A Combinatorial Argument against Practical Reasons for Belief

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1. Introduction

The ambit of the normative extends beyond the realm of action: just as there are norms of a distinctively practical kind that govern action, so too are there norms of a distinctively epistemic kind that govern belief. Some authors have exploited *certain similarities* between these two types of norms as a way of illuminating the nature of either practical or epistemic normativity.[1] In this essay I pursue the reverse strategy: here I exploit *certain differences* between practical norms governing action and epistemic norms governing belief as a way of illuminating the nature of both practical and epistemic normativity. More specifically, I use those differences to offer an abductive argument for the following thesis: *there are no practical reasons for belief*.

I frame my discussion in terms of reasons, but you can rephrase most of what I say using other normative categories for belief—rationality, justification, correctness, and so on—if you prefer.

2. Preliminaries

When theorizing about reasons, it is crucial to pay attention to the distinction between the contributory and overall levels. Suppose we are assessing whether agent X ought to ϕ (an action) in a given circumstance. At the contributory level, X has various *pro tanto* reasons for and against ϕ-ing and its alternatives, and these *pro tanto* reasons have various strengths (or, to switch metaphors, weights). At the overall level, X's ϕ-ing has a normative status such as the following:

- X has decisive reason to ϕ (i.e. ϕ-ing is required by the overall balance of X's reasons);

- X has sufficient reason to ϕ (i.e. ϕ-ing is permitted by the overall balance of X's reasons);

- X lacks sufficient reason to ϕ (i.e. ϕ-ing is forbidden by the overall balance of X's reasons).

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[1]   See, among others, Cuneo 2007, Littlejohn 2012, and Berker 2013.

And similarly for each of the alternatives to ϕ-ing: X has or lacks sufficient or decisive reason to perform each of these actions.

Four comments about this framework are in order. First, I assume, as is customary, that the facts at the overall level obtain in virtue of the facts at the contributory level. How do *pro tanto* reasons combine in order to determine overall verdicts? That is a very difficult question, with no generally agreed-upon answer. In a way it will be our main topic of discussion.

Second, I prefer to use 'reason' as a count noun at the contributory level and as a mass noun at the overall level.[2] Because of this, I will often drop the '*pro tanto*'-qualifier when discussing *pro tanto* reasons and allow my use of 'reason' as a count noun to make it clear the qualifier should be there.

Third, some authors draw a distinction, at the contributory level, between the sentences "X has a reason to ϕ" and "There is a reason for X to ϕ." We can draw a parallel distinction, at the overall level, between the sentences "X has decisive reason to ϕ" and "There is decisive reason for X to ϕ." This distinction has no bearing on the argument to come. I formulate my discussion in terms of the former member of each pair, but I just as easily could have chosen the latter.

Fourth, if we distinguish between different types of reasons that favor an action, then we can apply the contributory versus overall distinction for each type of reason. For example, suppose it turns out that all reasons for action fall into two exclusive and exhaustive categories: the moral and the prudential. Then X has *decisive* (or *sufficient*, or *neither*) *moral reason* to ϕ in virtue of *her moral reasons* for and against ϕ-ing and its alternatives; has *decisive* (or *sufficient*, or *neither*) *prudential reason* to ϕ in virtue of *her prudential reasons* for and against ϕ-ing and its alternatives; and has *decisive* (or *sufficient*, or *neither*) *all-things-considered reason* to ϕ in virtue of *all her reasons* for and against ϕ-ing and its alternatives.[3]

Let us now take this reasons-based framework for the assessment of action and port it over to the case of belief. So, instead of considering the reasons that bear on ϕ-ing and its alternatives, let us consider

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[2]   One reason for this preference: there are cases in which I have sufficient reason to ϕ without having a single *pro tanto* reason in favor of ϕ-ing. In such cases it is highly misleading to use count-noun locutions such as "I have a sufficient reason to ϕ" or "I have sufficient reasons to ϕ" instead of the mass-noun locution "I have sufficient reason to ϕ."

[3]   There are no such things as "all-things-considered reasons": the qualifier 'all things considered' applies only at the overall level, never at the contributory level (since it, in effect, means 'all reasons-and-other-normatively-relevant-factors considered').

the reasons that bear on *believing P* and its alternatives: *disbelieving P* and *suspending judgment on P*. Some authors hold that *disbelieving P* is the same as *believing ~P*, whereas other authors take these two attitudes to be distinct (Humberstone 2000, Rumfitt 2000); for our purposes, it won't matter which way one goes in that debate. When it comes to the nature of suspension of judgment, however, the argument I will offer requires me to be less neutral. Like Scott Sturgeon (2009, 2010) and Jane Friedman (2013, 2017), I think it is a mistake to identify *suspending judgment on P* with *neither believing nor disbelieving P*; rather, suspension of judgment on P is better thought of as the positive doxastic attitude of *being committedly neutral on P*. There is nothing analogous to this attitude in the case of action: there is nothing that stands to action as suspension of judgment stands to belief. This is one of the most striking disanalogies between action and belief, and it will play a prominent role in our discussion.

A classic issue concerning the nature of reasons for belief is this: in addition to *epistemic* reasons for belief of the sort typically studied by epistemologists, do there also exist *practical* reasons for belief? For example, do the practical benefits to oneself or others of one's holding a certain belief count in favor of the belief itself?

In recent discussions of this issue, philosophers who think that all reasons for belief are epistemic are usually called 'evidentialists', and philosophers who think that at least some reasons for belief are practical are usually called 'pragmatists'.[4] I dislike both of these labels. Concerning the first: we shouldn't assume that all epistemic reasons are ultimately based in evidence. According to some epistemologists, although some epistemic reasons are evidence based, other epistemic reasons are based in something quite different—such as, for example, a default entitlement to believe that our basic cognitive faculties are reliable. According to other epistemologists, the concept EVIDENCE doesn't play a fundamental role in epistemology, and thus *no* epistemic reasons for belief are ultimately based in evidence. It doesn't make sense to call either of these types of epistemologists 'evidentialists', and yet both types can weigh in on the debate over whether there exist practical reasons for belief and can side with the 'there aren't any'-camp.

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[4]   See, for instance, McCormick 2015; Reisner 2008, 2009, 2018; Rinard 2015, 2017, forthcoming-a, forthcoming-b; Shah 2006, 2011; and Way 2016.

So we should avoid using 'evidentialism' as a label for that camp.[5]

Concerning the second label: people call the view that there are practical reasons for belief 'pragmatism' because they assume the phrases 'practical reason for belief' and 'pragmatic reason for belief' are synonymous. However, the former phrase has wider application than the latter. I have no problem calling a reason for me to believe P grounded in the practical benefits *to myself* of my holding that belief a 'pragmatic reason for belief'. However, that terminology strikes me as rather strained when applied to a reason for me to believe P grounded in the practical benefits *to others* of my holding that belief. And matters are even worse if we renounce the assumption (distinctive of some forms of consequentialism) that all reasons for action are provided by the benefits, either to the agent or to someone else, of the agent's performing the action favored and hold that some of these non-benefit-related sources of reasons *for action* can also provide reasons *for belief* of a distinctively practical sort; such non-benefit-based reasons hardly deserve to be called 'pragmatic reasons for belief'.

Nevertheless, in this essay I will defer—begrudgingly—to recent tradition and refer to advocates of practical reasons for belief as 'pragmatists', mostly because the most salient alternative—'practicalists'—is unbearably ugly. I refuse, however, to call their opponents 'evidentialists'; to do so invites too many confusions. So I will stick to the term 'anti-pragmatists' instead.

3. The Initial Challenge for Pragmatists

The point of departure for my argument against pragmatism will be one of the most commonly cited disanalogies between *practical* reasons for *action*, on the one hand, and *epistemic* reasons for *belief*, on the other. As many authors have remarked (Dancy 2004, 95; Feldman 2000, 680–81; Feldman 2006, 229; Feldman 2007, 203; Harman 1995, 179–80; Harman 2004, 48–49), how individual *pro tanto* reasons combine at the contributory level to yield verdicts at the overall level is very different in the practical and epistemic spheres. Practical reasons for action exhibit a phenomenon I call *permissive balancing*. Suppose I

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[5] Another problem: in some circles (e.g. Conee and Feldman 2004 and Dougherty 2011), 'evidentialism' is the standard term for the view that all epistemic reasons are evidence based (and, correspondingly, that epistemic justification is always entirely determined by the overall balance of a subject's evidence), but such a view is *compatible* with the existence of practical reasons for belief. So not only is 'evidentialist' an inapt label for some deniers of practical reasons for belief, but moreover it turns out that many self-styled 'evidentialists' (such as, for instance, Richard Feldman) are accepters of practical reasons for belief, and so fail to qualify as 'evidentialists' in the sense that contrasts with 'pragmatists'.

have a strong practical reason to perform action A, an equally strong practical reason to perform alternative action B, and no other practical reasons that bear on the matter. Then I have sufficient practical reason to perform A, have sufficient practical reason to perform B, and lack sufficient practical reason to do anything else. In other words, A and B are both permitted by the overall balance of my practical reasons, and doing neither is forbidden. When the practical reasons in favor of two incompatible actions are equally balanced, and when there are no other reasons on the scene, practical normativity permits one to go either way.

Epistemic reasons for belief, on the other hand, exhibit a phenomenon I call *prohibitive balancing*. Suppose I have a strong epistemic reason to believe P, an equally strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P, and no other epistemic reasons that bear on the matter. Then I lack sufficient epistemic reason to believe P, lack sufficient epistemic reason to disbelieve P, and have decisive epistemic reason to suspend judgment on P. In other words, rather than being permitted by the overall balance of my epistemic reasons to believe P or to disbelieve P, neither option is epistemically permissible. When the epistemic reasons in favor of belief and disbelief in a proposition are equally balanced, and when there are no other reasons on the scene, epistemic normativity prohibits one from holding either attitude and instead requires one to suspend judgment on the matter.[6]

As I said, this difference between practical reasons for action and epistemic reasons for belief—that the former exhibit permissive balancing whereas the latter exhibit prohibitive balancing—has been frequently noted, by a variety of authors in a number of quite different literatures (although not under that description: the terminology of permissive and prohibitive balancing is mine).[7] Let us give this oft-noted contrast a name:

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[6]   Indeed, the same is plausibly true even if the epistemic reasons in favor of belief and disbelief in a proposition are *nearly* but not *exactly* equally balanced.

[7]   A point of clarification: holding that epistemic reasons for belief exhibit prohibitive rather than permissive balancing does not yet commit one to accepting the Uniqueness Thesis (in the sense discussed in White 2005 and its ensuing literature; see Kopec and Titelbaum 2016 for overview). Even if only one doxastic alternative with regard to P is epistemically permitted in situations featuring a strong epistemic reason to believe P, an equally strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P, and no other epistemic reasons, there may well be *other* situations in which several doxastic alternatives are permitted by the overall balance of one's epistemic reasons (for instance, maybe believing P and suspending judgment on P are both permitted in those situations), or in which only one alternative is permitted but which alternative that is varies depending on some non-evidential but still epistemically relevant factor (since the Uniqueness Thesis is usually taken to be a thesis about what is epistemically permitted, given one's evidence, not about what is epistemically permitted, given one's epistemic reasons).

the Familiar Combinatorial Contrast: Practical reasons for action exhibit permissive balancing, whereas epistemic reasons for belief exhibit prohibitive balancing.

I now want to take this common observation and bring it to bear on the debate over practical reasons for belief.

In particular, it is a very striking fact that practical reasons for belief, if there are such things, seem to exhibit *permissive* balancing, and not the sort of *prohibitive* balancing displayed by reasons for belief of a more mundane, epistemic sort. Suppose I offer you $1,000 to believe that there is an odd number of books in my office right now; call this proposition 'O'. Suppose I also offer you $1,000 to disbelieve O. Let us also assume that if there are practical reasons for belief, then financial incentives are at least one way of grounding such reasons. (Pragmatists who deny this assumption can vary the case so that it features their preferred ground of practical reasons for belief.) So, through my offers, I have made it the case that you have a practical reason to believe O and an equally strong practical reason to disbelieve O (assuming such things exist). Let us also suppose that there are no other practical reasons for belief in play in this situation. What follows about the facts at the overall level? It would be extremely odd to say that your two equally balanced practical reasons for belief make it the case that you are required to suspend judgment on O; after all, doing so would ensure that you get neither reward. Instead, it is much more plausible to hold that the overall balance of your practical reasons permits you to believe O and also permits you to disbelieve O. In other words, the two practical reasons for belief play off each other to make it the case that you have sufficient practical reason to believe O, have sufficient practical reason to disbelieve O, and lack sufficient practical reason to suspend judgment on the matter. Practical reasons for belief appear to balance with each other in a permissive manner.

