

This is a penultimate draft. Please cite the final draft in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*.

Do Your Homework! A Rights-Based Zetetic Account of Alleged Cases of Doxastic Wronging

This paper offers an alternate explanation of cases from the doxastic wronging literature. These cases violate what I call the *degree of inquiry right*—a novel account of zetetic obligations to inquire when interests are at stake. The degree of inquiry right is a moral right against other epistemic agents to inquire to a certain threshold when a belief undermines one’s interests. Thus, the agents are sometimes obligated to leave inquiry open. I argue that we have relevant interests in reputation, relationships, and the well-being of our social groups. These interests generate obligations against others to “do their homework” before closing inquiry. This alternate account makes better sense of puzzles that accounts of doxastic wronging fall prey to.

I. Introduction

Rima Basu and Mark Schroeder (2019) endorse the view that beliefs can wrong other people. They argue that we can wrong one another by merely believing. Basu and Schroeder—and others in the literature—primarily motivate their position with cases that appeal to intuitions. I offer an alternative explanation, which is theoretically more satisfying. I argue that what’s really going on in these cases is a rights violation—according to this right, we owe it to one another, as a matter of right, to do a more thorough investigation before forming beliefs that undermine another’s interests. I call this the *degree of inquiry right*.

In this paper, I show that touchstone views of doxastic wronging in the literature are misguided. I raise objections to *The Dominant View* of doxastic wronging. Of the several accounts in the literature, they all agree that doxastic wrongings are relational errors. The wrong-making feature of doxastic wrongings is that our beliefs fail to demonstrate a proper relation with the subject of belief. Basu (2019b), following P.F. Strawson, agree that doxastic wrongings involve taking up the objective stance when forming beliefs about others, while Schroeder (2018) argues that doxastic wrongings falsely diminish other people’s agential contributions. This paper undermines these explanations of doxastic wronging, showing that what is really occurring is a rights violation.

I argue that the intuitions the authors above endorse are explained by a rights violation. It is not the belief *itself* that wrongs; rather, it is the failure to “do one’s homework.” Following figures from the literature on zetetic duties, I argue that interests generate duties to inquire. In short, zetetic norms can capture what’s happening in the doxastic wronging literature. To this end, I argue that Joseph Raz’s interest theory of rights generates a right to a certain *degree of inquiry*. I show that when our beliefs threaten another person’s interests, we owe him a more detailed investigation than if the belief did not have this effect. To this end, I argue that beliefs can undermine our interests—specifically, interests in reputation, in relationships, and in the well-being of our social group. I show that this account of the ethics of belief better explains the touchstone cases in the doxastic wronging literature. Following Friedman’s (2020, forthcoming) arguments from the literature on zetetic norms, I argue that the problem with those cases is hastily closing inquiry.

In the next section, I first briefly survey epistemic inquiry and then suggest that zetetic norms better capture the wronging in cases that favor doxastic wronging. I then show that Joseph Raz’s interest theory of rights leads us to what I call a *degree of inquiry right*. The idea here is that we have a right that other people fulfill a certain degree of investigation before forming a negative belief about us. The degree of inquiry right is a rights-based alternate explanation of doxastic wronging. In section three, I shift to the offensive. I argue that the dominant view of doxastic wronging runs into problems. I also show how the degree of inquiry right can make sense of motivating cases in the literature, while avoiding these problems. In the fourth and fifth sections, I distinguish the degree of

inquiry right from moral encroachment and from arguments in the literature against doxastic wrongdoing and moral encroachment. The next section more thoroughly explains the content of the obligations that follow from the degree of inquiry right, namely, sometimes the degree of inquiry right can obligate one to reopen inquiry via, e.g., eliminating alternate possibilities or entertaining counterevidence. Then in the last section, I respond to several objections to my account: (1) distinguishing the degree of inquiry right from moral encroachment; (2) a general moral obligation to charity more elegantly explains motivating cases; (3) an interest in reputation is insufficient to generate any right at all, including the degree of inquiry right; (4) trade-off scenarios show that the account is too strong; and (5) the zetetic account, after close observation, is indistinguishable from the doxastic wrongdoing account. Given that both proposit that wronging beliefs (or inquiries) lack justification, there simply is no difference between them.

II. An Account of Rights and the Degree of Inquiry Right

This section fleshes out a positive ethical account of our zetetic duties. To do so, it lays out the *degree of inquiry right*. According to this right, we owe it to one another to meet a sufficiently high level of inquiry when a belief would undermine another person's interests. Let us now turn to understanding the nature of rights. For the purposes of this project, I draw upon the account of rights from Joseph Raz (1984). I show that beliefs can undermine our interests in the manner necessary for Raz's account. We, therefore, have a right—per Raz's account of rights—against others to do their homework before forming beliefs that undermine our interests. I first survey the nature of epistemic inquiry. I then argue that, according to Raz's theory of rights, we have a right against others to inquire more into beliefs that undermine our interests than we would otherwise.¹

2.1 A Brief Survey of Epistemic Inquiry

Before talking about an ethical account of our zetetic duties, let's turn to laying out some key features of epistemic investigation. First, investigation determines the credence we give to a proposition. According to dominant models in epistemology, investigation either raises or lowers the credence. Credence is the degree of confidence we ought to assign to a proposition, given our current evidence. Credences come on a scale from 0 to 1, where 0 is certainty that a claim is false and 1 is certainty that a claim is true. When we investigate, we entertain evidence that either lowers or raises our credence.

Prior to an investigation we have a sense of how much investigation we will pursue. Renee Bolinger (2020) thinks we decide how much evidence we will entertain before we open an inquiry. Epistemic inquiry is constituted by a number of activities, e.g., conducting tests, interviews, seeking out evidence, etc. Before I begin investigating whether, for example, investing in a self-automated Roth IRA is a fiscally good idea, I need to decide how much effort to put into the investigation and how much counterevidence to entertain. I need to decide what level of credence is necessary for closing inquiry and forming the belief that a Roth is a fiscally good idea. This does not preclude the possibility, however, that I adjust my inquiry based on what evidence I discover during inquiry. The

¹ It's noteworthy that several authors have identified that a right to privacy generates some epistemic obligations. Basu (2021), following Thomson (1975) and Marmor (2015), suggests that the right to privacy involves hiding certain facts about ourselves from others. This is because of a strong preference that others do not form true belief about us. Basu thinks that this shows that there are some morally relevant aspects to forming beliefs, which, she thinks, undermines purism. Similarly, Munch (2021, 2022) thinks that the right to privacy generates direct doxastic duties, e.g., a duty not to generalize based on statistical evidence. My account of the *degree of inquiry right* deviates from this literature. Part of the upshot of this piece is that we have specifically doxastic interests—and thus, specifically doxastic rights. For more on the right to privacy, see Hunter (2018).

point is that when we investigate, we decide in advance how much to investigate and what level of credence is sufficient for belief and action.

We can determine the degree of our investigation based on non-epistemic considerations. Consider again the IRA example. Since the stakes are high for me in this case, it is in my interest to do a thorough investigation and seek out lots of counterevidence. I, therefore, need to perform a higher degree of investigation than I would if, say, I were going to invest just one hundred dollars. This is the second feature of epistemic investigation: The degree to which we inquire—and when we close inquiry—is sensitive to the stakes of the inquirer, and this is because the proposition in question is bound up with my interests.

The extent to which one ought to inquire is determined in advance by non-epistemic considerations. But we also use the same process when we inquire and form beliefs about each other. For instance, if I want to know who Kanye West is currently dating or his net worth, I would decide to do a Google search and then investigate from there. I know in advance, however, that I won't spend my whole Saturday on the investigation, likely not even five minutes.

Closing inquiry, however, tracks with evidential with evidential standards. It is important to note, moreover, that Friedman (2020, forthcoming) argue that zetetic reasons and epistemic standards importantly track one another. According to this picture, inquiry is a matter of answering a question, e.g., by gathering evidence. Once an evidential standard is met, one no longer has a zetetic reason to inquire. This picture has an intuitive appeal—why investigate a question you already know the answer to? Importantly, however, I think we often have other, non-zetetic, reasons for inquiry, e.g., ruling out alternate possibilities and explanations, entertaining counterevidence, etc. My view of zetetic reasons is that they track evidential standards, but we can reasonably pursue additional inquiry based on non-evidential considerations, like wanting to know more about a topic to show off to friends.

Now, it is often in *someone else's* interest that we do a thorough investigation prior to closing inquiry and forming beliefs about them. For instance, suppose that there are rumors going around that a colleague has had a DUI in the past. Upon hearing this claim, these rumors open an investigation for me. I have a choice: I can either close my investigation and form the belief that the rumors are true, or I can leave the investigation open and withhold belief. More specifically, if I am going to potentially hold an interest-undermining belief about the colleague, then I owe it to him to perform a cost appropriate inquiry regarding that belief. It strikes me as intuitive that they would appreciate my leaving the investigation open and withholding the belief based on the rumors. This person's reputation is on the line after all.

