

# An Epistemic-Practical Dilemma for Evidentialism

Byeong D. Lee\*

Received: 22 October 2022 / Revised: 29 May 2024 / Accepted: 31 May 2024

*Abstract:* There are cases in which epistemic rationality seems to conflict with practical rationality. Evidentialists such as Parfit, Shah, Skorupski and Way deny that there are practical reasons for belief. On their view, the only genuine normative reasons for belief are epistemic reasons, and so the alleged practical reasons for belief are the wrong kind of reasons for belief. But I argue in this paper that the evidentialists can still face a genuine dilemma between epistemic and practical rationality which cannot be resolved on the grounds that the alleged practical reasons for belief are the wrong kind of reasons for belief.

*Keywords:* Epistemic rationality; practical rationality; evidentialism; the right kind of reasons; the wrong kind of reasons.


## 1. Introductory Remarks

Epistemic rationality is concerned with *what to believe* for the sake of our epistemic goal, which can be understood as having true beliefs (and avoiding false ones). In other words, epistemic rationality is concerned with *what is the case*. By contrast, practical rationality is concerned with *what to do* for realizing what is (practically) desired or desirable. In other words,

---

\* Sungkyunkwan University

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7080-6702>

 Department of Philosophy, 25-2, Sungkyunkwan-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea

 [bydlee@skku.edu](mailto:bydlee@skku.edu)



practical rationality is concerned with *what ought to be done*. Clearly, it is one thing to determine what is the case, and it is quite another thing to do what ought to be done. In this sense, epistemic rationality is fundamentally different from practical rationality. But there are cases in which epistemic rationality seems to conflict with practical rationality. One well-known example is this:

John Doe is suffering from an illness that is usually fatal, but believes with deep conviction that he will recover. The fact that John has this optimistic belief might actually contribute to his recovery. Or at least it might make him more cheerful during his dying days, which in turn might ease the pain of others who are close to him. In either case it would be a virtue or *merit* of John's belief that it has the good consequences that it does for himself or others. (Firth 1998, 259)

Suppose that John's chances of recovery from his illness are 10%. Suppose also that if he believes that he will recover from his illness, his chances of recovery will thereby increase to 30%. Then it seems that John has a good practical (or pragmatic) reason for believing that he will recover.<sup>1</sup> But this optimistic belief will not change the fact that his chances of recovery are still not above 30%. So he has a good epistemic reason for not believing that he will recover. Hence, the John Doe case illustrates a situation in which epistemic rationality seems to conflict with practical rationality. In such a case, what doxastic attitude should John take?

According to pragmatism, there are practical reasons for belief. Contemporary pragmatism is divided into two camps. On the one hand, there is *radical pragmatism*, which holds that, strictly speaking, only pragmatic reasons can be genuine reasons for belief. Versions of this view have been defended notably by Rinard (2015, 2017, 2019a, 2019b) and Maguire and Woods (2020). On the other hand, there is *moderate pragmatism*, which holds that there can be both pragmatic and evidential reasons for belief. Versions of this view have been defended by Foley (1992), Reisner (2008,

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that 'practical reason' is a more comprehensive expression than 'pragmatic reason'. For example, moral reasons, which are distinct from pragmatic or prudential reasons, are also practical reasons rather than epistemic reasons.

2009, 2018), McCormick (2014), Leary (2017), and Howard (2020), among others.

In contrast, evidentialism holds that only evidential reasons can be genuine reasons for belief. This view has been defended notably by Parfit (2011), Shah (2006), Skorupski (2009, 2010), and Way (2012, 2016, 2017). And to reconcile the apparent conflict between epistemic rationality and practical rationality, they distinguish between reasons for belief and reasons for bringing about belief. Let me quote what they say about this distinction:

But the question *what belief to bring about* is distinct from the question *what to believe*. Answering the former question issues in an action or intention, and thus is determined by practical considerations, such as whether it would be immoral or imprudent to bring about the belief, whereas answering the latter question issues in a belief, and thus is determined by reasons which speak to the truth of the proposition to be believed. (Shah 2006, 498)

