

Kieran Britt

Against Equal Treatment

Honors Thesis in Philosophy

Defended on March 18th, 2020

Advisor: Professor Matthias Steup (Philosophy)

Honors Council Representative: Professor Iskra Fileva
(Philosophy)

Outside Reader: Professor Benjamin Hale (Environmental
Studies)

University of Colorado, Boulder

Against Equal Treatment

In her papers “No Exception for Belief” and “Equal Treatment for Belief”, Susanna Rinard defends a view she calls “Equal Treatment” (ET).¹ ET is the thesis that, “whatever general principles govern what one should do, these same general principles also govern what one should believe, and vice versa.”² Rinard intends ET to be an alternative to Evidentialism – roughly speaking, the view that one’s evidence is the sole criterion that determines what one should believe. In this paper, I have three aims: (i) to explicate the nature and consequences of ET, (ii) to defend a version of Evidentialism against Rinard’s arguments, and (iii) to raise some problems for ET. I will conclude that ET is not a viable competitor for Evidentialism.

The Motivation for Equal Treatment and Why it Matters

Before launching into a discussion of the particulars of ET or its competitors, it will be worth giving a brief overview of what ET has going for it, and why anyone would be inclined to hold it. As I stated above, ET can be roughly defined as, “whatever general principles govern what one should do, these same general principles also govern what one should believe, and vice versa.”³ More precisely, Rinard intends this thesis only for a specific sense of ‘should’, which I will unpack in a later section. But it is important to know what the truth of ET affects. People frequently fret over what they should do, and what they should believe. It is commonly understood that the things that determine what one should do/believe are the reasons for and against one’s options. Whether you should go out to lunch or stay home depends on your reasons for each: if you are strongly craving a particular entrée from a certain restaurant, and this craving outweighs your desire to not spend money this week, you have the strongest reasons to go out to said restaurant. All else equal, it would be customary then to say that you *should* go out to said restaurant.

Reasons can be divided into different types. The two reasons I just listed for and against going out to lunch are called *prudential* reasons. These, along with *moral* reasons (e.g. the wrongness of hitting your spouse), constitute *practical* reasons. Practical reasons are commonly thought to be the types of reasons one has for actions. There are also *epistemic* reasons, such as one’s evidence for a given proposition. Your visual experience of a red chair is an epistemic reason to believe that there is a red chair in front of you. It is commonly thought that epistemic reasons are one’s reasons for belief, but not for action, while one’s

¹ Rinard 2017, pp. 121-43. Also, Rinard 2019, pp. 1923-1950.

² Rinard 2019, p. 1925. This characterization is accurate for Rinard 2019. Rinard 2017 defines Equal Treatment slightly differently. I will explicate the differences in a later section.

³ *Ibid.*

practical reasons are one's reasons for action, but not for belief. Rinard, however, argues that the types of reasons which determine what one should do are the exact same types as those that determine what one should believe; specifically, that one only has practical reasons to do or believe anything. If this is correct, then evidence plays a very different role in belief than is often thought. Epistemic reasons would not exist at all, and the common view that the evidence one has for a given proposition constitutes a reason to believe said proposition (or not believe it) would be mistaken.

Why might one hold such a view? Most of Rinard's current work is an attempt to defend what she calls "Robust Pragmatism," which is the view that only practical considerations constitute genuine reasons for belief, and that any practical consideration in favor of believing constitutes a reason to believe.⁴ As I will discuss later, ET and Robust Pragmatism are slightly different, as Robust Pragmatism is only one of multiple ET compatible theses. But Robust Pragmatism promises to be ontologically simpler and more unified than Pragmatism simpliciter, while retaining all of Pragmatism's benefits. And, if ET is correct, then Robust Pragmatism may be the most palatable of all ET compatible theses.

What makes Robust Pragmatism an attractive view? Robust Pragmatism offers intuitive solutions to certain difficult questions for the evidentialist. Evidentialists do not have a simple answer to the question "what should I believe?" in cases where one's evidence for a proposition is low, but the benefits of believing it are high. For instance, if a person has a terminal illness, and believing that they will get well increases the likelihood that they will by a significant margin, the pragmatist may simply say that the person ought to believe whatever will make them better. The evidentialist cannot say this, at least not so easily.

Robust Pragmatism also cuts down on the types of reasons that there are, compared to other types of Pragmatism which may allow non-pragmatic reasons for belief. But it's worth noting that in doing so, Robust Pragmatism does not eschew evidence entirely: Robust Pragmatism still recommends believing according to one's evidence in a wide variety of cases, because it is usually in one's interest to believe according to one's evidence. Rather, according to Robust Pragmatism, evidence is never a reason to believe by itself; one must also have overriding practical reasons in favor of a given belief.⁵

Despite this attractiveness, I believe that Robust Pragmatism, and ET in general, are deeply and irresolvably flawed. In the next sections, I

⁴ Rinard 2015, p. 217.

⁵ Rinard gives this argument herself multiple times. See Rinard 2015, p. 210 and p. 219. Also Rinard 2017, p. 125. Also, Rinard 2019, p. 1930-1931.

will break ET and its competitor, Evidentialism, down in detail. I will then defend Evidentialism against ET, and argue that ET is false.

Equal Treatment

In both Rinard 2017 and 2019, Rinard calls her theory “Equal Treatment.” The definitions of the theories offered in these papers, while related, are slightly different. In her 2019 paper, Rinard defines Equal Treatment as follows:

My aim in this paper is to explore a view that is more pragmatist than evidentialist in spirit. On this view, which I'll call “Equal Treatment,” the question “What should I believe?” is to be answered in the same way as the question “What should I do?”⁶

Rinard later specifies that, ‘should’ in this sentence, is specific to the guidance-giving sense of ‘should’, which I will define in the next section. By contrast, in Rinard 2017, Rinard says the following:

However the rationality of states like [wearing a raincoat, or listening to a Leo Kottke CD, or playing with one's dog, etc.] is determined, the rationality of any other state...is determined in precisely the same way.⁷

I will be focusing on Rinard's account of Equal Treatment given above, but will occasionally reference her 2017 paper. There are two key differences in the definitions of Equal Treatment Rinard gives in her two papers:

1. Rinard 2017 discusses states, while Rinard 2019 discusses actions.
2. Rinard 2017 discusses rationality, while Rinard 2019 discusses the guidance-giving sense of ‘should’.

Despite these differences, I will treat these versions of ET as essentially equivalent. There are three reasons for this. First, it seems clear to me that both versions are fundamentally similar in spirit, and that the version in Rinard 2019 is an evolution of the version in Rinard 2017. Second, Rinard mentions in her 2017 paper that her motivation for setting up the discussion in terms of states is because actions are by nature voluntary, while states are not.⁸ Rinard thereby wishes to ward off some concerns about doxastic voluntarism. I however, will only address doxastic voluntarism briefly, and it will not be the focus of any of my main arguments, so I will set aside this distinction. Third, in Rinard 2019, Rinard addresses the issue of rationality, defining a guidance-giving sense of rationality as follows:

⁶ Rinard 2019, p. 1924.

⁷ Rinard 2017, p. 123.

⁸ Rinard 2017, p. 132.

ϕ -ing is rational, in this sense, just in case ϕ -ing is permissible, in the guidance-giving sense--that is, just in case ϕ -ing is a genuine option and it's not the case that one shouldn't, in the guidance-giving sense, ϕ .⁹

It seems clear to me from her arguments that the sense of rationality that Rinard is referring to in "No Exception for Belief" is this sense, so I will use Rinard's definition as the link between this sense of rationality and the guidance-giving should.

The Guidance-Giving Sense of 'Should'

Rinard's thesis focuses exclusively on what she calls "the guidance giving sense of should." It is necessary to discuss the nature of this sense of 'should' before going further.

Rinard provides no formal definition of the guidance-giving sense of 'should.' As an explanation for the sense she has in mind, Rinard says:

"I'll call a sense of 'should' guidance-giving just in case, if one settles that they should, in this sense, ϕ , that properly settles for them the answer to the question whether or not to ϕ (namely, it settles it in favor of ϕ -ing)."¹⁰

Rinard also gives a few examples of similar senses of 'should' to guide the reader toward what she means. Namely, she references "the all-things-considered should", "the ought of advice", and "the sense in which it's irrational to believe that one should ϕ while failing to intend to ϕ ", among others.