I find this fact—that practical reasons for belief exhibit permissive balancing, whereas epistemic reasons for belief exhibit prohibitive balancing—remarkable, and in need of explanation. How can it be that these two types of reasons are directed at the same objects and yet combine with other reasons of their same type in strikingly different ways?

Anti-pragmatists have an easy time explaining this fact. Or, at least, they have an easy time

explaining it once we reformulate our fact-to-be-explained in a way that is acceptable to both pragmatist and anti-pragmatist alike, by not building into that fact a commitment to the existence of practical reasons for belief. A more neutral way of formulating our explanandum would be like so:

> *an Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast*: So-called 'practical reasons for belief' exhibit permissive balancing, whereas epistemic reasons for belief exhibit prohibitive balancing.

Why do anti-pragmatists have an easy time explaining this Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast? Because they can avail themselves of the following straightforward way of explaining that otherwise puzzling fact:

> *the Simple Explanation*: What people call 'practical reasons for belief' are really practical reasons to perform a certain action, namely the action of *bringing it about that one believes some proposition*. Since they are just practical reasons for action, like all practical reasons for action they exhibit permissive balancing.

This proposal does not yet explain why practical reasons for action permissively balance whereas epistemic reasons for belief prohibitively balance. That is, it does not yet explain the Familiar Combinatorial Contrast. But we already knew we had to explain that contrast, before we started considering the combinatorial behavior of practical reasons for belief. The idea behind the Simple Explanation is to off-load the explanatory task presented by the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast onto an explanatory task that all theorists face, namely that of explaining the Familiar Combinatorial Contrast. If the Simple Explanation is correct, then the combinatorial behavior of (what seem to be) practical reasons for belief presents us with no new explanatory task beyond those we already had.[8]

Advocates of practical reasons for belief cannot avail themselves of the Simple Explanation. So what *is* their explanation of the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast? That, in general terms, is the challenge I will be presenting to pragmatists.

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[8]   What does explain the Familiar Combinatorial Contrast, though? That is a topic outside the scope of the current essay. My own view is that this contrast holds *because of the natures of the objects at which each type of reason is directed*, and in particular because of the fact that suspension of judgment is an alternative to belief and disbelief, whereas there is nothing analogous to suspension of judgment that is an alternative to action. But the arguments to come do not depend on this view of mine: all they require is that there be some explanation of the Familiar Combinatorial Contrast, not necessarily the one I just sketched.

4. Against Interactionist Pragmatism

The explanatory challenge facing pragmatists gets worse when we consider how practical reasons for belief—if there were such things—would have to interact (or not interact) with epistemic reasons for belief in order to determine verdicts at the overall level.

Let us distinguish three forms of pragmatism. All pragmatists of the sort I am discussing here maintain that at least some reasons for belief are practical. According to *austere pragmatists*, there are no reasons for belief other than practical reasons for belief. Non-austere forms of pragmatism, by contrast, hold that there exist both epistemic and practical reasons for belief.[9] We can further subdivide non-austere pragmatism into two varieties, depending on whether the view countenances or denies the existence of all-things-considered verdicts at the overall level. According to *interactionist pragmatists*, such all-things-considered verdicts make sense, and they are determined by the interplay of a subject's epistemic and practical reasons for belief at the contributory level. By contrast, according to *separatist pragmatists*, epistemic and practical reasons for belief are non-overlapping magisteria (to steal Stephen J. Gould's phrase) that do not combine to determine all-things-considered verdicts at the overall level. So whereas separatist pragmatists accept that it makes sense to ask whether I have decisive or sufficient epistemic reason to hold a given belief, and also accept that it makes sense to ask whether I have decisive or sufficient practical reason to hold this belief, they deny that it makes sense to ask whether, all things considered, I have decisive or sufficient reason *sans phrase* to hold that belief.

I start by considering interactionist pragmatism, since in my experience that is the most widely held version of the view. (Later I extend my argument to austere and separatist forms of pragmatism.) At an intuitive level, my primary objection to interactionist pragmatism is as follows:

How can it be the case that epistemic reasons for belief play off each other in one way, practical reasons for belief play off each other in a completely different way, and yet somehow all of these

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[9]   To keep my taxonomy manageable, I assume here that epistemic and practical reasons for belief exhaust the range of possible reasons for belief. I also assume that these two categories do not overlap. (If they do, then feel free to construe the central argument in this essay as an argument against *non-epistemic* practical reasons for belief, since presumably reasons for belief that are practical but not epistemic permissively balance with one another, whereas reasons for belief that are both epistemic and practical obey prohibitive balancing, if they truly are epistemic reasons.)

reasons combine together to yield coherent all-things-considered verdicts at the overall level?

As I see it, epistemic and practical reasons for belief are like oil and water: their combinatorial behaviors are just too different for them to mix together in a well-behaved manner. More specifically, I will argue the following:

> Any version of interactionist pragmatism which is consistent with the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast and which yields plausible verdicts at the overall level must be so gerrymandered and ad hoc that we have good abductive reason to reject it in favor of the Simple Explanation.

Since the range of possible interactionist *combinatorial functions*—that is, of possible interactionist mappings from verdicts at the contributory level about a subject's *pro tanto* reasons and their weights to verdicts at the overall level about which doxastic attitudes that subject has sufficient or decisive reason to hold—is essentially infinite, there is no hope of arguing that is *impossible* to find an interactionist combinatorial function that yields plausible verdicts. Instead, my goal is to convince you that there is no elegant, well-motivated way of constructing such a combinatorial function without engaging in some ugly, ad-hoc reverse engineering from the very verdicts we aim to achieve.

4.1. Interactionism, Take One: "Combine, Then Compare"

In general, a combinatorial function is a mapping from the facts about the individual reasons of some type in a given situation (and their weights) to the facts about what one has decisive or sufficient reason of some type to do in that situation (where here I use the verb 'do' capaciously, to cover the holding of attitudes as well as the performing of actions).[10] Many—though, it is important to keep in mind, not all—combinatorial functions can be split up into two parts: first, an *aggregation*[11] *function* that maps the individual reasons for and against a given alternative (and their weights) to the total reason in favor of that alternative; and, second, a *comparison function* that compares the total reason in favor of each alternative so

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[10] See Berker 2007 for more on combinatorial functions. My terminology is inspired by Thomas Nagel's talk of 'combinatorial principles' in his seminal discussion of reasons, *The Possibility of Altruism* (see §§5–7 of ch. 13).

[11] Shyam Nair (2016) advocates using the term 'accrual' here instead of 'aggregation'. However, I prefer my terminology, since 'aggregation' is the standard term in practical philosophy when individual normative (or normatively relevant) elements of some type (claims, goods, preferences, rights, etc.) are combined into wholes of the same type.

as to yield overall verdicts.[12] With that in mind, the most flatfooted way of trying to construct an interactionist combinatorial function for epistemic and practical reasons for belief is to split up the combinatorial function in just this way, and to do all of our mixing between epistemic and practical reasons during the initial, aggregative phase of the combinatorial procedure. More specifically, here is how the proposal goes. First we posit an aggregation function that takes as input all of the epistemic and practical reasons for and against a given doxastic alternative (belief, disbelief, or suspension of judgment), together with their weights, and yields as output the total reason (*sans phrase*) in favor of that alternative. Next we posit a comparison function that takes as input the total reason (*sans phrase*) in favor of each doxastic alternative and yields as output a verdict about whether one has decisive or sufficient all-things-considered reason to hold that attitude (maybe via maximization, or maybe in some other manner). The overall combinatorial function is then constructed by composing these two functions together. We can summarize the proposal with a slogan: "Combine, then compare." That is how we weigh epistemic and practical reasons for belief together, one might suggest.

An analogy helps motivate this proposal. It is not uncommon for authors who distinguish between moral and prudential reasons for action to assume that they are weighed against each other in a similar manner. On this proposal, first we take the moral and prudential reason for and against each action available to an agent in a given circumstance and aggregate those reasons together in order to determine the total reason (*sans phrase*) in favor of that alternative. Then the total reason in favor of each alternative is compared—perhaps in a maximizing manner—in order to determine all-things-considered overall verdicts. Maybe, in the end, such a proposal about how to weigh moral and prudential reasons is mistaken; however, it doesn't seem outside the realm of possibility.

Matters are different, however, when we consider the 'combine, then compare' proposal as applied to the weighing of epistemic and practical reasons for belief; such a proposal is rarely endorsed, and for good reason: it is a non-starter. This result follows from two plausible ideas. The first is our

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[12]   Perhaps this comparison function is a *maximizing function* according to which an agent has decisive reason for an alternative if the total reason in its favor is greater than that in favor of any other alternative, has sufficient reason for that alternative if the total reason in its favor is at least as much as that in favor of any other alternative, and otherwise lacks sufficient reason for that alternative. Or perhaps it is a *satisficing function* according to which an agent has sufficient reason for an alternative iff the total reason in its favor is above some threshold. Or perhaps the comparison function is more complicated than either of these options.

already-mentioned Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast, according to which epistemic reasons for belief exhibit prohibitive balancing, whereas practical reasons for belief exhibit permissive balancing. The second idea is the natural thought that interactionism should be developed in such a way that when only one type of reason for belief is on the scene (that is, when there are only epistemic reasons for belief without any practical reasons for belief, or only practical reasons for belief without any epistemic reasons for belief), and when those reasons are strong ones, then the overall verdicts in terms of that type of reason are also the overall all-things-considered verdicts. In other words, in cases in which only strong reasons of a single type are around at the contributory level, those reasons carry the day at the overall all-things-considered level: if one has sufficient reason of that type to believe P, then one has sufficient all-things-considered reason to believe P; if one has decisive reason of that type to disbelieve P, then one has decisive all-things-considered reason to disbelieve P; and so on.

Now if we put these two ideas together, we get the following:

(Ep)   Suppose, at the contributory level, I have a strong epistemic reason to believe P, an equally strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P, and no other reasons (either epistemic or practical) that bear on the matter. Then, at the overall level, I lack sufficient all-things-considered reason to believe P, lack sufficient all-things-considered reason to disbelieve P, and have decisive all-things-considered reason to suspend judgment on P.

(Pr)   Suppose, at the contributory level, I have a strong practical reason to believe P, an equally strong practical reason to disbelieve P, and no other reasons (either epistemic or practical) that bear on the matter. Then, at the overall level, I have sufficient all-things-considered reason to believe P, have sufficient all-things-considered reason to disbelieve P, and lack sufficient all-things-considered reason to suspend judgment on P.

However, it is impossible for a 'combine, then compare' interactionist combinatorial function to yield these results. Since, after the total reason in favor of a doxastic alternative has been calculated, no record is kept of whether that total reason is due to epistemic considerations, or practical considerations, or some combination thereof, the 'combine, then compare' proposal will view the situations described in (Ep) and

(Pr) as identical after the first step in its two-step program has been completed.[13] Thus a 'combine, then compare' combinatorial function is committed, implausibly, to the two situations described in (Ep) and (Pr) giving rise to identical overall all-things-considered verdicts, and hence is committed to at least one of (Ep) and (Pr) being false. Given the plausibility of (Ep) and (Pr), we need to look elsewhere for an interactionist combinatorial function.

4.2. Interactionism, Take Two: Epistemic Tie-Breaker Pragmatism

As I said, the 'combine, then compare' method of weighing epistemic and practical reasons is rarely endorsed by pragmatists. A much more frequently encountered proposal is what we might call *the epistemic tie-breaker view*. (Sometimes such a view is attributed to Blaise Pascal and William James, but I will not concern myself with exegetical matters here.) This proposal goes as follows:

> *epistemic tie-breaker pragmatism*: Practical considerations only have a bearing on all-things-considered overall verdicts if the epistemic reasons in favor of believing P are equally balanced (or approximately equally balanced) with the epistemic reasons in favor of disbelieving P. And when practical considerations do come in, they settle the tie (or near tie) among belief and disbelief in P without interacting with epistemic considerations in any way.

