightly in favor of believing P, but all other relevant considerations are neutral between believing and not believing. On some versions of the view, the epistemic reasons against believing P will be taken to outweigh the prudential reasons for believing it, and it will be the case that, in the guidance-giving sense, you shouldn't believe P. On other versions of the view (say, versions on which the different relevant indexed shoulds are incommensurable), there will be no fact of the matter about whether you should, in the guidance-giving sense, believe P.[16]

Either way, the upshot is that, on this view, there are possible cases in which one should, in the guidance-giving sense, take the pill that causes belief on P; but, either one shouldn't believe P, or there's no fact of the matter about whether one should. This is problematic. As we saw before, if one's control over S* goes via S, such that S causes S*, then, if both S and S* are options, the guidance-giving should must say the same thing about each.

I'll now present the second problem. On this view, moral and prudential considerations in favor of believing P, as well as evidence for P, *all* count as reasons for believing P.

[16] See Reisner 2008 for a view on which epistemic and non-epistemic considerations can be weighed up to determine an all-things-considered should. See Feldman 2000 and Kelly 2003 for views on which epistemic and non-epistemic considerations are incommensurable.

(Assuming that the moral and prudential shoulds are both relevant, and that evidence for P counts as an epistemic reason for believing P.) But moral and prudential considerations for belief, on the one hand, and evidence, on the other, are very different sorts of thing. It is natural to think of a moral consideration in favor of φ-ing as, roughly, a consideration which indicates that φ-ing would benefit others, and a prudential consideration in favor of φ-ing as a consideration which indicates that φ-ing would benefit oneself. Here the commonality is clear: both indicate that believing P would benefit someone. If only these considerations counted as reasons for belief, then this category would be unified, a natural kind. However, on this view, evidence for P also counts as a reason to believe P. Evidence for P is, roughly, a consideration which indicates that P is true (or, perhaps, likely to be true), which is not necessarily an indicator that anyone would benefit from your believing it.

So, this view leaves it entirely mysterious why all of these very different things should count as reasons for belief. What do moral and prudential considerations in favor of believing P have in common with evidence for P that they do not also have in common with, say, considerations indicating that P is self-referential, or that P is contingent; or that believing P would make the number of stars even rather than odd, or would increase the average yearly rainfall in Colorado—or any consideration indicating that P has some property or other, or that believing P would have some effect or other? On this view, then, the category "reasons for belief" is disunified, not a natural kind.

Now, there certainly are *some* views on which evidence for P, and moral and prudential considerations in favor of believing P, have substantial commonalities, and do constitute a natural kind. I will briefly describe two such views. However, neither can be used to rescue the

combination of Only Beliefs and Epistemic Relevance from the objection just given. This is because both views are incompatible with, or at least in strong tension with, this combination.

First, suppose that true belief (or knowledge) has intrinsic value. Then, evidence for P would, in virtue of indicating that P is true, typically indicate that believing P would bring about a valuable state of affairs, namely, true belief (or knowledge). This would be a commonality with moral and prudential considerations for believing P, which (on at least some conceptions) indicate that believing P would bring about a state of affairs with intrinsic value, namely, increased well-being for oneself, or others.

However, a proponent of the view that evidence for P is a reason to believe P because it's an indicator that believing P would bring about intrinsically valuable true belief, or knowledge, should reject the view that only beliefs can be the objects of epistemic reasons. This is because non-beliefs can also bring about true belief, or knowledge.

Second, suppose that true belief (or knowledge) is good for you, i.e. contributes to your well-being. (This view is sometimes motivated by the experience machine example (Nozick 1974).) If so, this is a different way in which evidence could have a commonality with moral and prudential considerations: evidence that P is an indicator that P is true, and so, usually an indicator that believing P would be good for you. However, this is a view on which evidence is a *prudential* reason for belief, not a view on which there are distinctively *epistemic* reasons for belief which combine with the separate moral and prudential reasons to determine what one should, all-things-considered, believe.

