Truth Promoting Non-Evidential Reasons for Belief

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1. Introduction

Fred is told that, for some proposition *p* whose truth he has no information about, he will be put to death if he does not believe *p* (the example is adapted from Conee, 1992). To avoid concerns about what Fred can or cannot do, let's say that Fred already believes that *p*, despite his lack of evidence (imagine that an unreliable unconscious mechanism had previously created the belief). The threat to Fred creates reasons supporting the belief that *p*. These are not only prudential reasons, but also reasons strongly related to epistemically important ends, such as the end of believing true things, or of acquiring knowledge, wisdom, or understanding. After all, if Fred remains alive, he will form more true beliefs, come to know and understand more, and likely become wiser. We find similar reasons in less fanciful cases: research suggests that people often think that they are better than their evidence shows them to be, and that those with over-inflated self-images are more likely to investigate the world than those with accurate self-images (Taylor & Brown, 1988). If this latter claim is true, most of us not only have prudential reasons to think better of ourselves than our evidence warrants, we also have reasons relative to the goal of learning new things, or acquiring wisdom or understanding. Most epistemologists would deny that these reasons are epistemically relevant. Yet, as I will show in this paper, a set of very commonly held views in epistemology entail that these reasons *are* epistemically relevant. In fact, these views entail that these reasons can make Fred's belief that *p*, or ordinary peoples' over-inflated self-images, epistemically justified.

These examples are examples in which beliefs are supported by a certain kind of reason, which I will call a "truth promoting non-evidential reason," or TPR (the more accurate abbreviation "TPNER" is a bit of a mouthful). There are two ways of defining what TPR are, depending on whether one is interested in subjective or objective reasons. In terms of objective reasons, *A*'s belief that *p* is supported by TPR iff *A*'s having the belief that *p* would promote having other beliefs that are true, and this is a reason to believe *p* (that is, it counts in favor of the

belief).[1] To recast this in terms of subjective reasons, one might specify that *A* must be aware (or believe) that believing *p* promotes having other true beliefs. I'll use the term "believe on one's TPR" to refer to cases where one believes what one's TPR, but not one's evidence, tell one to believe, although the TPR need not cause the belief. Believing on one's TPR need not be believing *against* one's evidence. Believing that *p* when one's TPR favor this belief but one lacks any evidence about *p*, or lacks enough evidence to otherwise justify (dis)belief in *p*, is believing on one's TPR. Stated in these terms, my thesis is: it follows from certain widely accepted claims that, epistemically speaking, we sometimes ought to believe on our TPR, even in the absence of other epistemic reasons to believe. I take my arguments to also show that TPR can give propositional and doxastic justification to beliefs.

What are the views that entail that we sometimes epistemically ought to believe on our TPR? They are these, in conjunction: epistemic oughts have a source, the source of epistemic oughts is an end in which true belief plays a necessary role, and epistemic oughts are normative. I will refer to the conjunction of these three throughout the paper as "the three views" or "three claims." Denying any of these will be unpalatable to most epistemologists, and rightfully so. On the other hand, accepting that belief on one's TPR can be epistemically justified would have significant ramifications. It has implications for debates in "applied" epistemology, such as those about disagreement. If TPR are epistemic reasons, then in considering what peers ought to believe in the face of disagreement, we should consider not only what disagreement tells us about the proposition at issue, but also whether following the prescriptions of equal or extra weight views will tend to promote true belief in the long run. Accepting that TPR generate epistemic oughts would have implications at the level of normative epistemology. Many epistemologists explicitly or tacitly deny that there are TPR, or that TPR can make beliefs permissible (see, e.g. David, 2001, Fumerton, 2001, Alston, 2005, Adler, 2002, or Shah, 2006). The view also conflicts with well-known theories such as evidentialism (Conee & Feldman 1985) or standard accounts of reliabilism (Goldman, 1979). It has implications for methodology in epistemology as well. It is counterintuitive that belief on one's TPR can be epistemically justified; accepting that it can be would undermine the credibility one should give epistemic

[1] There are also reasons *against* belief analogous to TPR. One has such reasons against believing *p* when the belief that *p* promotes believing what is false. I won't discuss these, although I do think they will generate epistemic oughts in much the same way TPR do.

intuitions. On the other hand, my argument need not trouble all epistemologists who see true belief as a central epistemic aim. Some discussion in epistemology looks roughly consequentialist (e.g. Bishop & Trout 2005, Oddie 1997), and such views can plausibly be extended to endorse beliefs on TPR, since the practice of believing on TPR produces good epistemic consequences. If so, this paper will provide a novel argument for such approaches to epistemology.

My argument starts from the following point: that which promotes true belief – including TPR – will promote ends that have true belief as a necessary component. If the source of epistemic oughts is such an end, then the epistemic end gives us TPR. To support this point, I'll discuss a number of apparent counterexamples: accounts of the epistemic end that endorse the three claims but seem to not generate TPR. I'll show that TPR are reasons relative to the epistemic end on each such account. The second step in my argument is to show that, if the epistemic end generates TPR, then TPR have enough normative force to generate epistemic oughts.[2] I'll end by considering objections to my argument. One is that TPR cannot be epistemic reasons, and so the oughts I'm discussing aren't really epistemic oughts. I'll discuss three arguments for this objection: first, if TPR were epistemic reasons, then we would also have epistemic reasons to breathe, which is absurd; second, TPR cannot be epistemic reasons because one who believes *p* on their TPR cannot thereby know that *p*; third, TPR cannot be epistemic reasons because, if they were, one could be epistemically justified in believing things that one has conclusive evidence are false. I'll show that the intuitions behind these objections are compatible with the conclusion that TPR generate epistemic oughts. I'll also show that, even if the ought I'm discussing were not epistemic, the three views would then entail that we should

[2] I'm not the first to note that certain epistemic ends would generate TPR. This comes up, for example, in papers by Richard Fumerton (2001) and Marian David (2001); Fumerton's paper in fact is the source of one of the examples I use below (noted in a footnote). However, previous work on the topic considers a narrower range of epistemic ends than this paper, and doesn't really engage with the questions of whether TPR can generate oughts or if these could be epistemic. Further, this previous work tends to be dismissive of the possibility that we ought to believe on our TPR, being more interested in epistemic oughts that are intuitive. This paper, on the other hand, is less concerned with intuitions about epistemic oughts and more with what oughts have normative force and why.

stop using epistemic oughts in our evaluation of beliefs. I'll end by addressing the concern that TPR cannot be reasons at all, because belief on TPR is impossible.[3]

Before I begin arguing, however, I will first explain the three claims about epistemic oughts in more detail.

