

Moral Encroachment, Symmetry, and Believing Against the Evidence¹

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Abstract

It is widely held that our beliefs can be epistemically faultless despite being morally flawed. Theories of moral encroachment challenge this, holding that moral considerations bear on the epistemic status of our attitudes. According to attitude-based theories of moral encroachment, morality encroaches upon the epistemic standing of our attitudes on the grounds that we can morally injure others with our epistemic practices. In this paper, I aim to show that current attitude-based theories have asymmetric mechanisms: moral features only make it harder for attitudes to secure epistemic merits. I argue that, if attitudes can incur moral injury, failure to form attitudes can too. To make sense of this, I contend, attitude-based accounts require symmetric mechanisms, allowing that moral considerations make it both harder and easier for attitudes to attain epistemic merits. I maintain that, once we recognize this, attitude-based encroachment views must soon concede that they sometimes demand we believe against the evidence.

KEYWORDS: moral encroachment, ethics of belief, epistemic normativity, moral normativity, suspension of judgement, doxastic wrongdoing

I. Introduction

Proponents of moral encroachment say that moral features can impact the epistemic standing of our attitudes (Basu, 2019a, 2019c; Basu & Schroeder, 2019; Bolinger, 2018, 2020; Buchak, 2014; Fritz, 2017; Gardiner, 2018; Moss, 2018a; Pace, 2011; Schroeder, 2021).

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According to attitude-based accounts of moral encroachment, an attitude's epistemic status turns on whether one stands to morally injure one's attitude-target with one's attitude.³ As we will soon see, the mechanisms that attitude-based accounts offer are either implicitly or explicitly asymmetric: moral features only make it harder, never easier, for attitudes to attain epistemic merits.⁴

This paper has two central, interconnected aims. The first is to point out that attitude-based theories of moral encroachment are incomplete by their own lights, and to build more complete versions of these theories. Specifically, I argue that attitude-based accounts require symmetric mechanisms, allowing that moral features make it not only harder but also easier for attitudes to obtain epistemic merits. The second is to show a worrisome consequence of attitude-based accounts that we see upon recognizing this demand for symmetry: they sometimes insist that we believe against the evidence. Importantly, the purpose of this paper is not to endorse or reject attitude-based moral encroachment. Rather, it is to render candidate theories of attitude-based moral encroachment more complete subjects of assessment.⁵

The paper unfolds as follows. I (II) lay out the thesis of moral encroachment. I (III) unpack attitude-based theories and the two strains that comprise them: attitude-risk and attitude-wrong theories. I show that the threshold, direct-influence, and sphere mechanisms offered by attitude-based views are currently asymmetric. I contend that (IV) attitude-risk and (V) attitude-wrong theories alike must go symmetric, allowing that: the threshold moves not only up but also down, attitudes are not only morally banned but also morally required, and the sphere not only expands but also contracts. To do this I argue that, if belief can be morally problematic, suspension of judgement and abandoning questions can be too. I maintain that, if attitude-based encroachment

³ I use "morally injure" to include both risking harm and wronging, as some attitude-based accounts appeal to risk of harm as the basis of moral encroachment while others appeal to wronging. I elucidate this further in section III.

⁴ I use "epistemic merit" as shorthand for the relevant positive epistemic status of belief, be that counting as justified, rational, warranted, or knowledge.

⁵ Kelp (Manuscript) takes up a similar project for pragmatic encroachment—the view that knowledge partially depends on practical factors. In particular, he assumes that pragmatic encroachment is true, and offers an account of what the best version of pragmatic encroachment looks like. His project is importantly different than mine in that he focuses on "reasoning-based" accounts of pragmatic encroachment, while I focus on "attitude-based" accounts of moral encroachment. As such, we should not expect that the account of pragmatic encroachment he offers will necessarily generate a demand to believe against the evidence (for detail on the distinction between reasoning-based and attitude-based accounts, and on how this distinction might bear on the demand to believe against the evidence, see footnote 16). Further exploration of the relation between Kelp's picture of pragmatic encroachment and my project is warranted, but outside the scope of this paper. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the relevance of Kelp (Manuscript).

deems morally problematic belief epistemically faulty, then it must also deem morally problematic suspension epistemically faulty. In cases in which belief that P, suspension on whether P, and abandonment of whether P are all morally flawed, attitude-based encroachment has no option but to maintain that epistemology demands we believe that not P. I show that this gets attitude-based theories into trouble: they sometimes conclude that, epistemically, we ought to believe against the evidence. Finally, I (VI) treat worries for my project, and thereby affirm the scope of the demand for symmetry across attitude-based encroachment theories.

II. Moral Encroachment

Sometimes, epistemology and morality seem to make incompatible demands. Gendler (2011) endorses this notion, offering the following example:

Cosmos Club: Esther is at a social club in the American South, and forms the belief that John Hope Franklin is a staff member. She forms this belief because Franklin is black, and she knows that southern social club staff are predominantly black while southern social club members are largely white. Esther goes to hand Franklin her coat check ticket and ask that he bring out her coat.

