

Following The Argument Where It Leads

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Abstract: Throughout the history of western philosophy, the Socratic injunction to ‘follow the argument where it leads’ has exerted a powerful attraction. But what is it, exactly, to follow the argument where it leads? I explore this intellectual ideal and offer a modest proposal as to how we should understand it. On my proposal, following the argument where it leaves involves a kind of *modalized reasonableness*. I then consider the relationship between the ideal and common sense or ‘Moorean’ responses to revisionary philosophical theorizing.

1. Introduction

Bertrand Russell devoted the thirteenth chapter of his *History of Western Philosophy* to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. He concluded his discussion with a rather unflattering assessment:

There is little of the true philosophic spirit in Aquinas. He does not, like the Platonic Socrates, set out to follow wherever the argument may lead. He is not engaged in an inquiry, the result of which it is impossible to know in advance. Before he begins to philosophize, he already knows the truth; it is declared in the Catholic faith. If he can find apparently rational arguments for some parts of the faith, so much the better: If he cannot, he need only fall back on revelation. The finding of arguments for a conclusion given in advance is not philosophy, but special pleading. I cannot, therefore, feel that he deserves to be put on a level with the best philosophers either of Greece or of modern times (1945: 463).

The extent to which this is a fair assessment of Aquinas is controversial.¹ My purpose in what follows, however, is not to defend Aquinas; nor is it to substantiate the charges that Russell brings against him. Rather, my purpose is to explore the underlying intellectual ideal of which he allegedly falls short.

There is no question that the ideal of “following the argument where it leads” is one that has exerted a powerful attraction in the history of Western philosophy. As one might

¹For a recent exchange on the question, see Nelson (2001) and Oppy (2001).

expect given Russell's invocation of "Plato's Socrates", the theme is a recurrent one in the Platonic corpus. Thus, in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates declares that "the lover of inquiry must follow his beloved wherever it may lead him" (14c). In the *Republic*, he instructs his interlocutors that "...wherever the argument, like a wind, tends, there we must go" (394d; Cf. *Phaedo* 107b). And in the *Crito*, he offers the following self-description: "I am the kind of man who listens only to the argument that on reflection seems best to me" (46b). The ideal is also invoked by many later thinkers. For example, John Stuart Mill, in the midst of his defense of the freedom of conscience in *On Liberty*, declares that "No one can be a great thinker who does not recognize that as a thinker it is his first duty to follow his intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead" (1859/1978: 32). To this day, great philosophers who embraced strange conclusions are praised in eulogies for their willingness to follow the argument where it leads², and the ideal is mentioned in faculty handbooks in the context of discussions of academic freedom.³

In addition to not addressing the justice of Russell's assessment of Aquinas, there is another issue made salient by this passage that I will largely pass over. When Russell tells us that "if [Aquinas] can find apparently rational arguments for the faith, so much the better; if he cannot, he need only fall back on revelation", he adverts to one of the most vigorously contested issues in the history of Western thought: the issue of what kinds of considerations might legitimately ground religious belief. Indeed, especially in view of the fact that Russell was a particularly prominent and prolific critic of religious belief,

² See, e.g., Tim Crane, "David Lewis", in *The Independent*, October 23rd, 2001.

³ "A university is characterized by the spirit of free inquiry, its ideal being that of Socrates—to follow the argument where it leads". *Rice University Faculty Handbook*, (Spring 1999 edition).

one might very well think that that is the main point of the passage. In any case, one could certainly use the passage to motivate a discussion devoted to the philosophy of religion. But for better or for worse, that kind of thing is not on the agenda here. Instead, I will proceed on the assumption that the vices of which Russell accuses Aquinas (being inappropriately committed to the truth of some conclusion before inquiry commences, and so on) might also be manifested by a thoroughly secular thinker on behalf of some purely secular view. For example, we can imagine an applied ethicist who comes to philosophy irrevocably committed to a certain view about abortion or capital punishment, where there are no theological or quasi-theological motivations in play.

Interestingly, Russell himself seemed to think that the relevant vice is extremely common, indeed completely pervasive, in ethics. Thus, almost four hundred pages before his discussion of Aquinas, he offers the following rather sweeping generalization:

One of the defects of all philosophers since Plato is that their inquiries into ethics proceed on the assumption that they already know the conclusions to be reached (1945: 79).

Here Russell seems to suggest that the relevant vice is more or less universal, at least among philosophers after Plato in their ethical inquiries. In fact, one of the tacks that has sometimes been taken by defenders of Aquinas is to claim the following: even if Russell is correct that Aquinas has certain pre-philosophical commitments that he is not genuinely open to revising in the course of inquiry, it is simply naïve to think that the same is not true of other thinkers, including the very greatest philosophers. (Even if it is more obvious in Aquinas' case, because the commitments in question are orthodox religious doctrines, any secular philosopher will have her own commitments, which have similar status for her.)

While undoubtedly much could be said about this issue, here I will offer just one observation. I take it that, even if it is conceded for the sake of the argument that *everyone* will inevitably fall short when it comes to “following the argument where it leads”, that alone has no tendency to show that this putative ideal—however exactly we should understand it—is not a genuine one. Among other things, even if all of us will inevitably fall short of the relevant standard, it might nevertheless be possible to do a better or worse job of approaching or approximating it. Indeed, it would be surprising if this were not the case. That is a familiar point about ideals, and one which I take to apply to norms of belief no less than to norms of behavior.⁴

Indeed, in attempting to understand what it is to “follow the argument where it leads”, I will proceed on the assumption that that there *is* a genuine intellectual ideal here, and that a person who succeeds in adhering to it manifests a genuine intellectual virtue. Of course, to assume that following the argument where it leads is a genuine intellectual ideal is not to assume that doing so always has overriding importance, any more than to assume that truth-telling is a moral ideal commits one to thinking that there are no circumstances in which it is permissible to lie. (The content of our working hypothesis is not: “follow the argument where it leads, though the heavens fall”.)

But how should we understand this ideal?

2. A Modest Proposal

⁴ Compare the way in which the Bayesian will claim that having beliefs that are probabilistically coherent is a genuine rational ideal for believers while freely admitting that no actual believer can be expected to fully satisfy it. For an excellent defense of unattainable ideals for rational belief, see Chapter 6 of Christensen (2004), “Logic and Idealization”.