Despite this, it isn't immediately obvious what 'guidance-giving' is supposed to mean. Is the moniker 'guidance-giving' simply an alternative label for 'normative,' or does it bear some additional meaning? Rinard doesn't say, though her sense of 'should' appears to be a variant of the all-things-considered (ATC) should, that is restricted to those things that have a certain sort of normative force. To see this, note that Rinard believes that moral reasons are guidance-giving, but that the rules of etiquette are not.¹¹ There may be multiple different approaches to explain the specific sort of normative force that Rinard wishes to capture. First, one could restrict the guidance-giving should to those reasons whose normative force is sufficiently strong. Alternatively, one could restrict the relevant reasons to reasons one has, rather than reasons there are. This distinction recognizes that there are contexts in which one can distinguish between what ought to be the case and what a subject S ought to do. It

⁹ Rinard 2019, p. 1946. This effectively defines rational action as action which is permissible in the guidance-giving sense.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 1925-1926.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 1935. Rinard actually uses the notion of the guidance-giving should to explain the apparent difference in objective normative force between the rules of etiquette and morality.

may be the case that a given state of affairs ought (epistemically, morally, etc.) not continue, even though no agent is at all responsible for changing the state of affairs. Applied to the etiquette case, the rules of etiquette may be reasons there are for acting politely, but in some contexts not be a reason one has for acting politely (perhaps the person ought not be responsive to those reasons).

Rinard recognizes that there might be multiple guidance-giving shoulds, and that they sometimes might be incompatible.¹² For instance, it is commonly noted that there is a difference between what someone objectively should do, and what one subjectively should do given what one knows, and that it is theoretically possible that these conflict. Rinard claims that the guidance-giving should, as she means it, is only focused on cases where this does not happen, and gives the following revision of the ET thesis (which she admits is circular) that does not allow for a guidance-giving should to conflict with another guidance-giving should:

What if one settles that they should, in one guidance-giving sense, ϕ , but also settles that they should, in some other guidance-giving sense, not ϕ ?... if such cases are possible, our gloss of “guidance-giving” can be refined as follows: A sense of should is guidance-giving just in case, if one settles that they should, in this sense, ϕ —and it’s not the case that there is some other guidance-giving sense in which they have settled that they should, in that sense, not ϕ —then that properly settles for them the answer to the question whether or not to ϕ (namely, it settles it in favor of ϕ -ing).¹³

In effect, therefore, the guidance-giving should is only defined for those cases where one’s guidance-giving normative reasons, when compared, point toward some given option.

One last point: Rinard specifies that, strictly speaking, the objects of the guidance-giving sense of ‘should’ are *options*, not merely actions. The point here is that the actions that can be the objects of the guidance-giving sense of ‘should’ are only those actions that are available for one to perform in a given situation.

Rinard’s chosen sense of ‘should’ thus seems intended to pick out and weigh all factors or reasons that ought, in some highest sense, affect one’s practical decision making for what one should do, and, according to ET, also what one should believe. There remain substantial issues of describing the circumstances under which such a should exists, and what determines which reasons such a should gives weight. Going forward, whenever I use the word ‘should’ I will mean it in this guidance-giving sense, unless otherwise indicated.

¹² Rinard 2019, pp. 1925-1926.

¹³ Ibid, p. 1926.

Three ET Compatible Views

ET is not, strictly speaking, an account of what one should believe/do, but rather a restriction on acceptable accounts of the should for belief and the should for action. This means that there are multiple views which are compatible with ET. Here, I will discuss three of these views.

Robust Pragmatism

The first view is the variant of Pragmatism I previously discussed: Robust Pragmatism. It states that there are no purely epistemic reasons (henceforth e-reasons) for belief or for action at all. On this view, all reasons for what one should do are practical reasons (henceforth p-reasons), and all reasons for what one should believe are also p-reasons. Robust Pragmatism can take an extremely radical form, and a less radical one. The extremely radical version, which I will call *Eliminative Pragmatism*, says that there are no distinctively epistemic reasons at all: perhaps there are no epistemic facts, or perhaps facts about what one's evidence points toward are never reasons for belief. The less radical version, which I will call *Reductive Pragmatism*, makes e-reasons a subset of practical reasons. On this view, one's e-reasons, when one has them, are a species of one's p-reasons. Reductive Pragmatism would be true if, for example, the instrumentalist conception of e-reasons is true: e.g. if one only has e-reasons for belief when one has a practical goal that is aided by true belief (or alternatively a truth goal), then one's e-reasons are always p-reasons for belief. Because Rinard repeatedly argues that a strength of ET is its ability to account for evidence through its instrumental value,¹⁴ and because of her statements in Rinard 2015 and elsewhere,¹⁵ I believe that Reductive Pragmatism is what Rinard actually defends.

If Pragmatist ET is correct, then there are only practical reasons for belief or for action. The question then becomes, "is every practical consideration in favor of believing a reason to believe?" If the answer is yes, then the view being maintained is what Rinard calls "Robust Pragmatism."¹⁶ While there is theoretical room for other ET-compatible variants of Pragmatism, they would require some demarcation of which practical considerations constitute reasons for belief/action, and which do not. Since Rinard endorses Robust Pragmatism, I will not bother to spell out other varieties here.

In short, according to Robust Pragmatism, only p-reasons determine what one should do and what one should believe, and any practical consideration in favor of an action/belief is a reason to act/believe. There are also no non-practical epistemic reasons for belief,

¹⁴ Rinard 2017, p. 125. Also Rinard 2019, p. 1930.

¹⁵ Rinard 2017, p. 127. Also, Rinard 2015.

¹⁶ Rinard 2015, p. 217.

and evidence only plays a role in what one should believe when one's practical reasons favor believing according to the evidence.

The Absurd View: Epistemic Chauvinism

According to the second ET-compatible view, one has **only** e-reasons for both actions and beliefs. As I will discuss in the next section, this view would require a revision of the standard way of understanding what e-reasons are, from evidence in a proposition to something else. Epistemic Chauvinism seems patently absurd, and neither Rinard nor anyone else I am aware of would defend it, since it suggests that all reasons are fundamentally epistemic in nature. I merely mention it to illustrate that, so long as the criteria for what one should believe and what one should do are the same, ET is satisfied.

An Intermediate View: Epistemic Consequentialism/Selective Pragmatism

The third ET-compatible view says that there are both epistemic and practical reasons for belief and action. I've called this view Epistemic Consequentialism/Selective Pragmatism, since it, by allowing epistemic reasons for action, must allow the epistemic consequences of an action to be a reason to act, and since the view allows practical reasons for belief, licenses pragmatism in at least some cases. Rinard dubs this view "Not Only Beliefs," referring to the idea that there could, on this view, be e-reasons for non-beliefs, such as actions. For example, on this view, there would be e-reasons for the action 'reading an encyclopedia.' One way to obtain such a view is to hold, unqualified, that anything conducive to having true beliefs constitutes an epistemic reason.¹⁷ However, it is important to note that this view will depart from the definition of Evidentialism that I will give below, since it will allow for epistemic reasons for belief/action that are not evidence: I think it is uncontroversial that applying the concept of evidence to an action is a category error, even if there can be epistemic reasons for actions.

Though I will focus mostly on Rinard's view, that is, Robust Pragmatism, many of my arguments will apply to the other two views as well. Next, I will discuss the versions of Evidentialism that Rinard could oppose.

¹⁷ Rinard claims, without qualification, that Not Only Beliefs is compatible with ET (see Rinard 2019, p. 1936). However, it is possible for a view in line with "Not Only Beliefs" to oppose ET, if it allows epistemic reasons for action but denies that epistemic reasons are guidance giving for action, though not for belief. In other words, one could have only non-guidance-giving e-reasons for action, but guidance-giving e-reasons for belief. Alternatively, if e-reasons for action are of a different kind than e-reasons for belief, Not Only Beliefs will not satisfy ET either.

