WARD E. JONES

# EXPLAINING OUR OWN BELIEFS: NON-EPISTEMIC BELIEVING AND DOXASTIC INSTABILITY

ABSTRACT. It has often been claimed that our believing some proposition is dependent upon our not being committed to a non-epistemic explanation of why we believe that proposition. Very roughly, I cannot believe that *p* and also accept a non-epistemic explanation of my believing that *p*. Those who have asserted such a claim have drawn from it a range of implications: doxastic involuntarism, the unacceptability of Humean naturalism, doxastic freedom, restrictions upon the effectiveness of practical (Pascalian) arguments, as well as others. If any of these implications are right, then we would do well to have a precise statement of the nature of this phenomenon central to first-person doxastic explanations, as well as of our reasons for believing that it holds. Both of these are lacking in the literature. This paper is an attempt to elucidate and defend this claim.

## 1. THE CONSTRAINT AND ITS SUPPOSED CONSEQUENCES

Philosophical literature in the analytic tradition over the past 30 years contains a number of comparable assertions regarding first-person doxastic explanations.[1] The following are a small sample:

> In so far as we doubt that grounds wholly determine our belief, so far is our belief itself subjectively insecure. [Michael Ayers]
>
> . . . some explanations of the origin of a belief are such that once we accept them we can no longer hold the belief in question . . . [Barry Stroud]
>
> Necessarily, $\neg(\exists x)(\exists p)$ (x believes in full consciousness 'x believes $p \wedge$ x's belief of $p$ is not sustained by any truth considerations'). [Barbara Winters][2]

Most generally, the claim is that our believing some proposition is dependent upon our not being committed to a certain type of explanation of why we believe that proposition. Were we to be to become convinced of such an explanation of one of our beliefs, the belief itself would be threatened. This phenomenon I call the *First-Person Constraint on Doxastic Explanation*, or, more simply, the *Constraint*.

Those who have defended something like the Constraint have drawn from it a range of implications. Stuart Hampshire argues that the fact that our first-order beliefs are susceptible to our second-order doxastic explanations places limits upon the scientific or nomological explanation of intentionality, and is thus the source of doxastic freedom. Bernard Williams and, following him, Dion Scott-Kakures claim that the Constraint is responsible for doxastic involuntarism, our inability to directly control what we believe. Barry Stroud claims that it is responsible for our inability to accept evolutionary accounts of knowledge of necessary truths. Michael Ayers claims that the Constraint is responsible for the unacceptability of Humean naturalism. David Owens has very recently argued that reflection on the pragmatic sources of our beliefs cannot motivate them. Barbara Herrnstein Smith suggests that something like the Constraint is responsible for many of the aspects of intellectual controversy.[3] In Jones (forthcoming), I argue that the fact that scientists appear to adhere to the Constraint suggests that scientific theory-commitment is doxastic; in Jones (1997), I argue that scientists, or indeed anyone with doxastic commitment to a theory, will not be able to accept sociological or pragmatic explanations of their theory-acceptances; and in Jones (1998), I claim that the Constraint severely restricts the power of practical arguments for belief, like Pascal's Wager, a fact that I suspect Pascal himself recognized. What is more, I think that the Constraint has numerous unexplored implications, perhaps most notably in severely limiting our possibility of consciously engaging in any non-epistemic believing – of engaging in wishful thought, of following non-epistemic rules, and of possessing Jamesian self-fulfilling beliefs or akratic beliefs.

In the present paper, I will be concerned less with the implications of the Constraint than with its formulation and defense. If any of the above claims are right, then we would do well to have a precise statement of the nature of the Constraint, as well as of our reasons for believing it. Both of these are lacking in the literature.[4] Sections 3 and 4 will work up an initial statement of the Constraint. Section 5 will defend five reasons for believing that we are, and indeed must be, so constrained in our first-person doxastic explanations. Finally, Section 7 contains objections and replies.

## 2. 'UNHOLDABLE' SECOND-ORDER BELIEFS AND DOXASTIC IINSTABILITY

It aids understanding of the Constraint to see that it describes only one of many 'unholdable beliefs'. Imagine that I have become convinced that I believe that *p* and that I believe that *not-p*. This situation is *unstable*, and one of the beliefs must go. Which one? The instability apparently arises from my holding three beliefs (i) that *p*, (ii) that *not-p*, and (iii) that I believe that both *p* and *not-p*. Note, however, that the instability will only be lost once I lose (iii). Losing the second-order belief is both necessary and sufficient for resolving the instability at hand. It is necessary, because the situation will not be resolved until the second-order belief is lost. While it seems at least possible that I can lose (i) or (ii) without losing (iii), the instability would only be resolved by my eventually losing (iii). I must reach a point at which I no longer think that I accept a contradiction. Losing the second-order belief is sufficient to regaining reflective stability, because if I lose only the second-order belief without losing either of the first-order beliefs, this too, would resolve the instability. It thus becomes clear that the real perpetrator is the second-order belief. This brings about the instability, and it must go before instability can be resolved. The belief that I believe that *p* and that *not-p* is what we might call an '*unholdable belief*'. The inevitable result of coming to form this second-order belief is that I will soon lose it.[5]

I am not here describing the ideal reasoner, nor am I making a claim about what believers *should* do. For all I have said it may be a very bad thing that we cannot, in full awareness, hold contradictory beliefs. The instability of an unholdable belief is a real psychological instability. We do not, *as a matter of fact*, retain the second-order belief 'I believe that *p* and I believe that *not-p*'. The importance of unholdable second-order beliefs derives from the fact that they lead us into, and thus to resolve, unstable doxastic situations. The usual case will not be that in which only the second-order belief is lost. Losing just the second-order belief looks like some sort of self-deception, and that must be presumed to be an exceptional case. More likely, once someone realizes that she believes a contradiction, the result will be that she no longer believes one of the two contradictory first-order beliefs. Unholdable second-order beliefs are a

fallible mechanism for preventing us from holding certain first-order beliefs.

## 3. NON-EPISTEMIC EXPLANATIONS AND THE CONSTRAINT

Second-order beliefs come in many flavors. We believe things about the content of our beliefs, about relationships between beliefs, about how justified our beliefs are, and about why we have certain beliefs. The last category is comprised of explanations of beliefs. The Constraint, the phenomenon I will be describing and defending in this paper, says that certain first-person doxastic explanations lead to doxastic instability.

In order to state *which* doxastic explanations we cannot use to explain our own beliefs, I need to have a taxonomy of doxastic explanation strategies.

When one explains an agent's belief, the explanation naturally falls into a category delineated by the *goal* that the explanation posits for the agent's belief. Doxastic explanations divide quite neatly into the following three groups:

i. *Epistemically rationalizing doxastic explanations* presume that the agent believes in order to gain a true belief about the matter at hand.
ii. *Pragmatically rationalizing doxastic explanations* presume that the agent believes in order to gain some other goal.
iii. *Non-rationalizing doxastic explanations* presume no goal at all.

The prime examples of the first type are evidential and perceptual explanations: 'Mrs. Red believes that her husband is home because she can see his car in front of the house'; 'Mrs. Red believes that the people behind her are eating garlic because she can smell it'. Epistemically rationalizing explanations explain by showing that the belief was brought about by a process which should (by either the agent's or the explainer's lights) lead to a true belief. The subject is said to believe so that she can gain a true belief about the subject matter at hand, by using a method which appears (to either the agent or the explainer) to be appropriate for determining what the truth of the matter is. To offer an epistemically rationalizing doxastic explanation of S's belief that *p* is to see S's belief formation as aiming

towards one of a cluster of truth-related, or cognitive, goals. True belief is not the only cognitive goal of inquiry. We may also, or alternatively, be said to aim for knowledge, for justified true belief, for *mostly* true beliefs, for not believing falsehoods, and any other of a number of aims, all closely related to that of forming a true belief. When I speak of 'the' aim of true belief, this should be taken as shorthand for this group of aims.