In short, the views on which there is an underlying commonality uniting evidence for P, and moral and prudential considerations in favor of believing P, are in tension with the

combination of Only Beliefs and Epistemic Relevance. Since this combination of views recognizes all these as reasons to believe P, it makes this category disjunctive, not a natural kind.

4. Can non-evidential considerations be reasons for which one believes?

As we have seen, according to Equal Treatment, sometimes non-evidential considerations—such as moral or prudential considerations—can be reasons for belief. Some object that such considerations can't be reasons for belief because they cannot be reasons *for which* one believes.[17] In this section I respond to that objection.

First, as noted earlier, I see no impossibility in the idea that there could be creatures who can choose to believe directly, at will—and who can choose to believe directly on the basis of prudential or moral considerations.[18] Moreover, it is not implausible that actual humans can sometimes base their beliefs directly on such considerations—you might believe in God because doing so gives meaning to your life, or strengthens bonds with your family; you might believe in your friend's innocence out of loyalty, or believe that you will quit smoking because you resolved to do so. (These claims are defended at greater length in Rinard 2018.)

There are also possible cases in which a belief is caused indirectly by a moral or prudential consideration but is nonetheless still based on it. It is a familiar fact that indirectness itself is no barrier to basing. Suppose you see a police car while driving on the freeway, and decide to slow down. The reason for which you slow down might be that you want to avoid

[17] See Kelly 2002 and Shah 2006 for expressions of this idea. See Leary (forthcoming) for a recent response.

[18] Throughout this section I use "basis of belief" as a technical term, equivalent by stipulation to "reason for which one believes." In my view, there may be an ordinary sense in which a consideration can be one's basis for belief even if it's not a reason for which one believes—and it is this sense, if any, in which basing one's belief on evidence is required for knowledge.

getting a ticket, even though this caused your slowing down only indirectly, via your pressing the brake. Similarly, suppose the Inquisition is about to arrive, and you'll be executed unless you believe P. You decide to believe, in order to avoid death. Now it may happen that the only way you can end up believing P is by taking a belief-inducing pill. Still, that does not prevent your desire to avoid death from being the reason for which you believe, just as your desire to avoid a ticket was the reason for which you slowed down, even though the former caused the latter only indirectly.[19]

There are many different ways in which such a pill might work. Most simply, it might just give you the belief that P, with no other changes—in particular, it might leave unchanged your views about whether your evidence supports P. Some would object that this is impossible: that it is impossible to believe P unless one takes one's evidence to support P. (See, for example, Adler 2002.) But a number of examples show that this is quite possible. It is not uncommon for individuals to believe that God exists, even though they freely admit that their evidence does not support this belief. (For some, the whole point of faith is to believe in the absence of evidence.)

Or, consider a skeptic who can't get rid of her ordinary beliefs. She has been completely convinced by philosophical arguments that her evidence does not support ordinary beliefs over certain alternatives: for example, her evidence does not favor the proposition that she has hands over the proposition that she is a handless brain-in-a-vat. But, still, she is unable to get rid of her ordinary beliefs; she finds them irresistible. She can't help believing she has hands, even though she regards this belief as unsupported by her evidence. Or, consider someone with a flight phobia: he firmly believes he will die if he gets on the plane, even though he knows his evidence supports that planes are very safe. Similarly, you may find yourself unable to believe that a dear

[19] Is the basis a desire? A desire/belief pair? A fact? These details are orthogonal to what is at issue here.

friend of yours committed a heinous crime, even if you recognize that this is what the evidence supports. Finally, an anorexic may be unable to stop believing that he is overweight, even if he acknowledges that the evidence points in the opposite direction.

