

THESIS

EPISTEMIC CITIZENSHIP: A NEW DEFENSE OF ROLE-BASED EPISTEMIC  
NORMATIVITY

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### EPISTEMIC CITIZENSHIP: A NEW DEFENSE OF ROLE-BASED EPISTEMIC NORMATIVITY

One problem facing epistemic deontology is its (apparent) incompatibility with doxastic involuntarism. Intuitively, deontic epistemic evaluations—e.g., blame or reproach for unjustified belief—seem unbefitting if we can’t control that which we believe. However, Richard Feldman proposes a solve to this seeming incompatibility, which is a *role-based approach* to epistemic normativity. When we find ourselves within certain roles, the normativity of performing within one’s role appropriately, as one ought, can generate obligations, permissions, duties, etc. If we can rightly conceive of a “believer role,” then we can have coherent deontological normativity, *even if* we, in fact, lack control over our doxastic attitudes. However, Matthew Chrisman advances strong criticisms of the role-based approach, criticisms which I will argue ultimately fail. In response to Chrisman, I will argue that our doxastic role as a believer is akin to our role as *political citizens*. The upshot of the project will be a revitalized defense of role-based epistemic deontology, and a more apt analogy, i.e., that of *epistemic citizen*. Chrisman’s assertions of the role-based approach’s inherent explanatory insufficiencies will be shown to be unfounded once role-normativity itself is understood more precisely.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| ABSTRACT.....  | ii |
| INTRODUCTION.....  | 1  |
| Chapter 1.....   | 3  |
| Doxastic Involuntarism and its Incompatibility with Epistemic<br>Deontology..... | 4  |
| Feldman's Response: Role-based Epistemic Normativity.....                        | 8  |
| Why Role-based Epistemic Normativity is an Attractive Account.....               | 10 |
| Chrisman's Critique of Role-based Epistemic Normativity.....                     | 11 |
| An Extremely Brief Survey of Belief.....   | 20 |
| Belief for Feldman, Chrisman and Epistemic Deontology.....                       | 22 |
| Chapter 2.....   | 27 |
| In Response to Chrisman: A Discussion of Semi-Voluntary Role Adoption.....       | 27 |
| Concerning Our Reasons to be Believers.....                                      | 34 |
| Loeb and Higher-order Reasons for Belief.....                                    | 35 |
| Sextus and Psychological Wellbeing.....  | 36 |
| Clifford and the Morality of Believing.....                                      | 39 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Believing as Intrinsically Moral.....   | 39 |
| Believing and Acting.....   | 41 |
| The Prudential Reasons to Believe.....  | 45 |
| Externalist Prudential Reasons for Being a Believer .....                     | 46 |
| Internalist Prudential Reasons for Being a Believer.....                      | 47 |
| Chapter 3.....  | 50 |
| The Normativity of Citizenship.....   | 51 |
| Argument from Benefit.....  | 53 |
| Implicit Consent to the Laws: Argument from Just Agreement.....               | 55 |
| Exile, Epistemic Migration, and the Skeptic’s Republic.....                   | 57 |
| Argument from Harm.....   | 61 |
| Limitations to the Citizenship Model of Epistemic Normativity and Considered  |    |
| Responses.....  | 63 |
| The Normativity of Semi-Voluntary Role Adoption.....                          | 63 |
| Epistemic Migration and the Plausibility of the Citizen/Believer Analogy..... | 65 |
| The Choice-worthiness of Being a Believer.....                                | 67 |
| Conclusion.....   | 68 |

## **Introduction:**

In chapter one I will begin by discussing epistemic deontology. I will focus heavily upon one of the view's primary theoretical difficulties, i.e., the incompatibility of a deontological conception of epistemic normativity and doxastic involuntarism. Thereafter, I will motivate Richard Feldman's response to the aforementioned incompatibility worry, which is a *role-based approach* to epistemic normativity.<sup>1</sup> In the final sections of the first chapter, strong criticisms of role-based epistemic normativity (advanced by Mathew Chrisman) will be presented. Chrisman counters that doxastic (or epistemic) normativity and role-based normativity are asymmetric in a couple of regards: **1)** we don't have any real choice in adopting the role of believer, and thereby any comparison to in-principle *optionally adopted roles* (such as Feldman considers) would be misleading.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, **2)** there are plenty of *involuntarily adopted roles* which explicitly do **not** generate anything like categorical normativity, as seems to govern our doxastic lives. Lastly, there will be two clarificatory sections discussing some central concepts to Chrisman and Feldman's interchange on epistemic normativity: **a)** how best to understand *categorical normativity*, and **b)** what kind of *belief* Feldman and Chrisman seem to be discussing.

In the second chapter, I will be responding to Chrisman's criticisms of the RBA. There will be two primary responses: **1)** I will contend that Chrisman has prematurely excluded a conception of voluntary role-adoption, which consists neither in *directly* volunteering for a role, nor in *totally* involuntary role-adoption, such as impressment or compulsion. Additionally, I will

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<sup>1</sup> Or the RBA henceforth, for brevity's sake.

<sup>2</sup> See Feldman, pg. 676, for his list of analogous social roles.

argue: **2)** the believer role has a distinct choiceworthiness. a choiceworthiness which Chrisman's counterexample roles (*viz.* the thief and slave) clearly lack. There will be three independent domains of value which I will claim the believer role to possess, which makes being a believer particularly choice-worthy: **a)** its psychological value, **b)** its moral value, and **c)** its pragmatic/prudential value.

In the third and final chapter, I will proffer a yet unconsidered role by which to understand epistemic normativity more accurately. The believer role will be compared with our role as political citizens. Ultimately, it will be argued, that just as a political citizen semi-voluntarily adopts (and upholds) his/her role, so it is with believers. Similarly, both political citizens and believers have an abundance of hypothetical reasons for the sake of which to take on their respective roles. Throughout the third chapter, I will motivate the striking parallels between the role of believer and citizen (specifically the roles' comparable choiceworthiness and mode of adoption)—and arguments from *The Crito Dialogue* will primarily be used towards this end. I will conclude the chapter, and the thesis project itself, by discussing the limitations of my revitalized defense of role-based epistemic normativity, and I will demonstrate the theoretical assumptions to which my argument has helped itself.

# Chapter 1

We often talk about what individuals *should* or *shouldn't* believe, in much the same way as we discuss how individuals *should* or *shouldn't* act. For instance, we reproach those who believe unjustified propositions (such as a belief that: *Covid-19 is caused by 5-G networks*). And when we reproach individuals for their unjustified beliefs, we do so in a way that's similar to how we reproach individuals for unjustified acts. That is to say, as we condemn and judge to be wrong another's act of thievery, we also condemn and judge to be wrong another's unjustified belief(s).

Our common epistemic practice allows for certain doxastic attitudes (under particular circumstances and at a given time) to be deemed *impermissible* or *permissible*, which seems to parallel a common way of understanding agents' acts, i.e., as being either morally impermissible, or permissible.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the permissibility of our beliefs accords with some set of standards or rules, by which our beliefs are said to be *justified* (or not). William P. Alston contends of belief and justification that: "To say that S is justified in believing that *p* at time *t* is to say that the relevant rules and principles do not forbid S's believing that *p* at *t*." (258). Given Alston's conception of justification, when a subject believes a given proposition, at a given time, and this belief constitutes a violation of the relevant epistemic rules and/or principles, then the subject lacks *epistemic justification*. For those lacking epistemic justification, certain reactive attitudes

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<sup>3</sup> As Feldman notes of the deontic conception of ethics and evaluations of agents' acts: "... people have *obligations* to act in some ways, they have *rights* and *duties*, and they deserve *praise* and *blame* for what they have done." (667).



(like blame) are warranted, while conversely those adopting justified doxastic attitudes are said to believe permissibly (or are even sometimes thought to be owed praise).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, one plausible way to conceive of epistemic normativity is to think of it as being that prescriptive discourse that emerges from: **(1)** the normative symmetry between evaluations of acts and doxastic attitudes, *and* **(2)** the fundamentality, in the epistemic domain, of: “. . . *requirement, prohibition, and permission*, [. . .] with *obligation*, and *duty* as a species of *requirement*, and with *responsibility, blameworthiness, reproach, praiseworthiness, merit*, and *being in the clear*, etc. as normative consequences of an agent’s situation with respect to what is required, prohibited, or permitted.”(Alston).<sup>5</sup> Assent to both **(1)** and **(2)** is assenting to the rudiments of *epistemic deontology*.<sup>6</sup>

However, a challenge for epistemic deontology is that it’s not clear that believing and acting are *appropriately parallel* in the relevant normative sense. Particularly, we seemingly can’t believe with the same kind of volitional control with which we act. If we can’t exert the same kind of control when believing as when acting, then it could be that we aren’t accountable for our doxastic attitudes in the same way that we are held responsible for our actions.<sup>7</sup>

## **I. Doxastic Involuntarism and its Incompatibility with Epistemic Deontology**

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<sup>4</sup>As Feldman similarly claims: “We say that a person has a right to believe one thing and perhaps a duty to refrain from believing something else. We sometimes praise those who believe the things they should and we criticize those who fail in their believings.” (667).

<sup>5</sup> See Alston, pg. 257. The italics are Alston’s own.

<sup>6</sup> See additionally Jon Altschul who proposes that: “Is it true that there are certain beliefs we as epistemic agents ought to hold, moreover does failing to believe as we ought (or believing as we ought not) leave us epistemically responsible for our doxastic states? Those who answer this question in the affirmative tend to conceive of epistemic justification in [. . .] a ‘deontological’ way,” (pg. 245).

<sup>7</sup> Feldman notes that this was the position of Alston. See Feldman, pg. 668, wherein he writes: “Alston eventually argues that deontological conceptions are in the end ill-suited to epistemic purposes.”

While we can (rather straightforwardly) just choose to extend our arms, or kick our legs, it's decidedly less apparent that we have the same kind of control when it comes to choosing what we believe. As Mathew Chrisman notes: "When offered a reward for performing an action [. . .] you can, at least in normal circumstances, just raise your hand or turn off the light and collect your reward. By contrast, when offered a reward for believing a proposition, such as that the US is still a colony of Britain [. . .] you cannot." (346). Chrisman's formulation of the "*No Rewards Principle*" (NRP)<sup>8</sup> represents one of the most commonly advanced arguments for the *involuntariness* of believing.<sup>9</sup> The (NRP) demonstrates an important reality about our doxastic limitations; that is, despite the enticing promise of a great reward for doing so, one cannot simply choose to start believing propositions such as *the US is still a colony of Britain*. Hence, believings and doings appear not to be subject to the same kind of volitional control.

However, note that the claim: *believing is not under our direct and immediate voluntary control* in no way necessitates that we exert *no control (whatsoever)* over our believings. In fact, Feldman contends that we have a kind of indirect, or non-basic, control over our beliefs.<sup>10</sup> Feldman asserts that we certainly do have direct and voluntary control over some acts, such as turning off the lights, which affect resulting states of affairs (such as the lights being currently off). The states of affairs which we can alter at will, then, indirectly influences our corresponding beliefs about said states-of-affairs.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Alston contends that: "It does seem that we have some degree of long range voluntary control over at least some of our beliefs. [. . .] people

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<sup>8</sup> More specifically: "(NRP) No matter how large the reward, *S* cannot simply decide to believe some proposition *p* in order to collect that reward." See Chrisman, pg. 346, for the cited terminology and principle.

<sup>9</sup> See Alston, pg. 263, for an analogous argument.

<sup>10</sup> See Feldman, pg. 672, specifically: "... when I have control over a state of the world and my beliefs about that state track that state, then I have just as much control over my belief about the state as I have over the state itself."

<sup>11</sup> See Feldman, pg. 671-672, for this claim and cited line of argumentation.

do set out on long range projects to get themselves to believe a certain proposition, and sometimes they succeed in this.”(275).

So despite the involuntarist’s invocation of the (NRP), it does **not** mean that the involuntarist position is committed to there being *no discernable kind of control over believings*. Nonetheless, merely demonstrating weak forms of control over our beliefs does little to salvage epistemic deontology. Epistemic Deontology needs a thoroughgoing and robust voluntary control to obtain, so as to adequately support the relevant parallelism between deontic evaluations of doings and believings.<sup>12</sup> Even if we fully accept Feldman’s conception of doxastic voluntarism (which is more robust than Alston’s), it is still the case that much of our belief would be outside of the bounds of being voluntary, and epistemic deontology would only be warranted for a sub-set of belief; namely, those beliefs which were responsive to states of affairs over which we (in fact) had direct and immediate control. But as Feldman notes, “Of course, we don’t often exercise this control. [ . . . ] And this leaves this defense of doxastic voluntarism without a great deal of epistemological significance.” (672).

Importantly, having the *right kind of control* over our beliefs avoids contradicting a tried-and-true principle of moral theory: the “*ought*” *implies* “*can*” principle (OICP).<sup>13</sup> The roughshod idea behind the principle is that we cannot be obligated to do something, or cannot be reproached for failing to have done something, if we cannot have avoided doing (or failing to have done)

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<sup>12</sup> Or so the epistemic deontologist might require. As Feldman cites: “This conception [of deontological justification] is ‘viable’, in Alston’s terms, only if belief is sufficiently under our voluntary control.” (669) Whether or not a deontological conception of *moral* responsibility requires such direct and immediate control is (perhaps) up for debate, but at least among some leading epistemic deontologists (such as Alston), to have deontological epistemic justification (i.e., “. . . a conception according to which epistemic justification is to be understood or analyzed in terms of deontological concepts of obligation, permission, and the like.” 669) is to require a sufficiently robust voluntary control over our believings.

<sup>13</sup> See Alston, pg. 259, for the terminology.

that which was required of us. Alston states of the intuition behind the (OICP): “. . . one can be obliged to do A only if one has an effective choice as to whether to do A.” (259).

The (OICP) when extended to the domain of belief would mean that *when one does not have an effective choice in coming to believe a given proposition, then one cannot be obligated to believe it, or to have believed otherwise.*<sup>14</sup> Deontic judgements about our doxastic attitudes are undercut when there is not an effective choice in our believings, and yet we have seen that the (NRP) threatens the notion of our having an effective choice in believing. The precise problem doxastic involuntarism seems to raise for epistemic deontology is (helpfully) formalized by Christoph Jäger as follows:

**(1) Epistemic deontology implies doxastic voluntarism**

**(2) Doxastic voluntarism is false**

**(3) Hence epistemic deontology is unacceptable**<sup>15</sup>

Admittedly, the viability of premise (2) is still currently debated and the (NRP) is far from decisive in motivating this claim. However, (thankfully) the messiness of the current doxastic voluntarism debate is actually orthogonal to a defense of epistemic deontology, despite what has been discussed thus far of its centrality. Feldman has provided a response to the incompatibility of doxastic involuntarism and epistemic deontology which challenges premise (1) of the

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<sup>14</sup> More broadly, it would seem implied from the (OICP) that *any doxastic attitude (whatsoever)*, which one does not have an effective choice in adopting, cannot be deemed *obligatory*. For instance, if a subject *S* does not have an effective choice in refraining from (or suspending) belief in either *p* or its contrary, then refraining from either *p* or its contrary cannot be obligatory for *S*.

