

There is No Pragmatic (or Moral) Encroachment

Keshav Singh

Draft of 7/11/19 – please ask before citing or circulating

Abstract

This paper argues that there is no pragmatic (or moral) encroachment on epistemic justification. Pragmatic encroachers motivate their view using a conception of belief on which part of what it is to believe p is to rely on p in one's reasoning. To succeed in this, they need a very strong version of this reliance-involving conception of belief, according to which relying on p in one's reasoning means acting on the assumption that p is true and thereby discounting the possibility that it is not. However, this strong version is cannot be right, because unless one is justifiedly certain that p , one is never justified in completely discounting the possibility that p is false. It is argued that the strong version should be rejected in favor of a more modest version of the reliance-involving conception. However, once we accept the modest version, the case for pragmatic encroachment is undermined. Finally, it is argued that accepting the modest version also undermines the case for moral encroachment.

1. Introduction

According to defenders of pragmatic encroachment about some epistemic status, such as knowledge or epistemic justification, whether a particular belief has that status can depend in part on pragmatic considerations. In particular, pragmatic encroachers argue that higher stakes involved in believing something raise the bar for its having the relevant epistemic status(es).

My focus in this paper is pragmatic encroachment on epistemic justification.¹ And my goal is to argue that there is no such thing.

Before I outline my argument, two clarifications are in order.

The first is that while pragmatic encroachment on epistemic justification is separable from pragmatic encroachment on knowledge, they are related, and defenses of the latter sometimes go via defenses of the former.² So, while I won't argue directly against pragmatic encroachment on knowledge, what I

¹ It's crucial that pragmatic encroachment about justification be formulated specifically in terms of *epistemic* justification, because it's crucial to pragmatic encroachment that it be about distinctively epistemic statuses. There is no intelligible notion of pragmatic encroachment on practical justification.

² Because of the close relationship between knowledge and epistemic justification, defenses of pragmatic encroachment about each of these epistemic statuses are not always clearly separated. Furthermore, when defenses of pragmatic

say will undermine defenses of it that go via defenses of pragmatic encroachment on epistemic justification. (For ease of explication, I'll refer to pragmatic encroachment on epistemic justification simply as pragmatic encroachment, and epistemic justification simply as justification.)

The second clarification is that I'll understand 'pragmatic' quite broadly in this paper, such that all sorts of practical considerations, including moral ones, count as pragmatic in the relevant sense. Thus, while some of its defenders take it to be a separate phenomenon, I count moral encroachment as a kind of pragmatic encroachment.³⁴ As such, I take the argument I offer against pragmatic encroachment to apply to moral encroachment as well. Though most of the paper will be about pragmatic encroachment in general, I will discuss moral encroachment specifically in the final section.

My strategy in this paper will be to target a particular conception of belief that plays a central role in motivating pragmatic encroachment. On this conception of belief, part of what it is to believe p is to rely on p in one's reasoning.⁵ Call this the reliance-involving conception of belief.⁶ Importantly, pragmatic encroachers need a very strong version of the reliance-involving conception of belief to motivate their view, where relying on p in one's reasoning means acting on the assumption that p is true and thereby discounting the possibility that it is not.

encroachment about knowledge go via defenses of pragmatic encroachment about epistemic justification, this is sometimes explicit, but sometimes simply assumed.

³ For defenses of moral encroachment, see Pace (2011), Fritz (2017), Basu (2018), Moss (2018), and Basu and Schroeder (2019). For a critique of moral encroachment, see Gardiner (2018).

⁴ This is not to say that putative cases of moral encroachment should be treated just the same as cases involving narrowly pragmatic encroachment. The former are argued to be cases in which relying on a proposition involves performing deeply morally objectionable actions, such as racist or sexist actions. There is thus an important sense in which we need to be more careful about how we address such cases. But this need to treat putative cases of moral encroachment with such care is compatible with its being theoretically fruitful to treat moral encroachment as a special kind of pragmatic encroachment.

⁵ Some version of the reliance-involving conception of belief is endorsed Weatherson (2005, 2016), Ganson (2008), and Ross & Schroeder (2014). Fantl and McGrath (2002, 2009) endorse a normative version on which being justified in believing p involves being justified in relying on p in one's reasoning. Although I don't have the space to argue it here, I think the normative version of the reliance-involving conception relies on the descriptive version for support, so the arguments of this paper are relevant even to Fantl and McGrath's arguments for pragmatic encroachment.