Why think we have an interest in what others believe about us? Here are a few reasons. First, what others believe about us largely determines the relationship we will have with those people. Basu and Schroeder (2019) point out that important beliefs about other people determine the sorts of interactions and expectations that we have about one another. Given the importance of interaction with other people, I have an interest in what other believe about me. Secondly, some beliefs are partially constitutive of our reputation. A good reputation is a desirable, beneficial thing. And I have an interest in being a trusted member of my community and not a social outcast. Needless to say, we care about our reputation because it determines how other people view us.²

² There are a number of other interests that we have in what other people believe about us. First, Schroeder (2018b) identifies that some beliefs impose risks in virtue of possible actions that follow from the belief. It is clear that we have interests against such risks. Secondly, Marusic and White (2018) motivate the claim that beliefs wrong by appealing to fact that other people's beliefs promote and undermine our self-esteem, self-love, and self-consciousness (98). These are deeply held interests. Our interests—and how beliefs violate what's in our interest—seem to be the core motivation for doxastic wronging. My account is premised on this claim.

2.2 Zetetic Explanations are Better Than Doxastic Wronging Explanations

With this picture of inquiry, I want to entertain alternate explanations of some touchstone examples in the doxastic wronging literature. The general upshot of this paper is to show that doxastic wronging cases are better explained by the inquiry the characters conducted, rather than the beliefs themselves. In the following section, I move to a positive moral account of why we have zetetic obligations to others. However, even if the positive account fails, I still want to at least gesture toward the conclusion that the zetetic explanation is better.

Consider *Wounded by Belief*:

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? (Basu (2019c), Basu and Schroeder (2019))

Basu and Schroeder argue that this case is an intuitive instance of doxastic wronging, i.e., Maria's belief, in virtue of merely being held, wrongs Mark. A zetetic explanation can capture the intuitive appeal of this case. The problem, I think, is not the belief itself. There are clearly circumstances where Maria's belief would not wrong Mark—perhaps after Mark tell Maria he's been drinking or the smell of Mark's breath. The problem here is that Maria forms the belief too hastily. She is quick to conclude that Mark has fallen off the wagon and should have left the question open, assuming we have some duty to inquire about others.

Now consider *The Racist Hermit*:

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? (Basu 2019a, 919)

First, note that the hermit closes inquiry into a question—namely when Sanjay smells like—prematurely. I think it is the hastily closing inquiry that is wrong with the case. Rather, he ought to admit that he just does not know what Sanjay smells like. For instance, imagine that the hermit visits Sanjay's house for dinner, where they will be having curry. The hermit may in this instance (1) close inquiry on the question about the way Sanjay smells and (2) form the belief. In this case, it seems to me that he's inquired enough into this question. Thus, there does not seem to be anything distinctive about this belief that makes it wrong—rather it is the inquiry that proceeded it.

Finally, I want to mention one last case that favors doxastic wronging, *Security Guard*.

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? (Basu 2019a)

This case is yet another instance better explained by zetetic norms, rather than doxastic wrongdoing. We might think here that Jake’s inquiry into whether Jada stole deeply problematic. It’s problematic for two reasons. First, there is simply not enough inquiry. He has not thoroughly enough answered the question *has Jada stolen the purse?* If asked why he believes this of Jada, I do not think he could produce adequate answers. Moreover, it seems that the kind of inquiry he pursues here is problematic as well. That is, his inquiry is solely a stereotype applied to a member of the group. This strikes me as problematic (and largely inadequate form of investigation) from the start. Thus, the relevant question here is not “Has Jada been wronged by what Jake believes of her?” but rather it is “Has Jake’s investigation wronged Jada?” I think so. Like the other cases mentioned above, there are circumstances in which Jake can permissibly form this belief about Jada—e.g., it is true and formed after a thorough investigation, perhaps seeing her do it. I do not think that the Jake does anything wrong here. The inquiry explanation, for this reason, is better than the doxastic wrongdoing explanation.³

Each of these cases seems to have two common threads—the characters too quickly close inquiry and the beliefs, under certain circumstances, seem perfectly permissible (so long as the character gather enough and the right kind of evidence). Though it may seem that the beliefs wrong, if I am right, then it is clearly the inquiry—an upstream phenomenon—that wrongs in these cases. My proposal below will capture this feature of these cases.

In the coming sections, I’ll go into more detail about these cases and why the inquiry explanation is better. This section suggests a general claim that doxastic wrongdoing cases are better understood as errors of inquiry, rather than doxastic wrongings. For now, I turn to the degree of inquiry right.

2.3 The Degree of Inquiry Right

Joseph Raz (1984) gives an interest theory of rights. Rights obtain in virtue of a subject’s interests. Rights, according to Raz, are closely related to both the moral status of the rights holder and the interests of the being in question. If I have a right to, say, bodily integrity, then bodily integrity needs to be in my interest, and I need to be the sort of being that merits rights-based concern. Consider now Raz’s account of rights:

Definition. “x has a right” if and only if x can have rights, and other things being equal, an aspect of x’s well-being (his interest) is a sufficient reason for holding other person(s) to be under a duty. (195)

The Principle of Capacity to have Rights. An individual is capable of having rights if and only if either his well-being is of ultimate value or he is an “artificial person” (e.g. a corporation). (195)

I argue that our interests generate zetetic obligations against rights-bearers.⁴ I aim to show that we have rights pertaining to how others go about performing investigations into propositions that, when believed, undermine our interests, i.e., how they inquire when our interests are at stake. For

³ In section 3.4, I argue that the inquiry explanation of these cases is superior to the doxastic wrongdoing account because it avoids doxastic voluntarism. I go into more detail then, but for now I want to note that this is a general strength of the inquiry explanation. It is certain worthy of further pursuit.

⁴ There is a rich literature on the nature of zetetic obligation, and its relationship with epistemic and moral obligation. See Nottelmann (2007), Peels (2016), Friedman (2020, Forthcoming), Thorstad (2021, 2022), Falbo (2023), Haziza (forthcoming). The aim here, following this literature, is to establish a zetetic obligation as a matter of moral right.

my purposes, I show that what others believe about us is sufficiently connected to our interests such as to warrant a right. My suggestion is that we have a right that others meet a certain threshold of inquiry before closing investigation about beliefs that undermine interests.

Now let us turn to the degree of inquiry right. We have a strong enough interest in our reputation and what others believe about us to warrant a right to a level of inquiry. If my closing inquiry and forming a belief about another person will contribute to the demise of his reputation, then I should ensure that I “do my homework” before I close investigation. That is, the mere utterance of the rumor should not be sufficient to both open and then close investigation. I owe it to the person in question to perform a cost appropriate inquiry because their interest in my beliefs merit a right against a hasty inquiry. If this is right, then I have a duty to ensure that I do my zetetic diligence when my beliefs would undermine another’s interest. Following Raz’s account of rights, consider the formulation of the degree of inquiry right:

Degree of Inquiry Right. Rights-bearer, X, has degree of inquiry right if and only if X has an interest—e.g., reputation or relationship—in a particular duty-bearer, Y’s, belief, B, about X; those interests are sufficient reason to hold a duty against Y; and X is the sort of being that can have rights, i.e., a being of “ultimate value.”⁵

One strength of this account is that it is not too demanding. We can form negative beliefs but only after some threshold of investigation (which I mention shortly). Returning to the DUI case above, I am not precluded from *ever* believing that the colleague did get a DUI. In fact, I can (and perhaps should) believe this, but this is only after I do my due diligence. On other accounts (which I shall mention later), it is doubtful whether I should close investigation at all in this scenario. These accounts are too strong. The degree of inquiry right, I suggest, is strong enough to give our beliefs a moral dimension without requiring us to be epistemically neglectful.

I should say something about the evidential strength of the initial testimony that opens inquiry. Suppose that what is sent around to the department is a video of the colleague driving while proclaiming “I’m so drunk! In fact, way *too* drunk to drive!” In this case, the evidence that opens inquiry—the video—is strong enough to meet the colleague’s degree of inquiry right and thereby close inquiry. This case emphasizes that forming an interest-undermining belief is consistent with my account: it is just whether these beliefs are formed without sufficient inquiry.⁶

⁵ In section 5, I go into more detail about what the content of the obligation looks like for the degree of inquiry right. There, I entertain an objection about the nature of zetetic norms, i.e., that they are dependent upon epistemic norms. In response, I show that the degree of inquiry right can obligate one to carry out inquiry-adjacent activities, e.g., seeking out counterevidence, responding to counterevidence, entertain other possibilities, etc., even after one has met a sufficiently high threshold of evidence to close inquiry in normal circumstances.

⁶ What degree of inquiry is sufficient for meeting the right? I leave this purposefully vague, but I want to try out a couple of tentative answers. First, we may think that the level of inquiry one must put forth is a matter of the strength of one’s interests. Thus, as one desires certain things more, e.g., stable relationships, reputation, etc., this obligates others to do more homework. Another route is to borrow the epistemic mechanisms from the literature on moral encroachment. For instance, some authors think that the strength of the moral stakes raises the degree of probabilistic evidence needed for justification. This is the “beaker mechanism.” One needs *even more* probabilistic evidence to form a belief rationally. See Basu (2019a) and Worsnip (2021). See Gardiner (2021) and Atkins (2023a) for objections. Other authors argue that the moral stakes shift the “sphere” of alternatives one must rule out before one knows. See Dretske (1970), Lewis (1996), McKinnon (2013), and Gardiner (2019) for more about relevant alternatives theory in general. See Moss (2018), Atkins (2023a), and Gardiner (2021) for more about the relevance mechanism in the moral encroachment literature. For a survey of these mechanisms, see Bolinger (2020) and Atkins (ms.). It may be that when a belief would undermine interests it follows that the kind of inquiry is one must undergo, i.e., the kinds of or number of alternatives that one must rule out in their inquiry.

