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A Permissivist Alternative to Encroachment

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I. Introduction[1]

As a slew of recent work in epistemology has brought out, in a range of cases there is a strong temptation to say that prudential and (especially) moral considerations make a difference to what we ought to believe. For one kind of example, consider the following now-famous pair of cases:

> **Train Case 1.** You're at the station in Boston preparing to take the commuter rail to Providence. You're going to see friends. It will be a relaxing vacation. You ask a man standing beside you, "Does this train make all those little stops, in Foxboro, Attleboro, etc.?" It doesn't matter much to you whether the train is the Express (skipping all those little stops), though you'd mildly prefer it was. He answers, "Yeah, this one makes all those little stops. They told me when I bought the ticket."
>
> **Train Case 2.** You absolutely need to be in Foxboro, the sooner the better. Your career depends on it. You overhear a conversation like that in Train Case 1 concerning the train that just rolled into the station and leaves in 15 minutes. (Adapted from Fantl and McGrath 2002: 67–68)

Many people think that you are justified in believing that the train will stop in Foxboro when nothing significant hangs on relying on your belief (in Train Case 1), but that you are not justified in believing when relying on the belief risks incurring significant costs (in Train Case 2). Generalizing, some philosophers argue that you need stronger evidence to be justified in believing when relying on your belief risks incurring significant prudential or moral costs.

1. For helpful feedback, we are grateful to audiences at the Uppsala Epistemology Workshop and the Frankfurt Colloquium on Theoretical Philosophy, and especially to Sarah Paul, Daniel Fogal, Jennifer Morton, and two anonymous referees for *Philosophers' Imprint*. Alex Worsnip also wishes to thank Sarah McGrath and the students in her Spring 2020 metaethics seminar at Princeton, with whom he discussed his previous paper "Can Pragmatists be Moderate?" and sketched an early version of some of the ideas in this paper.

Moreover, many find it plausible that the moral costs of beliefs (or suspension of judgment) themselves — independently of the risks incurred by reliance — can affect whether you should believe or suspend judgment. Here are three cases:

> **Wedding.** Andrew is at the wedding of two college friends. The wedding is black-tie, so the waiters are dressed the same as the guests. Andrew knows these two college friends pretty well, and he knows that (unfortunately and for whatever reason) nearly all their friends are white. Andrew also knows that the wedding is taking place in a city where service-industry workers are, statistically, mostly Black — and he has already interacted with several black servers at the wedding. Andrew sees a Black man in a tuxedo (let's call him John) walking past. On the basis of the fact that John is Black (together with the background statistical information, just mentioned, that he has encoded), Andrew forms the belief that John is a waiter, and asks him to bring him a drink. In fact, John is not a waiter, but the wedding's only Black guest. (Worsnip 2021a: 540, adapted from Gendler 2011)

> **Wine Stain.** Suppose that you have struggled with an alcohol problem for many years, but have been sober for eight months. Tonight you attend a departmental reception for a visiting colloquium speaker, and are proud of withstanding the temptation to have a drink. But when you get home, your spouse smells the wine that the colloquium speaker spilled on your sleeve while gesticulating to make a point, and you can see from her eyes that she thinks you have fallen off the wagon. (Basu and Schroeder 2019: 182)

> **PhD.** Your close friend adopts a difficult, long-term goal: to obtain their PhD. You know that your friend is in every respect a typical PhD student: relative to other incoming PhD students in their field, their knowledge of the field, capacity to produce original research, writing ability, level of commitment, etc., are entirely average. But you also know that a significant proportion of students who begin doctoral work in your friend's field — roughly 1 in 4 — do not succeed in finishing their degree. In light of the difficulty of obtaining a PhD, you suspend judgment about whether your friend will succeed in achieving their goal. (Adapted from Morton and Paul 2018: 76)

Each of these cases has been taken to suggest that we can morally wrong others in virtue of our beliefs themselves (or lack thereof), independently of the beliefs' upstream causes or downstream consequences. In Wedding, Andrew's belief that John is a waiter — formed on the basis of merely statistical evidence regarding John's race — seems racist and seems to wrong John. In Wine Stain, you may feel that your spouse owes you an apology, which indicates that her belief wrongs you. And in PhD, you plausibly wrong your friend if you doubt the sincerity of their commitment by suspending judgment about whether they will succeed in completing their PhD. If believing or suspending judgment constitutes (or risks constituting) a moral wrong, this plausibly bears on whether you ought to believe or suspend judgment.

In all the cases above, you have pretty strong but far from infallible evidence for the proposition in question. But some find it plausible that practical considerations can affect what you ought to believe even in cases in which you have little or no evidence for a proposition, such as:

> **Threat**. A powerful evil demon credibly threatens to torture your family for eternity unless you believe that 2+2=5.

You have no evidence supporting the proposition that 2+2=5. Indeed, you have decisive evidence supporting the proposition that it is *not* the case that 2+2=5. Yet there is nonetheless a strong temptation to say

that you ought to believe that 2+2=5, because preventing your family from being tortured for eternity is far more important than avoiding a single false belief.

Two distinct accounts have emerged in the literature to explain *how* (some) practical considerations affect what we ought to believe. (We will use the term "practical considerations" to refer to both prudential and moral considerations, in contrast with "epistemic considerations.") On the first account, the "reasons pragmatist" model, the relevant practical considerations constitute distinctively practical reasons for (or against) belief. On the second account, the "pragmatic encroachment" model, the relevant practical considerations affect what one is *epistemically* justified in believing. It is typically argued that they do so by shifting the threshold for how much evidence is required for epistemic justification.

As we will see in §2, the pragmatic encroachment model appears to have several advantages over reasons pragmatism; this has led many philosophers to endorse the former. Here, however, we will argue that reasons pragmatism can be largely saved from these purported disadvantages once paired with an independently plausible permissivism about epistemically justified outright belief.[2] This hybrid view — "permissivist pragmatism" — holds that when there is more than one epistemically permitted doxastic attitude, practical (including moral) considerations can enter to determine which epistemically permitted doxastic attitude one all-things-considered ought to have. Permissivist pragmatism allows us to say a great deal of what the pragmatic encroachment view wanted to say. In particular, it also makes use of the idea that pragmatic factors can or should shift a kind of threshold for belief, but in a subtly different way from the pragmatic encroachment model. At the same time, it avoids saying that practical considerations encroach on epistemic justification, and consequently, it also avoids other problems that distinctively attend this claim. The permissivist-pragmatist view thus has a strong claim to deliver the best of all possible worlds.

In §2, we discuss the respective challenges that reasons pragmatism and pragmatic encroachment face. In §3, we develop our hybrid permissivist-pragmatist view as an alternative to pragmatic encroachment. In §4, we show how the permissivist-pragmatist view can handle each of the cases described above. In §5, we argue that the permissivist-pragmatist view avoids the respective problems faced by impermissivist versions of reasons pragmatism, and by pragmatic encroachment.

II. Reasons pragmatism vs. pragmatic encroachment

II.1 Reasons pragmatism

According to reasons pragmatism, practical considerations affect what we ought to believe by constituting distinctively practical (i.e., non-epistemic) reasons for or against belief. When a belief is (or has the potential to be) practically valuable, this value provides a (*pro tanto*) reason for belief. Likewise, when a belief is (or has the potential to be) practically costly, this cost provides a (*pro tanto*) reason against belief. Reasons pragmatism has the merit of providing a simple, intuitive explanation of how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe.