It helps generally distinguish between reasons to  $\psi$  and reasons to bring it about that one  $\psi$ s .... Reasons to believe that your partner is telling the truth are one thing; reasons to make yourself believe it are another. The first are epistemic reasons; the second are practical reasons. You can have practical reason to *make* yourself believe something if you can (e.g., that your partner is telling the truth, or that you will survive the dangerous mission) when there is in fact no reason for you to believe it. (Skorupski 2009, 114–115)

Since our epistemic reasons are related to the truth of *what* we believe, these reasons can also be called *object-given*. Many people assume that we can also have *state-given* reasons to have certain beliefs. Such reasons would be provided by facts that would make our *having* some belief in some way good. It is often claimed, for example, that we have such reasons to believe that God exists and that we shall have a life after death. These reasons would not be epistemic, or truth-related, but *goodness-related*, or *value-based*. Such alleged reasons to have beliefs are sometimes called *practical* or *pragmatic*. (Parfit 2011, 50–51)

According to this solution, the right kind of reasons are simply all the reasons there are. Strictly speaking, the wrong kind reasons for attitudes are not reasons for those attitudes, any more than fool's gold is gold. ... [I]ncentives for attitudes are not reasons for those attitudes, but are instead reasons to want these attitudes and to bring them about. (Way 2012, 492)

Following Way (2012, 490), we may distinguish between the right and the wrong kind of reasons for belief as follows: The right kind of reasons for believing that  $p$  are reasons that count in favor of the truth of ' $p$ '. And the wrong kind of reasons for believing that  $p$  are considerations that somehow count in favor of believing that  $p$ , but which don't bear on whether ' $p$ ' is true.<sup>2</sup> On the evidentialist view, evidential reasons for belief are the right kind of reasons for belief, whereas reasons for bringing about belief are the wrong kind of reasons for belief, and the only genuine normative reasons for belief are the right kind of reasons for belief.

With the above view in mind, consider the John Doe case again. In this case, the fact that his optimistic belief about his recovery will increase his chances of recovery significantly is certainly a practical consideration in favor of the belief. But this fact does not give him an epistemic reason for the belief, because his chances of recovery are still not above 30%. As a consequence, on the evidentialist view, there is no real conflict between epistemic and practical rationality for the following reason: John in this case has a good epistemic reason for not believing that he will recover, and he also have a good practical reason for bringing himself to believe that he will recover. But the former is a reason of the right kind for not believing that he will recover, and the latter is a reason of the wrong kind for believing that he will recover.

---

<sup>2</sup> More generally, the 'wrong kind of reasons' for an attitude are the kind of reasons that somehow count in favor of the attitude, but which do not bear on the correctness of the attitude. Suppose, for example, that an evil demon will exterminate the human race unless we admire him. In this case, we have a practical reason to admire the demon, but this reason does not bear on whether the demon is really admirable. Reasons of this kind were labeled as the 'wrong kind of reasons' by Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004, 393).

I agree with the evidentialists that, strictly speaking, there are no such things as practical reasons for belief. Nevertheless, in this paper, I will argue that the evidentialists can still face a genuine dilemma between epistemic and practical rationality which cannot be resolved on the grounds that the alleged practical reasons for belief are the wrong kind of reasons for belief.

## 2. The Wrong Kind of Reason for Belief and Epistemic-Practical Dilemma

In his 2016 paper entitled “Two Arguments for Evidentialism”, Way provides an argument against reasoning from pragmatic reasons, which he calls “the argument from good reasoning”. This argument is roughly as follows:

Reasons to believe ‘*p*’ must be premises of good reasoning. It is not good reasoning to reason from an incentive for believing ‘*p*’ to believing ‘*p*’. Therefore, incentives for believing ‘*p*’ are not good reasons to believe ‘*p*’.

According to Way, reasons are supposed to guide us and the way in which reasons guide us well is through good reasoning; thus, reasons must be premises of good reasoning. In addition, he argues that there is no good reasoning from an incentive for believing ‘*p*’ to believing ‘*p*’. Consider the following form of argument:

(1) Believing ‘*p*’ is practically beneficial to me. Therefore, ‘*p*’ is true.

