

What do we epistemically owe to each other? A Reply to Basu

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1. Introduction

What, if anything, do we epistemically owe to each other? Various “orthodox” views of epistemology might hold either that we don’t epistemically owe anything to each other, because “what we owe to each other” is the realm of the moral, or that what we epistemically owe to each other is just to be epistemically responsible agents. Rima Basu (2019) has recently argued, against such views, that morality makes extra-evidential demands upon what we should believe about one another.¹ So, what we owe to each other is not just a matter of word and deed, but also of belief. In this sense, the demands of epistemology and morality are not separate or neatly partitioned: agents, *qua* believers, are subject to both epistemic and moral demands. And in fact, Basu argues, sometimes those moral demands require us to believe in ways that cut against (at least orthodox, invariantist) epistemic norms.²

This paper has three aims. First, to consider two possible strategies for accommodating the kinds of cases Basu discusses while nonetheless holding that only epistemic normativity makes demands on belief. What we epistemically owe to each other, I will argue, does not require us to violate invariantist epistemic norms. Second, to develop an alternative account of what we owe to

¹ Basu argues for a variety of views and claims in other work that are relevant to the account she gives in this paper. For example, see Basu (2018a, 2018b) and Basu & Schroeder (2019).

² Some (e.g., Gardiner 2018) talk about “orthodox” epistemic norms when discussing how to resist moral encroachment views. For Gardiner, this mostly means orthodox *evidentialist* (or ‘intellectualist’) norms. However, given that Basu (and others) try to make their encroachment views compatible with certain evidentialist principles, it is worth saying a bit more. I think the kind of “orthodox” epistemic norms we should try to hold onto are *invariantist* norms, that is, norms that persist across contextual changes; in particular, norms that persist in the face of *moral* changes to an agent’s context, and are resistant to the influence of “moral risks.” See Reed (2010) for a defense of what he calls *stable invariantism*; this is roughly sense of ‘invariantism’ I will have in mind.

each other that does not hold that morality demands that we sometimes believe against our evidence or in violation of invariantist epistemic norms. And third, based on the positive account I will develop, to offer a brief diagnosis of why it is intuitive to think that morality makes demands upon what we should believe.

The paper will proceed as follows. In §2, I will briefly characterize what I take to be Basu's view regarding what we epistemically owe to each other, make some clarificatory remarks, and discuss some interpretive issues. In §3, I will consider two different strategies for accommodating the kinds of cases Basu discusses, ultimately developing the second as an alternative account of what we owe to each. In §4, I offer a brief diagnosis of the intuitiveness of moral demands upon belief. And in §5, I conclude, offering a closing motivation for my account.

2. Preliminaries and Ground Clearing

2.1. Basu's Account of What is Epistemically Owed

Basu ends her paper by acknowledging that she has yet to identify *exactly what* we epistemically owe to each, since there are likely a variety of mitigating factors and qualifications that will need to be accounted for. The point of her paper is, then, just to establish that there is *something* we epistemically owe one another. Basu's general suggestion, however, is that what we epistemically owe to each other is, except in special circumstances, not to objectify or dehumanize others in our beliefs. Basu characterizes this as the demand that we occupy *the moral standpoint* in our beliefs about others. This is the standpoint—like Strawson's *participant stance*—that involves seeing and acknowledging others as persons and not things.

So, although Basu admits that there may be situations in which treating someone as a person might in fact require treating them as a thing *in a sense*, the rough idea is that what we

epistemically owe to each other is not to take up an objectifying or dehumanizing doxastic stance towards one another. Let's conceive of what is epistemically owed, then, in the following way:

WIEO: *Ceteris paribus*, we owe it to one another, in our capacity as believers, not to believe things that require or involve relating to or treating others as objects rather than persons.

This involves refraining from believing things about others that degrade their status as rational agents or persons, such as, e.g., beliefs about them in light of what they are *expected* to be like, given their race, gender, etc. Further, and importantly, this is what we owe to each other *even when* it involves believing against our evidence. So satisfying the demands of *WIEO* sometimes requires believing against our evidence. Indeed, Basu argues that the excuse that one's belief was based on and justified by one's evidence, and that one intended no ill-will and was simply trying to be epistemically responsible, is in fact not a sufficient excuse for someone who has been wronged and feels hurt by a belief.

2.2. Clarifying the Nature and Extent of the Disagreement

I now want to clarify the nature of my disagreement with Basu. To this end, I would first like to make a partly terminological point, but one that will help clarify what is at issue in this paper. I'll begin by noting that I understand 'epistemic' demands as those that apply to us in relation to the pursuit of knowledge, warrant, and true belief. Epistemic demands are typically a species of *doxastic* demands, that is, they are requirements upon proper belief and belief-formation, and traditionally involve believing in accordance with one's evidence, and forming beliefs in a reliable manner. But in principle, the category of 'doxastic demands' might be broader than that of epistemic demands, especially if one thinks that there are *moral* demands upon belief. So I propose we understand 'doxastic demands' as a genus of which 'epistemic demands' and 'moral demands' might be species. These two species of demands differ principally in that they

require us to be sensitive to different kinds of reasons: epistemic (or evidential) reasons vs. moral (or practical) reasons.