Versions of Evidentialism

In both “No Exception for Belief” and “Equal Treatment for Belief,” Rinard presents ET as an alternative to Evidentialism. It will thus be useful to clarify what Rinard has in mind when she speaks of Evidentialism.

Prominent evidentialists define Evidentialism differently, though the various definitions tend to be similar in spirit. Thomas Kelly offers the following evidentialist account of epistemic rationality:

By *epistemic* rationality, I mean, roughly, the kind of rationality which one displays when one believes propositions that are strongly supported by one's evidence and refrains from believing propositions that are improbable given one's evidence.¹⁸

Similarly, Richard Feldman offers the following definition of the epistemic ought:

For any person S, time t, and proposition p, if S has any doxastic attitude at all toward p at t and S's evidence at t supports p, then S epistemically ought to have the attitude toward p supported by S's evidence at t.¹⁹

These views seem to be the sort that Rinard is challenging. She herself defines Evidentialism as the view that, “one should believe P just in case one's evidence adequately supports P, and that only evidence for P is a reason for believing it”²⁰ and cites the evidentialist view of epistemic rationality as the view, “that it is rational for one to believe P just in case P is supported by one's evidence.”²¹

Common among these definitions are the ideas 1) that there is an ontological category of ‘epistemic reasons for belief’, and 2) that only evidence constitutes such reasons. On this view, there is a distinctively epistemic type of should and a distinctively epistemic type of rationality such that, what one should believe and what would be rational for one to believe are determined solely by epistemic reasons, that is, by one's evidence.

There is room for variation in how I've construed Evidentialism here. Importantly, my definition remains uncommitted toward the following:

- 1) whether there are non-epistemic reasons for belief and other propositional attitudes,
- 2) if there are non-epistemic reasons for belief, whether the epistemic and non-epistemic types of reasons for belief are commensurable,
- 3) whether there are epistemic reasons for non-belief,

¹⁸ Kelly 2003, p. 612.

¹⁹ Feldman 2000, p. 679.

²⁰ Rinard 2019, p. 1930.

²¹ Rinard 2017, p. 123.

- 4) what counts as evidence,²²
- 5) whether epistemic reasons are intrinsically or instrumentally valuable,²³
- 6) how evidence conduces toward epistemic value,²⁴
- 7) why epistemic reasons have normative force.

Answers to these questions will vary from evidentialist to evidentialist. For instance, Feldman, unlike Kelly,²⁵ defends the view that there are non-epistemic reasons for belief, and allows for the existence of a notion of what we practically should believe, but argues that the epistemic should (henceforth 'e-should') and the practical should (henceforth 'p-should') for belief are incommensurable.²⁶ Both Kelly and Feldman also hold that epistemic reasons are intrinsically valuable, though some evidentialists disagree.

The version of Evidentialism that I will be defending is broadly the view Feldman defends, and is in line with Rinard and Kelly's definitions. Henceforth, when I speak of 'Evidentialism', I will mean Evidentialism of this sort, whose tenets are as follows:

1. There are distinctly epistemic reasons for belief, and a distinctly epistemic notion of 'should', which are guidance-giving.
2. What constitutes an epistemic reason for believing P is one's evidence for P.
3. There are also practical (prudential and moral) reasons for belief and a corresponding p-should, which are also guidance-giving.
4. Epistemic and practical reasons for belief are incommensurable, so there is no all-things-considered guidance-giving should when epistemic and practical reasons conflict.
5. There are practical reasons for action, but there are no epistemic reasons for action.

For all other differentia between evidentialist views that I have mentioned, I remain uncommitted within the context of this paper.

Rinard rejects Evidentialism thus construed, calling it alternatively "Different Senses"²⁷ and "Only Beliefs + Epistemic Relevance."²⁸ The former label refers to the fact that, on this view, there are two different, incommensurable senses of 'rationality' for belief. "Only Beliefs + Epistemic Relevance" refers to the fact that, on this view the e-should is among the guidance-giving shoulds for belief, and "only beliefs can be the

²² See Kelly 2008 for discussion of this.

²³ See Kelly 2003 for discussion of this.

²⁴ See Berker 2013 for discussion of this.

²⁵ See Kelly 2002. This paper is dedicated to arguing that practical reasons cannot be reasons for belief.

²⁶ Feldman 2000, pp. 691-694.

²⁷ Rinard 2017, p. 123.

²⁸ Rinard 2019, p. 1936.

objects of epistemic reasons.”²⁹ Only Beliefs + Epistemic Relevance is opposed by “Not Only Beliefs,” the view that there are epistemic reasons for non-beliefs, such as actions. While I’m primarily interested in defending Evidentialism as defined above, none of my arguments here will hinge on the incommensurability of epistemic and practical reasons. Thus, if my arguments are adequate to vindicate my form of Evidentialism against Equal Treatment, any other version of Evidentialism that falls under Only Beliefs + Epistemic Relevance will be vindicated as well.

Next, I will respond to what I regard as Rinard’s best arguments against Evidentialism.

The Argument from Normative Dilemmas

According to Rinard, we should prefer ET to Evidentialism because it avoids certain dilemmas that Evidentialism must accept. These dilemmas arise when one’s p-reasons support performing an action that will cause belief in P but, according to Evidentialism, one’s e-reasons oppose believing P. A paradigm example of this is the *Belief Changing Pill Case*:

The Belief-Changing Pill: Suppose S could take a pill that would cause them to instantly acquire a belief in the proposition, P. Suppose further that S’s p-reasons are slightly in favor of taking the pill (perhaps someone will pay S \$5 for taking the pill). Suppose further that S’s e-reasons are strongly against believing P: P is contrary to overwhelming evidence.³⁰

In such a case, the evidentialist must claim that S ought, in the guidance-giving sense, take the pill, because e-reasons do not apply to actions. However, for the evidentialist, e-reasons apply to beliefs, so either S ought, in the guidance-giving sense, not believe P (if p-reasons do not apply to beliefs), or there is no fact about if S ought, in the guidance-giving sense, believe P (if p-reasons do apply to beliefs, but are incommensurable with e-reasons). This state of affairs putatively generates a dilemma, because it violates what I will call The Control Principle:

The Control Principle: “if one’s control over ψ goes via ϕ , such that ϕ causes ψ , then, if both ϕ and ψ are options, the guidance-giving should must say the same thing about each.”³¹

To my mind, the Control Principle seems plausible, at least for the guidance-giving should. For example, if I have to choose between going to

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Adapted from Rinard 2019, p. 1937.

³¹ Rinard 2019, p. 1937. Rinard never gives this principle a name, and uses the symbols ‘S’ and ‘S*’ in place of ‘ ϕ ’ and ‘ ψ ’ respectively, but I replace these for added clarity.

the gym and staying home, and, all things considered, I ought to go to the gym, then it can't also be the case that I ought to do something I would do if I stayed home (within the same timeframe), say, do my homework. Either I ought to go to the gym, and thus ought not do my homework (right now), or I ought do my homework, and thus not go to the gym. Rinard claims that, in examples like the Belief-Changing Pill case, the evidentialist view violates the Control Principle, because "one should, in the guidance-giving sense, take the pill that causes belief in P; but, either one shouldn't, in the guidance-giving sense, believe P; or there's no fact of the matter about whether one should, in the guidance-giving sense, believe P."³²

What is going on in such a case, and what can the evidentialist say in response? It strikes me that there are three separate arguments that Rinard could be making to attack Evidentialism in the Belief-Changing Pill example.

1. The Contradiction Argument: If Rinard is correct, then in this case, if the Control Principle is preserved, the guidance-giving should demands contradictory things on the evidentialist view.
2. The Dilemma Argument: According to Evidentialism, there can be cases where e-reasons and p-reasons conflict irresolvably, causing a dilemma: there is no way to act without violating an ought.
3. The Diachronic Argument: Arguably, Evidentialism should demand that one ought not take a pill that will cause one to hold a belief that is strongly challenged by the evidence. However, since Evidentialism is usually maintained as a synchronic theory,³³ Evidentialism has no mechanism to say this.