2. Three claims about epistemic oughts

Whether or not one epistemically ought to believe such and such is a function of the epistemic reasons for and against the belief and of some epistemic norms or rules. Rules or norms, among other things, tell one how strongly the belief must be supported by reasons before it is to be believed, and can give constraints on how one may use one's reasons (they might, for example, forbid believing inconsistent claims even when they are each supported by reasons). This should be amenable to a wide range of epistemic theories, from evidentialist to reliabilist to responsibilist, although space does not permit me to explore that. Not all reasons and rules are relevant to what one epistemically ought to believe, however. Only those arising from the right source are. That source is the epistemic end or ends.

It's fairly widely accepted that epistemic reasons and rules arise from some source – that they are not brute. Some epistemologists think that the source of epistemic reasons and norms is a goal that human beings have, such as the goal of believing what is true and not what is false (e.g. Alston 1985, 2005, David, 2001, Lynch 2004), or of believing interesting truths (Goldman 2002), or the goal of achieving knowledge (Conee 1992), understanding (Kvanvig 2005), or wisdom (see Kvanvig 2003). One might alternately think that the source of epistemic reasons and norms is not any individual's goal of believing true things or acquiring knowledge or understanding, but rather a social or group goal to do one of these (e.g. Grimm, 2009). Another sort of view is that epistemic norms arise from something like a goal, but a goal built into the nature of belief itself, such as the goal of being true (Wedgwood, 2002, Velleman, 2000). This view is captured by the maxim, "Belief aims at truth." A third approach is to say that epistemic

[3] Some readers have indicated that they find these objections distracting, that one or another of them seems to make my argument a non-starter. If you feel similarly, I suggest skipping ahead now to the section where I respond to the relevant objection and then returning here. Most of my responses to objections don't rely on the points I make between here and there.

norms and reasons are generated by characteristically epistemic *values*, such as the value of (interesting) true belief, knowledge, or understanding (e.g. Sosa, 2007). These approaches have something in common: on each of them, epistemic reasons and rules arise from some end, whether this end is a goal, or an aim, or a value. Further, there is another shared theme. On the accounts I listed, true belief plays some important role in the epistemic end. Specifically, on each account I've noted, having true beliefs is necessary in order to achieve the end. (Note that I'm using "understanding" in the factive sense used by Kvanvig and Pritchard (2009), rather than in the non-factive way it is understood by, e.g., Elgin (2009)) True belief is not a component of every epistemic end suggested in the literature, but the idea that it plays a necessary part in the epistemic end seems to be shared by most epistemologists. This distinguishes epistemic ends from other ends for which truth is important, such as moral or prudential ends: having true beliefs is helpful for achieving moral or prudential ends, but it is not strictly speaking necessary.

So far I've discussed two of the three views which together entail that TPR can justify beliefs: epistemic oughts have a source, and this source has true belief as a necessary component. The last of the three views has to do with the normativity of epistemic oughts. Epistemic oughts are interesting objects of study in part because they are normative – they have what is sometimes called "normative force," or "authority," or "bindingness." This is not the sort of thing that can be well explained, but it might be captured colloquially: all "ought" claims purport to tell us what to do, but only those with force tell us what we *really* ought to do. If an epistemic ought has normative force, its force is derived from the force of the rules and reasons that generate it. The stronger the force of the rules and reasons behind a particular ought, the stronger the force of the ought. This is important, because normative force has something to do with how we resolve conflicts between oughts. When, for example, morality says we ought to do *phi* and prudence says we ought not, there arises the question of what we ought to do "full stop," or "all things considered." To resolve this question, we need to ask which ought has greater force. If the reasons and rules that generate epistemic oughts do pass normative force on to these oughts, they get this force from someplace. It may be that some kinds of reasons *just have* their force, that their authoritativeness is brute (moral reasons are a plausible candidate), but that isn't plausible for epistemic reasons. They get their force from their connection to the epistemic end. That is, epistemic reasons have their force because they promote the epistemic end. We see this idea manifest in arguments about what the epistemic end is. It is common to

object to an account of the epistemic end by pointing out that it does not give normative force where it should. For example, the view that the epistemic end is a goal that humans have has been criticized by pointing out that epistemic norms have force on everyone, whatever their goals are (e.g. Kelly, 2003, Grimm, 2009). This type of objection only makes sense if reasons and oughts get their force from their connection to the epistemic end.

In the next section we will see how the three views I've just discussed together entail that the epistemic end generates TPR.

3. Epistemic ends and TPR

We've considered three claims about epistemic normativity: epistemic reasons have their source in, and get their force from, an epistemic end, and this end has true belief as a necessary component. Given these, it should be *prima facie* plausible that the epistemic end generates TPR. Belief on one's TPR promotes true belief, and promoting true beliefs will promote things that have true belief as necessary component. This means that relative to the epistemic end there is something that counts in favor of, or that there are reasons for, belief on one's TPR. One might worry that this doesn't show TPR to be *epistemic* reasons; I address that objection towards the end of the paper. To illustrate how the epistemic end can generate TPR, consider a simplified version of the epistemic end discussed by Alston (1985): the end of increasing the ratio of true to false beliefs in one's set of beliefs. Imagine that Sally currently has true and false beliefs in a ratio of 1:1, and she knows that forming the belief that *p* will cause her to form three additional true beliefs, although she doesn't know what beliefs they are (otherwise she could just form them directly). Forming the belief that *p* promotes the end of increasing her ratio of true to false beliefs, and so Sally has a reason to form this belief relative to this end. This reason is a TPR. We see the same thing for epistemic ends that aren't as explicitly about true belief, as long as they have true belief as a necessary component. In the Fred case given at the beginning of this paper, Fred will know more, understand more, and (hopefully) become wiser if he lives than if he dies. If the epistemic end involved understanding, wisdom, or knowledge then Fred would have reasons relative to this end to believe the belief that keeps him alive; these would be TPR (or, if you prefer, UPR, WPR, or KPR). TPR are reasons relative even to putative epistemic goals that seem inimical to belief on TPR. For example, imagine that the epistemic goal were to form true beliefs just on the basis of evidence. Since TPR are not evidence, it might seem that

belief on TPR cannot be consistent with this epistemic end. However, the belief that *p* can lead to having other beliefs that are supported by evidence. Again, we see this in the example where Fred must believe that *p* or die. Fred has TPR relative to this putative epistemic end as well.