Basu presents her account as one of what we *epistemically* owe to one other, but she argues that morality sometimes demands *precisely not* what is epistemically required of us. That is, we sometimes (morally) owe it to each other not to believe what our evidence supports. In this sense, on Basu's account, epistemic demands (at least traditionally conceived) are sometimes in conflict with moral demands upon belief. Thus, it seems strange to say that what we *epistemically* owe to each other is to violate epistemic demands in the name of morality. Given this, I think a more natural way to frame the issue is in terms of what we *doxastically* owe to each other: what do we owe to each other *as believers*? And how are we to deal with conflicts between different kinds of doxastic demands (epistemic vs. moral)? We can then understand the debate as one about whether morality makes extra-epistemic (or 'extra-evidential') *doxastic* demands, that is, doxastic demands that sometimes require us to believe in violation of invariantist epistemic norms.

Basu seems to hold that morality makes doxastic demands that sometimes require the violation of (invariantist) epistemic norms. But there are two ways one might interpret her here. Call the first interpretation *Moral Encroachment*. On this view, Basu holds that our understanding of the doxastic demands made by morality should shape our conception of epistemology and the nature of epistemic norms. Moral considerations or "stakes" raise the evidential threshold on justified belief, and thus epistemic norms are constrained by moral ones. Indeed, Basu suggests something like this. She says:

According to a classical evidentialist or truth-oriented perspective in epistemology, ordinarily [...] [t]he role of our beliefs is to accurately capture the world *as it actually is*, not how we would like it to be. However, even if we accept that we ought to believe in accordance with our evidence, we can still ask the question of when the evidence is sufficient to justify belief. We recognize that in some cases we need more, and stronger,

evidence than in other cases. For example, we require more evidence when passing judgement in a criminal case than when settling a playground dispute.³

On this interpretation of Basu, morality is only in conflict with *invariantist* epistemic norms, that is, epistemic norms not properly constrained by moral demands. But once moral considerations are allowed to properly modulate our epistemic norms, there is no real conflict.

However, some of the things Basu says raise doubts about this first interpretation. For example, she explicitly holds that we have “extra-evidential doxastic obligations.”⁴ I take this to mean that we sometimes face demands upon what we should believe that are *not* related to the issue of what our evidence supports. But, given that Basu says there are these extra-evidential doxastic obligations (presumably those associated with morality), they cannot be accounted for simply by holding that moral considerations can raise the evidential threshold, since this is still an *evidential* matter. So, if the doxastic demands of morality were truly “extra-evidential,” it would be very strange for them to make a difference to what we should believe by simply raising the evidential threshold, since this still implies that our ultimate doxastic obligation is to *our evidence*. Given this, it is unclear whether Basu’s view is merely that moral risks raise the evidential threshold for justified belief, or whether morality does something more.

Similarly, Basu’s discussion of some of her central cases raises uncertainty about the first interpretation. For example, in presenting one of her cases (which we will examine below), she suggests that while agent A’s belief about agent B is strongly supported by the evidence, A nevertheless owes it to B not to hold the belief because B is morally wronged by it.⁵ And about another case, Basu suggests that agent C’s “belief seems to have been well-supported by the evidence, [and so] the belief—and in turn his act—was reasonable,” even though it is morally

³ Basu (2019: 926).

⁴ Basu (2019: 927).

⁵ Specifically, Basu writes: “Again, my hypothesis is that his relationship with Maria allows him to expect better of her and entails that she believe better of him and not immediately settle on the belief that he had a drink—even when the evidence strongly suggests that he did” (pg. 917-18).

objectionable.⁶ These seem to be cases where the relevant evidential threshold has been met, otherwise it is hard to see how the beliefs could qualify as reasonable, well-supported, and strongly supported by the evidence. Nevertheless, the agents are still, Basu suggests, obligated not to hold the beliefs for moral reasons. But if moral risks merely raise the evidential threshold, it's not clear how this would be possible, since A's and C's beliefs would fail to qualify as reasonable or strongly supported by the evidence, given the moral risks of the cases. It is possible that Basu simply means that A's belief is strongly supported by the evidence, and C's belief is reasonable, *according to invariantist* epistemic norms, but *not* according to epistemic norms properly constrained by morality. But if this is what she means, it is left unclear by her discussion, and strikes me as a somewhat unintuitive reading of her arguments.

Thus, I think there is a second interpretation of Basu according to which morality makes doxastic demands that (can) go beyond merely modulating the evidential threshold on belief. Call this interpretation *Moral Dominance*. On this second interpretation, sometimes *even when* we are doing nothing epistemically wrong, and we have met the evidential threshold on justification, morality nevertheless demands that we believe against our evidence.

It is unclear to me which of these two interpretations of Basu is correct, though *Moral Encroachment* is certainly the more standard one. However, what is important is that my account here can work in response to either one. On the *Moral Encroachment* interpretation, my view is that we can account for what we owe to each other without assuming that morality modulates the evidential threshold on justified belief. That is, we can hold onto "orthodox" (i.e., invariantist) epistemic norms. On the *Moral Dominance* interpretation, my view is that we can account for what we owe to each other without assuming that moral demands dominate epistemic demands upon belief, and thus sometimes require us to believe against our evidence. In either case, my central

⁶ Basu (2019: 916).

disagreement with Basu is about whether morality makes demands upon belief that conflict with invariantist epistemic norms, that is, epistemic norms free from moral influence.