⁶ I have borrowed the term 'reliance-involving conception of belief' from Worsnip (forthcoming).

The paper will proceed as follows: in §2, I'll briefly recount how the strong version of the reliance-involving conception motivates pragmatic encroachment. In §3, I'll argue that the strong version can't be right, because unless one is justifiedly certain that p is true, one is never justified in completely discounting the possibility that p is false. In §4, I'll argue in favor of a more modest version of the reliance-involving conception. In §5, I'll explain how, once we accept the modest version, the case for pragmatic encroachment is undermined. Finally, I'll conclude in §6 by showing how the modest version also undermines the case for moral encroachment.

2. The Strong Version of the Reliance-Involving Conception

The reliance-involving conception of belief says that part of what it is to believe p is to rely on p in one's reasoning. It's quite plausible that some version of the reliance-involving conception is true. But not just any version of it will deliver pragmatic encroachment. The case for pragmatic encroachment rests on the claim that a particularly strong form of reliance on p is partly constitutive of believing p . This strong form of reliance on p involves reasoning on the assumption that p is true and thereby discounting the possibility that it's false. Call the claim that believing p constitutively involves this strong form of reliance the *strong version* of the reliance-involving conception.

Here's how the strong version motivates pragmatic encroachment. If part of what it is to believe p is to act on the assumption that p is true, then one is only justified in believing p if one is justified in acting on the assumption that it is true (and thereby discounting the possibility that it's false). Since whether one is justified in acting in this manner seems to depend partly on practical considerations, such as the stakes of doing so, whether one's beliefs are justified will also depend partly on such considerations.

To bring this out, consider a standard pair of low and high stakes cases:

Low Stakes. You have just left the house for the day, and fairly confident you locked the door behind you. Moreover, your confidence is supported by the evidence, since you remember locking the door and have a quite reliable memory. Of course, you're not justified in being absolutely certain that you locked the door. But you live in a very safe neighborhood, so even if you turn out to be wrong, it's no big deal. You're justified in acting on the assumption that you locked your door (e.g. by deciding not to go back and check).

High Stakes. Everything is the same as in **Low Stakes**, except you live in quite a dangerous neighborhood where burglaries are common. Moreover, you know that inadequately secured homes are especially likely to be targeted. So, if you're wrong about having locked the door, things will likely go very badly for you. You're not justified in acting on the assumption that you locked your door in the ways you are in **Low Stakes**.

According to the pragmatic encroacher, because of the difference in stakes, you're justified in acting on the assumption that you locked your door in **Low Stakes**, but not in **High Stakes**. And because acting on the assumption that you locked your door is part of what it is to believe you locked your door, you're justified in believing that you locked your door in **Low Stakes**, but not in **High Stakes**. The basic idea is this: Pragmatic considerations bear on the justification of reliance on p . Since reliance on p is partly constitutive of believing p , pragmatic considerations bear on the justification of believing p . This is how pragmatic considerations are supposed to encroach on the justification of beliefs.

3. Against the Strong Version

3.1. *Reliance and Stakes-sensitivity*

There is some plausibility to the pragmatic encroacher's explanation of what's going on in **Low Stakes** and **High Stakes**. But it can't be right. As I'll argue, unless one is justifiedly fully certain that p is true, one is never justified in completely discounting the possibility that p is false. Thus, unless one is justifiedly certain that p , one can never be justified in acting on the assumption that p in the sense that entails *completely* discounting the possibility that p is false. But it's not the case that our beliefs can never be justified unless we are fully certain in them. So, the strong version of the reliance-involving conception must be false.

Of course, much of this depends on what it is to completely discount the possibility that p is false. For the pragmatic encroacher, it seems to be something like this: one completely discounts the possibility that p is false if and only if one does not take that possibility into account at all in one's reasoning. But even by the pragmatic encroacher's own lights, this is almost never justified, because there's a minimal way in which we must take into account the possibility that p is false anytime we are not certain that p .