<sup>15</sup> See Jäger, pg. 218, for the cited argument from involuntarism. The bolding is my own.

involuntarist attack, granting the involuntarist premise (2) and yet undermining the incompatibility argument itself.<sup>16</sup>

## II. Feldman's Response: Role-Based Epistemic Normativity

Feldman tackles the other end of the problem raised by the incompatibility of epistemic deontology and doxastic involuntarism; he denies that deontic judgements necessitate voluntary control.<sup>17</sup> Feldman's counterclaim is that: ". . . we can have epistemic obligations even though we can't fulfill them (or even if we can't help but fulfill them)" (674). Feldman thinks that this counterclaim is supported by the fact that there are many obligations that simply don't require voluntary control to remain obligatory. Feldman initially cites contractual obligations, "You can have an obligation to pay your mortgage even if you don't have the money to do so. . ." (674). An obligation still clearly obtains even if one *cannot have an effective choice* in doing what they contracted themselves to do.<sup>18</sup>

Feldman furthermore claims that: "There are oughts that result from one's playing a certain role or having a certain position. Teachers ought to explain things clearly. Parents ought to take care of their kids. Cyclists ought to move in certain ways." (676). Feldman asserts that being within particular positions/roles is enough to ground prescriptive claims about what one *ought to*

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<sup>16</sup>Feldman sees himself as engaging in: "The second sort of response to the Voluntarism Argument [which] denies that the deontological judgements about beliefs imply that those beliefs are voluntarily adopted." (674).

<sup>17</sup> In particular, Feldman rejects the claim that: "If deontological judgements about beliefs are true, then people have voluntary control over their beliefs." See Feldman (669) for his own formulation of the Voluntarist Argument. The cited line is Feldman's *premise 1*, and his response to the voluntarist argument starts on pg. 674.

<sup>18</sup> Feldman does not ultimately think that believing is akin to contractual obligation; as he states: "It's difficult to see any basis for saying that we all have some sort of contractual obligation to believe things. Surely no such contract is explicit, and nothing analogous to enrolling in a course establishes an implicit contract." (674). However, while a "contract" might not be explicit among believers and while certain actions like "enrolling in a course" certainly do not create stringent obligations for students, the possibility still remains that there could be some action(s) which would properly constitute an implicit contract. Furthermore, it seems possible that there could be an *implicit* contract among believers.

*do*. For instance, regardless of whether a teacher *can* explain things clearly, he/she still *ought* to do so. Furthermore, a parent who (despite their best efforts) does not manage to feed their child has appreciably failed to perform as one in their role *must*. In being a parent, teacher, or cyclist one ought to perform in their role minimally appropriately (*ceteris paribus*), and even if one is incapable of performing in the capacity demanded by the role one plays, it does not change the fact that one still *ought* to have done *X*, or refrained from *Y*.

Again, as Feldman notes of acting in the capacity of one's given role, the characteristic activity *ought to be done rightly*.<sup>19</sup> He (crucially) further maintains that *believing* is an example of just such an activity, and that *to believe* is to be in *the role of a believer*. Believers ought to go about believing rightly.<sup>20</sup> Hence, evaluations of the fittingness (or correctness) of one's activity as a *believer* can coherently allow for the kinds of deontic evaluations we initially discussed. When we evaluate one as a parent or teacher, we consider how one parented, or taught, and how that performance approximates what we ought to reasonably expect of one in such a role. Analogously, we when look to the believing of believers, we can make similar evaluations and we can do so without consideration given to whether one has an effective choice in coming to believe a given proposition or not. Consider again one who believes an absurd proposition such as: *Covid-19 is a government conspiracy, not a real virus*. Regardless of the choice one had in arriving at said belief, we can still say that one, in normal circumstances, has failed to believe as one in one's role ought to have (given any reasonable norm of belief).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See reference cited above, (Feldman 676).

<sup>20</sup> According to Feldman, to believe as one is obligated to means: ". . . to follow their evidence (rather than wishes or fears)" (676). Although (for our purposes) we don't need to commit to any particular norms of believing. Rather, the point is to show that "believer" can be seen as something akin to a role which can create obligations for those who believe (whatever the content of those particular obligations might ultimately be).

<sup>21</sup> To give the particular evidentialist norm of belief Feldman has in mind: "For any person *S*, time *t*, and proposition *p*, if *S* has any doxastic attitude at all toward *p* at *t*, and *S*'s evidence at *t* supports *p*, then *S*

### III. Why Role-based Epistemic Normativity is an Attractive Account

A role-based solution to the involuntarist challenge represents an attractive defense of epistemic deontology for (at least) a couple of prominent reasons: **(1)** it allows us to avoid having to defend a robust doxastic voluntarism. We do not have to come to any resolution (whatsoever) concerning the doxastic voluntarism debate, but we can still maintain the appropriateness of deontic, epistemic normativity. Additionally, **(2)** it allows for an epistemically significant range of belief (all of it) to be subject to deontic judgements, even if complete doxastic involuntarism were true. Let's examine these strengths of a *Feldman-like, role-based response* in turn.

If Alston is to be believed, the strong conception of doxastic voluntarism (i.e., the “*Basic Voluntary Control Thesis*”)<sup>22</sup> quote: “. . . has had distinguished proponents throughout the history of philosophy, e.g., Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Kierkegaard, and Newman. Though [it's] distinctly out of favor today. . .” (261). Role-based epistemic normativity is an attractive account *precisely* because it allows us to not stake any ground in this debate. The RBA has the flexibility to defend epistemic deontology given either resolution to the doxastic voluntarism question, respecting both the time-honored defenders and the more contemporary detractors of doxastic voluntarism. Whether or not doxastic voluntarism is true, Feldman's efforts to preserve epistemic deontology remain unblemished. The RBA **only** takes into consideration whether one occupies the role of believer. Hence, resolving the question of whether one has sufficient control (or effective choice) regarding one's beliefs does not have a decisive normative implication. The existence of a “believer role” with corresponding doxastic obligations, norms and principles is

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epistemically ought to have the attitude toward *p* supported by *S*'s evidence.” (pg. 679). But (to be clear) we needn't concern ourselves with particular norms of belief; rather, we must simply understand that there is *some kind of norm* which must obtain for those who are believers. I'm not arguing (one way or another) what a proper norm of belief would be.

<sup>22</sup> See Alston, pg.260. The italics are my own.

sufficient for getting us the normativity that epistemic deontology needs. As Feldman contends: “. . . we can have epistemic requirement, permissions, and the like even if voluntarism is false.” (676-677). The RBA allows us to simplify the problem, to remove entirely an ancillary debate concerning doxastic voluntarism.

Additionally, the RBA allows us to discuss an epistemically significant proportion of belief, and not just some circumscribed portion of our doxastic lives and practice(s). As was noted previously, some positive arguments for doxastic voluntarism *only* allow us to discuss deontic judgements for a particular sub-set of belief. If one is opting to preserve the (OICP) in relation to belief, then it would demand that one have effective voluntary control over each belief that is to be deontologically evaluated. But, of course, we tend to think that *any* belief is potentially subject to *permission, requirement, obligation, and the like*. We would need thoroughgoing (if not universal) effective voluntary control over our beliefs if we were to avoid significant revision to our commonsense notion of believing’s normativity.

A non-revisionary account of epistemic normativity would need to provide a basis for deontic evaluations for nearly any given belief; yet this is obviously no small task, since the claim is of such large scope. The RBA, on the other hand, does not have to undertake such a massive task in defense of doxastic voluntarism; rather, it can maintain epistemic normativity for all of belief, by simply denying that epistemic deontology implies effective voluntary control over belief to begin with.

#### **IV. Chrisman’s Critique of Role-based Epistemic Normativity**

While we have seen the potential appeal of the RBA, the approach is (of course) not without its detractors. Matthew Chrisman, notably, criticizes the RBA in his work “Ought to Believe.”



Chrisman's most damning attack comes from a discussion of the worrying asymmetry between the normativity of in principle "optional" role-based oughts and those "categorical" epistemic, or doxastic, oughts which obtain (always) for *all* of us in our role as believer. As Chrisman contends, "... unlike Feldman's examples of role oughts, doxastic oughts seem to be categorical. Even if you do not want to believe the truth about what you're doing right now, you ought to believe you are reading this paper right now." (356). Chrisman's example implies that, when it comes to believing, one unavoidably ought to do it in the appropriate ways, regardless of whether one *wants* to be a believer or not.<sup>23</sup>

If it is so that one always finds oneself in a position to believe and to do so correctly, *viz.* if one always finds oneself in the believer role, then Chrisman is right that this represents a disanalogy with Feldman's considered roles (*parent, cyclist, and teacher*) and our doxastic role as *believer*. Most significantly, one can, in principle at least, *opt-in* to parenting, to cycling, and/or to teaching. One cannot (however) opt-in to being a believer, seemingly ever, and yet doxastic oughts *still* obtain and for us all. If one is not a teacher, one isn't obligated to teach in any specific way, if one is not a cyclist one is not obligated to use certain hand gestures when turning to the right, etc, and (most often) we straightforwardly chose to take on such roles. Parents, teachers, and cyclists have some clear and appreciable say in the obligations to which they find themselves subject, but believers do not.<sup>24</sup> Chrisman, reasonably, questions why our doxastic obligations are categorical, and yet other role-derived obligations may be foregone

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<sup>23</sup> As Feldman similarly states: "... forming belief is something people do. That is, we form beliefs in response to our experiences in the world. Anyone engaged in this activity ought to do it rightly. In my view, what they ought to do is to follow their evidence (rather than wishes or fears)." (676).

<sup>24</sup> If one were, by some extraordinary circumstance, forced into the cyclist or teacher role by default, then it would be more equivalent to the *believer* role. Of course, as Feldman is explicit in pointing out, the normativity of the role obtains even if one had no say in coming to occupy it. But such roles do seem (in principle) optional, they can be (and most often are) volunteered for directly and explicitly, that is, one *opts-in* when adopting the role itself.

entirely. How can a role-based account of epistemic normativity be complete (or correct) if it can't address the dissimilarity between our categorical, doxastic oughts and optional non-doxastic oughts? The believer role seems importantly different from the social roles Feldman considers.

Chrisman's criticism of the RBA depends heavily upon the notion of "categoricity" itself, since doxastic oughts are categorical, and other (non-doxastic) role-based oughts are clearly not. Chrisman and Feldman both agree that doxastic oughts are *in fact* categorical, but Chrisman's understanding of categoricity appears distinctive and non-standard. Importantly, I think Chrisman understands categoricity in a way that adds unnecessary complication to his argument, and even risks misconstruction. I hope (in what follows) to distill categoricity down to what is essential and shared in Feldman and Chrisman's interchange concerning role-based epistemic normativity, and to get clear on what it means for Chrisman to point out the normative asymmetry between our categorical doxastic oughts and our oughts derived from social roles.

As the example cited above suggests, Chrisman construes *categorical normativity* as primarily involving something like *unavoidability*. For again, as Chrisman insists, one cannot (through simply wanting otherwise, or planning otherwise, etc.) *avoid* those obligations conferred by doxastic oughts.<sup>25</sup> Whatever one's contingent desires regarding the matter may be, one cannot skirt an obligation to (for instance) believe other than that one is currently reading this paper.<sup>26</sup>

Then again, Chrisman also uses the term "categorical" to approximate something like *overridingness*. As Chrisman further mentions of categorical oughts: "But because these oughts

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<sup>25</sup> See Chrisman, pg. 356, for reiteration of his stance on doxastic normativity.

<sup>26</sup> This is specifically Chrisman's example of a categorical, doxastic ought. The example is cited above in full.

flow from ideals rather than roles, *their normative force can be categorical* unlike the role oughts cited by Feldman.” (357).<sup>27</sup> Chrisman’s coupling of categoricity and “force” is puzzling. While the ideas of unavoidability and independence from agents’ contingent desires are standardly attributed to normative categoricity, the mention of *normative forcefulness* is not. Categorical oughts (typically) just designate those oughts which obtain independently of agents’ wishes, plans, and desires. Doxastic oughts may indeed be categorical (as seems correct), but such a fact does *not* necessarily establish that doxastic oughts obtain with any distinctive “normative force” merely in virtue of being categorical. Any categorical ought could conceivably be overridden by a more stringent, or normatively weighty *hypothetical* ought.

However, even if there is an appropriate sense in which overridingness (or normative force) could be attached to categoricity, we need only really concern ourselves with the *unavoidability* of categorical normativity, since an *overriding* conception of categorical normativity does not fit with Feldman’s understanding of epistemic normativity. Feldman is *not* committed to talking about the normative force of doxastic oughts when motivating the RBA. Rather, Feldman articulates his view on normativity (broadly construed) as follows: “For each ‘ought’ there is an associated value. We ought, in the relevant sense, to do the thing that maximizes that value [. . .] there seems to be no uniquely correct way (or range of correct ways) to combine moral, practical, epistemic, and other values. [. . .] There is no meaningful question about whether epistemic oughts “trump” or are trumped by other oughts.” (694).

Feldman is clearly of the mindset that oughts of different kinds, *viz.* pertaining to different values, are not commensurable nor can *all-things-considered oughts* even be meaningfully

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<sup>27</sup> Italics are my own, added for emphasis.

asserted.<sup>28</sup> Thus, given Feldman's denial of the normative overridingness of oughts across domains of different value and the opacity of the potential relation between normative force and categoricity in Chrisman's own account, we will speak only to the *unavoidableness* of doxastic oughts. Importantly, restricting ourselves in this way does not impact a charitable motivation of Chrisman's critique.

So as to reiterate, on Chrisman's account, the major point of difference between social-role-derived oughts and doxastic oughts is that obligations and norms pertaining to cycling, parenting, and/or teaching are (at least in principle) *optional*. One who *wants* to take on the role of cyclist can (in normal circumstances) just *choose* to do so.<sup>29</sup> However, in the case of believing, "... individuals ought, without qualification, to believe in those ways which, as a matter of fact, flow from good performance of the role of believer." (Chrisman 356).<sup>30</sup> Irrespective of one's desires to find themselves in the role of believer, and whether or not one wishes to perform in the role well, doxastic oughts obtain *categorically*,<sup>31</sup> which is to say that we all ought to believe rightly, and it does not matter whether we had wished to do otherwise. If doxastic and social-role-derived oughts do **not** seem analogous in this regard, then it would stand to undermine the viability of the RBA as an adequate account of epistemic normativity.

Feldman's argument for the RBA relies upon a crucial extension of social-role-derived normativity to the epistemic domain, which he states directly: "I suggest that epistemic oughts are of this sort—they describe the right way to play a certain role. [...] Even in cases in which a

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<sup>28</sup> Or, as Feldman calls them: "... just plain oughts." See Feldman, pg. 693-694, for use of the term.

<sup>29</sup> Take, for example, the norms pertaining to cycling (e.g., using proper hand signals, maintaining one's bike, etc.).

<sup>30</sup> The quote is one of Chrisman's citations from Hilary Kornblith's "Epistemic Obligation and the Possibility of Internalism."

<sup>31</sup> As has been established, I mean to pick out *only* the sense of being unavoidable when discussing categorical normativity.

believer has no control at all, it makes sense to speak of what he ought to believe and ought not to believe.” (676). However, Chrisman is proposing that Feldman’s suggestion is far from apparent, and that without some explanation of the normative asymmetry, it’s not clear that role obligations parallel epistemic/doxastic obligations. Chrisman’s challenge to the RBA demands an explanation for the apparent normative disparity since there must be *some reason* as to why our role as a believer is unavoidably obligatory. As Chrisman notes: “. . . believing is not, in the relevant sense, an action that *anyone* can *ever* voluntarily perform.” (358), and yet Feldman’s role examples are optional, i.e., they can be taken on *voluntarily*.