In the next three sections, I will address each of these potential arguments, in turn.

The Contradiction Argument

On the first interpretation of Rinard's argument, Rinard is claiming that Evidentialism generates a contradiction, given the Control Principle: one ought, in the guidance-giving sense, take the pill, but one ought, in the guidance-giving sense, not believe the resulting belief. If the control principle holds for the guidance-giving ought, this putatively generates a contradiction, since the same ought recommends contradictory courses of action.

³² Ibid.

³³ Feldman and Stewart Cohen, at the very least, hold this view. For a brief defense of Evidentialism as a synchronic theory, see Feldman 2003, pp. 47-48. Stewart Cohen also gives similar arguments in Cohen 2016, p. 431.

If this were correct, it would be a massive flaw in Evidentialism. However, the evidentialist has a fairly straightforward avenue for denying that the Contradiction Argument is correct, at least if they, like I, believe that there are both e-reasons and p-reasons for belief, but that these are incommensurable, or if they hold that there are only e-reasons for belief. The evidentialist can deny that the guidance-giving oughts in the example are the same ought. That is, the evidentialist can deny that the should for belief and the should for action are identical, even if both are guidance-giving.

Suppose that the Control Principle is true. Then, if I p-ought to ϕ , and ϕ -ing will cause ψ -ing, then I p-ought to $(\phi \ \& \ \psi)$. But the evidentialist need not deny this; the evidentialist claims that I *e-ought* to $\sim\psi$, and further, that *e-reasons* can't take actions as objects, so there is no fact about whether I e-ought to ϕ . That both the e-ought and p-ought are guidance-giving for belief simply means that there is no legitimate guidance-giving sense in which I ought to $(\phi \ \& \ \psi)$. Further, that both the e-ought and p-ought are guidance-giving does not imply by itself that they are the same, or that there is a higher-order ought that can take both as input. The Control Principle is only a plausible principle if guidance-giving ought₁ = guidance-giving ought₂. But since the evidentialist denies that the ought for belief and the ought for action are identical, there is no contradiction.

Applied to the Belief-Changing Pill case specifically, the evidentialist can say that one p-ought take the pill, and taking the pill will cause believing the resulting belief, so by the Control Principle, one p-ought to believe the resulting belief. But one e-ought not believe the resulting belief, so there is no legitimate guidance-giving ought for what one ought to believe, even if there is a guidance-giving ought for what one ought to do (take the pill). As I've explained, this is no contradiction, since the guidance-giving oughts in question are different.

In the next two sections, I will address the Dilemma Problem and the Diachronic Problem, in turn.

Are Normative Dilemmas Bad?

The next interpretation of Rinard's argument is the Dilemma Argument: If both practical and epistemic reasons exist for belief, then one has irresolvable conflict between one's epistemic and practical reasons for belief. This generates a dilemma, because, no matter what one does, one cannot act without violating an ought. In the Belief Changing Pill example, if one takes the pill, then one ends up with a belief they ought not have, but if one does not take the pill, one acts as one shouldn't. According to Rinard, this is a problem for Evidentialism, because a theory that permits dilemmas is worse off than a theory that doesn't.

*What should be relatively uncontroversial is that, other things equal, a view that does not involve commitment to dilemmas is preferable to one that does—and, the more dilemmas to which one is committed, the heavier the cost.*³⁴

I don't believe this is true. First, it seems to me that a theory's permitting of dilemmas is only problematic if it is implausible that said dilemmas are genuine. And it doesn't seem to me that the existence of genuine dilemmas arising from irresolvable conflict between epistemic and practical reasons is overly implausible, or at least any more implausible than the existence of dilemmas between moral and prudential reasons. If this is right, then the fact that Evidentialism recognizes such dilemmas, rather than smoothing them over, is a strength, not a flaw.

Rinard might reply that the dilemmas in question are unacceptable because they "reduce the guidance value of ought statements."³⁵ In Rinard 2017, Rinard says the following:

"It is natural to think of rationality as constituting an ideal to which one might aspire, and by which one might be guided. But rationality is poorly suited to play this role if it consists of two different voices urging us in incompatible directions."³⁶

This doesn't seem plausible to me: one can aspire to a goal that one can in some cases not achieve, or which, in some cases, provides no course of action. For instance, it should be uncontroversial that one can aspire to fulfilling one's promises even if there are cases where it is impossible to fulfill one's promises (though it may be impossible to aspire to such a goal if the goal is never possible to fulfill). But regardless, that the guidance value of ought statements is lower on one theory than on another is no argument against the former, because it is no indication that the theory is not true.

Second, it isn't clear to me that ET actually avoids dilemmas in a meaningful way. For one, even if ET is correct, there will be many cases in which there are genuine dilemmas that fall outside of its purview. That is, the guidance-giving should is only defined for cases where the various possible guidance-giving shoulds do not conflict, effectively making it a type of ATC-should. This prevents dilemmas from falling under what one should do, but doesn't prevent dilemmas from occurring. As Scott Stapleford has pointed out, there are cases where there is no fact about what one ATC-should do, because one is in a situation where one has two

³⁴ Rinard 2019, p. 1933.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Rinard 2017, p. 128.

tied-for-first obligations.³⁷ ET provides no course of action for such cases, but rather merely avoids discussing them, since they are cases where the guidance-giving should does not exist.

Third, even under ET, it is possible that there will be cases where there is genuine conflict between multiple guidance-giving shoulds. If it turns out, for example, that moral reasons and prudential reasons are incommensurable, then both the moral-should and the prudential-should will be guidance-giving. In cases where these conflict, there will thus be no guidance-giving should in Rinard's sense.³⁸ This, by itself, does not seem implausible. But if it is possible for dilemmas between moral and prudential reasons to occur, then it is difficult to see why it is so implausible that the same sorts of dilemmas can occur between either sort of practical reasons and epistemic reasons. Thus, even if Evidentialism permits dilemmas of this sort, that would be no argument against Evidentialism.

However, it may still seem unacceptable that Evidentialism has no way to suggest one ought not take the pill in the Belief-Changing Pill case. If this is what Rinard is alluding to, then Rinard is making the Diachronic Argument, which I will turn to next.

The Diachronic Argument

The last argument that Rinard's could be making is the Diachronic Argument: the evidentialist seems to be committed to the claim that acting in ways that will generate epistemically impermissible beliefs is acceptable, while believing the resulting beliefs is not. As I have shown, this is not contradictory, as the oughts for belief and action are different on the evidentialist view, and, if it does generate a dilemma, this dilemma may be acceptable. But it still might seem counterintuitive that the evidentialist cannot demand one ought not take a pill that will bring about an unsupported belief. What can the evidentialist say in response?

Before launching into the possible evidentialist responses, it is worth making a distinction between two different types of constraints. *Synchronic* constraints are constraints on what one ought to do at a time t , only considering factors that obtain at t . *Diachronic* constraints, by contrast, are constraints that take into account factors across time. So a diachronic constraint on what one ought do at time t_1 will take into account effects that an action will have at time t_2 . Evidentialism is usually regarded as only providing synchronic constraints on belief: what one ought believe at t is determined by one's evidence at t , and not affected by factors that occur at a later time.

³⁷ Stapleford 2015, pp. 1861–81.

³⁸ Rinard 2019, p. 1926. This issue is discussed under footnote 4 of Rinard's paper.

We can now return to how the evidentialist may respond to the Diachronic Argument. First, the evidentialist can simply stick to his or her guns, and deny that the problem Rinard's argument points toward is a problem at all. If the synchronicity of Evidentialism is taken seriously, then the fact that the state one ends up in after doing what one p-should is epistemically defective is not a problem. The evidentialist holds that what one does is not subject to e-reasons, while what one believes is. That the pill will put you in an epistemically defective state is not a reason not to take it, unless you have practical reasons for keeping those beliefs in the future, which would then be weighed against your practical reasons for taking the pill. Rinard's argument thus has no weight, because Evidentialism provides no diachronic constraints.