Pragmatically rationalizing doxastic explanations, on the other hand, claim that a belief is held because the believer aims to meet a goal other than that of a true belief. Prime examples are desire-induced beliefs (i.e., wishful thoughts), and what might be called 'utility-induced beliefs': 'Mr. Crimson believes that the sun will shine tomorrow because he wants to have a picnic'; 'Mr. Crimson believes in God because doing so alleviates his fear of death.' Pragmatic explanations recognize, as Foley puts it, that "what one believes can dramatically affect one's practical prospects . . ."[6] Such an explanation says that the belief is held because it fulfills one of the believer's desires (other than, of course, the desire for a true belief), or because it otherwise brings the believer some practical utility. A belief that is non-epistemically explained is claimed to be held independently of the aim of gaining a truth about the matter at hand.

While most doxastic explanations are rationalizing, we can and do offer doxastic explanations that are not. Non-rationalizing doxastic explanations do not posit a goal or norm of believing; as opposed to all rationalizing explanations, non-rationalizing explanations embody no claim that the subject stands to gain anything from the belief. Some emotional doxastic explanations, like 'Mr. Rose believes that his boss is being scornful because he resents her,' or 'Mr. Rose believes that he will not be successful because he is disappointed over not getting a promotion' do not appear to be rationalizing in any way. Similarly, it may be that social explanations like 'Mr. Rose believes that God exists because he grew up in Texas' may be cashed out as non-rationalizing. In such cases, the explanation seems not to be attributing any rationalizing or teleological element to the subject's commitment.[7]

I will for the most part work with a teleological view of doxastic explanations, categorizing doxastic explanations in terms of the

*goal*, *aim*, or *purpose* that the explanation is attributing to the believer. Two things should be said about this use of teleological terminology. First, as far as I can see, the claims of this paper do not require a teleological view of doxastic explanations, and are expressible consistently with any adequate account of doxastic explanations. An advocate of a norm-following account of doxastic explanations, for example, can read my definition of epistemically rationalizing explanations as those which 'presume that the agent believes because she is following a truth-concerned norm'. There is a substantial issue here, but I do not think that it affects anything more than how I express the Constraint. Secondly, when I speak of the aim or goal of believing, I do not presume that all believing is purposive in the sense of being an intentional action. Believing is often a goal-oriented process, but it is not (always) so in virtue of desires or intentions that the believer has. In the same way, the maintenance of my body temperature is a goal-oriented process, but it is not so in virtue of desires or intentions that I have.[8]

The claim is that a subject often believes in order to gain some goal, and that these goals are reflected in the different ways in which we explain beliefs. This is most vivid in pragmatic explanations: the folk practice of pragmatically explaining a belief reveals that we often see subjects as believing in order to gain some practical benefit. We do not see them as *intentionally trying* to achieve such a goal, nor as being aware of such a goal. However, in so explaining their beliefs, we are nonetheless describing their believing as goal-oriented. 'S believes that God exists because he wants to live forever' says that a practical benefit that S stands to gain from his believing in God, is responsible for his so believing.

Using this taxonomy of doxastic explanation strategies, the following is a first effort at the First-Person Constraint on Doxastic Explanation:

**[FPC1]** If I come to believe that the correct explanation of my believing that $p$ is non-epistemic, an unstable doxastic situation will be created between these two beliefs. Once this instability is resolved, I will be no longer convinced that my believing that $p$ is non-epistemically determined.

This is only a first effort, but with it we can clearly see the phenomenon that the writers with which I began this paper are

attempting to describe: a second-order belief with the content 'my belief that $p$ is correctly explained non-epistemically' leads to doxastic instability. It is an unholdable belief, one that I will not retain.

## 4. A MORE PRECISE STATEMENT

**[FPC1]** has a number of shortcomings that need to be rectified. Before discussing arguments for the Constraint in the next section, I will develop a more precise formulation.

The Constraint is a claim about first-person doxastic explanations *once they are given*. This is not to say, however, that they need to be given. Many of my beliefs are formed unconsciously, out of my mental sight. I have them without being aware that I have them, I may not have any beliefs about them at all. Others may be 'hunches', or 'intuitions', beliefs that I do not know how to defend or explain, but merely 'find myself with'. Yet again, a belief might simply be one which I find very difficult to explain, like my belief that $2 + 2 = 4$, my belief that I am seeing (perceiving) right now, or my belief that God exists. Many of us justly feel a lack of confidence that we have any explanation for beliefs such as these. While there is no doubt a correct account of why I hold these beliefs, it is far from clear what that explanation is. The Constraint says not that I must have an epistemically rationalizing explanation for any of our beliefs, but rather that *if* I do have an explanation, it must be an epistemically rationalizing one if I am to retain the belief being explained.

Secondly, I need not be *correct* about a first-person doxastic explanation in order for it to affect the belief it explains. Anyone can be wrong about the explanation of her beliefs. Explanations of beliefs are statements not just about mental states, but about the determinants of mental states, so even if we have indubitable or privileged access to what we believe, it is very unlikely that we have indubitable or privileged access to why we believe what we do. The Constraint says that if and when I become convinced, *rightly* or *wrongly*, that the right explanation for a belief is non-epistemic, then the grip of that belief will be loosened.

Thirdly, the Constraint only applies to my *current* explanations of my *current* beliefs. The Constraint is consistent with my using

any explanation to account for some belief that *p* that I used to
have, as long as I do not believe that *p* anymore. That is, I might
say something like

> I used to believe that my son was innocent, and that was because I loved him and
> could not face the fact that he is really guilty. I now believe that he is guilty.

The Constraint is also consistent with my thinking that the right
explanation for my present belief has changed. That is, I might say

> I used to believe that my son was innocent because my love for him blinded me
> to any evidence, but that is not true anymore. Now I clearly see that the evidence
> for his innocence is conclusive.

Here I explain my past believing by citing my love for my son, while
evidentially explaining my present believing. The determinant *now*
responsible for a belief may not be that which was responsible, say,
for the belief's initial formation. The sustaining determinant for a
belief may differ from the original determinant.[9] It remains true that
if I *now* believe that *p*, I will not account for why I *now* believe that
*p* except by an epistemic explanation.

Next, the Constraint applies only to first-person explanations of
*particular* beliefs. Many people have the vague, general belief that
'A great many of my beliefs are non-epistemically determined,' and
this belief does not constitute a counterexample to the Constraint.
I can *in general* recognize that I most likely have beliefs that are
non-epistemically determined. It is my recognition of their exist-
ence in *particular* instances, which is not allowed by the Constraint.
What I cannot admit is that a particular belief is explainable non-
epistemically. A *particular* second-order belief has a deleterious
effect on a *particular* first-order belief.[10]

Beliefs come in degrees of strength, and our statement of the
Constraint must reflect that. I can not only believe that *p* and that
*q*, I can furthermore believe that *p* more or less strongly than
I believe that *q*. The same is true of our second-order beliefs.
I may believe that *p*, and have some weak belief (i.e., a suspi-
cion, a hunch, a worry) that the right explanation for that belief is
non-epistemically rationalizing. In a famous passage in his article
'Deciding to Believe', Bernard Williams writes, With regard to no
belief could I know – or, if all this is to be done in full conscious-
ness, even suspect – that I had acquired it at will. Williams is wrong

to add the hyphenated clause. A mere suspicion or inkling that a belief is the product of my will is not incompatible with my holding that belief. This is clearer with respect to non-epistemic determinants other than willing. For example, given my often-pervasive agreement with my friends, peers, colleagues, and those I respect philosophically and otherwise, I often find myself with the suspicion that my relationship with them has had some non-epistemic effect on my beliefs. How could I not be? Indeed, we might take such a suspicion to be the basic background condition for anyone who has thought about these matters much at all. When such worries become stronger than suspicions they will, as the Constraint says, affect the beliefs they are about. However, we might think that *weak* second-order beliefs that non-epistemic determinants are responsible for particular first-order beliefs *constantly* co-exist with the latter. Therefore, we need to assimilate the notion of degrees of belief into **[FPC1]**, our formulation of the Constraint.