Chrisman contends that there is only one possible explanation, “. . . Feldman’s only means for explaining this [normative] contrast is the fact that, unlike the roles of teacher, parent, cyclist, we have no choice about whether to take on the role of being a believer.” (356). Chrisman insists that the very involuntariness of adopting the role of believer is the only available reason one has by which to explain the particular categoricity of role-based, doxastic oughts. For again, one can have an effective choice in whether to take on the role of teacher (at least in principle) and one can variably desire to perform well (or not) in one’s capacity as a teacher. However, it *doesn’t* seem to be the case that one always ought (unavoidably) to perform teaching rightly,<sup>32</sup> which is in stark contrast to the case of doxastic oughts which need be met always. Furthermore, whether or not one had *any possible choice* in coming to be a believer seems irrelevant.

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, if I were forced into teaching some morally abhorrent, or even dangerous, content to my pupils it doesn’t seem that I’m obligated to explain that material thoroughly and correctly. When taking on the role of teacher I ought to explain things thoroughly and correctly (all else being equal); but my desire to *not* properly instruct my students in dangerous and morally abhorrent content seems to be relevant to consider. In regards to doxastic oughts though, (irrespective of my thoughts on the matter) I ought to *believe correctly*, i.e., in accordance with the epistemic norms that govern belief. As Chrisman similarly notes: “—for example, ‘Teachers ought to be interested in their subject.’ However, this is not plausibly thought to be categorical.” (365).

Certainly, Feldman would agree that adopting the role of believer is likely involuntary, as he states explicitly: “Furthermore it is plausible to say that the role of believer is not one that we have any real choice about taking on.” (676). But Chrisman reasons that if the *optional roles* discussed above are (in principle) volitionally adopted and an agent’s desires can give shape to the nature of the obligations pertaining to oneself via such roles, then this represents an asymmetry, since epistemic normativity must be construed as *unavoidable and categorical* <sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, if Feldman were forced to rely on the involuntariness of adopting the role of believer so as to explain the asymmetric normativity of doxastic and optional role-derived oughts, then it would (I fully agree with Chrisman) constitute a “. . . *bad explanation*” (356). Chrisman provides some decisive counter-examples, which demonstrate well just how insufficient such an explanation would be. He initially mentions a *kleptomaniac thief*, who is compelled by her kleptomania to steal (i.e., the individual in the example has no effective say in the matter).<sup>34</sup> If involuntary adoption of a role *were* a means of deriving the kind of normativity at play in doxastic oughts, then we would have to contend that: *a kleptomaniac thief*

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<sup>33</sup> One potentially misleading aspect to Feldman and Chrisman’s considered roles is that there is possibly a non-optional, moral obligation undergirding the normativity of the social roles themselves. Perhaps, one might think, one’s social duties are merely a sub-species of a categorically normative moral duty (or moral role), i.e., perhaps we ought to perform in certain ways as a parent, not because parents ought to behave a certain way given their being within the “parent-role,” but because moral agents ought always to parent in a morally correct ways *qua* being a moral agent. Seemingly, the same could be said of the believer role, *viz.* believers should believe according to epistemic norms, since a moral agent ought morally to believe correctly. But I take it that epistemic normativity (at least for Feldman and Chrisman) is distinctly epistemic. Even if social roles are ultimately reducible to some broader *moral-agent-role*, the discussion at hand is (seemingly) imagining a self-contained, or self-constituting, normativity to our roles—that is, specific duties, permissions, and obligations pertaining to a role itself, such as with being a *believer*. Feldman and Chrisman’s considered examples (e.g., thief, slave, parent, teacher, etc.) flirt with moral normativity indirectly; however, the examples are given as discrete roles with independent norms stemming from them. Perhaps an agent is playing many roles at once, e.g., we are simultaneously teachers, parents, moral agents, epistemic agents all at once, and yet all these roles seem to confer their own normativity, their own set of norms and duties, and that doesn’t seem contradictory. I take no stance as to if the normativity of these roles is reduceable to another form. A certain normative pluralism is (possibly) being assumed in this debate, since both Feldman and Chrisman speak as though we can have discreet obligations and duties conferred by each role we take on.

<sup>34</sup> See Chrisman, pg. 356, for this mention.

*categorically ought to steal as we would think appropriate of one in the role of thief* just as a believer categorically ought to believe in the appropriate ways.

While it might make sense to think that a thief can go about performing thievery in better or worse ways (such as stealing in a cunning and/or stealthy manner, as opposed to a brutish and/or clumsy one),<sup>35</sup> the oughts pertaining to this role clearly cannot obtain categorically. We would (at least in normal circumstance) all say that thievery is something persons ought not to engage in, even if thievery has its own role-specific norms governing better and worse performances of thievery. As Chrisman himself asserts: “. . . we would not want to say that she [the thief] categorically ought to steal. Exactly the opposite: she categorically ought not to steal.” (356). Appealing to the normativity of *merely* involuntarily adopted roles is not going to do any satisfactory work in describing why doxastic oughts are categorical. Chrisman’s counter-example demonstrates that a role’s involuntariness cannot serve as the sole reason for its categorical normativity.<sup>36</sup> We should **not** be committed to saying: the kleptomaniac thief ought always to perform in her involuntarily adopted role correctly. Yet, we obviously can (and do) contend that: *believers ought to believe correctly always*.

Additionally, Chrisman provides the example of one in the role of a slave (see pg. 368). One’s involuntarily coming into the role of “slave” does not seem to generate any discernable

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<sup>35</sup> See Chrisman, pg. 365, for his similar discussion of “good performance” in the role of kleptomaniac, etc.

<sup>36</sup> Chrisman contrasts obligations derived from *ideals* with those derived from involuntarily adopted *roles* in trying to further motivate the insufficiency of (RBA), noting: “. . . respecting the legitimate property rights of others is plausibly thought to be a moral ideal, and from this ideal, it probably follows that one ought not to steal. The fact that, for example, your kleptomaniac friend cannot help but steal does not undermine the fact that she ought not to steal.” (357). Clearly something other than the involuntary adoption of such a role is deriving the oughts pertaining to property and theft. According to Chrisman, *ideals* seem better situated to get us the right conclusion than role oughts. However, it remains to be seen if “believer” is truly involuntarily adopted, furthermore, perhaps there is something intrinsically different about the reasons why we *should* be engaging in believing and *should not* be engaging in thievery—these matters will be discussed in the following section.

categorical obligations. Obviously, an individual that's enslaved is under no obligation to act as a slave paradigmatically ought to, and the involuntariness of such a role adoption (if anything) helps motivate the absurdity of any categorical obligation pertaining to it. One has good reason to stand behind Chrisman's assertion that, "... the mere fact that it is our 'plight' to play certain roles cannot explain the apparent categoricity of doxastic oughts." (356).

Before accepting Chrisman's take-down fully, it is fair to ask whether he has truly considered *all* available explanations by which to explain the normative asymmetry between doxastic and optional (or voluntarily adopted) role-oughts. While Chrisman's counterargument is intuitive, he (and perhaps Feldman to some extent) *wrongly* think(s) that if a role is not involuntarily adopted, then it must be entirely voluntarily adopted. But (as will be discussed in the coming chapter) there are *semi-voluntary* ways by which to adopt a role. If one is to fully exhaust the available options by which to explain the categorical normativity of doxastic oughts, then one must consider whether semi-voluntary role adoption is a plausible explanation.

Furthermore, what exactly it is to be a "believer" needs some brief clarification. A believer (*qua* believer) is one who partakes in a defining and characteristic activity, namely, *believing*. Analogously, a teacher is a role delimited by the very act of *teaching*, and a cyclist is one who (at some point) *cycles*, and so it is with the role of believer. If one engages in belief, regarding any content whatsoever, then one *is* adopting the role of a believer (*simpliciter*). But what exactly is it to be believing (*viz.* what constitutes belief)? We will not endeavor to solve such a deep metaphysical dispute definitively, but (hopefully) we can at least come to understand what it is that Chrisman and Feldman mean when they are discussing belief in the context of epistemic deontology. If we can get clear on what belief means in the context of these thinker's interchange, then we can attempt to respond to Chrisman's challenge properly.



## V. An Extremely Brief Survey of Belief

There is a plethora of accounts as to what precisely it is, or it means, to be *believing* (as opposed to wishing, or merely asserting, etc.) and we will, by no means, have an opportunity to look at them all. Instead, we will look to a constrained sample of accounts on the ontology of belief, and hone in on what account best fits the notion of belief pertinent to the dispute between Feldman and Chrisman.

One popular approach to defining belief is to contend that believing is *to affirm some propositional content as being true*, or as Howard Sankey specifically advocates: “. . . it is analytic to the concept of belief that to believe is to believe true. If one believes with respect to the content of a belief that it is false, then one does not believe it.” (2). While this account of belief doesn’t seem intrinsically in opposition to the kind of belief Feldman and Chrisman discuss, it is certainly not the robustly normative notion of belief that concerns the epistemic deontologist. An account such as Sankey’s seems to lack a clear integration of the corresponding obligations, duties, and permissions, etc. that belief is claimed to have.

There are *dispositional accounts of belief*. As Robert Audi articulates: “. . . for any person, *S*, and proposition, *p*, and any time, *t*, if, upon being asked at *t* whether *p* is the case, *S* would unhesitatingly affirm *p*, then, at *t*, *S* believes *p*.” (115). On Audi’s account of belief, being disposed to affirm propositional content (unhesitatingly) at a specified time, under specified circumstances, constitutes one’s believing. Additionally, dispositional accounts of belief, like that of R. B. Braithwaite, stipulate a necessary *behavioristic component* to belief, whereby being disposed to act as one would if one were entertaining *p* to be true, is the criterion of *actually*

*believing*.<sup>37</sup> However, as before, the dispositional notion of belief does not have the straightforward interconnection with normativity as epistemic deontology seemingly demands. Chrisman states of the central commitment of epistemic deontology: “Beliefs are proper subjects of epistemic oughts” (347). Belief *must* be the kind of thing which is properly subject to some epistemic ought, meaning that belief *is* characteristically normative for the epistemic deontologist.

Further yet to consider, Pascal Engel mentions: “Ernest Sosa takes epistemic normativity to be a special case of performance normativity, and invites us to understand belief as a kind of performance which has to pass three dimensions of evaluation to become knowledge: [ . . . ] On his view, the correctness of belief is explained as the instantiation of a teleological structure,” (617). For those like Sosa, belief is something performed (not unlike an *act*) and the performance of belief is evaluable in relation to its achievement of particular epistemic aims or goals.<sup>38</sup> Sosa’s account seems much more amenable to epistemic deontology and to both Feldman and Chrisman’s understanding of belief. On Sosa’s account, believing is subject to norms of good performance, so it is characteristically normative. Beliefs are subject to epistemic norms in that they are performances which ought to achieve goals/ends that are epistemic, such as knowledge.

Lastly, for our consideration, is Ralph Wedgwood’s *constitutively normative* account. As Wedgwood specifies: “I propose that certain concepts are normative because it is a constitutive feature of these concepts that they play a regulative role in certain practices.”<sup>39</sup> Wedgwood

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<sup>37</sup> See Braithwaite, pg. 132, wherein he contends: “My thesis is that ‘I believe one of these propositions *p*,’ [ . . . ] means the conjunction of the two propositions: (1) I entertain *p* (where entertainment is similarly used of an actual mental state and not of a disposition to entertain, and (2) I have a disposition to act as if *p* were true. [ . . . ] It is the latter proposition which on my view is the differentia of actual belief”

<sup>38</sup> I will argue in what follows that Feldman is also plausibly committed to an account of belief that is performance-based and teleological.

<sup>39</sup> See Wedgwood, pg. 268.

argues that, “It is often claimed that beliefs aim at the truth. Indeed, this claim has been thought to express an essential or constitutive feature of belief. But this claim is obviously not literally true. [. . .] I propose to interpret this claim as a *normative* claim—roughly, as the claim that a belief is correct if and only if the proposition believed is true.” (267). Belief, according to Wedgwood, always and necessarily is that which is subject to some normative standard, such as correctness. Wedgwood’s account gives us the robustly normative description of belief that seems demanded by epistemic deontology, but (as will be discussed further) belief as a *performance*, which is end-directed, might accord more precisely with how Feldman and Chrisman view belief. Nonetheless, Wedgwood gives us a definition of belief which would suffice for a bare epistemic deontology, since it gives us an inherently normative characterization of belief.

Essentially, the preceding brief survey should demonstrate that there are *plenty* of accounts of what belief is, some of which conflict with one another in not insignificant ways. Thankfully, we needn’t take any stance as to which account must be ultimately correct, since (again) we seek only to understand what kind of thing belief is taken to be within the parameters of Feldman and Chrisman’s dispute.

## **VI. Belief for Feldman, Chrisman and Epistemic deontology**

Feldman states that, “. . . forming beliefs is *something people do*. That is, we form beliefs in response to our experiences in the world. Anyone engaged in this *activity ought to do it right*.” (676).<sup>40</sup> There are two important implications for Feldman’s understanding of belief to explicate:

1) Feldman is committed to *believing* being something “people do”; it is an “activity” of some

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<sup>40</sup> The italics are my own, and were added for emphasis.

description. Additionally, **2)** belief is a kind of activity/doing that ought to be done *rightly*, which is to say, belief is subject to some evaluative standard or norm(s). Therefore, for Feldman, it seemingly must be the case that *to be believing*, an agent must: **a)** be doing the relevant kind of activity, such as responding to their world in the relevant manner, and **b)** this activity must be evaluable, such that it can be the subject of oughts and be done more or less rightly. Feldman seems in-line with a *performance-based* account of belief as advocated by Sosa, whereby: “. . . belief is after all a performance, one with an aim relative to which it can be teleological assessed. . .” (Sosa, passage 59).

As Feldman advances in his discussion on epistemic value, “One way to explain why we ought to do something is to show that it is a means to some goal that we have. . .” (682). Feldman specifies: “I want to defend [. . .] that following one’s evidence is the proper way to achieve something of epistemic value.” (682). Feldman maintains that belief is *goal-directed*, and that believers are evaluable according to their success in achieving an epistemic end. However, Sosa and Feldman do depart concerning what the epistemic goal of belief is (or ought to be). Feldman claims that: “. . . what has epistemic value are rational beliefs. To do well as a believer, is to achieve a kind of epistemic excellence, one must form only rational beliefs.” (Feldman, 685).<sup>41</sup> While Sosa and Feldman differ regarding what specifically belief ought to achieve (either knowledge or rational belief) the accounts are analogous in a clear sense, that is, both see belief as an evaluable performance, and as being something directed towards a distinctly epistemic end or goal. Epistemic normativity has a teleological structure for both thinkers.

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<sup>41</sup> Again, Sosa contends that knowledge is the epistemic end in virtue of which performances of belief are evaluable and to which any belief is ultimately directed.

For our purposes, we can remain entirely agnostic as to what belief *ought to achieve*. As long as something is *valuable enough* to represent an achievement of an epistemic end, epistemic normativity remains unblemished and can have a teleological structure which grounds epistemic normativity through performance-based evaluations of believers' characteristic activity, i.e., belief.