That minimal way is this: if we are to justifiedly rely on p in our reasoning without being certain that p , our reasoning must include the operation of a mechanism for checking the stakes of acting on the

assumption that p . Without such a stakes-checking mechanism operating in our reasoning, we would be unable to modulate our reliance in response to changing stakes. Of course, as long as our stakes-checking mechanism returns that the stakes are low, we are justified in bracketing the possibility that p is false. But as long as this mechanism is operative, we still do not completely discount the possibility that p is false, because the continued operation of this mechanism is itself a way of continuing to take into account in our reasoning the possibility that p is false.

If we understand reliance as the strong version does, then stakes-checking is incompatible with relying on p in reasoning. But that doesn't seem right. Intuitively, far from being incompatible with relying on p in reasoning, this minimal way of taking into account the possibility that p is false is an indispensable part of what it is to justifiably rely on p in our reasoning when we are (justifiably) not certain that p .

Consider **Low Stakes** and **High Stakes** again. In **Low Stakes**, you are perfectly justified in deciding to continue on your way (as opposed to going back to check the door). Defenders of pragmatic encroachment sometimes write as if the fact that the stakes are low by itself somehow explains why you are justified. But this can't be right. You're justified in deciding to continue on your way not just because the stakes *are* low, but because you *recognize* (or at least are in a position to recognize) that they're low. It only makes sense for you to discount the possibility that you didn't lock your door given your recognition of the low stakes. But for your reliance on p to be justified, it cannot be that you simply make one determination of stakes at the outset and then go on to completely discount the possibility that p is false once you determine the stakes are low. Rather, for it to be justified, your reliance on p must continue to be stakes-sensitive. This requires the continued operation of a stakes-checking mechanism in your reasoning.

The above point might be helpfully rephrased in dispositional terms. Grant that part of what it is to believe p is to be disposed to act on the assumption that p , where acting on the assumption that p involves discounting the possibility that p is false. Does this entail that anytime we believe p , we completely discount the possibility that p is false? No. Even if the disposition to act on the assumption that p is partly constitutive of believing p , this disposition must be such that its manifestation conditions are stakes-sensitive – that is, it must be a disposition to act on the assumption that p when

the risks of doing so are determined to be sufficiently low. If this disposition were not stakes-sensitive in this way, it would be difficult to see how beliefs with less than full certainty could ever be justified.⁷

Crucially, if the stakes are determined not to be sufficiently low, and the disposition is thereby not manifested, this doesn't entail that we no longer have the disposition that's constitutive of believing p . So it doesn't entail that we stop believing p whenever we cease to act on the assumption that p .

In short: unless we're justifiedly certain that p , our reasoning should always minimally take into account the stakes of being wrong about p , because determining that the stakes are sufficiently low is necessary for justifiedly acting on the assumption that p . So, unless we are justifiedly certain that p , we are never justified in completely discounting the possibility that p is false. But we are often justified in believing p without being fully certain that p . Thus, the strong version of the reliance-involving conception cannot be right.

3.2. Reliance on belief and credence

At this point, pragmatic encroachers might object that the kind of reliance described above is not reliance on belief at all, but reliance on credences. To reject the strong version, they might claim, would be to reject the idea that 'outright' beliefs play any role in justified reasoning in favor of a view on which justified reasoning consists simply in calculating expected utilities on the basis of justified credences. Such a view would be unrealistic because agents like us with finite cognitive resources can't reason exclusively in this probabilistic manner. We need belief as a kind of simplifying device to avoid getting bogged down in small, low-stakes possibilities of error.⁸

Grant that it would be unrealistic to claim that justified reliance consists solely in calculating expected utilities on the basis of justified credences. Fortunately, nothing I've said commits me to such a view. While calculating expected utilities would be one way of relying on p in a stakes-sensitive manner, it

⁷ As a more general point, it's difficult to see how any kind of dispositions that weren't sensitive to such features could figure in good reasoning. As Railton puts it when discussing the kind of reliance involved in belief, reliance "is quite far from being bound to a set of 'brute' or 'blind' dispositions to act." Instead, the dispositions constitutive of reliance "are regulated in a manner responsive to conditions and outcomes in an adaptive, open-ended way" (2014, p. 130).