Second, if the previous argument is not satisfactory, the evidentialist could try to soften the blow of Rinard's argument by pointing out that the problem Rinard alludes to may not actually obtain, at least for those situations where it is most intuitive that a person ought to act in ways that might change their belief, against the evidence. Consider the following case:

The Terminal Patient Case: Suppose that a person S has a terminal illness, and that holding the belief in the proposition, (P) "I will survive this illness" will optimize S's chances for survival. Suppose further that belief in P is epistemically unfounded; S most likely will not survive, and has evidence to suggest this.

It seems, at first glance, that in such a case, a problem obtains for the evidentialist, as the evidentialist would say that S ought not believe P, or there is no fact about whether S ought believe P, because S has the greatest epistemic reasons for believing $\sim P$, and the greatest practical reasons for believing P. Further, S has the greatest practical reasons for taking actions that might lead to not believing P, such as taking a belief-changing pill. Despite this, it may be possible for the evidentialist to say that it is epistemically permissible in such a case for S to believe P, despite it not being epistemically optimal. Iskra Fileva, for example, has argued at length that while one's evidence provides constraints on acceptable belief, it would set too high a normative bar if one was only epistemically permitted to hold beliefs that are epistemically optimal.³⁹ If Fileva is correct, then it is not the case that S epistemically ought not believe P, and by extension it is not the case that S ought not, in the guidance-giving sense, believe P.

Fileva's view has some plausibility. Many people are drawn to the conclusion that a terminally ill patient may believe they will get well,

³⁹ Fileva 2018, pp. 563-564.

against the evidence, when it will raise their chances of getting well. However, few would go so far as to say that the person could rationally believe that they *are well*, just because it would be better for them to do so.⁴⁰ Fileva gives a reasonable explanation for this: belief that one will get well is epistemically permissible while not epistemically optimal, but believing that one is already well would be too epistemically egregious to be permissible.

While Fileva's view is highly intuitive, Fileva does not provide an account of how one's epistemic reasons can permit but not require belief in a given proposition. She does, however, intimate that non-epistemic facts/psychological states can influence belief, without rendering it irrational, and without constituting non-epistemic reasons for belief.⁴¹ However, whether such an account works or not, Fileva's view also still permits some permutations of the cases alluded to in the Diachronic Argument-- cases where the belief in question is sufficiently epistemically suboptimal as to be impermissible, but one ought take a pill that will generate the belief in question anyway. Such a case would occur if, for example, the belief that the pill generates is the proposition "I am healthy" for a terminal patient. So it would seem that, even if Fileva is correct, there are still cases like the Belief-Changing Pill case where Evidentialism cannot avoid saying one ought to take actions that will cause epistemically defective states, because Evidentialism has no diachronic constraints. Perhaps the first solution I gave is the evidentialist's best option.

But it is worth noting that there is a strange asymmetry here: on the evidentialist view, taking the pill is what you ought to do, despite the resulting state being epistemically defective, but, for a being who can simply adopt the false belief at will, to do so would be acting wrongly.⁴² So it is possible that the problem alluded to in the Diachronic Argument is a problem after all. But if so, there are ways for the evidentialist to revise their view to handle this. Doing so may mean that Evidentialism does, in fact, need to supply diachronic constraints on what one ought to do, in order to avoid such cases. Whether or not such a solution would vindicate ET depends on the specifics of the approach. If avoiding Rinard's argument requires the evidentialist to allow for epistemic reasons for action, then, provided that these reasons are of the same sort as those for belief, this would vindicate a version of ET, albeit not the version Rinard would prefer.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Fileva 2018, pp. 567-570.

⁴² This presumes that it is logically possible that such a being exists, an assertion of a certain kind of doxastic voluntarism. Rinard herself has argued that there is no in-principle reason such a being could not exist, see Rinard 2019, p. 1927. Evidentialists seem to disagree with each other on this issue. See Williams 1976 and Alston 1985, pp. 64-65 for evidentialist arguments against doxastic voluntarism, and see Steup 2017 for evidentialist arguments in favor of doxastic voluntarism.

However, even a version of Evidentialism that provided diachronic constraints on action need not acquiesce to ET. For example, consider the following view:

Evidentialism_D: There are epistemic reasons for both action and belief. The practical reasons for both are as one would expect. The epistemic reasons for belief are one's evidence for any given proposition P. The epistemic reasons for action are the degree to which said action will harm one's epistemic agency.

Epistemic Agency: one's ability to respond to one's evidence, measured based on the evidence one has at the present moment.

Suppose an evidentialist adopted Evidentialism_D. The evidentialist would then claim that S should not, in the guidance-giving sense, take the pill in Belief-Changing Pill cases, because doing so would harm S's epistemic agency. This is because, by changing one's belief in the proposition P, against one's evidence, one arguably becomes less able to respond to the evidence one has at the present time. So the fact that the pill would harm S's epistemic agency in the future is an epistemic reason not to take the pill. But it is a very different kind of reason than S has not to believe ~P: S's evidence in the moment is what determines whether S ought to believe P. So the evidentialist who adopts Evidentialism_D does not satisfy ET, because only evidence is an e-reason to believe, but only projected harm to one's epistemic agency is an e-reason to act. Different considerations thus affect what one ought to believe and what one ought to do.

Evidentialism_D has some strengths. For instance, it presents a very restricted class of epistemic reasons for action: epistemic reasons for action only exist when the action in question would cause one to lose information, or be less able to act on information. But my intent here is not to endorse Evidentialism_D. I am merely pointing out that there are views that the evidentialist can adopt, that answer the Diachronic Argument, while not accepting ET. And this is assuming that the Diachronic Argument is, in fact, a problem, which the evidentialist can deny. If I am correct, it would appear that the evidentialist has multiple avenues to escape the problematic portions of Rinard's argument.

The Argument from Natural Kinds

Rinard's final argument against Evidentialism⁴³ is that Evidentialism can't explain why reasons for belief all have normative force, because Evidentialism makes the set of reasons for belief disjunctive, not a natural

⁴³ Rinard actually gives this argument specifically against sorts of Evidentialism that fall under "Only Beliefs + Epistemic Relevance." Since I have built Only Beliefs + Epistemic Relevance into my account of Evidentialism, for the sake of convenience I will not discuss this distinction here.

kind. On the evidentialist view, both evidence for propositions, as well as moral and prudential considerations, all count as normative reasons for belief, despite being wildly different in character. According to Rinard, if the class of normative reasons for belief is not a natural kind, then the fact that any of these reasons, and e-reasons in particular, are normative reasons is left mysterious.⁴⁴ Rinard motivates the problem with the following:

So, [the view that both e-reasons and p-reasons are normative reasons for belief] leaves it entirely mysterious why all of these very different things should count as reasons for belief. What do moral and prudential considerations in favor of believing P have in common with evidence for P that they do not also have in common with, say, considerations indicating that P is self-referential, or that P is contingent; or that believing P would make the number of stars even rather than odd, or would increase the average yearly rainfall in Colorado—or any consideration indicating that P has some property or other, or that believing P would have some effect or other? On this view, then, the category “reasons for belief” is disunified, not a natural kind.⁴⁵

Spelled out explicitly, Rinard’s argument is something like the following:

- (1) If Evidentialism is a good theory of reasons for belief, then Evidentialism must be able to explain the normative force of the set of reasons it posits (e-reasons, as well as p-reasons). (Premise)
- (2) If, according to a theory, the set of reasons for belief is not a natural kind, then that theory cannot explain the normative force of the set of reasons. (Premise)
- (3) If Evidentialism is true, then the set of reasons for belief is disjunctive. (Premise)
- (4) If the set of reasons for belief is disjunctive, then the set of reasons for belief is not a natural kind. (Premise)
- (5) If Evidentialism is true, then the set of reasons for belief is not a natural kind. (From 3 and 4)
- (6) Evidentialism cannot explain the normative force of the set of reasons for belief. (From 5 and 2)
- (7) Evidentialism is not a good theory of reasons for belief. (From 6 and 1)

There are multiple problems with this argument. First, premise 2 is highly problematic: whether the set of reasons for belief is a natural kind may not be important for establishing its normative force. It isn’t clear that

⁴⁴ Rinard 2019, p. 1938.