So far I have claimed that a belief can be based on moral or prudential considerations, even if they cause that belief indirectly, via a process which doesn't make the agent think the belief is evidentially supported. However, this is not the only way in which non-evidential considerations can be both indirect causes and bases of belief. There could also be pills—or, more realistically, strategies such as reading certain books or joining a particular community—that cause belief in P by making it seem to you (either correctly or incorrectly) that the evidence supports P. Some might think that if a belief that P was *caused* by evidence, or apparent evidence, for P, then that (apparent) evidence must also be the *basis* for that belief. I will claim that this need not be so. Belief that is caused by evidence need not be based on that evidence. (Here, and elsewhere in this section, for ease of exposition I use "evidence for P" in a way that is meant to include any consideration that seems to the agent to be evidence for P, regardless of whether or not it really is evidence.)

As we saw above, not all causes are bases. When you see the police car on the freeway, pressing down the brake pedal is a cause of, but not the basis for, your slowing down. The basis for your slowing down was that you wanted to avoid getting a ticket. Pressing down the brake pedal was the means by which you slowed down, not the reason for which you slowed down. What I will ultimately suggest is that, similarly, exposing yourself to evidence can be the means by which you believe P, not the reason for which you believe it. First, though, it'll be helpful to consider other examples of causes that aren't bases.

Suppose you find yourself furious with someone. You know you must calm down, because if you don't, you will act badly. In order to calm down, you count slowly to ten while taking slow, deep breaths. Counting and deep breathing are causes of your calming down—they are the means by which you did so—but they are not the basis for your calming down, the reason for which you did so. Your reason for calming down was to prevent yourself from acting badly.

Sometimes an experience functions as a mere cause, not a basis, in bringing on a particular mood or emotion. Hearing a deceased friend's favorite song on the radio puts you in a pensive, nostalgic mood, tinged with both happiness and grief. Watching a workout buddy power through a heavy squat makes you feel energetic and ambitious, ready to tackle a challenging project or take on a powerful adversary.

Or, consider cases in which one thought or experience triggers, unbidden, an associated thought. Driving through the countryside, you encounter a skunk smell, which makes you think of that time at summer camp when the counselor got sprayed. Watching a leaf fall from a tree on your walk to work reminds you that you need to rake up the leaves in your own yard. The skunk smell causes you to think of summer camp, but it's not a reason for which you do so; seeing the leaf fall causes you to remember you need to rake the leaves, but it's not a reason for which you do so.

Similarly, I suggest that it is possible for evidence to cause you to have a particular belief, without being a reason for which you do so. Imagine someone driving in busy traffic. They appear to see a truck on their left plow into the car in front of them, and immediately come to believe that there was a car accident. There is, I submit, a possible version of this case in which the visual appearance was nothing more than a mere cause of their belief—a cause, but not a reason for which they believe. Or, suppose you hear a particular tone in your friend's voice, and

find yourself believing that something is wrong. Once again, the tone could be a mere cause of your belief, rather than a reason for which you believe.

Those who think otherwise have the burden of explaining why we should think that these mental transitions from evidence to belief are fundamentally different from the mental transitions just described—from counting to calming down, from an experience to a mood, from a smell to a memory. All of these cases are remarkably similar with respect to their degree of involvement by the agent. In each case the agent transitions involuntarily from one state to another, one in simple reaction to the other. In none of these cases does the agent consciously deliberate about whether to make the transition; they do not decide, or choose, to transition into the second state on the basis of the first; indeed, they have no control over the matter. The transition was not directed, or guided, or caused, by the agent's desires or aims; indeed, they may have preferred not to have gone into the second state at all. It is natural, then, to think of all of these transitions as something that *happened to* the agent, rather than something they *did* on the basis of a *reason*. Anyone who wants to classify one transition, but not the others, as a case in which the first state was a *reason for which* the agent entered the second state, rather than a *mere cause* of their being in the second state, owes us an account of what it is about this case that warrants its being categorized differently than the others.