⁸ For defenses of this claim, see Weatherson (2012) and Ross and Schroeder (2014). See also Staffel (forthcoming) for a sophisticated discussion of the putative simplifying role of belief.

isn't the only way of doing so. In fact, the kind of stakes-checking mechanism I've described is far from such an expected utility calculus. The claim that there are only two ways of relying on p in reasoning: acting on the assumption that p , or performing an expected utility calculus, is a false dilemma. These options are but the extreme ends of a continuum between reasoning that's maximally insensitive to uncertainty and reasoning that's maximally sensitive to it.

It may be true that cognitively limited agents like us can't reason with credences all of the time. But even so, we can and should still take risk and uncertainty into account in our reasoning in less fine-grained ways. Moreover, I think as a matter of fact we *do* often take risk and uncertainty into account in this way. I've been in exactly the position of needing to decide whether to go back and check whether I locked the door. And while I didn't perform an expected utility calculus, I did briefly consider how badly things would go if I were wrong about having locked the door before deciding to go on my way. My claim is that this was the operation of a stakes-checking mechanism, one that continues to operate in the background even after the stakes have initially been determined to be low. This is a way of continuously taking into account the possibility that p is false that is not at all unrealistic for cognitively limited agents like us.

In contrast to relying on our credence in p , call this way of taking into account the possibility that p is false *hedged reliance*. Call the complete discounting of the possibility that p *unhedged reliance*. With regard to complexity of reasoning (and therefore cognitive load), it's plausible that hedged reliance is much closer to unhedged reliance than it is to relying on credences. In light of this, if the primary justification for reasoning with outright beliefs instead of credences is our cognitive limitations, it's unclear why we'd ever want to use so crude a method of reasoning as unhedged reliance, given the availability of hedged reliance. Unless we are justifiedly certain that p , only hedged reliance on p is justified, not unhedged reliance.⁹ So, considerations about our cognitive limitations don't support the strong version of the reliance-involving conception.

⁹ Jackson (2019) provides a similar but distinct argument against pragmatic encroachment. According to Jackson, when the stakes are high, we become unjustified in relying on our belief that p and only justified in relying on our credence in p . This argument requires rejecting outright the reliance-involving conception of belief, because it requires the possibility of continuing to hold a belief while no longer relying on it. Furthermore, it suggests that the only two options are unhedged reliance on belief and reliance on credence. I take it to be an advantage of my argument that it requires neither of these commitments.

4. The Modest Reliance-Involving Conception

4.1. Hedged Reliance

In light of the above, we should reject the strong version of the reliance-involving conception of belief. We need a more modest version of the reliance-involving conception, on which beliefs can be constituted by hedged reliance. This modest reliance-involving conception is necessary for explaining how we can have justified beliefs despite being justifiedly uncertain.

The modest reliance-involving conception agrees with the strong version that part of what it is to believe p is to rely on p in one's reasoning. But unlike the strong version, it allows that this reliance can be either hedged or unhedged. So far, all I have said about hedged reliance is that it involves the continuous operation of a kind of stakes-checking mechanism. To further explicate the modest version, I will try to say a bit more about this mechanism.

As I conceive of it, the kind of stakes-checking mechanism involved in hedged reliance is considerably more coarse-grained than the wholly probabilistic reasoning involved in calculating expected utility. While the latter involves computing the expected utility of various options given one's credence in p , and thus has a large (or perhaps infinite) number of outputs, the former simply involves checks at decision points as to whether an action is too risky, and thus only has two outputs.

Of course, in order to sort options in this way, the stakes-checking mechanism needs a way of differentiating insignificant risks from significant ones. And it would be a problem if this itself required something like an expected utility calculus, because that would make the stakes-checking mechanism much more like reliance on credence than unhedged reliance. But I don't think the stakes-checking mechanism would need to rely on anything like an expected utility calculus to differentiate insignificant risks from significant ones, because its sorting method could instead involve heuristics that reliably track expected utility without engaging an expected utility calculus. Since it's uncontroversial that our reasoning regularly relies on heuristics in a variety of ways, it's highly plausible that the stakes-checking mechanism involved in hedged reliance would use such heuristics to differentiate significant risks from insignificant ones.