Tragically, Gendler holds, we face a dilemma. On the one hand, Esther does something intuitively morally suspect in believing that Franklin is a staff member on the basis of his skin color alone. This is a paradigmatic case of racism. On the other hand, Esther's belief is epistemically unblemished: it is empirically well-supported and takes proper account of her prior probabilities. Gendler maintains that we have an irresolvable conflict between what morality and epistemology ask of us: epistemology licenses Esther's belief while morality condemns it (Gendler, 2011, p. 3).

Moral encroachment proponents push back against the idea that such cases involve an irresolvable conflict between epistemology and morality. They contend that Esther does something morally problematic and thereby epistemically faulty in believing "Franklin is a staff member" because he is black. They hold that moral considerations bear on the epistemic status of our attitudes, so that if an attitude is epistemically impeccable, it must be morally permissible.^{6,7}

⁶ Bolinger (2020) names this the "no conflicts thesis," and identifies that it underlies most all moral encroachment theories. As Bolinger notes, Fritz (2017) departs from other moral encroachers in this respect, instead seeking to motivate moral encroachment by appealing to a strategy closer to that which is sometimes used in pragmatic encroachment (as in Fantl & McGrath (2002, 2009)).

⁷ One might be curious about the extent to which moral encroachment aligns with our actual epistemic practices. Cusimano & Lombrozo (2021) explore this, maintaining that the thesis of moral encroachment is supported by intuitions in folk ethics of belief. In particular, they document ways in which the moral value of belief does indeed

This thesis leaves open a handful of questions: which moral considerations matter to the epistemic standing of our attitudes? What is the mechanism by which moral considerations impact our attitude’s epistemic standing? Which attitude’s epistemic standing is affected by moral considerations? What is the positive epistemic status, or ‘epistemic merit,’ that is sensitive to moral considerations? Various voices in the literature treat these questions differently, giving rise to distinct strains of moral encroachment.⁸ As we will soon see, which moral features matter to our attitude’s epistemic standing impacts whether moral encroachment mechanisms must be symmetric—our response to the first question bears on our answer to the second. This stands no matter how we answer the last two questions.

III. Asymmetry in Attitude-Based Accounts

Attitude-based accounts are a sub-species of moral encroachment accounts, distinguished by their stance on which moral feature matters to our attitudes’ epistemic standing. According to these views, the epistemic appropriateness of an attitude hinges on whether one morally injures another with one’s attitude. Such accounts take two forms: attitude-risk and attitude-wrong.

Attitude-risk accounts hold that morality encroaches upon the epistemic standing of one’s attitude when one risks harm upon another with one’s attitude. In *Cosmos Club*, for instance, attitude-risk accounts hold that morality encroaches in light of the risk of harm Esther imposes upon Franklin in believing he’s a staff member because he’s black. The thought here is simply that one is a danger to others when moving through the world with racist beliefs—this is rife grounds for morally faulty action. Esther stands to insult Franklin’s status and deprive him of the opportunity to signal authority and social position, thereby disrespecting his moral equality and autonomy (Bolinger, 2018, pp. 2425-2426). Even if Franklin turns out to be a staff member, and so Esther luckily avoids incurring the harm of mistaken belief upon him, she still imposes a risk of harm upon him given the cost of error—and so morality encroaches.

Attitude-wrong models, alternatively, maintain that one can wrong another with one’s attitude alone, and that morality encroaches when one wrongs another in holding an attitude. In

affect the evidential threshold required for an epistemic agent to believe in practice. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this relevant project that explores the descriptive dimension of moral encroachment.

⁸ These questions are often not pulled apart in the moral encroachment literature—some encroachers take stances on these questions only implicitly, and others offer accounts of encroachment that leave these questions entirely unanswered. See Bolinger (2020) for a robust catalogue and analysis of the questions, or, “choice points” that yield distinct varieties of moral encroachment.

Cosmos Club, morality encroaches because Esther wrongs Franklin merely in virtue of believing that he is a staff member because he's black. Some encroachers argue that her belief wrongs because of the racist and oppressive history underlying the social club's staff and club member divide (Basu, 2019a). Others locate the wrong mainly in forming a falsely diminishing belief—a false belief that brings one down, or, makes out one's agential contribution to be less than it in fact is (Schroeder, 2018). What unites attitude-wrong views is that the wronging is understood to be located *in the belief itself* rather than, or at least in addition to, the belief's risked or actual consequences.

Attitude-based theories adopt one of the following three mechanisms by which morality encroaches: threshold, direct-influence, or sphere.⁹ Threshold mechanisms allow moral considerations to influence the amount of evidence needed for an attitude to secure epistemic merit (Basu, 2019a; Basu & Schroeder, 2019; Pace, 2011; Schroeder, 2021). Direct-influence mechanisms enable moral features to fully settle whether an attitude has epistemic merit (Basu, 2019c). Sphere mechanisms permit moral characteristics to impact the scope of relevant alternatives one must rule out for her attitude to have epistemic merit (Bolinger, 2018; Buchak, 2014; Moss, 2018a).