Presumably, one might fail to follow the argument where it leads in virtue of making an honest intellectual mistake, just as one might simply botch some arithmetical calculation and arrive at the wrong number for an answer. It also seems that someone might fail to follow the argument where it leads because he is too tired to do so, or too distracted, or has had too much to drink. However, it is a striking fact that the importance of adhering to the ideal is seldom if ever mentioned in such contexts. Rather, the importance of adhering to the ideal is typically emphasized when the concern is that the relevant audience might be *unwilling* to draw the conclusions which emerge in the course of the inquiry: either because they are in the grip of some religious or ideological dogma, or because they are overly reluctant to deviate from common sense or the views held by their peers, or because they think that it would be morally objectionable to believe certain things, or for some other such reason. One stresses the importance of following the argument where it leads when one suspects that others might be too dogmatic, biased, timid, or politically correct to do so.

According to Russell, Aquinas' commitment to certain views is such that he is not genuinely open to abandoning them in response to considerations that might emerge in the course of a properly conducted inquiry. The outcome of the inquiry is inevitable; the conclusions to be reached are "fixed in advance" (462). Similarly, in the twentieth century Karl Popper (1959) charged that many Marxists and Freudians would retain their theories in the face of any evidence whatsoever: according to Popper, such thinkers in effect treat the core doctrines of Marxism and Freudianism as unfalsifiable. Let us say that someone is a *perfect dogmatist* with respect to some view that he holds just in case there is literally nothing that he would count as good reason to abandon it. Notice that to

accuse me of perfect dogmatism with respect to some view is not yet to go so far as to say that there are no possible circumstances in which I would give it up. (For example, perhaps I would abandon the view under hypnosis, or if you slapped me in the face hard enough.) Rather, it is to say that there is no possible body of evidence or argument that I would treat as a good reason to change my mind.⁵

Dogmatism admits of degrees. At one end of the spectrum is the ideal case, the perfect dogmatist, whose dogmatism is pure and unadulterated. Of course, one's dogmatism might be extreme even if it falls short of perfection. (Imagine a Marxist who truthfully reports that he would abandon his Marxism in exactly one evidential circumstance: the heavens arrange themselves so as to spell out "Marxism is false" in his native language.) At the other end of the spectrum are more modest varieties, as when someone clings to a belief a bit too long when presented with reasons to think it false but abandons it when the case is further strengthened. The extent to which one holds a belief dogmatically is a matter of how robust or resilient one's belief is in unfavorable epistemic circumstances. It concerns one's disposition to retain the belief in the face of reasons for thinking that it is false. While there are a number of different ways in which one might

⁵ On one traditional conception of the *a priori*, it is the distinguishing mark of an *a priori* truth that one is rationally entitled to believe it in the face of any possible evidence. For this very reason, a historically popular charge on the part of empiricists against rationalists is that the latter are dogmatists: the rationalists claim to know certain substantive truths about the world that are simply not susceptible to being undermined by any considerations that might emerge in the course of subsequent inquiry. (The title of Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" is, in part, an attempt to play on this history of criticism for purposes of provocativeness.) Contemporary rationalists, however, typically eschew this traditional conception and emphasize that *a priori* justification, like a *posteriori* justification, is defeasible. See, e.g., BonJour (1998).

attempt to make this vague idea more precise, let us proceed at the intuitive level for now.⁶

How does the thick concept *dogmatic* relate to the thin concept *unreasonable*? It is natural to assume that if someone's commitment to a view is dogmatic, then his belief is unreasonable. However, I think that this natural assumption is mistaken. Indeed, I'm inclined to think that even perfect dogmatism is compatible with reasonable believing. For example, I believe that my mother loved me when I was a young child, and I have a great deal of evidence that she did. Perhaps it would be so traumatic for me to abandon this belief that I would retain it no matter what the state of available evidence. (If the evidence available to me which bears on the question started to become unfavorable, certain psychological mechanisms would be triggered which would prevent me from responding to that evidence in the appropriate way.) Even if that's so, given the actual state of my evidence, my belief that my mother loved me is perfectly reasonable. Thus, the fact that one is dogmatically committed to a belief does not entail that one's belief is unreasonable.

One might try to defend the idea that there is an entailment here by appealing to a familiar distinction between *propositional* and *doxastic* justification. Consider two different ways in which a belief that one holds might be unreasonable. First, one might lack adequate reasons to think that the belief is true. Alternatively, one might possess

⁶For an alternative view of the vice of dogmatism, see Audi (1988: 432-435).

A note about terminology is also in order here. In what follows, I will employ the term "dogmatism" and its cognates so that they function as terms of negative epistemic appraisal. In this sense, "dogmatism" picks out a *thick* epistemic concept, and to call someone a dogmatist is *ipso facto* to criticize that person (or at least, to offer a negative evaluation of him or her). I believe that this is a common usage in contemporary Western culture, but it is not the only one. For example, "dogmatic" does not function as a term of criticism as it used by either the Catholic Church or Jim Pryor (2000).

such reasons but fail to hold the belief on their basis. Suppose, for example, that I both believe that you are a slacker and have strong evidence that this is so. Suppose further, however, that this evidence plays no psychological role in my believing as I do; rather, I believe that you are a slacker simply because you are a member of some racial or ethnic group that I despise. In these circumstances, even though I have propositional justification for the belief that you are a slacker, my belief itself is doxastically unjustified. Someone attempting to defend the idea that dogmatic commitment to a belief entails that one's belief is unjustified or unreasonable might claim that, in any case like the one described in the previous paragraph, the person's belief is doxastically unjustified (even though he or she possesses propositional justification for believing the relevant proposition).

However, this suggestion does not withstand scrutiny. Suppose that I'm looking directly at my son and can see clearly that he's perfectly fine; among other things, I believe that he has not just been killed in a horrific car accident. In these circumstances, not only do I possess propositional justification for the belief that my son has not just been killed in a horrific accident, but my belief is doxastically justified as well: it is not as though my belief is psychologically encapsulated or cut off from the justifying grounds provided by my current perception of my son. Moreover, my belief has this status even if there are psychological mechanisms that would prevent me from abandoning it in counterfactual circumstances in which my evidence suggests that it is false. Notice that in this example, as in the previous example involving my belief that my mother loved me, it is not simply that the fact that I believe as I do is overdetermined. Rather, the cases are ones of asymmetrical overdetermination, in which the compelling evidence on which I

base my belief is the preempting cause, and the psychological mechanisms that guarantee that I would still believe even in the absence of that evidence are preempted. Thus, I think that we should admit that someone's belief might be reasonable, even if his or her commitment to that belief is dogmatic in the relevant sense. Indeed, I suspect that this phenomenon is not uncommon.⁷