To illustrate how this would work, consider **Low Stakes** and **High Stakes** yet again. In each case, you've just left the house, and are justifiedly fairly confident, but not certain, that you locked your

front door. It's fairly easy to see how, at this point, a stakes-checking mechanism could determine whether it is too risky to continue on, without engaging in precise calculations of the probability that you forgot to lock the door, the conditional probability that your house will be burglarized, the precise disvalue of that outcome, etc.

Instead, the inputs to the stakes-checking mechanism could be a variety of background beliefs about various course-grained propositions, such as whether your neighborhood is dangerous, whether your memory about locking your door is generally reliable, and so on.¹⁰ And since it's plausible that some background beliefs are *always* operative in our reasoning when we decide how to act, using background beliefs as heuristics for determining risk when relying on a proposition doesn't seem particularly cognitively taxing. Furthermore, since it involves background beliefs, it's quite plausible that such reasoning would itself often take place in the background as opposed to in the agent's conscious deliberation.

Now, it might be objected such a stakes-checking mechanism would only need to be operative at the point of belief formation. In determining whether the stakes of being wrong about p are high or low, it determines whether we are justified in acting on the assumption that p . As such, pragmatic encroachers might argue, it determines whether we are justified in believing p , which is exactly the thesis of pragmatic encroachment.

But the stakes-checking mechanism can't be operative only at the point of belief formation. If this were so, then the way in which we went on to rely on p would be stakes-insensitive, and so unjustified. This becomes clear if we consider cases involving changing stakes. Imagine you're in a case like **Low Stakes**. Now imagine that you find out that a group of teenagers has been entering and vandalizing unlocked homes in the area. You're now in a case more like **High Stakes**. Clearly, you would want your stakes-checking mechanism to remain operative at this point so that it can re-check the stakes and determine whether you are justified in continuing to act on the assumption that you locked your door.

¹⁰ Thus, the stakes-checking mechanism is distinct from, and considerably simpler than, what Staffel calls "pseudo-conditionalization."

Of course, there's a way in which pragmatic encroachers can accommodate all of this. They can accept that the stakes-checking mechanism needs to be continuously operative in the sense that it re-checks the stakes every time there is salient new information. But they would then be committed to the claim that every time this happens, one stops acting on the assumption that p is true and so at least temporarily ceases believing p . The issue now becomes whether, in light of what has been said so far, defenders of pragmatic encroachment can provide sufficient motivation for such a verdict.

4.2 Reliance and stability

As the above shows, pragmatic encroachers aren't compelled to deny that there is a stakes-checking mechanism that's continuously operative in our reasoning and determines whether we (continue to) act on the assumption that p . Thus, defenders of pragmatic encroachment via the strong version of the reliance-involving conception might object as follows: The operation of our stakes-checking mechanism is not part of what it is to rely on p , but rather *governs* reliance. When it returns an output of high stakes, we are no longer justified in relying on p , and thereby no longer justified in believing p .

There are two responses to such an objection. The first is that it's unclear what the positive motivation for such a narrow conception of reliance is once we've made room for a notion of hedged reliance that is distinct from both unhedged reliance and reliance on credences. Pragmatic encroachers claim that we need the strong version of the reliance-involving conception because the point of having beliefs as opposed to just credences is to be able to discount the possibility of error. But I have shown that this isn't so, because unless we're justifiedly certain, we're never justified in completely discounting the possibility of error. Defenders of the strong version can stipulate all they want that the way in which we must always take such possibilities into account when we're uncertain is not part of reliance. But it's just not clear what motivation remains for saying this.

The second response is a more substantive point. Defenders of the strong version must hold that as soon as we start taking into the account the possibility that p is false, we are no longer relying on p , and therefore no longer believe p . This gives our beliefs a level of instability that's intuitively very odd. There are a variety of reasons (epistemic humility, risk aversion, etc.) why people might regularly consider whether propositions they are quite confident might be false. For example, when writing this paper, I have considered several times the possibility that I am mistaken in denying the existence of

pragmatic encroachment. It seems quite odd to say that every time I considered this possibility, I temporarily lost my belief that there is no pragmatic encroachment.¹¹

So, not only is the strong version undermotivated, but it has implausible implications about the stability of belief. The modest version does not have these implausible implications. Moreover, it has plenty of motivation. It's much more intuitive to think that how we rely on a proposition should change based on our rough level of confidence in it than it is to think that no matter how confident we are, we should rely on it in exactly the same dogmatic manner. The modest version of the reliance-involving conception allows for this by allowing for a variety of ways of relying on a proposition to count as genuine reliance (in the sense that's constitutive of belief).