The following formulation of the Constraint incorporates the fact that both first- and second-order beliefs come in degrees of strength, as well as the other qualifications to the Constraint that we have considered in this section.

**[FPC2]** If I am *at all convinced* of a non-epistemic explanation of my *particular, presently-held* belief that *p*, then the stronger this conviction, the weaker will be my belief that *p*. As belief in a non-epistemic explanation gets stronger, so will my tendency to give up the explanandum belief, with the result that I will no longer be so strongly convinced that my belief that *p* is non-epistemically determined.

This modified version of the Constraint makes clear that calling second-order non-epistemic doxastic explanations 'unholdable' is something of a misnomer. It is not that certain first-person doxastic explanations cannot be accepted, but rather that the stronger my commitment to a non-epistemic explanation, the weaker is the belief it explains. Nevertheless, it remains true that when a first-person non-epistemic explanation is strong enough, it is after all unholdable; it will disappear one way or another.

One last modification to the Constraint should be considered before moving on. In Section 2, I noted that doxastic instability

could be corrected not only by the loss of the first-order belief, but also by the loss of a second-order belief. Perhaps something similar is true here as well. If S is convinced of a non-epistemic explanation of his belief that *p*, **[FPC2]** says that S's belief that *p* will weaken. However, it may be possible for me to believe that *p* while thinking that I do not believe that *p*. In such a case, rather than lose his [first-order] belief that *p*, S loses his [second-order] belief that he [S] believes that *p*. This would relieve the instability created by the non-epistemic explanation, because the non-epistemic explanation itself would be lost. If this is possible, then **[FPC2]** should be modified. Here's a restatement:

**[FPC3]** If I am at all convinced of a non-epistemic explanation of my particular, presently-held belief that *p*, then the stronger this conviction, the weaker will be either (a) *my belief that p*, or (b) *my belief that I believe that p*. As belief in a non-epistemic explanation gets stronger, so will my tendency to give up either the explanandum belief or my conviction that I have it (with the result that I will no longer be so strongly convinced that my belief that *p* is non-epistemically determined).

All that is lost in accepting **[FPC3]** rather than **[FPC2]** is the ability to predict that when a subject is in the midst of doxastic instability, her first-order belief that *p* will be lost. However, it is still true that a belief with the content 'The right explanation of my presently-held belief that *p* is non-epistemic', is an unholdable and destabilizing belief. If a first-person non-epistemic explanation is strong enough, it will disappear, one way or another.

## 5. ARGUING FOR THE CONSTRAINT

In the course of responding to objections in Section 7, I will make further changes to this formulation of the Constraint. It is time to consider what reasons we have for believing that there is a phenomenon like that described by **[FPC3]**. I endorse five such reasons. In this section, I will look at all five in roughly ascending order of strength.

(1) *An Asymmetry in Doxastic Explanation Patterns*

In many cases, there is a striking asymmetry between our account of our own beliefs and our account of those of others. Believers who often explain other persons' beliefs non-epistemically will resort to epistemic explanations when they explain their own.

Here is one recent example. Theoretical biologist Stephen J. Gould's *Wonderful Life* is a sympathetic account of work done in the Burgess Shale, a large store of fossils first discovered and studied in the early twentieth-century. In his review of *Wonderful Life*, James Gleick observes:

Mr. Gould . . . is a scientist, not a journalist, and he must tell this story – about colleagues and friends – from the inside.

But I think that Stephen Jay Gould, the insider, falls into a trap that Stephen Jay Gould, the historian, has often warned against . . . When writing about [the early geologist C.D.] Walcott's mistakes, safely in the past, Mr. Gould shows in detail how scientific decisions were colored by cultural and philosophical prejudices . . .

Yet when writing about his colleagues, Mr. Gould lets his readers take away a simpler impression, that a rational group of scientists developed a new view of evolution because they received new evidence from the Burgess fossils.[11]

This excerpt is a nice record of the Constraint at work. In explaining the acceptance of theories with which he disagrees, Gould makes free use of non-epistemic determinants. Yet when it comes to explaining the acceptance of theories he himself accepts, Gould turns rationalist. Gleick chastises Gould for refusing to non-epistemically explain his own beliefs, but he is wrong to do so. It is to be expected that Gould will rationally explain work with which he agrees. Gould could not do otherwise while retaining his own beliefs.

Anecdotal and selective evidence for the Constraint can only be so convincing, however. A structured study of doxastic explanation patterns is available in *Opening Pandora's Box*, a sociological study in which Gerald Gilbert and Michael Mulkay analyze interviews with a number of working biochemists involved in a particular debate.[12] Gilbert and Mulkay report an "asymmetrical structure" in the biochemists' explanations of their own and each others' beliefs. First, they find that "speakers link [what they take to be] the correct view directly to experimental evidence."[13] This is true whichever side the speaker takes in the debate. "In contrast", however,

judgments of those scientists who are depicted as being or as having been in error are characterised and explained . . . in terms of various special attributes which they possess as individuals or as certain kinds of social actor.

For instance, scientists are presented as being in error because they are 'strong individuals who want to interpret everything in terms of their theories' and who, consequently, 'bend the data'. Alternatively, they are characterized as 'strong personalities', 'dogmatic' and inclined to avoid awkward questions, as being misled by publications which had not been subject to proper refereeing, as irrational, or as having too much invested in a theory to give it up.[14]

Scientists can explain competing positions as being non-epistemically determined, but, as the Constraint predicts, they do not have this latitude with respect to their own beliefs. Insofar as scientists believe the theories they accept, then they are no different from any believer in not being able see their beliefs as non-epistemically determined.

(2)  *The Limited and Negative Role of Pragmatic Benefit*

Any benefit that we gain from our beliefs plays a surprisingly limited role in our discussion of what and why we believe. Richard Foley writes:

Why does it seem so odd for practical reasons, or for other non-epistemic reasons, to override epistemic reasons for believing, making it rational all things considered to believe what is not epistemically rational? That it does seem odd, I think, cannot be denied. Indeed, when people reflect upon what reasons they have to believe something . . . they rarely even consider the practical advantages that might accrue to them by believing it . . . Likewise, when someone tries to convince another person that he has reasons to believe something, they rarely even mention the practical benefits that might result from believing it . . .[15]

People do not make themselves aware of, nor do they generally discuss, pragmatic reasons for beliefs. We do not consider the benefits we may gain from holding beliefs which support our values, or which would placate our desires. All this is true even though we can rightly see that pragmatic benefits *really are reasons* for holding a belief. Believing certain things does undoubtedly bring us happiness, comfort, and satisfaction, and would do so even if the facts we believed were false. Nevertheless, we do not tend to consider such aspects of believing, nor do we attempt to share this satisfaction by pointing out these practical benefits to others. The Constraint explains why this is so. We cannot hold beliefs that we

think are believed in order to achieve appeasement, even though they may, in fact, give us that appeasement.

Likewise, we do not appeal to the pragmatic reasons for beliefs in defending our positions. In no theoretical confrontational discourse (e.g., science, philosophy, history) do we find proponents of positions appealing to the pragmatic benefits of adopting their position. Defending one's theoretical position by pointing to its practical benefits is a possible dialectical move, but the Constraint tells us why it will rarely, if ever, be made. Even if I appreciate that some commitment would have certain non-epistemic benefit, and even if that benefit leads me to come to hold the belief, I could not think that I had done so *because* of my appreciation of that benefit. 'Practical arguments', as we might call them, must somehow cover their own tracks. They must lead to belief without the believer being aware that they are doing, or have done, so.

Blaise Pascal, who is known for offering the most famous practical argument, was well aware of this. Pascal knew that his Wager would not directly induce the belief in God's existence. After rehearsing the Wager, he has the reader respond:

Yes, but my hands are tied and my lips are sealed; I am being forced to wager and I am not free; I am being held fast and I am so made that I cannot believe.