One instance of this form of argument is this: Believing that God exists is practically beneficial to me. Therefore, ‘God exists’ is true. Observe that any argument of this form is not valid. For some false belief could be practically beneficial to someone. So I agree with Way that this kind of argument from an incentive for a belief to the truth of the belief is not good. But it is important to notice at this point that (1) is a theoretical argument rather than a practical argument.<sup>3</sup> And practical reasons must be such that

---

<sup>3</sup> Following Way (2016, 815), I assume here that good reasoning corresponds to good arguments. What is important to note in this regard is that any piece of good reasoning can be expressed in the form of a good argument.

they can serve as premises of good practical reasoning, rather than premises of good theoretical reasoning. Therefore, showing that there are no genuine practical reasons for belief requires showing that there is no good practical reasoning for belief. Accordingly, we need to think about whether there is no such practical reasoning.

Consider the John Doe case again. The first question worth answering is whether there is an argument to show that John ought to bring himself to believe that he will recover. In this regard, consider the following practical argument:

- (2) I ought to promote my survival. Bringing myself to believe that I will recover is the only means of achieving this end. Therefore, I ought to bring myself to believe that I will recover.

Note that (2) is an instance of the following typical form of means-end reasoning:

I ought to achieve end E. My doing *A* is the only means of achieving E. Therefore, I ought to do *A*.

This is standardly taken to be a valid rule of practical reasoning. Therefore, insofar as the two premises of (2) are justifiable, (2) can be considered as an argument to show that John ought to bring himself to believe that he will recover. The next question then is whether these two premises are justifiable.

Here we may assume that one's survival is a reasonable goal worth pursuing. So let us move on to the second premise of (2). Is this premise also defensible? What is noteworthy in this context is that the aforementioned evidentialists do not deny that it is possible for one to bring about a certain belief state by some means or other. So let us assume that John can somehow bring it about that he believes that he will recover. Let us also assume that having this optimistic belief is the only possible chance that he has for his recovery. Under these assumptions, the second premise of (2) can also be defended. If so, we have a good practical argument to show that John ought to bring himself to believe that he will recover. The crucial question at this point is whether (2) also provides him with a good reason for believing that he will recover. According to the evidentialists, the answer is 'no'. As mentioned in the previous section, they distinguish between reasons for

belief and reasons for bringing about belief, arguing that the latter are the wrong kind of reasons. Therefore, on their view, (2) does not provide John with a reason of the right kind for believing that he will recover.

Unfortunately, however, epistemic rationality can still conflict with practical rationality in a way that cannot be resolved on the grounds that reasons for bringing about belief are the wrong kind of reasons for belief. Consider the John Doe case again. Suppose that his survival is what matters the most to him, and so he wants to do everything he can to increase his chances of recovery. Suppose also that the fact that his chances of recovery improve from 10% to 30% could make a real difference between life and death for him. Under these conditions, it can be argued that John has a good practical reason for bringing himself to believe that he will recover. What is worth recalling at this point is that (2) is a valid practical argument and its two premises could be justified.

Now, suppose that John, as a rational being, wants to comply with what practical rationality demands of him. Then, since he has a good practical reason for bringing himself to believe that he will recover, we can say:

- (3) From the practical point of view, John ought to bring it about that he believes that he will recover.

This time, suppose that John, as a rational being, wants to comply with what epistemic rationality demands of him. In this case, his chances of recovery are low, and so he has a good epistemic reason for not believing that he will recover. Accordingly, we may say that he epistemically ought not to believe that he will recover. This is tantamount to saying that it epistemically ought to be the case that he does not believe that he will recover. For this reason, if John comes to believe that he will recover, he can be subject to epistemic criticism on the grounds that this belief violates epistemic rationality. As mentioned in section 1, epistemic rationality is concerned with what to believe for the sake of our epistemic goal of having true beliefs and avoiding false ones. And John's belief that he will recover is likely to be false. Accordingly, what epistemic rationality demands of John is that he should not believe that he will recover. And he fails to meet this epistemic demand if he brings about this belief. Along these lines, we can argue that John can meet what epistemic rationality demands of him only if he does

not bring it about that he believes that he will recover. If this is correct, we can also say:

- (4) From the epistemic point of view, John ought not to bring it about that he believes that he will recover.