Of course, I am happy to allow that there are *some* cases in which evidence may function as a reason for which one believes. A particularly thoughtful and self-aware individual might carefully consider a visual experience they had, or the tone in a friend's voice, and choose to believe, on that basis, that there was an accident, or that something is wrong. But the point is that it doesn't have to be that way. Evidence can bring about belief involuntarily, with no involvement by the agent—no conscious deliberation, no choice, no decision, no control, no

guidance by desires. In such cases, I do not see why we should think of this evidence as anything more than a mere cause of belief.

An objector might reply that the tone in your friend's voice is a reason for which you believe, rather than a mere cause of your belief, because whether or not you are justified in having this belief (and how strong this justification is) depends on whether or not the tone is evidence for the proposition believed (and how strong that evidence is). However, to make this claim about justification is simply to deny the Equal Treatment thesis, according to which the justification of a belief is not solely a matter of evidence.

If evidence can be a mere cause of belief, then one can use it as a means by which one believes, even if one's reason for believing is something entirely different, such as a prudential or moral consideration. Again, recall that pressing the brake pedal is the means by which one slows down; the reason for which one slows down is entirely different. Or, consider again the case in which you calm down in order to prevent yourself from acting badly. Counting and deep breathing are the means by which you calm down; the reason for which you calm down is that otherwise you'll do something you'd regret. (Suppose someone asks why you calmed down. There are two ways of taking this: as a request for an explanatory reason, or as a request for a motivating reason. The answer to the former is, "Because I counted slowly and took deep breaths." The answer to the latter is, "Because otherwise I would have done something foolish.")

Similarly, if there are compelling moral or prudential reasons to believe P, one may use evidence as a means by which to believe P, even though the moral or prudential consideration is the reason for which one believes. Suppose you know your family will break up unless you believe in God. You might choose to spend a lot of time with religious people, attend church services, etc., knowing that in doing so you will encounter evidence for God (again, this may be

mere apparent evidence), in light of which belief will follow involuntarily. The evidence acts as a cause of your belief, even though the reason for which you believe is that doing so will prevent the dissolution of your family.

Or, suppose someone offers you a billion dollars if you believe that the number of stars is even. You have a pill that would make it seem to you that there is overwhelming evidence for this proposition. You know that if things seem to you that way, belief will follow involuntarily. Here, although evidence is a cause of your belief, it is not the reason for which you believe. The basis for your belief is that so believing will earn you a billion dollars.

There are other ways in which evidence can be used as a mere means by which to believe. Suppose you have some evidence supporting P, and some evidence supporting not-P. If there are moral or prudential reasons to believe P, you might do so by selectively focusing your attention on the evidence supporting P, and ignoring the evidence against it. Or, perhaps you have a body of information that could be interpreted either as evidence for P, or as evidence for not-P. If you have non-evidential reasons for believing P, you may choose to interpret this information in the first way. In short, I claim that there are possible instances of both of these types of case in which it is the non-evidential consideration that is the reason for which you believe, even though the proximate cause of your belief is that you view something as evidence for P.

Some may object to all of these putative cases in which evidence is used as a means by which to believe that it would be impossible to believe something while knowing that a consideration irrelevant to its truth (such as a desire to keep your family together) played a crucial causal role in your coming to have that belief. In fact, though, as is well-known from the literature on irrelevant influences on belief, many of us are in exactly this situation with respect

to a number of our moral, religious, political, and philosophical beliefs.[20] For example, you may know that you decided to go grad school A rather than B because the former gave you more fellowship money. You may also know that had you gone to B, you would have become a consequentialist, whereas in fact, because you went to A, you are a Kantian. You can know all this while remaining a firm Kantian.

Nonetheless, I think that even if the pill, or other strategy, does remove your memory of the role played by non-evidential considerations, those considerations could still be the basis for your belief. First, here's an analogy. Suppose you come home one day tired and stressed. There's a particular piece of music that you know would calm you down. It is so absorbing, in fact, that when you listen to it you forget everything else—and reasons why you chose to listen to it are permanently forgotten. You decide to listen to the music in order to calm yourself down, and you bring this about by looking it up and pressing the "play" button on your computer.