When is an interest a “sufficient reason to hold a duty against” some other person? Raz lays out the criteria here:

An interest is sufficient to base a right if and only if there is a sound argument of which the conclusion is that a certain right exists and among its non-redundant premises is a statement of some interest of the right-holder, the other premises supplying grounds for attributing to it the required importance, or for holding it to be relevant to a particular person or class of persons so that they rather than others are obligated to the right-holder. (209)

This is an extremely general set of guidelines for establishing a right. In short, Raz thinks that we need an argument connecting the interests of some person to obligations against others. So, when is someone’s interest in reputation a sufficient reason for holding others obligated and to whom? To see a justification, consider anti-libel and anti-defamation laws. Such laws are, in part, grounded in an interest that one has a certain reputation. These interests are a good enough reason to obligate others to avoid defamation and libel. Note that such duties are negative—they obligate the omission of such behaviors. I think, however, that these interests—e.g., in reputation and in one’s stable relationships—also plausibly ground some modest positive duties, one of which is to do one’s homework before closing inquiry. This duty, it seems to me, is not too burdensome.

I leave precisely what interests are protected by the right vague. For instance, I may have an interest in being seen as the most attractive person at the party. Does this mean that someone who does not find me attractive has illegitimately undermined my interests—and consequently violated my degree of inquiry right? This seems implausible because that interest, following Raz, that aspect of my well-being does not seem to be a sufficient reason for holding others under a duty. One can legitimately undermine this interest. However, relationships and reputation are of central importance to one’s well-being—as are other interests too. Thus, it seems like the degree of inquiry right will protect these interests but not necessarily the vain interest.

Who is obligated to fulfill the degree of inquiry right? Raz distinguishes qualified rights from unqualified rights. Qualified rights are rights in which some person or set of persons is obligated, while unqualified rights are rights in which all persons are obligated. The degree of inquiry right will be qualified—only those who are sufficiently connected to one’s reputation, relationships, or the well-being of one’s social group will be obligated. The set of persons obligated may look different depending on the rights holder, e.g., the set of people who partially constitute the reputation of Joe Biden is much larger than the set of people that constitute my own. Thus, the set of duty-bearers is larger for Joe Biden than it is for me.

My view is that interests are part of an objective list of things that we need for well-being. Personal preferences, by contrast, are largely subjective. Both interests and personal preferences are important for our well-being, and the degree of inquiry right will obtain or dissolve in virtue of these facts. Sometimes preferences take precedent over our interests, e.g., out interests in reputation or flourishing relationships.

The degree of inquiry right and the interests that substantiate the right may bottom out at a more fundamental right: the right to privacy. Consider Raz’s distinction between derivative and core rights. A core right is a right that is non-derivative, i.e., it does not derive its justification from some other right. A derivative right is a right that is justified or entailed by some core right. We might—plausibly—think that the degree of inquiry right is derivative of some more fundamental right. Munch (2021, 2022) argues that the right to privacy also generates rights against what other people believe. Though I argue here that the general interests in reputation, relationships, and the well-being

of our social groups grounds the degree of inquiry right, we can imagine that these interests are all subordinate to some more fundamental interest, e.g., the interest in privacy.⁷

One of the broader and philosophically interesting upshots of this paper is that beliefs—merely in being held—can undermine interests. This claim is similar to Goldberg’s (2022) Moral Harm of Belief thesis—which states that moral harms can follow from merely believing about others. Though Goldberg rejects this thesis, he identifies Schroeder (2018) and Marusic and White (2018). What *this* paper has done is (1) explicitly connected the ethics of belief to morally impermissible interest undermining via the interest theory of rights and (2) connected beliefs to new damages that can follow from what others think, e.g., some beliefs cause damage to our relationships and reputation. Given this and our interests in these things, it follows we have an interests in these beliefs.

Let me, moreover, get a little clearer on the core of the wrongdoing here. My view is that failing to sufficiently investigate is what wrongs, but the ensuing beliefs undermine the interests of others. I will talk consistently of both belief formation and closing inquiry. I do this because both are important to my account. It is the hasty inquiry, however, where the wrongdoing is located. Belief formation is not what we are owed according to the degree of inquiry right, though it does undermine our interests. Performing a sufficient degree of inquiry morally justifies the interest-undermining belief that will likely follow the inquiry.

What about beliefs that are harmless? Consider the following “water cooler” conversation: “You know, I heard that Jim got a new dog this weekend.” This is a kind of gossip—talking about people without their knowing—but whether I close inquiry and form a belief a belief about Jim’s new dog does not seem to matter. So how can my account make sense of this case? Only beliefs that are of a sufficient interest for the person believed about require that we meet some standard degree of inquiry. Jim likely does not care whether I believe he bought a new dog because it will not change his reputation or how I relate to him, so the belief would not undermine his interests. More specifically, the stakes are not sufficiently high for Jim in this context. If they were higher, then I should engage in further inquiry before closing inquiry. Beliefs subject to the degree of inquiry right, therefore, are context sensitive.

However, in contexts where beliefs about dog ownership would undermine interests—if, say, Jim and I were members of an underground anti-doggo syndicate—the belief would be subject to a higher degree of inquiry. As a matter of Jim’s interests and, consequently, his rights, I would owe him a more thorough investigation. This is because my belief that he adopted a dog generates a high stakes situation (because we would think differently of him if he owned a dog as a pet). The belief would undermine interests in this context. These considerations highlight a strength of my account: it is context sensitive. We will see in the next section how this feature of the account can explain dominant cases for doxastic wrongdoing in the literature.

Does one always take an interest in one’s reputation and do interests sometimes conflict with other relevant interests or preferences? We can imagine a case where I can sacrifice my reputation for something else that is in my self-interest. Suppose I act snobbishly to my partner’s friends because I prefer to spend time alone. Does the degree of inquiry right still hold, even though my interests are restructured? In short, the answer will depend upon one’s theory of interests. Fleshing out a detailed answer lies beyond the scope of this answer. My view is that interests are part of an

⁷ This is a tentative suggestion. One may worry, as I do, whether the right to privacy could require us to *further pursue inquiry* into something someone prefers to keep private. We might be obligated to just leave it alone. A tentative response, I think, is that so long as the proposition that one prefers to keep private is out in the open, we ought either ignore it or, if we are to believe it, be certain that we are correct. Hence, the need to additional and more rigorous inquiry.

objective list of things that we need for well-being. Personal preferences, however, are largely subjective. Sometimes preferences take precedent over our interests. In such cases, whether the degree of inquiry right obtains will depend on the strength of one's preference over the interests I have mentioned above.

I mention one last relevant interest in passing, interest in the wellbeing of our social groups.⁸ Many of us hope that the social groups which we take part in fare well, both for us and for the other members of that group. I think that racist generalizations about our social group not only undermine the interests and wellbeing of our social group, but they also undermine our own personal interests. Thus, if I close inquiry and form a racist belief against a social group, then I also undermine the interests of each individual of that group and, thereby, violate their degree of inquiry rights.

Let me clarify the sorts of beliefs that are incorporated in the scope of the degree of inquiry right. Do we have a claim against others for under-inquired beliefs (1) that are (or could be) operationalized such that they lead to actions that undermine our interests or (2) any ill-formed belief that undermines our interests? Later in this paper, I argue that our reputation and our relationships are partially constituted by what others believe of us. Thus, I argue that the degree of inquiry right is a right against (2). It is not necessary, according to my account, that others operationalize ill-formed beliefs into actions that undermine our interests.

Does the valence of the proposition matter for the degree of inquiry right? For instance, suppose I hear a rumor that my friend has published a paper in a top tier journal. Believing this, I think, will positively affect her reputation. Do I owe her additional inquiry when a proposition will positively affect her reputation?⁹ I do not think so. This is because the belief does not undermine her interest in a positive reputation or in any way I've identified here.¹⁰

I think this opens a new question, however. Should I inquire less about propositions with a positive valence? When it is in someone's interest that I believe that, say, they published a paper in a top tier journal, perhaps I ought to close inquiry sooner than I would (say, about a neutral or negative belief). This seems plausible to me. Perhaps we own a *less* thorough investigation when it comes to a proposition with a positive valence. Imagine a colleague who does an extensive investigation to verify your top tier publication. Perhaps this is blameworthy, per the degree of inquiry right. This all appears consistent with what I've said so far about the degree of inquiry right.

What degree of credence is sufficient for forming an interest-undermining belief? I do not think every interest-undermining belief will demand the exact degree of credence. Following David Annis's (1978) objection mechanism for epistemic justification, the degree of credence necessary for meeting the degree of inquiry right will be whatever credence degree is necessary for *answering the*

⁸ By *social group*, I have in mind Iris Marion Young's account. According to Young (1990), a social group is "a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other social group by cultural forms, practices, or ways of life" (43). Social groups are not mere aggregates—like green-eyed people— or associations—like churches or political parties—but a group of people who share "a sense of identity... a certain social status... [a] common history and, [who] self-identif[y]" with the group (44).