While the core claim of reasons pragmatism is that (actual or potential) benefits and costs of believing provide practical reasons for or against belief, this claim is compatible with different views about the relationship between practical and epistemic reasons for belief. Berker (2018) provides a helpful taxonomy of three different versions

2. Others have appealed to something like permissivist pragmatism to explain how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe in specific cases, such as cases of epistemic partiality in friendship (Kawall 2013, Hawley 2014), Pascal's Wager (Jackson 2023), racist credences (Johnson King and Babic 2020), beliefs about success in accomplishing difficult, long-term goals (Morton and Paul 2018, 2019), and giving up beliefs that one has already formed (Soteriou 2013: §15.4). However, to our knowledge, no-one has defended permissivist pragmatism as a general account, rivaling pragmatic encroachment, of how practical considerations affect what we all-things-considered ought to believe. Indeed, Morton and Paul (for example) seem to endorse *both* permissivist pragmatism and pragmatic encroachment, and do not clearly distinguish the two.

of reasons pragmatism. "Austere pragmatism" (Rinard 2019a; Mantel 2019; Maguire and Woods 2020) holds that practical considerations constitute the only genuine (or "authoritative") normative reasons for belief, so epistemic reasons are at best "formally" normative (like the rules of etiquette or chess). "Interactionist pragmatism" (Reisner 2008; Leary 2017; Howard 2020) holds that practical considerations and epistemic considerations both constitute genuine normative reasons for belief, and that both contribute to determining what we all-things-considered ought to believe. "Separatist pragmatism" (Feldman 2000; Kauppinen 2023) holds that practical and epistemic considerations both constitute reasons for belief, but that they cannot be compared or weighed against each other to determine an all-things-considered verdict about what we ought to believe.

Of these versions of reasons pragmatism, only austere pragmatism requires denying that there are genuinely normative epistemic reasons for belief. We take austere pragmatism to be a highly revisionary view, and we will assume here that the most plausible form of reasons pragmatism will accept that there are both practical and epistemic reasons for belief.[3] We also reject strict versions of separatist pragmatism — on which practical and epistemic reasons can *never* combine to determine what we all-things-considered ought to believe — for reasons that will become clear in §5.3.

Despite its simplicity and intuitive appeal, reasons pragmatism faces several significant challenges. The most prominent objection holds that, at least in many cases, it seems psychologically impossible to believe *on the basis of* practical considerations.[4] Suppose someone offers you $1,000,000 to believe that 2+2=5. While this financial incentive may motivate you to try to bring it about that you believe that 2+2=5 (e.g., by taking a drug that will induce this belief), it cannot directly motivate you to believe that 2+2=5. So, proponents of this objection conclude, the financial incentive cannot constitute your motivating reason for belief (i.e., the reason *for which* you believe). A plausible necessary condition on normative reasons for belief is that it must be *possible* for them to serve as motivating reasons that directly figure in our deliberation about what to believe. Practical considerations such as financial incentives seem not to satisfy this condition, which suggests that they cannot be normative reasons for belief. At most, proponents of this objection argue, practical considerations are reasons to bring it about that you have a certain belief.

Second, because interactionist and separatist versions of reasons pragmatism hold that both epistemic and practical considerations constitute genuine reasons for belief, they create the possibility of normative conflicts, whereby one epistemically ought to believe p, but practically ought not to, or vice versa. It may not be so objectionable or counterintuitive to countenance conflicts in exceptional circumstances in which holding a patently epistemically irrational belief would be extremely (dis)valuable (e.g., in Threat). But it would be more worrisome to accept a) routine, pervasive conflicts, and b) conflicts that seem counterintuitive and distinctively troubling (e.g., the verdict that epistemic rationality requires holding racist beliefs in cases like Wedding). Moreover, Basu and Schroeder (2019) argue that not only is it objectionable to posit *conflicts* between moral and epistemic norms (whereby, for example, epistemic norms *require* a morally prohibited belief), but it is likewise unpalatable to allow a lack of *coordination* between moral and epistemic norms (whereby epistemic norms even *permit* a belief that morality prohibits). It is inappropriate, they claim, to apologize for holding an epistemically justified belief. So, they infer, epistemically justified beliefs cannot be morally wrong. Reasons pragmatism allows for conflicts — perhaps pervasive and especially troubling conflicts — and it certainly does not guarantee coordination. This, for some, is a reason to reject the view.

A third (and related) challenge — which arises primarily for interactionist versions of reasons pragmatism — is that it is difficult to provide

3. The view we defend in this paper may be logically compatible with forms of austere pragmatism that regard epistemic reasons as "formally normative" (Mantel 2019; Maguire and Woods 2020). But we will often write as if such views are false.

4. Adler (2002), Kelly (2002), Shah (2006).

a satisfactory account of how practical and epistemic reasons for belief interact to determine what we all-things-considered ought to believe. Selim Berker (2018) has most forcefully articulated this challenge. Berker observes that practical and epistemic reasons exhibit different weighing behaviors. While equally balanced practical reasons in favor of two competing alternatives generate a permission to choose either alternative, equally balanced epistemic reasons (according to Berker) generate a requirement to suspend judgment. In light of this difference, it is difficult to see how practical and epistemic reasons combine to render verdicts about what one all-things-considered ought to believe. Separatist pragmatism, of course, avoids this problem. But it faces a different worry:[5] that by declining to offer a verdict about what we all-things-considered ought to believe in cases of conflict between practical and epistemic domains, it can in many cases offer no helpful guidance about what to believe.

II. 2 Pragmatic encroachment

While proponents of reasons pragmatism have responses to these challenges,[6] the difficulties are sufficiently significant to motivate exploring alternative accounts of how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe. The most prominent such account is pragmatic encroachment.[7] Whereas reasons pragmatism holds that practical considerations constitute *non-epistemic* reasons for or against belief, pragmatic encroachment holds that practical considerations bear on what we ought to believe by affecting *epistemic* justification. According to the most common version of encroachment, practical considerations shift the threshold for how much evidence is necessary to epistemically justify belief (or for a belief to constitute knowledge). In at least some cases in which believing (or relying on one's belief) is actually or potentially practically costly, the evidential threshold for epistemic justification increases (i.e., more evidence is needed to epistemically justify belief). And according to some versions of pragmatic encroachment, in some cases in which *not* believing is (actually or potentially) practically costly, the evidential threshold for epistemic justification decreases.[8]

Pragmatic encroachment has the advantage of avoiding the three problems facing reasons pragmatism. First, because it holds that practical considerations shift the threshold for how much evidence is needed for epistemic justification — rather than directly constituting practical reasons for or against belief — pragmatic encroachment provides a way for practical considerations to affect what we ought to believe without serving as the basis for belief. Second, by holding that epistemic norms are themselves sensitive to practical costs or risks, proponents of pragmatic encroachment can avoid the conclusion that there are pervasive and troubling conflicts between epistemic and practical norms. And third, pragmatic encroachment provides a straightforward account of the interaction between practical and epistemic considerations: instead of combining with epistemic reasons, practical considerations bear on what we ought to believe by affecting how strong the epistemic reasons must be to epistemically justify belief.

However, pragmatic encroachment faces problems of its own.[9] First, Worsnip (2021a) argues that it is very difficult for proponents of encroachment to provide a principled explanation of *which* practical

5. Forcefully expressed in Rinard (2019a).

6. Responses to the first challenge include Reisner (2009), Leary (2017), and Rinard (2019b). Responses to the second challenge can be found in Fritz (2020). Responses to the third challenge include Reisner (2008), Howard (2020), and Meylan (2021).

7. In the cases originally used to motivate pragmatic encroachment, it is prudential considerations that (allegedly) affect epistemic justification. Recently, attention has been directed toward cases in which moral considerations affect it. We will use the term "pragmatic encroachment" to refer to any view on which prudential and/or moral considerations affect epistemic justification. Important statements of pragmatic/moral encroachment include, among many others, Fantl and McGrath (2002), Pace (2011), Schroeder (2012), Ross and Schroeder (2014), Moss (2018), Basu (2019a), Basu and Schroeder (2019), and Bolinger (2020).

8. See Basu (2019a) and Crewe and Ichikawa (2021).

9. In addition to the two challenges discussed below, other notable objections to pragmatic encroachment are raised by Brown (2008), Reed (2010), and Jackson (2019), among others.

considerations encroach on epistemic justification. While proponents of encroachment have typically wished to include the practical considerations in cases such as Train Case 2, Wedding, Wine Stain, and (perhaps) PhD as encroaching on epistemic justification, they have typically wished to exclude bribes, threats, or Pascalian considerations about one's eternal salvation or damnation from encroaching on epistemic justification.[10] But, Worsnip argues, none of the most promising principles to which proponents of encroachment have appealed successfully distinguishes between those practical considerations that do encroach on epistemic justification and those that do not, such that they exclude *all* types of bribes, threats, or Pascalian considerations. Without such a principle, proponents of encroachment are arguably committed to the counterintuitive claim that sometimes bribes, threats, or Pascalian considerations affect the *epistemic* justification of our beliefs.