Even though a belief to which one is dogmatically committed might be reasonable, there are, presumably, important connections between dogmatism and unreasonableness. When one's commitment to a belief is dogmatic, one would hold it even if the evidence were unfavorable: if such circumstances were to obtain, one would believe unreasonably. Unreasonableness is the manifestation of dogmatism in evidentially unfavorable environments. On the other hand, when one is in an evidentially favorable environment, the tendency of dogmatism to manifest itself in unreasonableness might be masked, at least to some extent. The reason why even perfect dogmatism is consistent with reasonable believing is that whether one's belief is reasonable typically depends on the evidence that one actually possesses, and on the psychological relationship between that evidence and one's belief that actually obtains. Holding a belief on the basis of compelling evidence is sufficient for reasonable believing; in particular, one's reasonableness in the actual world is not undermined by what is true in possible worlds at

⁷ A possible example: along with many other people, I hold the belief that men and women are more or less equally intelligent. I also believe that, given the evidence available to me that bears on the question, that is a reasonable opinion for me to hold. (Certainly, I can imagine my evidence being quite different: for example, all the intelligent people I know are women, and all of the unintelligent people are men. But that's not how my evidence is: in fact, it seems to me that there isn't any interesting distribution of intelligence relative to sex.) However, I also suspect that my commitment to this belief is at least somewhat dogmatic. That is, I suspect that if evidence began to accumulate that, e.g., women were more intelligent than men, or vice versa, I would cling to my belief in equality, for at least some period of time.

a distance, even if the closest possible worlds in which one's evidence is unfavorable are also worlds in which one still holds the belief.

My suggestion is that even if dogmatic commitment is compatible with reasonableness, it is not compatible with genuinely following the argument where it leads. In order to fully satisfy the ideal, one must not hold any views that have been discredited in the course of the inquiry; in addition, it must be true of those views that one does hold, that one is disposed to abandon them in the event that the inquiry turns against them. Someone who lacks dogmatic commitments to any of the views under discussion more perfectly exemplifies the ideal than someone who has such commitments, even if, given the state of the inquiry as things stand, the views of both are reasonable. In this respect, following the argument where it leads is a more demanding standard than believing reasonably or having beliefs that are proportioned to the evidence: the former involves a deeper modal aspect than the latter.

In addition to dogmatic commitments, there are also what we might call *dogmatic aversions*. Perhaps there are some propositions that I'm dogmatically averse to believing, in the sense that I wouldn't believe them even if my evidence strongly suggested that they were true: my not believing them is quite robust. Someone who perfectly fulfilled the ideal of following the argument where it leads would lack not only dogmatic commitments but also dogmatic aversions.

I mention this explicitly because some philosophers have held that there is an important normative asymmetry between (1) believing something when the available reasons strongly suggest that it is false, and (2) refraining from believing something when the available reasons strongly suggest that it is true. Notably, both Bernard Williams

(1973) and Robert Nozick (1993) have claimed that, while there is something objectionable about holding a pleasant belief in the face of strong evidence, it is at any rate much less objectionable to simply refrain from holding an unpleasant belief that is well-supported by the evidence.⁸ Indeed, according to the norms of belief revision proposed by Nozick, while one should not hold a belief that is unlikely to be true given one's evidence (even if doing so would have high expected utility), it is perfectly permissible to *refrain* from holding a belief that *is* well-supported by one's evidence if the expected utility of refraining exceeds the expected utility of believing (85-86).

Whatever might be said on behalf of such a system of norms, it seems clear that someone who revised his beliefs in this way, discriminating among equally well-supported views on the basis of considerations of utility, would not be following the argument where it leads. (In terms of the Socratic metaphor: such a person's beliefs would not be carried along by the argument, in the way that the leaves are carried along by the wind.)

Thus, in order to fulfill the ideal, one must not only refrain from believing discredited views, one must also hold any view that is adequately supported at a given stage in the inquiry. Moreover, just as there is a modal aspect to the former, so too there is a modal aspect to the latter. That is, in order to fully satisfy the ideal, it is not enough that one holds all of those views that are well-supported by the argument at any given stage, on

⁸According to Williams: "...there is almost certainly a genuine asymmetry here, tied in to the asymmetry that while every belief I have ought ideally to be true, it is not the case that every truth ought ideally to be something I believe: belief aims at truth, knowledge does not similarly aim at completeness" (p.151). Nozick writes: "It is clear that many things are irrational to believe. It is less clear that some beliefs are so credible that they are mandated by rationality, so that it is irrational not to hold them when you hold no belief about the matter at all" (pp.87-88). (Compare those in ethics who think that there is a morally significant distinction between acts and omissions.)

the basis of the considerations that support them; in addition, one must be prepared to take up any view that one does not currently hold, should the argument turn in its favor. (If one is dogmatically averse to holding some view that is under discussion, one does not get off the hook simply because the view is not well-supported as things actually stand.)⁹

On the present account then, following the argument where it leads involves a kind of *modalized reasonableness*: one tracks the state of the argument through time, both in what one believes and what one refrains from believing. Suppose that p and q are among the propositions that are at issue in the inquiry in which one is engaged. If one believes p, then it will typically be true both that:

- (1) One's belief that p is reasonable, and
- (2) If it were not reasonable for one to believe that p, then one would not believe that p.

Similarly, where q is a proposition that one does *not* believe, it will typically be true that:

- (3) It is reasonable for one to refrain from believing q, and
- (4) If it were not reasonable for one to refrain from believing q, then one would believe q.

One might attempt to incorporate these conditions into a reductive analysis of following the argument where it leads.¹⁰ However, I think that the prospects for such an

⁹ Compare Brand Blanshard:

What is creditable...is not the mere belief in this or that, but the having arrived at it by a process which, had the evidence been different, would have carried one with equal readiness to a contrary belief (1974: 413).

¹⁰ Such an account would parallel Nozick's (1981) "tracking" account of knowledge, according to which (roughly) one knows that p just in case one's true belief that p is counterfactually sensitive to whether p obtains. On the envisaged account, one is following the argument where it leads with respect to p just in case one's believing p is counterfactually sensitive, not to the truth of p, but rather to the reasonableness of believing p given the state of the argument at a particular point in time.

analysis are bleak, as it would immediately confront the kinds of problems that bedevil conditional analyses more generally. For example, perhaps the closest possible worlds in which one's evidence fails to support *p* are worlds in which the process responsible for this difference also affects one's rationality in a way that leads one to unreasonably believe *p*. In that case, the relevant counterfactual (2) would be false. But this does not mean that one in any way falls short of the ideal in the actual world, given that here one both reasonably believes *p* and is genuinely disposed to abandon that belief in the event that the evidence becomes unfavorable. For parallel reasons, (4) is not a plausible candidate to play the role of a necessary condition in an analysis. However, although neither (2) nor (4) is a necessary condition for following the argument where it leads, in typical cases an inquirer who adheres to the ideal will satisfy them with respect to the views under discussion.