⁹ I think this opens a new question, however. Should I inquire less about propositions with a positive valence? When it is in someone's interest that I believe that, say, they published a paper in a top tier journal, perhaps I ought to close inquiry sooner than I would (say, about a neutral belief). This seems plausible to me. Perhaps we own a *less* thorough investigation when it comes to a proposition with a positive valence. It's plausible that someone who doesn't believe someone else's accomplishment "off the bat" but only after more investigation is blameworthy.

¹⁰ Sarah Stroud (2006) identifies a tension between believing truthfully and believing "well" of our friends—in a manner similar to Michael Stocker's (1976) claim about individual motivation and "modern moral theories." Given that the degree of inquiry right targets beliefs with a negative valence, i.e., beliefs that undermine certain interests, there will be a similar tension in my argument. However, this tension is superficial at the end of the day. After we give due diligence to the rights-holder, it follows that we can close inquiry and form the negative belief. Also see Keller (2004) and Atkins (2021) for similar claims.

most demanding reasonable objections from the person believed about. Annis argues that justification is context sensitive, where we must answer pressing objections—the strength of which is contingent upon the strength of the subject’s interests. The believer, therefore, needs to be in a strong enough epistemic position to be able to answer the subject’s objections. Such objections become increasingly far-fetched as the stakes in the belief rise.

Lastly, I think that the degree of inquiry right is a weak right, as opposed to a strong one.¹¹ This means, in part, that the right can be overridden in some situations, e.g., in cases of interest of conflict or dilemmas. But we may worry that if the degree of inquiry right is a weak right, it may not be a proper right at all. Following Wenar (1998), however, a weak right is a right that’s been “properly shaped,” such that it is overall more beneficial to sometimes recognize other interests over this right. It is a right so long as there are no other conflicting interests or duties.

In the next section, I contrast the degree of inquiry right against the dominant views of doxastic wronging. My discussion shows that the degree of inquiry right is avoids issues that these accounts run into.

III. The Dominant View of Doxastic Wronging

I argue in this section that zetetic norms better explain cases that motivate doxastic wronging. Theorists argue that these cases substantiate an intuitive pull to the conclusion that beliefs wrong other people. This is not right because further inspection reveals that the lack of a sufficient degree of inquiry is the problem with these cases (and not necessarily the belief itself). I argue that what’s occurring in touchstone cases is a different kind of moral mistake, brought about by the degree of inquiry right.¹² We can wrong one another by prematurely closing inquiry, and that occurs in the touchstone cases in the literature. My account can explain the problem of hasty and half-hearted inquiry, where the dominant view of doxastic wronging cannot. By analyzing these cases, I further flesh out the degree of inquiry right.

As I noted in a previous section, if the degree of inquiry right is implausible, a more general claim can still stand, namely, that motivating cases for doxastic wronging are better explained by zetetic norms and duties—whatever those duties are—regardless of whether the degree of inquiry right is true. This section addresses in more detail the broad points raised in 2.2 and then highlights what sorts of verdicts the degree of inquiry right will demand.

3.1 False Belief Accounts

Rima Basu and Mark Schroeder (2019) argue that we can wrong one another with our beliefs.¹³ What are examples of this sort of wronging? One example in the literature is racist and sexist beliefs:

¹¹ Following Leif Wenar’s (1998) vector-sum approach, the degree of inquiry right is, I think, a weak right, i.e., a right that can be overridden by other interests. According to the vector-sum approach, we imagine scenarios where different rights are in place, e.g., a strong right or a weak right. We then examine how various versions of a right affect the interests of those in the scenario, e.g., a strong property right may, for instance, have crippling effects on the interest of someone who must cross a plot of land to get to a hospital. After totaling the sum of costs and benefits, we then plug the data into a normative theory, which renders the best version of the right. The degree of inquiry right, I argue, is a weak right after we consider the benefits and burdens of the right.

¹² For objections in this vein to encroachment style views or doxastic wronging, see Gardiner (2018), Osborne (2021) Fritz (2020), Atkins (2023b), Rioux (forthcoming), and Hirvela (forthcoming).

¹³ Several of the accounts of doxastic wronging available in the literature motivate *radical* moral encroachment—the view that beliefs that wrong require a greater degree of epistemic work than beliefs that do not wrong. For more about radical moral encroachment, see Basu (2019c) and Bolinger (2020). For more about moral encroachment generally, see Michael Pace (2011), James Fritz (2017), Basu (2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2021), Gardiner (2018), Bolinger (2018), and Atkins (2023b). Georgi Gardiner (2021) also gives, but does not endorse, an account of moral encroachment. For objections, see Fritz

this person must be a server because she is black. Other examples have to do with beliefs formed in the context of close relationships. Consider, again, *Wounded by Belief*. The idea here is that Maria has wronged Mark in virtue of the contents of her belief. They find it intuitive that Maria owes an apology because she fails to note Mark's accomplishment. But how does it work?

They argue that doxastic wrongings must meet three conditions:

Doxastic Wrongings must be (1) directed wrongings; (2) where it is the belief itself is what wrongs; and (3) the content of a belief is what wrongs.

Basu and Schroeder (2019) argue that the wrongdoing occurs in virtue of a relational wrongdoing. Beliefs represent the way in which we relate to the world: if I believe that the tiger is dangerous, then my belief will tailor the way in which I will relate to the tiger, perhaps I won't pet it like I would a fluffy cat. Similarly, beliefs about other people create certain relations we have with those people. My belief will influence the way in which I will interact with certain people.

It is noteworthy that beliefs are not wrong in virtue of the behaviors that follow them, according to Basu and Schroeder. Rather, it is the content of the belief itself that wrongs. Thus, Maria wrongs Mark like this: "Yes, you have a long history of falling off of the wagon, and yes, there is some evidence that this time is another. You can see how it could be reasonable for someone to draw this conclusion. But it still hurts—not least because in your eyes, tonight was an achievement to stay on the wagon despite adverse circumstances" (2). The content of Maria's belief undermines Mark's accomplishment; thus, Maria's merely believing of Mark that he drank wrongs him.

Would it, for instance, be unreasonable for Mark to demand an apology from Maria in this case? Basu and Schroeder (2019) and Basu (2021) argue that it is not. This feature reveals the intuitive force that beliefs themselves can wrong. We can owe an apology for the belief itself because—Basu and Schroeder argue—apologies like the following are unsatisfying: "Well, I'm sorry for believing that you fell off the wagon, even though my belief was epistemically impeccable, short of being true" (19). What we owe, rather, is an apology for the belief itself and not the plausible epistemic processes. The core wrong making feature of all of these views is that we can fail to relate to one another as we ought in virtue of what we believe.

Schroeder (2018) offers a slightly different analysis of what makes these beliefs objectionable. He thinks that beliefs that *diminish* others are wrong. Beliefs that diminish others "bring them down" such that their agency is compromised. Schroeder writes: "What I mean is interpreting them in a way that makes their agential contribution out to be less. An agential contribution can be less because it is a worse contribution, but it can also be less because it is less of a contribution" (124). This account explains what is wrong about beliefs formed on racial generalizations and stereotypes: the person is not distinct from their reference class. Schroeder argues that only *false* beliefs that diminish amount to doxastic wrongings. Thus, the issue in *Wounded by Belief* is the fact that Maria falsely diminishes Mark's agency and thereby brings him down.

3.2 Against False Belief Accounts

Does my account of the degree of inquiry right capture the intuitive pull of *Wronged by Belief*? Yes! The noteworthy feature of the case is the spousal relationship. Recall I argued that the degree of inquiry right obtains if we have an interest in functional relationships. But it is not merely in our interest that we have a functional relationship with our spouse. It is important—and, therefore, in our interest—that one's spouse think highly of her, that her spouse acknowledge her

(2020), Atkins (2023b), Rioux (forthcoming), and Hirvela (forthcoming). My view deviates from the encroachment literature because I argue that the wrongdoing is at the level of inquiry, not necessarily in the belief itself.

accomplishments. These are central, vital things to our interest. I, therefore, think that this interest generates a right for Mark that Maria violates. Maria hastily closes inquiry, and *that's what wrongs Mark*. Intuitively, something is going wrong in this case, and my account better explains what that is.

The zetetic explanation is superior to the above account of doxastic wronging account. Consider a true belief version of this case: Mark in fact did fall off the wagon and drink at dinner. Schroeder (2018) argues that only false beliefs can amount to doxastic wrongings. Thus, if Maria forms the belief that Mark drank, she would not be wronging him. The fact that Maria's belief is false informs the intuition that her belief wrongs him. But I find that there is still a moral issue in the true belief version of the case, and my account can explain that.¹⁴ The wronging that occurs in the true belief version of *Wounded by Belief* is Maria's hasty closing of the inquiry. She would need to do a more thorough investigation to believe that Mark drank—for instance, the smell of alcohol on his breath, his testimony, his drunkenly falling about the room. She needs *something* more here than the evidence that she has. It is not that Maria is wrong about her evaluation of Mark that wrongs him, rather it is her hastily closing inquiry and ensuing formation of belief. My account is superior to the false belief account of doxastic wronging since it can explain the true belief version of *Wounded by Belief*. What's going on here, rather, is that Maria too hastily closes inquiry.