In this case, the basis for your listening to music—the reason for which you are listening to it—is that it will calm you down. This is so, even though, while you are listening to it, you have completely forgotten this fact. The proximate cause of your listening to music is the pressing of the "play" button. But this is a mere cause, not the reason for which you are listening. (It may be the reason *why* you are listening—but this is an explanatory, not motivating, reason.)

Similarly, suppose you know that believing in the possibility of a just and equal society would give you the hope necessary to go on in life. You have a pill that, if you take it, will give you evidence that this is indeed possible, which would involuntarily cause the belief that it's possible, but which would also erase from your memory the knowledge that you decided to so

[20] See, for example, White 2010.

believe for the prudential reason that without doing so you would be unable to continue on in life. Even though, once you take the pill, you forget that this is your reason, still, as in the music case, it is true that this is the motivating reason for your belief.

There are multiple ways in which evidence can lead to belief. So far I've focused on belief as an involuntary reaction to evidence, without any involvement by the agent in the form of conscious deliberation, decision, choice, or guidance by desire. However, there are other cases in which evidence plays what I'll call an *enabling* role. By this I mean that, without the evidence, belief would be impossible for the agent; but with it, belief is—not an inevitable, involuntary response, as described above—but rather, something the agent is able to choose to do, or not do, and which they could choose to do on the basis of moral or prudential considerations.

Here's an analogy. Suppose you are aware that ingesting a tablespoon of cod liver oil each day would bring great health benefits. You want the benefits, so you want to drink it. But you find pure cod liver oil repulsive. Drinking it, in its pure state, is impossible. (Perhaps the smell so nauseates you that you start vomiting before it even touches your lips.) You discover that mixing it with orange juice neutralizes the smell and makes it taste ok. It's not delicious; you could easily choose not to drink it. Being presented with cod liver oil mixed with orange juice does not inevitably bring about your drinking it, as an involuntary response. Rather, mixing orange juice with cod liver oil makes it possible for you to choose whether or not to drink it. And, since doing so brings great health benefits, you choose to drink it. Here, your adding the orange juice plays an indispensable causal role in your drinking the cod liver oil. But it is not the basis for your drinking it, the reason for which you drink it. The reason for which you drink it is the prudential reason that doing so brings great health benefits.

Evidence can play a similar enabling role. Consider a variation on the case above, in which your believing in God is the only way to prevent the dissolution of your family. Suppose that, in the absence of evidence for God, belief is impossible for you. However, you know that, if you put yourself in the right situations—for example, if you read certain books, or join certain communities—some evidence (which, again, could be mere apparent evidence) will be forthcoming, and this will make it possible for you to choose to believe—or not. You will then be able to either let yourself go along with this evidence, and believe—or, to maintain a skeptical attitude, and resist. Since believing is the only way to save your family's unity, in fact you choose to believe. Here, the evidence plays an indispensable causal role in your believing—without it, belief would have been impossible for you—but it is not the basis of your belief. The reason for which you believe is that doing so is necessary for keeping the family together.

Examples of this form are not uncommon. Say you're about to run a race. Last year you competed against the same group of people, and won. If you know that believing you'll win this time will help your performance, knowing about your past success makes it possible for you to choose to go ahead and believe you'll win again. But suppose, instead, that uncertainty about whether you'll win is the best way to spur yourself to try your hardest. If you know this, you can choose not to believe, even knowing that you won last year; you can choose to maintain a skeptical attitude, and cultivate your doubts.