Relatedly, proponents of pragmatic encroachment have a difficult time explaining how certain moral costs of belief make a difference to *epistemic* justification. Fritz (2020) holds that traditional accounts of pragmatic encroachment can explain how the potential moral costs of *relying* on one's belief affect epistemic justification. (He calls views on which only these moral costs make a difference "moderate moral encroachment.") But he contends that proponents of what he calls "radical moral encroachment" — which holds that moral costs of beliefs *themselves* affect epistemic justification — cannot explain why *these* costs affect epistemic justification, rather than constituting practical reasons against belief.[11] One reason why this is particularly hard is that in many cases in which a belief — say, a racist belief — is *itself* morally wrong, this does not seem to merely *raise the threshold* for how much evidence one needs to permissibly believe, but rather to make the belief prohibited *no matter how much* evidence one has.[12] But if a belief is prohibited no matter how much evidence one has for it, it is hard to see how the relevant prohibition counts as epistemic.[13]

III. A permissivist pragmatism

Given the difficulties facing both pragmatic encroachment and simple versions of reasons pragmatism, there is good reason to seek a new account of how practical considerations affect what we all-things-considered ought to believe. In this section, we will introduce a view that combines a reasons-pragmatist picture with permissivism about epistemically justified outright belief.

III.1 Permissivism about outright belief

Roughly, permissivist views in epistemology claim that, in some cases, one's evidence is such that more than one of a range of incompatible doxastic attitudes toward a proposition would be epistemically justified (i.e., epistemically permissible) to hold. So, a permissivist about credence might hold that one's evidence can be such that *either* a 0.7 credence in p or a 0.8 credence in p would be epistemically justified. The version of permissivism we will be making use of here, however, applies to coarse-grained doxastic attitudes toward a proposition p: believing p (i.e., having an "outright" belief in p), suspending judgment about p, and disbelieving p (i.e., having an outright belief in its negation). The claim is that there are situations in which one's evidence is such that more than one of these attitudes would be epistemically justified (i.e., epistemically permissible) to hold.

For our purposes, we need take no stand on whether one's evidence is ever such that believing p and disbelieving p would each be

10. Benton (2018) is an exception.

11. See also Leary (2022).

12. This is particularly evident if one thinks, as Basu (2019b) does, that beliefs can morally wrong *even when true*. If this is so, it is difficult to see why any amount of additional evidence (of the beliefs' truth) would suffice to make such beliefs permissible.

13. In light of this, one could accept pragmatic encroachment for some cases and reasons pragmatism for others. (This seems to be Fritz's own view.) But once one admits that reasons pragmatism is true after all, a central motivation for accepting pragmatic encroachment—its ability to say that practical considerations make a difference to what one ought to believe *without* endorsing reasons pragmatism—dissipates.

epistemically justified. Rather, we aim to motivate only the claim that there are cases in which believing p and suspending judgment about p would each be epistemically justified.[14] Moreover, the version of permissivism we aim to motivate is both "intrapersonal" — holding that a *single agent* can be epistemically justified either in believing p or in suspending judgment about p — and "synchronic" — holding that this agent can be epistemically justified either in believing p at time t or in suspending judgment about p at a single time t.[15]

Thus, the view is as follows:

> **Intrapersonal, Synchronic Permissivism about Outright Belief.** There are cases in which an agent's evidence is such that (i) they would be epistemically justified in believing p at t; *and* (ii) they would be epistemically justified in suspending judgment about p at t.

III.2 Motivating permissivism

There are several motivations for accepting permissivist views. Permissivism about credence is often motivated via appeal to the intuitive implausibility of the claim that one's evidence makes only one precise point-valued credence permissible. For example, it may seem absurd to say that one's evidence makes credence 0.8136 permissible, but neither credence 0.8137 nor credence 0.8135. The facts about evidential support, it may be thought, are (at least typically) just not so fine-grained. And both permissivism about credence and permissivism about outright belief are sometimes motivated via appeal to the thought that there is sometimes more than one reasonable way to evaluate a particular body of evidence: when one's evidence is complex and involves many different considerations, there is no uniquely correct way to weigh all those different considerations.

Here, however, we want to focus on a different way to motivate permissivism, one that is specific to permissivism about outright belief which will be of particular use for the permissivist-pragmatist hybrid we defend.[16] Suppose that the probability of p on your evidence is exactly 0.9, and suppose that you have correctly determined this and, correspondingly, have formed a credence of 0.9 in p. You still face a further question about whether to (outright) believe p or not.[17] Our claim is this: in this kind of situation, often neither believing p nor suspending judgment about p would constitute an epistemic mistake.

To bring this out, let us begin with an interpersonal case. Suppose that Manchester City, the top-ranked team in the English Premier League, are scheduled to play Norwich City, the bottom-ranked team.[18] Liam and Noel are both rabid Manchester City fans. Together they have built a complex regression model drawing on a huge amount of data to assign probabilities to different outcomes for football (soccer) games. And Liam and Noel — rationally, let's suppose — base their credences in the different outcomes solely on the model's outputs. Their model assigns to a Manchester City win a probability of 0.9 in their game against Norwich City, so they both have a rational credence 0.9 that Manchester City will win.

But now suppose that Liam and Noel differ in their attitudes toward *epistemic risk*. At least when it comes to football games, Liam is relatively *risk-seeking* in his outright belief-forming practices. This does not involve being overconfident in the sense of overestimating the probabilities of Manchester City wins; his credences in those probabilities are perfectly epistemically rational. Rather, his risk-seeking involves being inclined to outright believe a proposition about who will win a football game when there is fairly strong, but far from completely infallible, evidence in its favor: evidence that would make, for example, a 0.9 credence rational. Consequently, Liam outright believes that

14. Horowitz (2014) calls this view "moderate permissivism."

15. Cf. also Jackson (2021).

16. This argument for permissivism about outright belief takes no stand on whether permissivism about credence is true.

17. We assume here that outright belief is not metaphysically reducible to credence above some fixed threshold, such that for an agent to have credence 0.9 is thereby automatically for that agent to already believe p (or to lack belief in it).

18. As of May 2022.

Manchester City will win their game against Norwich City. By contrast, Noel is relatively *risk-averse* in his outright belief-forming practices. He is not generally inclined to believe a proposition about who will win a football game on the basis of evidence that would make a 0.9 credence rational. Consequently, Noel does not outright believe that Manchester City will win their game against Norwich City, but instead suspends judgment.

Here is our judgment, which we invite you to share: neither Liam nor Noel is making an epistemic mistake. There is a range of different permissible attitudes toward epistemic risk,[19] and neither Liam nor Noel falls outside the permissible range.[20] We can think of this in terms of the twin "Jamesian" epistemic goals of believing the truth and avoiding error.[21] As many epistemologists have emphasized, when it comes to propositions for which one has strong but not infallible evidence, these goals trade off against each other: believing gives one a good shot at believing the truth, but carries a risk of error; whereas suspending judgment guarantees avoidance of error, but precludes one from believing the truth. (Relatively) risk-seeking epistemic agents like Liam and (relatively) risk-averse epistemic agents like Noel assign different weights to believing the truth as opposed to avoiding error. Liam puts more weight on believing the truth than Noel does, and Noel puts more weight on avoiding error than Liam does. We find it extremely plausible that there is no uniquely correct way, at least from an epistemic point of view, to weigh the value of believing truth versus that of avoiding error. If this is right, it helps to explain why Liam and Noel are both epistemically justified in their doxastic attitudes.

19. Cf. Buchak's (2013) analogous view that practical rationality permits different attitudes toward risk.

20. There may be limits on this permissible range, of course. In particular, we are inclined to think that it is not permissible to be so epistemically risk-seeking as to believe propositions for which one has a credence of 0.5 or below.

21. James (1896). The twin Jamesian goals have been invoked to motivate permissivism about belief (Levi 1967; Kelly 2013; Pettigrew 2022), permissivism about credence (Johnson King and Babic 2020), and encroachment (Pace 2011).