The argument above should establish the *prima facie* plausibility of my claim that any epistemic end that has true belief as a necessary component will generate TPR. But that's just a *prima facie* argument; to really support this claim, we have to consider possible counterexamples. I'll work from the weakest to the strongest.

One might wonder, first, if what I've said only works if the epistemic end has to do with increasing something, such as increasing the ratio of true to false beliefs, or increasing one's stock of understanding or wisdom. Some philosophers have denied that the epistemic end has to do with increasing anything, partly because it seems that we are not required to believe true propositions that we have never considered. One might suggest instead that the epistemic end is to believe only true things, or believe only what one knows, or something along these lines. But ends of this sort still give us TPR. Imagine that Jennifer knows that if she believes that *p* now, she'll have ten true beliefs in the future, but if she doesn't believe that *p* now, she'll have ten false beliefs in the future, although she doesn't know what these future beliefs will be. She has reasons to believe *p* relative to the end to only have beliefs that are true. So this end generates TPR. Similar examples can be made for related versions of epistemic ends, such as ones that call on us to only believe what would be known if believed, or to only believe what wise people would believe, etc.

This discussion may seem to presuppose that the epistemic end is diachronic, that one's future states give one reasons to believe now. Some epistemologists, however, take epistemic ends to be synchronic, claiming that the epistemic end is to have true beliefs, or understanding, knowledge, wisdom, etc., *now* (e.g. Feldman, 2000, Foley, 1987, 1992). At first glance, one might think that synchronic epistemic ends do not generate TPR because future epistemic benefits are irrelevant to synchronic ends. In fact, Richard Foley (1987, 1992) explicitly argues that the epistemic end must be synchronic by pointing out that, if the end were diachronic, then it would be epistemically rational to believe on the basis of TPR (although he doesn't use that term). But synchronic ends can generate TPR. An agent's beliefs at a moment can depend on one another, so that, for example, if Jennifer did not believe *p* now, then Jennifer would not believe *q*, *r*, and *z* now. We can imagine either supernatural explanations or quite plausible

psychological explanations for this dependence. If having *q*, *r*, and *z* were endorsed by the epistemic end – if *q, r*, and *z* were true beliefs, or pieces of knowledge, wisdom, or understanding – then Jennifer's belief that *p* would put her at this moment closer to achieving the epistemic end than she would be if she lacked that belief. Jennifer would thus have TPR to believe *p* relative to even synchronic epistemic ends.[4]

Before I go on, let me flag a point I'll return to later in the paper. One of the main motivations for Foley to claim that the epistemic end is synchronic seems to be the worry that other types of ends would allow beliefs in obvious falsehoods to be justified, since other ends give rise to TPR. I suspect that others will be similarly motivated. However, since both synchronic and diachronic ends can generate TPR, synchronic epistemic ends do no better than diachronic in ruling out the possibility of an obviously false belief being justified. To illustrate, imagine that the epistemic end is to currently believe all the truths and none of the falsehoods. If Jennifer's having at this moment a vast enough number of the true beliefs she has depends on her current belief that *p*, and she comes across conclusive evidence that *p* is false, then it looks like she'll be still justified in believing that *p* relative to a synchronic epistemic end. At least, there is nothing about a synchronic end that does a better job of ruling this out than would a diachronic end. The next question must be whether this can possibly be *epistemic* justification (which is, I think, Foley's concern). I will discuss this later in the paper.

Once we see that diachronic and synchronic epistemic ends generate TPR, we can also see that subjunctive epistemic ends do as well. Marian David, for example, argues that epistemic oughts arise from the "subjunctive truth goal," which is, "for every *p*, if I were to believe that *p*, then *p* would be true, and if *p* were true, then I would believe *p*." (David, 2001 p.166) He also argues that, given this goal, we cannot be justified in believing that *p* on the basis of TPR. But this subjunctive end does give us TPR. If one has the goal "If I were to believe *p*, then *p*, and if *p*

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4 This argument comes from Fumerton (2001). Interestingly, Foley, who seems to assume that synchronic epistemic ends cannot generate TPR, does say that synchronic epistemic ends can give one epistemic reasons that are not evidence. He says that one has epistemic reasons but not evidence to believe *p* in a situation where, were one to believe *p*, *p* would likely be true, and were one to not believe *p, p* would likely be false (Foley, 1992, 29-30). These reasons aren't TPR because they don't arise from *p*'s promoting *other* true beliefs, but allowing for these reasons does suggest that, if Foley had considered the possibility of dependence relations between beliefs, he would agree that synchronic epistemic ends generate TPR.

were true, believe *p*," then one has the sub-goal to believe all propositions that are true. This is because all things that are true satisfy the antecedent of "If *p* were true, believe *p*." As we've seen, this sub-goal gives one TPR. We'll get similar results for any subjunctive goal that can be furthered by actually believing what is true. The only sort of subjunctive goal that would not generate TPR would be a goal that was purely subjunctive – a goal that only took into account what occurred in non-actualized possible worlds. For example, if the epistemic goal were only to have beliefs that are true in most near-by possible worlds, whether or not they are actually true (call these beliefs "safe*"), then that one actual belief promoted having other true actual beliefs would not count in favor of it. Such a goal can't be taken seriously as having normative force, however: it's absurd to suggest that *only* unactualized possibilities matter.