A more promising account eschews counterfactuals and appeals directly to dispositions to change one's mind. Replacing conditions (2) and (4) above, we thus arrive at the following modest proposal.

FOLLOWING THE ARGUMENT WHERE IT LEADS. One who is engaged in an inquiry is *following the argument where it leads* just in case:

(A) For any proposition *p* at issue in the inquiry which one believes:

(1) One's belief that *p* is reasonable, and

(2*) One is disposed to abandon one's belief that *p* in response to its becoming unreasonable for one to believe that *p*

and

(B) For any proposition *q* at issue in the inquiry which one does *not* believe:

(3) One's refraining from believing p is reasonable, and

(4*) One is disposed to acquire the belief that q in response to its becoming unreasonable for one to refrain from believing q .

It is tempting to think that someone who follows the argument where it leads will be open to believing *anything at all* at the beginning of inquiry: for her, nothing is ruled out in advance. Even if exceptions are made for such special cases as propositions that are obviously self-contradictory, it is in any case natural to think that such a person will at least come to the inquiry *open to believing anything that might be true*.¹¹ But even that much seems dubious. Roy Sorensen (1988a) has argued for the existence of “overshadowed hypotheses”: perfectly consistent hypotheses that cannot be rationally believed regardless of the evidence in their favor.¹² Similarly, Adam Elga and Andy Egan (2005) have argued that there are limits to the kinds of “anti-expertise” that one can rationally attribute to oneself, even if one *is*, in fact, an anti-expert of the relevant kind, and even if others rationally believe this on the basis of the evidence. (Notice that unflattering truths about oneself are exactly the kind of thing that proponents of the ideal tend to emphasize one should not shy away from believing.) In view of this, it is, I think,

¹¹ As William James wrote in “The Will to Believe”: “A rule of thinking that would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truths if those kinds of truths were really there, would be an irrational rule” (p.28).

¹² Sorensen offers the following examples:

- (1) It is raining but it is not the case that I believe it.
- (2) My memory is completely unreliable.
- (3) Perpetual motion machines are impossible but I am trying to build one.
- (4) The successor of the largest number ever conceived is 8,392,192,043.
- (5) Sentience is impossible.
- (6) The world popped into existence five minutes ago complete with fossil records, ‘memories’, and so on.

a virtue of the account on offer that it does not guarantee that “following the argument where it leads” requires an openness to believing anything, even anything that might be true or for which genuine evidence might exist. Rather, what seems true of the person who adheres to the ideal is this: she is genuinely open to believing anything that it might become reasonable for her to believe. If there are overshadowed hypotheses, then it is not a mark of dogmatism that there are no possible circumstances in which one would come to believe them, despite the fact that there are possible circumstances in which those hypotheses are true, and reasonably believed to be true by others.¹³

Of course, many questions could be asked about an account along these general lines, and various possible refinements naturally suggest themselves.¹⁴ I will not pursue these more detailed matters here. In Section 4, I will consider a number of relatively fundamental objections, according to which the account on offer is on the wrong track entirely. First, however, I want to take up the question of the relationship between the ideal and common sense.

3. The Ideal and Common Sense

¹³ Here I follow Sorensen, who explicitly addresses the “dogmatism” charge (pp.391-392). But see also Christensen (forthcoming).

¹⁴For example, a more straightforward fourth condition reads as follows:

(4**) One is disposed to acquire the belief that *q* in response to its becoming reasonable for one to believe that *q*.

If we assume that it is reasonable for an individual to believe *q* if and only if it is unreasonable for him to refrain from believing *q*, then (4*) and (4**) come to the same thing. However, that assumption is controversial. In particular, it is controversial whether it is reasonable to believe *q* only if it is unreasonable to refrain from believing *q*. For discussion of this issue, see White (2005).

Suppose that a philosopher comes to accept certain principles, either on the basis of arguments, or because they seem intuitively compelling to him. It then emerges that those principles, perhaps in conjunction with highly plausible collateral assumptions, entail radically revisionary conclusions about what there is, or what we know, or what we are morally required to do. (For example: that there are no tables, or rocks, or human beings; or that, for all one knows, one's own mind is the only thing of its kind in existence; or that if the only way to save five people dying for want of some vital organ is to overpower and harvest the organs of some innocent sixth person, then one is not only morally permitted but required to do so.) Rather than modify or abandon some principle or collateral assumption, the philosopher departs from common sense and endorses the radically revisionary conclusion. Often, such a philosopher will be praised for "following the argument where it leads", i.e., for not shying away from endorsing the conclusions to which he is committed by his principles. Moreover, it is a striking fact that such praise is often forthcoming *even when those who offer it do not themselves accept the revisionary conclusions in question*.¹⁵ Conversely, attempts to resist radically revisionary theorizing by 'Moorean' appeals to common sense are frequently criticized on the grounds that such

¹⁵ Some examples: Rosenberg (1993: 701) on van Inwagen (1990); Lewis (2000: 154) on Unger (1996); and Russell (1945: 78) on the Sophists.

The back cover of Oxford's 2002 re-issue of Peter Unger's radical manifesto *Ignorance: A Case for Skepticism* features a summary of his main conclusions (among them: 'no one can ever be happy or sad about anything', 'no one can ever believe, or even say, that anything is the case') immediately followed by a glowing blurb from the decidedly non-skeptical Ernest Sosa. The blurb begins as follows: "Unger follows the argument to great depth, wherever it may lead..."

appeals are dogmatic, and we have treated dogmatism as the antithesis of following the argument where it leads.¹⁶

However, if the modest proposal offered above is on the right track, we should be skeptical of the suggestion that whenever one departs from common sense for reasons of philosophical principle, one thereby manifests the intellectual virtue of following the argument where it leads. Indeed, we should not even assume that a person who clings to common sense in the face of a philosophical argument to which he can offer no adequate reply is thereby guilty of failing to follow the argument where it leads. For example, consider Zeno's ingenious arguments for the impossibility of motion. Given the history of our understanding of the concept of infinity, it's extremely likely that none of Zeno's contemporaries possessed sufficient sophistication to offer an adequate diagnosis of where his reasoning breaks down. Imagine then the position of one of Zeno's unsophisticated neighbors, the Average Eleatic, upon encountering one of Zeno's arguments for the first time. The Average Eleatic freely admits that he can identify no false premise or fallacious step in the argument. Nevertheless, he steadfastly retains his belief that motion is possible, and indeed, that a great deal of it actually occurs. Isn't this a paradigm of dogmatism and unreasonableness, and (therefore) of failing to follow the argument where it leads?¹⁷

¹⁶For the charge of dogmatism in this context, see Lehrer (1971: 292-293), Stroud (1984: 279) and Unger (1975: 25). For recent defenses of Moorean appeals to common sense against the charge, see especially Lycan (2001) and also Kelly (2005, 2008).