My inquiry driven explanation is also superior to the false belief account because, I believe, it intuitively captures what is wrong with this case. Following Basu and Schroeder (2019), Maria's belief undermines Mark's accomplishment in this case, and that does wrong him, but rather it is her hasty, half-hearted investigation. My account is more intuitive because it puts the wronging upstream, where it is clearer that we have some choices in the matter. Maria has wronged Mark—not because of the contents of the belief—but because she rushed to the conclusion that Mark falls off the wagon, against Mark's interests. She has too closed off inquiry too abruptly, thereby violating Mark's interest in her belief and his degree of inquiry right. It is clearer to me that she has *done* something wrong here, rather than merely believed something wrong.

Schroeder also mentions a gold medalist who believes that he merely lucked out in winning his event, as well as a father that does not believe that his daughter will do well in engineering school. Both cases are instances of false diminishment.

I think there are issues with these cases too, but it is really because we have an interest in being seen as making a contribution. Consider well-justified false diminishments. Suppose the gold medalist won, in part, because another competitor tripped as he was nearing the end of the race. This is a reasonable belief to hold, but suppose that, in fact, this is false. And suppose that the daughter's math scores were poor during grade school, and that she consistently complains about how hard her program is. In such cases, these beliefs are, I think, well justified enough not to be doxastic wrongings, even though they are technically false diminishments. According to the degree of inquiry right, these may not be wrongings. This is because, even though they are false, they may meet a sufficient threshold of inquiry to merit belief formation without wronging.

3.3 Against the True Belief Account of Doxastic Wronging

We have seen a shortcoming of Basu and Schroeder's (2019) and Schroeder's (2018) false belief accounts of doxastic wronging, but what about a true belief version of doxastic wronging? Basu (2019b) argues that both false and true beliefs can wrong, and beliefs that run *no* risk of affecting the person believed about can amount to a doxastic wronging.¹⁵ In this section, I'll address how the

¹⁴ Basu (2019b), we will see momentarily, argues that even true beliefs can amount to doxastic wrongings. Needless to say this view runs into trouble. My point is that my account can make sense of the true belief case without running into the problems that Basu's account of true belief wronging runs into.

¹⁵ For more about the true belief account of doxastic wronging, also see Fabre (2022).

degree of inquiry right handles racist beliefs (and even true racist beliefs). Recall *The Racist Hermit*. Basu thinks that there is something wrong in this case. It cannot be that the hermit would act on his belief that Sanjeev smells of curry, nor will he ever contribute to any racist structures given his isolation. If there's no downstream risk of the hermit's belief, why does it feel so wrong? Basu thinks that the contents of the hermit's belief wrong Sanjeev, even though there is no risk of the hermit expressing his belief to Sanjeev or contributing to racist structures.

The Racist Hermit poses challenges to my account. I argue, however, that even though the rights-based view of doxastic wrongdoing cannot make sense of *The Racist Hermit*, it can make sense of cases sufficiently like it. Let's think through a slightly modified version of the case that has both the distance feature and the true belief feature of Basu's *Racist Hermit*:

The Racist Construction Worker: Suppose a racist construction worker on a job site discovers trash containing an alumni newsletter from Sanjeev's university, which includes Sanjeev's photo. The construction worker 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 construction worker's belief is true—Sanjeev does smell of curry. Has the construction worker wronged Sanjeev?

Let's stipulate that Sanjeev will likely never meet this construction worker, but (unlike the hermit) the construction worker will be involved in society. I think that the issue with *The Racist Construction Worker* is the lack of investigation that the worker undertakes. There is a wrongdoing, but the wrongdoing is not necessarily the content of the belief; rather it is the fact that the construction worker hastily closes inquiry on a belief that is sufficiently in Sanjeev's interest. But what is the interest?

Sanjeev has a strong interest against beliefs like the construction worker's not because the construction worker himself will harm or affect Sanjeev but because beliefs like the construction worker's make Sanjeev's social group worse off. Sanjeev's interest in the well-being of his social group generates, I believe, an obligation for the hermit not to form a belief *about Sanjeev*. Thus, one of the interests for a more thorough degree of inquiry is the belief's contribution to structural norms of racism. Insofar as I have an interest against systemic stigma of my group, I have a right against others not to close inquiry too quickly—for *beliefs about me!* If I adopt my own group's interest as my own interest, others must pursue more evidence before forming potential racist beliefs about me.

Up until now, my account has lacked an explanation for the wrongness of racist beliefs: racist belief could only be explained if they undermined relationships or reputations. However, I have identified a separate interest at stake: the interest in the well-being of one's social group. This interest generates the degree of inquiry right *for beliefs that are specific to an individual*.

Basu's account, moreover, struggles with the context sensitivity of the contents of belief, i.e., some racist beliefs. Recall the context sensitivity of my account. Think about the content of the hermit's and the construction worker's belief: *Sanjeev smells of curry*. In the context of these cases, the belief is racist. However, there may be contexts where this is not a racist belief. Imagine that the hermit and the construction worker are guests at Sanjeev's house for dinner. Sanjeev makes curry for supper and then mentions that he spilled some on his shirt. The hermit could form the belief—*Sanjeev smells of curry*—without prompting any moral issue. I think my account explains these differing contexts. The hermit has met a sufficient degree of evidential support for the belief in question. This is good reason to think the hermit appreciates Sanjeev's right to a certain level of inquiry.¹⁶ Basu's

¹⁶ In general, meeting a high evidential threshold—such that one can close inquiry—will be sufficient for meeting the degree of inquiry right. However, as I'll mention in section 5, I think that the degree of inquiry right can demand that

account, I think, cannot easily explain why the hermit's belief is problematic in the case without also admitting it is problematic in the dinner case too. It must be the belief formation process in conjunction with the context-sensitive interests at stake that explain the hermit's wrongdoing.

Now to *The Racist Hermit* case. This case poses a challenge to my account: the hermit will never contribute to any racist structures that affect Sanjeev or members of his social group. Given that the hermit's belief does not pose any risks against relevant interests, it seems to me that there's nothing wrong with his belief, according to my account. The hermit may be blameworthy for his belief formation procedure—e.g., he may be blamed for his hasty epistemic generalization or the fact that in other contexts his belief would undermine Sanjeev's interests—but he is not blameworthy as a matter of undermining Sanjeev's degree of inquiry right. Thus, the hermit does not, according to my account, wrong Sanjeev.

Is this a problem for the degree of inquiry right? I do not think so. With *The Racist Construction Worker*, I have shown how true belief and beliefs formed from far away can undermine our interests. The hermit, as an isolated person, does not stand in a position to harm anyone else; there is no interest at stake with his belief. But so long as the racist believer is not a hermit, i.e., participating in society to *any degree* at all, then we can hold them responsible for a rights violation. Moreover, we can point to other wrongdoing-making features of the hermit's belief—both moral and epistemic—to explain the hermit's wrongdoing. Given that my account will capture any *non-hermit* zetetic activity and that it is compatible with other wrong-making features, I find this blemish does not give us good reason to reject the degree of inquiry right.

My analysis of *The Racist Construction Worker* and *The Racist Hermit* brings out two features of my account of degree of inquiry. First, the scope of relevant interests for the right is broader than we might have thought. One's concern about the well-being of one's group generates an interest. This interest, if I am right, is a sufficient reason to pose zetetic duties against others. When I haphazardly investigate into Sanjeev that undermine his interests in his social group, I've violated his right and thereby wronged him. Secondly, the degree of inquiry right can be violated from any distance, regardless of whether there is any risk that the belief will affect the person believed about, so long as the belief will contribute to racist structures.

Before moving on, let me field an objection. The account well-being and interests matters here. A hedonist might respond by saying that, since Sanjay will never know about the hasty investigations, the beliefs formed and the ensuing damage to his social group, the beliefs and the preceding inquiry do not really undermine his interests. They do not make him any worse off, according to hedonism, since they do not directly cause him any pain or distress. This seems correct, per hedonism. However, I outlined a broad account of the objective list theory of well-being above. If the well-being of one's social group is part of the list, then we can be worse off, even if we are not aware of the beliefs that harm our social group. More broadly, beliefs can make us worse off, even if we do not know about them directly.

Consider now a modified version of *Wounded by Belief*. In this case, we have a true belief that, I'll argue, wrongs.

Wounded by Disbelief: Sarah is on a third date with Jimmy. Jimmy seems to be a really interesting, genuine person. Jimmy, however, has odd beliefs. With a straight face, he abruptly tells Sarah of all of the strange conspiracy theories that he believes. It is his life's mission to stop the committee of time travelers bent of tormenting the greater tri-county area. Sarah finds it increasingly difficult to take such beliefs seriously: revealing a face of

one reopen inquiry. This may be to entertain counterevidence or rule out new alternatives, etc. It is, therefore, possible the hermit reopen inquiry, even after meeting a sufficiently high threshold of evidential support.

disbelief. And Jimmy can tell. Jimmy feels wronged by Sarah's disbelief. Has Sarah wronged Jimmy by not believing his conspiracies? Should Sarah apologize to Jimmy?