We've seen so far that it's *prima facie* plausible that all epistemic ends that have true belief as a necessary component generate TPR. We've also considered a wide range of potential counterexample ends – ends of knowledge, wisdom, understanding, ends to have more of such things, ends to only have such things, synchronic ends, diachronic ends, subjunctive ends. So far each will give rise to TPR in some circumstances. This gives very strong support to the claim that the epistemic end, whatever it is, generates TPR. I'll end this section by bringing up a candidate epistemic end that is the best bet for an end that does not generate TPR.

Versions of this epistemic end are discussed by Ralph Wedgwood (2002) and David Velleman (2000), although others seem to think about epistemic ends similarly (e.g. Alston, 2005). For convenience I'll call this Wedgwood's account. It starts with the idea that each individual belief has an aim – to be true.[5] There are thus as many epistemic ends as there are beliefs, as each belief has its own individual aim.[6] One might then claim that what makes each belief justified is just what is relevant to that belief's aim, and not anything relevant to the aim of some other belief. That justification is limited in this way suggests that reasons are as well. The argument would be: that belief in *p* promotes having other true beliefs would never be a reason to believe *p* relative to *p*'s end, and since *p*'s end is the one that generates oughts for *p*, it should

[5] One might have a parallel view according to which beliefs aim at knowledge.

[6] This is perhaps metaphorical. Wedgwood says that *believers* take themselves to be committed to this goal, so perhaps this is not an aim of belief but of believers. On the other hand, Wedgwood talks about correctness standards that are built into belief itself, which function like epistemic aims of belief. My argument works if we substitute either of these in where I talk about the aim of belief or epistemic ends.

be the one that generates reasons for believing *p*. It seems that we've found an epistemic end that does not generate TPR.

Later in this paper I will show that this end does generate TPR, but doing so will depend on points that are best explained by talking about how TPR generate oughts. Showing that TPR generate epistemic oughts would be the next step in my argument in any case, so let's turn our attention to that now.

4. TPR generate epistemic oughts

Assume that the epistemic end, whatever it is, is such that in some cases TPR are reasons for belief relative to it. If an agent's belief is supported by enough reasons, then that agent ought to have that belief. So, if TPR are reasons, then in some situation one will have enough of them to justify or require a certain belief (just increase the number of true beliefs promoted by the belief). This is the second premise in my argument, and what I've just said should make it initially plausible. But that doesn't settle the issue.

What one epistemically ought to believe is function of reasons and *rules* (or norms). If there were epistemic rules/norms that forbade belief on reasons like TPR, then the fact that we can have a vast weight of TPR supporting the belief that *p* might not show that we ought to believe *p.* Can there really be such rules? Initially, it's hard to see why an end that is promoted by belief on TPR would also generate a rule forbidding such belief. But some rules that forbid belief on one's TPR do make sense relative to potential epistemic ends. For example, "Believe only what is supported by one's evidence," is quite often a good rule to follow relative to the end of believing what is true and not what is false. It may be that, if we understood well enough how ends generate rules, we would see that the epistemic end does generate rules forbidding belief on TPR.

The obvious point to make here, however, is that following rules that forbid belief on one's TPR will sometimes make one much worse off relative to the epistemic end. In fact, an agent will often be able to identify when this is case. Fred, for example, could easily note that keeping himself alive will promote a number of plausible epistemic ends. This suggests that rules prohibiting belief on TPR, if they existed at all, would be rules-of-thumb or would establish *prima facie* duties. Such rules or duties can be overridden given strong enough reasons, and so even if these duties exist, one ought to sometimes believe on their TPR.

Why can't the duty to not believe on one's TPR be an *absolute* duty, one that cannot be overridden? Assume for *reductio* that the epistemic end generated an absolute duty to not believe on our TPR. Now imagine a case in which our TPR overwhelmingly support some belief that *p*. The Fred case, where Fred will die if he does not believe that *p*, is a good example. In such a case, one has a conflict between what one's *reasons* say one ought to believe, and what one particular *rule* says one ought to believe. How do we resolve conflicts between oughts? As discussed above, we look to which ought has more normative force. All of the relevant considerations in this case – the TPR and the absolute duty – get their normative force from the same epistemic end. There will be some possible cases where the force behind the reasons outweighs the force behind the duty. This is because belief on the TPR in these cases will be more closely tied to the source of the normative force of the duty than the duty itself. Put another way, belief on the reasons will be more conducive to the epistemic end than belief in accordance with the rule. Again, the Fred case is a good example, as he has overwhelming TPR to believe what will keep him alive. Since the force behind the reasons is greater than that behind the rule, the duty will be overridden by the reasons. This generates a contradiction, since absolute duties cannot be overridden. Epistemic duties to not believe on TPR cannot be absolute duties, because the epistemic end cannot give them enough force to *always* override the force given by one's TPR.

Perhaps, though, I'm overlooking a possibility. One might believe that ethical oughts, for example, are generated both by the interests of individuals and also by an end like respect, which could generate side-constraints on how interests are promoted. Why can't epistemic oughts be generated both by a truth-involving aim and some other aim, one that forbids belief on one's TPR? My response will be somewhat abstract, since I'm not sure what the additional aim could be. First note that, in order to provide side-constraints prohibiting belief on TPR, the additional aim must provide so much normative force that it can never be overridden no matter how many TPR support a belief. This is implausible in itself. I'm addressing those who tie epistemic oughts to ends involving true belief. These philosophers should be reluctant to recognize as epistemic any oughts generated by an aim that is wholly disconnected from truth *and* completely trumps the end involving truth. Further, we should expect that the additional aim would sometimes forbid belief on one's evidence. Evidence is reason-giving because of its tie to truth. If one of the epistemic ends were so divorced from the pursuit of truth that it could forbid belief

on truth-promoting reasons like TPR, then we should expect that it would sometimes forbid belief on other truth-related reasons as well. Of course, TPR might also justify belief against one's evidence, but this makes sense because of the tie between TPR and the end that makes belief on one's evidence epistemically reasonable. The idea that we could be epistemically forbidden from believing on our evidence for *no* truth-related benefit, on the other hand, should be quite unpalatable to those I'm addressing; it will be hard to recognize oughts of this sort as epistemic oughts.