Here two things are worth pointing out. First, even the evidentialists can hardly deny (4). To deny this is tantamount to saying that John is allowed to bring it about that he believes that he will recover. But as argued above, John can meet what epistemic rationality demands of him only if he does not bring about this belief. Second, the reason for John not to bring about this belief is not a reason of the wrong kind in the sense that it is directly relevant to meeting what epistemic rationality demands of him, instead of what practical rationality demands of him. Let me explain. As mentioned in section 1, reasons of the wrong kind for believing that  $p$  are considerations that somehow count in favor of believing that  $p$ , but which don't bear on whether ' $p$ ' is true. So we can say that if there is a consideration that counts against believing that  $p$ , and which doesn't bear on whether ' $p$ ' is true, then that consideration is a reason of the wrong kind for not believing that  $p$ . But in the John Doe case under consideration, John can meet what epistemic rationality demands of him only if he does not bring it about that he believes that he will recover. In other words, if John brings about this belief, he fails to meet what epistemic rationality demands of him. This implies that whether he brings about this belief is directly relevant to whether he meets what epistemic rationality demands of him. If this is correct, the reason for not bringing about this belief is not a reason of the wrong kind in the sense that it is directly relevant to meeting what epistemic rationality demands of him, instead of what practical rationality demands of him. To put the point another way, the reason for not bringing about this belief bears on whether or not this belief is true. Hence, even the evidentialists can hardly deny (4) just on the grounds that the reason for John not to bring about this belief is a reason of the wrong kind.

In sum, John can meet what practical rationality demands of him by bringing about the optimistic belief, and he also can meet what epistemic rationality demands of him by not bringing about this epistemically unjustified belief. Hence, what epistemic rationality demands of John conflicts with what practical rationality demands of him. What then should he



believe or do? Clearly, the aforementioned evidentialist claim, namely that reasons for bringing about belief are the wrong kind of reasons for belief, is not of much help in answering this question. What is worth emphasizing in this regard is that (2) can be a sound practical argument, so that John can have a practical reason of the right kind for bringing about the belief that he will recover. And if he complies with what practical rationality demands of him, then he thereby fails to comply with what epistemic rationality demands of him. One more thing worth pointing out here is that this kind of conflict between epistemic and practical rationality is compatible with the aforementioned reasoning view, according to which reasons, at least primarily, serve as premises of good reasoning.

### 3. A Genuine Dilemma for Evidentialism

As argued in the previous section, in the John Doe case, John can meet what epistemic rationality demands of him by not bringing it about that he believes that he will recover, and he also can meet what practical rationality demands of him by bringing about this belief. Accordingly, what epistemic rationality demands of John conflicts with what practical rationality demands of him. And as I will argue in the remainder of this paper, the evidentialists cannot resolve this dilemma in a principled way.

Suppose, *for reductio*, that they could resolve this dilemma in a principled way. Then there are two possibilities. One possibility is that it is the right thing for John not to bring himself to believe that he will recover, all things considered. The other possibility is that it is the right thing for John to bring about this belief, all things considered.

Let us begin by considering the first possibility. To say that this possibility is the case is tantamount to saying that epistemic rationality overrides practical rationality when they conflict with each other. Then we can make the following claim:

- (5) John's epistemic reason for not believing that he will recover overrides his practical reason for bringing about this belief.

But the evidentialists can hardly defend this claim. Let me explain.

To begin with, as pointed out in section 1, epistemic rationality is concerned with believing what is true, whereas practical rationality is concerned with bringing about what is (practically) desired or desirable. Clearly, it is one thing to determine *what is the case*, and it is quite another thing to do *what ought to be done*. In this sense, epistemic rationality is fundamentally different from practical rationality.

In addition, if John believes that he will recover, then this belief plays dual roles. On the one hand, it is a belief whose content can be either true or false. On the other hand, it is also a condition necessary for promoting his survival, which is a practical goal that he can hardly give up. And this latter role requires John to bring about a state necessary for promoting his survival, and this state happens to be a certain belief state. So it is a contingent fact about John that this belief plays these dual roles. And epistemic rationality is concerned with the first role, and practical rationality is concerned with the second role.

Moreover, an exceptional case like the John Doe case is not a reason to revise our present epistemic or practical norms. Let me elaborate on this point a bit further.