As we said, this is an interpersonal case, and it might be objected that it does not support intrapersonal permissivism. Given Liam's attitude toward epistemic risk, it might be said, he is epistemically justified *only* in believing that Manchester City will win; and given Noel's attitude toward epistemic risk, he is epistemically justified *only* in suspending judgment.[22] Thus, while this is a case in which the same evidence makes different attitudes permissible for *different* agents, it isn't one in which a body of evidence makes more than one attitude permissible for the *same* agent. But we think this is the wrong way to think about things. It would be entirely permissible for Liam to have Noel's attitude toward epistemic risk (and correspondingly, suspend judgment); likewise, it would be entirely permissible for Noel to have Liam's attitude toward epistemic risk (and correspondingly, believe). Thus, Liam *is* permitted either to believe or to suspend judgment. It is just that he would need to do the latter in concert with having a different attitude toward risk.[23] We therefore think the case for interpersonal permissivism here plausibly extends to intrapersonal permissivism.

It might now be worried that, because it takes time to revise one's attitude toward risk, Liam is permitted to suspend only *once he has revised that attitude*, and consequently, the case supports only diachronic and not synchronic permissivism.[24] But this objection too is misguided. First, the claim that Liam is permitted to suspend only *once he has revised his attitude toward risk* is, we think, mistaken. Rather, our view

22. Cf. Schoenfield's (2014) defense of interpersonal permissivism, on which an agent's "epistemic standards" determine what they ought to believe (given their evidence). Schoenfield's notion of "epistemic standards" might be taken to include the agent's attitude toward epistemic risk.

23. The point can be expressed more precisely by saying that the requirement to align one's doxastic attitudes with one's attitudes toward epistemic risk is "wide-scope" (cf. Worsnip 2021b: §9.5). Put into disjunctive form, it says that Liam is required *either* to have the risk-seeking attitude and believe, *or* to have the risk-averse attitude and suspend judgment. The requirement is to satisfy at least one of the disjuncts, but either is a permissible way to satisfy it. It may not be permissible for Liam to have his current risk-seeking attitude and yet suspend judgment. But it does not follow that it is impermissible for him to suspend: [impermissible to (Φ & Ψ)] doesn't entail [impermissible to Ψ].

24. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this objection.

is that at the very time t that Liam has a risk-seeking attitude, he is permitted to either {have a risk-seeking attitude, believe} *or* {have a risk-averse attitude, suspend}.[25] That he has the former combination of attitudes at t does not render the latter combination impermissible at t (even if it means that he can feasibly adopt it only at a time after t).[26] Second, even if one finds the first response unpersuasive, the case still establishes synchronic permissivism. Again, let t be a time when Liam has the risk-seeking attitude. Let t_1 be a time far enough after t that Liam has had time to revise his attitude toward risk by t_1. Since it would also be permissible for Liam *not* to revise his attitude toward risk by t_1, there is a time — namely, t_1 — when it would be permissible for Liam to either {have a risk-seeking attitude, believe} *or* {have a risk-averse attitude, suspend}. But then synchronic permissivism is true, since this thesis requires only that there is at least *one* time such that more than one outright doxastic attitude would be permissible to have at that time.

The case of Liam and Noel brings out the plausibility of the claim that often, when one has strong but not infallible evidence for a proposition, one's evidence permits either believing or suspending judgment. As the case illustrates, one thing that influences whether one believes or suspends judgment in such a case is one's attitude toward epistemic risk. But this general attitude toward epistemic risk may not be the *only* thing that might properly influence whether one believes in permissive cases.

25. Again (cf. n. 23), the "wide-scope" nature of the requirement relating attitudes toward epistemic risk and first-order doxastic states is important here. It is not that Liam's attitude toward risk at *t fixes* what first-order doxastic state is rational for him at t. Rather, there are constraints on which *combinations* of attitudes toward epistemic risk and first-order states are permissible for him at t — with multiple combinations being permissible, and multiple combinations being prohibited.

26. Quite generally, the fact that one *is* Φ-ing at t does not render every action or state incompatible with Φ-ing at t impermissible. For example, the fact that I am currently murdering my cousin at t doesn't render *refraining from murdering my cousin* impermissible at t (even if I cannot cease murdering my cousin until some later time t_1). Whatever follows from the correct statement of "ought implies can," if there is one, it isn't that.

We now turn to the idea that considerations concerning the practical costs and benefits of believing might do so. This will introduce the reasons-pragmatist aspect of our permissivist-pragmatist view, and allow us to contrast it with pragmatic encroachment.

III.3 How permissivism makes room for pragmatism

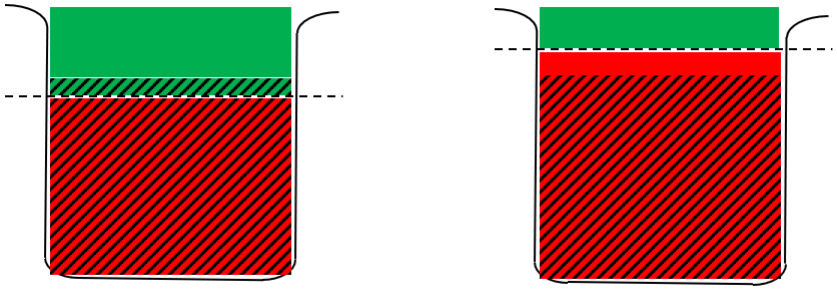
The idea of the permissivist-pragmatist view is simple: when there is more than one epistemically permitted doxastic attitude, practical considerations, including moral ones, can come in to determine which of these epistemically permitted doxastic attitudes one all-things-considered ought to have.

It is vital to distinguish this view from pragmatic encroachment. On the pragmatic encroachment view, practical considerations affect what one is *epistemically* justified in believing, or what one knows. This is not so on the permissivist-pragmatist view. On the latter view, practical considerations make no difference to what one is *epistemically* justified in believing or what one knows; they only influence what one *all-things-considered* ought to believe.[27] However — crucially — at

27. As an anonymous referee pointed out, one might wonder whether pragmatic encroachment's and permissivist pragmatism's different conceptions of the sense in which practical considerations affect a belief's justification reflect substantive disagreement or merely amount to a verbal dispute. This might be so if the two views use the term 'epistemic' differently—though that difference in usage could itself reflect a substantive, non-terminological disagreement about the nature and boundaries of the epistemic domain. This is a subtle issue we cannot fully address here (see, e.g., Cohen 2016; Friedman 2020 for recent discussions). However, we will briefly suggest two ways the dispute between permissivist pragmatism and standard versions of pragmatic encroachment can be anchored in something non-terminological. First, the two views appear to disagree about whether practical considerations can *affect the type of justification necessary for knowledge*. Second, pragmatic encroachers typically claim that practical considerations either a) do not constitute *reasons* for belief at all, or b) constitute *right-kind* reasons for or against withholding belief (e.g., Schroeder 2012, 2018, 2021). By contrast, on our permissivist-pragmatist view practical considerations constitute *wrong-kind* reasons for belief, in a technical sense on which right-kind reasons for belief are connected with the fittingness of a belief while wrong-kind reasons are not (Howard 2019; see also Leary 2022 for this way of drawing the pragmatic encroachment/reasons pragmatism distinction).

least in permissive cases, they can do this without making it the case that one all-things-considered ought to believe something that one is epistemically unjustified in believing, since they select *between* the epistemically permitted options.