And Pascal replies:

That is true . . . You want to be cured of unbelief and you ask for the remedy: learn from those who were once bound like you and now wager all they have . . . They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally . . .[16]

Pascal introduces his Wager in the context of the *Pensées* in order to induce not a belief in God, but the *desire for* the belief in God. Once that desire is in place, Pascal reasons, the reader would be willing to engage in 'Christian behavior', and she would be more susceptible to the extensive epistemic arguments that Pascal goes on to offer in defense of Christianity. Pascal knew that this was the only way that he could utilize pragmatic concerns to get his reader to believe in the existence of God. He knew, in other words, that practical arguments must work indirectly.[17] The Constraint tells us why this is so.

Far from being *positive* currency in theoretical dialogue, pragmatic and nonrationalizing doxastic explanations of another

person's commitments are intended, and taken, critically. When I wish to criticize another person's belief, I may use a certain type of non-epistemic determinant in explaining why she holds it in order to criticize her holding it. To say that someone is engaged in wishful thinking, for example, or in the grip of an *idée fixe*, is to say that she believes something not because of any evidence she has for it, but because she cannot avoid doing so, or because she wants it to be true. In a recent and heated debate over the rationality of religious beliefs, the chemist Peter Atkins declared that theologian Keith Ward's "beliefs are caused by too much water in the brain".[18] Needless to say, Atkins' (non-serious) explanation was actually a vitriolic criticism of Ward's religious commitments. On the face of it, such statements are merely doxastic explanations, but as we all know they carry implicit judgement. Again, the Constraint predicts why this should be so: to assert non-epistemic determination of S's belief is to attack S's very holding of that belief.

Lastly, there are numerous examples of non-epistemic doxastic explanations which, although not intended critically, are nevertheless taken to be so. A nice example is the friction created by the non-epistemic explanations Freud made of religious beliefs.[19] Theologians, religious psychologists, and others berated Freud for what they saw as an explicit attack on religion, occasionally turning the tables on him by psychoanalyzing Freud's own lack of belief.[20] Freud never intended his explanations to be attacks, but the Constraint makes it clear why they would be *seen* (by the religious believer) as such. Freud's explanations are, for the religious believer, unholdable.

## (3)  *The Appeal to the First-person*

One of the main factors supporting the Constraint is our inability to discover counterexamples in our own belief systems. In order to decide whether the Constraint is right, you (the reader) should see for yourself whether you can explain any of your beliefs by using non-epistemic determinants. Can you non-epistemically explain one of your beliefs without that explanation negatively affecting the strength of the explained belief? If the Constraint is correct, then it predicts that, and explains why, you cannot do so.

This sort of appeal will be familiar from Locke and Hume's respective defenses of aspects of their (thoroughly phenomenal) theories of ideas. Arguing for the source of our ideas in the senses and introspection, Locke writes,

Let any one examine his own Thoughts, and thoroughly search into his Understanding, and then let him tell me, Whether all the original Ideas he has there, are any other than of the Objects of his Senses; or of the Operations of his Mind, considered as Objects of his Reflection: and how great a mass of Knowledge soever he imagines to be lodged there, he will, upon taking a strict view, see, that he has not any Idea in his Mind, but what one of these two have imprinted . . .

And similarly, arguing for the thesis that all ideas come from impressions, Hume writes,

Every one may satisfy himself in this point by running over as many [ideas] as he pleases. But if any one should deny this universal resemblance, I know no way of convincing him, but by desiring him to shew a simple impression, that has not a correspondent idea, or a simple idea, that has not a correspondent impression.[21]

As a descriptive claim about the effect of seeing ourselves in certain ways, the Constraint lends itself to the same sort of plea.

### (4) *Attribution Conditions and the Constraint*

It is very easy to *imagine* coming across a counterexample to the Constraint: Mr. Scarlet tells us that he believes that it will be sunny tomorrow because he wants to have a picnic. Mr. Scarlet is telling us that he believes something about the weather because of his own wishes for what the weather will be like. It seems clear, however, that we would not take Mr. Scarlet's claims at face value. We will not accept his assertion of both the belief and the explanation. Instead, we will tend to re-interpret Mr. Scarlet's statement. Either he believes that it will be sunny tomorrow and he is joking about the explanation, or he is merely confessing that he does not really believe that it is going to be sunny tomorrow at all. In such a case, Mr. Scarlet's reasserting or reemphasizing his non-epistemic explanation of his belief would not lead us to change our minds.

Put into current philosophical lingo, we could say that the Constraint is a part of the attribution conditions for beliefs.

The attribution conditions for a concept C are those properties that we must see as holding of a state of affairs $\phi$ before we can accept that $\phi$ is correctly understood in terms of C.

We will tend not to believe someone when he presents us with a counterexample to the Constraint, and will instead re-interpret anyone who appears to violate the Constraint in such a way that we understand him to be either (i) not asserting that *p*, or (ii) not asserting a non-epistemic explanation of his belief that *p*.

A well-known quotation from Montaigne allows me to illustrate this feature of beliefs. After discussing the weakness of religious belief, he writes:

All this is a very evident sign that we receive our religion only in our own way and with our own hands, and not otherwise than as other religions are received. We happen to have been born in a country where it was in practice; or we regard its antiquity or the authority of the men who have maintained it; or we fear the threats it fastens upon unbelievers, or pursue its promises. Those considerations should be employed in our belief, but as subsidiaries; they are human ties. Another region, other witnesses, similar promises and threats, might imprint upon us in the same way a contrary belief.

We are Christians by the same title that we are Perigordians or Germans.[22]

Montaigne's use of the first-person pronoun 'we' suggests that this is a counterexample to the Constraint. He appears to be saying that his own belief in God is socially, and nonrationally, determined. However, I think that we are resistant to ascribing to Montaigne both (i) a Christian belief and (ii) the conviction that social environment plays the primary role in determining this belief. We are more likely to deny either (i) or (ii) than we are to attribute both to him.

Some of Montaigne's own contemporaries took the first response to this passage, taking it to show that Montaigne was not a believer. Many not surprisingly saw it as an attack on Christianity.[23] Alternatively, however, we might somehow unpack Montaigne's explanation of religious believing in such a way that it becomes epistemically rational. Perhaps we should understand Montaigne as saying that it is only in virtue of living among believers that we become susceptible to God's grace.[24] Whatever option we choose, the point remains that we find it difficult to take Montaigne's statement as a straightforward violation of the Constraint. We are loathe to tolerate

violations to the Constraint, and we interpret accordingly. In her discussion of the Constraint, Winters puts the point strongly:

> one cannot conceive of someone who takes himself to believe that God exists and also genuinely thinks that he knows of nothing that tends to show that the proposition is true.[25]

Although I am in agreement with Winters here, I think that the use of the word 'conceive' may be misleading. We can certainly *imagine* someone doing this; we did so at the beginning of this section. I think that the best way to put the point is that we would not *believe* anyone who said that they have a belief and explain it non-epistemically. This is simply not a state of affairs that we could take to happen.[26]

Given the fact that we have no general objection to attributing unconscious non-epistemically determined beliefs to other persons, it is perhaps surprising that the Constraint is to be found among attribution conditions. If someone does not have the second-order belief that her first-order belief has been non-epistemically determined, then we do not, *mutatis mutandis*, hesitate to attribute a non-epistemically determined belief to her. That is, we can readily accept that Mr. Scarlet is engaged in wishful thinking, but once he *himself* says that he is engaging in wishful thinking, we become suspicious. We are willing to attribute beliefs to those whose beliefs are non-epistemically determined, but not to those who *admit* that their beliefs are non-epistemically determined.