So, if the epistemic end – the source of epistemic oughts – is such that there are TPR relative to it, then we sometimes ought to (epistemically speaking) believe on our TPR.[7] The arguments I've just made will be helpful in our discussion of why, even if the epistemic aim is that suggested by Wedgwood, we ought to sometimes believe on our TPR.

5. Returning to Wedgwood's view

I've shown that, if the epistemic end generates TPR, then TPR can make it the case that we epistemically ought to believe something. But we considered at least one view of the epistemic end that seems to show that it does not generate TPR. On my reconstruction of Wedgwood's view, each belief aims at being true, and these aims are epistemic ends. Further, one might claim that whether or not one epistemically ought to believe that *p* is based just on what is a reason relative to *p*'s aim. This suggests that there are no TPR on Wedgwood's view, or that they are epistemically irrelevant. Is that correct?

Consider a case similar to one I discussed above. Jennifer has a bunch of true beliefs, each of which is sustained by her belief that *p*; if she did not believe that *p*, she would believe falsehoods instead of these truths. We can stipulate that Jennifer knows all of this but that she doesn't know which of her beliefs are sustained by believing *p*; further, if she failed to believe *p* she wouldn't be able to identify the false beliefs that replace the true. Each of the non-*p* true beliefs has an end on Wedgwood's view (to be true), and these ends generate reasons of some kind to believe *p*. One might alternately think of the potential false beliefs that would be formed in the absence of the belief that *p* as giving Jennifer reasons to believe *p*. There are readings of

[7] I'll address later in the paper the special case where TPR make it so that we ought to believe some claim that we have conclusive evidence against.

Wedgwood's view on which this latter alternative is preferable, but either works for my purposes. The important point is that the aims of these other beliefs are epistemic ends, and so the epistemic ends *do* give rise to TPR. The question is whether these reasons are relevant to epistemic oughts.

My initial discussion of Wedgwood's view simply asserted that epistemic evaluation of any specific belief must take into account only reasons that arise from that belief's aim. Let's look at that assertion more closely. Jennifer has reasons to believe *p* because belief in *p* promotes the aims of each of some bunch of actual or potential beliefs. Given enough of these sorts of reasons (gotten by increasing the number of true beliefs sustained by believing *p*), Jennifer ought to believe *p* in some sense of "ought." Let's call this sort of ought a "t-pistemic ought" for now. T-pistemic oughts are oughts that take into account all reasons that arise from all epistemic ends, including both evidence and TPR. Let's use "e-pistemic ought" to refer to ought claims about a belief that are based only on reasons, like *e*vidence, that arise from the aim of the belief in question.[8] One e-pistemically ought to believe that *p* iff reasons relative to *p*'s aim sufficiently favor this belief. Let's stipulate that Jennifer has enough TPR that t-pistemically she ought to believe that *p*, but e-pistemically she ought not. How do these oughts interact, and which has a better claim on being the *epistemic* ought?

When oughts conflict, as they do in Jennifer's case, we look to the normative force of each to see which overrides the other. Both the t-pistemic ought and the e-pistemic ought get their normative force from the exact same kind of source: epistemic ends. But a single t-pistemic ought can get force from the aim of any number of beliefs, while an e-pistemic ought can get force from the aim of only a single belief. In Jennifer's case, for example, the claim that she e-pistemically ought not believe that *p* gets its force from *p*'s end, but the claim that she t-pistemically ought to believe that *p* gets its force from the aims of all the true beliefs sustained by believing *p*. T-pistemic oughts will thus sometimes have more normative force than e-pistemic oughts, and can thus override them. In fact, whatever reasons generate e-pistemic oughts will also be relevant to t-pistemic oughts, since t-pistemic oughts take into consideration the aim of all beliefs. This means that, whenever a t-pistemic ought commands something different than an

[8] For those familiar with Wedgwood's paper, Wedgwood might describe the e-pistemic ought as an ought that applies to a belief and arises out of the correctness standard for that belief alone.

e-pistemic ought, there is a greater weight of TPR in favor of a belief than there is evidence against it. So, whenever e-pistemic and t-pistemic oughts conflict, the t-pistemic ought will override the e-pistemic.

We might take this argument to show that there is only one ought generated by what Wedgwood takes to be the epistemic end: the t-pistemic. It seems unnatural to insist that the e-pistemic ought is a real ought even though it is always overridden by another ought generated by the same sort of end. Alternately, the argument might just show that there are two sorts of oughts generated by Wedgwood's epistemic end, although one always overrides the other. If so, which, is the epistemic ought? Which is the sort of thing epistemologists intend to study or should intend to study, which should play the role in our evaluation of beliefs that we expect epistemic oughts to? In the next section I discuss this question more generally about oughts generated by TPR.

6. Am I really talking about epistemic oughts?

If one accepts that epistemic reasons and oughts are generated by certain kinds of ends, then one must accept that sometimes one ought to believe on one's TPR, where this ought is an ought that is generated by the epistemic end. Is this ought – which I will continue to call a t-pistemic ought – really an epistemic ought? In answering this question, let's start by noting that the epistemic end is what generates epistemic oughts, and we should expect any oughts it generates to be epistemic ones, absent good arguments that show otherwise. Are there such arguments? In this section, I'll respond to three arguments that t-pistemic oughts cannot be epistemic, even though they are generated by the epistemic end. I'll end the section by discussing a "trump" response for those who remain unconvinced by my responses to these three objections, or who have some further objection in mind. This response will show that, even if it were inappropriate to call the t-pistemic ought an epistemic ought, the three views of epistemic normativity I outlined earlier in the paper would entail that the t-pistemic ought should replace the epistemic in our evaluation of beliefs.