What seems to be most fundamental for Chrisman's understanding of belief and epistemic normativity is that: **1)** doxastic oughts be true, and **2)** that beliefs be the proper subjects of these doxastic oughts. As Chrisman straightforwardly says: ". . . it also seems clear that many statements about what we ought to believe are true. [. . .] We can isolate this intuition in the following *true doxastic oughts principle*: (DOP) At least some sentences of the form 'S ought to believe *p*' are true." (347). Furthermore, Chrisman contends of epistemic deontology that it necessitates: "(ED) Beliefs are proper subjects of epistemic oughts." (347). As was equally true for Feldman, beliefs must be the focal subjects of distinctly *epistemic* norms.

Given both of these thinker's understanding of belief, it could be reasonably asserted that Feldman and Chrisman take belief to be *de re* normative, that is to say beliefs must be understood as being the appropriate subjects of some epistemic (or doxastic) ought(s). As Chrisman contends above, and as the foregoing discussion should also have motivated, belief as the subject of epistemic normativity is *required* by epistemic deontology itself. Irrespective of either discussant's specific position on belief, if epistemic deontology is accepted it entails (at the very least) Chrisman's understanding of (ED).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Again, (ED) is Chrisman's understanding of the central commitment of epistemic deontology. See Chrisman, pg. 347, and cited above as well.

Lastly, does Chrisman also view belief as akin to an act/doing, and does he see epistemic normativity as being performance-based? While there is some subtlety to Chrisman's specific understanding of belief, I think this commitment is also fairly ascribable to him. Chrisman states: "If a doxastic ought is true, then there is someone who ought to do (or to have done) something." (370). Hence, like Feldman, Chrisman agrees that if doxastic oughts are true, something ought *to be done* in a specific way, and if epistemic deontology takes beliefs to be the subject of doxastic oughts, then believing rightly (as one ought to) is something to be done in better and worse ways.

Additionally, Chrisman remarks: "Kornblith has an alternative proposal which I think provides a crucial insight. He suggest that what Feldman is right about is that some oughts come from evaluations of what counts as good performance; and the cogency of such oughts clearly does not require voluntary control to do what they prescribe or proscribe. . ." (356). Chrisman concurs with Kornblith's assertion that some oughts can be derived from evaluations of performances, which aim at achieving some good.

However, it's fair to note, that Chrisman does not discuss explicitly *what is of epistemic value*, nor what aim belief must have, or what it ought to achieve. Chrisman (I think) clearly sees belief as fundamentally normative and performative in *some basic sense*, specifically in his conceiving of belief's needing to be *done* rightly. There is nothing precluding Chrisman from accepting that beliefs, as the subjects of doxastic oughts, are performances directed towards some *epistemic* end. Furthermore, since Chrisman is responding to Feldman, and Feldman is committed to an *end-directed* and *performative* conception of belief, I think it is fair to consider the relevant notion of belief at issue between the two as being **both** performative and teleological.

We now have the relevant understanding of belief before us, and we can continue with our response to Chrisman and a defense of the RBA. In the following chapter, we will **1)** demonstrate the plausibility of semi-voluntary role adoptions, thereby showing that one defending the RBA needn't only appeal to the "bad explanation" from involuntariness in sourcing doxastic normativity. Additionally, **2)** we will motivate the specific third-order desirability of the role of believer, which Chrisman's counter-example roles crucially lack.

## **Chapter 2**

### **I. In Response to Chrisman: A Discussion of Semi-voluntary Role Adoption**

Again, as discussed in the previous chapter, Chrisman thinks that one defending the RBA is in the untenable position of needing to appeal to the believer role's involuntary adoption to explain its categorical normativity. The social roles which Feldman considers (e.g., parent, teacher, and cyclist) are in principle optionally taken-on, while conversely the believer role is seemingly not. Doxastic and social oughts have asymmetric normativity, and the only relevant dissimilarity between doxastic and social role oughts (according to Chrisman) is that believers adopt their role non-optionally, or involuntarily. We fully grant that *if* the RBA *must* rely upon involuntary adoption so as to explain the categoricity of epistemic normativity, then it is *in fact* an untenable position and provides an unsatisfactory explanation. But, of course, the counter to Chrisman (as prefaced above) is that the believer role's involuntariness is **not** the only available explanation for its asymmetric normativity. Chrisman, at least implicitly, is prematurely precluding the possibility of roles that are *neither* fully optionally adopted (in the sense of being actually chosen), *nor* involuntarily adopted, such that, "... we have no choice about to take on the role" and are impressed or compelled (356). But, it would seem, that some roles are adopted in ways that escape this strict fully volitional, or completely involitional demarcation (as will be shown).

The focus of this chapter will be to show that Chrisman's dismissal of the RBA has been too fast in two regards. There **(1)** *does* exist an unconsidered explanatory option for a defense of role-based epistemic normativity, i.e., *semi-voluntary* and/or *implicitly consented to* role



adoptions, which are neither *actually* optional nor *strictly* involuntary. Additionally, (2) roles such as thief and believer may be different from one another in their choice-worthiness, such that there could be independent value (or benefit) to upholding one role and not the other. If one had more reason to uphold the believer role than the thief role, then (presumably) the normative demand would be correspondingly distinct.

To begin to rebut Chrisman, we will consider whether it is *in fact* the case that roles can **only** be fully voluntarily (as in directly chosen) or involuntarily adopted (as in instances of compulsion or impressment). Again, if we find that there is an alternative to this volitional dichotomy, then it would undermine Chrisman's contention that a defender of the RBA *must* rely upon the involuntariness of being in the believer role to explain the role's particular categorical, normativity.<sup>43</sup>

Both Chrisman and Feldman agree that fully voluntary adoption of the believer role is implausible. Intuitively, no one explicitly signs any agreement, nor agrees outright, to become a believer, and believing seems to be something we innately start doing as soon as our cognitive capacity allows it. However, nothing necessitates that whenever the role of believer isn't actually chosen, it need then be completely involuntarily adopted. Rather, there is a precluded middle ground to role adoptions. In what follows, I will explicate this middle ground, which can be termed *semi-voluntary role adoption*.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See the previous chapter for an enumeration of this claim of Chrisman's.

<sup>44</sup> To be clear, I am not trying to say anything of ontological significance with this term. I am not claiming that there is a new volitional space being carved out; rather, I'm showing the existence of something that escapes the extremes of volition that Chrisman imposes upon the epistemic normativity debate. The term *Semi-voluntary* is being used only to denote those exercises of will which exist outside of Chrisman's paradigm. Semi-voluntary role adoptions may (in other contexts) be straightforwardly called: *voluntary*. But we need a means of showing something outside of Chrisman's volitional dichotomy, hence the use of "semi-voluntary" is a debate specific shorthand.

Michael O. Hardimon explains: “The fact that one has not signed on for a social role does not entail that one has acquired it against one’s will. Signing on is not the only alternative to being impressed. The other alternative is birth.” (347-348). Furthermore, Hardimon contends: “In contrast to the volunteer principle, which calls for a form of choice that is actual, the ideal of reflective acceptability calls for a form of acceptance that is *hypothetical*.” (348). Hardimon furnishes us with examples of role adoptions that are neither *actually* chosen, nor strictly against our will. Let us consider Hardimon’s example of being born into a role. One could, for instance, *hypothetically* assent to the acceptability of existing within a born-into-role, such as son or daughter.<sup>45</sup> For our born-into roles, such as being X and Y’s son/daughter, there is a lack of actual choice in its initial adoption; that is, we merely find ourselves within the role by default, having not exercised our will in any immediate or direct capacity.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, we can easily understand that being born into the role of son or daughter is not equivalent to impressment, and one might assent to being another’s son or daughter upon reflection at a later time. One’s reflective acceptance of a born-into role is, in at least an indirect way, a volitional exercise regarding one’s role(s). One may default into being *X’s biological daughter*, given how lineage and contingencies of fate work, but one may also later reflect upon that contingent, biological fact and maintain that: *being X’s daughter is something, had I been given the choice, I would have preferred*. One’s reflecting upon the role one is fated to be within, and approving of it, even if already within the role itself, is some form of volitional choice; thereby *it is volitional adoption* even though *daughter* is not in-principle optional in the same way the role of *teacher*

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<sup>45</sup> Hardimon specifically gives the example of female familial roles (including daughter) on pg. 349.

<sup>46</sup> This isn’t to say that one can’t later reject the role or decide not to fulfill the role in all its social and emotional depth. Rather, the point is that by birth we are taken to be within the role. One simply doesn’t say: “This child whom I birthed may one day be my daughter.” Of course, instead, the role is simply foisted upon the child and the role is defaulted into simply by a contingency of birth and/or fate.

may be. A teacher does not wake up and find themselves to be a teacher, we are not ever born-into the teacher role. And Chrisman would be wrong to claim that roles we happen into by default, or by birth (such as being a believer or daughter) are akin to the impressment of slavery, or the psychological compulsion of kleptomania. The slave and the kleptomaniac thief are (naturally) never going to assent to the role they are forced to play; rather, the roles are inherently objectionable, i.e., there is *no* potential for the kind of reflective acceptance Hardimon discusses. A slave role is involuntary in the most complete sense, since it precludes any reflective and/or hypothetical acceptance.

*Reflective acceptance* of a role's choice-worthiness, or *hypothetical assent* to being within a role one had no *actual* choice in taking on, does not square with Chrisman's strict conception of role adoptions. Again, Chrisman would have us think that ". . . we have **no** choice about whether to take on the role of believer." (356),<sup>47</sup> but this is an impoverished understanding. *Actual choice* may not exist for the believer role (and this seems right to say). However, a lack of actual choice does not preclude reflective acceptance of a role, nor does a lack of actual choice in the adoption of a role preclude our coming to hypothetically accept a role we find ourselves within.<sup>48</sup> We have some form of choice in these role adoptions, since our reflective acceptance is not compelled, and our choice—while not actual—can still be hypothetical. Chrisman's volitional dichotomy has the consequence of making exercises of will, such as: "*I would have chosen to be a believer, given the choice*" and "*I accept that being a believer is a good thing, and I want to be in the role I'm already in*" as irrelevant and equivalent to **no choice** whatsoever. Obviously, to render such

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<sup>47</sup> The boldening is my own for emphasis.

<sup>48</sup> Again, hypothetical acceptance would take the form of: "I may not have had any effective choice in adopting this role, but I find it acceptable upon reflection, and would have chosen it, given the chance to have done so." If this kind of reflective acceptance of a role's adoption is precluded, then (I contend) it is absolutely involuntary. Since, no potential for an exercise of will in such a capacity is possible, given the total non-choice-worthiness of a role such as slave, which (I assume) to be straightforwardly objectionable in every regard for any reasonable agent.

statements as incomprehensible, or even involuntary, is incorrect. Such statements are volitional to some degree, perhaps not fully voluntary, but at least semi-voluntary.

The counter to Chrisman, more concisely, is to note that being a believer is not unlike being a daughter in a couple of crucial respects. Being a believer is akin to being within a born-into-role, which is to say we find ourselves within the roles retrospectively, having not had actual choice in taking it on, nor ever directly volunteering for it. Furthermore, just as Hardimon claims of the daughter role, *believer* is one of those roles that one could find to be “. . . meaningful, rational, or good” (348) upon reflection. If one can agree to this parallelism, then it shows that Feldman is not forced into saying that the believer role *must* be involuntarily adopted. There is a middle ground to being optional or fully impressed/compelled. Roles which have the potential to be assented to upon reflection, or which could be adopted for their own sake by a reasonable agent, can allow for some form of choice. Therefore, Feldman, or a defender of the RBA, could escape a *bad explanation* for role-derived epistemic normativity, simply by expanding an understanding of how role adoption works and expanding the volitional space between impressment/compulsion and actual choice.

Additionally, we can look to an account of political obligation to additionally demonstrate that *indirect* and *non-explicit* assent to a role does not equate (*ipso facto*) to involuntary adoption. One's will may be invoked (or exercised) in other non-actual ways. I take it that when one's consent can be construed, then it is evidence of an operation of one's will, which is to say, impressment, or psychological compulsion would be (as before) inappropriate descriptions of what is going on. Absent signing on for the role, in any explicit sense, some political subjects (such as citizens by birthright) do find themselves within a role by default, having corresponding duties and obligations, and yet they are clearly not impressed, nor psychologically compelled

into adopting the role. I contend that if consent to a role adoption can be construed, then it represents another means by which to show the inadequacy of Chrisman's understanding of the voluntariness of role adoptions, since consent would mean that an agent's will can be expressed and/or exercised (at least to some degree). The discussion of consent in what follows will similarly show that in the absence of actual choice—that is, absent directly signing-on, or explicitly opting-in—it doesn't presume a totalizing involuntariness. Harry Beran's discussion of "implicit consent" to the authority of one's state will help demonstrate another means of role adoption which escapes Chrisman's artificially imposed volitional binary.

Beran asserts: ". . . implicit consent to do *X* simply consists in the absence of explicit refusal to agree to do it in a context which gives such absence of (explicit) refusal the significance of (implicit) consent." (269). On Beran's account, in the absence of one's explicit refusal, in an appropriately significant context,<sup>49</sup> one has implicitly consented to adopting a given role, such as citizen or political subject, etc.<sup>50</sup> Hence, it seems plausible that—barring any explicit refusal in an appropriately significant context—one is *implicitly assenting* to take on those roles one remains within. The question for Chrisman becomes: might believers be implicitly consenting to their role as a believer and their obligations to believe rightly? I take it that when one is assenting, even if only implicitly, this constitutes **some** exercise of choice and/or will. And if consent is on the table, then impressment or fully involuntary adoption seems an inappropriate

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<sup>49</sup> That is, a context devoid of: ". . . deception, mental incapacity, coercion or undue influence, and unfair bargaining position." (Beran 267). The presence of any of these conditions, according to Beran: ". . . cannot create a promissory obligation." (266) which he takes to be the basis of political obligation.

<sup>50</sup> Beran thinks there are (at least) three legitimate ways by which one could "*avoid agreeing*" to be in the role of political subject, namely: ". . . secession, migration, or a public declaration that they are not accepting membership in the state in whose territory they are living." (266). I don't contend that these means of avoiding agreement are analogous to the ways in which we can avoid agreeing to be a believer, but it remains an open possibility that some implicit consent constituting context exists for believers as well.

ascription. If this is an accurate analysis, it would further show the inadequacy of Chrisman's dismissal of the RBA.

Chrisman *must* show us that the role of believer is somehow incompatible with the semi-voluntary role adoptions we've discussed, at least if he is to force the RBA to *have to* rely upon the *bad explanation* of epistemic normativity (again, the involuntariness of the believer role's adoption). Chrisman's critique has a significant problem; his slave and kleptomaniac thief counterexamples are *strictly involuntary* role adoptions.<sup>51</sup> Hence, Chrisman's dismissal of the RBA remains incomplete and an alternative explanatory move exists.

Furthermore, there is yet another distinct way of rebutting Chrisman. Being in the believer role is *uniquely valuable*, and there are reasons to want to be a believer that clearly do not exist for other roles. We can put aside entirely discussions of the voluntariness of role adoptions, and *still* explain the disparate normativity between the believer role and a role such as thief or slave. If we look at the overarching *reasons* (or motivations) for adopting a given role, then we can explain how and why one needn't be compelled to steal in the role of thief yet ought always to believe rightly as a believer.