As before, we can motivate this proposal with an analogy to the case of moral and prudential reasons. Some authors hold that moral and prudential reasons for action combine in a similar way. On this view, prudential considerations only kick in when several of the actions available to an agent are tied for having the most moral reason in their favor, and when prudential considerations do kick in, they settle the tie among the morally permissible options entirely independently of the moral considerations which led to that tie. So if I have equally strong moral reasons to walk home by the river and to walk home through the

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[13]   I assume here that it is possible to find versions of the scenarios described in (Ep) and (Pr) such that the epistemic reason in favor of believing P in (Ep) has the same weight as the practical reason in favor of believing P in (Pr). If it is not possible to find equally strong epistemic and practical reasons of this sort, then presumably this is because epistemic and practical reasons for belief are always incomparable, incommensurable, or otherwise not weighable with one other. But in that case, it is far from clear how even to make sense of the 'combine, then compare' proposal. How do we aggregate reasons with incomparable, incommensurate, etc. weights into a total? And once we have our totals, how do we compare them with one another (especially if one total is mostly the result of epistemic considerations and the other mostly the result of practical considerations)? At this point the 'combine, then compare' view has ceased to be a specific proposal about how to weigh epistemic and practical reasons for belief but rather has become a placeholder for where such a proposal might go.

city (and less moral reason to do anything else, because I said I would be home by dinner), and if I have more prudential reason to take the river route than the city route, then these facts suffice, on the view we are considering, to make it the case that I have decisive all-things-considered reason to walk home by the river. As before, such a proposal about how to weigh moral and prudential reasons might be mistaken; however, it doesn't seem outside the realm of possibility.

The analogous position with regard to epistemic and practical reasons for belief also has much to recommend it. In particular, one appeal of the epistemic tie-breaker view is the way in which it appears to avoid having to reconcile the differing combinatorial behavior of epistemic and practical reasons for belief, by cordoning off the behavior of each type of reason: first the epistemic reasons for belief do their thing, and then if there is a certain result the practical reasons for belief come in and do their independent thing. Nevertheless, as I shall now argue, the appearance of combinatorial separation here is an illusion, and more generally the epistemic tie-breaker view is insufficient as it stands.

My argument proceeds in two stages. First I attack the spirit of the view, by undermining the analogy between the epistemic tie-breaker view of how epistemic and practical reasons for belief weigh up and the putatively analogous "moral tie-breaker view" (as we might call it) of how moral and prudential reasons for action weigh up. Although these thoughts don't touch the letter of epistemic tie-breaker pragmatism, they destabilize how we think of the view. Moreover, they serve to motivate my argument's second stage, in which I do attack the view's letter.

I start the first stage of my argument by noting that the label 'epistemic tie-breaker pragmatism' is extremely misleading. Although, on this view, practical considerations become relevant only when there is a tie *at the contributory level* between epistemic reasons, in such cases there is no tie *at the overall level*: in such cases the overall balance of epistemic reasons *requires* one to suspend judgment on P. This represents an important disanalogy with the moral tie-breaking view of how prudential reasons for action interact with moral ones. In that case, 'tie-breaking'-talk is perfectly apt, since in situations in which several practical alternatives are tied for having most moral reason in their favor, an agent is permitted by the overall balance of her moral reasons to pursue any one of these options. In short, it is because moral reasons for

action permissively balance that ties at the contributory level lead to ties at the overall moral level, and hence 'tie-breaking'-talk is perfectly at home. But since epistemic reasons for belief prohibitively balance, a tie among belief and disbelief at the contributory level leads to both options losing out to a third option—suspension of judgment—at the overall epistemic level. Thus when, according to this sort of pragmatist, practical considerations come in and shift the overall all-things-considered verdict to, say, belief, those considerations are not breaking an epistemic tie; rather, they are unseating an epistemic winner.

A second important disanalogy between the epistemic tie-breaking view in the domain of belief and the moral tie-breaking view in the domain of action arises once we realize that pragmatists should countenance not only practical reasons for and against *belief* and for and against *disbelief*, but also practical reasons for and against *suspension of judgment*. For example, presumably pragmatists are committed to the practical benefits or costs of suspending judgment on some matter providing a reason for or against suspension of judgment on that matter. This puts pressure on the analogy between the epistemic tie-breaking and moral tie-breaking views because, although practical reasons for and against suspension of judgment presumably can be relevant to verdicts at the overall all-things-considered level according to advocates of epistemic tie-breaking pragmatism, they are not reasons that count for or against the doxastic options among which there is an epistemic tie. But on the moral tie-breaking view, it is *only* the prudential reasons that count for or against the morally permissible options which are at all relevant; the prudential reasons that count for or against the morally impermissible actions available to the agent are entirely beside the point when determining what, on such a view, the agent should do all things considered.

Thus we have unearthed two disanalogies between the epistemic tie-breaking account of how to weigh epistemic and practical reasons for belief and the moral tie-breaking account of how to weigh moral and prudential reasons for action. Both views hold that, when there is a tie among reasons of one sort, reasons of a second sort come in to settle the overall all-things-considered verdicts. But—and this is the first disanalogy—on the epistemic tie-breaker view the tie among the first sort of reasons is only at the contributory level, not at the overall level, whereas on the moral tie-breaker view the tie among the first
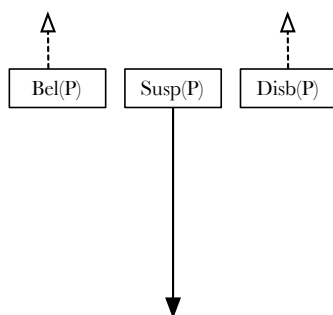
Figure 1. Dashed arrows are epistemic reasons; solid arrows are practical reasons. Upwards arrows are reasons for an alternative; downwards arrows are reasons against.

sort of reasons is at both levels. Moreover—and this is the second disanalogy—on the epistemic tie-breaker view the reasons of the second sort that become relevant are reasons for and against all of the options, whereas on the moral tie-breaker view the reasons of the second sort that become relevant are ones that count for or against those options among which the first sort of reasons are tied. We can illustrate both disanalogies with the following example. Suppose (a) I have equally balanced epistemic reasons to believe P and to disbelieve P, (b) there would be a gigantic practical cost if I were to suspend judgment on P, and (c) no other reasons are in play. (See Figure 1.) If there exist both epistemic and practical reasons for belief, then presumably they play off each other to determine the following all-things-considered verdicts: all things considered, I have sufficient reason to believe P, have sufficient reason to disbelieve P, and lack sufficient reason to suspend judgment on P. These results are compatible with the letter of epistemic tie-breaker pragmatism, as we have formulated it so far. But notice, first, that this isn't a case in which practical considerations break a tie among *pro tanto* epistemic considerations; rather, practical considerations make us switch from one sort of tie to another sort of tie. And notice, second, that our eventual all-things-considered verdicts are partially determined by a practical reason counting in favor of an alternative other than the two among which we had our initial tie. Thus the sort of tie breaking being posited by epistemic tie-breaker pragmatists in the doxastic realm works very differently from the sort of tie breaking between moral and prudential reasons that is sometimes posited in the practical realm.

Moreover—and now I have begun the second stage of my criticism—once we observe these disanalogies, we can use them to argue against the details of epistemic tie-breaker pragmatism. My worry,
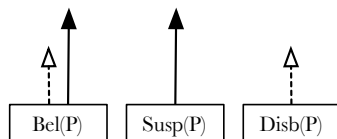
Figure 2.

in essence, is this: it is simply not plausible that practical considerations always settle an "epistemic tie" entirely independently of the epistemic considerations that made there be that tie. Sometimes the mere presence of those epistemic considerations changes how we should weigh practical considerations against each other. For example, suppose you have equally balanced epistemic reasons to believe and to disbelieve O (which, recall, is the proposition <There are an odd number of books in my office right now>), and let us also suppose that I offer you $1,000 to believe O and $1,000 to suspend judgment on O. (See Figure 2.) If we merely take into account the practical considerations on their own, you are permitted by the overall balance of your practical reasons to believe O and also permitted to suspend judgment on O. So, if we mechanically apply the epistemic tie-breaker view to this case at hand, we should get the following result: you have sufficient all-things-considered reason to believe O and also have sufficient all-things-considered reason to suspend judgment on O. But that seems to be the wrong verdict. It is much more plausible to hold that, all things considered, you have decisive reason to suspend judgment on O and lack sufficient reason to believe O.

Now, it is not too hard to alter the letter of the epistemic tie-breaker view so that it yields this more plausible result. But it is important to realize that a change in the view's letter is called for. Moreover, there are other problems with the letter of epistemic tie-breaker pragmatism that would require more serious alterations in order to address. For sometimes not just *the presence* but moreover *the strength* of the tied epistemic considerations has a bearing on how the practical considerations which come in to settle that tie should be weighed against each other. A variant of our previous case shows this. Suppose you have an epistemic reason of strength x to believe O, an epistemic reason also of strength x to disbelieve O, and no other epistemic reasons which bear on the matter. Let us also suppose that I offer you $1,000 + y$ dollars (where $y > 0$) to believe O and 1,000 dollars to suspend judgment on O. (See Figure 3.) I claim that
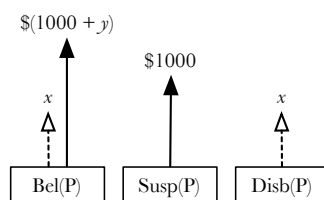
Figure 3.

which verdicts it is most plausible for interactionist pragmatism to yield at the overall all-things-considered level in this case will depend on the comparative values of *x* and *y*. For example, if *x* is zero, then for any value of *y* greater than zero, it is plausible that you have decisive all-things-considered reason to believe O. But if *x* is fairly large—as it would be if, for example, your two equally reliable friends just got back from each independently counting the books in my office, and one of them told you, "The number of books is odd, not even," whereas the other told you, "The number of books is even, not odd"—then matters are less clear. If $y = 0.01$, then presumably you have decisive all-things-considered reason to suspend judgment on O. (The difference of a penny surely isn't enough to outweigh the epistemic pressure toward suspension of judgment.) If $y = 1,000,000$, then presumably you have decisive all-things-considered reason to believe O. (The difference of a million bucks is another matter altogether.) And perhaps as we vary *y* between these two values, we reach a point at which, all things considered, you have sufficient to believe O and sufficient reason to disbelieve O—or maybe we simply reach a point at which we switch from one decisive all-things-considered reason verdict to the other (possibly with a zone of vagueness in between). But either way, at which point we transition between these various verdicts as we vary *y* will depend, I claim, on the value of *x*: as we increase *x*, the values of *y* during which such a transition occurs will also increase.

The example I considered two paragraphs ago (and depicted in Figure 2) involves, in effect, splicing together a case of prohibitive epistemic balancing with a case of permissive practical balancing that cuts across it (so that rather than belief and disbelief being balanced, instead belief and suspension of judgment are balanced). The example I considered in the previous paragraph (and depicted in Figure 3) involves deforming that previous example so that the initial case of prohibitive epistemic balancing is spliced together with a case that either approximates or becomes very far from a case of permissive

practical balancing that cuts across it, depending on how we vary a parameter. And my central claim about that second sort of example is that which sort of balancing dominates will depend not only on how close we are to a case of permissive practical balancing, but also on the strength of the epistemic reasons that gave rise to the prohibitive epistemic balancing. Epistemic tie-breaker pragmatism only seems plausible when we consider a small diet of examples—ones, in effect, in which there are no practical reasons for or against suspension of judgment in play. Once we consider a more varied assortment of cases, we can see that accounting for the full range of our judgments about such cases requires modifying epistemic tie-breaker pragmatism in some quite significant ways.

4.3. Interactionism, Take Three: Reisner's Proposal

Let us try a different tack. The basic idea behind epistemic tie-breaker pragmatism is (to attempt) to avoid having to say something about how epistemic and practical reasons for belief combine with one another by having each set of reasons go about their business independently of each other. We saw that epistemic tie-breaker pragmatism's way of implementing that idea runs into trouble. But there are other ways to implement this basic idea, and maybe some of these other ways will be more promising. In particular, the epistemic tie-breaking approach lets the behavior of epistemic reasons determine whether it is the epistemic reasons for belief or the practical reasons for belief that determine the overall all-things-considered verdicts. Maybe, though, we should reverse things, and instead let the behavior of the practical reasons for belief determine which of these two types of reasons determines the overall all-things-considered verdicts.