As pointed out before, it is one thing to make an epistemic evaluation of whether or not a certain belief is true, and it is another thing to make a practical evaluation of whether a certain action is required for realizing what is desired or desirable. And we make such an epistemic evaluation in terms of our epistemic norms, and such a practical evaluation in terms of our practical norms. Another important thing to note is that our epistemic norms are primarily *intersubjective* norms, which have normative force for us in our social practice of demanding justification and responding to such demands. For example, our beliefs are bound by modus ponens. So, if you believe not only that if  $p$  then  $q$ , but also that  $p$ , and if you care whether  $q$ , then you ought to believe that  $q$ . Of course, someone can believe in a way that violates some epistemic norms such as modus ponens. But such a person can be subject to rational criticism on the grounds that he or she violates an epistemic norm of rationality. A similar point can be made about our practical norms. Our practical norms are primarily *intersubjective* norms, which have normative force for us in our social practice of justification. For example, our actions are bound by the following means-end

reasoning: If you ought to achieve end *E*, and if doing *A* is a means implied by your achievement of *E*, then you ought to do *A*. Again, someone can act in a way that violates some practical norms such as means-end reasoning. But such a person can be subject to rational criticism on the grounds that he or she violates a practical norm of rationality.

As mentioned before, John's belief that he will recover plays dual roles: a belief whose content can be either true or false, and a condition necessary for promoting his survival. And epistemic rationality is concerned with the first role, and practical rationality is concerned with the second role. Accordingly, the first role is evaluated in terms of our epistemic norms, and the second role is evaluated in terms of our practical norms. Now observe that, on the basis of our present epistemic norms, we can judge that John epistemically ought not to bring it about that he believes that he will recover, and also that, on the basis of our present practical norms, we can judge that he practically ought to bring about this belief. At this point, three things are worth pointing out. First, the former judgment is concerned with the aforementioned first role of John's belief, and the latter judgment is concerned with the aforementioned second role of this belief. Second, there is nothing wrong with these judgments. Third, an optimistic but improbable belief could be practically beneficial to someone, and there is no mystery about this familiar fact. Therefore, an exceptional case like the John Doe case is not a reason to revise our present epistemic or practical norms.

In addition to the above reasons, the view that epistemic rationality overrides practical rationality has a very implausible consequence. If this view is correct, then it ought to be the case that John does not believe that he will recover, all things considered. Then it should be the case that the evidentialists can rationally demand (or advise) of John that he not bring it about that he believes that he will recover. But this is tantamount to demanding that he give up his efforts for promoting his survival by holding the optimistic belief that he will recover. And it can be argued that nobody has the right to demand that one give up one's efforts to survive, at least insofar as those efforts do not infringe anyone's rights.

Suppose that John's survival is what matters the most to him, and so he is willing to do everything he can to survive. Suppose also that his

optimistic belief that he will recover could make a crucial difference for his survival. To put it another way, the fact that his chances of recovery improve from 10% to 30% could make a real difference between life and death for him. As a consequence, if John survived his illness (because of this optimistic belief), he could argue that, if he did not hold this belief, he could not have survived. Suppose further that John could somehow bring about this optimistic belief. Under these conditions, (2) can be a sound argument for John.

- (2) I ought to promote my survival. Bringing myself to believe that I will recover is the only means of achieving this end. Therefore, I ought to bring myself to believe that I will recover.

Let us also assume that John's efforts to survive do not infringe anyone's rights. In such a case, we can say that it is practically rational for John to bring it about that he believes that he will recover. And we can hardly argue that he ought to give up his efforts to survive, just on the grounds that the chances of his recovery are low. What is worth considering in this context is Kant's claim that practical reason has primacy over theoretical reason. He says:

Thus, in the union of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy, assuming that this union is not *contingent* and discretionary but based a priori on reason itself and therefore *necessary*. ... But one cannot require pure practical reason to be subordinate to speculate reason and so reverse the order, since all interest is ultimately practical and even that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone. (Kant 1996, 5:121)

[I]n the end all the effort of our faculties is directed to what is practical and must be united in it as their goal. (Kant 2000, 5:206)

On Kant's view, thus, all interest is ultimately practical, and in the end all the effort of our faculties is directed to what is practical. Therefore, insofar as theoretical reason has an interest, this interest must be ultimately practical. Let me elaborate on this point a bit further.