3. Two Strategies for Resisting Moral Demands Upon Belief

3.1. Strategy One: Appreciating the Full Range of Available Evidence

I will now offer two strategies for accommodating the kinds of cases Basu discusses without holding that morality makes doxastic demands. The first holds that some cases can be accounted for by appreciating that the agents often have more evidence (i.e., epistemic reasons) than is initially apparent. One might worry, in particular, that some of the cases Basu considers are under-described in the sense that it is not clear whether the involved agents merely have *some* evidence that supports believing *that p* or whether their *total evidence* supports believing *that p*. So some of Basu's verdicts about the cases might be accommodated simply by showing that, while the agents do have some evidence in support of adopting the relevant belief, their *total evidence* in fact does not support or justify the belief. In order to show this concretely, I will consider two of Basu's cases. First:

Wounded By Belief: Suppose that Mark has an alcohol problem and has been sober for eight months. Tonight there's a departmental colloquium for a visiting speaker, and throughout the reception, he withstands the temptation to have a drink. But, when he gets home his partner, Maria, smells the wine that the speaker spilled on his sleeve, and Mark can tell from the way Maria looks at him that she thinks he's fallen off the wagon. Although the evidence suggests that Mark has fallen off the wagon, would it be unreasonable for Mark to seek an apology for what Maria believes of him?⁷

Basu suggests that, even though Maria's belief is rational and justified by the evidence, Mark is still wronged by it, and is entitled to expect better of her, so Maria owes it to him to believe against her evidence and abandon her demeaning belief. But it's not clear that Maria's belief is

⁷ Basu (2019: 917).

epistemically rational. Does Maria's evidence really suggest that Mark has fallen off the wagon? Not, it seems, if she takes *all* her evidence into account.

Here, we can appeal to Sanford Goldberg's (2019) recent account of *value-reflecting reasons* within friendship—in particular, *epistemic* value-reflecting reasons.⁸ An epistemic value-reflecting reason is a reason one has to believe that some person *S* values something *V*. Goldberg says, "Part of what it is to have such reasons is to have epistemic reasons to think that *S* has (and recognizes having) *prima facie* practical reasons to do what she can to preserve or promote or protect *V*, and to avoid doing what would demote or undermine or threaten *V*."⁹ Returning to the case, Maria has (we can assume) epistemic value-reflecting reasons, deriving from her relationship with Mark, to believe that Mark values staying sober. After all, he has been sober for eight months, which is no small feat. Furthermore, it is likely that Maria has witnessed Mark struggle with and resist temptation repeatedly for those eight months. So, Maria actually has very good evidence, on the basis of her epistemic value-reflecting reasons, to believe that Mark has not fallen off the wagon, because she has good evidence that Mark values sobriety and so would avoid doing what would undermine that.

One might wonder why Maria's value-reflecting reasons are *epistemic* reasons? That is, why are they truth-tracking or truth-connected reasons? The reason is this: if Maria *knows* that Mark values sobriety, and Maria *knows* that Mark reliably promotes and protects the things he values, then Maria knows that Mark will likely act so as to protect and maintain his sobriety. Thus, Maria has epistemic value-reflecting reasons to believe that Mark has not fallen off the wagon, since there is a truth-tracking connection between Maria's knowledge of Mark's values and Maria's knowledge of Mark's (likely) behavior. So Maria's belief about whether Mark has fallen

⁸ See Stroud (2006) for the seminal essay in the recent debate over epistemic partiality in friendship, which is part of what Goldberg (2019) is responding to.

⁹ Goldberg (2019: 2226).

off the wagon is more likely to be true if it is based on these reasons, and thus the reasons are epistemic in the relevant sense.¹⁰

So, what Maria doxastically owes Mark can be captured by the demands of invariantist epistemic norms. Namely, in this case, Maria owes it to Mark to take her epistemic value-reflecting reasons into account, as evidence that he has not fallen off the wagon. Taking these reasons into account may lead Maria to be more careful in her reasoning and, for example, consider alternative explanations for the fact that Mark smells like wine, such as that someone spilled wine on him. So what Maria doxastically owes Mark is not to believe against her evidence. It is, rather, to be more diligent about taking all her evidence into account.

Let's consider another case offered by Basu:

The Security Guard: Jake is a security guard at a fancy department store. He hates the company he works for, and he couldn't care less if people shoplift and cost the company money. One day, Jake sees Jada leave the store and comes to believe that Jada shoplifted the purse she's carrying. But, given his contempt for his company, he chooses not to intervene or act on his belief in any way. Has Jada been wronged by what Jake believes of her?¹¹

The implication is that Jake believes this about Jada because he is racist. What does Jake owe Jada with respect to his belief? Well, there is an open question here not answered by Basu's description of the case: is Jake's belief true, and is it justified by the evidence? Basu seems to imply that the belief is false. And if it is based on hasty racist generalizations, we can also safely assume that it is unjustified.¹² So, if Jake owes it to Jada not to believe that she stole the purse, this can be accounted for by noting that Jake's belief is (presumably) false and unjustified, and thus proscribed by invariantist epistemic norms. Indeed, even if Jake's belief is true, it is hard to see how it would be warranted by the evidence. And so, if *it is* true, it is merely accidentally so.

¹⁰ Others besides Goldberg have made the point that we have access to epistemic reasons on the basis of friendship relations. For example, see Hawley (2014) and Keller (2004).

¹¹ Basu (2019: 919).

¹² See Gardiner (2018) for a discussion of why beliefs based on such racial generalizations are (virtually) always epistemically deficient.