That is just what Andrew Reisner (2008) proposes in an article that constitutes one of the few existing discussions of how practical and epistemic reasons for belief might weigh against one another. His suggestion is as follows:

> *Reisner's proposal*: If the practical benefits or costs of believing (or disbelieving, or suspending judgment) are above some very high threshold, then epistemic considerations become irrelevant and practical considerations alone determine the overall all-things-considered verdicts. Otherwise, practical considerations are irrelevant and epistemic considerations alone determine the overall
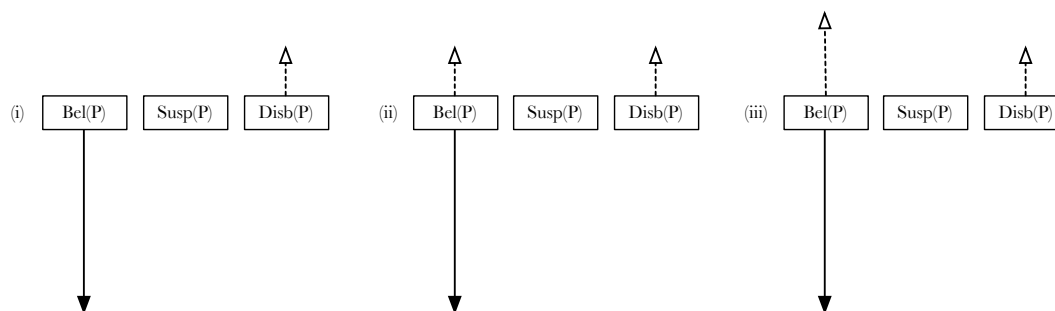
| (i) | Bel(P) | Susp(P) | Disb(P) | | (ii) | Bel(P) | Susp(P) | Disb(P) | | (iii) | Bel(P) | Susp(P) | Disb(P) |

Figure 4.

all-things-considered verdicts.

Or, as Reisner (2008, 24) summarizes his view at one point, "when pragmatic reasons for belief are strong enough, [epistemic] reasons for belief are silent, and . . . otherwise, pragmatic reasons for belief are silent in determining what one ought to believe, all-things-considered."

What should we make of this view? Positing sharp thresholds in the behavior of reasons makes me nervous. But the more pressing problem with Reisner's proposal is that it breaks down when applied to high-stakes cases in which several options are permitted by the balance of one's practical reasons. Consider the following three cases:

(i)   The practical costs of my believing P are disastrously high, and I have a strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P (and no other epistemic reasons that bear on the matter).

(ii)   The practical costs of my believing P are disastrously high, and I have a strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P and an equally strong epistemic reason to believe P (and no other epistemic reasons that bear on the matter).

(iii)   The practical costs of my believing P are disastrously high, and I have a strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P and a much stronger epistemic reason to believe P (and no other epistemic reasons that bear on the matter).

(See Figure 4.) Case (ii) is once again a scenario in which practical balancing crosscuts with epistemic balancing: the practical reasons are permissively balanced between suspension of judgment and disbelief, whereas the epistemic reasons are prohibitively balanced between belief and disbelief. And the other two

cases deviate from this situation by breaking the epistemic balance either in favor of disbelief (case (i)) or in favor of belief (case (iii)). In all three cases, the stakes are high enough that we are in the region in which, according to Reisner, practical reasons alone determine the overall all-things-considered verdicts and epistemic reasons are silent in that determination. Moreover, the only thing that practical considerations tell me, in all three cases, is not to believe P; they leave it open whether I should avoid belief in P by disbelieving P or by suspending judgment on P. So it follows, on Reisner's proposal, that in all three cases I have sufficient all-things-considered reason to disbelieve P, have sufficient all-things-considered reason to suspend judgment on P, and lack sufficient all-things-considered reason to believe P. When it comes to case (iii), this verdict is not obviously objectionable. But such a verdict about cases (i) and (ii) is not at all plausible. In case (i), it is much more plausible to hold that I have decisive all-things-considered reason to disbelieve P. And in case (ii), it is much more plausible to hold that I have decisive all-things-considered reason to suspend judgment on P.

We can illustrate the implausibility of Reisner's verdicts about cases (i) and (ii) by continuously varying the weight of the practical reason in them until we reach analogous cases in which, according to Reisner, practical reasons are silent and epistemic reasons alone determine the overall all-things-considered verdicts. Consider this variant of case (ii):

(ii*)   I have a strong epistemic reason to believe P, an equally strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P, and no other reasons (either epistemic or practical) that bear on the matter.

Let us suppose, moreover, that for some reason I disbelieve P. I take it all will agree that I lack sufficient all-things-considered reason to hold that attitude. And that is the verdict Reisner's proposal yields in this case, since I lack sufficient epistemic reason to disbelieve P and the practical stakes with regards to my doxastic attitudes in P are low. But let us now change the case so that, because of some pesky evil demon, nefarious brain-monitoring scientist, or other agent of that sort who will cause a certain amount of suffering if I believe P, I have a practical reason against believing P. As we vary the amount of suffering that this agent will bring about if I believe P, eventually we reach a version of case (ii). But it would be extremely odd, I think, to say—as Reisner's proposal does—that as we start in a version of case (ii*) and

transition into a version of case (ii), my disbelief in P goes from being forbidden by the overall balance of all my reasons to being permitted by the overall balance of all my reasons merely in virtue of our changing the incentives associated with my holding an entirely different doxastic attitude, namely a belief in P. That would involve saying, "Well, before this threat was in place, you should have suspended judgment on P instead of disbelieving it. But now that there are costs associated with believing P, it's fine for you to disbelieve P rather than suspend judgment on it." It is far more plausible to hold that, both before and after the cost of believing P is in place, I have decisive all-things-considered reason to suspend judgment on P. In short, the verdict that Reisner's view yields about case (ii) is unacceptable. And a similar line of reasoning can be used to reinforce my claim that the verdict his view yields about case (i) is also unacceptable.

Perhaps, then, we should modify Reisner's proposal so that it yields what I claimed were the more plausible verdicts about cases (i) and (ii). And, in fact, near the end of his article, Reisner unwittingly modifies his view in just such a way. Although for most of his article, Reisner summarizes his proposal in the way I have been presenting it so far (see Reisner 2008, 22–25), near its end he offers a different way of interpreting his proposal which he takes to be extensionally equivalent to the first interpretation, but in fact is not (see Reisner 2008, 26–27).[14] On this second interpretation, overall all-things-considered verdicts can be determined by two successive processes of weighing. First we weigh the epistemic reasons for and against belief and its alternatives in the standard epistemic-reasons-for-belief-like way (where this includes prohibitive balancing, if such a case arises). Then we weigh the practical reasons for and against belief and its alternatives in a standard practical-reasons-for-action-like way (here Reisner assumes a maximizing 'combine, then compare' combinatorial function), with one exception: if the first weighing process resulted in the subject having decisive epistemic reason to hold a given doxastic attitude, then we include an additional reason of a fixed, very high weight in favor of that attitude in the second weighing process.[15] This "double-weighing proposal" (as we might call it) generates the same overall all-things-considered

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[14] My thanks to Paul Marcucilli for helping me to see this.

[15] If, after the first weighing process, the subject has sufficient epistemic reason to hold either of two doxastic alternatives, Reisner leaves it unclear whether in the second weighing process both alternatives have a reason of that fixed weight in their favor, or whether instead both alternatives have a reason of a lower (maybe half, if these things can be quantified?) weight in their favor.

verdicts as Reisner's original proposal does in many cases. Many, but not all. In particular, it is easy enough to show that the double-weighing proposal yields the result that, in case (i), I have decisive all-things-considered reason to disbelieve P (since, in the second stage, we weigh a very, very strong reason against believing P against a strong reason in favor of disbelieving P that resulted from the first stage and also against no reasons for or against suspending judgment on P), and also yields the result that, in case (ii), I have decisive all-things-considered reason to suspend judgment (since, in the second stage, we weigh a very, very strong reason against believing P against a strong reason in favor of suspending judgment that resulted from the first stage and also against no reasons for or against disbelieving P). Since the double-weighing version of Reisner's original proposal agrees with his original about case (iii), perhaps Reisner could simply move to his double-weighing proposal instead of his original proposal to avoid the objections I have raised so far. Doing so would require Reisner to revise his rhetoric about how epistemic reasons for belief are silent when practical reasons for belief are active, and vice versa (since in cases (i) and (ii) both practical reasons and the reason derived from the epistemic weighing process are needed in order to determine the final verdict in the second weighing process). But no doubt a revision of that rhetoric is a small price to pay for extensional adequacy.

However, even after this revision, problems persist. In particular, the double-weighing view is saddled with some very weird consequences. Suppose we start with a version of case (i), so that I have an extremely strong practical reason against believing P and a fairly strong epistemic reason in favor of disbelieving P, where this latter reason is (let us suppose) evidence based. And suppose that over time my evidence for P steadily improves, so that I transition from being in a version of case (i) to being in a case (ii) and then eventually find myself in a version of case (iii).[16] Now let us focus on the all-things-considered status of disbelief in P during this process as I move from (i) to (ii) to (iii). At first, disbelieving P is permitted (because required) by the balance of all my reasons; then, as my epistemic position vis-à-vis P improves, disbelieving P becomes forbidden; but then, as my epistemic position with regard to that proposition improves yet again, disbelieving P goes back to being permitted. What a bizarre sequence of

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[16] Here I am imagining a *temporal* sequence of cases, but it would perhaps be cleaner to consider a *modal* sequence of cases: instead of having my evidence change over time, we can consider a sequence of distinct possible cases laid out across modal space, in each of which my overall evidence for P is better than in the last.
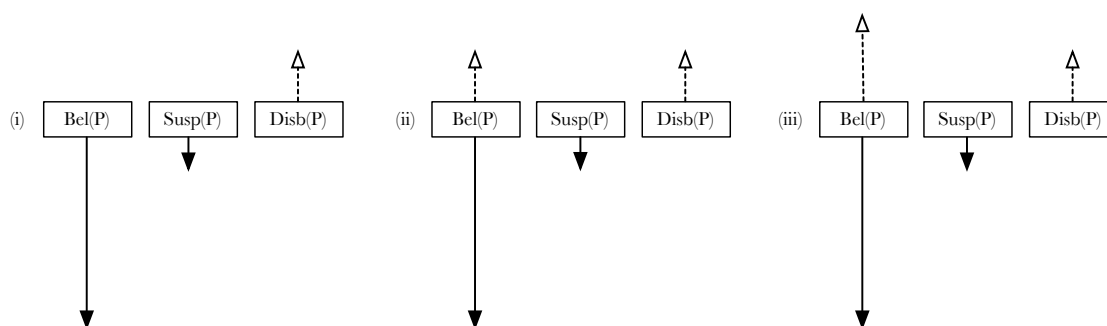
Figure 5.

events! In particular, notice that last transition. How can disbelief in P go from being forbidden (all things considered) to being permitted (all things considered) merely in virtue of my *gaining* reasons to believe P? Such a result seems intolerable.