⁴⁵ Rinard 2019, p. 1938.

p-reasons themselves are a natural kind.⁴⁶ Rinard construes the set of practical reasons as a natural kind having to do with benefit: prudential reasons have to do with the benefit of the agent, while moral reasons are about the benefit of others. But on some accounts, like W. D. Ross's theory of prima facie duties, moral reasons don't necessarily have anything to do with benefit. If such an account is correct, then p-reasons may be disjunctive as well. This would mean that the pursuit of a natural kind for normative reasons is a fruitless endeavor, as whatever account would be needed to explain the normative force of these reasons, it would not depend on the reasons being a natural kind.

Second, the demand for a natural kind to explain the normative force of reasons presupposes a sort of naturalism about reasons and normative value in general. If such naturalism is mistaken, then there may be no need to provide a natural kind for reasons, as reasons may have sui generis normative force without being a natural kind. So there are more avenues for the evidentialist to reject premise 2 of the argument, depending on the axiology which the evidentialist wishes to espouse.

Third, it may be that even ET itself cannot meet the demands of premise 1. Whether practical reasons are a natural kind or not, the normative force of moral reasons may be mysterious. Even if moral reasons are reasons because they have to do with benefit, it isn't clear that this is enough to push moral reasons into the set of reasons one has rather than the set of reasons there are. Why should the fact that my actions will benefit or harm someone else grant **me** normative reasons for or against those actions? While I, personally, am happy to admit that moral reasons do have this normative force, it isn't at all obvious where this normative force comes from: there is certainly no consensus about this question among philosophers.⁴⁷ So even if Rinard is correct that the normative force of e-reasons is mysterious if 'reasons for belief' is not a natural kind, the normative force of moral reasons is also mysterious (whether they are a natural kind or not), if moral reasons are not instrumentally valuable.⁴⁸ It would thus appear that this mysteriousness about normative force is not confined to epistemic reasons and is independent of the question of natural kinds.

All of these responses presuppose that no adequate account of why the set of reasons for belief is a natural kind (that is, non-disjunctive)

⁴⁶ Thanks to Matthias Steup for pointing this out to me.

⁴⁷ There are possible solutions to this issue, though it isn't at all clear that these solutions are adequate. For example, it may be that moral reasons get their normative force because it is always, or usually, beneficial for a person to act morally, at least in the long run. This would render moral reasons as a sort of instrumental reason. But it isn't at all clear why this should be the case; it certainly seems possible for one to be in a situation where acting morally is not beneficial for the person, and perhaps downright detrimental. It also isn't clear that Rinard wishes to be pinned to such an account.

⁴⁸ Thanks again to Matthias Steup for pointing this out to me.

can be given from an evidentialist point of view. But of course, it could be argued that such an account can be given. Rinard herself gives a candidate account of e-reasons which would make the set of reasons for belief a natural kind: the view that true belief or knowledge has intrinsic value.⁴⁹ Assuming p-reasons have intrinsic value as well, then these reasons form the natural kind ‘things that conduce toward intrinsic value’. Call this the Intrinsic Value Account (IVA). Rinard argues that a proponent of the IVA should accept a version of ET, since non-beliefs can conduce toward true belief or knowledge.⁵⁰ This would mean that, following ET, if e-reasons exist for belief, then they also exist for non-beliefs, such as actions.

However, Rinard’s argument is easily avoided by an evidentialist proponent of the IVA.⁵¹ The reason is that, while the IVA is committed to allowing those things (here, options) that conduce toward intrinsic value to have what value-theorists call ‘final value’ – i.e. value for their own sakes, the evidentialist who embraces the IVA can specify the conducting relation in such a way as to prevent the existence of epistemic final value for non-beliefs such as actions. There are multiple ways to make such a restriction, and the conducting relation need not be specified in the same way for epistemic final value as for practical final value. First, one could demand that reasons at a time *t* (for e-reasons at least) are only those things that conduce toward final value instantaneously at *t*, which would make evidence a reason for belief, but not a reason for action.⁵² Second, one could restrict the conducting relation in other ways, such as to those things that constitute, or base, or ground, states that have final value.

However this is hashed out, there will be replies that an opponent such as Rinard could make. But the point is, there is at least one *prima facie* plausible candidate account of reasons for belief as a natural kind that an evidentialist could adopt, and which would allow for the rejection of ET. If any such account is correct, then Rinard’s Argument from Natural Kinds is no threat to Evidentialism.

The Case Against Equal Treatment

In this section, I will present some arguments against Equal Treatment. Here I will be focusing my arguments against Robust Pragmatism, rather than against all ET compatible views. Henceforth, when I refer to ET, I have the Robust Pragmatist variant in mind.

⁴⁹ Rinard 2019, p. 1938.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ The suggestions in this section were adapted from Selim Berker’s discussion and framework for specifying consequentialist theories in Berker 2013, pp. 365-371.

⁵² This, and the next suggestion, are discussed as ways for an epistemic consequentialist to avoid some of the problems of epistemic consequentialism in Berker 2013, p. 371.

My first argument is simply the observation that ET has some radical and perhaps unpalatable consequences.

The Argument from Decisive Evidence:

- (1) If ET is true, then there are no non-practical e-reasons for belief. (Premise).
- (2) There are many propositions without practical value, but supported by decisive evidence. (Premise).
- (3) If ET is true, then one would have no reasons at all to believe these propositions. (From 1,2, and the nature of ET).
- (4) We do have reasons to believe these propositions. (Premise).
- (5) Therefore, ET is false. (Conclusion, modus tollens from 3 and 4).

Such propositions are very common. For example, according to ET, a person entirely uninterested in math has no reason to believe a proven mathematical theorem that is shown to them, merely because of their lack of interest. Similarly, on ET, one would have no reason to believe a plethora of perception-based propositions. Such propositions about one's perceptual experience are ones that one usually does not consider, but one has overwhelming evidence for. On ET, if one did consider any of these propositions, say, "the table I'm sitting at is made of wood" but didn't have practical reasons to hold this, that person ought not believe said proposition. But if this isn't unpalatable enough, consider a corollary:

The Argument from Decisive Counterevidence:

- (1) If ET is true, then there are no non-practical e-reasons for belief. (Premise).
- (2) There are many propositions opposed by decisive counterevidence, but with some practical value. (Premise).
- (3) If ET is true, then one has overriding reasons to believe these propositions, despite decisive counterevidence. (From 1, 2, and the nature of ET).
- (4) One should not believe propositions that one has strong undefeated evidence against. (Premise).
- (5) Therefore, ET is false. (Conclusion, modus Tollens from 3 and 4).

For example, if belief in a proven theorem of mathematics, P, has no practical benefit for an agent S, but I will pay S one dollar to not believe in said theorem P, then S should not believe P. The same goes for cases involving perceptual evidence, so long as believing against the perceptual evidence isn't dangerous for the subject. For example, ET says that I

ought to believe that my chair (which is red) is blue if offered any practical reason (say, a dollar) to do so, and I am able.⁵³

The class of cases encompassed by the Argument from Decisive Counterevidence potentially includes many cases where one's reason is mere dislike of the new evidence. For example, on ET, if S wishes for a particular politician to win the next election, and learns that said politician will probably lose, the mere fact that S dislikes this prospect is good enough reason for S to reject it, no matter how strong the evidence.

Most worryingly, Rinard seems to think that even cases of obvious contradiction supply no reason to not believe, and even goes so far as to say, "The idea that there is anything inherently wrong with believing contradictions is just a symptom of evidentialist thinking."⁵⁴ So long as one is capable of believing contradictory propositions⁵⁵ and has practical reasons in favor of each, one ought, in the guidance-giving sense, believe said contradiction. So if I wish to believe that God exists, and am offered money to believe God doesn't exist, then, if it is in my power, I ought to believe both! Doing so would be the height of rationality, on ET.

I find all of this unpalatable. Even if one thinks that one's strong p-reasons can overrule one's e-reasons in some cases, it is a far less plausible claim that e-reasons are never guidance giving, even in those cases where no other concerns, or only weak concerns, challenge one's e-reasons.