Or, say you hear that a friend of yours was seen buying a pack of cigarettes earlier today, even though they promised you months ago that they would quit smoking immediately. You confront your friend about it, and they tell you the cigarettes were for their uncle, who has a hard time getting to the store, not themselves. We can suppose that the effect of your friend's testimony is to make it possible for you to choose whether or not to believe they really did quit

smoking. Perhaps you know that if you believe they failed to quit, you'll be furious with them, which will undermine your friendship and ultimately make things worse for both of you. If so, you may decide to go ahead and believe their testimony. Alternatively, perhaps your friend has a potentially fatal condition which is made worse by their smoking, and you know they'll never manage to quit unless you call them out on it whenever they relapse. If they did relapse and you don't give them a hard time about it, a tragic outcome is likely. If so, you may decide not to believe their testimony, and emphasize to them that they'd better really quit for good. Either way, what your friend's testimony does is make it possible for you to choose whether or not to believe they really quit smoking, and this is a choice you can make for moral or prudential reasons.[21]

My goal in this section has been to respond to the objection that non-evidential considerations can't be reasons for belief because they can't be reasons for which one believes. I have argued that they can be, in a wide variety of different ways. In doing so, I've made some claims that are controversial. However, my overall response to the objection does not rely exclusively on any one such claim. For example, at one point I claim that it is possible to believe P while taking your evidence not to support P. However, even if I'm mistaken about this, that would not undermine another argument in which I propose that evidence can function as a mere cause of belief, which one can use as a means by which to believe, even though one's belief is based on non-evidential considerations. Moreover, even if I am mistaken about this, that would not undermine my argument that evidence can play an enabling role, making it possible for one to choose whether to believe—a choice one can then make on the basis of moral or prudential

[21] Conor McHugh (2015) also argues that evidence can sometimes play this enabling role, and that, in such cases, non-evidential considerations can be the basis for belief.

considerations. In short, in this section I have given a variety of independent lines of argument against the objector's claim that it is impossible for non-evidential considerations to function as reasons for which one believes.

5. Equal Treatment and Rationality, Justification, Knowledge, and Reasoning

In this section, I clarify how, in my view, the guidance-giving should is related to other important concepts. It is not my aim here to defend these claims, but rather to illustrate how Equal Treatment could fit into a broader theoretical framework.

In my view, there is a common and important sense of rationality which is basically the same as the guidance-giving should. More precisely, φ-ing is rational, in this sense, just in case φ-ing is permissible, in the guidance-giving sense—that is, just in case φ-ing is a genuine option and it's not the case that one shouldn't, in the guidance-giving sense, φ. On this conception of rationality, there's no substantive question about whether one should be rational. Trivially, the answer is yes.

But I allow that there may also be a different, non-normative sense of rationality, also common, in which it's just part of what rationality is that a rational person always apportions their beliefs to the evidence. Here, rationality represents a certain kind of extreme—like musical perfectionism (which is a matter of always singing and playing on key, in all circumstances) or grammatical perfectionism (which is a matter of always abiding by the rules of grammar, in all circumstances). There's a substantive and important question about whether one should always be rational, in this sense. Defenders of Equal Treatment will think the answer is no: just as there are possible circumstances in which one shouldn't sing on key, or abide by the rules of grammar, there are possible circumstances in which one shouldn't believe in accordance with the evidence.

I'm doubtful that there is a special epistemic sense of rationality—I suspect this is a philosophers' invention. But if there is, issues here will parallel issues concerning the epistemic should, discussed in section 3, which I won't repeat here.

I hold that justification is also basically the same as the guidance-giving should—that is, one is justified in φ-ing just in case φ-ing is permissible, in the guidance-giving sense. Once again, if one wants to postulate a special epistemic sense of justification, issues will parallel those concerning the epistemic should.

Knowledge, in my view, requires evidential support (at least in many cases). It does not require that one should, in the guidance-giving sense, believe the proposition in question; it does not require that the belief is justified, or rational (in the first sense). There are possible cases in which one knows P but should believe not-P.

