

Higher-Order Evidence is the Wrong Kind of Reason

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1. Critical Reflection and Enkrasia

Critical reflection: adopting/revising beliefs in light of higher-order evaluations

Possible reconstruction: If I judge that it is irrational for me to hold a belief, then I think I *ought not* hold it. It would be irrational to retain a belief that I think I ought to give up.

Common precisification.

(RR) If you rationally believe that it is irrational for you to hold some doxastic attitude, then it is irrational for you to hold that attitude.

But RR could be true simply because...

(Rational Access) If it is rational for you to hold some doxastic attitude, then a failure to know this fact amounts to a rational failure.

The principle really at issue is closer to:

(Enkrasia, first pass) If you believe that it is irrational for you to hold some doxastic attitude, then that gives you an apparent reason not to hold that attitude.

An “apparent reason” can be...

- merely pro tanto
- merely “as if”, as in ordinary cases of false / irrational belief

Because ‘apparent reasons’ are cheap, Enkrasia is compatible with enkratic reasons being outweighed, generating dilemmas, etc. My objections to Enkrasia won’t assume otherwise.

2. Evidentialism and the Wrong Kind of Reason Problem

My objection is: Enkratic reasons are the *wrong kind of reason*.

Evidentialism: the right kind of reason to believe p is evidence for p , and the right kind of reason not to believe p is evidence against p (i.e., evidence reducing likelihood of p)

So, beliefs about the rationality of believing p , *like beliefs about anything*, give you the right kind of reasons when (and to the extent that) this amounts to evidence for/against p .

Examples of the wrong kind of reason for belief:

- a cash prize
- an “epistemic prize”

Common Diagnosis: Reasons of the wrong kind are state-given, rather than object-given.

Common Diagnosis vindicates my claim that enkratic reasons are the wrong kind, but...

1. maybe common view is mistaken / needs qualification
2. maybe Enkrasia could be replaced by something else making same predictions
 - a. beliefs about what one’s evidence “shows”
 - b. higher-order beliefs affect rational requirements without giving your reason

So, I will develop the objection in a way that does not presuppose Common Diagnosis, and that applies to any replacement principle that makes same predictions as Enkrasia.

3. Enkratic Reasons Against Suspending Judgment

An example thought to support Enkrasia (Horowitz, Feldman):

Sherlock's Helpful Suggestion: Based on his inconclusive evidence, Watson is justifiably uncertain whether p . But Sherlock says (falsely) that Watson is rationally required to believe p , and Watson trusts him.

Verdict: Watson now has an apparent reason to believe p . Perhaps rationality requires him to believe p , or at least increase his confidence that p .

Enkratic explanation: Watson believes that his uncertainty is irrational, and thus has an apparent reason not to remain uncertain.

Evidentialist explanation: The apparent fact that an agent is rationally required to believe that p is evidence that p is true.

Compare Sherlock's Helpful Suggestion with:

Sherlock's Secret Evidence: Sherlock tells Watson that he, Sherlock, is in possession of further evidence such that he, Sherlock, is rationally required to believe that p .

A test case for Enkrasia vs. Evidentialism (Turri, Christensen, Lasonen-Aarnio):

Sherlock's Unhelpful Suggestion: Based on his inconclusive evidence, Watson is justifiably uncertain whether p . But Sherlock says (falsely) that Watson's uncertainty is irrational, but does not tell him whether he has reason to believe p or instead believe not- p .

Verdict: Watson has been given no reason to believe p , and no reason to believe not- p . Rationality requires him to remain uncertain (and doesn't prohibit him from doing so).

Enkrasia falsely predicts that Watson has a reason not to be uncertain whether p .

Possible refinement of Enkrasia (Christensen, Horowitz?):

(Enkrasia, second pass) If you believe that it is irrational for you to hold some doxastic attitude, and also believe that it is rational for you to hold some other particular doxastic attitude to the same proposition, then that gives you an apparent reason to hold the latter attitude.

Another test case:

Sherlock's Preface: Based on his inconclusive evidence, Watson is uncertain whether p . He writes a book in which he records all the conclusions he has drawn from his evidence, but notes at the end that he has been unable to determine whether p . Sherlock writes a preface, which (falsely) says: "Watson has every reason to believe each claim made in this book. But one of them is false. And curiously, Watson has failed to notice that this falsehood entails that p ." Watson believes what Sherlock says, and concludes that he, even now, is rationally required to believe that p .

Verdict: Watson has been given no reason to believe that p , and is rationally required to remain uncertain.

Enkrasia falsely predicts that Watson has a reason to believe that p .

Possible refinement of Enkrasia (Lasonen-Aarnio, Bergmann?):

(Enkrasia, final) If you believe that it is irrational for you to hold a belief, and also believe that it is rational for you to suspend judgment, then that gives you an apparent reason to suspend judgment.

4. Enkratic Reasons to Suspend Judgment

A common example in support of Enkrasia:

Fuel Gauge Undermining: Your initial background evidence supports that a fuel gauge is reliable. You see that the gauge reads 'full'. You then learn new evidence that the fuel gauge is broken.

Verdict: Your new evidence gives you a reason not to believe that the tank is full.

Evidentialist explanation: Your new evidence is a reason to suspend judgment because it is evidence against the tank being full (because it lessens the evidential weight of the gauge's reading).