One might object that this analysis of *The Security Guard* fails to capture the salient *moral* dimension of the case: there is a moral dimension to what Jake owes Jada, and to the way in which she is harmed. If we presume that Jake's belief is based on a racist generalization, then this is highly plausible. However, in the next section of the paper, I will argue that we can account for the moral dimension of what Jake owes Jada (and what we owe one another in general) without holding that this is a matter of moral demands upon belief.

So, for the cases of *Wounded by Belief* and *The Security Guard*, we need not suppose that there are moral demands on the agents' beliefs. Rather, what the agents doxastically owe to others in the cases can be captured by the fact that they are in some way failing epistemically, in particular, failing to be appropriately sensitive to the full range of their evidence, and in Jake's case, going *well beyond* his evidence. So, in considering these kinds of cases, we want to be careful that we are taking agents' full range of evidence into account.

However, I suspect this way of accommodating Basu's cases won't work as a perfectly general strategy. Presumably there are at least some cases in which agents are not failing epistemically—they have taken the full range of their evidence into account—and yet *still seem* to face a moral demand not to believe what their evidence supports. For example, we could imagine a modified version of *The Security Guard* case, where Jake's belief that Jada stole the purse is not only true, but seemingly based on good evidence, e.g., he believes she stole the purse on the basis of having (seemingly) *seen* her steal it. Nevertheless, given that his belief might reflect racist commitments, we may still think Jada is wronged by it and thus that there are moral reasons for him not to hold the belief.

I think we need something to say about these kinds of cases that can't clearly be addressed with the first strategy: cases where, once all the evidence has been taken into account, there is no

epistemic failure, but there still seems to be moral wrongdoing. And so I will now develop a second strategy that I believe can address such cases.

3.2. *Strategy Two: Non-Doxastic Demands and Proper Regard*

I think Basu is correct that there is a cognitive aspect to what we owe to each other, and that this is more than just that our beliefs about one another are true, rational, justified, etc. But this is not because morality makes *doxastic* demands upon us: only epistemology does that.¹³ Rather, I want to suggest that what morality requires is that we have proper *regard* for others. Having proper regard for and towards others often, at least partly, consists in taking up the *rational* or *participant stance* in the majority of one's interactions with them. But one's regard for others is, I suggest, essentially moral in a way that one's doxastic stance is not. How one regards others is constitutive of one's practical stance towards the world: it is a matter of how one sees, treats, and orients oneself towards others as being with rational dignity and thus as worthy of respect. One's regard and one's beliefs about others are independent in the following way: one can hold beliefs that Basu would insist are objectifying *without* taking up a diagnostic or objectifying stance in one's regard for others. So, for example, one can believe that someone in racial group G is X-likely to be F based on highly reliable government statistics without *regarding them* in an objectifying or dehumanizing way. What morality demands of us is that we have a morally appropriate regard for others, not that we sometimes believe against our evidence when forming beliefs about them.

One might object that we cannot make sense of what is involved in one's *regard* for others without supposing that it involves *beliefs* about others, and so we are left with the same problem. It is true that belief and regard are often connected, such as when one's objectionable regard for

¹³ See Hieronymi (2006) for an influential argument that one can only believe, or at least only *reason about* what to believe, on the basis of "constitutive," i.e., truth-related reasons.

others is reflected in, e.g., racist beliefs (below, I will say more about this). However, I am suggesting that we understand one's regard for others as, at bottom, *non-doxastic*. Rather, having proper regard for others is constituted by various moral and evaluative commitments, as well as perceptual states, that are themselves not beliefs. This kind of idea is not new. It is suggested, if not explicitly endorsed, by various kinds of non-cognitivist, quasi-expressivist, or quasi-realist views in metaethics. For example, Simon Blackburn (1996: 82) says: "Epistemology is traditionally the investigation of whether we know *that* various things are the case. Ethics, in my view, is more to do with knowing *how*: how to live and feel and act."¹⁴ This, of course, does not mean that we can't in principle have beliefs relevant to "knowing how." But those are not the kind of beliefs, at least not primarily, that Basu seems to be interested in.

But how, more specifically, are we to understand the distinction between *belief* and *regard*? I've suggested that regard is a matter of states or attitudes that are not beliefs. But what kinds of attitudes, or states, are they then? There are, I suggest, two kinds of non-doxastic states involved in regard: *perceptual states* and *evaluative commitments*.¹⁵ Regard is partly a matter of how we *see* others, and of how we orient ourselves toward them given *how* we see them. So some of the states involved in regard are non-doxastic because they are *perceptual* states. That is, not perceptual *beliefs*, but states of *seeing* or *perceiving*.¹⁶ Having *proper* regard for others, then, involves seeing them as, e.g., creatures with rational dignity deserving of respect.

¹⁴ As we will see below, Darwall (2006) also endorses the separation of the moral and the epistemic, in the form of a separation between the *second-personal* and the *third-personal* standpoints.

¹⁵ Presumably *affective states* also play a role in regard. Depending on one's theory of affect or emotion, these states might be evaluative judgments or they might be a kind of perceptual state. While I think they can be incorporated into my notion of regard, I won't here discuss them separately. I will simply assume that they fall under the heading of the 'perceptual states' that I will be discussing.

¹⁶ Some theorists hold that (at least some) perceptual states *just are* beliefs. This is a minority view, and I will simply be assuming here that it is false.