The first argument starts by noting that my continued breathing is necessary for my continued existence. Hopefully, if I continue to exist I will do better than I currently am with regards to having true beliefs. If the fact that believing *p* promotes having other true beliefs provided an epistemic reason to believe *p*, then the fact that breathing promotes having true

beliefs would provide epistemic reasons to breathe. It is absurd to say that we have *epistemic* reasons to breathe, even if there were reasons to breathe generated by the epistemic end. So, the objection goes, TPR cannot be epistemic reasons, even if they are reasons generated by the epistemic end.[9] Those who hold the conjunction of views I mentioned above can thus accept that the epistemic end generates TPR but deny that TPR are epistemic reasons or give us epistemic oughts.

I don't feel the force of this argument. Epistemologists often speak as if epistemic oughts can apply to behaviors, and not just beliefs. These behaviors include reasoning (Bishop & Trout, 2005, Wedgwood, 2002), inquiry (Brady, 2009), exploration (Jones, 2009), and scientific investigation (Oddie, 1997). If epistemic oughts apply to these behaviors, then we can have epistemic reasons to engage in these behaviors. And if that's the case, then we should be open to the possibility that we also sometimes have epistemic reasons to engage in other behaviors, like breathing. On the other hand, there is a difference between breathing and the behaviors sometimes thought to be governed by epistemic oughts. Inquiry, but not breathing, is aimed at the epistemic end; perhaps only behaviors aimed at epistemic ends can be governed by epistemic reasons. If so, denying that we have epistemic reasons to breathe would not require denying that TPR are epistemic reasons. Belief on our TPR, like inquiry but unlike breathing, is aimed at the epistemic end. So, if we can have epistemic reasons to inquire or experiment, then we should either be open to saying that reasons to breathe and to believe on TPR are epistemic reasons, or we can explain why we don't have epistemic reasons to breathe without showing that TPR are not epistemic reasons.

However, many epistemologists simply define epistemic reasons as reasons for belief or for believing.[10] What I've just said won't alleviate their concerns about epistemic reasons to breathe. To them I would point out the following: when they ask what one epistemically ought to do, they always ask, "What ought one *believe*?" That is, on their view, epistemic oughts apply uniquely to beliefs. This explains why epistemic reasons can only be reasons for belief, and it also explains the absurdity of saying that we have epistemic reasons to breathe. But it also undermines the argument that TPR are not epistemic reasons. TPR are by definition reasons that

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[9] Thank you to Julia Staffel for pointing out this objection.

[10] See Turri, 2009 for a very clear example. I could just as well cite a tedious number of other articles.

count in favor of belief. By explaining why it is absurd to say that we have epistemic reasons to breathe, we've also shown that calling TPR epistemic reasons does not commit one to saying that reasons to breathe are epistemic. The first argument that TPR cannot generate epistemic oughts thus fails.

The next argument that TPR cannot generate epistemic oughts starts from the following intuition: a person who believes *p* on her TPR, in the absence of sufficient evidence that *p*, cannot come thereby to know that *p* even if *p* is true and she t-pistemically ought to believe that *p*. Epistemic justification is the sort of justification required for knowledge, however, and so t-pistemic justification must not be a species of epistemic justification (see Conee 1992 for an argument along these lines).[11] This would allow those who accept the conjunction of claims about epistemic oughts that I've been discussing to admit that the epistemic end generates t-pistemic oughts, but deny that t-pistemic justification is epistemic justification.

We can accept the intuition that one can't come to know *p* by t-pistemically justifiably believing *p* and also the claim that epistemic justification is the sort of justification relevant to knowledge, without having to accept that t-pistemic justification is not epistemic. It is widely accepted that someone who is epistemically justified in believing *p* does not know that *p* when the truth of her belief is a matter of a certain kind of luck, which I'll call "knowledge-preventing luck." If one's belief that *p* is justified only by one's TPR and not one's evidence, then it is quite fortuitous if one turns out to believe something true. And so we should be unsurprised that such beliefs will not count as knowledge even if t-pistemic justification is epistemic.

My discussion of luck and knowledge will bring to mind Gettier cases, and so I should be clear that I am not saying that cases where true belief is justified by TPR are Gettier cases. Rather, I'm pointing out that such cases have a crucial feature in common with Gettier cases – the truth of the relevant belief is due to knowledge-preventing luck. This is not only *prima facie* plausible (it feels lucky that these beliefs turn out true), but also accords with popular understandings of knowledge-preventing luck. In his recent paper on knowledge-preventing luck, Duncan Pritchard notes that, "One of the most standard accounts of luck offered in the literature involves defining it in terms of the notion of an accident… Another common way of

[11] The claim about the connection between knowledge and justification is not completely uncontroversial; see, e.g. Kornblith (2008).

characterizing luck is in terms of control, or rather the absence of it." (Pritchard, 2004, 195-6)[12] It's perhaps not surprising that such luck would be incompatible with knowledge, as it is often thought that knowing is a kind of success on the part of the believer, and when one arrives at the truth accidentally, or not due to what one controls, this is not a success on one's part (see eg. Riggs, 2002, Zagzebski, 2003). When an agent believes that *p* on her TPR, and this belief is not supported by her evidence but still turns out true, the fact that the agent ended up with a true belief is accidental, out of the agent's control, and not a success attributable to the agent. Thus, on common accounts of knowledge-preventing luck, we would expect that true belief on one's TPR won't count as knowledge even though t-pistemic justification is epistemic justification.[13]

The final objection I'll discuss in this section starts with the claim that, if TPR generate epistemic oughts, then sometimes one epistemically ought, on the basis of TPR, to believe things that are obviously false or that one has conclusive evidence against. But surely we never *epistemically* ought to believe against our conclusive evidence (I suspect this worry motivates claims in Foley 1987 about epistemic oughts). So, the objection goes, even if the epistemic end generates TPR, TPR cannot generate epistemic oughts.[14]

The arguments I've given in this paper are compatible with the claim that it is never the case that we epistemically ought to believe obvious falsehoods, or against our conclusive evidence. One can accept the claims I've made about epistemic oughts and TPR while also accepting that belief in obvious falsehoods is impossible. If one further accepted that ought implied can, one could then say that TPR *generally* generate epistemic oughts, but not in cases

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[12] When an agent luckily believes a truth, what's accidental or out of an agent's control is not the truth of the proposition that the agent believed, but rather that the agent ended up believing a proposition that is true.