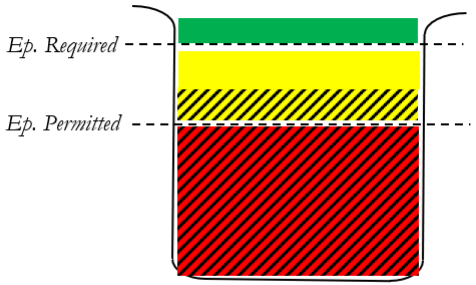
We can model all this a bit more precisely. As we saw in §2, on the most popular version of pragmatic encroachment, at least some actual or potential practical costs of believing p make it the case that one requires more evidence for epistemically justified belief in p than one would otherwise require, were those costs not present. Suppose that one has strong but far from infallible evidence for p. Let the "default case" be the one in which there are no special practical costs of believing p, and the "costly case" the one in which there *are* (actual or potential) costs (of the kind the pragmatic encroacher thinks makes a difference). Simplifying somewhat,[28] we can represent the pragmatic encroachment view pictorially as follows:



Default case *Costly case*

The diagonal black shading represents the extent to which one's evidence probabilifies p (filling to the top of the cup would represent its giving p probability 1). The dotted line is the threshold for epistemically justified belief. Below it, the background is colored red to indicate that any amount of evidence below this threshold would not suffice for epistemically justified belief; above it, it is colored green to indicate that any amount of evidence above this threshold suffices for epistemically justified belief. According to the pragmatic encroachment view, the threshold rises in the costly case compared with the default case. This means that although one's evidence probabilifies p to the same extent, in the costly case one is no longer justified in believing p.

By contrast, our view (again, simplifying somewhat) can be represented as follows:



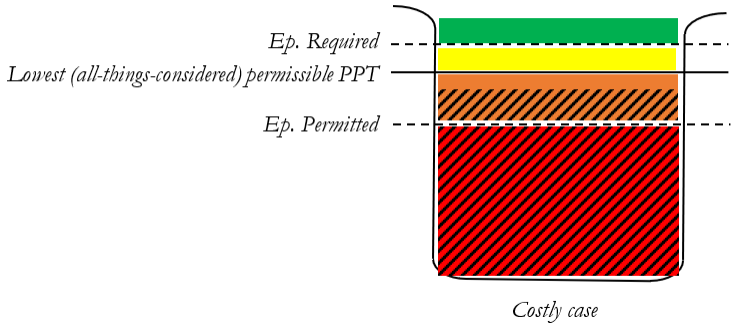
Default and costly cases

Here, we have a zone of epistemic permission, shaded yellow, between the threshold for permitted belief and that for required belief. Pretty strong but far from infallible evidence — as in the case depicted here — will exceed the former threshold but not the latter. The epistemic status of belief in p does not change between the default and costly case: in both cases it is epistemically permitted but not required, and in both cases the thresholds for both epistemically permitted and epistemically required belief remain the same. So there is no pragmatic encroachment on epistemic justification.

28. The simplification is that this picture, and the ones that follow, assume that a belief's being epistemically justified is a matter of its being sufficiently supported by the evidence—where this means exceeding some (perhaps variable) threshold of evidential probability. (Note that this is not the same as the metaphysical reduction of belief to credence we set aside in fn. 17, on which what it *is* to believe p just is to have credence above some threshold.) This assumption is not essential to any of the views under discussion, but it makes them easier to represent pictorially.

However, let's now introduce a *different* kind of threshold, which we will call one's "personal psychological threshold" (PPT) for belief in a proposition.[29] One's personal psychological threshold is the threshold of apparent evidence above which one will *actually believe* the proposition in question. Now, on a non-permissivist view, one epistemically ought to match one's personal psychological threshold to the threshold for epistemically justified belief. By contrast, given permissivism, it is epistemically permissible to set one's personal psychological threshold *anywhere* between the threshold for epistemically permitted belief and that for epistemically required belief (inclusive of these thresholds): that is, anywhere in the yellow zone above. However, it does not follow that it is always *all-things-considered* permissible to set one's personal psychological threshold anywhere in this zone. Rather, practical considerations might make it the case that one all-things-considered ought to set one's personal psychological threshold at a relatively high (or low) level within this zone.[30]

Thus, there is *a* difference — albeit not one in epistemic status! — between the default and costly cases. In the latter case, one (all-things-considered) ought to set one's personal psychological threshold at a relatively high level within the yellow zone. We can thus specify our view of the costly case in greater detail:



Here, the orange-colored area represents the zone within which belief is epistemically permissible, but all-things-considered prohibited — and given the amount of evidence in this case, that is the status which believing p has. By contrast, in the default case, one is (all-things-considered) permitted to set one's personal psychological threshold lower within the epistemically permitted zone.

As a result, the permissivist-pragmatist view has some important similarities with pragmatic encroachment. Both views agree that purely evidential considerations underdetermine where to set one's personal psychological threshold.[31] And both views say that practical considerations can help to determine where one's personal psychological threshold should be. However, our view demonstrates that, by accepting epistemic permissivism, it is *possible* to embrace both claims without allowing *any* pragmatic encroachment on the epistemic: that is, without allowing that practical considerations make any difference to the epistemic status of one's beliefs.

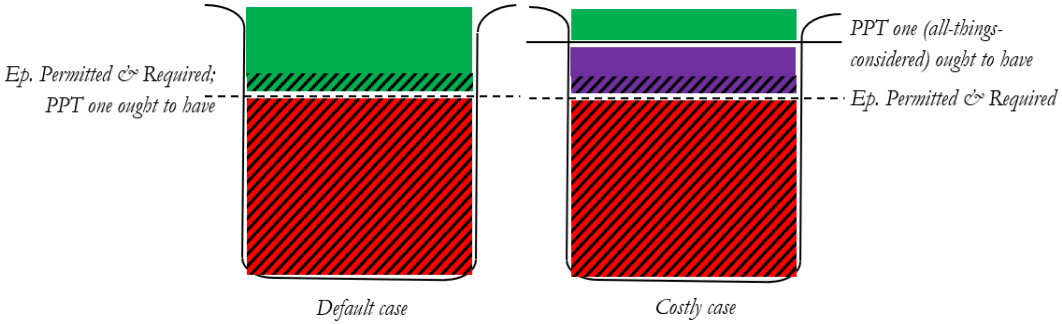
Finally, let us compare our view with one combining reasons pragmatism with a non-permissivist view of epistemic justification. On a non-permissivist view, the thresholds for epistemically permitted and epistemically required belief are the same: below this threshold one is epistemically prohibited from believing, while above it one is epistemically required to believe. Thus, if practical considerations can shift the

29. This closely resembles Morton and Paul's (2018, 2019) notion of an "evidential threshold."

30. We do not say that the way practical considerations make a difference to what one ought to believe is *always* best modeled in terms of adjusting one's personal psychological threshold. See the final paragraph of §4.2.

31. Pragmatic encroachers often appeal to this point to motivate the view; cf. esp. Owens (2000).

personal psychological threshold that one all-things-considered ought to have, they must move it away from the threshold for epistemically permitted and required belief:



The divergence of the personal psychological threshold one all-things-considered ought to have from the threshold for epistemically permitted and required belief opens up a zone, here colored purple, in which belief is epistemically *required* and yet all-things-considered forbidden. Indeed, on this view, *any* case in which practical considerations make a difference to what one all-things-considered ought to believe must be one in which they either make it all-things-considered prohibited to have an epistemically required belief, or make it all-things-considered required to have an epistemically prohibited belief. By contrast, while our view does not definitively rule out *some* such cases (see §5.2), it opens the way for practical considerations to influence what one all-things-considered ought to believe *without* doing this (and, as we have already shown, without encroaching on the epistemic).

One final clarification about our view. We have talked of practical considerations making a difference to what one ought to believe. Do they do so by constituting *reasons* for or against belief? One might suggest that they don't. As we have proposed, we can think of practical considerations as influencing the personal psychological threshold that one ought to have. So perhaps, it might be suggested, they are (directly) reasons for *adopting a particular personal psychological threshold* rather than being reasons for (or against) belief as such. Now, this suggestion *may* be right. However, there are grounds to doubt the metaphysical distance between adopting a personal psychological threshold and believing (or suspending). Most ordinary people do not explicitly think of themselves as having a threshold of probability above which they are willing to believe a proposition. Consequently, a personal psychological threshold is best understood dispositionally or counterfactually in terms of what one *would* believe or not believe given different (perceived) amounts of evidence. Thus, in adopting a personal psychological threshold such that one's (perceived) evidence for p exceeds that threshold, one arguably *thereby* believes p: if one does not believe p, one has not really adopted the threshold in question. Thus, at least in some cases, practical considerations plausibly constitute reasons to adopt a particular personal psychological threshold and *thereby* believe (or suspend).