These perceptual states are importantly related to the second kind of state that makes up our regard: evaluative commitments. I am here inspired by Angela Smith's (2005) account and use of the notion, which she uses interchangeably with "evaluative judgments." She says:

the judgments [or 'commitments'] I am concerned with are not necessarily consciously held propositional beliefs, but rather tendencies to regard certain things as having evaluative significance. These judgments, taken together, make up the basic evaluative framework through which we view the world. They comprise the things we care about or regard as important or significant.¹⁷

So, on Smith's view, evaluative commitments are not beliefs, but rather dispositions or tendencies to view or regard things as valuable. Just as we presumably have belief-forming dispositions that are not themselves beliefs, we also likely have evaluative dispositions that are not themselves simply beliefs with evaluative content. Notice that Smith speaks in terms of "regard" and "regard[ing]" things in certain ways, and also in terms of our evaluative commitments (or 'judgments') being that through which we "view" the world. This suggests a nice, natural fit with the notion of regard I have been working with, as well as with the perceptual analogy I suggested above. One of the fundamental evaluative commitments associated with a proper regard for others, then, is to treat human beings as rational agents with moral dignity. This is not a belief, though: it is simply what one is (or ought to be) committed to in virtue of one's practical orientation toward the world.

One might wonder whether we have greater, less, or simply different agency over the evaluative commitments that structure our regard as compared to our doxastic agency. I suspect that the kinds of agency we have over our regard and over our beliefs are both importantly distinct and importantly similar in the following ways. First, distinct in that the two involve being sensitive to importantly different kinds of reasons: doxastic agency involves being sensitive to epistemic or evidential reasons, whereas the agency related to regard involves being sensitive to practical or

¹⁷ Smith (2005: 251-2).

moral reasons.¹⁸ But second, they are importantly *similar* in that we lack direct voluntary control over both: just as we cannot simply *decide* or *will ourselves* to believe something, we also cannot simply decide or will ourselves to adopt, abandon, or revise certain evaluative commitments. Instead, I suspect that for both belief and our evaluative commitments, our agency over them is largely a matter of what Angela Smith (2005) calls “rational control,” or what Pamela Hieronymi (2006, 2008) calls “evaluative control.” That is, roughly, we “control” them by subjecting them to rational evaluation, or evaluative assessment, and by deciding whether they are justified by our reasons.

To put the pieces together, then, the idea is this: our regard for others is a matter of how we *see* or *view* them in light of our evaluative commitments, which are the things that shape our general evaluative and practical outlook. This is the sense in which ‘regard’ is non-doxastic: neither the perceptual states nor the evaluative commitments which make up regard are beliefs. Morality, I suggest, makes demands on our regard for others by making demands on how we see and treat others and, perhaps more fundamentally, on our evaluative commitments. Morality *appears* to make demands upon belief when morally objectionable regard is reflected by a belief. In such cases, what is actually *morally* demanded of us is that we not let the belief in question have an objectionable or degrading impact on our regard for others.

Above, I’ve employed the notion of one’s regard being “reflected” in one’s beliefs, but I should explain more precisely what I mean by this. The idea is that one’s beliefs can often be taken as a guide to one’s evaluative commitments, and more broadly, one’s regard. For example, racist beliefs typically imply racist evaluative commitments, e.g., that one is disposed to evaluate one’s experiences or evidence in a way that reinforces a racist outlook. Similarly, racist beliefs will typically imply that the person *sees* others through the lens of their racism. So, the sense in which

¹⁸ See Hieronymi (2005, 2006) for influential discussions of the ‘wrong kind of reason’ problem.

an agent's regard can be "reflected" in their beliefs is that the content of those beliefs can serve as a good guide to determining what their regard for others is like.¹⁹ Nevertheless, as I will argue below, not all beliefs that might *appear* to reflect an objectionable regard actually do so.

To better understand the distinction between belief and regard, and how this second strategy is supposed to work concretely, let's consider the case that Basu begins with:

Mistaken Identity: After attending a conference, you are at dinner with some of the other conference goers and organizers. After getting up to use the restroom and returning, one of the other diners, Jim, attempts to get your attention and says, "Where's my water? I asked for a refill fifteen minutes ago."

Basu continues describing the case as follows:

For a moment you're confused, then it dawns on both of you what mistake has been made. Most philosophers don't look like you. With regard to melanin levels, you share more in common with the wait staff than your fellow diners. Given your skin color, the likelihood that you are a member of the staff rather than a fellow diner was high enough to seemingly make it rational for Jim to assume that you were a waiter, not a fellow diner. The belief that Jim had—and in turn his actions—might amount to a social faux pas, but, given that the belief seems to have been well-supported by the evidence, the belief—and in turn his act—was reasonable. He's not a bad guy; he just made an honest mistake.²⁰

Basu suggests that, despite the fact that Jim's belief is rational, it still wrongs you. This is because Jim's belief objectifies you on the basis of your race or ethnicity, and so he owes it to you not to believe this. I want to suggest that we can account for this case without holding that morality requires Jim to refrain from or abandon his rational belief.

Unlike the previous cases, let's grant that Jim's belief *is* rational and epistemically justified, and that it is based primarily on reliable statistical or demographic generalizations about the probability that you are a waiter given your perceived race/ethnicity.²¹ Further, let's imagine that

¹⁹ Towards the end of the paper, I will suggest that this fact plays an important role in diagnosing the intuitiveness of the idea that morality makes demands upon belief.

²⁰ Basu (2019: 916).