Perhaps we should go back and tinker with Reisner's proposal yet again. Maybe, for example, we should say that in case (iii), in which I have a very, very strong practical reason against believing P, a very strong epistemic reason to believe P, and a fairly strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P, not only does the first weighing process yield a reason to believe P with a given fixed weight that is incorporated into the second weighing process, but it also yields a reason to suspend judgment on P with a lower fixed weight that is incorporated into that second weighing process as well. This revision would allow the double-weighing proposal to yield the verdict that, in case (iii), I have decisive all-things-considered reason to suspend judgment on P, so the transition from a version of case (ii) to a version of case (iii) in the continuum of cases I just considered would not look quite as weird. But other problems would arise. First, we could get back those bizarre results by considering a continuum of cases that are just like the continuum of cases we have been considering, except there is an additional practical reason against suspending judgment present in every case that is equal in weight to the weight of this new reason to suspend judgment that is now being postulated in the second stage of the process in case (iii). (See Figure 5.) This additional practical reason would not change the revised double-weighing proposal's overall all-things-considered verdicts about cases (i) and (ii), but it would get us back to the old verdict about case (iii). Second, once we include two additional reasons derived from the first stage of weighing in the second

stage of weighing in case (iii), it becomes difficult to motivate the idea that the weights of these two reasons are entirely independent of the weights of the epistemic reasons that went into the first stage of weighing. After all, the rough idea behind the second additional reason is that, although I have decisive epistemic reason to believe P, if I don't believe P, it would be "epistemically better" if I suspend judgment on P instead of disbelieving P. But *how* epistemically better it would be to do the former rather than the latter presumably depends on the strength of my epistemic reason to believe P. So it is not clear why we should think that this second reason has a fixed weight. And if the second reason does not have a fixed weight, it is also not clear why the first reason has a fixed weight. But once the weight of the reasons that get fed into the second stage of weighing are a function of the facts at the contributory level during the first stage (and not just a function of the facts at the overall level during that stage), disaster has struck: now all hope of segregating the combinatorial behavior of epistemic and practical reasons for belief has disappeared. At this point we are not really weighing these two types of reasons independently of one another (with a few extra fixed inputs to the second weighing process), but rather are back to trying to find a complex way of weighing them all together.

4.4. Interactionism, Take Four: A Schroederian Proposal

Let us take a step back. We have been considering two broadly different ways of developing interactionist pragmatism, both of which concede that epistemic reasons for belief exhibit prohibitive balancing whereas practical reasons for belief exhibit permissive balancing, but try to circumvent these differing combinatorial behaviors by cordoning off, as much as possible, the weighing process involving one type of reason from the weighing process involving the other. Maybe, though, what interactionist pragmatists should do is *not* concede that epistemic and practical reasons for belief balance in different ways. Moreover, the double-weighing variant of Reisner's proposal provides a clue for how they might do just that. One key ingredient in the double-weighing proposal is the idea that additional reasons are added into the mix when practical reasons for belief are being weighed against each other in a standard, practical-reason-for-action-like way (that is, in a way that is compatible with permissive balancing). Perhaps, then, what we should do is add in extra reasons even when we weigh epistemic reasons for belief

on their own, so that we can weigh those reasons in a practical-reason-for-action-like way but, through the presence of these additional reasons, get overall verdicts that mimic the verdicts of prohibitive balancing.

In a recent article, Mark Schroeder (2015) makes just such a proposal. He, in effect, denies that epistemic reasons for belief ever exhibit prohibitive balancing, but accounts for the appearance that they do by positing additional reasons, beyond the most obvious ones, that are thrown into the combinatorial mix when epistemic reasons play off each other so as to determine overall epistemic verdicts. In particular, Schroeder makes the following claim:

> *Schroeder's Posit*: Whenever a subject's epistemic reasons to believe P are equally balanced with her epistemic reasons to disbelieve P, then in virtue of that she has an epistemic reason to suspend judgment on P.

It follows from Schroeder's Posit that the scenarios in which I have claimed prohibitive balancing occurs in fact never arise: it is *never* the case, if Schroeder's Posit is correct, that I have a strong epistemic reason to believe P, an equally strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P, *and no other epistemic reasons that bear on the matter*. Whenever I have two equally balanced epistemic reasons in favor of believing P and disbelieving P, there will be an extra epistemic reason in favor of suspending judgment on P that (Schroeder insists) must be weighed together with these two other reasons. This allows us to weigh epistemic reasons for belief via a straightforward, maximizing version of a 'combine, then compare' combinatorial function, while still reaching the verdict that I have decisive reason to suspend judgment on P in the situation just described. For if the epistemic reason to suspend judgment on P that arises as a result of Schroeder's Posit outweighs my epistemic reason to believe P and also outweighs my epistemic reason to disbelieve P, then—assuming these are the only reasons in play—I will have most epistemic reason to suspend judgment on P, and hence—given a maximizing 'combine, then compare' combinatorial function from the contributory epistemic level to the overall epistemic level—it follows that I have decisive epistemic reason to suspend judgment on P.

Schroeder himself does not develop this proposal in the service of pragmatism; he simply develops it as part of a unified account, across all domains, of "what makes reasons sufficient" (as he puts it). But it

is easy to see how an interactionist pragmatist might put Schroeder's proposal to work. Since, on Schroeder's view, epistemic reasons for belief do not (despite the appearances) exhibit prohibitive balancing but rather combine in exactly the same manner as practical reasons for belief do, it is no mystery how these two types of reasons might interact with one another to yield all-things-considered overall verdicts. In particular, an interactionist pragmatist who endorses Schroeder's Posit might propose that they interact via a maximizing 'combine, then compare' combinatorial function that takes us from the entire contributory level (both epistemic and practical) to the overall all-things-considered level.

This Schroederian form of interactionist pragmatism is an elegant view with much in its favor. Nevertheless, I have three worries about it that, as a whole, make me doubtful that the view—or other variants of it along the same lines—can be made to work.

First worry: in fact, we need something stronger than Schroeder's Posit to yield the right verdicts about cases of equally strong epistemic reasons to believe and to disbelieve. What we need instead is:

> *Schroeder's Strengthened Posit*: Whenever a subject's epistemic reasons to believe P are equally balanced with her epistemic reasons to disbelieve P, then in virtue of that she has an epistemic reason to suspend judgment on P *that is greater in strength than either the epistemic reason to believe P or the epistemic reason to disbelieve P*.

I find it very mysterious why Schroeder's Strengthened Posit would be true. Why is the reason to suspend judgment generated by two equally balanced epistemic reasons in favor of belief and disbelief always weightier than either of those reasons, *no matter how strong those two reasons are*? Either this reason to suspend must be a very weighty reason indeed, or else its weight must vary together with the weight of the balanced epistemic reasons in a way that seems, frankly, like magic. And, more generally, it is not clear what the independent motivation for Schroeder's Strengthened Posit is, short of its being what Schroeder needs in order to mimic the overall verdicts of prohibitive balancing.

Second worry: in either version of Schroeder's Posit, the epistemic reason to suspend judgment counts as a *derivative* (or *non-basic*, or *dependent*) *reason*—that is, a reason which obtains in virtue of another reason. Moreover, it is a derivative reason that is being weighed against the very reasons from which it is

derived. But it is standard to hold that, when comparing reasons in order to determine overall verdicts, we should only consider reasons that are *independent* of each of other—that is, only consider reasons which do not obtain in virtue of other reasons which serve as inputs to that same combinatorial procedure—lest we engage in an illegitimate form of double-counting (Harman 1995, 41; Parfit 2011, 59). If I have a reason to pursue some end, and in virtue of that have a reason to pursue its indispensable means, then when weighing my reasons so as to determine what, all things considered, I should do, we don't say that a course of action in which I achieve both the end and the means has two reasons in its favor: the reason for the end and the reason for the means. When combining reasons in order to determine overall verdicts, derivative reasons are just shadows of the reasons from which they are derived and should not be considered independent normative units in the weighing process.

Third—and most pressing—worry: the Schroederian variant of interactionist pragmatism we are considering has just as much trouble with cases (i), (ii), and (iii) (and with other cases of their ilk) as the double-weighing version of Reisner's view does. With Schroeder's Posit in place, cases (i) and (iii) stay the same, but in case (ii) we must now add in an extra epistemic reason to suspend judgment. After this change, our three cases look as follows:

(i)   The practical costs of my believing P are disastrously high, and I have a strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P (and no other epistemic reasons that bear on the matter).

(ii)   The practical costs of my believing P are disastrously high, and I have a strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P, an equally strong epistemic reason to believe P, and an epistemic reason to suspend judgment that is strong than either of them.

(iii)   The practical costs of my believing P are disastrously high, and I have a strong epistemic reason to disbelieve P and a much stronger epistemic reason to believe P (and no other epistemic reasons that bear on the matter).

(See Figure 6.) The Schroederian view generates the following verdicts about these cases: in case (i), I have decisive all-things-considered reason to disbelieve P (since there is some total reason in favor of disbelief,
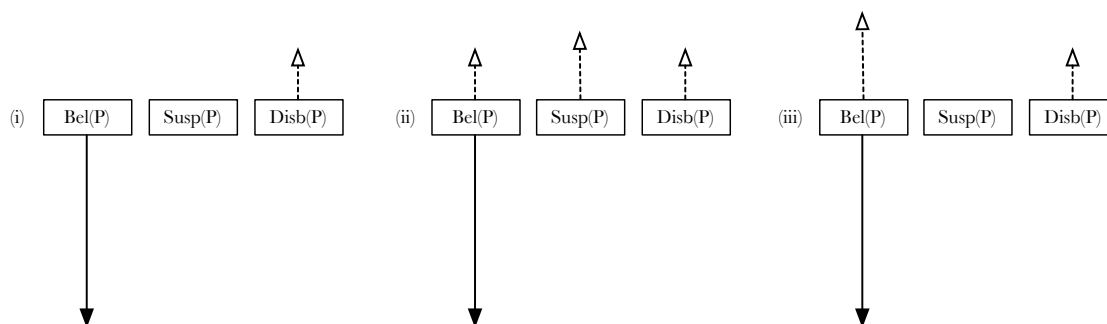
Figure 6.

no total reason in favor of suspension of judgment, and much total reason against belief); in case (ii), I have decisive all-things-considered reason to suspend judgment on P (since there is some total reason in favor of disbelief, more total reason in favor of suspension of judgment, and much total reason against belief); and in case (iii), I have decisive all-things-considered reason to disbelieve P (since there is some total reason in favor of disbelief, no total reason in favor of suspension of judgment, and much total reason against belief). These verdicts are just as problematic as the ones yielded by the double-weighing version of Reisner's view, which we can see by once again considering a series of cases that starts with a version of (i), slowly transitions into a version of (ii) as my evidence for P improves, and then finally becomes a version of (iii) as my evidence for P improves even more. During this process, disbelief in P goes from being required by the overall balance of my reasons to being forbidden and then back again to being required. Or, in other words, acquiring additional evidence for P can—implausibly—make it the case that disbelief in P becomes required, all things considered.

4.5. Summing Up

We have just surveyed four broad approaches to an interactionist combinatorial function for epistemic and practical reasons for belief. None of them were able to explain

> *the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast*: So-called 'practical reasons for belief' exhibit permissive balancing, whereas epistemic reasons for belief exhibit prohibitive balancing

without making ad-hoc posits, or yielding implausible verdicts at the overall level, or both. In all four cases,

I have not ruled out every variant of these approaches. It is open to the interactionist to go back and attempt to mend one of these proposals—adding some more duct tape here, some additional soldering iron there—in an effort to yield an extensionally adequate view that is compatible with the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast. But I hope to have made a case that it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to do so without putting forward a view that is excessively complicated in its details, and excessively arbitrary in its emendations. And at that point, my abductive argument kicks in. Take your pick. On the one hand, you can accept that there are practical reasons for belief which interact with epistemic reasons for belief while abiding by the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast via this incredibly baroque combinatorial function. Or, on the other hand, you can deny that there are practical reasons for belief and explain our Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast by appealing to

> *the Simple Explanation*: What people call 'practical reasons for belief' are really practical reasons to perform a certain action, namely the action of *bringing it about that one believes some proposition*. Since they are just practical reasons for action, like all practical reasons for action they exhibit permissive balancing.

When faced with these theoretical alternatives, I think the choice is clear: we have more abductive reason to accept the Simple Explanation than to accept interactionist pragmatism. It is better to believe that practical reasons for belief do not exist than to believe that they exist and combine with epistemic reasons for belief in such an oddly convoluted manner.

5. Against Austere Pragmatism

Austere and separatist pragmatists will complain that I have just put forward a false dilemma, since I neglected their own positions when asking my readers to choose on abductive grounds between the Simple Explanation and interactionist pragmatism. So maybe, rather than combinatorial considerations serving as the basis of an argument against practical reasons for belief as such, instead they constitute an argument for the conclusion that if one is going to countenance practical reasons for belief, one should do so *either* by being an austere pragmatist who denies that there are any reasons for belief other than

practical ones *or* by being a separatist pragmatist who allows that there are both practical and epistemic reasons for belief but denies that they combine together to determine all-things-considered verdicts at the overall level. Indeed, austere and separatist pragmatists might welcome my combinatorial argument, insofar as it gives us reason to prefer their own form of pragmatism over interactionism.