¹⁷ Indeed, in some respects, the stance of the Average Eleatic might seem to be about as bad as it gets. Consider, for example, the contrast between his stance and that taken by Pryor's (2000) "reasonable dogmatist". According to Pryor, one can be justified in holding perceptual beliefs even if one is not in a position to offer non-question-begging arguments for those beliefs against the skeptic. On reflection, this is perhaps not such a

In fact, such a stance need be neither unreasonable nor dogmatic. When the Average Eleatic scrutinizes Zeno's argument and fails to find any flaw in it, there are from his perspective two competing explanations of this failure. First, his failure might be due to the actual flawlessness of the argument: that is, the argument might really be sound. Alternatively, it might be that the argument is in fact flawed, and his failure to find that flaw is due to his own cognitive limitations. (If he were better informed, he would recognize one of the premises as false; if he were more sophisticated or insightful, he would detect some subtle fallacy or equivocation.) In deciding how to respond to the argument, the Average Eleatic is thus in the position of performing an inference to the best explanation, where the *explanandum* is his own inability to identify some flaw in the argument despite having attempted to do so. If the better explanation of this fact invokes the actual flawlessness of the argument, then he should adopt the belief that motion is impossible and revise the rest of his beliefs accordingly. If, on the other hand, the better explanation of his failure invokes his own cognitive limitations, then he should retain his belief that motion is possible in the face of the argument. I submit that, surely for the average resident of Elea, it was reasonable to adopt the latter explanation as opposed to the former. This is so not merely because of the extremely strong first-order reasons that such a person would have had to believe that motion is possible, but also because of what

radical claim: after all, constructing compelling arguments that don't beg the question against formidable and determined opponents is (one might think) typically a tough road to hoe. Pryor's reasonable dogmatist is not adept at *playing offense* against the skeptic, and the claim is that this is compatible with his being justified in believing as he does. By contrast, the Average Eleatic is not adept at *playing defense*: in that case, it is Zeno who has willingly accepted the burden of proof and offered what purports to be a non-question-begging argument for the revisionary conclusion. All the Average Eleatic must do is raise some doubt about a particular premise or inferential step, but he finds himself unable to execute even this comparatively modest intellectual task.

it would have been reasonable for him to believe about his own fallibility in evaluating arguments, as suggested by a proper appreciation of the limits of his own knowledge and understanding.

Plato's Socrates bequeathed at least two compelling ideals to the Western philosophical tradition. On the one hand, there is the ideal of following the argument where it leads. On the other, there is the ideal of appreciating the extent of one's own ignorance, the respects in which one's current knowledge and understanding are subject to profound limitations. These two ideals can interact in interesting ways. Of course, an awareness of one's current ignorance and lack of understanding should leave one open to changing one's mind in response to novel arguments, including in relatively dramatic ways. However, with respect to the rationality of radical belief change, an awareness of one's own cognitive limitations can be something of a double-edged sword. Particularly when one initially has at least some reason for believing as one does, an awareness of one's own cognitive limitations might legitimately give rise to some measure of skepticism about arguments that attempt to undermine those beliefs.¹⁸

¹⁸ Indeed, there is a respect in which the cognitively unsophisticated person should be *less* open to revising her beliefs in response to novel arguments than the more cognitively sophisticated person. In terms of the "inference to the best explanation" model introduced above: the greater one's cognitive sophistication, the more reasonable it is to expect that one would identify a flaw in a given line of argument if there were such a flaw to be found. In a case in which one critically scrutinizes the argument yet fails to find any flaw, one's failure is thus comparatively strong evidence that the argument is flawless. On the other hand, the more unsophisticated one is, the less one should be impressed by the fact that one has tried and failed to find a flaw in a given argument: such a failure is comparatively weak evidence for the argument's flawlessness. In principle then, radically different responses to the same revisionary argument might be appropriate for different individuals, even if neither is able to identify any flaw in the argument. What is a dogmatic and unreasonable response for one might be a perfectly reasonable response for the other. (footnote continued)

When the Average Eleatic encounters Zeno's argument, he in effect reasons as follows:

The conclusion of Zeno's argument is that motion is impossible. But motion *is* possible. Therefore, Zeno's argument must harbor some hidden flaw, even though I am unable to find it.

I have argued that this reasoning is perfectly legitimate, and that when the Average Eleatic retains his belief in motion in these circumstances it does not mean that his doing so is either unreasonable or dogmatic, or that he has failed to follow the argument where it leads. Still, the feeling that there is something deeply wrong with such reasoning might persist. After all, if such reasoning is legitimate, what is to prevent one from simply retaining any belief that one desires to hold onto, no matter what arguments and evidence are offered against it, by simply asserting that, since one's belief is true, any arguments and evidence to the contrary must be misleading?

Consider first the case in which my belief that *p* is initially unreasonable. Seeking to change my mind, you offer an argument for not-*p*. I dismiss your argument on the grounds that since its conclusion conflicts with *p* and *p* is true, it must be unsound. Here my procedure is unreasonable and dogmatic, inasmuch as I lack a reasonable basis for dismissing your argument: the proposition *p*, from which I infer the unsoundness of your argument, is not something that I believe reasonably.¹⁹ In contrast to cases of this kind, it

In this connection, it is interesting to note that a good number of Socrates' interlocutors remain completely unmoved in their original beliefs, despite having been trounced in debate. On the present account, whether such an interlocutor is genuinely guilty of failing to follow the argument where it leads might very well be something of an open question, and one whose answer depends on facts that go beyond anything that is specified in the fiction of the dialogue.

¹⁹ In the usual case, if it is unreasonable for me to believe *p* prior to considering your argument for not-*p*, then it will still be unreasonable for me to believe *p* after considering

is (I assume) reasonable for the Average Eleatic to believe in motion, at least prior to his encountering Zeno's argument. Of course, it is not sufficient that my belief that *p* is reasonable prior to being presented with those considerations that suggest that not-*p*. For even if I am initially justified in believing *p*, your providing me with considerations that suggest that not-*p* might undermine my justification for believing *p*, in which case I am in no position to reasonably conclude that those considerations are misleading.²⁰ Someone who thinks that the Average Eleatic is dogmatic and unreasonable for dismissing Zeno's argument as unsound, but who concedes that it was reasonable for the Average Eleatic to believe in motion before encountering Zeno's argument, will view it as a case of this kind.