IV. How the permissivist-pragmatist account handles the cases

IV.1 Train Cases 1 and 2

We will now demonstrate how the permissivist-pragmatist account can handle the cases described in §1. Let's start with the Train Cases, in which the potential costs of *relying* on a belief intuitively affect what you ought to believe. Fantl and McGrath originally employed these cases to argue for pragmatic encroachment. And pragmatic encroachment provides a straightforward explanation of the difference between these two cases: while you are justified in believing that the train will stop in Foxboro in Train Case 1, in Train Case 2 the practical risks of relying on that proposition render belief epistemically unjustified. Proponents of pragmatic encroachment typically explain this by positing something like the following principle:

> **Epistemic justification-reliance link**: If S is epistemically justified in believing p, then S is justified in relying on p in S's reasoning.

Applying **epistemic justification-reliance link** to Train Case 2 generates the following explanation: since you are not justified in relying on the proposition that the train will stop in Foxboro, by modus tollens you are not epistemically justified in believing that the train will stop in Foxboro.

Although **epistemic justification-reliance link** is a normative principle stating a sufficient condition for being *justified* in relying on a proposition, it is often defended by appeal to a descriptive view on which believing that *p involves* relying on *p* in one's reasoning, or being disposed to rely on it.[32] If this is right, costs of relying on *p* are *ipso facto* costs of believing *p*.

Because the permissivist-pragmatist view denies that practical considerations affect *epistemic* justification, and because practical considerations obviously do affect which propositions one is justified in relying on, proponents of permissivist pragmatism cannot accept **epistemic justification-reliance link**. However, they can (if desired) accept the following alternative:

> **All-things-considered permission-reliance link**: If S is all-things-considered permitted to believe *p*, then S is justified in relying on *p* in S's reasoning.

Notice that appeal to a descriptive connection between belief and reliance does not favor **epistemic justification-reliance link** over **all-things-considered permission-reliance link**. Even if costs of reliance are *ipso facto* costs of believing, this does not show that they are costs of believing that affect one's *epistemic* justification, as opposed to affecting whether one is all-things-considered permitted to believe *p* by constituting non-epistemic reasons against believing. And by appealing to **all-things-considered permission-reliance link**, the permissivist pragmatist can explain why you ought not to believe that the train will stop in Foxboro in Train Case 2: since you are not justified in relying on the proposition that the train will stop in Foxboro, by modus tollens you are not all-things-considered permitted to believe this proposition.

But it does not follow that you aren't *epistemically* permitted to believe that the train will stop in Foxboro. Rather, the permissivist pragmatist can diagnose the case — and other similar cases used to motivate pragmatic encroachment — as an epistemically permissive one: that is, it is a case where you are epistemically permitted to either believe or suspend judgment. Like the case of Liam and Noel from §3.2, Train Cases 1 and 2 are scenarios in which you have pretty strong but far from infallible evidence that justifies a reasonably high credence in the proposition that the train will stop in Foxboro. While we share Fantl and McGrath's intuition that it is *permissible* to believe in Train Case 1, it seems to us that you also don't make an epistemic mistake if you, more cautiously, suspend judgment. That is, the evidence seems to permit either doxastic attitude. The permissivist pragmatist says that, likewise, neither believing nor suspending judgment constitutes an epistemic mistake in Train Case 2; rather, believing constitutes a *prudential* mistake.

Thus, the permissivist pragmatist can provide the following overall verdicts about the cases. In Train Case 1 (the low-stakes version), either believing or suspending is epistemically permissible, *and* either believing or suspending is practically permissible. Thus, all-things-considered, belief is permitted (but not required). To put things in terms of our model from §3.3, you are practically permitted to adopt a personal psychological threshold anywhere within the epistemically permitted zone, and thereby either to believe or to suspend judgment. In Train Case 2 (the high-stakes version), it is still the case that either believing or suspending is epistemically permissible, but, due to the potential cost of believing falsely, believing is practically impermissible (whereas suspending judgment is practically permissible). Thus, belief is all-things-considered impermissible, and suspending judgment is all-things-considered required. In terms of the model, you practically ought to adopt a relatively high personal psychological threshold, near the "top" of the epistemically permitted zone. Given

32. Cf. Weatherson (2005); Ganson (2008); Fantl and McGrath (2009: ch. 5); Ross and Schroeder (2014).

that you have pretty strong but far from infallible evidence for the proposition that the train will stop in Foxboro, the evidence probabilifies this proposition to a degree below the high personal psychological threshold that you all-things-considered ought to adopt. You therefore all-things-considered ought to suspend judgment.

Is this permissivist-pragmatist diagnosis of the case at a disadvantage compared with the pragmatic encroachment diagnosis? The answer depends on whether there is a clear, pretheoretical intuition not just in favor of the coarse-grained verdict that you *ought not* to believe in Train Case 2, but in favor of the finer-grained verdict that you ought not to believe because you are *epistemically* unjustified in believing. For our part, we do not have the more fine-grained intuition. Since the intuition that belief is impermissible is driven by the potential practical costs of relying on one's belief, we think it is at best unclear whether the prohibition in question is epistemic, and we are suspicious of claims to be able to intuit that it is.[33] The link between belief and reliance to which pragmatic encroachers appeal is intended to provide a powerful theoretical case for pragmatic encroachment beyond appeal to intuitions about cases. Yet it is only if this link is developed in terms of *epistemic* justification that it supports pragmatic encroachment over the permissivist-pragmatist view. And it is not clear what, beyond a similar appeal to questionable fine-grained intuitions about cases, justifies developing the link between belief and reliance in terms of epistemic justification, rather than in terms of all-things-considered permissibility.[34] Absent such a justification, the pragmatic encroacher's diagnosis of Train Case 2 does not have an advantage over the permissivist pragmatist's diagnosis.

Of course, one might not have *either* the coarse-grained or fine-grained intuition — particularly if one sees belief and reliance as not being all that tightly connected, such that one could believe *without* incurring the risks of reliance.[35] For the sake of argument, we have been granting to the pragmatic encroacher that there is such a link, and thus that we wish to accommodate the verdict that you (at least all-things-considered) shouldn't believe in Train Case 2. But the permissivist-pragmatist view is also entirely compatible with a view on which there is no such link, and Train Case 2 thus would not be a case where significant practical costs or reasons come into play: there you are all-things-considered permitted to believe, but you shouldn't rely on your belief if you do so. By contrast, pragmatic encroachers *need* a principle like **epistemic justification-reliance link** to explain why there is a difference in justification for belief between Train Case 1 and Train Case 2, and hence to establish that pragmatic encroachment occurs. We take this difference to be a point in favor of the permissivist-pragmatist view: it is consistent with but doesn't *depend* on accepting a normative link between belief and reliance.

IV.2 Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD

Let's turn to how permissivist pragmatism addresses cases such as Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD, in which moral costs associated with belief or suspension *themselves* — independently of the costs of relying on a belief — plausibly affect what we ought to believe. Proponents of pragmatic encroachment can say that the fact that holding a belief will (actually or potentially) wrong someone makes it such that more evidence is needed to epistemically justify belief, and that the fact that suspending judgment will (actually or potentially) wrong someone makes it such that less evidence is needed to epistemically justify belief. Some proponents of pragmatic encroachment claim that their

33. Cf. Leary (2022). See also D'Arms and Jacobson (2014) on "the opacity of normative force."

34. It might be objected that we have the intuition that one cannot *know* in Train Case 2, and this can only be accommodated by pragmatic encroachers. However, first, experimental philosophy studies (Buckwalter 2010, May *et al.* 2010, Feltz and Zarpentine 2010) have indicated that the effect of high stakes on intuitions about knowledge is weak to negligible. And second, to the extent that this intuition does exist, it can also be explained by a contextualist semantics for knowledge attributions that denies pragmatic encroachment (DeRose 2009: esp. chs. 6–7).

35. Cf. Jackson (2019); Singh (ms.).

view provides the best way to handle these cases since (as discussed in §2.1) it avoids positing a conflict between epistemic and moral norms in these cases.