However, this reaction neglects the initial challenge with which I opened my argument. All pragmatists must either explain the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast or explain away our inclination to judge that thesis to be true. While I cannot, when deploying this challenge against austere and separatist pragmatists, sharpen that challenge by considering difficulties which arise when one attempts to find a plausible interactionist combinatorial function that is compatible with the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast, there are other ways of sharpening that challenge which make trouble for pragmatists of these non-interactionist varieties.

Let us start by considering austere pragmatism. Since austere pragmatists reject the existence of epistemic reasons for belief, they must deny the thesis I have been calling 'the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast': if there are no epistemic reasons for belief, then, all the more so, it is not the case that there are these things, epistemic reasons for belief, which prohibitively balance with one another. Nevertheless, we are, I claim, very strongly inclined to hold that the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast is true, so it is incumbent on the austere pragmatist to explain away this inclination on our part: austere pragmatism without any kind of an error theory is too radical a position to take seriously. Presumably such an error theory involves claiming that (a) practical reasons for belief permissively balance with one another, (b) what we take to be epistemic reasons for belief are in fact practical reasons for belief, and (c) whereas such reasons in fact obey permissive balancing, we mistakenly take them to obey prohibitive balancing. The trick for the austere pragmatist is to find a way of motivating (b) and (c).

A natural suggestion at this point is for the austere pragmatist to help herself to a notion of evidence. She can then insist that although evidence is not itself a source of reasons for belief, and hence there are no epistemic reasons for belief of a directly evidential sort, we almost always have a strong practical reason to form our beliefs and other doxastic attitudes in accordance with our evidence, because

it is generally useful to do so. Thus in a case in which a given subject has some evidence for proposition P and equally strong evidence against P, we mistakenly take our subject to have two equally balanced reasons of an epistemic sort (one in favor of believing P, the other in favor of disbelieving P) that prohibitively balance with one another, when really our subject has a single practical reason to suspend judgment on P, since that is what the overall balance of her evidence dictates that she do. This single practical reason to suspend can then be weighed against our subject's other practical reasons for and against belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment in a standard practical-reasons-for-action-like way. So rather than evidence being a direct (or basic) source of epistemic reasons for belief, instead evidence is an indirect (or derivative) source of practical reasons for belief. Or, more precisely (since there is a contributory versus overall distinction for evidence just as much as there is for reasons): rather than a subject's *pro tanto* evidence being a direct source of epistemic reasons for belief, instead the overall balance of a subject's evidence is an indirect source of practical reasons for belief. This explains (b) above, says our austere pragmatist. Moreover, her error theory would continue, (c) is explained by the fact that we confuse the (true) claim that one's evidence obeys prohibitive balancing with the (false) claim that one's evidence is a direct source of reasons that obey prohibitive balancing.

One problematic feature of this error theory is that it relies on the claim that beliefs can be supported by evidence, and that might seem an awkward concession for an austere pragmatist to make. Like the word 'evident' from which it is derived, 'evidence' is a normative term, and moreover it is a normative term with a distinctively epistemic flavor. It would be rather odd if beliefs can be epistemically assessed in this one manner (namely: being supported by evidence), without being epistemically assessable in other manners (such as: being supported by epistemic reasons). Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how our austere pragmatist might construct her error theory without appealing to something like evidence: somewhere in the story there must be some widget whose prohibitive-balancing-like behavior we confuse with the balancing behavior of (what we take to be) epistemic reasons, and if that widget is not itself evidence, it is something very much like evidence.

Moreover, the close parallel between the role of evidence in the austere pragmatist's error theory

and the role of epistemic reasons in the theories of her opponents points the way to a more serious problem. Once we observe this parallel, the austere pragmatist's error theory should feel eerily familiar. That's because her error theory is little more than a notational variant of the double-weighing version of Reisner's proposal that we considered earlier. According to the double-weighing proposal, first we weigh the epistemic reasons that bear on a belief and its doxastic alternatives in a manner that is compatible with prohibitive balancing. This process yields a reason in favor of its winner that we then feed into a second weighing process, in which that new reason is weighed against the practical reasons that bear on the belief and its doxastic alternatives in a manner that is compatible with permissive balancing. According to the austere pragmatist's error theory, first we weigh the *pro tanto* evidence that bears on a belief and its doxastic alternatives in a manner that is compatible with prohibitive balancing. This process yields a reason in favor of its winner that we then feed into a second weighing process, in which that new reason is weighed against the practical reasons that bear on the belief and its doxastic alternatives in a manner that is compatible with permissive balancing. There are only two differences here. First, the double-weighing interactionist deems the initial weighing process to involve the weighing of *epistemic reasons*, whereas the austere pragmatist deems the initial weighing process to involve the weighing of *evidence*. And, second, the double-weighing interactionist deems the results of the final weighing process to be verdicts about what doxastic attitudes one has overall *all-things-considered* reason to hold, whereas the austere pragmatist deems the results of the final weighing process to be verdicts about what doxastic attitudes one has overall *practical* reason to hold.

These similarities mean that the austere pragmatist's error theory is susceptible to the same objections we levied earlier against the double-weighing proposal. In particular, our trio of cases (i), (ii), and (iii) cause problems here as well.[17] Consider the following variants of those cases:

(i′)   Something terrible will happen if I believe P, and I have some strong *pro tanto* evidence against P (and no other evidence that bears on the matter).

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[17] I continue to utilize versions of these three cases for familiarity's sake, but really the austere pragmatist (and, for that matter, the double-weighing interactionist) has trouble with any number of cases in which the balancing behavior of one's evidence crosscuts with the balancing behavior of the practical reasons that are on the scene.

(ii′)   Something terrible will happen if I believe P, and I have some strong *pro tanto* evidence against P and some equally strong *pro tanto* evidence for P (and no other evidence that bears on the matter).

(iii′)   Something terrible will happen if I believe P, and I have some strong *pro tanto* evidence against P and some much stronger *pro tanto* evidence for P (and no other evidence that bears on the matter).[18]

As before, let us suppose that I start in a version of case (i′) which continuously changes over time first into a version of (ii′) and then into a version of (iii′), all while I steadfastly maintain an attitude of disbelief toward P. The austere pragmatist's error theory yields the result that, as my evidential situation with regard to P steadily improves over time, my disbelief in P goes from being permitted, to being forbidden, and then back to being permitted by the overall balance of my practical reasons. As before, these are excessively odd verdicts, especially that final transition. How can my disbelief in P go from being forbidden to being permitted by all of the reasons that the austere pragmatist countenances, when the only relevant change is that I have gained some evidence for P? How can acquiring evidence for some proposition make it okay—even from a purely practical perspective—to disbelieve that proposition, when nothing else of normative significance in the situation changes over time?

     More generally, once we realize that the error theory we have been considering is structurally identical to the double-weighing variant of Reisner's proposal, we can see that the fortunes of austere pragmatism are closely tied to those of interactionist pragmatism. Indeed, for just about any error theory the austere pragmatism might propose as a way of explaining away our inclination to judge that the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast is true, it is possible to reverse engineer an analogous interactionist combinatorial function which is compatible with the truth of that combinatorial contrast. Thus, insofar as all of these interactionist combinatorial functions either make ad-hoc posits, or yield implausible overall verdicts, or both, the austere pragmatist's error theory faces parallel objections. In short, austere

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[18]   In all three of these cases, let us assume that there are no other sources of practical reasons for or against belief, disbelief, or suspension of judgment other than those mentioned in the description of each case (or, if there are such sources, let us assume that the additional reasons they provide all cancel each other out).

pragmatists have just as much trouble explaining away the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast as interactionists have accounting for it.

6. Against Separatist Pragmatism

This leaves one last form of pragmatism for us to consider: separatism. Recall that, according to separatists, there are both epistemic and practical reasons for belief, but they do not combine into overall verdicts about which doxastic attitudes one has all-thing-considered reason to hold.[19] Because separatists deny that there is a combinatorial function taking us from the epistemic and practical reasons present in a situation to the verdicts about what, all things considered, one has sufficient or decisive reason *sans phrase* to believe in that situation, they do not face the difficulties that beset interactionists when they attempt to find a plausible combinatorial function of that sort. And because separatists can accept the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast, they need not face the difficulties that beset austere pragmatists when they attempt to construct an error theory for our inclination to judge that thesis to be true. But separatists are not entirely in the clear.

According to separatists, there are these two normative sources, one practical, the other epistemic, and they both generate bona-fide reasons for belief. Thus separatists (assuming they do not go the error-theory route with regard to the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast) owe us an explanation of why the reasons generated by one of these sources exhibit permissive balancing, whereas the reasons generated by the other exhibit prohibitive balancing. Separatists cannot rest this explanation on anything having to do with the types of objects at which those reasons are directed, since—unlike anti-pragmatists who appeal to the Simple Explanation—they hold that both kinds of reasons are directed at the same type of object, viz. belief and its doxastic alternatives. And separatists cannot rest this explanation on anything having to do with the way in which epistemic and practical normativity interacts with one another, since—unlike interactionists—they deny that there is any combinatorial commingling between practical and epistemic

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[19] At this point, I should clear up a potential confusion. Separatism is *not* the same as the view that there are both epistemic and practical reasons for belief, but their weights are always incomparable, incommensurable, or otherwise not weighable with one another. That latter view is compatible with separatism, but also compatible with interactionism. For example, consider an interactionist view on which a subject has sufficient all-things-considered reason to hold some doxastic attitude if and only if either (a) the subject has sufficient epistemic reason to hold it, or (b) the subject has sufficient practical reason to hold it. Such a form of interactionism might be true even if the weights of epistemic and practical reasons for belief are never comparable.

reasons for belief. So presumably separatists must hold that there is just something about epistemic normativity itself that makes the reasons it generates obey prohibitive balancing, and there is just something about practical normativity itself that makes the reasons it generates obey permissive balancing.

The problem, though, is that if we think of these normative sources as generating reasons directed at objects of varying types—where these objects include actions as well as beliefs—then this separatist explanation of the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast is unsustainable. We can see this by considering the flipside of the issue that has been our main concern in this essay. So far we have been focusing on the question "Do there exist practical reasons for belief?" But we can also ask, "Do there exist epistemic reasons for action?"

Although the first of these questions has been widely discussed by contemporary philosophers, the second question is generally overlooked.[20] However, that second question deserves greater attention than it has received. In particular, most separatists (and, for that matter, most interactionists) are committed not just to the existence of reasons for belief of a distinctively practical sort, but also to the existence of reasons for action of a distinctively epistemic sort. That's because whatever separatists think makes it the case that both practical and epistemic normativity can glom onto beliefs (leading to practical as well as epistemic reasons for belief) is also likely to make it the case that both types of normativity can glom onto actions (leading to epistemic as well as practical reasons for action). For example, here is one natural account of how there can be both epistemic and practical reasons for belief. First we assume a teleological conception of reasons, according to which all (normative) reasons have their basis in the promotion of value. Then we posit a distinction in value between those values that are epistemic in nature and those that are practical in nature: maybe the epistemically valuable states of affairs are ones in which subjects have true beliefs, or evidentially-supported doxastic attitudes, or knowledge; maybe the practically valuable states of affairs are ones in which agents experience pleasure, or satisfy some select subset of their desires, or live together in harmony; the details here don't much matter. Finally we say that practical reasons to believe P are those which have their basis in the fact that believing P would promote a

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[20] Not entirely overlooked, though: see Hall and Johnson 1998, Feldman 2002, Booth 2006, and Rowbottom 2008.

practically valuable state of affairs, whereas epistemic reasons to believe P are those which have their basis in the fact that believing P would promote an epistemically valuable state of affairs. It follows from this account that there will also be a distinction between practical and epistemic reasons *for action*: practical reasons to perform the action of ϕ-ing are those generated by the fact that ϕ-ing would promote a practically valuable state of affairs, whereas epistemic reasons to perform the action of ϕ-ing are those generated by the fact that ϕ-ing would promote an epistemically valuable state of affairs. A similar result follows for most other explanations of how there can be both epistemic and practical reasons for belief: whatever makes it the case that practical normativity can attach itself to belief (thus resulting in reasons for belief of a practical kind) will also make it the case that epistemic normativity can attach itself to action (thus yielding reasons for action of an epistemic sort).