On attitude-based accounts, the mechanism by which morality encroaches is only ever shown to make it harder for an attitude to gain epistemic merit, never easier. For instance, morality is said to increase the epistemic burden for rational belief when: a father wrongs his daughter in believing she isn't cut out for engineering (Schroeder, 2018b); a consultant risks harming a female employee in believing that she is an administrative assistant (Moss, 2018b); a wife wrongs her husband who is aiming to overcome alcoholism in believing he has been drinking (Basu, 2019b); a cab driver risks harming the minority pedestrian flagging him down in believing that he won't tip (Moss, 2018a); and a store clerk risks harm upon his black customer in believing he's probably going to shoplift (Moss, 2018a). This restriction is often baked into broader descriptions of attitude-based accounts:

The bar for sufficiency of evidence does depend on moral factors. As the moral considerations against belief increase, so does the evidence that is required in order to epistemically justify that belief. (Basu & Schroeder, 2019, p. 200)

⁹ It remains to be seen whether there are other viable candidate mechanisms by which moral encroachment might occur.

[Moral considerations] expand the scope of relevant alternatives, or extend the range of relevantly close worlds, so that the evidence must dismiss more error possibilities than would be relevant if the moral stakes were lower. (Bolinger, 2020, p. 13)

Moral facts raise the standard for warrant. (Fritz, 2017, p. 628)

Moral encroachment holds that the epistemic justification of a belief can be affected by moral factors. If the belief might wrong a person or group more evidence is required to justify the belief ... the threshold for justified belief is higher than for a belief that is morally neutral. (Gardiner, 2018, pp. 1, 5)

On the picture that I have been laying out, the morality of belief, just like the moral encroachment on knowledge and epistemic rationality, works solely by making it harder to justify some beliefs—not by making it easier to justify others. (Schroeder, 2018, p. 126)

Though there are moral reasons against belief, there are no moral reasons in favor of belief. (Schroeder, 2021, p. 190)

That an attitude wrongs or risks harm is shown to: *raise* the threshold, increasing the amount of evidence needed for an attitude to attain epistemic merit; *prevent* an attitude from having epistemic merit; or *expand* the sphere, increasing the scope of relevant alternatives one must rule out for her attitude to secure epistemic merit. The result is that attitude-based views implicitly build asymmetric mechanisms: when we risk harm upon or wrong another with our attitude, the epistemic burden needed for our attitude to have epistemic merit increases. Whether the risk of harm or wrong we impose on others with our attitudes can symmetrically serve to *lower* the threshold, *demand* belief, or *contract* the sphere is either left untreated, or raised and rejected.^{10,11}

IV. Attitude-Risk Views Must Go Symmetric, Sometimes Requiring Belief Against the Evidence

To better understand what symmetry in attitude-risk accounts would look like, let's return to *Cosmos Club*. On attitude-risk models, Esther imposes a risk of harm upon Franklin in believing

¹⁰ Only a handful of encroachers suggest in passing that it might be appealing to have an account of encroachment with the explanatory power to epistemically critique morally faulty lack of belief (see Basu (2019b) and Crewe and Ichikawa (2021)). They do not, however, take up the project of building such encroachment accounts themselves.

¹¹ In fact, without seeking to capture the asymmetry present in moral encroachment mechanisms, Bolinger's (2020) gloss on moral encroachment theories reflects this one-sidedness. She maintains that moral encroachment proponents hold that "moral norms explain why the range of epistemically permissible attitudes is narrower in some of the cases of interest." Moral encroachment advocates argue that the relevant moral reasons "operate to undermine the [relevant] positive epistemic status" (Bolinger, 2020, p. 12).

he's a staff member because he's black. This is because the moral cost of mistaken belief is significant. In believing that he's a staff member, she stands to insult his status, diminish his ability to signal authority and social status, and thereby disrespect his moral equality and autonomy (Bolinger, 2018).

The standard analysis goes as follows: as Esther risks harm upon Franklin with her belief, the evidential burden required for her belief to be epistemically justified is greater than it would be in a morally neutral situation. Either the threshold rises, demanding more evidence; direct-influence condemns, forbidding belief; or the sphere expands, insisting that scope of relevant alternatives increases.

But beliefs are not the only features of our epistemic lives that can risk harm. Imagine that Esther takes up the question of whether Franklin is a staff member, only to suspend judgment. She intentionally forbears from belief that P and belief that $\neg P$, maintaining a credence that lies between the thresholds of the two. Suspension, too, can be fertile ground for morally faulty action. With the aim of collecting her coat, Esther might approach Franklin because he's black and ask "excuse me sir, do you work here? I just couldn't be sure." Seeking to track down a server to refresh her drink, Esther might see that Franklin is black and follow him around the room with her eyes, keen to gather more evidence. Esther might simply fail to interact with Franklin as if he's a club member, uncertain of how to engage with him as she can't tell whether he's staff given that he's black.¹²

In these ways, Esther can risk harm upon Franklin by suspending judgement because he is black. If she stands to insult his status, diminish his ability to signal authority, and disrespect his moral equality and autonomy in believing, then she does so too in suspending. That suspension of judgment can foster morally pernicious action is, after all, unsurprising. Being uncertain as to