Some ways of interpreting the claim that belief aims at truth—for example, as the claim that to believe P is to take P to be true—are perfectly compatible with Equal Treatment. The claim that truth (or fit with evidence) is the correctness, or fittingness, condition of belief, or the evolutionary function of belief, is also compatible with ET, as long as it is granted that these conditions have no constitutive connection to the guidance-giving notions. (This is independently plausible, especially in the case of evolutionary function. Suppose we learned that we have fingernails because our ancestors used their fingernails to scratch their adversaries to death. This settles the evolutionary function of fingernails, but nothing at all follows about what we have reason to (in the guidance-giving sense), or what we should (in the guidance-giving sense), do with our fingernails.)

It is common among philosophers to distinguish between practical and theoretical reasoning. On one way of drawing the distinction, practical reasoning is deliberation about what

to do, and theoretical reasoning is deliberation about what to believe. A defender of Equal Treatment will not think of these as fundamentally different. The distinction here is no deeper than the distinction between, say, deliberation about where to live and deliberation about what to wear. (Perhaps an even better comparison: the distinction between deliberation about what to wear and deliberation about what shirt to wear. It would be natural for a defender of ET to think of believing as a *kind* of doing.)

A defender of Equal Treatment will, however, recognize an important distinction between, on the one hand, deliberation about what to do or believe; and, on the other, reasoning about whether some proposition is true. In particular, there is an important difference between deliberation about whether to believe P, and reasoning about whether P is true.

Sometimes we are just interested in figuring out whether some proposition P is true. Is climate change real? Is the corner market open on Sundays? Does God exist? We think about evidence for and against the proposition in question; consider various lines of reasoning for or against it; etc. To do all this is to reason about whether P is true, but it is not necessarily to deliberate about whether to believe P. Of course, if reasoning about whether P is true results in the conclusion that it is, then the agent in fact believes P. But this does not mean that the agent has deliberated about whether to believe P, decided that they should, and gone ahead with the belief on that basis.

Sometimes we are interested, first and foremost, in whether to believe something. Should I believe that God exists? Should I believe that climate change is real? Should I believe that the corner market is open on Sundays? It may be natural, in the course of some such deliberations, to reason about whether certain propositions are true. It may be that whether we should believe that the corner market is open on Sundays depends on whether it's true that the corner market is

open on Sundays. If so, then, in deliberating about whether to believe it, it'll be natural to reason about whether it's true. But this need not be the case. For example, it may be that whether we should believe in God doesn't depend on whether God really exists. It may depend more on the effect this belief would have on ourselves and others. Even if we learned that God doesn't exist, that needn't settle the question whether we *should* believe that God exists. Of course, learning that God doesn't exist will make it the case, at least temporarily, that we do in fact believe that God doesn't exist. But that doesn't settle whether we should or not. Maybe after further deliberation we'll decide that we should believe that God exists, and then pursue a means by which to bring about that belief.

6. Applications

As we have seen, Equal Treatment opens the door to the possibility that non-evidential considerations may play a substantial role in determining what one should, in the guidance-giving sense, believe. This has important implications for anyone who deliberates about what to believe—in other words, all of us. I will conclude the paper by describing how Equal Treatment may have consequences for a diverse range of important issues.

It is widely agreed that racial profiling is unwarranted if the evidence suggests equal crime rates among different races. But what if actual commission rates, for certain crimes, vary between races? If so, then the evidence supports that a randomly-chosen member of one race is more likely to have committed that sort of crime than a randomly-chosen member of another race. It has seemed to some that, if this is the case, one should be more confident that a randomly-chosen member of one race has committed a crime than a randomly-chosen member of another race; and if so, it has seemed to some that a police officer or security agent would be

warranted in taking race into consideration in deciding whether to detain or search an individual. And yet, this seems deeply wrong. How can we find our way through this issue?