Now, Rinard can, and I think would, bite the bullet on these points, rejecting premise 4 in each of my arguments, though it seems to me to be a hefty bullet to bite. Rinard could also suggest that there exists a default p-reason to believe according to one's evidence, when no other p-reasons count against that belief.⁵⁶ This would solve the problems caused by the first argument, though not the second, unless that p-reason is relatively hard to overrule. The reason is, if such a p-reason exists, then one always ought believe propositions one has evidence for, and no reason not to believe. But in cases where one has some reason not to believe the proposition, it will still be the case that one ought not believe it. So on this proposal, I ought to believe all of the propositions about my perception if I

⁵³ Such cases always include a caveat: if there are overriding practical reasons to believe according to the evidence, then a person ought, on ET, believe according to the evidence. The overriding practical reason in question may be fear of embarrassment, or risk of future danger. But the fact that ET can avoid some of these cases is no reason to think that ET avoids all of them, or even those that seem most important.

⁵⁴ Rinard. "No Exception." 137.

⁵⁵ It's worth noting that, since Rinard is committed to a particularly strong version of Doxastic Voluntarism, there is no in-principle reason to deny this, on her view.

⁵⁶ Rinard could also take a route analogous to Rule Consequentialism, and argue that, since following the evidence usually is practically beneficial, one ought, as a rule, to follow the evidence. This approach, too, is not truly in the spirit of ET, and also saddles ET with the same sorts of problems that Rule Consequentialism has.

consider them, but if you offer me a dollar to not believe them, then I ought not believe them.

More importantly, I think that this response is not an avenue Rinard would take. First, the claim that we have an omnipresent p-reason to believe truly is not particularly plausible. Of what practical benefit does this reason consist, in cases where the proposition in question does not contribute to one's survival, or personal interest? Rinard would have to respond that one has either a moral or prudential reason to believe according to the evidence, all else equal. Taking this route, however, aligns ET with Evidentialism in all cases where one has no other practical reasons for or against belief. And if e-reasons and p-reasons are incommensurable, then there will be no cases where ET challenges Evidentialism, since the guidance-giving will only be defined for cases where they line up. So taking this route forces Rinard to directly challenge the incommensurability thesis (a notoriously difficult thesis to support or challenge)⁵⁷ in order to make ET oppose Evidentialism in a substantive way.

The Argument from Unrevised Belief

ET has another, perhaps significantly more serious problem, that Evidentialism can avoid. On ET, there will be cases where one is exposed to evidence that totally undermines one's practical reasons for believing P, but because one has overriding practical reasons for not believing the evidence, one (subjectively) ought not take the evidence into account. This results in the person being obligated (in the guidance-giving sense) 1) to ignore the evidence, and 2) to believe a proposition (P) that, were the person to take the evidence into account, the person would have no reason to believe.

The easiest way to express this problem will be to show that the problem exists for an agent who is ideally rational, according to ET. So suppose that our agent, John, is perfectly rational, according to ET. That is, John will only believe a proposition if he has overriding practical reasons to do so. Suppose further that John has a high degree of voluntary control over what he believes. We will further stipulate that John is not a highly truth interested individual: a proposition being true by itself generates no practical reasons for him to believe it.

We can now generate an example of the problem I'm discussing, using John:

The Flat Earther. Suppose John is a Flat Earther, who believes 'the Earth is flat' (P) on the sole basis of his belief in the following proposition: 'the Earth rests on the back of a turtle, and if enough people on Earth stop believing in P, the turtle

⁵⁷ Feldman 2000, pp. 692-694. Also, Booth 2012, p. 512.

will destroy the world.' (Q). Suppose John gets very powerful evidence that Q is false: an astronaut and philanthropist offers to take John into low-Earth orbit, to view the world from space. Upon doing so, John gets strong visual evidence for the proposition 'there is no turtle on which the Earth rests' (R). However, John is part of the Great Turtle Organization, and participation in said organization earns him a modest sum of \$50 a month, as well as community and friendship, so long as John continues to believe in Q. Since John is not a very truth-interested individual, these benefits constitute overriding p-reasons to retain belief in Q (but not P).

What should John believe in this case, according to Evidentialism and ET? For Evidentialism, the case is straightforward. John learns R, R rebuts Q, so R undercuts John's reasons for believing P, assuming that R does not rebut P outright⁵⁸ (and we can stipulate that neither R nor John's evidence for R do). John thus has no e-reasons to believe P, and no longer has any p-reasons to believe P, assuming R is believed. So regardless of if the evidentialist allows for p-reasons for belief, John ought not believe P, according to Evidentialism.

According to ET, however, John has overriding independent p-reasons to believe Q (the money and companionship he gets for doing so), so John ought not accept the evidence for R, or believe R. Since belief in Q is the basis for John's belief in P, John's moral reasons for believing P are undefeated, so John ought, in the guidance-giving sense, believe P. This is despite John being in possession of evidence that, were it accepted, would totally undermine all of John's practical reasons for believing P.

Cases like this are obviously not restricted to examples of Flat Earthers with particularly obscure religious beliefs. Rather, this sort of case will occur, for any agent who obeys ET, in any example which satisfies the following structural constraints:

1. A proposition, P, is believed, as is another proposition, Q, on which P is based.
2. Q, if believed, generates practical reasons to believe P, but \sim Q generates no overriding practical reasons to believe \sim P; it merely neutralizes one's current practical reasons to believe P.
3. One has decisive evidence for a proposition R.
4. R rebuts Q, thereby undermining one's practical reasons to believe P.
5. Despite awareness of R, one retains overriding practical reasons to believe Q.

⁵⁸ Even if R does rebut P outright, the evidentialist will still recommend believing R, and thus not Q and not P, while ET will recommend ignoring R. This, however, would fall under the cases I brought up in my example from The Argument from Decisive Counterevidence, so isn't the sort of case I'm highlighting here.

As I will defend later, I suggest that the class of cases satisfying these constraints may actually be relatively wide. And as my example above highlights, they include cases where one's practical reasons for a belief are generated by the community that one is a part of. But there is a subset of the above cases which is perhaps even more troubling.

The Argument from Dogmatic Attachment

I've shown there are cases, on ET, where one is obligated to believe what one's evidence contradicts, and thus any belief that the first practically supports, even if said evidence completely undermines one's p-reasons for the further beliefs. But on top of this, in some cases, the mere fact that a person holds a belief can produce the overriding p-reasons that obligate the person to ignore evidence against the belief. Consider the following revision of the Flat Earther case (changes in bold):

The Flat Earther. Suppose John is a Flat Earther, who believes 'the Earth is flat' (P_1) on the sole basis of his belief in the following proposition: 'the Earth rests on the back of a turtle, and if enough people on Earth stop believing in P_1 , the turtle will destroy the world.' (Q). **John also believes the proposition 'I have been ostracized by society at large for my beliefs, but will be rewarded by the Great Turtle in the afterlife' (P_2), also based on Q .** Suppose John gets very powerful evidence that Q is false: an astronaut and philanthropist offers to take John into low-Earth orbit, to view the world from space. Upon doing so, John gets strong visual evidence for the proposition 'there is no turtle on which the Earth rests' (R). **However, because John believes P_2 , John cherishes belief in Q , so finds accepting R overly painful.** Since John is not a very truth-interested individual, **this pain** constitutes an overriding p-reason to retain belief in Q (but not, directly, P_1 or P_2).

Once again, ET is required to say that, because of the practical reasons generated by John's belief in P_2 , John ought not accept the evidence for R , nor believe R , which, if believed, would rebut Q , thus undermining John's reasons to believe P_1 and P_2 . The upshot is, on ET, in some cases one ought, solely because of the fervor of one's belief, reject any and all evidence that would undermine one's reasons for belief.⁵⁹ And just as before, this isn't isolated to silly cases about flat Earthers who believe in turtle gods. We can state the structural features required to generate further cases like this, modifying the constraints above:

1. A set of propositions, $P_1_P_n$, are believed, as is another proposition, Q , on which $P_1_P_n$ are based.

⁵⁹ As before, I give an example of this phenomenon which highlights the fact that the evidence undermines the practical reasons for believing P_1 and P_2 , and since these support Q , John ought reject the evidence, on ET. But a simpler example can be given where the evidence directly rebuts a proposition, and the fact that one cherishes said belief is reason enough for one to reject the evidence. This would, however, fall under the Argument from Decisive Counterevidence.