¹² Importantly, in the literature, when attitude-based encroachers hold that Esther morally injures (risks harm upon or wrongs) Franklin in believing "Franklin is staff," they make the assumption that Esther's belief is *on the basis of Franklin's blackness*. When I maintain that, if Esther morally injures Franklin in believing, then Esther morally injures Franklin in suspending, I retain the literature's assumption that Esther's epistemic state is *because of Franklin's blackness*. This is to say: if Esther morally injures Franklin in believing he is staff *because of his blackness*, then Esther would by the same token morally injure Franklin in suspending on whether he is staff *because of his blackness*. In this way, I do not speak to cases in which Esther's suspension has nothing to do with identity prejudice. Note, however, that even if we do stipulate that identity prejudice doesn't impact Esther's epistemic state, our intuitions do not undermine my symmetry thesis – if Esther doesn't morally injure Franklin when her suspension on whether Franklin is staff has nothing to do with prejudice, in parallel, it is intuitive that Esther doesn't morally injure Franklin when her belief that Franklin is staff has nothing to do with prejudice. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the importance of making this clarification.

whether climate change is real, tobacco is harmful, or a history of racism and sexism shape our world, threatens dangerous moral consequence.

In such cases, how do attitude-risk accounts react? Currently, attitude-risk accounts fail to recognize, or even consider, whether encroachment extends to suspension—only encroachment on *belief* is recognized. But, is difficult to see how an attitude-risk encroacher could justify accepting encroachment on the epistemic standing of belief while rejecting encroachment on the epistemic standing of suspension. Suspension too is an epistemic practice, suspension too can risk harm upon others. Given this, it would be arbitrarily restrictive for attitude-risk theories to limit moral encroachment to belief. By their own lights, attitude-risk theories should extend to suspension. As Esther risks harm upon Franklin in suspending on whether he's a staff member, it should be more difficult for her to suspend in an epistemically unfaulty manner than it would be in a morally neutral scenario.

What is Esther to do when attitude-risk encroachment deems both belief and suspension epistemically faulty given her evidence, if she wants to remain an epistemically unflawed agent? She could abandon the question altogether. Abandonment is distinct from intentionally forbearing from belief that P and belief that $\neg P$ while continuing pursuit of the question: it involves giving up pursuit of the question entirely without settling on belief that P or belief that $\neg P$. Abandoning the question, too, would risk harm upon Franklin. We can imagine Franklin's appropriate offence when Esther's eyes follow him around the room, scrutinizing his attire in search of a name badge, only to see her shrug her shoulders and turn to make conversation with those around him. In this way, abandonment of a question can run counter to the spirit of attitude-risk accounts. Since belief, suspension, and abandonment are all forbidden, the defender of risk-based encroachment must say that disbelief is required: Esther epistemically ought to believe that Franklin is *not* a staffer member, but rather a club member. The only alternative would be to conclude that Esther is thrust into an epistemic dilemma: all available attitudes—belief, disbelief, suspension, question-abandonment—are epistemically forbidden. This would be an unsavory result.

The heart of the matter is that, in some scenarios when one has taken up a question, settling on belief that P , suspension, and abandonment will all risk harm. Sometimes, belief that $\neg P$ will be required to avoid or minimize risk of harm. In such cases, to remain consistent, attitude-risk theories should lower the epistemic burden required for the remaining epistemic state on the table, belief that $\neg P$, to have epistemic merit.

To make sense of this, mechanisms of attitude-risk theories must function symmetrically. On threshold models, the threshold must be able to fall lower: sometimes permitting that relatively less evidence is required for belief to secure epistemic merit than would be required in a morally neutral scenario. Direct-influence models must be capable of epistemically requiring belief. On sphere models, the sphere must have the capacity to contract: allowing the scope of relevant alternatives one needs to rule out for belief to have epistemic merit to shrink—the evidence can dismiss fewer error possibilities than would be relevant were the moral stakes neutral.

In this way, attitude-risk moral encroachment will sometimes insist that we believe against the evidence. In particular, attitude-risk models will demand we believe against the evidence when doing so is necessary to minimize risk of harm. As it minimizes risk of harm, Esther's only morally and so epistemically viable option is to believe that Franklin is not a staff member. This holds for attitude-risk accounts no matter which mechanism they adopt. On direct-influence views, this belief is morally demanded and therefore epistemically obligatory. On threshold views, this belief is the one epistemic state that Esther's evidence morally and so epistemically justifies her in holding. On sphere views, this belief is the sole epistemic state that Esther can hold rationally—is the sole epistemic state for which she has sufficiently ruled out relevant alternatives given the moral stakes.