The key, I suggest, is to observe that racial profiling has a wide range of terrible consequences. It harms people to know that their race may have been a factor in a decision to detain or search them—particularly in the context of our history of race relations. It harms our society in its quest for justice and equality, and it may even harm the officials who treat people in this way.

When considering what to do, that a particular action would have consequences like this is clearly a powerful reason against doing it. The same is true, says a defender of Equal Treatment, of belief. Even if the evidence supports that a member of one race is more likely to have committed a crime than a member of another race, it doesn't follow that we should believe it. If believing this would have the consequences mentioned above, that is a powerful reason not to.

One might object that these considerations show not that one shouldn't have this belief, but rather that one shouldn't act on it, if they have it. However, it may not be possible for an individual to have the belief without being more likely to engage in deleterious actions in some context or other. Belief usually reveals itself in action. And, even if not, it may be that we wrong individuals just by having certain beliefs about them. Of course, there are further complexities—once we are aware of the evidence, do we have control over our beliefs? And, might there be some positive consequences of racial profiling that could outweigh the bad? It is not my aim here to settle these and other issues. The point I want to emphasize is simply this: Insofar as we have control over these beliefs (be it direct or indirect), Equal Treatment acknowledges the moral dimension as highly relevant to the question of what we should believe.

A similar point applies to cases of gender stereotyping. Suppose you know that, among the attendees of a particular reception, there are more female English professors than female Math professors. You meet a woman at the reception about whom you know nothing - nothing that would provide further evidence about whether she's in Math or English. The evidence supports that she's more likely in English. But it doesn't follow, according to Equal Treatment, that you should be more confident that she's in English than Math. It could be that this would have negative consequences for her, and you, and the atmosphere and culture in general; if so, that is a reason for you not to be more confident that she's in English than Math.

Equal Treatment, as we have seen, also allows for the possibility of non-evidential reasons for religious belief. A number of philosophers have thought that, even if the evidence doesn't support religious beliefs, it may nonetheless be that we should have them. (For two classic examples, see Pascal (1670) and James (1896).) Some psychologists have claimed that religious belief improves well-being. (For example, see Lyubomirsky 2008 and Wilson 2011.) If this is right (which it may not be), then, according to Equal Treatment, we have non-evidential reasons for religious belief.

Psychologists have also claimed non-evidential reasons for other sorts of beliefs. Martin Seligman (1991) argues that individuals with an optimistic explanatory style—who believe that good things they do or experience are the result of permanent, universal, internal features of themselves, whereas bad things they do or experience are the result of temporary, specific, external factors—have fewer mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, than individuals with a negative explanatory style. Another research program purports to show that certain positive illusions—such as believing that you are a better-than-average driver, parent, etc.—increase well-being. (See, for example, Taylor and Brown 1988.) According to the so-

called "depressive realism" thesis, only depressed individuals have an accurate picture of themselves and their abilities. (For example, see Alloy and Abramson 1988.) If it is true (and it may not be) that a certain explanatory style, or a certain positivity bias, would enhance your well-being, then, according to Equal Treatment, we have non-evidential reasons for such beliefs.

Finally, Equal Treatment is also relevant to debates about philosophical skepticism. Even if the skeptic is right that ordinary beliefs are not supported by our evidence, it doesn't follow that we shouldn't have them. It may be that ordinary beliefs are necessary for pursuing our projects, for mitigating existential angst, or for having genuine friendships and relationships with other people. If so, then it may be that we should have ordinary beliefs, even if the evidence doesn't support them. (These issues are discussed at greater length in "Pragmatic Skepticism" (Rinard forthcoming).)

In short, Equal Treatment has implications for a number of deeply important issues: what to believe about people of a particular race or gender; whether to believe in God; what to think about ourselves and the events of our lives; and whether to have any beliefs at all. Whether or not Equal Treatment is true matters to all of us who deliberate about what to believe on these and other matters. It has been my goal in this paper to make the case that Equal Treatment is a strong contender among competing views, and worthy of serious consideration.

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