However, another way to avoid positing a conflict between epistemic and moral norms in these cases is to hold that — like the pair of train cases — Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD are all permissive cases.[36] Again, we find it very plausible that all of these cases are indeed permissive: in each case, you have pretty strong but far from infallible evidence, and you do not seem to make an epistemic mistake either by believing or by suspending judgment. We thus disagree with Gendler (2011), who seems to imply that refraining from believing in cases such as Wedding constitutes ignoring base rates about the proportion of service-industry workers who are Black, and thus involves epistemic irrationality. While base rates should be encoded in Andrew's credence,[37] having a rational high credence while also suspending judgment does not constitute ignoring base rates in any good sense. Hence, the base rate information does not epistemically require Andrew to outright believe that John is a waiter.[38]

If Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD are permissive cases, our permissivist-pragmatist view applies straightforwardly. In Wedding and Wine Stain, belief is epistemically permitted but morally prohibited, whereas suspension of judgment is the only attitude both epistemically and morally permitted; hence, one all-things-considered ought to suspend judgment. In PhD, belief is epistemically permitted but morally required, whereas suspension of judgment is epistemically permitted but morally prohibited; hence, one all-things-considered ought to believe. Notably, in each case, there is an option that is both epistemically permitted and morally permitted (or required). We can consequently avoid a conflict between epistemic and moral norms in these cases without appealing to pragmatic encroachment.

Whether the more specific personal psychological threshold model developed in §3.3 can be applied in these cases may depend on whether beliefs can morally wrong only when false (Schroeder 2018, 2021) or even when true (Basu 2019b, Fabre 2022). If beliefs can wrong only when false, then the risk of doxastic wronging can affect what one ought to believe by shifting the personal psychological threshold one all-things-considered ought to adopt. But if beliefs can wrong even when true, such beliefs are plausibly morally impermissible *no matter how much* evidence one has. It may then be misleading to say that one should raise one's personal psychological threshold in such a case: rather, one shouldn't believe no matter how much evidence one has.

However, the permissivist pragmatist might reply that in cases where a belief wrongs even if it is true, one should simply adjust one's personal psychological threshold to whatever level is required (given one's evidence) to preclude belief. Since a personal psychological threshold is not a threshold for *epistemic* justification, this move does not seem obviously unprincipled to us.[39] In any case, regardless of whether the PPT model applies here, we can still preserve the core of the permissivist-pragmatist view in these cases: when two different doxastic attitudes are both epistemically permissible, moral considerations can come in to determine which of the two one should all-things-considered have.

36. Cf. also Morton and Paul (2018)'s argument that the case on which PhD is based is permissive.

37. But see Johnson King and Babic (2020) for a *credal* permissivist view on which the evidence in this case may not even require an extremely high credence.

38. Some philosophers (such as Gardiner 2018 and Munton 2019) have defended views on which believing that John is a waiter on the basis of merely statistical evidence is outright impermissible on purely epistemic grounds. While this is compatible with our view, we don't need to assume it: it is enough that belief is not epistemically *required*, which opens the way for morality to make it all-things-considered impermissible.

39. Admittedly, there might in principle be cases in which the personal psychological threshold required to preclude belief exceeds that for epistemically *required* belief. If so, this would be a conflict case. This isn't obvious, though, because some (e.g., Nelson 2010) maintain that no amount of evidence can epistemically require belief.

IV.3 Threat

Thus far, we have diagnosed the cases in which practical considerations intuitively bear on what we ought to believe as plausibly epistemically permissive. But there are other cases in which practical considerations may bear on what we ought to believe — such as Threat — in which belief is clearly epistemically impermissible.

Because permissivist pragmatism is an account of how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe in epistemically permissive cases, permissivist pragmatists are not committed to accepting or denying any particular view of how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe in cases like Threat in which belief is epistemically prohibited. It is consistent with permissivist pragmatism to hold that there is a genuine normative conflict, which can either be left unresolved, be resolved in favor of the practical norms, or be resolved in favor of the epistemic norms. But it is also consistent with permissivist pragmatism to adopt a more restricted form of reasons pragmatism on which practical considerations do not constitute reasons for belief when belief is epistemically prohibited. This position would preclude conflicts between moral and epistemic norms.

V. Solving the problems for reasons pragmatism (and pragmatic encroachment)

We will now illustrate how our view overcomes the problems for reasons pragmatism (and, more briefly, those for pragmatic encroachment) that we outlined in §2.

V.1 Psychological impossibility

As mentioned in §2.1, those who wish to bring out the purported psychological impossibility of believing on the basis of pragmatic considerations usually appeal to cases like being offered $1,000,000 to believe that 2+2=5, or to believe that the sky is green. These cases have a striking feature: they involve being offered an incentive to believe something for which one obviously has inadequate evidence. It is quite plausible that practical incentives cannot motivate one to believe something that one judges oneself to have inadequate evidence for. And it is tempting to infer from this that practical considerations can never motivate one to believe, and thus can never constitute *normative* reasons for belief.

However, this line of thought overlooks the possibility of permissive cases. It is far from obvious that practical considerations cannot motivate us to believe (or suspend) in cases in which we take the evidence to merely *permit*, but not *require*, believing. In fact, numerous philosophers have argued that we do in fact have voluntary control over our beliefs in such cases.[40] Suppose, again, that one judges oneself to have pretty strong but not completely infallible evidence for p, and that one judges that either believing or suspending on p would be epistemically permissible. One nevertheless faces the question of whether to believe p or suspend judgment about whether p. We think that it is quite plausible that, in such a case, one can choose to believe p or to suspend judgment about whether p on the basis of practical considerations.

Indeed, we must have this ability if it is possible to respond to pragmatic and moral considerations in cases such as Train Case 2, Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD — and it does indeed seem possible. For instance, it's very natural to say that one can choose to suspend judgment on whether one's alcoholic spouse has relapsed — as opposed to settling on the belief that they have done so. This is particularly natural if one thinks that belief is tightly connected to closing inquiry, and suspension of judgment to keeping inquiry open.[41] One can choose to inquire into the matter more *rather than* making up one's mind and believing now. Similarly, we think that when one already has a pretty high credence that one's friend will complete their PhD, and judges that this is at least epistemically permissible to believe, one can choose

40. See Roeber (2019), who also provides references to other philosophers who have defended this view.

41. See Friedman (2019), Kelp (2021), and Fraser (forthcoming) for views on which belief is closely connected with closing inquiry. Fraser, in particular, holds that resolving to close inquiry (and thereby believe) involves the will.

to make up one's mind and believe that one's friend will successfully complete their PhD, rather than continuing to entertain doubts and inquire further.[42] In our view, what explains the possibility of doing these things — as compared with cases in which one is, say, bribed to believe something absurd — is that the former cases are (at least implicitly) recognized by the agent to be permissive.[43]

V.2 Conflicts and coordination

As we have already observed, going permissivist about epistemic norms at least reduces the prevalence of conflicts between epistemic and moral norms. For example, it allows us to say that there is no conflict in cases such as Wedding, Wine Stain, and PhD. In all these cases, there is a way to satisfy both the epistemic and moral norms.[44]

However, in these cases permissivist pragmatism does not deliver *coordination* between epistemic and moral norms: in all of them, there is an attitude that is epistemically permissible but morally impermissible. For example, in Wedding, believing is epistemically permissible but morally impermissible. How troubling should that be? In our view, not very, given that believing *p* is not epistemically *required*, and there is an alternative — viz., suspending — that is both morally and epistemically permissible. The phenomenon of an option being *permitted* by one set of norms but prohibited by another is perfectly familiar. It arises whenever one set of norms leaves some choice between multiple options open, and another set of norms narrows that choice down. For example, it occurs whenever there are two morally permissible options, one of which is required of you given prudential considerations, or two prudentially permissible options, one of which is morally required of you. This is simply not as troubling as outright conflict.

What, then, of Basu and Schroeder's argument for coordination? Their key premise is that it is inappropriate to apologize for holding an epistemically justified belief. But if 'justified' means *permissible*, we think this premise is too strong. It is plausible that it is inappropriate to apologize for holding an epistemically *required* belief. For if a belief is epistemically required, a conscientious follower of the evidence has, in effect, no choice but to hold it. But it is much less plausible that it is (always) inappropriate to apologize for a belief that is merely epistemically *permitted*. For here it is not as if a conscientious follower of the evidence has no choice but to hold the belief: it is open to them to suspend, and if the moral considerations require doing so, that is what they should do.