My contention, more specifically, is that there are compelling reasons to believe, and to do so appropriately, but that such reasons **don't** extend to the roles of thief and/or slave. One can take their pick of the litter when it comes to sourcing doxastic oughts' categorical normativity. There

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<sup>51</sup> This is not at all to say that Chrisman cannot provide such counterexamples. Rather, the point is merely to show the insufficiency of his dismissal in its current state. Another (yet unrefuted) explanatory move is simply made available to his opponent.

will be an explication of the psychological reasons, moral reasons, and prudential reasons for the sake of which to adopt the role of believer.<sup>52</sup>

## II. Concerning Our Reasons to be Believers

If one finds oneself in the role of believer, as all presumably do, then what *reason* is there to accept the role and its obligations? Why should we think that the role of believer is a role worth taking on at all? Furthermore, what basis is there (if there even is one) to perform in the role of believer well?

We will look at three reasons for the sake of which being a believer is particularly choice-worthy. No decisive reason will be given, but three independently sufficient reasons will be examined. We will consider believing *for the sake of*: **1)** psychological wellbeing, **2)** morality, and lastly, **3)** prudence/pragmatics.<sup>53</sup>

Before presenting the case for our first candidate-reason, we will need to examine how it is possible to have a higher-order reason for the sake of which to go about believing. Additionally, it will be shown that one can possess a *lower-order aim* to believe a certain way (or according to a particular epistemic norm), while simultaneously having an overarching reason to take on the project of believing itself.<sup>54</sup> Insights from Louis E. Loeb will be invaluable in helping to give us a coherent picture of the *orders of reason* in adopting the role of believer.<sup>55</sup> However, many of

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<sup>52</sup> These reasons are specific to being a believer and explicitly don't extend to Chrisman's counter-example roles of thief and slave.

<sup>53</sup> Believing for the sake of prudential aims can be understood as pertaining either to the ends of an individual or a community. The way in which we will talk about prudential aims will often seem to presume a singular agent, but this isn't to preclude the possibility that belief could be a means to achieving the ends of a community (or collective).

<sup>54</sup> One can always consider whatever epistemic norm(s) one finds most convincing; the point to be demonstrated is one concerning broader reasons to follow *any* epistemic norm at all. The particulars of what a proper epistemic norm entails are not going to be explored with any substantive depth.

<sup>55</sup> See Loeb, pg. 207, for the cited term in context.

the particulars of Loeb's account will not be relevant to our discussion. For instance, he seems to be assuming a *dispositional* account of belief, but we needn't adopt such notions of belief along with Loeb.<sup>56</sup>

### III. Loeb and Higher-order Reasons for Belief

As was mentioned in our brief survey of belief in the previous chapter, belief might be the kind of thing which aims at achieving some epistemic goal; that is, it might be teleological and aim at things of epistemic value, such as truth or knowledge. But the epistemic aims of our doxastic practice(s) *could* be supplemented by some higher-order aim(s), which are not strictly epistemic in kind. Loeb advances just such a notion, and he demonstrates how it is possible for an aim to serve as *the ultimate reason for which* to take on the project of believing itself. Truth, rational belief, and knowledge may all be fine and good *epistemic* ends to seek, but to even want to pursue these ends presuppose a further reasoning, a reason for valuing these epistemic goals (or goods) in the first place.

Loeb asserts of belief that: “. . . we can possess yet higher-order dispositions than aiming at the truth.” (207), and as he elaborates through analogy: “One's engagement in the activity of chess, however, might itself be directed by a higher-order desire, for example, to have fun, or develop a skill, or to show off—by playing chess. For the sake of achieving these other aims, one aims to win.” (207). Loeb contends, we might decide to play by the rules of chess because we want to win, but there can be a *further reason* to try to win at the game in the first place—to show off, to have fun, etc. There are three levels of abstraction to keep in mind pertaining to

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<sup>56</sup> As Loeb specifically asserts of belief on pg. 206: “In the first place, belief is typically associated with a first-order disposition, or set of dispositions, to behave in particular ways in particular conditions. [ . . . ] In the second place, belief is typically associated with a second-order disposition to regulate one's belief that a proposition is true, and hence the first-order dispositions associated with belief, by (what one takes to be) evidence or indicators of truth.”



Loeb's analogy: (1) a reason to move pieces on the board this way and not that way, because one is aiming to play a specific game; then (2) there is a reason to follow rules of piece-movement adroitly because one aims to win the game; and lastly, (3) one has reason to attempt to win at the game of chess because one has the ultimate aim of doing something of like showing off.<sup>57</sup>

Reasons 1-3 represent correspondingly higher-order aims *for the sake of which*<sup>58</sup> to be playing chess, and Loeb thinks the case is paralleled with believing. Loeb states: "Of course, in playing chess and in regulating belief, there need not be a higher-order objective than winning and aiming at the truth, respectively, but there might be." (207). In this chapter we will examine plausible third-order reasons for the sake of which to go about believing and believing correctly (i.e., according to some epistemic norm, or the rules of the game, as it were).

#### IV. Sextus and Psychological Wellbeing

We might take on the role of a believer for the sake of our psychological well-being. Straightforwardly, our psychological wellbeing is often at stake in our doxastic practice(s), and it would seem appropriate as a concern when going about our doxastic life. We can be made utterly miserable when gripped by a disquieting belief, and even to be in doubt can be its own kind of misery. Loeb goes so far as to contend that some of the biggest names in the history of Western philosophy,<sup>59</sup> ". . . share the view that the desire to aim at truth that is characteristic of belief is itself subject to a higher-order desire, the desire to secure doxastic states that satisfy the conditions characterized in psychological terms, without reference to truth." (209).

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<sup>57</sup> See Loeb, pg. 207, for the full chess analogy in context.

<sup>58</sup> I am borrowing this phrasing (roughly) from Loeb, see 207, wherein he writes: "We might, for example, possess a third-order desire to possess first-and-second-order dispositions characteristic of belief *for the sake of* achieving stability in doxastic states. . ."

<sup>59</sup> Sextus, Peirce, Hume and Descartes respectively.

We will look to Sextus Empiricus and *the Skeptic's way* for an example of a doxastic practice which is directed towards a purely psychological end, i.e., *mental tranquility*. Suspension of judgement is the Pyrrhonian means to his/her desired end,<sup>60</sup> and a doxastic life which practices suspension of judgement is thought by the skeptic to achieve second-order epistemic rationality (or meet our epistemic obligations) as well.

Sextus claims: "Our assertion up to now is that the Sceptic's end, where matters of opinion is concerned, is mental tranquility; [. . .] His initial purpose in philosophizing was to pronounce judgements on appearances. He wished to find out which are true and which false, so as to attain mental tranquility." (41). In judgements of appearance and in matters of opinion, the skeptic is one who is engaged in the pursuit of the psychological state of mental tranquility. Of course, Sextus thinks our doxastic practice(s) should be directed towards this higher-order end in virtue of its independent choice-worthiness. Mental tranquility ". . . is an undisturbed and calm state of the soul." (34), and it seems (straightforwardly) to be a state worth achieving.

Sextus further mentions: "An end is 'that at which all actions or thoughts are directed, and which is itself directed at nothing, in other words, the ultimate of desirable things.'" (41). When the Skeptic speaks of an end, he/she means the *ultimate of desirable things*, which is not unlike Loeb's discussion of higher-order ends in belief. If mental tranquility is the skeptic's end, then *all* thoughts and actions ought to be directed towards its achievement. All doxastic states (belief, disbelief, and/or suspension of judgment) ought then to be undertaken for the sake of achieving mental tranquility.

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<sup>60</sup> As Sextus mentions directly: "We were saying that mental tranquility follows on suspension of judgement in regard to all things." (42).

However, Sextus seems to imply that the Skeptic's ultimately desired end *might* come at the frustration of some other commonly touted epistemic achievements (e.g., knowledge and/or truth). Loeb directs our attention to this point specifically, mentioning: "Pyrrhonian skepticism is an example of a position on which a higher-order desire for a psychological objective supplants the lower order desire for truth." (214). Notice that the Skeptic's end is *ultimate* though, and so it is hierarchically superior to other goods or ends.

Furthermore, *if* the Skeptic is correct in maintaining, "To every argument an equal argument is opposed" (35),<sup>61</sup> *then* perhaps the only epistemically permissible (or rational) attitude is a suspension of belief, or judgment.<sup>62</sup> One ought not to deny, nor affirm the truth of a proposition if it is such that the evidence (or arguments) for it and its opposition are equal in strength. Epistemic justification for the Skeptic seemingly demands the suspension of belief always. At the second-order level, if one seeks to be reasonable, and to have rational doxastic states, then one ought to suspend belief, or judgement, as best as one can. As it so happens, suspending judgment is also the means by which to achieve an independently valuable third-order psychological aim of mental tranquility.

We will examine two other candidate-reasons for the sake of which to take on the believer role, and for which to meet the role's demands (i.e., those demands inherent to some reasonable second-order epistemic norm). Again, the third-order reasons being presented should *not* be taken as independently decisive, but rather each is a potential reasoning through which one *could* find the role of believer to be particularly choice-worthy. In tandem, our epistemic obligations

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<sup>61</sup> Wherein, *equal* means: "... equality in respect of credibility and incredibility, since we do not admit that ant of the conflicting argument can take precedence over another on grounds of being more credible." See Sextus, pg. 34.

<sup>62</sup> To be clear, Sextus conceives of "*suspension of judgment*" as being: "... a cessation of the thought processes in consequence of which we neither deny nor affirm anything." (34).

will be shown to be acceptable, because meeting our epistemic obligation(s) so happens to be in the service of achieving independently desirable, third-order ends.

## V. Clifford and the Morality of Believing

Another reason for which to be in the role of believer is for the sake of *morality*. Our doxastic practice(s) is not only intimately linked to our psychological well-being, but it is closely tied to our moral projects. In stark contrast to Chrisman's counterexamples (e.g., the *thief* and *slave* role), the role of believer might be a thoroughgoingly moral undertaking.

We will examine two moral characterizations of believing extrapolated from W.K. Clifford. We will explore in-turn: **1)** how believing might be an intrinsically moral activity; and **2)** how believing might be derivatively moral, given its causal interconnection with our actions. If either of these characterizations is fitting, then morality can provide another adequate third-order reason for the sake of which to be a believer.

### A) Believing as Intrinsically Moral

A strong moral depiction of believing emerges from Clifford's discussion of the wrongness of misbelieving. For Clifford, misbelief is a *misdeed* in kind, and epistemically unjustified belief is akin to an *act* of theft or deception. Clifford asserts: "But if the belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence, the pleasure is a **stolen** one. Not only does it **deceive** ourselves by giving us a sense of power which we do not really possess, but it is sinful, because it is **stolen** in defiance of our duty to mankind." (293).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The bolding is my own for emphasis.

The “sinfulness” of misbelief is identified as being a failure of duty, but Clifford ascribes other moral, deontological qualities to misbelief. Misbelieving is: **(a)** deceitful, and **(b)** theft of unearned “pleasure.” Naturally, to *deceive* and to *steal* are paradigmatic moral infractions (*ceteris paribus*).<sup>64</sup> If to believe wrongly is ever a matter of unjust theft,<sup>65</sup> then it is a clear moral infraction. Misbelief very well may be a kind of *wrongful taking*; a taking of some epistemic good (such as surety, or truth) which is not deserved by the misbeliever who comes to possess it. The misbeliever *steals* in those instances where he, “. . . nourished a belief, when he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him; and therein he would know that he had done a wrong thing.” (291).

Furthermore, Clifford contends that there is a certain self-deception to misbelieving, in that we deceive ourselves about something like the extent of our own “powers,” or the domain of our actual knowledge. Misbelief deceives in that it often confers a false sense of “. . . mastery over more of the world” (Clifford 293).

The deceptiveness of misbelieving is rather intuitive. For example, if a new lifter, who just struggled to complete a 95-pound lift on flat-bench, believed that the true extent of their strength

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<sup>64</sup> There is subtlety to this claim. I do not mean to imply that theft is wrong *in kind*; rather, we have something resembling a *prima facie* duty not to steal. As W.D. Ross notes: “If as almost all moralists except Kant are agreed, and as most plain men think, it is sometimes right to tell a lie or to break a promise, it must be maintained that there is a difference between a *prima facie* duty and actual or absolute duty [. . .] We have to distinguish from the characteristic of being our duty that of tending to be our duty.” (28). Similarly, we *tend* to think that one ought not to deceive nor steal, but there are obvious cases in which either would be permissible (e.g., stealing some bread to save a starving child). Furthermore, there may be an analogous *prima facie* obligation to believe as is epistemically justified, *viz.* it *tends* to be the case that we ought to believe according to the dictates of some reasonable second-order epistemic norm, though exceptions (conceivably) also exist. Our achieving some non-epistemic ends, such as psychological well-being, might represent exceptions to believing as the prevailing second-order epistemic norm stipulates.

<sup>65</sup> As Clifford mentions of the pleasure derived from belief: “We feel much happier and more secure when we think we know precisely what to do, no matter what happens [. . .] we naturally do not like to find that we are really ignorant and powerless.” (293). Assumedly, the *stolen pleasure* of misbelief is in reference to a false surety, or premature doubtlessness.

was being able to bench 405 pounds (if only they really tried), then their belief belies a dangerous self-deception. They do not have sufficient evidence that they could complete such a lift, and to the contrary, the difficulty with which they completed their previous lift should serve as strong defeating evidence. The new lifter attributes themselves with a capability they almost certainly do not possess, and even if it were so that they could (somehow) complete such a lift, the antecedent pleasure of thinking themselves to be *that* strong, and *that* capable is wrongly had. There is no good reason to dismiss the possibility that they cannot complete such a lift, and they actively must stifle reasonable doubts to persist in their belief that they could bench 405 pounds. The belief is deceptive in kind, for it requires a particular species of lying, a lying unto oneself.

Hence, belief can *itself* be a moral project. Clifford's negative characterization of belief (i.e., when we believe without sufficient evidence for the given proposition) is such that there is no stark evaluative distinction between it and disregarding a *prima facie* moral duty. Misbelief and the correlative misdeeds of theft and deception may have analogously moral ontologies.

## **B) Believing and Acting**

An agent's beliefs and acts are certainly (by some means) interlinked.<sup>66</sup> And our believings interconnection with our acts may make them derivatively moral. The moral significance of one having a given belief could be recognized in the possibility that it: ". . . may someday explode into overt action," (Clifford 292). In so far as we think it is morally significant that agents avoid

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<sup>66</sup> I will attempt no definitive argument for how best one should understand this interconnection. Rather, I find that Clifford presents a *plausible enough* account of how it might be so. Irrespective of the particulars of how beliefs and acts are ultimately interrelated though, the recognition that *they are* (in some way) seems mostly uncontroversial.

and/or perform certain acts, we have a moral reason for the sake of which to take our doxastic practice(s) seriously.