This is an instance of doxastic wronging, according to Basu's true belief account. Why is there a wronging? Following Strawson (1962) and Audre Lorde (1984), Basu suggests that feelings like resentment are "good indicators that some moral demand has not been met" (922). Jimmy's hurt feelings may reveal that some apology is due. To further see this, consider Basu's explanation of why it is wrong to mistake "a white man at a Beyonce concert for a staff member rather than a concert-goer" (924). She argues that, in this case, you would fail to see the concert-goer as he sees himself, and you would "observe him in the way a scientist observes the planets" (924). Similarly, when Sarah disbelieves Jimmy, she fails to identify Jimmy as he sees himself—a hero bent on stopping time travelers—and so she relates to him as a scientist might observe planets. This would, according to the account, wrong Jimmy.

This wronging is directed. Sarah's belief is likely something as follows: *Jimmy is wrong about these conspiracy theories*. The belief itself and its content, it seems, is what hurts Jimmy's feelings. Moreover, Sarah's belief is clearly true since Jimmy's beliefs are ludicrous. If this assessment is correct, then this account gets the wrong verdict in this case. It strongly seems as though Sarah should not believe Jimmy's strange beliefs: an implausible conclusion. Basu does not have any explanation as to why there is no wronging in this case. Without further explanation, Basu's true view is too weak.

The degree of inquiry right sidesteps a wronging in this case. According to the degree of inquiry right, we leave inquiry open for beliefs that matter for those believed about. However, we can close inquiry once we reach a high credence. Sarah, though, has reached this high degree of credence that Jimmy's views are false since Jimmy's beliefs are *so* far-fetched. Sarah can close inquiry without violating Jimmy's rights or wronging him. More specifically, she is in a strong enough epistemic position to answer Jimmy's most "reasonable" objections.

3.4 Against the Strawsonian Account

I want to entertain one more account of doxastic wronging: The Strawsonian Account of Doxastic Wronging. P.F. Strawson (1962) argues that we can view each other in at least two ways: the objective stance and the participant stance. According to the objective stance, we view others as objects to be "managed or handled," much like a scientist may view the object of her study. It is typically wrong to view people like this. According to Basu (2019a) and Marusic and White (2018), any belief that wrongs takes up the objective stance. Maria, for instance, wrongs Mark insofar as she views him as the object of study, rather than an autonomous person.

In support of this position, Basu (2019a) turns to Langton (1992):

We don't simply observe people as we might observe planets, we don't simply treat them as things to be sought out when they can be of use to us, and avoid when they are a nuisance. We are, as Strawson says, involved. (486)

Marusic and White are primarily interested in believing others' testimony and taking their views as serious evidence for the truth. However, Basu elaborates that to form negative beliefs about others often involves taking on the objective stance. Like Sherlock Holmes, we adopt problematic belief formation practices that ultimately insult the other person and treat them as an object.

Let me highlight one more strength of the zetetic explanation, broadly, over the dominant view. One of the hurdles over which doxastic wronging proponents often must vault is doxastic voluntarism. Doxastic voluntarism is the view that we exhibit some degree of control over what we

believe. But doxastic voluntarism has problems, for I cannot simply make myself believe that it is raining outside when it isn't.¹⁷ Many object to voluntarism on the grounds that we have no or sufficiently little control over what we believe, and that if we have no control over our beliefs then beliefs cannot be the kind of thing that wrongs. There's much more to be said here than I have the space for, and Basu and Schroeder (2019) have offered substantive responses. My point is that the degree of inquiry right can sidestep this entire problem altogether. Given that the degree of inquiry right is about *inquiry*, which we can generally choose to open and close, we avoid this problem. Thus, even if we have no control over belief, we can still make sense of these cases on my account.

An objector may press, however, that some beliefs are formed automatically and beliefs that are formed this way automatically close inquiry. Automatically forming the belief that it is raining closes inquiry for me about whether it is presently raining. Recall that belief formation matters for this account only insofar as beliefs can undermine interests. Such beliefs though do not wrong in and of themselves. What we owe one another comes down to a matter of inquiry solely, which we can typically leave open.

In some cases, however, belief formation forces us to close inquiry. Imagine that Maria, from *Wounded by Belief*, cannot help but form the belief that Mark is drunk. If Maria does something wrong, then my account, like the doxastic wronging proponent, runs into the involuntarist problem. I want to suggest that, when she automatically forms the belief, Maria does not wrong Mark in these circumstances. Much like a muscle reflex that causes some harm, there is nothing wrong about a this "kneejerk" closing of inquiry. However, Maria does wrong Mark by *failing to choose to open inquiry back up* when the belief undermines his interest. Consider that we can open inquiry for things that we already believe (in some cases about things that we are confident about). I am confident that vaccines do not cause autism. But, despite this, I can conduct an inquiry to the contrary of my belief, e.g., I can read the essays showing the correlation between vaccines and autism or read articles online. Thus, Maria's failure to reopen inquiry would wrong in this case and, consequently, the account avoids the involuntarism problem.

My account of the degree of inquiry right, I have argued, explains touchstone cases from the literature without the "baggage" that the dominant explanations carry with them. Before continuing, note that my account is an upstream version of doxastic wronging. Beliefs do wrong, but not necessarily the beliefs themselves, but rather the fact that inquiry is prematurely closed against another person's interests. This feature, I have argued, shows my account holds up in shifting, morally non-problematic contexts, which is a strength of the account. So, who cares whether the belief itself wrongs? What matters is that we can explain the intuitive wrongings done in these cases, which I have done.

As a last and tentative note, consider Schroeder's *Kantian Gambit*:

"If and when you interpret someone's behavior in causal terms, this explanation goes, you take the objective stance toward them, and if and when you take the objective stance toward someone, you thereby preclude the participant stance." (5)

Basu notes that sometimes treating someone as a person is perfectly compatible with treating them as a thing (930). Given this feature of the Strawsonian account, Basu admits that "perhaps...there are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions we can state for when beliefs wrong" (930). In response, I believe that my interest-based account gives us a sharper, though not yet complete, picture of when beliefs wrong. Violating another person's degree of inquiry right, this account goes, is sufficient for a belief that wrongs.

¹⁷ See Alston (1985, 1988) and Audi (2013)

Before continuing, I want to highlight one last strength of my account: It captures Basu's (2019b) intuitions about the "rational racist."

The Supposedly Rational Racist. You shouldn't have done it. But you did. You scrolled down to the comments section of an article concerning the state of race relations in America, and you are now reading the comments. The comments on such articles tend to be predictable, but there is one comment that catches your eye. Amongst the slurs, the get-rich-quick schemes, and the threats of physical violence, there is the following comment: "Although it might be 'unpopular' or 'politically incorrect' to say this, I'm tired of constantly being called a racist whenever I believe of a black diner in my section that they will tip worse than the white diners in my section." The user posting the comment, Spencer, argues that the facts don't lie, and he helpfully reproduces those facts. For example, he links to studies that show that on average black diners tip substantially less than white diners. The facts, he insists, aren't racist. If you were to deny his claims and were to believe otherwise, it would be you who is engaging in wishful thinking. It would be you who believes against the evidence. It would be you, not Spencer, who is epistemically irrational. (Basu 2019b, 2498)

Basu thinks that this is an example of a racist who, through objective research, comes to form a justified, true belief that Blacks tip less than Whites. For the sake of argument, let's assume that the rational racist forms true beliefs that are the result of "cool rationality" rather than "hot irrationality," i.e., they do not form racist beliefs on the basis of ill-will. But Basu thinks, rightly I believe, that *something* goes awry with the rational racist. My account of interests in the wellbeing of their social group captures this, while also leaving open the possibility of permissibly forming the belief (after a sufficient inquiry). Moreover, my account leaves open the possibility that true beliefs can wrong others. It is only after a thorough inquiry—an inquiry that tracks the stakes of the belief in question—that we can form a belief that undermines another's interests. Thus, Spencer's belief *could* be morally permissible, but only after a good faith inquiry endeavor.

I have already identified a number of interests we have in what they believe about us, even if we never found out about those beliefs. But, following Basu, we might think that "the world is an unjust place and there may be many morally objectionable beliefs that it justifies" (2512). In light of this fact, I think we have good reasons to use caution when forming beliefs about others. But certain beliefs should not be completely off limits. What we owe to others is an extensive, good-faith investigation when forming beliefs about one another.

This section has been at pains to show that the accounts of doxastic wronging available are either theoretically underwhelming or have implausible implications. I have argued that the degree of inquiry right explains the wronging in these above cases. Rather than the content of the belief, it is whether an agent properly "does her homework" that makes these cases wrong. I now move to objections to my account.

IV. Distinguishing the Zetetic Response

Consider a natural question: Why is the degree of inquiry right not simply moral encroachment or an "encroachment-akin" position masquerading as some other position? My answer is that, given the gap between the zetetic and the epistemic, the account here is wholly focused on the zetetic (Thorstad, 2022). Note that moral encroachment is the view that for some epistemic attitude p whether p has positive epistemic status, e.g., knowledge or justification, depends on the moral features of p (Bolinger, 2020). The central idea here is that the moral stakes can make it more difficult to be justified in believing that p or knowing that p . The degree of inquiry right, however, does not shift the evidential threshold. There is no change in the epistemic status of p in virtue of

violating another's degree of inquiry right. That is, one may be epistemically justified in forming a belief, but nevertheless not inquire sufficiently to the degree of inquiry right. The degree of inquiry right is about one's moral duty to inquire.¹⁸ But what zetetic standards are violated in when we fail to carry out the degree of inquiry right?