(5) *Non-epistemic Explanations and Being Conscious of a Belief*

The final, and most powerful, argument for the Constraint claims that seeing oneself as having a belief is inconsistent with offering a non-epistemic explanation of that belief.[27]

The notion of a belief tells us that to believe that *p* is to think that *p* is true. It follows that in thinking about one of my beliefs, I must see it as an attempt to grasp some truth about the matter at hand. I have to see my beliefs as – in a phrase from Bernard Williams[28] – 'aiming at truth' regarding the subject matter to which the proposition *p* belongs. This does not mean that all beliefs do, as a matter of fact, aim at truth. A wishful thought, for example, is a belief that aims not at truth, but at bringing the believer comfort, or relieving

her of anxiety.[29] Nevertheless, Williams' slogan is correct if under-stood as saying that any believer – *including* a wishful thinker – must view her belief as truth-aimed. If she did not, she would not see it as a belief of hers, that is, a state that correctly represents what the world is like.

Even understood in this way, however, 'aiming at truth' only partially captures what is unique about beliefs, for non-doxastic states like *presuming* or *guessing* also involve aiming at truth. To guess is to guess *at the truth*. The difference lies, again, in how the guesser and believer can see the norms or aims that their respective states are attempting to meet. Guessing can be consciously under-taken in full awareness that the guesser is doing so in order to meet other *non-epistemic* goals. David Owens nicely illustrates this when he imagines being a contestant in a quiz show:

> In a given round I have a minute to answer as many questions as I can. I am not expect to know the answer to many of these questions straight off, so the question master gives me a series of clues which are designed to help me guess the answer. I must decide how many clues I shall listen to before making a stab at it. Clearly, at any given point, I should weigh the likelihood of getting this particular question right if I wait for another clue against the likelihood of getting it right now and moving onto the next question, or at least of getting it wrong and perhaps moving onto a more tractable question.[30]

I can hazard a guess at any point in the quiz, all the while realizing my doing so *rather than not doing so* is dependent upon pragmatic considerations, in this case the correct answering of as many ques-tions as I can in a minute. Indeed, we can embellish the account in such a way that my guessing that p *rather than that q* is consciously dependent upon my pragmatic aims: there is another contestant who has already guessed that q, and I know that we cannot share the prize money. While guessing aims at truth, the guesser can see herself as guessing in order to achieve some goal or meet some norm *other* than that of truth. It is characteristic of guessing that it is possible for the guesser to recognize this, to see the stating of a truth as only one norm of her guessing, alongside other non-truth-related goals. 'I am not convinced that *p* is right', the guesser can explain, 'but, if I am going to win, I have to say *something* ...' (or, 'I have to say something *other than q* ...').

The difference between non-doxastic states that aim at truth, like guesses, and beliefs, is that one cannot view one's beliefs in the same way: 'I have to believe *something* if I am going to win . . .' I cannot see myself as believing that *p* (rather than that *q*) *so that* I will pass a test or win a game. The believer cannot see her belief – her commitment that something is true – as not held solely in order to gain a truth. Something is a guess or presumption, and not a belief, because the guesser or presumer can see it as, say, a *hurried* or *pressurized* or *motivated* attempt at the truth. The believer cannot. The belief is one's *take on* the truth, and not one's, say, *pressurized stab at* the truth or one's *idle speculation* or *entertaining imagining* of the truth. The difference is not merely one of degree. It is rather that one sees one's take on the truth (as opposed to these other attitudes) as not being held with the aim of relieving pressure, filling idle time, or gaining joy. As Owens concludes:

> The guesser can exercise control over her guesses by reflecting on how best to strike a balance between the goal of truth and other goals her guessing serves; the believer cannot.[31]

The guesser can think that her guess is dependent upon her being in a hurry, but the believer must not. The believer must think that were she not in a hurry or under pressure, she would have had the same belief. To think that being in a hurry has affected my inclination that *p*, that I have this inclination in order to have it *now*, is to see my commitment to *p* as something other than a belief, indeed most likely to see it as a guess. We all recognize, of course, that certain of our beliefs fulfill other goals of ours. They bring us comfort and allow us to earn money and find wine. But the believer must see each of these gains as derivative from the goal of truth. When I hold a belief I must see the possession of a truth as the primary aim of my believing what I do. To do otherwise would be to undercut the belief, or to see it as something other than a belief.

Thus, in acknowledging that I have a belief that *p*, I characterize myself as being in a state *only* for the purpose of being committed to a truth about the subject matter at hand. However, this view of my own beliefs is incompatible with explaining my belief non-epistemically. If I explain my doxastic commitment to *p* non-epistemically, then I am seeing my commitment as aiming for some goal other than truth, or for no goal at all. I understand

myself as believing that *p* (rather than that *q*) because I am in a hurry, in order to bring myself happiness or fame, because I want a simple or elegant theory, or because I am in such-and-such a social position. Therefore, holding a doxastic commitment is essentially incompatible with non-epistemically explaining why one has that commitment; the two cannot exist, in full force, together. To consider and retain one of my current doxastic states requires seeing it as fundamentally aiming at truth, but to non-epistemically explain that belief is see it as aiming primarily at some other goal, or at no goal at all. Thus the incompatibility. I cannot see a state as doxastic while fully endorsing a non-epistemic explanation of it. It simply does not make sense to see myself as both believing that *p* is true and being convinced that I do so because of factors that have nothing to do with *p*'s being true.

Let me summarize this argument for the Constraint:

i.   I cannot see my own belief as not being held primarily so that I grasp some truth about the subject matter at hand [from the notion of belief].

ii.  If I were to explain my believing that *p* non-epistemically, then I would be seeing my belief as aiming for some goal other than truth, or for no goal at all [from the notion of a non-epistemic explanation – see Section 3].

iii. These are incompatible attitudes to take towards a belief. I cannot attribute the exclusive goal of truth to the belief (by continuing to consciously believe) while taking it away (by accepting a non-epistemic explanation). Therefore, it is impossible to hold a belief and non-epistemically explain my holding it.

The argument simply spells out two conceptual truths, and then states that they are incompatible attitudes for someone to take towards a single belief. It does not make sense to see myself as believing that *p* is true and meanwhile admitting that my doing so depends upon factors that have nothing to do with *p*'s being true. The combination of the two attitudes, goes the argument, makes for nonsense.

Notice that this argument supports only the Constraint, and nothing either stronger or weaker. It does not entail that no one else can see my belief as dependent upon non-truth-related aims, as she

would if she were attributing, for example, a wishful thought to me. I have to see my beliefs as aiming at truth, but no one else has to see each of my beliefs in that way.[32] Secondly, this argument does not block the possibility of my holding a belief without explaining it at all. My (i) believing that $p$ is true and meanwhile (ii) not having any idea why I believe that $p$ is true, are not incompatible attitudes.

## 6.  THE MODAL STATUS OF THE CONSTRAINT

Is the Constraint a necessary truth, true of all possible believers, or is it merely a contingent truth, true (perhaps) of all human believers, but not of all possible believers? The Constraint is usually taken to be a necessary truth. Winters states so explicitly in her formulation. Williams, whose primary concern is explaining doxastic involuntarism, is clear that the latter is necessary: 'It is not a contingent fact that I cannot bring it about, just like that, that I believe something, as it is a contingent fact that I cannot bring it about, just like that, that I'm blushing.' The fact that Williams takes the Constraint to be responsible for doxastic involuntarism strongly suggests that he takes the Constraint itself to be a necessary phenomenon.[33]

Whether or not the Constraint is a necessary truth should be determined from our grounds for thinking that it is true. The final argument from the previous section is the strongest argument for the Constraint in this regard. It takes two conceptual truths, one about belief and one about non-epistemic explanations, and it says that they are incompatible. It is not possible to believe that $p$ is true while holding that this belief does not aim at truth (which is what one would be doing if one were to non-epistemically explain a belief). If this is correct, and I think it is, then the Constraint is necessary in the strongest possible sense. It is true of all possible believers.

Once we endorse the §5(5) argument for the Constraint, it is clear that the Constraint is a necessary phenomenon. From this, we know that all phenomena that are logically implied by the Constraint will also be necessary. If the Constraint is necessary and entails doxastic involuntarism, for example, doxastic involuntarism will turn out to be necessary. Secondly, violations of the Constraint will not be possible. Counterexamples will be impossible, even if they are imaginable. I will return to counterexamples in the next section.