What might such epistemic reasons for action look like? Of course the details will vary depending on our separatist's account of the ultimate basis of epistemic reasons, but some possible epistemic reasons for action might include:

- reasons to go to the library and read up on some subject (Booth 2006, 133), or to consult a website devoted to the topic, or to ask a knowledgeable friend about it;

- reasons to enroll in a critical thinking course (Feldman 2002, 369), or to get enough sleep (ibid., 372), or to keep oneself sufficiently caffeinated, so as to make it more likely that one will respond to one's evidence in the right way;

- reasons to gather more evidence on some question (Hall and Johnston 1998), or to continue to deliberate about it (if that is an action), or to debate the issue with intelligent interlocutors.

Not all separatists will be committed to all of these being epistemic reasons for action, but most will be committed to some.

But here is the crucial thing: all of these candidates for epistemic reasons for action are plausibly ones that obey permissive balancing. If I am deciding whether to go to two equally good libraries to read up on the rules for presidential impeachment, and if there are no other epistemic reasons for action on the

scene, then plausibly I am permitted by the overall balance of my epistemic reasons to go to the first library and also permitted to go to the second. Similarly, if I have epistemic reason to drink a cup of the French roast and equally strong epistemic reason to drink a cup of the Sumatra blend, because they both have the same caffeine content and hence will increase my cognitive functioning to the same degree, and if there are no other epistemic reasons for or against either of these actions or their alternatives, then plausibly I have sufficient epistemic reason to drink either. And so on: in all of these cases, it is not as if, when faced with these equally balanced epistemic reasons for two incompatible actions, I am instead required to do something else analogous to suspending judgment. (What would that analogue even be?) Epistemic reasons for action, if such things exist, exhibit permissive balancing.

Thus we have four types of reasons to consider, and their balancing behaviors are as follows:

	. . . for action	*. . . for belief*
practical reasons . . .	permissive balancing	permissive balancing
epistemic reasons . . .	permissive balancing	prohibitive balancing

So it cannot be the case, as our separatist would have us believe, that epistemic normativity by its very nature gives rise to reasons that prohibitively balance with one another, whereas practical normativity by its very nature gives rise to reasons that permissively balance with one another. Once we allow that a given source of reasons can affix to both actions and beliefs, it is just not true that each source leads to its own distinctive balancing behavior.

This leaves one last option for separatists: to deny that there are such things as epistemic reasons for action. Moreover, it might appear that at least one separatist is on record as adhering to such a view. Richard Feldman countenances the existence of both epistemic and practical reasons for belief (2002, 375–76), denies that all-things-considered verdicts at the overall level make sense (2000, 191–94), and explicitly argues against the existence of some candidates for epistemic reasons for action, namely those involving reasons of an epistemic sort to gather more evidence (2002, 381–82). However, on closer inspection, Feldman does not avoid the argument I have just given against separatism, because while he does reject one kind of epistemic reason for action—namely, putative epistemic reasons to perform those

actions that change one's evidential situation for the better—he allows that there exist epistemic reasons for action of a different kind—namely, putative epistemic reasons to perform those actions that improve one's chances of responding in the appropriate way to whatever evidential situation one might happen to be in. For instance, Feldman grants that we may well have epistemic reasons to enroll in critical reasoning courses, if it turns out that such classes are effective at teaching us how to form the attitudes merited by our evidence (2002, 380). And, indeed, Feldman appears to be committed to this result. Feldman's preferred account of what distinguishes epistemic from practical reasons (or, in his terms, what distinguishes epistemic *prima facie* duties from moral or prudential ones) is that epistemic reasons have their source in the promotion of epistemic success (2002, 376), where epistemic success consists in having (epistemically) justified doxastic attitudes (2002, 380). Given Feldman's additional commitment to epistemic justification being a matter of having doxastic attitudes that fit one's evidence (Conee and Feldman 2004), it follows that he is committed to us having reasons of a distinctively epistemic variety in favor of any actions that promote our forming and maintaining doxastic attitudes that fit our evidence. But such reasons permissively balance with one another. So Feldman's brand of separatism is vulnerable to my argument as well.

Now perhaps a different sort of separatist could endorse an account of the ultimate grounds of practical and epistemic reasons, respectively, on which the former generates both reasons for action and reasons for belief, but the latter generates only reasons for belief. However, I have serious doubts that this is a stable position. There are two difficulties here. The first is defending a story about the source of epistemic reasons on which that relation sticks to beliefs but not to actions; this was the hurdle that tripped up Feldman. The second difficulty is defending a story about the source of practical reasons on which that relation sticks to both actions and beliefs without sticking to everything else. In other words, separatists want to motivate the idea that there are practical reasons for action and practical reasons for belief, perhaps because of the benefits that accrue to the agent as a result of those actions and beliefs, without also being committed to the existence of practical reasons that count in favor of every state or process or entity that benefits the agent in question. Consider the following states: (a) my experiencing pleasure;

(b) my knowing P; (c) your believing P. Each of these states might be ones that benefit me. But it is not plausible that these benefits make it the case that I have a practical reason that counts in favor of my having that pleasurable experience, or that counts in favor of my knowing P, or that counts in favor of your (not my) believing P. These are not the sorts of states for which I can have a reason, much less a reason of a distinctively practical sort. So it is not the mere fact that my believing P would benefit me which makes it the case that I have a practical reason to believe P; we must appeal to something more in order to secure that result, something which makes my belief the sort of state that can be the object of a practical reason. But finding that something more is a particularly difficult task for separatists, since they view practical and epistemic reasons as non-overlapping magisteria that are completely independent of one another. So separatists cannot say that there can be practical reasons favoring one's own beliefs because in general there can be reasons—both epistemic and otherwise—favoring such states. For separatists, that there can be epistemic reasons favoring one's own beliefs tells us nothing about whether there can be practical reasons favoring such states. Thus separatists need a separate story, as it were, about why the epistemic-reason relation and the practical-reason relation each comes customized so that it can take beliefs in the object slot. And, as already mentioned, they also need to explain why the second of these relations but not the first can, in addition, fit actions into its object slot. The prospects of succeeding in all of these explanatory tasks at the same time strike me as excessively dim.

7. Acting vs. Wanting vs. Trying vs. Intending

This completes my main case against pragmatism. But there is one loose end I would also like to tie up. In particular, I want to show how my argumentative strategy can help settle a certain internecine dispute among anti-pragmatists.

Anti-pragmatists are united in their denial of the existence of practical reasons for belief, but divided over what they offer in their place. Most anti-pragmatists say that putative practical reasons for belief are really something else. According to the Simple Explanation I have been advocating, cases in which pragmatists take there to be a practical reason for me to believe P are in fact cases in which I have a

certain reason for action, namely *a reason to bring it about that I believe P.*[21] However, that is not the only option. Some anti-pragmatists hold that in addition—or instead—such cases are ones in which I have *a reason to want to believe P.* Others hold them to be cases in which I have *a reason to try to believe P.* And others still hold them to be cases in which I have *a reason to intend to believe P.* So which is it? Are would-be practical reasons for belief really reasons to act, reasons to want, reasons to try, reasons to intend, or some combination thereof?

Other recent arguments against pragmatism—such as the widely discussed arguments due to Thomas Kelly (2002) and Nishi Shah (2006)—give us no guidance here: they provide grounds to doubt the existence of practical reasons for belief, without offering us any resources for choosing among these hypotheses about what there is instead. This perhaps explains why there is such a diversity of opinion among anti-pragmatists on this issue.[22] It might also explain why anti-pragmatists often select a seemingly

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[21] Why have I been characterizing the relevant reason for action in this way, rather than characterizing it as *a reason to cause myself to believe P*, as some anti-pragmatists do (see Kelly 2002, 171; Parfit 2011, 51)? Answer: the bringing-it-about formulation is superior to the causing formulation because we want to allow for cases in which I come to believe P through constitutive, rather than causal, means. (For instance, suppose—as some action theorists hold—that my intentionally performing the action of ϕ-ing is partially constituted by my believing that it is possible for me to ϕ. Then if you offer me \$1,000 to believe that it is possible for me to rub my tummy while counting to 5, I might cash in on your prize by intentionally rubbing my tummy while counting to 5, which would bring it about that I have the prize-winning belief without causing me to have that belief.) To handle cases in which I already believe P, and thus cannot bring it about that I believe P, it might be better yet to characterize the relevant reason to act as *a reason to see to it that I believe P*, or perhaps *a reason to get myself to either come to or continue to believe P*. But as these turns of phrase are awkward, I will stick to the simpler bringing-it-about formulation in the main text.

[22] To give you a sense of that diversity, here is a sampling of recent anti-pragmatist proposals about what would-be practical reasons for belief instead are:

	reasons to act	reasons to want	reasons to try	reasons to intend
Gibbard 1990, 37		√		
Parfit 2001, 24		√	√	
Piller 2001, 206*	√			√
Kelly 2002, 171	√			
Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004, 412*		√	√	
Hieronymi 2005, 441*		√	√	
Kolodny 2005, 550–51	√	√		
Piller 2006, 163*			√	
Shah 2006, 495–98	√			√
Danielsson & Olson 2007, 513*	√			
Persson 2007, 1		√	√	√
Reisner 2009, 268–69*	√		√	
Skorupski 2010, 87–88	√			
Parfit 2011, 51	√	√		
Way 2012, 492	√	√		
Rinard 2015, 211*				√
Cohen 2016, 428	√	√		√
Howard 2016, 54*		√	√	
Leary 2017, 532*	√	√		

Note that I use a '*' to designate authors who are not themselves anti-pragmatists, but rather are characterizing the position in order to critique it. (Thanks to Chris Howard for help in assembling this chart.)

random subset of the four options I have mentioned and just pronounce that what people take to be practical reasons for belief are really those things, without telling us why they have selected their preferred subset of the relevant options. One advantage of the argumentative strategy I have been pursuing in this essay, though, is that it does provide us with a way of choosing among these options. Not only do combinatorial considerations tell against the idea that there are practical reasons for belief, but moreover they tell against the hypothesis that what appear to be practical reasons to believe P are in fact reasons either to want or to try to believe P, and perhaps (depending on one's other commitments) also tell against the hypothesis they are in fact reasons to intend to believe P.

Let us start with reasons to desire or want (I use those terms synonymously), since that case will serve as a basis for the others. Recall that my challenge to pragmatists was to offer an explanation of the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast that we have more abductive reason to take to be true than the Simple Explanation, according to which what people call 'practical reasons to believe (or disbelieve) P' are really practical reasons to bring it about that one believes (or disbelieves) P. Can anti-pragmatists who prefer to think of would-be practical reasons for belief as reasons to desire rather than reasons for action endorse the following instead of the Simple Explanation?

> *the Desired Explanation*: What people call 'practical reasons to believe (or disbelieve) P' are really reasons to desire that one believes (or disbelieves) P. Since they are just reasons to desire, like all reasons to desire they exhibit permissive balancing.

No, they cannot. The problem is that the sorts of reasons to which this explanation appeals do not permissively balance with one another.