V. Attitude-Wrong Views Demand Symmetry, Sometimes Requiring Belief Against the Evidence

Do attitude attitude-wrong accounts require symmetric mechanisms, too? To treat this question, let me turn to an example representative of attitude-wrong accounts:

Mugging: On her way to an interview, Nikki is mugged: her bag and car (a red Honda) are stolen, and her arm is bruised. Before the interview, she manages to buy a new bag identical to her old one, and covers the bruise with makeup. Nikki Ubers home (coincidentally, in a red Honda), and tells her wife Elina what happened: she was mugged—but managed to conceal her bruise, get a new bag, and catch an identical Uber home. Nikki sees Elina's eyes wander from Nikki's seemingly unscathed arm to the new bag that looks exactly like her stolen bag with a doubtful expression. She sees Elina crane her neck, suspiciously inspecting the red Honda Uber in their driveway. Nikki can tell that Elina believes she wasn't mugged. Although the evidence suggests that Nikki was not mugged, she nonetheless feels wounded by what Elina falsely believes.

On an attitude-wrong analysis of this case, Elina wrongs Nikki in believing that she was not mugged. As they share a close relationship, Elina wounds Nikki deeply in believing that she is not telling the truth. In so believing, Elina makes out an event that was significant for Nikki to be less than it in fact is—she fails to recognize that Nikki experienced a traumatic event, and perhaps also Nikki’s triumph of seeing through her end of completing an interview that was important to her in the face of deeply adverse circumstances. It would be appropriate for Nikki to ask for an apology.¹³

The standard analysis would go as follows: as Elina wrongs Nikki with her belief, morality drives up the standards for Elina’s belief to be epistemically justified. Either the threshold raises, demanding that epistemically justified belief requires more evidence; direct-influence condemns, rendering epistemically justified belief impossible; or the sphere expands, insisting that the scope of relevant alternatives one must rule out to have epistemically justified belief increases.

But, if we build more detail into the example, it can also be used to motivate the idea that morality can drive down the standards for belief to attain epistemic merit. Imagine that, when Nikki arrives home and shares what happened, she sees Elina skeptically observing her bag, her arm, and the car, and says, “you think I wasn’t mugged, don’t you,” to which Elina truthfully responds, “Well... I just can’t be certain... I haven’t made up my mind yet either way – let me take another look at your arm.” If Elina wrongs Nikki in believing she was not mugged, it would be natural to think that Elina’s suspension on the question, too, would wrong Nikki. Just as Nikki would feel wounded by Elina’s believing she was not mugged, she could also feel wounded by Elina’s failing to believe that she was in fact mugged. Similarly, just as Nikki feels she is owed an apology for Elina’s believing she was not mugged, Nikki could also feel that she’s owed an apology for Elina’s holding out for more evidence before she settles on belief that Nikki was in fact mugged. In both belief and suspension, Elina fails to acknowledge the reality of Nikki’s

¹³ This example parallels important features of *Wine Spill*, a paradigmatic example used to argue for attitude-wrong encroachment, while forgoing *Wine Spill*’s more disputed components. In *Wine Spill*, a recovering alcoholic comes home to his wife with wine on his sleeve despite successfully remaining sober. Basu & Schroeder hold that the wife wrongs her husband in believing he relapsed (Basu & Schroeder, 2018, pp.182-185). One might disagree that the wife wrongs her husband in believing he drank: as the spouse of an alcoholic, we might think so believing is a way of promoting her own safety; or we might recognize so believing as an act of care that could allow her to help her husband. Alternately, in *Mugging*, (again, *if* we grant the idea that beliefs can wrong) it is intuitively less controversial that Elina wrongs Nikki in believing she was not mugged despite Nikki saying that she was mugged. Unlike *Wine Spill*, Elina derives no potential protection or safety from doubting that Nikki was mugged, nor does she stand to benefit Nikki in so doubting. Many thanks to two anonymous reviewers for pointing out these controversial features of *Wine Spill* and suggesting that I employ a parallel example absent these features.

traumatic encounter, and fails to recognize Nikki's feat of completing an interview that was important to her in the face of deeply adverse circumstances.

In short, if belief can wrong, there is nothing that stops suspension of judgment from wronging by the same token. If this is right, in certain situations when we have taken up a question, attitude-wrong accounts should hold that we stand to wrong others in settling on either belief or suspension.

Once Elina takes up the question of whether Nikki has been mugged, then, what can she do to proceed in an epistemically unfaulty manner from the perspective of attitude-wrong encroachers? She could abandon the question altogether. But her abandonment would share the same pitfalls as those of Esther's abandonment detailed in the above analysis of attitude-risk theories. If Elina would wrong Nikki in believing she was not mugged, it's natural to think that she would also wrong Nikki in abandoning the question of whether she was mugged. We can imagine the hurt Nikki might feel if, upon telling Elina that she was mugged, simply turns on the TV or redirects the conversation elsewhere. Just as Nikki would feel she was owed an apology were Elina to believe she wasn't mugged, she could want an apology for Elina's giving up on the question so easily where she could instead believe in her. In this way, demanding that Elina abandon the question would go against the spirit of attitude-wrong encroachment itself. Alternately, attitude-wrong encroachment could hold that Elina is thrust into an epistemic dilemma where, whatever epistemic state she takes up, she's condemned to irrationality. This would be an unappealing result.