When we form an interest-undermining belief, I think that this should open several new questions, into which we must inquire. For instance, we need consider the reasons for thinking that proposition is false. Maria—the character from *Wounded by Belief*—forms the belief that her husband has fallen off the wagon. According to the moral encroacher, the moral stakes of the belief shift the evidential threshold such that she's not forming a rational belief. However, my position says that she's failing to consider the right sorts of questions and has not conducted an adequate investigation. She has not addressed convincing counterevidence. Because of this, she has done something morally wrong, even if she has adequate evidence for her belief that Mark's fallen off the wagon.

Unlike the moral encroacher, who claims that the moral stakes a belief change epistemic standards, e.g., the standards of evidence, the degree of inquiry right implies that beliefs that undermine interests trigger two things: (1) the standards for inquiry change, such that agents must address certain questions, possibilities, explanations, etc., and (2) failing to do (1) amounts to a morally problematic violation of one's rights. Thus, for interest undermining beliefs there is a zetetic problem, i.e., answering questions, etc., and a moral problem, i.e., the rights violation. This is all perfectly compatible with the possibility that an agent is rational to believe the interest-undermining belief.

I also want to distinguish my line of critique from others available in the literature. A common trend in the literature is to show that various cases of doxastic wronging are epistemically problematic. While I address two of these critiques momentarily, I want to say broadly that the analysis here deviates from this common strategy. Rather, I aim to show that there is a different *moral* problem in these cases. Instead of beliefs that directly wrong others, it is the *choice to inquire* that wrongs. Thus, my critique is not to say that these beliefs are irrational but to show that even these rationally formed beliefs are problematic, i.e., because they fail to meet a sufficient threshold of inquiry. In short, doxastic wronging proponents are correct to note that there is a moral wronging; they are just incorrect about *where* the wronging is precisely. In short, the wronging occurs at the level of inquiry, rather than at the content of the belief.

Gardiner (2018) argues the sorts of belief in the touch cases for moral encroachment are based upon insufficient evidence.¹⁹ She thinks that there's an epistemic mistake made. Given that there are epistemic mistakes in these cases, e.g., reasoning from demographics to predictions about individual behavior, these cases actually fail to motivate moral encroachment—and perhaps doxastic wronging—because those cases must assume that there are no epistemic mistakes. The objection I raise here, however, is different. What's happening in the cases, I think, is a different *moral* mistake, rather than an epistemic mistake. I've argued that we owe it to others to do one's due diligence when

¹⁸ One additional reason to think that the degree of inquiry right is not just moral encroachment is that I've argued that it is a zetetic duty. The degree of inquiry right is about inquiry, not necessarily about epistemic status. However, moral encroachment is a claim about the relationship between the moral stakes and an agent's epistemic status. If David Thorstad (2022) is correct that the zetetic and the epistemic are two separate domains, then the degree of inquiry right cannot be moral encroachment. See Arianna Falbo (2023) for a similar sort of argument and see Palmira (2020) for a contrary argument. Moreover, it is noteworthy that, if Thorstad is right about the gap between the zetetic and the epistemic, then it is likely the case that the degree of inquiry right is consistent with the truth of purism, i.e., the view that epistemic status is solely a matter of the degree of one's evidence. As stated, the degree of inquiry right is not a claim about one's epistemic status. It is solely a claim about the inquiry that one must do to meet one's moral obligation. One's epistemic status is not relevant. This seems to me to be consistent with the truth of purism.

¹⁹ Such cases include *The Cosmos Club*, *Administrative Assistant*, and *Tipping Prediction*.

deliberating about propositions that undermine their interests. The characters in these cases fail to meet that threshold and, thereby, commit a moral wrongdoing. Thus, the line of critique is distinct from other lines of critique because it identifies an alternate (zetetic, rather than epistemic) moral wrongdoing.

Osborne (2021), following Sanford Goldberg (2019, 2020), argues cases of doxastic wrongdoing from the literature can be explained away by value-reflecting reasons. Value-reflecting reasons are the practical reasons produced by what one values. He argues that in *Wronged by Belief* Maria has epistemic value-reflecting reasons, e.g., reasons to think Mark will stay sober because he values the relationship, reasons generated by the fact that she values her relationship with Mark. Given that Maria fails to consider these epistemic reasons, her belief is formed on an epistemic mistake. And, like Gardiner (2018) argues, the case fails to motivate the right intuitions for doxastic wrongdoing.

I am generally skeptical of this strategy of explaining away doxastic wrongdoing intuitions. This is because people often (1) hold conflicting values and (2) act in ways to undermine their values. Think about someone who tries to save money. We might imagine this person giving into the temptation to buy frivolous things. The fact that this person values saving money is no reason to think that they will act on this value. Values, and the fact that someone holds some value, do not provide accurate predictions of one's behaviors, since we so often act against those values or hold conflicting values. Thus, it strikes me that Maria is generally rational in her belief about Mark.

Now that the response here has been distinguished from other responses in the literature, I now address a concern about the coordination problem. To do that, I'll develop the account given here.

V. Zetetic Reasons and Evidential Standards

Before addressing objections, the argument hitherto has ignored a common picture of zetetic norms. According to this picture, zetetic reasons are a special kind of practical reason. They are reasons derived from a goal of figuring out or answering some question. Thus, if you have figured out a question, then you have no zetetic reason to seek out additional inquiry.

To get clearer on the problem, consider the following dialogue: ACCUSER: "You wronged me by prematurely closing inquiry and believing I fell off the wagon." DEFENDER: "Well, why should I not close inquiry? After all, I sufficient evidence to be rationally (or epistemically) justified in believing you fell off the wagon. Gathering further evidence would not be necessary for my belief having the adequate epistemic status." DEFENDER looks plausible—the speaker there does not seem to have any additional reason to pursue further inquiry. If DEFENDER is right, then it seems like whether we have zetetic reasons is contingent on evidential standards and whether we have evidence that measures up to those standards.²⁰

This is a problem for my position because I have largely assumed that (1) we have strict control over how much we inquire and (2) we often have good reason reopen inquiry even after we have sufficient evidence (such that we answer a question). Thus, it seems that my account violates this general account of zetetic reasons.

The picture I have painted here is only *prima facie* different. First, I think that meeting a certain level of evidence in relation to a question is generally sufficient for closing inquiry, though it is not necessary. It is not necessary because sometimes we decide to entertain less evidence than is sufficient for the evidential standards. For instance, my effort to figure out who Kanye West is dating may fall short of epistemic standards, simply because I don't care very much. But I also think that the degree of inquiry right can force us to *reopen* inquiry too.

²⁰ Many thanks to the reviewer for pressing me on this concern.

One can have zetetic obligations even after they have, say, figured out the answer to a question or met some evidential threshold. Much of my explanations above have assumed something like this. My account, I think, can appreciate the above picture of zetetic norms and make the following claim: inquiry can be required even if evidential thresholds have been met or one can answer a question.

The degree of inquiry right can obligate one to do more than *just* inquire. It may obligate some other zetetic-related activities, e.g., opening inquiry back up, entertaining counterarguments and counterevidence, producing good explanations of that counterevidence, etc. To open inquiry back up goes beyond the picture of zetetic reasons mentioned above. Unless we have some evidential reason to open inquiry back up, we have no reasons to continue pursuing a question. Rather, what the degree of inquiry right does is offer different sorts of reasons for opening inquiry or entertaining alternative explanations e.g., moral reasons.

Perhaps the way that ACCUSER can respond is something like, “I know you have a lot of evidence for thinking I’m drunk, but did you entertain the possibility that the academic speaker spilled her wine on me, and my breath smells this way because of my cold medicine? I think you need to entertain this evidence and these possibilities before closing inquiry. You owe me that much!” In such a case, it seems reasonable that ACCUSER would need to do additional investigation. I want to say that in many cases the zetetic demands of the degree of inquiry right will track with evidential standards. However, perhaps in particularly high stakes circumstance, further, zetetic-related things may also be required of an agent. In short, the account I have presented here, I think, can be consistent with this dominant picture of zetetic reasons. I now turn to some objections.

VI. Objections

Consider an objection: First, recall that I said that the degree of inquiry right applied to costly beliefs. Let’s call costly beliefs that are also formed too quickly *rash beliefs*. Recall that I have argued that reputation and relationships are interests of sufficient reason to ground the degree of inquiry right and thereby avoid rash beliefs. But perhaps this move is misguided. Why think that the wronging-making feature of this hasty inquiry is a rights violation? David Oderberg (2013) argues that rash beliefs violate a general moral obligation to be charitable. Oderberg argues that the moral obligations of charity involve benevolent interpretation of character evidence, as well as the degree of inquiry claim I have argued for. So why prefer my explanation over Oderberg’s charity explanation?