While aspects of Clifford's belief-metaphysic depart from Chrisman and Feldman's own, all thinkers seem amenable to the idea that our beliefs have *some* causal influence upon how we act (as has been discussed previously). Clifford claims of belief that: "Nor is that truly a belief at all which has not some influence upon the actions of him who holds it." (291). If something like Clifford's account of belief is correct, then a belief is sufficient for *influencing* and/or *prompting* one to act.<sup>67</sup>

Clifford further stipulates: "If a belief is not realized immediately in open deeds it is stored up for the guidance of the future." (291-292). Accordingly, even if a belief isn't the immediate cause of a given act, beliefs may "*store up*" a potentiality for action at some later point. Anyone concerned with morality, which may be all of us by default, should be concerned with having beliefs that promote morally correct action. Brian Zamulinski comments: ". . . beliefs and desires can explain acts, and, in some cases in which a person's desires are morally unobjectionable, he can do objective wrong because of what he believes, as Clifford's examples illustrate." (442). Belief can be the impetus which manifests a morally objectionable (or acceptable) outcome. While acts are likely the result of many disparate cognitive inputs and/or processes, belief *alone* can be causally efficacious. Belief can be *that* which leads to a ship sinking into the ocean's depths.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> This account is not dissimilar to the dispositional, behavioral account of belief surveyed in chapter 1 (Braithwaite's position). However, again, the particulars of Clifford's exact metaphysical account of belief are not all that pertinent, since all that we are attempting to establish is that there is *some casual interconnection between beliefs and acts*. For instance, we do not need to commit to the idea that belief always (as a matter of necessity) influences behavior; rather, it would suffice merely to show that this was true of belief some of the time.

<sup>68</sup> This is, of course, in reference to Clifford's titular example (see pg. 289).

Clifford demonstrates not only the causal interconnection between beliefs and acts, but he stipulates their evaluative coupling: “For it is **not** possible to sever the belief from the action it suggests as to condemn the one without condemning the other.”<sup>69</sup> While demonstrating a mere causal connection to acts is not enough for ascribing moral significance to beliefs, the causal interconnection paired with an appropriate ethical framework might be sufficient. For instance, *act-consequentialism (or utilitarianism)* might provide the theoretical framework by which to understand the moral significance of belief.<sup>70</sup> For the act-consequentialist, the consequence(s) of an act is that which has moral content. According to act-consequentialism, matters of right and wrong are delimited by outcomes (or states-of-affair) which either bring about good, or avoid that which is bad. Thus, if some belief (B) influenced the performance of some act (A), and (A) brought about some State-of-affairs (S), in which there is more overall pleasure than pain, then (B) is itself morally significant.<sup>71</sup>

Clifford motivates the idea that believing with epistemic justification is an effective means for avoiding morally bad outcomes. For instance, Clifford’s initial cases of misbelieving in “The Ethics of Belief” lead to ultimately preventable deaths, and the ruination of an innocent group’s reputation. The ship-owner who relied upon providence for believing that his ship was seaworthy, and the accusers who acted upon a mere suspicion of a religious sect’s wrongdoing “. . . *had no right as to believe on such evidence as was before them*” (290). The consequences of

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<sup>69</sup> The bolding is my own for emphasis.

<sup>70</sup> As J. J. C. Smart describes: “Utilitarianism is the doctrine that the rightness of actions is to be judged by their consequences.” (344). I take Smart’s description of *Utilitarianism* to be synonymous with a basic *act-consequentialism*; but whatever one wants to term this theoretical position, it is that to which I refer.

<sup>71</sup> Again, as Smart also describes: “A hedonistic utilitarian holds that the goodness of the consequences of an action is a function only of its pleasurable . . .” (345). I give the example of *hedonistic* utilitarianism as it is prevalent and rather straightforward. One could presumably imagine other types of ethical value and have the example run equally well. To be clear, there is no implication that a commitment to hedonistic utilitarianism is required for the broader claim that *belief is morally significant*.



agents believing as they ought not to have, were (predictably) bad. However, if the hypothetical believers were to have followed an epistemic norm resembling Clifford's own (in which they only ever believed upon sufficient evidence), then the travesties would have been avoided entirely. The reason to want to fulfill our obligation as believers could therefore be moral. We might want to believe with justification so as to avoid morally bad states-of-affairs.

However, admittedly, it's not clear that *all* cases of correct belief will correspond to good deeds (nor the inverse). The point being made is much simpler, that is, we have reason to think that meeting our epistemic obligations *tends* to avoid morally undesirable outcomes.<sup>72</sup> Certainly, differing epistemic norms, with different content, could be better or worse at bringing about acts which manifest optimific states-of-affairs (in *concreto*). Nonetheless, it seems fair to think that believing correctly, according to some reasonable epistemic norm, *tends* to lead to morally correct outcomes overall.

Ultimately, one need not agree wholesale with the moral characterizations of believing sketched above. All that is being asserted is that there is some plausible moral motivation for the sake of which to want to be a believer and to meet our epistemic obligations. Perhaps our first characterization of belief lends itself more to a deontological ethical understanding, perhaps the second a consequentialist understanding; but regardless of any specific ethical commitments, there is ample reason to think that believing has an inextricable connection with our moral projects.

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<sup>72</sup> Zamulinski contends of Clifford's position that: "What he has shown seems to be merely that there is always a morally relevant reason not to overbelieve. He has not shown that the reason is always decisive. Surely, it will often be wrong to overbelieve, even almost always, but Clifford seems to have stopped short of proving that it is always wrong to overbelieve." (444-45).

## IV. The Prudential Reasons to Believe

Lastly, in this chapter, we will look to the *prudential reasons* for the sake of which to take on the role of believer. If we have certain aims, or goals, then we might *practically* want to go about believing and to meet our epistemic obligations as a believer. As seems *prima facie* correct, we have strong pragmatic reason to want to believe and to do so with justification. Believing with justification seems to be an effective stratagem for making our way throughout the world and for achieving those ends which we seek. There is an obvious value to having true beliefs about states-of-affairs of the external world and having epistemically justified beliefs is (plausibly) tied to having true beliefs about how best to achieve our ends.<sup>73</sup>

As has been specified previously, there is no assumption of what the content of our second-order epistemic norm(s) ought to be. Additionally, there will be no definitive discussion of the extent to which pragmatic reasons/motives ought to dictate epistemic normativity more generally. Instead, we will examine how a justified doxastic practice *could* be sought for the sake of third-order prudential reasons. Essentially, if one believes *as one is expected to*, then one will (in most instances, though not all) be in a *better* position to accomplish one's ends. We will look

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<sup>73</sup> However, there is no direct entailment between epistemically justified belief and true belief. As Richard Foley mentions: "... it is possible for more of what it is epistemically rational for us to believe (regardless of what we do in fact believe) to be false than to be true." (191). One could be fully epistemically justified (or epistemically *rational*) and yet still have the misfortune of being systematically and fundamentally deceived. Nonetheless, while epistemically justified beliefs are *no guarantee* of truth, epistemically justified beliefs seemingly *tend* to be true. Earl Conee and Feldman contend of evidentialist epistemic justification: "We agree that gaining the doxastic attitudes that fits one's evidence is the epistemically best way to use one's evidence in trying to believe all and only the truths one considers." (20)

to two second-order epistemic norms, from two opposing conceptions of epistemic justification, and demonstrate that being a believer, *qua* believer, is (likely) prudentially beneficial.

### **A) Externalist Prudential Reasons for Being a Believer**

Externalists are most essentially committed to the position that: “. . . justification involves or depends essentially, in part, on non-mental factors.” (Hasan 119).<sup>74</sup> And for a plausible epistemic norm based upon an Externalist conception of epistemic justification, we can look to Alvin Plantinga. As Plantinga advances: “. . . a belief has warrant if it is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth.” (428).

Given Plantinga’s Externalist epistemic norm, if one were to believe with “warrant,” then one would have beliefs that were in accordance with a design plan “successfully aimed at the truth.” Beliefs which had warrant would thereby be massively prudentially beneficial. If one achieved a doxastic practice which often coincided with truths concerning propositions such as:  *$\phi$  is an efficient means for achieving my goal of X*, then one’s beliefs could greatly facilitate the accomplishing of one’s ends. Whereas one with an epistemically unwarranted belief concerning  *$\phi$*  would have no reasonable means of determining if it (in fact) were likely to be a good means for achieving X. Therefore, believing with epistemic justification (or warrant) seems to be prudentially beneficial for the Externalist. If one were to suspend belief entirely, for instance,

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<sup>74</sup> I have cited merely *one* of the ways in which to characterize the complex Internalist/Externalist divide. There are various other ways by which to categorize the debate, as Hasan additionally mentions: the distinction could come down to a matter of the fundamentality of a subject’s access or awareness to some justificatory factor, or the representational (or non-representational) nature of the content of our beliefs, and/or whether justification is necessarily minded. See Hasan, 117-124, for this discussion.

then one would spurn a means to instrumentally useful doxastic content(s) about one's ends and states of the external world.

## **B) Internalist Prudential Reasons for Being a Believer**

If one were convinced of epistemic Internalism, then one would (of course) subscribe to fundamentally different second-order epistemic norms. However, this difference does not make a difference when it comes to the prudential reasons for the sake of which to be a believer. An internalist, abiding by an evidentialist second-order norm (for example), would still have plenty of compelling prudential reasons to be a believer.

Epistemic Internalism is committed to the idea that: “. . . awareness or access to reasons is a necessary condition for justification.” (Hasan 118). In contrast to the externalist, the internalist sees epistemic justification as a matter explicitly concerning the internal mental states/goings-on of the believer and what specifically the believer's evidence set permits him/her to believe.

We can look to the norm offered by Feldman to see an internalist, epistemic norm, which provides compelling prudential reasoning for being a believer.<sup>75</sup> Feldman claims: “For any person S, time t, and proposition p, if S has any doxastic attitude toward p at t and S's evidence at t supports p, then S epistemically ought to have the attitude toward p supported by S's evidence at t.” (Feldman 679). Feldman's epistemic norm seems reasonable enough, and it is internalist in so far as it permits the subject to adopt only that doxastic attitude which his/her *own*

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<sup>75</sup>Note that Feldman takes himself to be: “. . . defend[ing] a variation on William K. Clifford's frequently quoted claim that: 'it is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone believe anything upon insufficient evidence.'" (677). Hence, when I discuss Feldman and Clifford in what follows I take them to be emblematic of a broader Evidentialism.

evidence set supports. Irrespective of whether S's evidence tends to be reliably true, the permissible doxastic attitude for S regarding *p* is what S's own evidence supports.

As was so with externalism, one believing according to Feldman's norm would still often have true beliefs regarding the proposition(s) subject to doxastic deliberation. If one followed one's evidence adroitly, and barring systematic deception or some fantastically severe epistemic impoverishment, one's evidentially supported beliefs regarding *p* would often construe the truth regarding *p*. As Feldman himself claims: "And, of course, unless one is in unfortunate circumstances in which one's evidence frequently leads to false beliefs, anyone who follows (02) [i.e., the norm cited above] will mostly have true beliefs." (686). Again, it would be a major prudential boon for one to have "mostly true beliefs" regarding instrumentally valuable propositions, such as: *Φ is the best means of accomplishing my goal of X*.

Secondly, independent of the potential to produce instrumentally valuable true beliefs, following an evidentialist epistemic norm might be prudentially beneficial in another respect. Adherence to an evidentialist norm might foster a doxastic disposition, which would be broadly useful in the accomplishment of one's ends. As Clifford mentions: "Every time we let ourselves believe for unworthy reasons, we weaken our powers of self-control, of doubting, of judicially weighing the evidence." (294). For Clifford, "worthy reasons" allude to those reasons which would meet standards of sufficient evidence, and one following Feldman's norm would believe only when S's evidence sufficiently supported *p*.

A believer not following an evidentialist second-order epistemic norm would (accordingly) lack self-control, an ability to properly doubt, and/or an ability to correctly weigh evidence—all of which would severely impede the accomplishment one's ends. Without self-control, one would not be able to execute upon the means of achieving one's own ends, as one's agency

would be fundamentally impaired. One lacking an ability to correctly weigh evidence and doubt would likely be too quick in one's doxastic deliberations and might (in virtue of this prematurity) come to believe a great many falsehoods. Therefore, a believer with a doxastic practice that lacked evidentialist justification, *might* inculcate an epistemically vicious disposition, which would be to the frustration of his/her ends.<sup>76</sup>

One has obvious prudential motivation to want to be a believer (of any stripe), and no matter the particulars of how one ought ultimately to believe, doing so with epistemic justification seems to be a straightforwardly good way to go about understanding and accomplishing one's ends and goals. Admittedly though, our survey of potential, reasonable second-order epistemic norms has been extremely restricted. And while I suspect that the same results would carry over to most other reasonable epistemic norms, I have explicitly *not* demonstrated such universality.

Now that the plausibility of semi-voluntary role adoptions has been motivated, and now that we have seen three independent reasons for the sake of which to take on the role of believer, we can make a more incisive move against Chrisman's critique of the RBA. In the final chapter, I will contend that the believer role is one that is (in fact) likely semi-voluntarily adopted and that the believer role is strikingly parallel in kind to the role of *political citizen*. Once the believer role is given a more befitting analogy, I hope to show the (RBA) is not imperiled by Chrisman, but rather renewed by a response to his critiques.

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<sup>76</sup> There is an important qualification here, in that certain ends *might* require the abandonment of the evidentialist second-order epistemic norm(s). As William James mentions in "The Will to Believe," when it comes to gaining friendship, love, or achieving religious revelation, evidentialist epistemic norms (such as Clifford's own) might make it difficult, or even impossible. As James claims: "In truths dependent on our personal action, then, faith based on desire is certainly a lawful and possibly an indispensable thing." (44). While it is so that a great many truths and goals are equally achievable through an Evidentialist mediated doxastic practice, there may be some exceptional instances in which it is prudentially inadvisable to abide by such an epistemic norm. So, ultimately, given one's specific ends, and/or the nature of the truths one seeks, there may be cases in which prudence fails as a superordinate reasoning for the sake of which to believe with Evidentialist justification.

## Chapter 3

Chrisman's critique of the RBA has been shown to be deficient in two independent regards:

1) Chrisman has not yet ruled out *semi-voluntary role adoption* as a means by which to explain the asymmetric normativity found in the believer role. Additionally, 2) it has been demonstrated that there are specific third-order reasons *for the sake of which* to take on the role of believer that simply don't exist for Chrisman's counterexamples of thief and slave roles.<sup>77</sup>

Deficiencies (1) and (2) demonstrate that the RBA can stave off Chrisman's objections. The supposedly forced "*bad explanation*" from involuntariness is not the only potential source for the categoricity of doxastic oughts. As has been discussed in chapter two, it is plausible that some

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<sup>77</sup> A question which remains somewhat open, yet which should be addressed before proceeding with the final chapter, is: how (exactly) are we to understand the obligations and oughts pertaining to role-based, epistemic normativity? More specifically, do oughts and obligations inherently provide *at least some reason* to act (and/or believe) compliantly? Well, assumedly, when Feldman writes: ". . . all people epistemically ought to follow their evidence, not just those who have adopted some specifically epistemic goals." (682) he's taking it to be the case that all believers have *epistemic reason* to believe appropriately, as one in the role of believer ought to, irrespective of one's interests or any other prudential considerations. By extension, I take it that Chrisman and Feldman agree that teachers have *teacher-based-reason* to teach as they ought, parent's *parent-based-reason* to parent as they ought, etc. Chrisman and Feldman's discussion of role-based normativity seems to be assuming that there are associative oughts (pertaining to a given role) which generate reasons to act, even if they are not ultimate, or all-things-considered oughts. Accordingly, Chrisman's considered kleptomaniac thief and slave role appear to be thought of as generating some reason to act, merely in virtue of the norms inherent to the roles themselves. A natural way to make sense of Chrisman's counterexamples is to assume that a role-based-ought can be overridden when in competition with other (more compelling) reasoning. Nonetheless, role-derived-obligations seem to be reason-giving in and of themselves. One's reason to act as a slave ought to act (for instance) is not an all-things-considered reason to act in any particular way. Hence, Chrisman presses Feldman on the asymmetric normativity between doxastic and non-doxastic, social-role-derived oughts; *viz.* Chrisman thinks doxastic oughts provide *more convincing reason* to act, than other role-based oughts do. Importantly though, for a normative comparison across roles to even be possible there seemingly must be an assumption that there is reason-giveness to each role-derived ought. I think it is intelligible to talk about the slave role giving one some reason to act according to the norms of slavery—perhaps a norm of being obedient, or some such thing—even if we find the role itself deeply objectionable, or even fundamentally hostile to the prudential ends, or well-being, of any agent. The mere association itself (that is, merely being within the slave role) appears to provide some reason to act obediently. Although, of course, I hope that the discussion in the previous chapter demonstrates that there are far more compelling reasons to act/believe as believers ought, than reasons to act as a thief or slave paradigmatically ought. Ultimately, when we talk about normativity, oughts, and/or obligations we are assuming a discourse of reasons.

non-optional roles are semi-voluntarily adopted; furthermore, the role of believer might itself be semi-voluntarily adopted. Therefore, it is *not* obviously the case that the normativity of being a believer *must* be explained by the involuntariness of its adoption. Also, Chrisman's counter-example roles of thief and slave (which clearly do not create categorical demands) are defanged by the realization that they do *not* have the same third-order choice-worthiness that exists for the role of believer.