By the lights of attitude-wrong encroachers, then, only one epistemic state remains on the table that does not stand to wrong: believing that Nikki was in fact mugged. Elina stands to wrong Nikki by doing anything other than believing in her: believing that she is truthful when she says she was mugged.

In such cases, it is plausible that believing "Nikki was mugged," the sole epistemic state that does not wrong, requires less of an epistemic burden to secure epistemic merit than it would require in a morally neutral scenario. The thought is simply that, if wronging one's belief-target serves to up the epistemic burden required for belief that P and suspension on whether P to have epistemic merit, it would be strange if the epistemic burden necessary for belief that \neg P to attain epistemic merit remained fixed.

To make sense of this, attitude-wrong theories require symmetric mechanisms. Thresholds must be able to lower: allowing that less evidence is required for belief to attain epistemic merit. Direct-influence models must allow epistemically requiring belief—that belief and suspension are epistemically forbidden. The sphere must be able to contract, permitting the scope of relevant alternatives one needs to rule out for her belief to have the relevant epistemic merit to shrink.

Like attitude-risk models, attitude-wrong models will then sometimes insist that we believe against the evidence. Attitude-wrong models will mandate belief against the evidence when it is required to prevent wrongdoing. In *Cosmos Club*, Esther’s only morally and so epistemically viable option is to believe “Franklin is not a staff member.” Just as this demand to believe against the evidence holds across mechanisms for attitude-risk theories, so too does it hold across mechanisms for attitude-wrong theories. Direct-influence views conclude that Esther’s belief is morally demanded and therefore epistemically obligatory. Threshold views insist Esther’s belief is the sole epistemic state that her evidence morally and so epistemically justifies her in holding. Sphere models maintain that this belief is the only epistemic state for which Esther has sufficiently ruled out relevant alternatives given the moral stakes, and so is the only epistemic state she can rationally hold.¹⁴

VI. The Scope of the Demand for Symmetry

I have drawn from examples to argue that attitude-based encroachment, extended to its fuller ends by my symmetry thesis, will sometimes insist that we believe against the evidence. Naturally, the question arises: what is the range of cases in which attitude-based encroachment requires that we believe against the evidence – will it *always* do so?¹⁵ To consider this, let us explore what would have to obtain for attitude-based encroachment to maintain that there are

¹⁴ One might wonder: are all cases in which attitude-based encroachment insists we believe against the evidence ones that involve “contaminated evidence” – evidence that reflects racism, sexism, etc. (Goldberg, 2021, p. 396)? While many cases involve contaminated evidence (such as *Cosmos Club*), not all do. To see this, consider *Mugging*. Attitude-based encroachment insists that Elina believe against the evidence that “Nikki was mugged”. Elina fails to believe that Nikki was mugged because, while Nikki says her bag and car were stolen and that her arm was bruised, Elina sees Nikki holding a bag identical to her old one, sees a car identical to her old one in their driveway, and sees no bruising on Nikki’s arm. This evidence has nothing to do with racism, sexism, etc. Or, consider *Wine Spill*: attitude-based encroachment demands that the wife believe against the evidence that “my husband remained sober.” The wife fails to believe that her husband stayed sober because he’s a recovering alcoholic and there’s a wine stain on his arm. Once more, this evidence has nothing to do with racism, sexism, etc. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I consider this.

¹⁵ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to explore this question.

particular cases in which morality does indeed encroach and forbids one from believing, but does not yield the demand that one believe against the evidence.

By stipulation, we are examining cases in which: A takes up the question whether P, A would morally injure (risk harm upon or wrong) B in believing P according to attitude-based encroachers, and believing $\neg P$ would amount to believing against the evidence. As A would morally injure B in believing P, attitude-based encroachment deems believing P morally and so epistemically forbidden. Believing $\neg P$ is not an option either, as believing $\neg P$ is believing against the evidence, and as we are seeking a case where it is not demanded of A to believe against the evidence. What does the attitude-based encroacher ask of A, epistemically? Three options remain: advise that A suspend on whether P; advise that A abandon whether P altogether; or forbid A from believing P, suspending on P, believing $\neg P$, and abandoning P – thereby thrusting her into an epistemic dilemma. Let us first consider the initial two options.

In order for attitude-based encroachment to deem suspension on P or abandonment of whether P permissible, it has to be that either: A does not morally injure B in suspending on P, or A does not morally injure B in abandoning whether P. Is it plausible that there are cases in which attitude-based encroachers can maintain that believing P morally injures while suspending on P or abandonment of whether P does not?

This would be plausible only if the features that are understood to make believing P morally injurious do not also apply to either suspending on P or abandonment of whether P. The key to treating this question, then, is getting clear on why it is that beliefs morally injure for attitude-based encroachers. Let us consider why it is that beliefs morally injure according to attitude-risk encroachment and attitude-wrong encroachment in kind.

As we have seen in section III, attitude-risk encroachers hold that beliefs morally injure in light of risking harm. A is a danger to B when moving through the world in believing P when doing so risks harm upon B—when so believing is rife grounds for morally faulty action, e.g. disrespecting B's moral equality and autonomy. In order for attitude-risk encroachment to neither demand we believe against the evidence nor thrust us into an epistemic dilemma, they would have to offer a principled distinction between believing P on the one hand and suspending on P or abandonment of whether P on the other such that believing risks harm while suspension or abandonment do not.