5. Why There is No Pragmatic Encroachment

Consider **Low Stakes** and **High Stakes** one more time. According to the pragmatic encroacher, in **High Stakes**, you aren't justified in believing that you locked the door because you aren't justified in acting on the assumption that you locked the door. This verdict relies on the strong version of the reliance-involving conception of belief. But as I've shown, we should reject the strong version in favor of a more modest version that allows for hedged reliance. Here's what the modest version says about our two cases.

In **Low Stakes**, you're justified in continuing on without going back to check your door precisely because you recognize that it's not a big deal if you're wrong. Your appreciation of the low stakes justifies you in relying on the proposition that you locked the door in a particular way – that is, by temporarily bracketing the possibility of error and doing something you take your belief to justify.

In **High Stakes**, you're *not* justified in continuing on without going back to check your door precisely because you recognize that it *is* a big deal if you're wrong. Your appreciation of the high stakes means you're not justified in bracketing the possibility of error. The pragmatic encroacher claims that this means you're no longer relying on p if you go back to check the door. But this is false. You still take

¹¹ Ross and Schroeder grant this point to a degree, and defend a more attenuated version of the pragmatic encroachment thesis. But I think once this point is granted, it becomes less clear why we should be interested in salvaging pragmatic encroachment at all. So, I think it does more to undermine the case for pragmatic encroachment than even Ross and Schroeder realize.

rely on the proposition that you locked your door in your reasoning about whether to continue on or go back and check. It's just that in light of the high stakes you no longer take your less than full certainty that you locked your door to provide sufficient justification for continuing on as opposed to going back and checking.

The verdict, then, is this: in both **Low Stakes** and **High Stakes**, you believe you locked your door, and your belief is justified. In both cases, you exhibit hedged reliance on the proposition that you locked your door. The difference is that in **Low Stakes**, hedged reliance leads you to continue on, whereas in **High Stakes** it leads you to go back and check.¹²

Thus, the modest version of the reliance-involving conception doesn't get us pragmatic encroachment in cases like **High Stakes**. In fact, it doesn't get us pragmatic encroachment in *any* cases. Here's why. No matter how wide a variety of actions one would ordinarily perform if one believed p are rendered unjustified by the stakes, this still can't render hedged reliance on p unjustified. For example, imagine you're plagued by a very peculiar evil demon: whenever you become quite confident in p , he appears and tells you he will kill you if you in any way act on the assumption that p and p turns out to be false. Presumably, in such a case, you're no longer justified in acting in any of the ways you ordinarily would if you believed p .

The evil demon's threat makes the stakes extremely high. And yet, you're still justified in exhibiting hedged reliance on p in your reasoning, because you're still justified in reasoning in a stakes-sensitive manner about whether perform various actions on the basis of p . And when you reason in such a manner, you recognize that these actions have become far too risky for p to provide sufficient justification for them given your lack of complete certainty.

This point too can be put in dispositional terms. Hedged reliance involves a disposition to act on the assumption that p when the risks of doing so are determined to be sufficiently low. While the evil demon has made acting on the assumption that p incredibly risky, he has not thereby removed this disposition. Instead, he has simply prevented the manifestation condition from being met. The fact

¹² One might ask why we should think you are continuing to rely on p at all when you go back and check in **High Stakes**. The answer is that there are still a variety of lower-stakes actions you would be willing to perform on the basis of p . It is in that sense that you continue to rely on p .

that manifesting this disposition would be unjustified thus does not bear at all on whether believing p is justified.

No matter the stakes, hedged reliance is not only justified, but necessary for justifiedly relying on p when one is not justifiedly certain that p . Because of this, stakes and other pragmatic considerations can never render unjustified hedged reliance on a proposition in one's reasoning. This shows that even when pragmatic considerations render unjustified all of the actions one would perform if one were acting on the assumption that p , they still don't render the belief itself unjustified. Therefore, there is no pragmatic encroachment.