I take it that if these insufficiencies of Chrisman's critique are well motivated, then it will vindicate the RBA and reestablished it as theoretically tenable. I hope to show that the RBA is not subject to any inherent explanatory deficiency, nor must it lead to absurdity in the case of involuntarily adopted role obligations. Our refined task in what follows will be to: (1) demonstrate that "believer" might plausibly be a semi-voluntarily adopted role, *and* to (2) show that the believer role is one akin to that of political citizen, which (as I will argue) is a role that has its normative weightiness *in virtue of* its third-order choice-worthiness.

## **I. The Normativity of Citizenship**

The role of believer is simply not analogous to either those in-principle optional roles (such as Feldman considers), nor those strictly involuntarily adopted roles without third-order desirability (as considered by Chrisman). Indeed, we are in need of a new analogy entirely. I contend that a more apt analogy by which to understand the role of believer is that of *citizen*.

The role of citizen occupies a rather unique niche. While some sign-on *fully* voluntarily to become citizens of a given state (e.g., taking citizenship tests, establishing residency, etc.) many are simply born into the role. Yet in being so born, persons don't necessarily feel compelled to occupy their role as citizen. Rather, we citizens-by-birth think that there is something laudable,



even choice-worthy, about being a citizen and performing our civic duty rightly. However, surely, the mere happenstance of being born somewhere is *not* why we feel obligated to our respective states (to the point of thinking it right to forfeit our very lives); but what then gives the role of citizen its compelling normativity? Again, at least for citizens by birthright, we didn't even sign-on to the role in any explicit way, nor did we actively assent to any of the obligations inherent to the role.

Three potential explanations for the compelling normativity of citizenship emerge from the *Crito* dialogue, and any one of these explanations (if successful) would suffice for grounding the norms pertaining to the role of citizen, and by extension the normativity of the role of believer (as will be demonstrated).<sup>78</sup> Three sourcing reasons for the sake of which to abide by the norms of the citizen role are as follows: **(1)** we receive some benefit (from a benefactor such as a state) and that received benefit creates some reasonable obligation to reciprocate; **(2)** we have (at least implicitly) contracted ourselves to being in the role of citizen by our not having explicitly refused it and we have good reason to uphold our contracts with one another (more generally speaking); and lastly **(3)** it constitutes a particular harm, or leads to some disvaluable state-of-affairs, when we do not abide by a state's laws, and therefore we ought (rationally) to follow the norms of being a citizen so as to avoid significant harm and/or negative consequence.

The compelling reasons for upholding the norms of the believer role can be analogously explained, or so I will contend. I will demonstrate that also we receive benefit when occupying the believer role; that we (hypothetically or implicitly) agree to abide by our epistemic

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<sup>78</sup> It may be the case that some of these arguments work together *jointly*, i.e., providing a more robust explanation when in conjunction with one another. However, for our purposes, we need only show the plausibility of the role providing compelling reasons to abide by its norms, and then to further demonstrate that the same sourcing argument could extend to Believer role.

obligations in not refusing to be believers; and that we similarly risk imperiling some epistemic goods of well-maintained belief when violating epistemic norms (or *the laws of belief*, so to speak).

### **A.) Argument from Benefit**

Citizens often receive tangible *benefit* from being within their citizen-role. Our merely having enjoyed some benefit(s) can be seen as giving us good reason to reciprocate for it. Socrates mentions, when embodying the Laws of Athens in discussion with Crito, “We have given you birth, nurtured you, educated you; we have given you and all other citizens a share of all the good things we could.” (Plato 54). Certainly, there are many fine goods that one’s state could provide for its citizens. And (*ceteris paribus*) when someone benefits you, you have a strong reason to repay that benefit in some way, at least given that the repayment is not too hefty nor disproportionate.

Commonsensically, if I find myself in your home and I eat your food—enjoying the ripe vegetables that you just picked from your garden—you seem rational and just in expecting of me some help with the dishes, or even some help weeding the garden (or some such comparable thing). One’s enjoyment of some benefit, which was conferred by a benefactor at some cost, seems (*prima facie*) to invoke cause for reciprocation on the part of the beneficiary. Thus it might be said to go for a citizen and their respective state. As John Locke insists: “. . . every man, that hath any possessions, or enjoyment, of any part of the dominions of any government,

doth thereby give his tacit consent, and is as far obliged to obedience to the laws of that government, during such enjoyment, as anyone under it;" (63).<sup>79</sup>

Alternatively, as Hobbes states of his 4<sup>th</sup> *Law of Nature*: "As justice dependeth on antecedent covenant; so does gratitude depend on antecedent grace; that is to say, antecedent free gift; [. . .] that a man which receiveth benefit from another of mere grace endeavor that he which giveth it have no reasonable course to repent him of his good will. For no man giveth without intention of good to himself. . . " (40). The Hobbesian line of reasoning contends that just as no *man* "giveth" without expectation of a reciprocated good to himself, no *state* giveth to its citizens without similar expectation of benefit to itself. For instance, a state may demand that its citizens be willing to serve as juror or soldier, since it has conferred the gifts of a legal system and protection from external threat unto its citizens. Furthermore, the state (as hypothetical benefactor) might be owed *some gratitude* since it is by its "grace" that we receive such goods as an education and proper upbringing in the first place. We have good reason not to spite a state's (or benefactor's) good-will in its giving us some gift, instead we ought to be grateful for such benefits, or so *the 4<sup>th</sup> Law of Nature* instructs.

Therefore, a born-into-role (e.g., citizen) might generate its strong normativity simply in virtue of its being a role which confers benefit to those who occupy it. Beneficiaries plausibly have some straightforward reasoning (or natural obligation) to repay benefactors (*ceteris paribus*), and states typically benefit citizens in ways such as the Laws claim to have benefited Socrates. But

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<sup>79</sup> Importantly, Locke references "*tacit consent*" within this passage, in addition to "*enjoyment*." Perhaps it is the adjoining of both enjoying some benefit AND tacitly consenting to a state's authority which generates the obligation to abide by a state's laws in Locke's account. But irrespective of how we are to understand Locke's coupling of benefit/enjoyment and tacit consent, clearly the enjoyment of a benefit has *something* non-trivial to do with creating a political obligation in Locke's account.

does this explanation, or line of reasoning, relevantly parallel our role of believer, and can epistemic normativity be explained with the same rationale?

Well, as has been shown in chapter two, there are a myriad of ways in which believers *benefit*, at least when they believe in accordance with a reasonable second-order epistemic norm (e.g., they can more effectively make their way throughout the world, secure their own mental well-being, etc.). One can imagine “the Laws” of a hypothetical “Republic of Believers” speaking to us in a similar fashion as the Laws of Athens speak to Crito, i.e., “We have facilitated your psychological well-being, aided your moral agency, and given you the ability to navigate your world more effectively so as to accomplish those ends you find most valuable. Have we not?” We believers would be in no position to deny the clear benefits conferred to us by these hypothetical laws of our believers’ republic. We have clearly received *some gift or benefit* from our collective epistemic practice. We have good reason to be grateful for our epistemic inheritance and rationality (or morality) may similarly demand of us that we reciprocate for that benefit and/or grace in some way. Belief, much like a political state, is a domain governed by laws (i.e., epistemic norms of some stripe). We plausibly have equally good reason, to abide by those laws that exist for belief, in so far as belief confers to us tangible benefits.

### **B.) Implicit Consent to the Laws: Argument from Just Agreement**

As a brief reminder from Chapter 2, Beran contends that: “. . . implicit consent to do X simply consists in the absence of explicit refusal to agree to do it in a context which gives such absence of (explicit) refusal the significance of (implicit) consent.” (269). But what does an appropriately “significant” absence of explicit refusal truly look like? Does this occur for citizens, and/or believers?

At least for Socrates, our exemplar citizen, he did not *refuse* the agreements and covenants the Laws put forth for all Athenians. As the Laws assert: “You [Socrates] would not have dwelt here most consistently of all the Athenians if the city had not been exceedingly pleasing to you.” (Plato 55). Socrates’ very act of remaining in Athens so steadfastly is taken by the Laws to have been *significant enough* so as to construe his consent to the state’s authority and dominion.<sup>80</sup>

The Laws mention further: “You [Socrates] have had seventy years during which you could have gone away if you did not like us, and if you thought our agreements unjust” (Plato 55). But (of course) Socrates did *not* go elsewhere, despite having ample time and means to do so, and so the Laws seem to think it significant that Socrates *had in fact not left*. If one were to physically leave a given role (e.g., Athenian citizen), then it would reasonably be inferred that one did not agree to be in said role; however, in the absence of some such means of explicit refusal (as Beran and the Laws seem to agree upon) one has implicitly consented to occupy that role. A citizen, by remaining in their homeland steadfastly without external constraint or compulsion to do so, *might* be thought to be implicitly consenting to their citizenship and (by extension) agreeing to meet those demands which one’s state stipulates for its citizens. One can imagine that the act of picking up and leaving (when one has genuine opportunity to do so) is reasonable grounds for thinking that one does *not* find some state, or some rule of law, or some obligation agreeable.<sup>81</sup>

Socrates not leaving when he previously could have (i.e., before being imprisoned) seems to have generated an *unavoidable* obligation to do as the laws of the Athenian state so demand. The Laws are precise in stipulating that: “. . . you [Socrates, would be in fleeing] breaking the

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<sup>80</sup> Similarly, as with the Locke excerpt above, the Laws specifically invoke the fact that Socrates found the Athenian polis “*pleasing*.” Finding something agreeable (i.e., taking a pro-attitude towards something) seems to be significant in construing one’s consent. However, I take no stand as to what the exact interconnection amongst benefit, enjoyment, and consent is or ought to be.

<sup>81</sup> Beran explicitly lists “*migration*” as one of three ways to avoid agreement or consent. See Beran, pg. 266.

commitments and agreements that you made with us without compulsion or deceit, and under no pressure for deliberation.” (Plato 55).<sup>82</sup> Thereby, the Laws seemingly imply that Socrates might have been off the hook had he been deceived, or compelled, or not given ample opportunity to deliberate about his actions. We must keep in mind that what makes a context significant for construing one’s consent is the absence of consent obscuring factors (such as the Laws list). Intuitively, it is not telling of what one consents to if one is forced to remain in a role, and/or if one is deceived about what role it is that one occupies.

But does this all relevantly parallel the role of believer? One important question to address is: what possible alternative there is to being a believer? Socrates (for instance) had a multitude of other states to which to potentially flee, Thessaly being merely one alternative, but that doesn’t seem analogous to the context of being a believer. For the Laws to be able to construe Socrates consent, it must be the case that he genuinely had the ability to pick up and leave. As the Laws directly invoke: “You [Socrates] did not choose to go to Sparta or Crete, which you are always saying are well governed, nor to any other city, Greek or foreign” (Plato 55). But what is the possible analog to a “foreign city” when it comes to believing?

### **C.) Exile, Epistemic Migration, and the Skeptic’s Republic**

Perhaps we can conceive of the *foreign city* to the *Republic of Belief* by returning to Sextus Empiricus. One possible alternative to remaining within the (metaphorical) “Republic of Belief” is to adopt global skepticism and to engage in a total suspension of all believings. As Sextus contends of this potential alternative: “Scepticism is an ability to place in antithesis, in any manner whatever, appearances and judgements, and thus—because of the equality of force in the

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<sup>82</sup> The importance of a lack of *coercion*, *deception*, and *unfair bargaining position* are actually mentioned in Beran’s own account of an appropriate context for implicit consent. See Beran’s inclusion of these conditions on pg. 267.

objects and arguments opposed—to come first of all to a suspension of judgement and then to mental tranquility.” (32-33). Citizens of this foreign city (the *Skeptic’s Republic*, as it were) would still be subject to their own set of laws; for instance, being expected to refrain from: “. . . indulging in opinion or making positive statements about the reality of things outside himself.” (37). Thus, it is conceivable that a believer deciding to exile themselves from the Republic of Belief, could *epistemically migrate* to an alternative republic ruled by the Skeptic’s law. In *suspension of judgment* the characteristic activity of being a believer (i.e., *believing*) is naturally forgone. Hence, one’s suspending judgement would effectively constitute having *left Athens* for another city-state. If the Skeptic’s Republic represents an alternative to which believer-citizens could epistemically migrate, then (as with Socrates having not fled Athens) it is *significant* when believers continue to remain within a *state of belief*.<sup>83</sup>

Further yet, if we parallel the injunctions from the Laws of Athens and restate them as coming from the Laws of the Republic of Belief, it can be framed in a compellingly similar light: “You have remained a believer for years on end. You could have refused our demands, suspended judgment entirely, and fled for the Skeptic’s Republic; but you haven’t done so. You have remained a believer devotedly and without coercion, so you must find our republic and its laws agreeable.”

Then again, perhaps it is too extreme to insist that *global* skepticism and *total* suspension of *all* judgement is a reasonable expectation. Could the *laws of belief* invoke the significance of such an alternative to hold a believer responsible? —merely catching a ride with Crito is far less demanding (and far less extreme) of an alternative. Furthermore, one might even contend that the

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<sup>83</sup> While it may be incorrect to analogously claim that we are “born-into” being believers, it certainly is a role we take on as soon as cognitively developed enough to form beliefs. Intuitively, we (not unlike natural-born citizens) happen to find ourselves within the role of believer without having explicitly volunteered for it.

Pyrrhonists themselves seem to think it practically impossible to totally avoid *all* of belief: “The Sceptic, of course, assents to feelings which derive necessarily from sense impressions; he would not, for example, when feeling warm (or cold), say, ‘I believe I am not warm (or cold)’” (Sextus 36).<sup>84</sup> So perhaps the viability of global skepticism as exile, or epistemic migration, is (at least) suspect.