As mentioned before, epistemic rationality is concerned with our epistemic goal of having true beliefs (and avoiding false ones). So we may say that the interest of theoretical reason consists in having true beliefs. But one important question arises here: why should we be interested in having true beliefs in the first place? One plausible answer might be that we need true beliefs about the world in order to make rational decisions for our ultimate practical goal, such as our survival and well-being or the Kingdom of Ends. Note that all living animals need correct information about the world necessary for their survival and well-being. We are no exception. One important difference between mere animals and us is that we can engage in theoretical reasoning in order to obtain true beliefs about the world. In other words, unlike mere animals, we are rational beings whose beliefs are bound by epistemic norms of rationality. But notice that such epistemic norms would be pointless to us, if they are of no use for us to make rational decisions for our ultimate practical goal. To put the point another way, we can hardly enforce such epistemic norms on people if those norms are useless or even detrimental for their survival and well-being. Along these lines, we may argue that the reason why we should be interested in theoretical reason (or our epistemic goal of having true beliefs and avoiding false ones) is that we need true beliefs about the world in order to make rational decisions for our ultimate practical goal. It is in this sense that practical reason has primacy over theoretical reason. If these considerations are on the right lines, it is very unlikely that epistemic rationality overrides practical rationality when they conflict with each other.

Let us now turn to the second possibility, namely, that it is the right thing for John to bring about the belief that he will recover, all things considered. If this possibility is the case, the evidentialists can rationally demand (or advise) of John that he bring it about that he believes that he will recover. As I argue below, however, there are important reasons to think that they also can hardly make this demand.

The first reason is concerned with the *ought-implies-can* principle. As Kant (1998, A807/B835) insists, 'ought' implies 'can'. The most important theoretical rationale for this ought-implies-can principle is that it is pointless to demand of any person that they do what they are unable to do. The question then is whether John can bring it about the belief that he will

recover. Recall that the chances of his recovery are low. And insofar as he is well aware of this fact, he can hardly believe that he will recover. In this context, it is important to note that beliefs are not actions but *mental states*. An action is essentially something one can do on purpose. In contrast, a mental state is what occurs in a person's mind, rather than something one does on purpose. So, although you may decide to perform a certain action, you cannot directly decide to make a mental state occur in your mind. In other words, it is not under your direct volitional control to make a certain mental state occur in your mind.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, if you believe that there are good reasons for the truth of 'p', then, under normal circumstances, you are thereby disposed to believe that p. For example, if you believe that 'p' follows by modus ponens from things you firmly believe, you are thereby disposed to believe that p. Therefore, at least under normal circumstances, we do not form beliefs directly by willing to believe them. This is why John can hardly believe that he will recover just by intending to believe it, especially in the face of strong evidence against it. Hence, in order to bring about the belief that he will recover, he needs to ignore evidence against this belief. To put the point another way, he needs to engage in self-deception on this matter. But the problem is that engaging in self-deception is not something that one can normally do on purpose. What is noteworthy in this regard is that John is confronted with a dilemma, when he intends to ignore evidence against his belief that he will recover. Insofar as he does not forget that he needs to engage in self-deception so as to form and maintain this optimistic belief, he is (implicitly) aware that he is unlikely to recover. Under this condition, he can hardly succeed in really believing that he will recover. If he somehow forgets that he is engaging in self-deception so as to maintain this belief, then he is very likely to lose this belief as soon as he is again confronted with the compelling evidence against it. Therefore, self-deception of this sort tends to be very unstable. If, however, engaging in self-deception is not something that John can normally do on purpose, the evidentialists can hardly demand that he bring about the belief that he will recover through self-deception. To put the point another way, John can refuse this demand on the grounds that he can hardly meet this demand.

---

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Sellars, 1967, esp. 74.

The second and related reason against the second possibility is that if one holds a false belief by engaging in self-deception, then one can be more vulnerable to making wrong moral or other decisions on the basis of this false belief. Let me explain.