None of the other arguments establish that the Constraint is necessarily true. The argument from attribution conditions comes closest to doing so. If a subject's abiding by the Constraint is an attribution condition for the concept of belief, then once we see that a subject does not abide by the Constraint, then we are not willing to accept that she really possesses the beliefs that she is non-epistemically explaining. However, this fact is consistent with the Constraint's not being a necessary phenomenon. I will not accept that what you saw flying yesterday was a pig, but that does not mean that I think that 'does not fly' is a necessary property of pigs. On the contrary, 'pigs do not fly' characterizes pigs only as a matter of contingent fact. Had we only the observation that first-person non-epistemic explanations lead us to not believe that the subject has the belief being explained, we would have no reason to conclude that the Constraint is a necessary phenomenon. This observation leaves open the possibility that our not accepting that some state that is non-epistemically explained is a belief is just like our not accepting that a flying object is a pig. We simply do not think that beliefs and pigs act like this *as a matter of contingent fact*. So a successful argument for the Constraint from attribution conditions is consistent with the Constraint's being a contingent phenomenon about us and our beliefs.

In any case, it is perhaps worth mentioning that even if the Constraint were contingent, and that counterexamples to it were possible, this would still not entail that counterexamples are actual, or that we (humans) are capable of contradicting the Constraint. That there is a phenomenon, affecting human believers, like that I am calling the Constraint, in no way depends upon its being a phenomenon of heavy modal strength. So, while my endorsement of the §5(5) argument for the Constraint means that I take the Constraint to be necessary, I am not convinced that anything very important hinges on this fact.


## 7. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

In this final section, I will respond to four objections to the Constraint. Each of them raises quite deep issues related to beliefs, belief explanation, and belief attribution. While the first two objec-

tions can be kept at bay, I will restrict or modify the Constraint in response to the subsequent two.

*Objection 1: Counterexamples Involving Behavioral Tendencies*

The following story looks like a straightforward violation of the Constraint.

Mr. Cherry works at a bank. One day, in a reflective mood, Mr. Cherry thinks about his behavior towards his customers. He realizes that he treats his women customers pedantically. He concludes from this that he believes that all women are inferior. This is so in spite of the fact that he takes himself to have no evidence for this belief, and would never assent to it. He concludes that this belief is non-epistemically determined, perhaps by the social environment in which he was raised.

In arguing for the Constraint, I have claimed not only that we feel considerable resistance in accepting a counterexample to the Constraint, but also that counterexamples are impossible. If this is correct, then it is not only true that we tend to reinterpret an apparent violation of the Constraint in such a way that it does not violate the Constraint, it is furthermore true that we *must* so reinterpret. If violations to the Constraint are impossible, then the correct way of understanding such violations must be other than as a violation to the Constraint.

That said, this sort of situation contains a good reason for not accepting it as a counterexample. Doing so would require that we attribute contradictory beliefs to Mr. Cherry. He readily asserts that women are not inferior. He recognizes that he has far more reason to believe that women are not inferior than he does to believe the contrary. This is central to the example, for it is the recognition that he has evidence *against* these beliefs that leads Mr. Cherry to non-epistemically explain them. He would not have non-epistemically explained his belief in the inferiority of women if he did not think that he had every reason to believe and assent to the contrary. Indeed, all counterexamples to the Constraint – involving as they do a believer's non-epistemically explaining one of her beliefs – depend upon the believer's being led to do so because he has no epistemic reason to hold the belief he does. Were Mr. Cherry to think that he has epistemic grounds for his belief that women are inferior, then he would have no reason to *infer* that he has such a belief; *he would*

*simply assert that women are inferior*. However, he does not, he asserts that they are not inferior. It is for this reason that we would need to attribute to Mr. Cherry the belief that he does not believe that women are inferior (because of his assertion that they are not) *and* the belief that they are (because of his behavioral tendencies).

I do not claim that people do not have contradictory beliefs, nor do I think that there are no conditions under which we should attribute contradictory beliefs. Nevertheless, in situations like these, there is something very peculiar about the supposed non-epistemic belief. Mr. Cherry is not willing to assert that women are inferior. This is not by itself unusual, we have many beliefs – like secrets – that, for pragmatic reasons, we are not willing to assert. However, it is not pragmatic reasons that prevent Mr. Cherry's assertion that women are inferior; he is not willing to assert that women are inferior because the rest of his beliefs indicate otherwise. He himself explicitly asserts that he has no reason to believe that women are inferior. It follows from this that if he does have the belief that women are inferior, it is not responsive to coherence and consistency with the rest of his beliefs. His supposed belief that women are inferior is wholly and oddly isolated from the rest of his beliefs. This is further reflected in the fact that we would expect Mr. Cherry to give up his belief that women are inferior as soon as he was aware that he held it. As I suggested in Section 2 above, the second-order belief that I believe that *p* and that not-*p* (like the belief that my believing that *p* is non-epistemically determined) has the property of being unholdable. Mr. Cherry would not be happy with the claim that he holds contradictory beliefs about the inferiority of women, and if his belief that women are inferior is actually a belief, then we would expect him to lose it. It looks as if we are going to have to endorse an extremely liberal view of believing were we to attribute the belief that women are inferior to Mr. Cherry.

We can avoid attributing to Mr. Cherry such a peculiar belief were we to simply conclude that Mr. Cherry has a socially determined tendency to behave in certain ways towards women. He does not, however, have the belief that his behavior suggests. Under this interpretation of Mr. Cherry, we admit that he has behavioral and emotional tendencies that would be expected to accompany certain beliefs, while denying that he has these beliefs themselves.

*Objection 2: Separating Justification from Explanation*

It might be thought that someone could say something like the following: "I believe that *p*, and that belief is justified, but the explanation for my believing that *p* is *another story altogether*; it has nothing to do with my justification for *p*. Thus, I can accept that the explanation for my belief is non-epistemic, as long as I retain the commitment that the explained belief is justified". Behind this sort of counterexample lies the thought that from the first person, psychological (i.e., explanatory) considerations can be separated from epistemic or justificatory considerations. A subject can talk about why she has a belief *independently* from whether she thinks that belief is justified. We might call this the 'Separation Thesis':

It is possible for me to think that my justification for my present belief that *p* can lie in completely different considerations from my explanation for my belief that *p*.[34]

The Constraint says that I can accept an explanation of a presently-held belief only if that explanation is epistemically rationalizing, that is, only if it is determined by considerations that make it justified by my own lights. So it is clear that I must deny the Separation Thesis.

Imagine that Ms. Rust says, 'My belief that *p* is justified, but the explanation for my believing that *p* is a separate story from my justification for that belief'. The first thing we should ask Ms. Rust is whether she would continue to believe that *p* if the justification for that belief were taken away. What would happen to her belief that *p* if, say, her evidence for *p* were revealed to be wrong? If she would no longer believe that *p*, then she is *wrong* to say that her belief does not depend upon her justification. The truth of the counterfactual 'If Ms. Rust no longer believed the evidence for her belief that *p*, then she would no longer believe that *p*' indicates that, contrary to what she says, her belief is dependent upon the evidence she has for it.

If, on the other hand, Ms. Rust thinks that she would continue to believe that *p* even if her evidence for *p* were undercut, then, indeed, upon that basis, she would be right to conclude that her belief is not dependent upon its justification. And perhaps she is justified in this prediction. Perhaps by some mechanism or other Ms. Rust always keeps her second-order non-epistemic explana-

tion and her first-order belief apart. When Ms. Rust thinks about whether $p$ is true or not, she considers and responds only to truth-apt considerations, and when she attends to her *belief* (and not just to whether $p$), she sincerely believes – perhaps because of some complex theory of her psyche to that effect – that her belief that $p$ is non-epistemically held in place. However, we can imagine that the latter does not bring about any change in the belief itself. Ms. Rust's complex non-epistemic explanation is somehow (perhaps artificially or pathologically) kept apart from her belief that $p$ such that it will not have an effect upon the latter.