2. Q, if believed, generates overriding practical reasons to believe $P_1_P_n$, but $\sim Q$ generates no overriding practical reasons to believe $\sim(P_1_P_n)$; it merely neutralizes one's practical reasons to believe $P_1_P_n$.
3. One has decisive evidence for a proposition R.
4. R rebuts Q, thereby undermining one's practical reasons to believe $P_1_P_n$.
5. Despite awareness of R, one's current belief in $P_1_P_n$ generates overriding practical reasons to believe Q.

I suspect that there are many cases which will satisfy constraints, ranging from religious beliefs, political beliefs, beliefs about morality, scientific beliefs, and others. But in all such cases, so long as one's attachment to one's beliefs outweighs the practical reasons generated by the evidence against the beliefs, ET recommends remaining dogmatic, and holding said beliefs against any and all evidence.

At this point, it is worth taking stock of what I have argued. First, I pointed out that ET gives no reason to believe strongly supported propositions that don't have practical benefit. Second, I pointed out that ET recommends ignoring decisive counterevidence against propositions that do have overriding practical reasons in their favor, no matter how strong the counterevidence nor how weak the practical reasons in favor. Third, I argued that there exists a class of cases where one's evidence undermines one's practical reasons for belief in a proposition, but, because one has independent overriding practical reasons to not accept that evidence, one ought, on ET, retain one's belief. Finally, I argued that there is a further class of cases like the previous, but where one's overriding practical reasons are generated by one's belief itself, meaning that ET demands one dogmatically retain their belief in spite of all evidence. It is this last class of cases I find most unpalatable about ET. Depending on the specifics of the case, and how moral and prudential reasons interact, I think this last sort of case could even generate instances where ET requires one to remain dogmatic despite some practical benefits to not doing so. For instance, on ET, it may be that a climate change denying CEO of a large company **ought**, in the guidance-giving sense, maintain their beliefs about climate change despite any and all evidence, if the prudential harm to the CEO of changing the company policies outweighs the CEO's own moral reasons to change them. But this sort of result will depend on the specific case, and ET does recommend changing such beliefs when one has overriding practical (in this case moral) reasons to do so.

How could Rinard respond to all of this? First, Rinard could bite the bullet. I think that recommending dogmatic resistance to evidence, even in cases where said evidence undermines one's practical reasons for belief, is unacceptable for an account of rational belief. However, if Rinard truly wishes, she can simply deny that this is problematic. I doubt that most philosophers would find such results so easy to shrug off. But since the cases I've highlighted only occur when, upon acquiring new evidence, one doesn't attain new overriding p-reasons to reject one's previous beliefs (constraint 2 above), perhaps this is the route she would take.

Rinard could also attempt to soften the blow of these cases by attempting to deny that they ever actually occur, or if they do, only rarely. Perhaps, she could say, people's natural inclination toward possessing true beliefs makes such cases particularly rare. However, I don't believe that such cases are rare. There is no shortage of topics where many people cherish their beliefs (politics, religion, beliefs about morality, etc.). In many such cases, either simply because one cherishes their beliefs, or because of some benefits that come with believing, people will often be intransigent, despite having access to evidence against their beliefs. It is quite strange to think that such cases could be considered the height of rationality-- doing exactly as one ought, in the guidance-giving sense. But further, even if such cases are rare, the contingent fact that they are should not be the basis for accepting ET.

Rinard also could potentially deny that ET recommends dogmatism in the cases I've highlighted. One way she could do this, is by arguing that what one subjectively ought to believe/do relativizes itself to the set of things one **knows**, not the set of things that one believes. Rinard espouses an account of knowledge that does not include belief or justification as a prerequisite.⁶⁰ On Rinard's view, it is possible that one knows a given proposition, but still should not believe it. If Rinard demands that what one ought to believe is relative to the information that one knows, rather than that one believes, then, in my examples above, John ought accept R into the set of things he knows, but not believe it, and retain his belief in Q, but is then permitted to not believe P₁ or P₂, since John knows R. This would be a very substantial thesis, and would need defending. In particular, an explanation would be needed for why knowing R allows John to reject P₁ and P₂, but does not allow John to reject Q. This solution would also render it mysterious as to what role beliefs play in a person's decision making, as, on this account, when one's beliefs and one's knowledge predict different outcomes, one ought to follow one's knowledge. Further, it

⁶⁰ Rinard 2019, p. 1946.

would render belief a rather mysterious psychological state, as on this account, in many cases, one would believe a proposition while not holding the proposition to be true. It isn't clear what "belief" is supposed to mean if not, minimally, that the person affirms the proposition in question.

I suggest that these problems are good reasons to think that there are epistemic reasons for belief (namely evidence), which do not hold for action. If I am correct here, then allowing for the existence of such non-practical epistemic reasons is crucial for giving a plausible explanation of how one ought revise one's beliefs. This in turn provides a strong argument against pragmatist ET, and, if e-reasons for action are implausible, for any version of ET.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to accomplish three things: 1) To lay out and explain Rinard's thesis, Equal Treatment, and how it compares to Evidentialism. 2) To neutralize Rinard's best arguments in favor of ET and against Evidentialism. 3) To provide some problems for ET, hopefully demonstrating its implausibility. If I have been successful, then I will have provided good reason to think that ET is not a plausible competitor to Evidentialism.

Bibliography

- Alston, William. 1985. "Concepts of Epistemic Justification." *The Monist* 68, no. 1: 57-89.
- Berker, Selim. 2013. "The Rejection of Epistemic Consequentialism." *Philosophical Issues* 23, no. 1: 363–387.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/phis.12019>.
- Booth, Anthony Robert. 2012. "All things considered duties to believe." *Synthese* 187: 509-517. doi:10.1007/s11229-010-9857-5
- Cohen, Stewart. 2016. "Reasons to Believe and Reasons to Act." *Episteme* 13, no. 4: 427-438. doi:10.1017/epi.2016.22
- Feldman, Richard. 2000. "The Ethics of Belief." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60, no. 3: 667-695.
doi:10.2307/2653823.
- Feldman, Richard. 2003. *Epistemology*. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River: New Jersey.
- Fileva, Iskra. 2018. "What Does Belief Have to Do with Truth?" *Philosophy* 93: 557-570. doi:10.1017/S0031819118000335
- Kelly, Thomas. 2002. "The Rationality of Belief and Some Other Propositional Attitudes." *Philosophical Studies* 110: 163-196.

- Kelly, Thomas. 2003. "Epistemic Rationality as Instrumental Rationality: A Critique." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66, no. 3: 612-640. doi:10.1111/j.1933-1592.2003.tb00281.x.
- Kelly, Thomas. 2008. "Evidence: Fundamental Concepts and the Phenomenal Conception." *Philosophy Compass* 3/5: 933–955. doi: 10.1111/j.1747-9991.2008.00160.x
- Rinard, Susanna. 2015. "Against the New Evidentialists." *Philosophical Issues* 25: 208-223. doi: 10.1111/phis.12061
- Rinard, Susanna. 2017. "No Exception for Belief." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 94, no. 1: 121-143. doi:10.1111/phpr.12229.
- Rinard, Susanna. 2019. "Equal Treatment for Belief." *Philosophical Studies* 176, no. 7: 1923-1950. doi:10.1007/s11098-018-1104-9.
- Stapleford, Scott. 2015. "Epistemic versus All Things Considered Requirements." *Synthese* 192, no. 6: 1861–1881. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-015-0660-1>.
- Steup, Matthias. 2017. "Believing Intentionally." *Synthese* 194: 2673-2694. doi: 10.1007/s11229-015-0780-7.
- Williams, Bertrand. 1976. "Deciding to believe." In: *Problems of the self*. 279–300. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press