However, there are also cases in which it is quite clear that one *is* entitled to dismiss considerations that suggest that not-*p* on the basis of one's belief that *p* (Sorensen 1988b; Kelly 2008). Consider, for example, the following

TRUE STORY. I live with my family at 210 Prospect St. On a fairly regular basis, we receive mail for a person named "Frederick Jacobs" at this address. This mail provides genuine evidence that someone named Jacobs lives at 210 Prospect. (Consider: when a passerby on the street, curious about who lives at this address, opens our mailbox and finds mail addressed to Jacobs, this increases the credibility of the relevant proposition for the passerby.) Nevertheless, on the basis of my

your argument. There are unusual cases in which this condition fails to hold, but I will ignore them here.

²⁰ Indeed, as Saul Kripke (1971) pointed out, even if one initially *knows* that *p*, it might be unreasonable and dogmatic to dismiss subsequently encountered considerations that suggest that not-*p*. For once one is presented with those considerations, one might no longer know that *p* and thus no longer be in a position to rationally infer that those considerations are misleading (Harman 1973). Of course, if one once knew that *p*, then *p* is true, so the considerations that suggest that *p* is false must be misleading. But one is in no position to reasonably conclude this, once one's knowledge has been undermined. For good discussions of the Kripke-Harman 'dogmatism paradox', see also Sorensen (1988b) and Conee (2001).

knowledge that only members of my family live at 210 Prospect. and that Jacobs is not a member of my family, I reasonably conclude that this evidence is misleading and dismiss it without further ado.²¹

Why isn't my behavior in TRUE STORY unreasonable? Answer: given all of the evidence available to me which bears on the question of whether someone named Jacobs lives in my house--including those considerations that suggest that he does--it is still reasonable for me to believe that he does not, and thus, to conclude that those considerations are misleading. In doing so, I manifest neither unreasonableness nor dogmatism.

The case of the Average Eleatic, I suggest, is a case of *this* kind. Even after he hears Zeno's argument, it is still reasonable for the Average Eleatic to believe that motion is possible, given the extremely strong first-order reasons he has for thinking this, along with the kinds of higher order considerations discussed above. And if it is still reasonable for him to believe that motion is possible after hearing Zeno's argument, then he is still in a position to conclude that Zeno's argument is unsound without manifesting either unreasonableness or dogmatism.

As presented by Plato, the Socratic elenchus has great potency when it comes to undermining the pre-philosophical views of Socrates' interlocutors. (Whether a given interlocutor actually changes his mind in response is, of course, another matter.) In a typical case of Socratic elenchus, the original commitments of Socrates' interlocutors are revealed to lead to an explicit contradiction. At this point, the interlocutor is expected to backtrack and abandon some previously expressed opinion. It is not, after all, as though it would be acceptable for the character Euthyphro to reply to Socrates as follows:

²¹ Although all of the details of the example are nonfictional, the inspiration for using them in this way is due to Crispin Wright (2004).

I agree, Socrates, that it is extremely surprising that some things are both pious and not-pious. Prior to our inquiry together, I was sure that nothing is both. But this is the conclusion to which we have been led by the argument, and we should follow the argument wherever it leads. So let us not take the strangeness of this conclusion as a reason not to accept it! (Cf. *Euthyphro* 8a).

Even for Plato's Socrates, it seems, there is at least one place where argument cannot lead us: to belief in an explicit contradiction. An explicit contradiction is treated as an *argumentative dead-end*: once it is made clear to Euthyphro that his previously expressed commitments entail it, he is rationally required to retreat and revise those commitments. But what accounts for why the proposition plays *this* role in the argument, as opposed to that of an extremely surprising consequence that nevertheless ought to be accepted in order to uphold the norm of following the argument where it leads?

One possible answer to this question is that it is the logical property of *being a contradiction* that is crucial. On this view, a proposition's having this property is both a necessary and sufficient condition for its properly being treated as an argumentative dead-end. But alternative answers are possible as well. Consider, for example, the following characteristic passage from G.E. Moore:

You see, the position we have got to is this. If Hume's principles are true, then, I have admitted, I do not know now that this pencil—the material object—exists. If, therefore, I am to prove that I *do* know that this pencil exists, I must prove, somehow, that Hume's principles, one or both of them, are *not* true. In what sort of way, by what sort of argument, can I prove this?

It seems to me that, in fact, there really is no stronger and better argument than the following. I *do* know that this pencil exists; but I could not know this, if Hume's principles were true; *therefore*, Hume's principles, one or both of them, are false. I think this argument really is as strong and good a one as any that could be used: and I think it really is conclusive. In other words, I think that the fact that, if Hume's principles were true, I could not know of the existence of this pencil, is a *reductio ad absurdum* of those principles (1953/1993: 71-72).

In this passage, Moore treats the proposition that he does not know of the existence of the pencil as an argumentative dead-end: if Hume's principles entail it, then they can be

rejected on that basis. Of course, that Moore knows, of some particular pencil, that it exists, is on anyone's view a contingent matter; there is no suggestion that Hume's principles lead to logical contradiction. If, in order to play the role of argumentative dead-end, a proposition must have the logical property of being a contradiction, then Moore's reasoning is illegitimate. But Moore's reasoning cannot be dismissed so easily. After all, there is nothing contradictory about the suggestion that someone named Jacobs lives in my house; nevertheless, given that it is reasonable for me to believe that no one named Jacobs lives in my house, it is reasonable for me to conclude that those considerations that suggest otherwise are misleading. Similarly, when Moore declares that "I do know that this pencil exists", *either* this is something that it is reasonable for him to believe at that time--despite his recognition that Hume's principles entail that he knows no such thing--or it is not. If it is not reasonable, then his basis for concluding that Hume's principles are false is inadequate, and he is guilty of unreasonableness and dogmatism. He has failed to follow the argument where it leads. If it is reasonable, however, then, given an extremely plausible closure principle²², he is in a position to reasonably conclude that Hume's principles are false. There is, I think, no *general* objection to Moorean reasoning of this kind—although, of course, certain instances of such reasoning are objectionable.²³

²² The principle is that if S knows that p entails q, and S reasonably believes that p, then S is in a position to rationally believe q.