In this sort of situation, it looks as if Ms. Rust would be right to separate the justification for her belief from the explanation for it. If S's believing that $p$ is not affected by the undercutting of the evidence S has for $p$, then S's believing that $p$ clearly does not depend upon evidence. Epistemically rationalizing doxastic explanations are premised on the believer's being evidence-sensitive, so if Ms. Rust's belief is, as she thinks, not dependent upon her losing her justification for it, then her belief that $p$ is dependent upon non-epistemic determinants.[35]

Even if it is possible for such a case to arise, they will be very rare indeed. Ms. Rust cannot think that *in general* her beliefs do not respond to the undercutting of their justification. It would be difficult to make sense of a doxastic agent of whom that was true. It would be even more difficult to make sense of *ourselves* as doxastic agents if that were true. At the very least, we would not be capable of anything like investigation; investigating requires that we see our beliefs as being modifiable in the face of what else we discover to be true.

The Constraint predicts that once Ms. Rust comes to accept that her belief is based on non-epistemic determinants, she will seriously doubt that $p$. Insofar as Ms. Rust is convinced that her belief depends upon non-epistemic considerations, says the Constraint, so far will that belief be doubted. We should remind ourselves that our discussion of Ms. Rust is an imagined situation, and it has yet to be established whether or not the prediction of the Constraint will not come true. The thought experiment cannot tell us that, and insofar as it cannot, it is merely begging the question against the Constraint. Imagining a counterexample to the Constraint has no force against

it unless it is established that the belief would not be subjectively lessened by the non-epistemic explanation of it.

Furthermore, while we may think that we can *imagine* some such believer, on closer inspection it is clear that we would not *accept* all that Ms. Rust tells us. For Ms. Rust to explain her belief that *p* is for her to give an account as to why she holds it. No matter how complex her theory of explanation is, we simply would not accept that she believes that *p and* that she thinks her doing so is dependent upon non-truth-related considerations. Imagine *any* non-epistemic explanation that Ms. Rust may give us, 'My believing that *p* is dependent upon . . .' Our response would involve an inability to make sense of this as a belief. Her commitment to *p* looks closer to a guess than it does to a belief. The concept of belief demands that a subject's belief be responsive in this way to her own view of it, and if Ms. Rust's 'belief' does not have any such response to her thinking that it is non-epistemically determined, then we will consider it not, after all, a belief.

*Objection 3: Counterexamples Involving Non-cognitive Commitments*

While it may be true that someone cannot sincerely say 'I believe that this painting will sell for one million dollars because I want it to,' it does seem possible to say something like 'I believe that painting is attractive because of the culture in which I was raised.' Similarly, it seems possible to say 'I believe that calf fries are delicious, but that is only because I grew up in Texas'. This sort of example has considerable force. I think that many of us would have no hesitation in non-epistemically explaining our gustatory, style, fashion, and aesthetic commitments. Such judgements, it seems, may not be susceptible to the Constraint.

What characterizes such commitments, such that they are not susceptible to the Constraint? Perhaps the best clue lies in the §5(5) argument for the Constraint. That argument says that I cannot see a belief as aiming at the truth and also see it as being non-epistemically determined. This suggests that if there are any beliefs that I can see as non-epistemically determined, then I must not be seeing them as aiming at the truth. Perhaps, then, the beliefs that are not susceptible to the Constraint are precisely those that the

believer does not see as aiming towards truth. That is, beliefs that are non-epistemically explainable are not *beliefs* at all.

This is how the non-cognitivist about aesthetic response sees aesthetic judgement. To call something beautiful is to report one's subjective response to it. Gustatory, style, and aesthetic judgements, says the non-cognitivist, are on a par; they are expressions of one's nature and developed taste. It would seem that the non-cognitivist would not have any qualms about non-epistemically explaining her expressions. In explaining an expression of taste, one is not explaining why one believes that one has that taste, but rather *why one has that taste at all*. And one can certainly see tastes, which themselves have no truth conditions, as having arisen non-epistemically. So the non-cognitivist about aesthetic judgement can explain her particular aesthetic judgements non-epistemically.

Generalizing, we could speculate that a true non-cognitivist about *any* area of discourse D will be able to non-epistemically explain her 'commitments' in that area. The Constraint only applies to those commitments – namely, doxastic commitments – that a subject takes to be true. The non-cognitivist about D, however, says that statements in D have no truth-conditions. The Constraint thus has no strength for her. So how are we going to reformulate the Constraint in response to this sort of counterexample? I suggest that we do so in terms of how the subject views the belief that she is explaining. If she is a committed non-cognitivist about the belief, then she will be able to explain it non-epistemically. If she is not, then her first-person doxastic explanations will, like her other beliefs, be susceptible to the Constraint.

**[FPC4]** If I am at all convinced of an explanation of my presently-held commitment, *and I am a cognitivist about that commitment*, then the stronger my conviction that the correct explanation of a particular belief is non-epistemic, the weaker will be that commitment.[36]

None of this is intended as a criticism of the non-cognitivist. However, if this is correct, then the Constraint may emerge as a test for whether someone is a true non-cognitivist about discourse D: if it is not possible for S to accept a non-epistemic explanation of her commitments in D, then she is not really committed to her non-cognitivism. Perhaps the main interest of such a test would lie

in its results for moral non-cognitivists. The question 'Can we be moral non-cognitivists?' would be substituted by 'Can we accept non-epistemic explanations for our moral commitments?'[37]

*Objection 4: Partial Non-epistemic Explanations*

I have so far ignored the distinction between full and partial doxastic explanations. Once the distinction is admitted, then the following sort of question arises: "Can I not think that non-epistemic determinants play a *partial* role in determining my belief that *p*?" I have no doubt that we can, and the Constraint should be modified accordingly.

The relationship between full and partial doxastic explanations is a complex one, and there are a number of ways in which an explanation can be partial rather than full. A first way is expressed in counterfactuals like 'If I were to live in another culture/society/era, I would not believe that the earth rotates around the sun.' Even though one's culture, society, or era may be seen as a non-epistemic determinant, once their role in the determination of my belief is cashed out, the explanation may be, on the whole, epistemically rationalizing. Once fully understood, this counterfactual may mean that if I lived in another culture, I would not be exposed to the evidence (including testimonial evidence) for this belief to which this culture exposes me. What looks like a non-epistemic explanation may actually turn out to be part of an epistemic one.

A second way in which a doxastic explanation becomes partial is by answering only one contrastive why-question relevant to the belief being explained. An explanation is an answer to a why-question, and most why-questions are *contrastive*. Contrastive questions isolate certain aspects of the phenomenon to be explained; they ask 'Why X *rather than* Y?'. Contrastive questions about a belief take the form 'Why does S believe that *p*, *rather than* q?' or 'Why does S, *rather than* T, believe that *p*?' It would seem that a subject might be able to offer non-epistemic answers to certain contrastive why-questions about one of her beliefs, without putting that belief in danger. Some examples which readily spring to mind: I might answer the question 'Why do I believe that *p now*, rather than at some other time?' by citing some social fact, like 'because it was only recently that I joined the Flat Earth Society'. Or, in answer

to the question, 'Why do I believe that *p*, and Ms. Roan not?', I might give some non-epistemic explanation of Ms. Roan's disbelief. Or, 'Why do I have a belief about this matter, rather than having no belief?' can be answered by citing one's interests. Accordingly, this suggests that there may be a more precise way of stating the Constraint, in terms of the sorts of contrastive questions that I *cannot* answer non-epistemically.

**[FPC5]** The stronger my conviction that the correct answer to one of the following contrastive questions regarding my belief that *p* (about which I am a cognitivist) is non-epistemic, the weaker will be my belief that *p*:

    (i)   Why do I believe that *p*, rather than believe that *q*? Why do I believe that F(a), rather than F(b), or F(a) rather than G(a)?