Without resorting to extreme and total skepticism then, perhaps we can still have a more circumscribed notion of *suspending judgement* which would (minimally) constitute epistemic migration from the Believer’s Republic. For instance, if we were to take Feldman’s evidentialist norm as being *the* law of belief—Again, “For any person S, time t, and proposition p, if S has any doxastic attitude at all toward p at t, and S’s evidence at t supports p, then S epistemically ought to have the attitude toward p supported by S’s evidence.” (pg. 679)—then the law(s) of belief would apply **only** in relation to a *particular proposition*, at a *specific time*, and given a subject’s *particular set of evidence*. Thereby, if we were to opt into, or out of, our covenant with the laws of belief it could be done at very specific junctures, and suspension of judgement would be far less daunting of an alternative to belief (since its scope would be very circumscribed). If Feldman’s epistemic norm were law for all believers, we could epistemically “migrate”

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<sup>84</sup> Importantly, however, beliefs derived necessarily are not obviously “dogmatic,” at least not in the Pyrrhonian sense. For according to Sextus: “. . . concerning non-evident things the Pyrrhonian philosopher holds no opinion [. . .] the dogmatizer affirms the real existence of that thing about which he is said to be dogmatizing,” (36). Additionally, it should be noted that it is disputed whether the Pyrrhonist is actually “believing” when assenting to “necessary” sense impressions, e.g., such as feeling cold or thirsty. For instance, Diego E. Machuca refers to such impressions as “*affections*” and notes: “Yet the sceptic is better off with regard to these unpleasant affections (*pathē*) than the dogmatist, since he lacks the additional disturbance induced by the belief that such affections are by nature bad. . .” (6). So belief might be a doxastic state above and beyond the impression itself, i.e., rather an attitude to take regarding it—like that it is an objectively good or bad thing. But as far as we are concerned herein, the idea is that one might see these *necessary impressions* as something akin to believing, such that these impressions would be subject to epistemic norms and sanction. If it is not the case that these affections/impressions are subject to epistemic norms then all the better for our argument, since in that case global skepticism is a genuine possibility, and epistemic migration is (theoretically) viable in the extreme.



frequently and with ease from the Republic of Belief to the Skeptic's Republic and return (without much consequence) when the time, evidence set, etc. were different. The Believer's Republic governed by Feldman's epistemic norm would be far easier to flee from than the state of Athens.

However, yet again, we have a complication. If we take Feldman's specific epistemic norm as being our hypothetical "law of belief," then it is also the case that the laws of belief would pertain to *any* doxastic attitude (whatsoever). Suspended judgement is itself a doxastic attitude and so if some hypothetical believer-citizen's evidence set were to be strongly in favor of believing *p* to be true, then it we would actually be *violating* the laws of belief if the believer were to suspend judgement so as to reject the role of believer. Therefore, it doesn't seem that one could genuinely take a doxastic attitude (of any stripe) which would constitute refusal to be a believer and relevantly parallel migration/exile from one's state.

Feldman's epistemic norm is merely one among many (equally plausible) epistemic norms though, there are other epistemic norms which could see suspension of judgement as a genuinely exculpatory doxastic attitude. Clifford, for instance, advances an epistemic norm that holds: "To sum up: it is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." (295). For Clifford's proposed norm of belief, it is wrong *specifically* to arrive at a *belief*, or a *definite judgement* regarding the content of some *p*, without sufficient evidence (e.g., believing that one's ship is seaworthy, when merely absent contrary evidence that it is unseaworthy). If one were to suspend judgment regarding whether or not a ship were seaworthy, it would be a means of genuine epistemic migration. That is to say, if one doesn't contend anything to be the case regarding *p*, then there is no possible epistemic sanction (given Clifford's epistemic norm at least), since nothing is in fact being *believed* and one's doxastic attitude would

not be subject to some standard of sufficient evidence. Rather, there is a suspension of that activity which is subject to being sanctioned.

Regardless of what specific epistemic norm(s) one takes to be plausible, and irrespective of whether or not Clifford is an appropriate candidate for one who endorses the exculpating nature of suspending judgement, we simply don't have the room or need to decide upon a definitive norm of belief which can exactly parallel the laws of the Republic of Belief. Instead, it will suffice, for our purposes, to have shown that the laws of belief *might* be avoided, or fled from, through suspending judgment.

Furthermore, *just agreement* to being a citizen is merely one means of sourcing the particular normativity of the citizen role, the alternative (or even complementary) sources for the normativity of belief remain unblemished absent the viability of epistemic migration and a proper consent-constituting context to being a believer.

#### **D.) Argument from Harm**

The Laws ask Socrates to consider the seriousness of violating his commitments and agreements with the Athenian state by demanding: “. . . consider what good you will do yourself or your friends by breaking our agreements and committing such a wrong. It is pretty obvious that your friends will themselves be in danger of exile, disenfranchisement, and loss of property [. . .] all who care for their city will look on you with suspicion, as a destroyer of the laws.” (Plato 56). It is a serious injunction from the Laws and the wrongness of disobeying the state's demands is (apparently) weighty. For anyone who cares about those valuable things the Laws

help protect (e.g., one's friends, one's property, and one's sense of belonging) it would be a decidedly bad result to undermine the institution and rules which preserve them.

But is there a similar sense of imperiling goods, or risking harm, in the epistemic domain? Can negligence and/or disobedience in our doxastic practice(s) reap equally objectionable consequences?

Certainly, we can imagine that we could do some tangible harm in being epistemically disobedient (i.e., in violating the obtaining second-order epistemic norm, or norms). Again, as Clifford cautions: "Every time we let ourselves believe for unworthy reasons, we weaken our powers of self-control, of doubting, of judicially and fairly weighing evidence. We all suffer severely enough from the maintenance and support of false beliefs and the fatally wrong actions which they lead to, and the evil born when one such belief is entertained is far and wide." (294). Belief for "unworthy reasons" is plainly unjustified belief, *viz.* belief which is not permitted by the governing epistemic norm. If Clifford is correct, the consequences of unjustified believing are so severe as to degrade to our very agency and imperil our intellectual faculties. Additionally, in so far as unjustified belief furnishes us with false beliefs it can even precipitate "fatally wrong" actions.

Straightforwardly, we can understand that all of the goods of belief, which we enumerated in the previous chapter, are the result of a specifically well-maintained doxastic practice, i.e., believing (or suspending belief) according to the appropriate epistemic norm(s).<sup>85</sup> In so far as

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<sup>85</sup> As Clifford mentions: "Our words, our phrases, our forms and processes and modes of thought, are common property, fashioned and perfected from age to age; an heirloom, which every succeeding generation inherits as a precious heirloom, which every succeeding generation inherits as a precious deposit and sacred trust [. . .] into this, for good or ill, is woven every belief of every man who has speech of his fellows. An awful privilege, and an awful responsibility, that we should help to create the world in which posterity will live." (292)

psychological well-being, morality, and prudential efficacy are important to preserve and promote, so we all possess very compelling reason for believing according to the law(s) of belief.

Ultimately, violating established second-order epistemic norms (or engaging in *doxastic disobedience*) risks frustrating those goods that properly maintained belief can give us, just as breaking the laws of a well-governed state risk those goods that such a state could provide for its citizens. A breaker of “epistemic laws” spites all of belief, threatens all that it can achieve. Citizens must do their part and uphold the laws and institutions of their state, and so must believers do their part and abide by second-order epistemic norms.

## **II. Limitations to the Citizenship Model of Epistemic Normativity and Considered Responses**

While it seems fair to claim that we have staved off Chrisman’s objections in a restricted sense, it is important for us to acknowledge the limitations inherent to the believer/citizen analogy, and to make explicit the assumptions we have helped ourselves to throughout this project.

### **A.) The Normativity of Semi-voluntary Role Adoption**

Firstly, the success of our “believer-citizen” analogy *only* works if there is genuine, obligation-conferring reasons to abide by the norms of semi-voluntarily adopted roles. I cite the examples of (1) citizens’ *implicit consent* to political authority<sup>86</sup> and (2) one’s *hypothetical assent* to born-into familial roles<sup>87</sup> to try and motivate the plausibility of this concept. But, of

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<sup>86</sup> Again, Beran’s account of a political subject’s implicit consent to political authority.

<sup>87</sup> Hardimon’s account of hypothetically acceptable, born-into familial roles. See Hardimon, pg.s 348-349, also referenced in chapter 2.

course, Beran and Hardimon's accounts are *not* without controversy, and I have *not* offered a thoroughgoing defense of non-explicit forms of consent.

Nonetheless, I think it's more than fair to acknowledge the enormity of defending non-explicit consent in full, which is simply far, far beyond the scope of this very circumscribed project. Additionally, I take it that, we understand (*prima facie*) the rationale undergirding the obligations of semi-voluntarily adopted roles like that of son or citizen, and that (*ceteris paribus*) we can entitle ourselves to make appeals couched in the normativity of these widely understood and uncontroversial social roles.

However, this is not to push serious worries aside. As Onora O'Neil mentions: "The problems of the defeasibility and indeterminacy of consent, of ideological distortions and self-deception, and of impaired capacities to consent, are all forms of one underlying problem. The deeper problem in this area is simply a corollary of the opacity of intentionality." (256) Perhaps trying to infer one's private mental states, one's implicit intention, is a fundamentally fraught notion, one so *deeply opaque* that it is not appropriate in any normative discourse whatsoever.

I offer no direct response to such worries, and I acknowledge that fundamental aspects of this project—both the dismissal of Chrisman's counterexamples and the plausibility of epistemic citizenship as a working analogy for deontological, epistemic normativity—are *conditional* upon the coherence of something like implicit/tacit consent in role adoptions. Nonetheless, the motivation for the intelligibility of implicit consent to roles, which we have provided above (primarily via Beran and Plato), is clearly not brutish nor entirely implausible. I leave it to my reader to determine why (if so) the motivation I have provided would not be sufficient.

Furthermore, even if one grants the intelligibility of implicit consent for *some* role adoptions, and the strength of reasons to do as one has willingly contracted themselves to do, one could still deny that the role of *citizen* (specifically) is adopted in the same way. I have cited from the *Crito* dialogue, what I take to be, three *plausible* explanations for the specific normativity of citizenship, and have articulated three extensions of these arguments to the believer-role specifically; however, (yet again) I have not definitively argued for the exact reasoning underlying the oughts of citizenship.

One could contend that all three arguments/explanations are insufficient (in some regard). But these three arguments work independently, i.e., any one of them could sufficiently source the normativity of citizenship *if* successful, and (by analogy) could explain the normativity of being a believer as well—since I have argued that each sourcing explanation/reasoning for the normativity of citizenship is parallel in kind to being a believer. My hypothetical objector would need to show the insufficiency of all three sourcing arguments (i.e., dismissing the argument *from harm*, *from benefit*, and *from just agreement*) to properly reject the normativity of citizenship. As before, I invite my reader to do so and I acknowledge that epistemic citizenship is intelligible only in so far as citizenship is an intelligibly normative role.

### **B.) Epistemic Migration and the Plausibility of the Citizen/Believer Analogy**

One could assert that: even though the sourcing arguments are successful in explaining the reasoning we have to abide by the norms of citizenship, the analogy fails in that it insufficiently parallels the role of *believer*.

Certainly, we've dealt with this worry most explicitly in the "Exile, Epistemic Migration, and the Skeptic's Republic" section above, but there are undoubtedly weaknesses in our account of

*epistemic migration*.<sup>88</sup> To be clear, I present the idea of epistemic migration as merely a conceptual possibility. I have not shown that there is *always* the appropriately significant, consent-constituting context to every conceivable iteration of the Believer's Republic and its corresponding laws. Again, a Believer's Republic which adopted (something like) a Cliffordian, second-order epistemic norm is a *cleaner* iteration of the analogy, than a Believer's Republic governed by an epistemic norm like Feldman's. My argument has merely shown that a potential set of epistemic norms *could* allow for epistemic migration through suspension of judgement.

However, it is also possible that one could have some epistemic norm(s) in mind, which could be entirely incompatible with the possibility of epistemic migration. We've already surveyed Feldman's evidentialist epistemic norm, which would explicitly *not* allow for epistemic migration, in that it does not allow for an exculpatory sense of suspension of judgement. An objector could feasibly push back, given his/her commitment to some specific epistemic norm(s), and could contend that epistemic migration is just not possible. But I take it that arguing definitively for the content of *the* epistemic norm is a difficult task (to put it lightly) and I certainly haven't the room herein, nor the ability, to attempt to do so myself. If my reader has a completely successful argument for a second-order epistemic norm which precludes the possibility of epistemic migration, then I unhesitatingly concede the point.

I offer *epistemic citizenship* as merely a conditional account. *IF* one thinks there are some plausible epistemic norms, which would allow for suspending judgement to be an exculpating doxastic attitude, *THEN* the possibility of epistemic migration out of the Believer's Republic is conceivable. But, to be clear, I never herein argue for *the* definitive epistemic norm. I have

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<sup>88</sup> A term I'm using to denote one's being able to reject the role of believer in a significant enough way so as to constitute refusal to abide by the rules of belief (in an exculpatory and just sense).

merely motivated the idea that suspending judgment *might* be different enough from believing true, or believing false, such that it *could* constitute leaving the Believer's Republic. I admit fully that this analogy's success is contingent upon a certain understanding of suspension of judgement, i.e., that it is a uniquely exculpatory doxastic attitude.

### C.) The Choice-worthiness of Being a Believer

Lastly, one could question whether those values we enumerated in chapter two are *truly* derivable from our doxastic practice(s). As before, my objector would have to systematically undermine all three independent third-order reasons for the sake of which being a believer is choice-worthy, but nothing I've said shows this response to be impossible. One could certainly take up this project. Most glaringly, it has *not* been explored whether these third-order values are equally derivable from all second-order epistemic norms.

A given epistemic norm might be more suited to bringing about particular third-order values, and less suited for bringing about others. For instance, as Peter Railton mentions of differences in internalist and externalist norms of epistemic rationality: "There certainly is no internal 'sign' that infallibly distinguishes genuine feedback [from the world] from mere noise, or that distinguishes appropriate vs. inappropriate adjustments among those that lessen the negative effects of feedback." (819). If we were to extend Railton's line of reasoning, if one sought to believe correctly so as to make one's way throughout the world most effectively and achieve one's ends, then an internalist epistemic norm seems deficient in ways an externalist epistemic norm **might** not be (i.e., epistemic externalism gives *causal feedback with the world* a preeminence, which epistemic internalism does not).



I haven't the room to explore this idea fully, and I take no stance as to the proper content of any epistemic norm, so I merely leave it open as to whether (or not) the third-order values we have discussed are equally achievable across all reasonable, second-order epistemic norms. I admit that one could (in principle at least) adopt some specific epistemic norm which would preclude some of the choice-worthiness for the sake of which to be a believer; however, I would find it extremely unlikely that some reasonable epistemic norm would lead to justified belief, and yet would also frustrate achievement of *all three* of the specified third-order values achievable via well-maintained belief.

#### **D.) Conclusion**

One can take issue with different aspects of the epistemic citizenship model, and/or could reject some of the philosophical precepts used to undermine Chrisman's critiques of the RBA. However, I take myself to have presented a *conditional* refutation of Chrisman and a new and fruitful analogy to be used in defense of role-based epistemic normativity, within a deontological framework. My project is conditional upon the viability of such notions as *implicit consent* and *suspension of judgement* as an exculpatory doxastic attitude. Nonetheless, it seems that re-contextualizing the role of believer as one of epistemic citizen is (at the very least) a *more* fitting analogy for understanding our obligations as believers than has been considered by Chrisman or Feldman. If this project has succeeded, then the RBA does not yet seem defeated by Chrisman's objections, and (if anything) the RBA has been bolstered by an engagement with Chrisman.

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