²¹ There are difficult and important questions about if and how statistical data or demographic generalizations can be used to justify beliefs or predictions about particular individuals or members of the relevant groups. E.g., see Gardiner (2018), who also engages with Basu. But addressing this issue more directly or fundamentally is beyond the scope of this paper. So I will here be assuming that, at least in principle, statistical data can justify beliefs about individuals, though these may not be 'outright' or 'full' beliefs.

the content of Jim's belief is roughly of the form "Person A is X-likely to be F in virtue of being part of group G." What does morality demand of Jim in this case? I have been arguing that morality does not demand that Jim believe against his evidence. Rather, what morality demands of Jim—and thus what he morally *owes you*—is that he not see or treat you in an objectionable manner. That is, morality demands that Jim maintain proper regard for you.

If morality demands that Jim maintain proper regard for you, but *does not* demand that he believe against his evidence, then what morality effectively requires is that Jim's proper regard for you be *compatible with* his belief that you are (very likely to be) a waiter. Is this possible? I think so. This is because Jim's belief that you are a waiter need not lead him to see or treat you with disrespect, especially if we imagine that Jim refrains from acting on his belief, i.e., asking you for a glass of water. To see this, begin by noting that the belief "Person A is very likely to be a waiter in virtue of being part of group G" does not appear to have any salient moral, or even evaluative, content (unless one considers judgments of probability to be evaluative). On its face, the belief's content seems more or less flatly descriptive. So if we are imagining that Jim has done his epistemic due diligence, it's not clear that the mere holding of the belief is itself problematic.

One worry, I think, that makes Basu's position compelling is that Jim's belief might seem to be only a short step—or a short, irrational inferential leap—away from various other beliefs that *do* have moral content, and that would reflect objectionable regard for others.²² For example, Jim might move from the belief that "Person A is very likely to be a waiter in virtue of being part of group G" to the belief that "Person A is very likely to be uneducated, and thus a waiter, in virtue of being part of group G" to "Person A is less deserving of respect in virtue of being part of group G." The latter two beliefs would reflect objectionable regard for others, and would likely arise

²² See Gardiner (2018, Section 11.7) for a relevant discussion put in terms of how beliefs are connected with and integrated into an agent's broader "understanding," where this is what gives beliefs their moral properties.

partly out of problematic evaluative commitments of Jim's. But notice that the second belief has clear evaluative content, and the third has clear moral content, which explains why they would reflect aspects of Jim's regard for you. It is important to see that Jim could hold the first belief *without* adopting these (or other) further, problematic beliefs on its basis, and without having objectionable regard for you. Jim can maintain proper regard for you *while also* believing that you are (very likely to be) a waiter. That is, he can believe that you are (very likely to be) a waiter while still seeing you as someone who deserves respect, and treating you as such, and this is precisely what I suggest morality demands of him.

Let's briefly consider another case of Basu's that I suggest can be handled similarly:

The Racist Hermit: Suppose a racist hermit in the woods discovers trash containing an alumni newsletter from Sanjeev's university, which includes Sanjeev's photo. The hermit immediately concludes that the pictured person—Sanjeev—smells of curry. Suppose also that Sanjeev happens to have recently made curry, so in this instance the hermit's belief is true—Sanjeev does smell of curry. Has the hermit wronged Sanjeev?

To begin, despite the fact that the hermit's belief is true, it is hard to see how it would be justified by the evidence, since it is based on a hasty racial generalization. So, again, we could account for this case in the same way as *Wounded by Belief* and *The Security Guard*: by noting that the hermit's belief is epistemically deficient. But if we suppose that the hermit's belief is not only true, but also *somehow* based on good evidence, what are we to say about what the hermit owes Sanjeev? Basu suggests, correctly I think, that the "harm is a *relational* harm: the hermit fails to relate as he ought."²³ However, if the hermit's belief is both true and justified, then his failure is a matter of his *regard* for Sanjeev. He owes it to Sanjeev not to see him through the lens of his racism, and not to regard him in an objectionable, objectifying manner. *This* is what morality requires of him, not that he believe against his evidence (whatever we imagine it is).

²³ Basu (2019: 919).

However, it's also important to see that there will be cases, as with the belief "Person A is less deserving of respect in virtue of being part of group G," where a belief appears straightforwardly incompatible with maintaining proper regard for others. That is, one simply cannot believe *that p* and also maintain proper regard. Doesn't this mean, in such cases, that morality demands that we not believe *that p*? I am here inclined to follow Gardiner's (2018) strategy in responding to this worry, which is to emphasize that beliefs which appear to be obviously morally problematic will also exhibit epistemic deficiencies. Gardiner says:

Many real life beliefs are morally problematic. Sexism, racism, and other prejudice are widespread. But these real life beliefs also exhibit myriad epistemic errors. People are poor at statistical reasoning. They overestimate patterns, extrapolate too readily from limited and biased sources of information, and engage in motivated reasoning. Confirmation and availability biases contribute to the epistemic faults of such beliefs. If the morally wrong belief is also epistemically unjustified according to orthodox epistemology, the moral wrong does not impugn evidentialism. Arguments for moral encroachment need to abstract away from the myriad, ubiquitous flaws of real life beliefs and insist that a belief with no epistemic flaw of this kind is also immoral; my contention is that advocates of moral encroachment have failed to do this.²⁴

The idea, then, as applied to my own approach here, is that beliefs that are "morally wrong" in the sense that they are *incompatible* with proper regard will always exhibit some kind of epistemic flaw.²⁵ And so we can account for the fact that agents ought not hold these improper beliefs in terms of what is required by the norms of "orthodox" (i.e., invariantist) epistemology, not in terms of the idea that morality makes doxastic demands.²⁶

²⁴ Gardiner (2018: 184).