A parallel story holds for attitude-wrong encroachment. Attitude-wrong encroachers contend that that beliefs morally injure in light of wrongdoing. While they don't provide an exhaustive account of why it is that beliefs wrong, they maintain that the following is supposed to constitute evidence that A has wronged B with A's belief P: A owes B an apology for believing P; B would feel wounded were B to find out A believes P; in believing P, A fails to relate to B as B is/as B properly sees herself (Basu & Schroeder, 2018, pp. 182, 198; Basu, 2019b, pp. 919, 928).¹⁶

If there are cases in which attitude-wrong encroachment neither insists we believe against the evidence nor thrusts us into an epistemic dilemma, such cases must hold the following feature. They must be cases for which we can draw a principled distinction between believing P on the one hand and suspension on P or abandonment of P on the other such that believing P warrants an apology, would make another feel wounded, and would constitute a failure to relate another as herself, while suspension or abandonment would not do the same.

To consider whether such a principled distinction is plausible for both attitude-risk and attitude-wrong abouts, imagine that—rather than believing—a father suspends on or abandons whether his daughter was harassed. Imagine that—rather than believing—a store clerk considers whether a black customer has shoplifted, eyeing her as she walks, only to suspend on the question or abandon it out of boredom. Is it not intuitive that, if the store clerk risks harm in believing, he risks harm in suspending and abandoning? Is it not intuitive that, if the father: owes an apology for belief, would make his daughter feel wounded were she to know of his belief, and fails to see his daughter as she is in believing, then he would do as much in suspension and abandonment, too? If we accept that belief is the sort of thing that risks harm or wrongs in these cases, it is natural to think that suspension and abandonment do too.

Further, generalizing from the literature, we see two types of cases: those which involve prejudice (e.g. *Cosmos Club*) and those which involve interpersonal relationships (e.g. *Mugging*, *Wine Spill*). I have shown that such a principled distinction between the moral weight of belief

¹⁶ Importantly, I am unpacking the stance that attitude-wrong encroachers would have to take given their commitments. Attitude-wrong encroachers seem to implicitly endorse that wrongdoing is always impermissible, indeed, it is forbidden. It is worthy of note that there is precedent in ethics and moral theory for challenging this claim. On a standard view of rights, one wrongs another when and only when one violates another's claim right and does something impermissible (Anscombe, 1990, p. 152; Feinberg, 1987, p. 34; Owens, 2012, p. 46; Thompson, 2004, p. 334; Thomson, 1990, p. 122). On accounts of others who challenge this standard view, one's violating another's rights is not necessary for wrongdoing her – one can wrong another in *infringing* her rights and doing something that is permissible (Kamm, 2008, p. 241; Kamm, 2015, pp. 86-87; Cornell, 2015; Driver, 2017, p. 208.) What an attitude-wrong account would look like were it to adopt the non-standard view on which wrongdoing is sometimes permissible warrants further exploration.

and suspension or belief and abandonment cannot be made and so that belief against the evidence is required for instances of both types of cases. While arguments in favor of or against such a principled distinction will ultimately bottom out in our intuitions about cases, as it stands, I am hard pressed to find a case in which it is compelling that we can justify such a distinction.

Finally, attitude-based encroachment could escape requiring we believe against the evidence by accepting that it pushes us into an epistemic dilemma, forbidding belief that P , belief that $\neg P$, suspension, and abandonment. This is intuitively unsavory: it would mean that the ask of attitude-based theories would be to insist that, when it comes to morally weighty inquiry, we be in no epistemic state at all. It is widely thought that, when we take up inquiry into a question, it is epistemically permissible to arrive at an epistemic state in light of this inquiry. Were attitude-based encroachment to result in the mandate that sometimes, when we take up questions, we cannot occupy any epistemic state at all, it would run counter to this standard assumption.¹⁷

One might have a distinct worry concerning the scope of my thesis. Have I overstated the scope of the demand for symmetry – must all attitude-based accounts allow that moral considerations both increase and decrease the epistemic burden necessary for belief to attain the relevant epistemic merit? Recall that attitude-based accounts, irrespective of the particular mechanism they adopt, can take different stances on both *what positive epistemic status* is sensitive to moral considerations, as well as *which attitudes* moral considerations impact the epistemic standing of. Is symmetry, the thought would go, really required by any given attitude-based account regardless of its position on either of these choice points?