There are cases in which deceiving a person could bring about good results for him. But this does not show that in such a case it is rationally permissible to deceive him. It is important to observe at this point that what one believes can serve as reasons for moral or other decisions. And we can hardly rule out the possibility that the deceived person could make a wrong decision on the basis of the false belief. In a similar vein, there are cases in which engaging in self-deception could bring about good results. But this does not show that in such a case it is rationally permissible to deceive oneself. For one thing, if one holds a false belief through self-deception, then one can be more vulnerable to making wrong moral or other decisions on the basis of this false belief. For example, if John believes that he will recover through self-deception, he may miss the opportunity to address personal matters before his potential passing, such as settling debts and ensuring the well-being of his children in his absence. Besides, if he will not recover, perhaps he would be better off accepting this fact and spending his remaining days as meaningful as he can.

Now suppose that John refuses to engage in self-deception because he does not want to compromise his own moral or intellectual integrity, and also because he wants to spend his remaining days as meaningful as he can, while fully understanding his real situation. In such a case, we can hardly say that he deserves criticism or blame. Especially, from the evidentialist perspective, there is nothing wrong with John's decision not to bring about the belief that he will recover. If this is correct, the evidentialists can hardly argue that John ought, all things considered, to bring it about that he believes that he will recover.

There is one more thing worth considering here. As pointed out before, practical reason has primacy over theoretical reason in the sense that we need true beliefs in order to make rational decisions for our ultimate practical goal. But the primacy of practical reason in this sense does not imply that whether or not a belief is true is affected by our ultimate practical goal. Insofar as we need to make rational decisions on the basis of true

beliefs, we have to evaluate whether or not a relevant belief is true on the basis of our epistemic norms. And as emphasized before, it is one thing to determine on the basis of our epistemic norms whether a belief is true, and it is quite another thing to determine on the basis of practical norms whether one ought to realize a certain state of affairs. Furthermore, recall that the evidentialists deny that there are practical reasons for belief. Thus, our epistemic judgment of whether ' $p$ ' is true or not is not the kind of thing which can be defeated by any practical consideration. For example, the fact that John Doe has a practical reason for bringing about the belief that he will recover has no effect on the fact that he is not epistemically justified in holding the belief. Therefore, although practical reason has primacy over theoretical reason in the sense that we need true beliefs in order to make rational decisions for our ultimate practical goal, epistemic reasons for belief are not such that they can be defeated by any practical reasons.

In sum, the evidentialists can hardly demand that John not bring it about that he believes that he will recover, because nobody has the right to demand that one give up one's efforts to survive, at least insofar as those efforts do not infringe anyone's rights. In addition, they can hardly demand that John bring himself to believe that he will recover, either, because he can rightly refuse this demand on the grounds that this belief is not epistemically justified and he wants to spend his remaining days as meaningfully as he can, while fully understanding his real situation. Hence, the evidentialists cannot resolve this kind of epistemic-practical dilemma in a principled way.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

The evidentialists deny that there are practical reasons for belief. On their view, the only genuine normative reasons for belief are epistemic reasons, and so the alleged practical reasons for belief are the wrong kind of reasons for belief. But if the arguments presented in this paper hold, they can still face a genuine dilemma between epistemic and practical rationality which cannot be resolved on the grounds that the alleged practical reasons for belief are the wrong kind of reasons for belief.

I argued for the above claim by focusing on the John Doe case. In this case, John's belief that he will recover is likely to be false, and so it is not



epistemically justified. Therefore, we may say that from the epistemic point of view, John ought not to believe that he will recover. This, in turn, requires him not to bring it about that he believes that he will recover. The reason is clear. If he does so, he thereby fails to comply with what epistemic rationality demands of him. By contrast, if John believes that he will recover, this optimistic belief increases his chances of recovery significantly. Therefore, we may also say that from the practical point of view, John ought to bring about this belief. Hence, what epistemic rationality demands of John conflicts with what practical rationality demands of him. And the evidentialists cannot resolve this conflict in a principled way.

To begin, the evidentialists can hardly demand that John not bring it about that he believes that he will recover. To demand that he not do so is tantamount to demanding that he give up his efforts for promoting his survival by holding the optimistic belief that he will recover. But nobody has the right to demand that one give up one's efforts to survive, at least insofar as those efforts do not infringe anyone's rights. And one's right to survive is not overridden by the claim that reasons for bringing about belief are the wrong kind of reasons for belief.