²⁵ It is, I think, an empirical and thus open question whether the epistemic flaws and errors that Gardiner discusses are in fact "ubiquitous" in the sense that we can assume that any immoral belief will exhibit at least one such flaw. I suspect that Gardiner's strategy will need to be supplemented in order to account for certain kinds of immoral beliefs that are *not* based on statistical evidence or statistical reasoning. However, while it is beyond the scope of this paper to argue, I think there are various other ways in which immoral beliefs can be epistemically flawed beyond those that Gardiner discusses. I hope to return to this issue at a later time.

²⁶ One might wonder, if I am drawing upon Gardiner here, why do we need my own account? It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer criticisms of Gardiner. However, I am here only appealing to one part of Gardiner's account (the view that immoral beliefs are always epistemically deficient), and *not* her positive account of how beliefs come to have their moral properties. Further, Gardiner does not address the issue of how what we owe to each other might be non-doxastic, and so my account extends beyond hers.

Having and maintaining proper regard for others often involves broadly practical demands that are nonetheless non-doxastic. In particular, I suggest that there are at least three categories of demands we might face that are relevant here. These categories concern *evidence-gathering*, *evaluative diligence*, and *acting on belief*. We sometimes owe it to one another to (a) go out and gather more evidence, and/or (b) to be especially critical of our current evidence, and/or (c) not act on our beliefs. However, note that this is not a version of pragmatic or moral encroachment. That is, what I am suggesting is *not* that practical risks, e.g., *raise the evidential threshold* for justification. Rather, the idea is that sometimes, due to practical or moral risks, we owe it one another to be especially careful in making sure that our beliefs *are justified*, and if we are not sure, then we should not *act on* those beliefs.

One might object, on Basu's behalf, that the demands associated with evidence-gathering and evaluative diligence certainly look like moral demands upon belief, and so they are precisely the kind of thing that Basu's account would predict or imply. However, even though these demands are sometimes moral in nature, it is important to see that they are *not doxastic*. That is, they are demands on what we ought to *do*, not on what we ought to *believe*. For example, if we are trying to determine what to believe about some sensitive matter, where the belief might cause harm, morality might demand that we gather additional evidence. But this is not a demand *to refrain from or abandon* the belief, and does not imply that the evidential threshold has been raised. It is a demand regarding *action*, and thus is non-doxastic. Similarly, morality might demand that we are especially diligent in *evaluating* our evidence. But this does not determine what we should believe given our evidence, only that we should be *especially sure* that the belief *is* justified by our evidence. Again, this is effectively a practical, not a doxastic, demand.

Being sensitive to these demands in forming one's beliefs is part of having proper regard for others. This is because having proper regard for others involves recognizing them as vulnerable

to being harmed or wronged in various ways. Thus, proper regard involves recognizing that some people are *disproportionately vulnerable* to harm, and so we should be especially careful in forming beliefs about them.²⁷ Basu suggests, “the best we can do is to develop our epistemic characters so that we respond correctly to the morally relevant features of our environment in a virtuous manner.”²⁸ I agree. But what I have been suggesting is that developing our epistemic characters in this way is not a matter of responding to extra-evidential doxastic demands and so sometimes believing against our evidence. Rather, it involves being sensitive to demands regarding *evidence-gathering*, *evaluative diligence*, and *acting on belief*, where this is connected to developing our moral characters so as to have proper regard for others.

So, while I’ve argued that morality does not make doxastic demands, we do owe it to one another to be sensitive to various demands that are related to our regard for one another. This involves having a practical orientation towards the world and one another that is shaped by the right kind of evaluative commitments. This leaves us with something not unlike Darwall’s (2006) view regarding *the second-personal standpoint*, which Basu discusses. What I have called “having proper regard” for others is perhaps similar to the notion of occupying *the second-personal standpoint* in a morally appropriate manner.

However, unlike Darwall (it seems), it is important to see that my account can vindicate Basu’s highly plausible claim that there is a broadly cognitive aspect to the moral demand we place on one another to be treated well. Darwall holds that “epistemic authority” is third-personal and so is separate from the second-personal standpoint. So, as Basu notes, “Darwall explicitly denies there is a cognitive element to the second-personal stance.”²⁹ However, as long as we do not simply equate ‘the cognitive’ with ‘the doxastic’, the view I’ve offered can allow that proper regard does

²⁷ As Basu suggests in a footnote (fn. 22), this might involve something like *wokeness*. So, both proper regard and being epistemically responsible likely involve *being woke*.

²⁸ Basu (2019: 930).

²⁹ Basu (2019: 925).

involve a cognitive element. I've suggested that one's regard is constituted by both evaluative commitments and perceptual states. The latter are cognitive in that they have representational content, and the former are at least indirectly cognitive in that they can be dispositions towards cognitive states and processes, e.g., forms of reasoning. So we can allow that there is a cognitive aspect to what we (morally) owe to each other; it's just that this does not involve moral demands upon what we should or should not *believe*.