[13] Pritchard and some others advocate an alternate view of luck. On this view, an event's being lucky has to do with the fact that the event doesn't occur in most nearby possible worlds (Pritchard 2004). I think this account is problematic, because I have a hard time seeing why it matters that one is lucky in this way (as long as such luck doesn't eliminate one's justification). That said, I suspect that, given a plausible understanding of what possible worlds are nearby, t-pistemically justified beliefs that turn out true will also be lucky in this modal sense. However, I'm uncomfortable making arguments based on a particular view of the ordering of possible worlds, and so I will refer readers who agree with Pritchard to my trump argument at the end of this section. (Note that discussions of the ordering of possible worlds also pose a problem for those defending a modal view of luck and knowledge like Pritchard's; see e.g Baumann 2008).

[14] My thanks to an anonymous referee for making this worry salient for me.

where they clash too much with one's evidence. While I argue later in this paper that belief on one's TPR is possible, that discussion focuses on belief in the absence of evidence, not against one's conclusive evidence, and so the conjunctions of views I've just described is compatible with my arguments in that section. However, I am not myself inclined to say that epistemic ought implies can. So I will offer an additional reply to this worry about justified belief in obvious falsehoods.

My reply is that, while this worry has *prima facie* intuitive force, this force doesn't stand up to scrutiny. I do share the intuition that one epistemically ought not believe against one's conclusive evidence, or in obvious falsehoods. Further, I share the intuition that such beliefs are not justified just by the fact that they bring some epistemic benefits. However, these intuitions needn't compel us to accept that beliefs in obvious falsehoods can *never* be epistemically justified by TPR. To see why, first note that it will only be in very extreme cases that agents like us ought to believe *p* in the face of conclusive evidence that ~*p*. These are cases where one is enormously better off (relative to the epistemic end) believing that *p* than not.[15] This is because, for any agent like us, believing *p* when one has conclusive evidence that ~*p* will have very bad epistemic consequences. When we have conclusive evidence that ~*p*, we will have reasons to believe ~*p* and reasoning strategies that tell us how to get from these reasons to the belief that ~*p*. Our beliefs tend to be causally and dispositionally linked together, so that having the belief that *p* – not merely claiming that one believes that *p*, but actually coming to believe it – will have consequences for one's beliefs about the reasons to believe ~*p*, for one's beliefs about what counts as a reason, and for one's beliefs about reasoning. Thus, forming a belief against one's evidence will involve rejecting or even disbelieving true things about one's reasons and reasoning. This epistemically hurts the believer at the very moment of forming that belief, and for the future as well (as pointed out in Foley, 1992). The stronger one's evidence that ~*p*, the worse the epistemic consequences of believing that *p* will be, and thus the greater the benefits need to be for such belief to be justified/required. What this means is that we only t-pistemically ought to believe obvious falsehoods in order to avoid something like epistemic disaster. For example, one might be justified in believing that 5 is not prime if one would otherwise die, or

[15] One may be able to generate cases for other sorts of beings – beings with almost no beliefs, for example – where their beliefs against conclusive evidence are justified by fewer epistemic benefits. But these won't present compelling objections to my arguments.

become a brain in a vat, but not if this belief were to merely cause one to form a handful of other true beliefs.[16]

The idea that we may violate even very serious duties to avoid disaster is a familiar one. Consider a moral duty such as the duty to not kill innocents. Common intuitions say that we may not violate this duty even to make the world better off – we ordinarily may not kill one innocent to save five. However, this duty can justifiably be violated when the stakes are high enough; we may kill one to save five thousand (or perhaps fifty or five hundred thousand). Further, this justification is moral justification. Even among deontologists about ethics, who take duties very seriously, the majority view is that the violation of ethical duties can be morally justified by significant enough consequences.[17] This should blunt the intuitive force of the objection I'm considering. The very strong intuition that murdering innocents is ordinarily not justified by the consequences of such murder isn't taken to show that consequences are morally irrelevant. Similarly, we shouldn't take the intuition that believing obvious falsehoods is ordinarily not justified by the consequences of such beliefs to show that consequences are epistemically irrelevant. Rather, if there is a good argument that shows that belief in obvious falsehoods can be epistemically justified in epistemic emergencies, then we should be open to this conclusion; what I've shown in this paper is that, if one accepts a certain conjunction of claims about epistemic oughts, then there is such an argument.

The burden of proof is on those who say that t-pistemic oughts are not epistemic, and the three arguments I've considered fail to meet this burden. Some may not be convinced of this; others may think up objections that I haven't considered.[18] For them, I have a "trump"

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[16] I've been asked if this doesn't render my findings in this paper uninteresting, as TPR can generate oughts only in very rare circumstances. However, remember that TPR can also make it the case that we ought to believe propositions for which we have insufficient evidence. Cases in which such beliefs are justified by TPR may be much more common.

[17] This is a view sometimes called "threshold deontology" or "moderate deontology" (Alexander 2000), and I'm assured that it is the majority, although not consensus, view among deontologists (White, 2009). Moore (1989), Nagel (1979), and Nozick (1974) are supposed to have held such a view (Alexander, 2000).

[18] One additional worry would be that, if TPR were epistemic reasons, then it turns out that Pascal's Wager might show that we have epistemic reasons to believe in God: perhaps we can expect that God will reward believers, but not unbelievers, with infinite true beliefs in the afterlife. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this issue) This would be a surprising consequence, since Pascal's Wager is traditionally taken to be an argument for

argument. This argument shows the following: even if it were the case that t-pistemic oughts simply cannot be epistemic, given the three claims about epistemic oughts that we started with, t-pistemic oughts should replace epistemic oughts in our evaluation of beliefs.