In this subsection, we have so far been discussing only epistemically permissive cases in which the moral norms require one of the epistemically permitted options (and prohibit the others). But we must acknowledge that our view does not demonstrate that all cases will be like this. It does not rule out the possibility of outright conflicts between epistemic and practical (including moral) norms in *non*-permissive cases, or in permissive cases where moral considerations favor an option that is not among the permitted ones.

However, we do not think this constitutes a severe problem for our view in particular, for two reasons. First, the onus is on the opponent of our view to provide a case in which (a) our view is committed to saying that morality prohibits a doxastic attitude that is categorically epistemically required, *and* (b) the verdict that epistemic and practical norms conflict is not intuitively plausible. We submit that such cases have not been forthcoming in the literature so far. Examples such as Wedding and Wine Stain involve morality prohibiting a doxastic

42. Our argument here implies that "transparency"—the claim that the deliberative question of *whether to believe p* reduces to the question *whether p*—is false. When considering *whether p*, one will often be uncertain either of the answer *p* or of the answer *not-p*. In such cases, one still faces the *further* question of whether to believe *p* (or suspend judgment), which has *not* been fully resolved by the considerations bearing on the question of *whether p*.

43. Those who still find it unintuitive that we can decide to believe in (apparently) permissive cases may prefer the idea that we control our beliefs in such cases *via* setting a particular personal psychological threshold. Plausibly, a personal psychological threshold *is* something that one can decide to adopt on the basis of practical considerations.

44. Interestingly, Basu and Schroeder themselves implicitly concede that cases of doxastic wronging seem to be epistemically permissive (Basu and Schroeder 2019: 196; Schroeder 2021: 190), which entails that there is no conflict between moral and epistemic norms.

attitude that is epistemically *permitted*, but not required, and so they fail to satisfy (a). On the other hand, cases such as Threat more plausibly satisfy (a),[45] but in our view they *are* very plausibly viewed as cases of conflict between moral and epistemic norms, and thus do not satisfy (b).

Second, pragmatic encroachment *also* does not categorically rule out conflicts between practical (including moral) and epistemic norms.[46] This is because there are plausibly limits on how low the threshold for epistemically justified belief can go, even given encroachment. If one's evidence for a proposition is too weak to meet even the lowest possible threshold, even the encroacher will have to say that belief is epistemically unjustified, no matter how strong the moral reasons are. That opens the way for conflicts. In fact, it is not obvious to us that there are *any* cases in which we are committed to a conflict but the pragmatic encroacher is not. This is because, we suspect, whenever the evidential situation makes it plausible for the pragmatic encroacher to claim that a morally required attitude is epistemically justified given the moral considerations, it likewise makes it plausible for the permissivist to claim that the morally required attitude is *among* the epistemically permitted options (even if it isn't the *only* epistemically permitted one). Thus, this purported advantage of pragmatic encroachment over reasons pragmatism has been neutralized.

V.3 Interaction

Let us turn next to the closely related issue of how epistemic and practical considerations interact (or don't). Recall that "interactionist pragmatists" hold that epistemic and practical reasons combine to produce verdicts about what one all-things-considered ought to believe, while "separatist pragmatists" hold that they do not. Both views have their problems: interactionist pragmatists face the difficult task

45. But this still isn't obvious. Perhaps in light of your inability to believe that 2+2=5, given how obviously ill-supported by the evidence this is, morality doesn't require it of you.

46. Cf. Traldi (2023).

of explaining how seemingly incommensurable considerations weigh against each other, while separatist pragmatists fail to issue clear guidance about what one ought to believe.

With permissivism on the table, a *strict* separatist view — on which epistemic and practical considerations *never* interact to produce all-things-considered verdicts — becomes implausible. Suppose that two doxastic attitudes are each epistemically permitted, but only one is morally permitted.[47] It is incredibly natural to say that you all-things-considered ought to have the attitude that is both epistemically and morally permitted. Similarly, if two doxastic attitudes are both morally permitted but only one is epistemically permitted, it is incredibly natural to say that you all-things-considered ought to have the attitude that is both epistemically and morally permitted. Thus, there are at least some verdicts about what one all-things-considered ought to believe. Moreover, there is no mystery about how the moral and epistemic considerations combine to produce these all-things-considered (ATC) verdicts. We can map how they do so, on our view as specified so far:

	Morally prohibited	*(Merely) morally permitted*	*Morally required*
Epistemically prohibited	ATC prohibited	ATC prohibited	??
(Merely) epistemically permitted	ATC prohibited	ATC permitted or required[48]	ATC required
Epistemically required	??	ATC required	ATC required

47. In this section, we will speak specifically of *moral*—rather than generically of *practical* — prohibitions, permissions, and requirements. But everything we say likewise applies to the interaction between prudential and epistemic norms.

48. More precisely: all-things-considered required if the attitude is the *only* one that is both epistemically and morally permitted; all-things-considered permitted if there are other attitudes that are both epistemically and morally permitted.

The highlighted boxes are those that open up only once we recognize the possibility of epistemically and/or morally permissive cases. If we ignore this possibility, it looks like we only get clear all-things-considered verdicts when the moral and epistemic considerations happen to yield the same verdict. Given this, one might hold that moral and epistemic considerations never interact in any significant way: they either happen to concur, or they conflict. But once we acknowledge the possibility of permissive cases, we see more substantive interaction, whereby the moral and epistemic statuses of a belief are not the same, yet the belief has an all-things-considered status. This suffices, we think, to render strict separatist pragmatism very unattractive.

Of course, we are still left with the question of what to say in the boxes marked with '??'. These are cases in which epistemic and moral norms conflict. We take no stand about whether or how epistemic and moral norms interact in such cases. One of us is inclined to embrace a kind of *restricted* separatism which says that there is no all-things-considered verdict about these cases — while noting that such cases will be significantly rarer on our view than on a non-permissivist view, and that moral and epistemic considerations *do* interact in permissive cases. (This position is intermediate between the separatist and interactionist views.) But one could also marry our account with one of the existing accounts of how epistemic and practical considerations weigh against each other (Reisner 2008; Howard 2020), or with a view on which, in conflict cases, either practical considerations always take precedence or epistemic considerations always take precedence. In any case, attention to permissive cases at least opens a way for epistemic and practical considerations to interact in a non-mysterious, utterly unproblematic way in a range of cases.

V.4 The problems for pragmatic encroachment

While our view is in a good sense a version of reasons pragmatism, it is *not* a version of pragmatic encroachment because it denies that practical factors affect epistemic justification. Thus, it avoids both the problems raised for pragmatic encroachment. First, there is no need to delimit *which* practical considerations can make a difference to what one ought to believe. For while it doesn't seem like bribes, threats, or Pascalian considerations are the right kind of things to make a difference to *epistemic* justification, it is far less obvious that they can't (in principle) make a difference to what one *all-things-considered* ought to believe. We can therefore allow that, at least within the range of epistemically permissible options, *any* kind of practical considerations can help determine which of the epistemically permissible options one all-things-considered ought to adopt. Second, we do not need to explain why the wrongness of a belief *itself*, independently of the costs of relying on it, makes a difference to *epistemic* justification, as we deny that practical considerations affect epistemic justification. Rather, we say that the wrongness of a belief itself makes a difference to what one all-things-considered ought to believe, within the range of epistemically permitted options.

VI. Conclusion

In this paper, we have articulated and defended a new account of how practical considerations affect what we ought to believe that combines reasons pragmatism with intrapersonal, synchronic permissivism about outright belief. In addition to ameliorating classic problems for simple, impermissivist versions of reasons pragmatism, permissivist pragmatism nicely handles cases traditionally used to motivate pragmatic encroachment while avoiding the central challenges encroachment faces. We therefore hope to have shown that permissivist pragmatism is a compelling alternative to pragmatic encroachment, and deserves serious philosophical consideration.

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