²³ In the same way, when Euthyphro and Socrates treat "Such and-such actions are pious, and it is not the case that such-and-such actions are pious" as an argumentative dead-end, something that compels revision of previously-accepted assumptions, it is not the fact that this proposition has the logical property of *being a contradiction* that is essential. Rather, what is essential is the fact that that proposition possesses the epistemic property of *being rationally believed to be false* at that stage in the argument. (Of course, the fact

This brings me to my last major claim about the ideal of following the argument where it leads, and the corresponding vice of dogmatism. It is natural to think that dogmatism is a *formal* vice, in something like the way hypocrisy is. Someone who demands that others conform to putative moral standards that he himself transgresses is guilty of hypocrisy. This is a moral failing even if the standards that he fails to meet are not genuine moral standards at all. Because of this, one can be in a position to correctly charge another with hypocrisy without entering into potentially messy and difficult to resolve issues about what the correct moral standards are. It is tempting to think that dogmatism resembles hypocrisy in this respect: that whether a person who dismisses considerations that challenge her beliefs is guilty of dogmatism is an issue that can in principle be adjudicated without resolving substantive and potentially difficult questions about the status of the beliefs to which she appeals. But if what has been argued here is correct, then our sense that this is so is an illusion. Dogmatism, unlike hypocrisy, is not a formal vice. And for similar reasons, we should not credit someone with the virtue of “following the argument where it leads” unless we too are prepared to take a substantive stand, a stand to the effect that the arguments that lead him to believe as he does are rationally compelling.

4. Some Objection and Replies

Objection #1: Your proposal says nothing about *arguments*. (Surely that’s an objectionable feature in an account of “following the argument where it leads”!) Even if your account succeeds in capturing a genuine intellectual ideal, that ideal applies to

that it has that epistemic property is presumably not independent of its having the logical property.)

inquiry in general, as opposed to inquiry that is driven by the rational consideration of arguments, in the sense of articulated bits of text containing premises and a distinct conclusion.²⁴

Reply: In fact, the ideal of following the argument where it leads is often invoked in contexts in which it is clear that it is intended to apply to inquiry quite generally, as opposed to argument driven inquiry in any narrower sense. For example, recall the declaration from the Rice University faculty handbook:

A university is characterized by the spirit of free inquiry, its ideal being that of Socrates—to follow the argument where it leads (cf. footnote 3 above).

I assume that this statement is supposed to be relevant not only for members of the Rice philosophy department (and others who traffic in arguments in some relatively narrow sense) but also for natural and social scientists. Moreover, it is not only university administrators and those outside of philosophy who say such things, but canonical philosophers as well. Thus, when Mill declares that “No one can be a great thinker who does not recognize that as a thinker it is his first duty to follow his intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead”, it is quite natural to interpret him as saying something that is relevant for inquiry in the broadest sense. (And quite unnatural, I think, to interpret him as talking about anything narrower than that.)

There is then the idea, both inside philosophy and in the broader intellectual culture, that Socrates’ norm constitutes an ideal for theoretical inquiry in general. (Thus, we should not think of the ideal as “follow the argument where it leads” *as opposed to* “accept whatever conclusions are best supported by your observational evidence”, or

²⁴A worry of this kind was raised by both Earl Conee and Lisa Downing. Here and below, those whom I credit with inspiring an objection should not be held responsible for the specific way in which I formulate it.

something similar.) That the ideal is frequently understood in this relatively inclusive way is no accident, I think. According to a venerable and still popular line of thought, Socrates and Plato are among the founders, not only of philosophy narrowly construed—the kind of thing that in the 21st century is predominantly carried out in academic philosophy departments—but of the Western intellectual tradition itself. If one takes this idea seriously, it's natural to interpret the various intellectual ideals that Socrates articulates in such a way that they have application to theoretical inquiry quite generally. This is what my modest proposal attempts to do, with respect to the specific case of “following the argument where it leads”. (Indeed, I would regard it as a good objection to an account of following the argument where it leads that it cannot make sense of what is said in the Rice faculty handbook, understood as something that applies to the various intellectual disciplines that are represented in the contemporary university.)²⁵

²⁵ Still, one might think that a genuine change of subject has occurred at some point—*Socrates*, at least, really was talking about argument-driven inquiry, as opposed to anything wider than that. However, I think that to say even this much is potentially misleading. In this context, one thing that we should bear in mind is that someone like Socrates would not have been inclined to make much of a distinction between argument-driven inquiry and inquiry in some more general sense, for the following reason. For the ancient Greeks, the construction and evaluation of arguments was *the* paradigm of theoretical inquiry, in a way that it perhaps no longer is in our intellectual culture. After all, for the ancient Greeks, the paradigms of theoretical inquiry were mathematics (understood as a deductive science in which theorems are derived from axioms) and philosophy; and of course, both of these intellectual disciplines are argument-driven in the relevant sense. In contrast, in our own intellectual culture, observation- and experiment-driven science is the paradigm of theoretical inquiry, which can look quite different from the kind of thing that Socrates and his interlocutors were doing. But imagine an experimental physicist who concludes that a cherished hypothesis is false on the basis of his laboratory observations, after resisting the temptation to explain away the unwelcome data points by embracing *ad hoc* hypotheses. Surely Socrates and Plato would have been able to recognize in such behavior a case of adhering to the ideal that they championed.

Objection #2: Following the argument where it leads is not modalized reasonableness; rather, it's simply an absence of motivated irrationality.²⁶

At the outset, I noted that the importance of adhering to the ideal is typically emphasized when the concern is that the target audience might be *unwilling* to draw the conclusions that emerge in the course of inquiry. Why not simply take this fact at face value? One follows the argument where it leads when where one ends up is not influenced by one's desires or other conative states concerning the questions at issue in the inquiry.

Reply: Although I believe that it would be a mistake to simply identify following the argument where it leads with the absence of motivated irrationality, there are clearly important connections between the two. First, even if (as I will argue) an absence of motivated irrationality is insufficient for following the argument where it leads, it is extremely plausible to think that the former is a necessary condition for the latter. (Certainly, a proponent of the modalized reasonableness account will think that when motivated irrationality influences the conclusions that one reaches, one has failed to follow the argument where it leads.) Moreover, it's also extremely plausible to hold that an absence of motivated irrationality is both necessary and sufficient for something in the near neighborhood of the relevant ideal, viz. being *willing* to follow the argument where it leads. Just as philosophers are praised for following the argument where it leads and criticized for failing to follow the argument where it leads, so too they are sometimes praised for their willingness to follow the argument where it leads, and criticized for their

²⁶ An objection along these lines was put to me by Timothy Schroeder.

unwillingness to do so. I suggest that a willingness to follow the argument where it leads is simply a lack of motivated irrationality.