    (ii)  Why do I believe that *p*, rather than staying neutral on the matter?[38]

    (iii) Why do I believe that *p to the degree that I do*, rather than to some other degree?

As opposed to the previous formulations of the Constraint, **[FPC5]** isolates certain aspects of believing, and claims that they cannot be explained non-epistemically. It says that my believing one proposition rather than another, or believing some proposition at all, or believing it to the extent that I do, rather than to some other extent, are all aspects of beliefs which must be explained, by me, epistemically. I suspect that some such formulation of the Constraint is potentially the most precise possible. A fully adequate formulation of the Constraint in these terms would be a *complete* list of contrastive questions that cannot be answered non-epistemically from the first person. However, I do not know how to go about determining when such a list would be complete.[39]

## NOTES

[1]  The word 'doxastic' does not have a technical use in this paper; it is merely the adjective corresponding to 'belief'.

[2]  Ayers (1991) Vol. 1 p. 148, Stroud (1979) p. 239, and Winters (1979) p. 245.

[3]  Hampshire (1972) pp. 11–13, Williams (1973) p. 148, Scott-Kakures (1993) p. 94, Owens (2000) Ch. 3, and Smith (1997) preface. While I attribute a 'belief

in the Constraint' to all of the writers above, this should be taken loosely. While I have no doubt that each of them believes that there is a phenomenon closely related to that which I defend in this paper, I do not know whether each of them would agree with my formulation of it.

[4]  With the exception of Winters (1979), I know of no in-depth treatment of the Constraint. The most serious shortcoming in Winter's discussion is in its neglect of our reasons to believe that there is a Constraint.

[5]  As we will see, doxastic instability is a more complex phenomenon than I have indicated in this paragraph.

[6]  Foley (1988) p. 131.

[7]  Although I here claim that there are non-rationalizing doxastic explanations, their existence is not essential to this paper. The important distinction for understanding the Constraint is between doxastic explanations that are epistemically rationalizing and those that are not.

[8]  Collins (1978) and (1984). See also Velleman (2000) pp. 252–253.

[9]  This distinction is made in Winters (1979) p. 246.

[10]  This is also a point made in Winters (1979) pp. 245–246.

[11]  Gleick (1989).

[12]  Gilbert and Mulkay (1984).

[13]  Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) p. 68.

[14]  Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) p. 68.

[15]  Foley (1987) pp. 214–215.

[16]  Pascal (1966) Fragment 418. Pascal frequently engages in an imaginary dialogue with the reader of the *Pensées*.

[17]  For a defense of this interpretation of the *Pensées*, see Jones (1998).

[18]  Reported in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, October 7 1996.

[19]  Perhaps most prominently in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927).

[20]  For this debate, see Faber (1972) Ch. 2.

[21]  Locke (1975) II, i, 5 and Hume (1978) pp. 3–4.

[22]  Montaigne (1948), pp. 324–325.

[23]  See the editor's preface to "Apology for Raymond Sebond", Montaigne (1948) p. 319.

[24]  The thought that our social environment makes us more susceptible to grace is also found in Pascal's work. See Jones (1998).

[25]  Winters (1979) p. 251.

[26]  This point will be relevant when we return to discuss the modality of the Constraint in Section 6.

[27]  This section is heavily indebted to J. David Velleman (2000), especially Chapter 11, and David Owens' discussions of guessing and believing in Owens (2002) and in a manuscript entitled 'Does Belief Have An Aim?' That said, I do not know whether Velleman or Owens would agree with the argument here.

[28]  Bernard Williams 'Deciding to Believe', in his (1973).

[29]  Velleman's claim that 'to believe a proposition is to accept it with the aim of thereby accepting a truth' is too strong for the same reason. Velleman (2000) p. 251.

[30] Owens (2002).

[31] Owens (2002).

[32] This is not to say that they do not have to see the vast majority of my beliefs as aiming at truth. There are surely limits to our non-epistemic explanation of someone's beliefs.

[33] Williams (1973) p. 148. See also Cook (1985) p. 441.

[34] The Separation Thesis was first pressed on me by John Hyman, in conversation.

[35] For more discussion of this point, see Jones (2000).

[36] For simplicity, I have modified **[FPC2]**, rather than the more complex **[FPC3]**, into **[FPC4]**.

[37] For discussion of the question of how far our moral commitments can survive our theorizing about them, see the essays collected in Harcourt (2000).

[38] Notice that 'staying neutral' is different from 'having no beliefs'. I would have no beliefs about a subject matter if I had never thought about it, but I remain neutral only if I have considered the matter and still formed no beliefs.

[39] Thanks to Jonathan Adler, Michael Ayers, David Charles, David Cockburn, Brian Eno, Elizabeth Fricker, Matthew Kieran, Michael Martin, Tom Martin, Linnell Secomb, Paul Snowdon, David Velleman, Samantha Vice, and Thomas von Schroeter.

## REFERENCES

Ayers, M. (1991): *Locke* Vol. I, London: Routledge.

Bennett, J. (1990): 'Why is Belief Involuntary?', *Analysis*, pp. 87-107.

Collins, A. (1978): 'Teleological Reasoning', *Journal of Philosophy* 75, 540–550.

Collins, A. (1984): 'Action, Causality, and Teleological Explanation', in P. French et al. (eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy IX*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Cook, J.T. (1987): 'Deciding to Believe Without Deception', *Journal of Philosophy* 84, 441–446.

Faber, H. (1972): *Psychology of Religion*, London: SGM Press.

Foley, R. (1987): *The Theory of Epistemyse Rationality*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gilbert, G. and Mulkay, M. (1984): *Opening Pandora's Box*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gleick, J. (1989): 'Survival of the Luckiest' (Review of S.J. Gould's *Wonderful Life*), *New York Times Book Review*, October 22.

Hampshire, S. (1972): 'Freedom of Mind', in his *Freedom of Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 3–20.

Harcourt, E. (ed.) (2000): *Morality, Reflection, and Ideology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hume, D. (1978): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jones, W.E. (forthcoming): 'Is Scientific Theory-Commitment Doxastic or Practical?', *Synthese*.

Jones, W.E. (2000): 'Can We Infer Naturalism from Scepticism?' *Philosophical Quarterly* 50(201), 433–451.

Jones, W.E. (1998): 'Self-deception, Religious Belief, and Pascal's Wager', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36(2), 167–188.

Jones, W.E. (1997): 'Questioning the Role of Pragmatic Virtues in Theory-Acceptance', *Proceedings of the 20th International Wittgenstein Symposium*, pp. 441–447.

Locke, J. (1975): *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in P.D. Nidditch (ed.), Oxford: OUP.

Montaigne, M. de (1948): 'Apology for Raymond Sebond', in Donald Frame (trans.), *Complete Works*, London: Hamish Hamilton.

Owens, D. (2002): 'Epistemic Akrasia', *The Monist* 85(3).

Owens, D. (2000): *Reason Without Freedom: The Problem of Epistemic Normativity*, London: Routledge.

Pascal, B. (1966): *Pensées*, in A.J. Krailsheimer (trans.), Penguin: London.

Pears, D. (1975): *Questions in the Philosophy of Mind*, London: Duckworth.

Scott-Kakures, D. (1993): 'On Belief and the Captivity of the Will', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, 77–103.

Smith, B.H. (1997): *Belief and Resistance: Dynamics of Contemporary Intellectual Controversy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Stroud, B. (1979): 'Evolution and the Necessities of Thought', in L.W. Sumner, J. Slater and F. Wilson (eds.), *Pragmatism and Purpose: Essays Presented to T. A. Goudge*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 236–247.

Velleman, J.D. (2000): *The Possibility of Practical Reason*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Williams, B. (1973): 'Deciding to Believe', in his *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge: CUP, pp. 136–151.

Winters, B. (1979): 'Believing at Will', *Journal of Philosophy* 76, 243–256.

*Rhodes University*
*South Africa*