To conclude this section, I'd like to consider an objection. The objection is that my account can't make sense of the fact that we sometimes justifiably feel hurt and wronged by others' beliefs even when they have been epistemically responsible and their beliefs are true, justified, etc. This is because my account implies that we have nothing to apologize for with respect to our beliefs if we have satisfied all the relevant (non-moral) demands. And so we cannot, it seems, respond appropriately to those that feel hurt or wronged by our beliefs. As a result, the objection goes, my account cannot fully address Basu's concerns.

However, I believe my account can address this issue. I think that when people feel hurt and wronged by another's belief, it is because they take this belief to be a reflection of how that person *regards them*. That is, they take the belief to be a manifestation of that person's practical and moral stance towards them. This is why beliefs based on demographic generalizations can seem to embody a morally problematic objectifying stance. So when someone feels wronged or hurt by a belief that is not epistemically deficient, what we must do is assure them that the belief does not reflect an objectionable moral *regard* for them. And if our regard for them *is* deficient, then we should apologize and strive to do better. So my account can make sense of why we might sometimes owe others an apology for a belief that is responsibly held: namely, because that belief might reasonably be taken to reflect an objectionable regard for them, even if it doesn't. But this

does not mean that morality demands that we give up the belief, only that we clarify, evaluate, and if need be, repair our regard for others.

4. A Brief Diagnosis of the Intuitiveness of Moral Demands Upon Belief

Having seen my proposed alternative account, we are now in a position to consider a diagnosis of why the idea that morality makes demands upon belief is intuitive. As I have said, I think that Basu is correct that there is a cognitive aspect to the moral demands associated with what we owe to each other. And it is rather intuitive to think that these are demands on *belief*. However, I have argued that morality instead makes demands upon our regard for others.

The initial reason that the notion of moral demands upon belief is intuitive is that beliefs can have salient moral content, and for this reason, we can have reasonable moral responses to them. As Basu discusses, we can feel wounded or hurt by beliefs, or simply find them morally objectionable. Given this, it seems plausible to think that belief is subject to moral demands, since if we rightly judge a belief to be morally objectionable, doesn't that mean the agent has moral reasons to revise it?

This line of reasoning can seem attractive, I think, because, as I discussed above, we often take people's beliefs to *reflect* their regard for others, in the sense that those beliefs serve as a guide to, e.g., their evaluative commitments. For example, it is easy (and very reasonable) to take someone's racist beliefs as reflecting racist evaluative commitments, i.e., that their basic practical and moral outlook on the world is infected with racist values. It is then intuitive to think that the person faces a moral demand to revise their racist beliefs. Insofar as these beliefs are a reflection of their commitments and values, it may seem that they thus have moral reasons to revise the beliefs.

However, I have argued that the moral demands in such a case would apply to the person's regard, such as their objectionable evaluative commitments, rather than their beliefs. Nevertheless, we can understand why it is tempting and intuitive to think that agents face moral demands to revise their beliefs, since they often face moral demands to revise aspects of their regard which we *take to be reflected in* their beliefs.

And lastly, a final reason I suggest it is tempting to think that there are moral demands on belief is because it is easy to mistake the (sometimes moral) demands upon responsible evidence-gathering for *doxastic* demands. That is, sometimes morality might require that we gather further evidence for a belief, and this might lead us to think that, e.g., moral risks have raised the evidential threshold on justified belief. However, I've argued that these demands can be understood as only *practical* demands—demands upon what we should *do*—rather than demands upon what we should believe. So while morality might sometimes require that we gather more evidence for a potentially harmful belief, it does not tell us *what to believe* given our evidence.

5. Conclusion

I've explored two strategies for vindicating Basu's claim that there is a cognitive aspect to what we owe to each other without holding that we are subject to moral demands regarding what we should believe. The first strategy captures many but not all of the relevant cases, but the second strategy is, I think, promising as a general strategy for resisting that idea that morality makes doxastic demands upon us. In line with this strategy, I've argued that the cognitive aspect of what we morally owe to one another is a matter of having *proper regard*. Namely, it is a matter of whether we see and treat others as, e.g., beings with rational dignity and worthy of respect. But our regard for others is, at bottom, non-doxastic: it is constituted by evaluative commitments and perceptual states that are not beliefs. What morality demands of us is that we have the proper kind

of regard for others, not that we (sometimes) believe against our evidence, or in violation of invariantist epistemic norms. Morality and epistemology can, then, continue to live in harmony, or at least in peace.

I want to conclude by briefly offering a parting motivation for my account here. One might be left wondering *why* I have defended the view that what we should believe is not subject to moral demands. I've introduced quite a bit of conceptual machinery just to argue that morality does not make demands upon belief. But *why not* believe against our evidence (or at least violate invariantist epistemic norms) for morality's sake? *Why* would this be so bad? The worry, I think, is this: traditionally, and I think rightly, belief has been thought to be valuable because it allows us to represent the truth, and what's more, to acquire *knowledge*. But if we allow that belief doesn't simply aim at truth and knowledge, but also at avoiding moral wrongdoing, we start to lose our grip on the essential role belief is supposed to play in our coming to know things about the world. What's more, moral demands are typically thought to exhibit *normative dominance*: that is, they normatively *override* other norms or demands that they might conflict with. But this means that if belief is subject to both epistemic *and* moral demands, the latter will always win out. This leaves us with a picture of belief where it aims at avoiding moral wrongs *first* and aims at truth and knowledge *second*. This might not strike some as anything to worry about. But I think it should, since if true, it would rather seriously limit and undermine the epistemic value of belief, and thus our general ability to acquire knowledge.

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