6. Why There is No Moral Encroachment

According to defenders of moral encroachment, whether a belief is epistemically justified can depend on moral considerations. Since I take moral considerations to be a kind of practical consideration, I take moral encroachment to be a special case of pragmatic encroachment. In this final section, I'll argue that the case for moral encroachment also rests on the strong version of the reliance-involving conception, and thus that rejecting the strong version undermines the case for moral encroachment.

Defenses of moral encroachment often invoke cases involving beliefs about other people based on demographic or statistical evidence. In such cases, though the evidence may be ample, it is supposed to be rendered insufficient to justify belief by the fact that there would be something morally wrong with forming the relevant belief. For example, the following case, originally introduced by Gendler (2011), is commonly used to motivate moral encroachment:

In the summer of 1995, historian John Hope Franklin... a call from the White House informing him that President Clinton planned to present him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. On the night before the award ceremony, Franklin hosted a dinner for a small group of friends at the Cosmos Club, a Washington DC social organization of which he was a member. He writes: "It was during our stroll through the club that a...woman called me out, presented me with her coat check, and ordered me to bring her coat. I patiently told her that if she would

present her coat to a uniformed attendant, ‘and all of the club attendants were in uniform,’ perhaps she could get her coat.”¹³

In this case, the woman at the Cosmos Club believes that Franklin is a club attendant. She presumably comes to believe this on the basis of inductive evidence. Since Franklin is black, and nearly everyone at the Cosmos Club who is black is an attendant, she concludes that Franklin as an attendant.

One thing about this case is clear: the woman wrongs Franklin by treating him like a club attendant, and her actions are unjustified. Interestingly, I think her actions would have been wrong and unjustified even if she had happened to demand her coat from an actual attendant. There is something wrong with acting on the assumption that any black person in the Cosmos Club is an attendant whether or not it leads to misidentification. As such, this case seems importantly different from traditional cases of pragmatic encroachment, and not just because moral considerations are involved. In traditional cases of pragmatic encroachment, it’s only the costs of being mistaken that are relevant. In this case, however, it’s plausible that if the moral costs are relevant, they’re relevant whether or not one is mistaken.¹⁴

Regardless of such differences, this case is often taken to motivate moral encroachment. A clear way in which it might motivate moral encroachment is through something like the strong version of the reliance-involving conception of belief. Let’s say the woman (call her A) has the following belief: “the man walking by is a club attendant.” According to the strong version, it’s partly constitutive of A’s having that belief that she acts on the assumption that the man walking by is a club attendant. Since acting on this assumption is unjustified, A’s belief is unjustified.

As I have shown, the strong version is false. A could believe that the man walking by is a club attendant without acting on the assumption that he is a club attendant, if she recognizes the costs of acting that

¹³ Gendler quotes from Franklin (2005, p. 340). It’s worth noting that Gendler introduced this example to motivate conflicts between moral and epistemic requirements, not moral encroachment. However, it’s since been used to motivate moral encroachment; see, for example, Basu and Schroeder (2019).

¹⁴ Basu endorses similar conclusions about such cases. So, on her account, there is an important structural difference between them and traditional cases of pragmatic encroachment. But of course, it is also possible to defend a version of pragmatic encroachment that similarly rejects the idea that only the costs of being mistaken are relevant to the status of the belief. Moss, on the other hand, maintains that the belief is morally problematic because of the moral costs of being mistaken.

way and hedges her reliance accordingly. It would be unrealistic to deny that this is possible; after all, there are plenty of people who form all kinds of racial and other stereotypes but have the good sense not to act on them (whether for moral or prudential reasons).

Of course, this doesn't entail that A's belief is epistemically justified. In fact, there's a good case to be made that it's unjustified on purely epistemic grounds. As Gardiner (2018) has noted, the statistical or demographic evidence used in such cases is often clearly epistemically insufficient. A is ignoring plenty of evidence about Franklin that suggests he isn't an attendant – for example, the fact that he's dressed differently from the attendants. It seems that A's belief is both racist and epistemically unjustified for the same reasons: she ignores all sorts of other evidence against Franklin's being an attendant and zeroes in on one bit of putative evidence that he is.