In addition, the evidentialists can hardly demand that John bring it about that he believes that he will recover, either. Recall that John can rightly refuse this demand on the grounds that this belief is not epistemically justified, and he wants to spend his remaining days as meaningfully as he can, while fully understanding his real situation. Recall also that, at least from the evidentialist perspective, epistemic rationality is not overridden by practical rationality, and so there is nothing wrong with this refusal.

If the above considerations are correct, the evidentialists can still face a genuine dilemma between epistemic and practical rationality which cannot be resolved on the grounds that the alleged practical reasons for belief are the wrong kind of reasons for belief. And insofar as they are right about the claim that epistemic rationality is not overridden by practical rationality, all of us can face such a genuine dilemma which cannot be resolved in a principled way.

## References

- Firth, Roderick. 1998. "Epistemic Merits, Intrinsic and Instrumental." *In Defense of Radical Empiricism: Essays and Lectures*, edited by John Troyer, 259-71. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2693706>
- Foley, Richard. 1992. *Working without a Net: A Study of Egocentric Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0029-4624.00100>
- Howard, Christopher. 2020. "Weighing Epistemic and Practical Reasons for Belief." *Philosophical Studies*, 117(8): 2227-2243. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-019-01307-y>
- Kant, Immanuel. 1996. "Critique of Practical Reason." In *Practical Philosophy*, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor, 133-271. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 2000. *Critique of the Power of Judgment (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant)*, edited and translated by Paul Guyer, translated by Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leary, Stephanie. 2017. "In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 95(3): 529-542. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2016.1237532>
- McCormick, Miriam Schleifer. 2014. *Believing against the Evidence: Agency and the Ethics of Belief*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203579146>
- Maguire, Barry, and Jack Woods. 2020. "The Game of Belief." *Philosophical Review*, 129(2): 211-249. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-8012843>
- Parfit, Derek. 2011. *On What Matters. Volume One*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199572809.001.0001>
- Reisner, Andrew. 2008. "Weighing Pragmatic and Evidential Reasons for Belief." *Philosophical Studies*, 138(1): 17-27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-006-0007-3>
- Reisner, Andrew. 2009. "The Possibility of Pragmatic Reasons for Belief and the Wrong Kind of Reasons Problem." *Philosophical Studies*, 145(2): 257-272. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-008-9222-4>
- Reisner, Andrew. 2018. "Pragmatic Reasons for Belief." In *The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity*, edited by Daniel Star, 705-728. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199657889.013.31>
- Rinard, Susanna. 2015. "Against the New Evidentialists." *Philosophical Issues*, 25(1): 208-223. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phis.12061>
- Rinard, Susanna. 2017. "No Exception for Belief." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 94(1): 121-143. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12229>
- Rinard, Susanna. 2019a. "Believing for Practical Reasons." *Noûs*, 53(4): 763-784. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12253>

- Rinard, Susanna. 2019b. "Equal Treatment for Belief." *Philosophical Studies*, 176(7): 1923-1950. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-1104-9>
- Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen. 2004. "The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-attitudes and Value." *Ethics*, 114: 391-423. <https://doi.org/10.1086/381694>
- Sellars, Wilfrid. 1967. *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Shah, Nishi. 2006. "A New argument for Evidentialism." *Philosophical Quarterly*, 56(225): 481-498. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9213.2006.454.x>
- Skorupski, John. 2009. "The Unity and Diversity of Reasons." In *Species of Reason: New Essays in the Philosophy of Normativity*, edited by Simon Robertson, 113-139. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199572939.003.0005>
- Skorupski, John. 2010. *The Domain of Reasons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199587636.001.0001>
- Way, Jonathan. 2012. "Transmission and the Wrong Kind of Reason." *Ethics*, 122: 489-515. <https://doi.org/10.1086/664749>
- Way, Jonathan. 2016. "Two Arguments for Evidentialism." *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 66(265): 805-818. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqw026>
- Way, Jonathan. 2017. "Reasons as Premises of Good Reasoning." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 98(2): 251-270. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12135>