Consider a brief response: a general moral obligation to charity is too demanding. Charity strikes me as something above and beyond moral duty. If there were general duties to charity, then why not think that they would persistently demand we make the world better, an objection also posed against utilitarianism? Secondly, even if there is a general obligation to charity, it still does not follow that one needs to undertake Oderberg’s epistemic tasks. What matters for charity is treatment of the other person and not necessarily what we believe about them. A charitable person, I think, could believe that another person did something wrong but could nevertheless still act charitably toward (perhaps more charitably since this person does not likely deserve charitable treatment).

I have hitherto on briefly discussed the question of whether an interest in reputation, relationships, and the well-being of my group are a sufficient reason to merit a right. An objector may, therefore, point this out as a weakness of my account. After all, one million dollars is a fine thing and may be in my interest to acquire. But that interest does not generate a right that forces other people to give me enough money to meet my financial goals. Reputation, relationships, and interests in my social group’s well-being may be of the same sort.

In response, recall what I said above about libel and defamation. We commonly recognize duties to care for others' reputations in various contexts. It is generally considered wrong to disseminate false information with the intention of desecrating another's reputation or straining their relationships. If I spread a false rumor that another colleague has gotten a DUI in the past, then I am clearly doing something wrong. One plausible explanation of the wrongness in this case is that I undermine the colleague's interests in a decent reputation. It, therefore, seems plausible to think that we have an interest in maintaining a good reputation, and perhaps that I have violated his right to a decent reputation among and relationship with his peers. Thus, an interest in reputation and relationships strongly seem to generate various rights.

Consider a separate but related issue: By withholding money from me, other people seem to undermine my interests, but this interest undermining does not seem wrong. This raises a question: What kinds of "interest undermining" violate one's rights? And what kinds of interest undermining are morally permissible?

For an answer to this question, let us return to Raz. One of the conditions of having a right is that "an aspect of x's well-being (his interest) *is a sufficient reason* for holding other person(s) to be under a duty" (195, my emphasis). Raz argues that what makes an interest a "sufficient reason" for establishing a right may vary with one's moral theory. However, he argues that an interest is sufficient so long as one can provide an argument showing (1) that a rights-holder has an interest in x; (2) that the interest in x is important enough to generate a duty for others; and (3) that there are no contrary considerations—e.g., the rights-holder's interest in x violates other people's interests. Raz does not define precisely what makes an interest sufficiently important to generate a duty, but we might think that an interest is important if violating it ends my life, significantly disrupts the trajectory of my life, or causes me some serious inconvenience or harm. Thus, to return to the objection, even though withholding money from me may violate my interest in making a million dollars, Raz might say that either my interest is not important enough to generate a duty for others or that there are contrary considerations, e.g., other people's interest in keeping their own money. Note that a violation of one's relationships and reputation could interrupt my life or constitute a serious inconvenience.

The proposal here, upon further inspection, seems oddly similar to the doxastic wronging account.²¹ As mentioned in the previous section, zetetic reasons are largely subordinate to epistemic standards. If this is correct, then my account does not appear to be all that distinct from the accounts of doxastic wronging mentioned above. For instance, consider that Basu and Schroeder might claim that beliefs are wrong (in virtue of the belief being justified), while my view states that lack of inquiry is what's wrong (largely in virtue of the belief that follows from the inquiry being unjustified). Thus, how different are the two perspectives?

Moreover, as I mentioned in the previous section, being justified is not always sufficient for whether an inquiry meets the degree of inquiry right. For instance, the degree of inquiry right might demand that we open inquiry back up, entertain counterevidence, etc. I do not think that the doxastic wronging account has anything like this.

To see this, recall the perfectly justified DEFENDER. If ACCUSER's follow up—about alternate, uneliminated alternatives—is plausible, then DEFENDER must open inquiry back up as per the degree of inquiry right. That is, even though DEFENDER is perfectly justified, this alone is not sufficient for meeting the degree of inquiry right, assuming it can require inquiry-related behaviors.

Why are rights violations not just a violation of the objective stance? For instance, why not think that failing at doing one's duty to inquire simply violates the objective stance? It may be that

²¹ Thanks to the reviewer for this interesting objection.

undermining others' interests—including their interests in what others believe—is just an instance of the objective stance. I think that this is compatible with my argument so far. What I've tried to show is that taking on the objective stance with *our beliefs* is too strong. My target is not the objective stance in general. Rather it is understanding beliefs—in and of themselves—in terms of an adoption of the objective stance. One relevant difference here is that the wronging does not occur at the belief itself, but rather it occurs at the level of inquiry one puts forth when one forms a belief that undermines another's interests. Thus, the difference here lies in identifying different wronging-making features.²²

At this point, I must say more about conflicting considerations. There's a plethora of contrary considerations that must be weighed against one another. For instance, my crooked financier might have a deep interest in being seen as a good guy. Does this mean that I owe it to him to do further investigation when I suspect he's burning my money away? If my account says that I must pursue further evidence in this case, then this is a problem.

Consider, moreover, a case about inquiry "trade-off." The idea here is that my account cannot plausibly handle instances of inquiry trade-off. Instead of understanding doxastic wronging in terms of rights, perhaps we merely have moral reasons to inquire more about each other when our interests are at stake. This case may pose a problem for my account of the degree of inquiry right.

Oncologist. Sam is a renowned surgical oncologist. When he is not meeting with patients or performing surgeries, he is reading the latest studies and journal in his field. Keeping up with the research better helps him perform life-saving tasks. It's clear that nearly all his epistemic space is occupied with research relevant to oncology. Suppose that at the end of a long surgery Sam overhears gossip that a new resident in the hospital, James, slept with one of the other residents. Sam, exhausted from his day, forms the belief that James slept with the other resident.²³

Given Sam's limited—and vitally important—epistemic resources, it seems as though he's got overriding reasons not to go about investigating whether James has slept with the other resident. However, if believing this involves violating James's degree of inquiry right, then it might be wrong of Sam not to seek out more evidence. But this does not seem plausible. A better explanation here, the objection goes, is that we have mere moral reasons to inquire about others, moral reasons that do not amount to moral rights. If this is right, then Sam has an overriding reason not to inquire more, where on the rights view it is not as clear that he does have an overriding reason.

As a tentative response, I contend that rights can conflict with other duties. This shows that, sometimes, the duties following from the degree of inquiry right might be defeated by some other duty, e.g., the doctor's duty to his patients. One reason to think this is that patients have a stronger interest in having a doctor who is up to date on the most cutting-edge literature than I have in having a solid reputation. Moreover, I have a stronger interest in keeping my finances than my crooked financier has in his reputation. By *stronger interest* I mean that a greater degree of my well-being rides on the interest. For instance, my interest in not dying is greater than my interest in friendship because dying undermines my wellbeing much more than, say, losing a friend. Thus, our

²² Thanks to the reviewer for this interesting objection.

²³ Thanks to [redacted] for this case and objection.

interests in reputation and relationships—the interests I’m arguing ground the degree of inquiry right—compete against a number of other (stronger and weaker) interests.²⁴

We may worry, moreover, that the degree of inquiry right bottoms out at some more fundamental interest—and consequently can be captured by a more general right. A good candidate is the right to privacy. The interest in what other’s believe of us, moreover, is present in the interest to privacy. Basu (2021) argues that the right to privacy generates various epistemic obligations against others. This may mean that, per the interest theory of rights, we have some interest in what others believe of us, e.g., concerning our own privacy. If the degree of inquiry right does bottom out at the more general right to privacy, I think that’s fine for the degree of inquiry right, though I’m skeptical.²⁵ I think that these three interests—reputation, relationships, and well-being of one’s social group—are each general and fundamental enough to provide sufficient reason for the right in and of themselves. The core claim that I endorse here is that the right to inquiry is subordinate to other, more pressing interests and concerns.

VII. Conclusion

This paper has argued for a conception of the connection between moral and zetetic norms. I have argued that we owe it to one another—as a matter of moral rights—to inquire more when a belief would undermine the interests of another person. The interests at stake—reputation, relationships, and the well-being of our social group—render some beliefs with a with a more rigorous zetetic requirements.

I have argued that this proposal threatens the dominant views of doxastic wrongdoing in the literature. The degree of inquiry right (and, more importantly, zetetic reasons in general) can capture intuitions from touchstone cases and avoid problems that these proposals face. My view can make sense of the cases in the literature without philosophical baggage. The degree of inquiry right also offers more theoretically sound explanations of the touchstone cases from the literature because the account moves the wrongdoing from the epistemic domain to the zetetic domain. If the argument here is correct, this should raise serious concerns for the doxastic wrongdoing theorist. One general upshot of this paper is that zetetic explanations put pressure on the intuitive pull of many cases of doxastic wrongdoing.

²⁴ Appealing to strength of interests here will still run into objections. How strong an interest is will not always be a determining factor for whether we have a right. Consider, for instance, a general who at a moment’s notice can command a person to likely die. This is an appropriate use of his power. This general, however, cannot command that a person have sex with him. The soldier likely has a stronger interest in not dying than he does in not having sex with the general; however, the former is appropriate, where the latter is not. Thus, rights do not necessarily track strength. I do not yet have a response to this concern.

²⁵ For more about the relationship between general rights and more specific rights, see Dworkins (1977).

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