Enkratic explanation: Your new evidence is a reason not to believe the tank is full because it is a reason to believe that this belief is (already) irrational.

The enkratic explanation is committed (implausibly) to...

Extreme Externalism: Objective reliability is a necessary condition for rationality.

Extreme Externalism says (implausibly) that it is irrational for you to believe that the tank is full in the following case:

Unreliable Gauge: Your (misleading) background evidence supports that a fuel gauge is reliable. You see that the gauge reads 'full', and so you believe that the fuel tank is full. In fact, the fuel gauge is broken.

Enkratic explanation of Fuel Gauge Undermining is committed to Extreme Externalism, because your new evidence that the gauge is broken is simply evidence that you are in Unreliable Gauge.

For similar reasons, we should favor an Evidentialist explanation of:

Testimony Underminer: Your initial background evidence supports that Norma is a reliable source of testimony. Norma tells you that the President is in New York, and you can tell that she sincerely believes what she says. You then learn new evidence supporting that Norma's belief is irrational.

Evidentialist explanation: Your new evidence is a reason to suspend judgment because it is evidence against the President being in New York (because it lessens the evidential weight of Norma's belief).

Enkratic explanation: Your new evidence is a reason not to believe the President is in New York because it is a reason to believe that this belief is (already) irrational.

- ❖ The evidentialist explanation is plausible because you know that Norma is not reliable unless she is rational. (Your belief would not have been undermined if you knew that she is an irrational but objectively reliable clairvoyant.)
- ❖ The Enkratic explanation is implausibly committed to an extreme externalism.

But Enkratic explanation is more plausible for:

Sherlock's Reasoning Underminer: Based on his strong evidence, Watson believes that p . Sherlock tells Watson that he doesn't really have sufficient reason to believe p , and that his evidence doesn't support belief either way.

Verdict: Watson has a reason not to believe that p .

Evidentialist explanation: Sherlock's testimony is a reason for Watson to suspend judgment because is evidence against p (because it lessens the evidential weight of Watson's own belief/judgment).

Enkratic explanation: Sherlock's testimony is a reason for Watson to suspend judgment because it is a reason for Watson to believe that his belief that p is (already) irrational.

- ❖ The evidentialist explanation risks 'externalizing' everything.
- ❖ The Enkratic explanation has no commitment to externalism. Watson straightforwardly has reason to believe that it is irrational for him to believe p .

However, the enkratic explanation faces serious problems:

- (1) Enkratic explanation lacks generality.

Hypoxia: Based on a long deduction from known premises that imply that p , a pilot believes that p . Then the pilot learns evidence supporting that he has hypoxia, which renders one unreliable at reasoning.

Dilemma for Enkrasia: either (i) apparent same-order unreliability is sufficient for undermining, or (ii) higher-order enkratic reasons are necessary. If (i), then Enkrasia is not needed to handle undermining cases. If (ii), then a vicious regress is generated.

- (2) Enkratic explanation has false consequences.

Infallibilism: Based on a long deduction from known premises that imply that p , a logic student believes that p . Then a professor persuades the student of a kind of infallibilism that says that one is rationally required to suspend judgment entirely about a question unless one has an infallible means of determining the truth. The student has excellent track record evidence that she is extremely reliable at logic, but not quite infallible.

Sherlock's Preface II: Based on strong supporting evidence, Watson believes that p . He writes a book in which he records the strong (non-deductive) case that can be made for p given his evidence. Sherlock writes a preface, which (falsely) says: "Watson is right that a strong case can be made for p from the evidence he considers. But what Watson doesn't notice is that an equally strong case can be made from other parts of his total evidence for a falsehood that is inconsistent with p ."

Verdict: In both cases, the agent does not get a reason to suspend judgment, and ought retain the belief.

Enkrasia entails that Watson and the student both get reasons to suspend judgment.

5. Embracing the Wrong Kind of Reasons

Two reactions in Testimony Undermining:

- (1) Norma's irrational belief is untrustworthy.
- (2) Norma's irrational belief ought to be revised.

The evidentialist diagnoses higher-order undermining by extending reaction (1) to one's own case. But what about reaction (2)?

You ordinarily wouldn't take it upon yourself to see to it that *Norma's* irrational belief is revised. But perhaps you have a duty to "tend your own garden."

Intuitions favoring intellectual duties:

- the political partisan, who deliberately lives in a media bubble
- the fundamentalist, who avoids entertaining doubts about his religious views
- Cypher, who elects to return to the Matrix with an erased memory

Maybe there are intellectual duties that these people are not responsive to. These duties aren't providing "epistemic reasons" for beliefs—they're not even reasons for belief!

Perhaps enkratic reasons have a similar source in intellectual duty—a duty to cultivate rational beliefs in ourselves.

Problems for the intellectual duty view:

- (i) not clear that a failure to prioritize duty is a rational failure
- (ii) psychological difficulty of believing for non-epistemic reasons (especially given basing requirements)
- (iii) requires primary duty to be cultivating rational rather than true belief, as in:

Misleading Evidence: You are informed that there is some falsehood or other which you are rationally required to believe. Currently you do not believe it, but you can push a button to cause yourself to believe it based on your reasons.

Lucky Guess: You are informed that you have some belief or other that is irrational but nevertheless true. You can push a button to eliminate the belief.

An intellectual duty account of enkratic reasons must say you have a duty to push.