In general, however, being willing to Φ is distinct from actually Φ -ing. Thus, inasmuch as it is plausible to identify a willingness to follow the argument where it leads with an absence of motivated irrationality, it is plausible that following the argument where it leads is *not* simply the absence of motivated irrationality, or having arrived at views that are uninfluenced by one's desires or other conative states.

Moreover, there are strong independent reasons for not identifying following the argument where it leads with an absence of motivated irrationality. First, notice that, on the assumption that an absence of dogmatism (in the sense of 'dogmatism' explained above) is a necessary condition for following the argument where it leads, the absence of motivated irrationality is insufficient, for dogmatism does not require motivated irrationality. Although paradigmatic cases of dogmatism might very well involve such irrationality, it is perfectly possible to be dogmatic about some issue (in the sense that one's view about that issue is resilient in unfavorable epistemic circumstances) where this is not due to the operation of motivated irrationality. For example, in principle, one might simply overestimate one's evidence and become certain that some claim is true even when it is uncertain, where this mistake is not due to the operation of a desire or other conative state; thereafter, one might simply reason from the belief that one treats as certain to the conclusion that particular pieces of evidence that suggest that it is false must be misleading. That is a coherent story in which one becomes a *perfect* dogmatist in the sense given above, but in which there is no motivated irrationality. (In Bayesian terms: one mistakenly invests maximal credence in some contingent proposition, for

some reason other than motivated irrationality, and after that conducts one's epistemic life in the manner of a perfect Bayesian reasoner, dismissing putative counterevidence.)

Moreover, as suggested in Section 2 above, even the absence of dogmatism seems to be insufficient for following the argument where it leads. A participant in the inquiry might make an honest mistake about the normative import of the arguments which she has been offered and arrive at a view that is not rationally tenable; perhaps if this were pointed out to her, she would see the error and immediately change her mind as a result. Still, even though she is not at all dogmatic about her current view, we should not credit her with having successfully followed the argument where it leads as things stand, in the way that someone who has responded to the arguments correctly has. Indeed, one might think that this possibility follows more or less immediately from the nature of *following*: typically, genuinely following (as opposed to trying to follow, or being willing to follow) involves being on track to reach some target destination (at least, as indicated by the person or thing that one is following). But one can get off track for any number of reasons, and the possibility of honest mistakes always exists. Similarly, a person might fail to follow the argument where it leads for any number of reasons, although it is unsurprising that cases in which the failure is due to motivated irrationality and/or dogmatism are especially salient, and especially likely to evoke censure.

Objection #3: Your account misclassifies some of the paradigms. For example, according to your account, a philosopher such as Peter Unger is (at least arguably) guilty of failing to follow the argument where it leads on those very occasions when he embraces intuitively bizarre conclusions on the basis of philosophical considerations (cf.

Unger 1975). But those are *exactly* the circumstances in which we would actually use the expression “following the argument where it leads” to describe what someone is doing.²⁷

Reply: first, we should bear in mind that the account on offer only counts such philosophers as not following the argument where it leads if they embrace their intuitively bizarre conclusions on the basis of bad arguments. If the arguments in question are good ones, then the account will credit them with having lived up to the ideal. Indeed, in those circumstances, such philosophers might count as particularly good exemplars of the ideal in virtue of not having been deterred from accepting the best-supported view simply because it conflicts with common sense. But suppose that we simply *stipulate* that the argument that leads the philosopher to accept his intuitively bizarre conclusion is a bad one. One might still think that we can credit the philosopher with “following the argument where it leads” in that case. Indeed, one might think that the expression is often used in just such circumstances: one credits a philosopher with following the argument where it leads in part because one is unwilling to credit him with Discovering the Truth about the issue, or with offering an argument that is genuinely compelling. (Thus, the expression might sometimes function as a kind of backhanded compliment, or something that one says when one wants to say something positive but is unwilling to say anything stronger.)

This in effect amounts to a paradigm case argument against my account. As such, it suffers from the traditional weakness of such arguments: even if people regularly use the expression in this way, it does not follow that they should do so. In this particular instance, I believe that it is incorrect to apply the expression to a philosopher who accepts

²⁷ This objection was pressed by Josh Schechter.

an intuitively bizarre conclusion on the basis of bad arguments. Why? Here is a three-step argument. (1) First, we should assume that when one successfully follows the argument where it leads, one manifests a genuine intellectual virtue (cf. Section 1 above). But (2) when one believes an intuitively bizarre conclusion on the basis of bad arguments, one does not manifest any intellectual virtue. (Of course, one might still *have* the relevant virtue; the point is simply that one does not manifest it on this occasion.) (3) Therefore, believing an intuitively bizarre conclusion on the basis of bad arguments does not amount to following the argument where it leads.

At the outset of his *Inquiry* (1764), Thomas Reid describes “a traveler of good judgment” who chooses an apparently promising route to his destination. So long as the traveler finds no reason to doubt his choice, it makes sense to continue on the original route; but once the evidence mounts that he has chosen incorrectly, it is no virtue to simply forge ahead in the same direction. The point of Reid’s parable is clear, and, I believe, correct: in philosophy, one displays no virtue by resolutely sticking to early assumptions and simply accepting whatever consequences emerge in the course of subsequent inquiry. Rather, once it becomes unreasonable to continue on in the same direction, the rational course is to revisit and revise the assumptions that led down the current path. Of course, in accepting an intuitively bizarre conclusion on the basis of inadequate arguments, a philosopher might very well provide us with evidence that he or she lacks a certain vice: that of being overly respectful of common sense. And that vice can, of course, prevent a person from following the argument where it leads, in cases in which the inquiry successfully undermines common sense. But it is a mistake to confuse (i) conducting oneself in such a way as to provide evidence that one lacks a certain vice

with (ii) manifesting the opposite virtue. (Compare: by acting recklessly in the face of danger on a given occasion, I might supply evidence that I lack the vice of cowardice, but it does not follow that I have manifested the virtue of courage.) Similarly, I do not manifest any intellectual virtue by believing an intuitively bizarre conclusion on the basis of a bad argument; on the assumption that following the argument where it leads involves manifesting an intellectual virtue, my doing this does not amount to following the argument where it leads.²⁸

²⁸ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Brown University, Stanford University, The Ohio State University, the University of Houston, the University of Nevada (Las Vegas), Princeton, the 2010 Bellingham Summer Philosophy Conference at Western Washington University, and at an epistemic normativity workshop hosted by Fordham University. I would like to thank the audiences present on those occasions. Special thanks are due to Earl Conee and Josh Schechter, my commentators at the BSPC conference, as well as David Christensen, Alexander Nehamas, and Daniel Berntsen for reading earlier drafts.

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