Furthermore, when it comes to beliefs about a particular person, it's plausible that statistical or demographic evidence becomes irrelevant in the face of evidence that's particular to that person. For example, if all you know about Amit is that he's a 22-year-old man, base rates might be evidence that he's a reckless driver. But if you have strong evidence that Amit in particular is a very careful driver, it seems illegitimate to take those base rates into account at all. What might be demographic evidence by itself is neutralized in the presence of evidence about the particular person. The same seems to be true of Franklin: in light of evidence about Franklin in particular, the demographic evidence is neutralized. In this way, demographic and statistical evidence are highly fragile.

This point is important because it seems right that A's belief about Franklin is epistemically unjustified. If the only way to explain such intuitions was by appeal to moral encroachment, this would be a powerful argument in favor of moral encroachment. But it's not. In this case (and in others involving statistical or demographic evidence) we can deliver the verdict that the belief is unjustified without appealing to moral encroachment.

This leaves open the possibility that, if there is no moral encroachment, there may be cases in which forming beliefs about people on the basis of statistical/demographic evidence is (epistemically) justified. Whether such cases actually arise in ordinary life depends on whether there are real cases in which we truly have only statistical/demographic evidence, and no evidence about the particular person. And if there really are such cases, whether that is a problem for moral encroachment deniers depends on whether believing on the basis of statistical/demographic evidence still seems

objectionable in those cases, especially once we reject the strong version of the reliance-involving conception. It is at least unclear, I think, that such cases can sufficiently motivate the existence moral encroachment.

There is surely more to say about both pragmatic and moral encroachment. The difficult cases raised by defenders of moral encroachment in particular deserve more attention than I have been able to give them here. But in the current debate, much of the case for pragmatic and moral encroachment has rested on accepting (implicitly or explicitly) a strong version of the reliance-involving conception of belief. I've argued if we are to accept the reliance-involving conception of belief, we should accept a significantly more modest version. But once we accept a more modest version, we are no longer compelled to accept putative cases of pragmatic and moral encroachment as such. This undermines much of the case for both kinds of encroachment.

References

- Basu, Rima & Schroeder, Mark (2019). "Doxastic Wronging." In Brian Kim & Matthew McGrath (eds.), *Pragmatic Encroachment in Epistemology*. Routledge. pp. 181-205.
- Basu, Rima (2018). Beliefs that wrong. PhD Dissertation. University of Southern California.
- Fantl, Jeremy & McGrath, Matthew (2002). Evidence, pragmatics, and justification. *Philosophical Review* 111 (1):67-94.
- (2009). *Knowledge in an Uncertain World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Franklin, John Hope (2005) *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin* New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Fritz, James (2017). Pragmatic Encroachment and Moral Encroachment. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 98 (S1):643-661.
- Ganson, Dorit (2008). Evidentialism and pragmatic constraints on outright belief. *Philosophical Studies* 139 (3):441 - 458.
- Gardiner, Georgi (2018). Evidentialism and Moral Encroachment. In McCain Kevin (ed.), *Believing in Accordance with the Evidence*. Springer Verlag.
- Gendler, Tamar (2011). On the epistemic costs of implicit bias. *Philosophical Studies* 156 (1):33-63.
- Jackson, Elizabeth (2019). How Belief-Credence Dualism Explains Away Pragmatic Encroachment. *Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (276):511-533.
- Moss, Sarah (2018). VIII—Moral Encroachment. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 118 (2):177-205.
- Pace, Michael (2011). The Epistemic Value of Moral Considerations: Justification, Moral Encroachment, and James' 'Will To Believe'. *Noûs* 45 (2):239-268.
- Railton, Peter (2014). Reliance, Trust, and Belief. *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 57 (1):122-150.
- Ross, Jacob & Schroeder, Mark (2014). Belief, Credence, and Pragmatic Encroachment. *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research*, 88(2): 259-288.
- Weatherson, Brian (2005). Can We Do Without Pragmatic Encroachment? *Philosophical Perspectives*, 19: 417-443.
- (2012). "Knowledge, Bets, and Interests," in Brown & Gerken (eds.), *Knowledge Ascriptions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

——— (2016). Games, Beliefs and Credences. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 92(2): 209-236.

Worsnip, Alex (forthcoming). Can Pragmatists Be Moderate? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.