Symmetry is impervious to varying epistemic status. We have no reason to think that anything about the profile of a given epistemic merit would make it such that, if moral features bear upon its attainability, they only do so asymmetrically. If risk of harm or wrong can increase the epistemic burden necessary for justified belief (Basu, 2019c; Fritz, 2017; Guerrero, 2021; Pace, 2011; Schroeder 2021), rational belief (Bolinger, 2018; Buchak, 2014), epistemically

¹⁷ Nonetheless, there are some who reject this standard assumption. Hughes (2019, 2021), for instance, rejects the idea that the existence of epistemic dilemmas should only be accepted as a last resort. It is not clear, the thought goes, that recognizing dilemmas would require us to give up principles that we have good reason to keep – principles that are motivated independently of rejecting dilemmas. Further, he takes it that accepting epistemic dilemmas allows us to make sense of a handful of epistemological puzzles. While I will refrain from entering the debate on whether or not we should accept epistemic dilemmas here, it is helpful to note that there is precedent for accepting epistemic dilemmas, were attitude-based encroachers to take this path. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this relevant debate in the literature.

irreproachable belief (Schroeder, 2018), or knowledge (Moss, 2018a), it's intuitive that that risk of harm or wrong can also decrease the epistemic burden needed to secure these epistemic goods.

Symmetry is also insensitive to variance in the relevant epistemic state—be it belief (Basu 2019c; Basu & Schroeder, 2018; Bolinger, 2018; Fritz, 2017; Gardiner, 2018; Munton, 2019; Schroeder, 2021), probabilistic belief (Moss 2018a), or credence (Fritz & Jackson, 2021). The epistemic burden required for epistemically merited belief and probabilistic belief is understood to increase when these states risk harm or wrong. By the same token, the epistemic burden required for epistemically merited belief and probabilistic belief should decrease when these states are necessary to minimize risk of harm or wrong. If failure to believe “Franklin is not a staff member” can risk harm or wrong, then failure to hold the probabilistic belief “Franklin is probably not a staff member” can too. The threshold should be able to lower, direct influence should be able to demand, and the sphere should be able to contract—diminishing the epistemic burden necessary for both belief and probabilistic belief alike to have epistemic merit.

The argument for symmetry is even more immediate with credences. For a probabilistically coherent agent, lowering credence in a proposition ipso facto requires raising credence in its negation. When morality and epistemology demand that Esther have a lower credence in “Franklin is a staff member,” they simultaneously demand that Esther have a higher credence in “Franklin is not a staff member.”¹⁸

VII. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that attitude-risk and attitude-wrong accounts of moral encroachment must have symmetric mechanisms, allowing that moral considerations make it both harder and easier for attitudes to obtain epistemic merits. To do this, I showed that attitude-based encroachment is not just restricted to beliefs, but extends to suspension of judgement, too. I contended that, once we recognize that these encroachment accounts will in some cases advise

¹⁸ Do *all* accounts of moral encroachment sometimes demand we believe against the evidence? Reasoning-based accounts are a sub-species of encroachment views that differ from attitude-based views. On reasoning-based accounts, encroachment falls out of the relationship between knowledge and reasons for action (Fantl & McGrath, 2002, 2009; Fritz, 2017; McGrath, 2018). The epistemic appropriateness of a doxastic attitude hinges on whether the relevant proposition is epistemically appropriate to use in reasoning, and moral stakes can impact epistemic appropriateness of use in reasoning. Unlike attitude-based models, reasoning-based models locate the relevant risk of harm or wrong not in the attitude, but instead in the pertinent action. As reasoning-based theories are shaped differently from attitude-based theories in this way, it is not clear whether they sometimes insist we believe against the evidence—this question warrants further exploration.

against belief, suspension, and question-abandonment, we must soon concede that they will in some cases ask us to believe against the evidence. Finally, I defended the demand for symmetry across attitude-based encroachment accounts, arguing that it is insensitive to variance in the pertinent moral flaw, epistemic merit, and epistemic status.

Where does this paper leave attitude-based encroachment? Importantly, this is not a *reductio* of attitude-based encroachment. Rather, it shows that the theory of epistemology on offer from attitude-based encroachment comes with the cost of an additional commitment: sometimes demanding we believe against the evidence. On the one hand, this commitment allows attitude-based encroachment to offer an analysis of certain examples that some encroachers seem particularly amenable to—for instance, that morality and so epistemology will insist we believe the woman who reports being harassed despite the evidence suggesting otherwise. On the other hand, this commitment requires acceptance of two controversial claims. The first is that we have positive epistemic duties—duties to believe. Many epistemologists will be unwilling to accept this, as they hold that beliefs can only ever be forbidden, not demanded.¹⁹ The second is that some of the positive epistemic duties we have are duties to believe against the evidence, which will be difficult for some epistemologists to swallow.

¹⁹ E.g. Littlejohn (2012), Nelson (2010), and Wrenn (2007). Nelson (2010), for instance, argues that it's implausible to demand belief in all of what the evidence supports – the evidence supports a lot, and we're epistemically finite agents. Different epistemologies offer distinct views of what it is to be critiquable *in believing*: believing falsely, believing on insufficient evidence, believing truly out of luck, believing unwarrantedly, believing inaptly, etc. Across these views, beliefs are thought to be sometimes forbidden when they are faulty: when one's belief falls sufficiently short by the relevant epistemic metric, one should not believe in this way. Rarely are epistemic agents thought to be critiquable for failures to believe (notable exceptions to this view are Ichikawa, (2022) and Simion (Forthcoming), who argue for positive epistemic duties).

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