This is for two reasons. First, my arguments might show that any ought generated by epistemic ends that have true belief as a necessary component is t-pistemic; there are no epistemic oughts. I discuss this possibility at the end of the second on Wedgwood's view. Second, even if there were epistemic oughts that are not t-pistemic, given the three claims about epistemic oughts, t-pistemic oughts would override epistemic oughts. This is because, as we've seen, t-pistemic oughts are based on all the reasons epistemic oughts are and more; acting on them is more conducive to the epistemic end than acting on epistemic oughts. There's almost no context in which it would make any sense to consider or follow epistemic over t-pistemic oughts.[19] To make this clear, consider how conflict between epistemic and t-pistemic oughts contrasts with other conflicts between oughts. When morality and prudence conflict, for example, it can make sense for someone to be more interested in what prudence says to do, even if morality always overrides prudence. We can make sense of this because someone can care about the prudential end more than the source of morality, even if doing do so is inappropriate. Epistemic oughts and t-pistemic oughts, however, are both generated by the same end, and so one can't explain an interest in one over the other by an interest in different ends. There is nothing else to make sense of making use of the weaker ought rather than the stronger. If t-pistemic oughts were not epistemic – and, again, I'm not conceding this point – then they should replace epistemic oughts.

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theistic belief based in practical, not epistemic, reasons. However, I don't think anyone should find this consequence to be unacceptable. There is a large literature on Pascal's Wager which shows that the Wager does not justify belief in God in the practical sense; for example, it is often argued that the balance of our reasons doesn't favor belief in God over alternate deities. The arguments in this literature will generally be able to be adapted to show that the Wager does not justify belief in God in the epistemic sense as well, even if TPR can justify beliefs.

[19] We can imagine cases in which one has practical reasons to follow one's epistemic oughts; e.g. if one were paid to do so.

7. Is belief on TPR impossible (and does that matter)?

The arguments throughout this paper depend on the assumption that TPR are reasons of one kind or another. But some will deny this. In some discussions of reasons for belief, the following claim is made: we cannot consciously believe on the basis of certain alleged reasons, and so these are not really reasons to believe at all (e.g. Shah 2006, Jones 2009, Adler 2002). This point is made largely in the context of discussion about non-truth related reasons to believe, but some arguments for it might plausibly be marshaled against TPR as reasons, and so I should address them. The authors who make these arguments all think that evidence, at least, is a reason for belief,[20] and they all accept that a belief *can* be based on reasons that are not related to its truth; they just think that we cannot *consciously* believe on such reasons. I disagree on this last claim, and I'll engage with some of the arguments for it in a moment. However, even if it were true, TPR would still be reasons for belief. We would still want to epistemically evaluate both conscious and unconsciously formed beliefs relative to the epistemic end. Belief-forming mechanisms that could believe on TPR (perhaps unconscious ones) would be superior belief-forming mechanisms relative to the epistemic end, and so we would need to see TPR as providing reasons for belief.

That said, let's consider the arguments for the claim that conscious belief on our TPR is impossible. Moran (2001, and cited favorably by Shah 2003, 2006) claims that rational people accept that belief must be based on evidence, and so cannot believe on other bases. This sort of argument simply begs the question against my view, so I won't consider it further. A more serious argument comes up in both Adler (2002) and Moran (2001), and is related to Moore's paradox. The argument is that, if one could consciously believe on non-evidential considerations, one could believe that *p* (based on non-evidential reasons) while seeing that *p* is false (based on one's evidence). This point at best shows that, in the occasional case where belief on our TPR leads to belief in contradictions, such beliefs don't survive close inspection. Even so, the possibility that belief on TPR could lead to endorsing contradictions does not show it is impossible, or that TPR cannot be reasons. Belief on our evidence (but not our total evidence) can in principle lead to belief in contradictions, but belief on our evidence is possible,

[20] They either deny doxastic involuntarism, or think that it is irrelevant to whether or not we have reasons to believe. I won't address involuntarism because of this.

or, at least, is not impossible in way relevant to the status of evidence as reason-giving. A similar point can be made against another argument from Adler. He argues that beliefs based on non-evidential reasons will be unstable, because we will quickly realize that they are inconsistent with our other beliefs. This is not generally true: sometimes a belief will be supported by our TPR when we lack evidence that it is false. Since belief on one's evidence can also sometimes lead to believing contradictions, this argument does not show that TPR cannot be reasons for belief.

Finally, Adler (2002), claims that forming beliefs based on anything other than evidence is self-undermining. If we allow our ends to influence what we believe, then we will be less likely to form true beliefs, which makes accomplishing these ends more difficult. One who does not see this and respond accordingly, according to Adler, cannot actually believe. However, even if belief on prudential reasons is self-undermining, belief on our TPR is not. Like belief for practical reasons, belief on TPR is influenced by ends. However, unlike belief for practical reasons, belief on TPR promotes the very ends the belief is influenced by.

The main arguments that conscious belief on TPR is impossible, and thus cannot be reasons for belief, don't work: if they did, they'd show that evidence does not provide reasons for belief, either. In any case, whether or not conscious belief on TPR is possible, we need to epistemically evaluate beliefs, belief forming processes, and belief forming agents. In doing so, we should look to how they use their TPR.

8. Conclusion

When most epistemologists consider the question "What ought one believe?" or "Ought so and so believe such and such?" they take the answers to these to be binding, take them as arising from reasons and rules which are in turn generated by an epistemic end, and take this end as having true belief as a necessary ingredient. It turns out that, if they are right in their assumptions, then the epistemic end gives us reasons that most epistemologists have either overlooked or dismissed – TPR – and these reasons can tell us what we epistemically ought to believe (or what we ought to believe in an even more important sense than the epistemic). What does this mean?

It might mean that we should give up on some of what so many epistemologists accept about the source of epistemic oughts. Assessing that option is outside the scope of this paper,

but it seems to be giving up too much; it seems to be giving up on some of what makes epistemology distinctive and worthwhile. On the other hand, if we don't give some of this up, we must accept some radical consequences. In considering what we ought to believe, we would have to look to a class of reasons that gets almost no discussion in epistemology. Forms of reasoning and inquiry that have previously looked dubious might turn out to be acceptable or even required. Finally, we would have to be more suspicious of using intuitions as evidence about epistemic norms than many of us have previously been.

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