Suppose two of my friends are running against each other in an election, and only one of them can win. Let us also suppose, somewhat artificially, that I am exactly equally good friends with both, that they are exactly equally qualified for the position, and so on. Finally, suppose that all the other candidates would be an unmitigated disaster if elected. Assuming there are such things as reasons for desires, then in this case my reasons to want my first friend to win the election are equally balanced with my reasons to want my second friend to win the election. Do these two sets of reasons permissively balance with each

other at the overall level? If they did, then I would be merely permitted (i.e. permitted but not required) by the overall balance of my reasons to desire that my first friend win and also merely permitted to desire that my second friend win. But that is the wrong verdict. I would be a terrible friend if I wanted one of my friends to win but was indifferent toward the other's winning. Surely my friendship-derived reasons require me to have *both* a desire that my first friend win *and* a desire that my second friend win, even though it is not possible for the two of them to do so at the same time. Similarly, if I offer you $1,000 to believe O (our proposition about the number of books in my office) and also $1,000 to disbelieve O, and if that incentive gives rise to a reason for you to desire that you believe O and also a reason to desire that you disbelieve O, it would be an affront to your reasons if you were to form one of these desires but not the other; instead, you should desire both eventualities equally, assuming there are no other reasons in play. (This becomes all the more clear if we make something morally significant turn on whether you have that $1,000.) Thus anti-pragmatists can't diagnose away our inclination to judge that, in this situation, you have sufficient practical reason to believe O and also sufficient practical reason to believe O by insisting that, instead, you have sufficient reason to desire that you believe O and also sufficient reason to desire that you disbelieve O. You have decisive, not sufficient, reason to hold each desire. The Desired Explanation does not work.[23]

A worry now arises, though. Perhaps we should reexamine our initial temptation to say that (what we take to be) practical reasons for belief permissively balance in the same way that practical reasons for action permissively balance. Up to now I have been implicitly assuming that, in the case in which I give you money if you believe O and also if you disbelieve O, having both attitudes at the same time is not an alternative available to you. However, let us now relax that assumption. (Maybe you have a convenient believe-and-disbelieve-O pill on hand.) Let us also suppose that the financial incentives I offer you for believing O and disbelieving O are independent of one another, so if you manage to get yourself to hold

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[23]   Does this mean that reasons to desire do not obey permissive or prohibitive balancing, but instead exhibit a third type of balancing behavior that we might call 'mandatory balancing'? Not necessarily. For what makes the examples we have just considered work the way they do is the fact that desiring that p and desiring that q are not alternatives to one another, even when those desires cannot be jointly satisfied. But permissive and prohibitive balancing are phenomena that arise when the reasons in favor of one action or attitude are equally balanced with the reasons in favor of *an alternative to that action or attitude*. So, for all I have said, it may well be that reasons to desire display balancing of a permissive or prohibitive sort.

both attitudes at once, I will give you $2,000, rather than the $1,000 you would get for each. It is plausible that, in this variant of our case, the overall balance of your so-called 'practical reasons for belief' *requires* you *both* to believe O *and* to disbelieve O: you have decisive reason of that sort with regard to belief in O, and also decisive reason of that sort with regard to disbelief in O. Does this cause trouble for my claim that putative practical reasons for belief permissively balance with one another in cases of this sort, as well as my claim that the Simple Explanation can account for our verdicts about these cases? No, it doesn't. First, even if this particular variant of our financial-incentives case is not one featuring permissively balanced would-be practical reasons for belief, it is still true that *other* variants of that case (for instance, ones in which you cannot bring it about that you both believe and disbelieve O) *do* feature permissively balanced would-be practical reasons for belief. And, second, the Simple Explanation is perfectly able to account for our verdicts about the variant of our financial-incentives case we are now considering, in which you get $2,000 for both believing and disbelieving O and can bring this about. For given that it is possible for you to get yourself to believe O while also disbelieving O, *bringing it about that you believe O* is not, in this situation, a practical alternative to *bringing it about that you disbelieve O*. So the Simple Explanation easily yields the verdict that you have decisive reason to bring it about that you believe O and also decisive reason to bring it about that you disbelieve O, without even needing to rely on the fact that practical reasons for action permissively balance when directed at actions that are alternatives of each other: each action has a strong reason in its favor and, by stipulation, no reasons against nor any reasons for or against any of its alternatives.

So whereas it might have at first appeared that the Desired Explanation was better positioned than the Simple Explanation to explain the version of the financial-incentives case we just considered, that appearance was mistaken. Moreover, as we continue to vary our financial-incentives case while holding constant the possibility that you both believe O and disbelieve O, the Simple Explanation continues to yield verdicts at the overall level which mimic the verdicts pragmatists would give. For example, if we switch to a version of the case in which I offer you $1,000 if you believe O without disbelieving O and $1,000 if you disbelieve O without believing O, then the Simple Explanation yields the verdict that you

have sufficient reason to bring it about that you believe-but-don't-disbelieve O and also sufficient reason to bring it about that you disbelieve-but-don't-believe O, since now we are back to considering two actions that are alternatives. But the Desired Explanation lacks this flexibility. In every version of our financial-incentives case, it yields the verdict that you have decisive reason to desire each eventuality that results in you getting some money (if we are talking about overall verdicts with regard to on/off desire), and decisive reason to most desire each eventuality that results in you getting the most money possible (if we are talking about overall verdicts with regard to degree of desire). These verdicts at the overall level are nothing like the pragmatist's verdicts about such cases.

A similar problem faces anti-pragmatists who insist that would-be practical reasons to believe some proposition are in fact reasons to try to believe that proposition. It is almost never the case that trying to believe P is an alternative to trying to disbelieve P. (At this very instant I am trying both to believe that Vladimir Putin is scratching his nose right now and to disbelieve this proposition—without much success in either case, I might add.) So anti-pragmatists cannot account for the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast by endorsing

> *the Trying Explanation*: What people call 'practical reasons to believe (or disbelieve) P' are really reasons to try to believe (or disbelieve) P. Since they are just reasons to try, like all reasons to try they exhibit permissive balancing.

Even if it is true that two equally strong reasons to try *that favor alternative options* permissively balance with one another, the sorts of reasons to try that correspond to alleged practical reasons for belief are not of this sort: they favor options that fail to be alternatives. For this reason, the overall verdicts generated by the Trying Explanation parallel those generated by the Desired Explanation; in particular, we get decisive-reason verdicts in many cases in which we would need to get sufficient-reason verdicts in order to explain away our inclination to make pragmatist judgments about such cases.

Finally, I turn to the case of reasons for intention. This case is the most difficult, since the nature of reasons to intend is a fraught topic. One complication concerns the relationship between reasons for action and reason for intention: some authors think all so-called 'reasons for action' are really reasons to

intend to perform the relevant action (Scanlon 1998, 21); other authors think that although reasons to act are distinct from reasons to intend, a reason to perform the action of ϕ-ing always generates a derivative reason to intend to ϕ (Way 2012); and yet other authors deny this thesis (Heuer 2018). A second complication concerns the alternatives to intending: some authors think there is such a thing as "suspension of intention" with regard to ϕ-ing, where this is not the same as neither intending to ϕ nor intending to not-ϕ, but rather involves being committedly neutral on the issue of whether to ϕ.

I do not wish to wade into these controversies here.[24] So instead I will offer a conditional argument. Suppose the following are the case: (a) intending to ϕ and intending to ψ are alternatives to one another just when it is not possible to ϕ and to ψ at the same time; and (b) reasons to intend obey permissive balancing. Then the following hypothesis will work just as well as the Simple Explanation at explaining the Unfamiliar Combinatorial Contrast:

> *the Intended Explanation*: What people call 'practical reasons to believe (or disbelieve) P' are really reasons to intend to believe (or disbelieve) P. Since they are just reasons to intend, like all reasons to intend they exhibit permissive balancing.

However, if (a) is false, perhaps because intending to ϕ and intending to ψ are alternatives to one another only when it is not possible *to intend* to ϕ and *to intend* to ψ at the same time, then we will encounter the same difficulties that beset the Desired and Trying Explanations. And if (b) is false, perhaps because reasons to intend obey a version of prohibitive balancing in which suspension of intention plays the role of suspension of judgment, then the Intended Explanation fails as well, since the second half of that

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[24] Can I really be so non-committal? For instance, if there is such a thing as suspension of intention, what are we to make of my frequent claim that nothing stands to action as suspension of judgment stands to belief? Now, as it turns out, I am skeptical that suspension of intention is a genuine attitude. But even if such an attitude does exist, that would not undermine my frequent claim, for suspension of intention would at most be something that stands *to intention* as suspension of judgment stands to belief, not something that stands *to action* in that way.

For the purposes of my argument in the main text, I cannot accept that (i) all putative reasons for action are really reasons to intend, and (ii) reasons to intend do not obey permissive balancing. But I am fine denying that combination of views, since it amounts to a denial of the claim that reasons in the practical sphere permissively balance with one another, and hence amounts to a denial of the Familiar Combinatorial Contrast.

For the purposes of the explanation of the Familiar Combinatorial Contrast that I sketched in n. 8, I do need to be somewhat more committal: that explanation would require repair (or at least supplementation) if (iii) there is such a thing as suspension of intention, and (iv) reasons to intend obey permissive balancing. However, as I already said, I am skeptical of (iii), and anyway my main argument in this essay does not depend on the success of the explanation I broached in n. 8.

explanation will not come out true. On the other hand, if both (a) and (b) hold, then for all I have argued in this essay, putative practical reasons for belief may well be reasons to intend to believe (although I myself favor a view on which they are exclusively reasons for action of a certain sort).

8. Conclusion

I have just presented an abductive argument against the existence of practical reasons for belief. On the picture I prefer, the 'epistemic' in 'epistemic reasons for belief' and the 'practical' in 'practical reasons for action' are both redundant: all reasons for belief are epistemic, and epistemic reasons only bear on belief (and other doxastic attitudes), whereas all reasons for action are practical, and practical reasons only bear on action (and, perhaps, certain attitudes intimately related to action, such as intention). I have not fully defended that picture here; for example, I have not explicitly argued against the existence of epistemic reasons for action, and I have not explicitly argued against the existence of practical reasons for attitudes such as fear or admiration. But my combinatorial argument in this essay does help establish one central portion of that picture

I want to end by noting an important upshot of the picture I have partially motivated in this essay. If I am right that all and only reasons for belief are epistemic, and all and only reasons for action (and, perhaps, for action-related attitudes such as intention) are practical, then this provides us with a simple answer to an otherwise very difficult question, namely:

(Q)   What characterizes the difference between epistemic and practical normativity?

For instance, what distinguishes epistemic reasons from other types of reasons? What distinguishes epistemic value from other types of value? What distinguishes epistemic justification from other types of justification? Although I lack the space to argue this here, I believe that most of the standard accounts of the nature of epistemic normativity that tie it to some privileged ground for epistemic modes of assessment—such as evidence, or knowledge, or the promotion of true belief or accurate credence—all fail. However, if the picture to which I am attracted is correct, this need not bother us, since we can instead answer (Q) as follows:

(A)   Epistemic and practical normativity are individuated *by their objects of assessment*: the normative assessment of belief (and other doxastic attitudes) is epistemic normativity, and the normative assessment of action is practical normativity.[25]

So, on this view, epistemic normativity is perhaps more aptly described as 'doxastic normativity', and epistemic reasons are perhaps more aptly described as 'doxastic reasons'. I prefer, though, an older term that seems to have fallen out of fashion of late: rather than distinguishing epistemic and practical reasons, we can draw a distinction between theoretical and practical reasons.[26]

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[25] In making this proposal, I leave it open whether there are other types of normativity beyond these two that are individuated by their own distinctive objects of assessment.

[26] I presented versions of this essay at the 2015 Penn Reasons and Foundations in Epistemology Conference at the University of Pennsylvania, at the 2016 Northwestern–Notre Dame Graduate Epistemology Conference, at the 2016 Spring Colloquium on Epistemic vs. Practical Normativity at the University of Michigan, at the 2017 Northern New England Workshop in Ethics and Epistemology at the University of Vermont, in a graduate seminar at Harvard University on Norms of Belief co-taught with Susanna Rinard, and as colloquia talks at CUNY Graduate Center and the University of Miami. I am grateful to all participants and audience members for their feedback, especially Rachel Achs, Sara Aronowitz, Lance Aschliman, Magdalena Balcerak Jackson, Rima Basu, Berit Brogaard, Jorah Dannenberg, Marc-Kevin Daoust, Louis deRosset, Samuel Dishaw, Daniel Drucker, Anna Edmonds (who was my commentator at the University of Michigan), Zachary Gabor, Zoe Jenkin, James M. Joyce, Sarah Moss, Kate Nolfi, David Papineau, David Plunkett (who was my commentator at the University of Vermont), Peter Railton, Mark Schroeder, Harvey Siegel, Michael Slote, Julia Staffel, David Thorstad, Ralph Wedgwood, and Matthew Weiner. Special thanks go to David DiDomenico, Chris Howard, Stephanie Leary, Conor McHugh, Neil Mehta, Ram Neta, Andrew Reisner, Susanna Rinard, Jacob Rosen, Jonathan Way, and an anonymous referee for written comments that significantly improved the paper, and to Paul Marcucilli and Jonathan Vogel for two crucial conversations.

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