

Beyond Bad Beliefs

Abstract: Philosophers have recently come to focus on explaining the phenomenon of *bad beliefs*, beliefs that are true and apparently well-evidenced but nevertheless objectionable. Despite this recent focus, a consensus is already forming around a particular explanation of these beliefs' badness called *moral encroachment*, according to which, roughly, the moral stakes engendered by bad beliefs makes them particularly difficult to justify. This paper advances an alternative account of bad attitudes more generally according to which bad beliefs' badness originates not in a failure of sufficient evidence but in a failure to respond adequately to reasons. I motivate this alternative account through an analogy to recent discussions of moral worth centered on the well-known grocer case from Kant's *Groundwork*, and by showing that this analogy permits the proposed account to generalize to bad attitudes beyond belief. The paper concludes by contrasting the implications of moral encroachment and of the proposed account for bad attitudes' blameworthiness.

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1. Introduction

In his *Mirror to America*, historian John Hope Franklin recounts a party at The Cosmos Club, a Washington D.C. social club:² “It was during our stroll through the club that a white woman called me out, presented me with her coat check, and ordered me to bring her coat. I patiently told her that if she would present her coat to a uniformed attendant, ‘and all of the club attendants were in uniform,’ perhaps she could get her coat.” Nearly all Cosmos Club attendants were Black, while few members were, likely explaining the woman’s false belief. But there’s something amiss with that belief, beyond its falsity: were Franklin an attendant, the woman’s belief would still be, in some sense, morally bad.³ A puzzle emerges from these *bad beliefs*, as I’ll call them. How can some beliefs be true, apparently well-evidenced, and bad, all at the same time?

Bad beliefs have only recently enjoyed sustained and widespread attention from analytic philosophers. However, an increasingly popular explanation of the beliefs’ badness, known as *moral encroachment*, is already emerging. The approach holds that whether a claim is backed by sufficient evidence isn’t strictly a function of the evidence; it is also a function of the moral stakes engendered by the belief. According to this approach, though the statistical correlation between being an attendant and being Black is strong, it is not strong enough to justify the woman’s belief given the high moral stakes that beliefs with that content engender.

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² Gendler (2011) also offers this case in her discussion of implicit bias.

³ Philosophers disagree about whether true beliefs can be bad in the sense alluded to below, some maintaining that all bad beliefs are false. I will assume, perhaps controversially, that true beliefs can be bad. This assumption does not compromise the view defended below for its distinctive explanation of a belief’s badness is independent from claims about the belief’s truth-value for it applies to attitudes that are not truth evaluable.

However, as I will argue, the badness of bad beliefs is better explained by analogy with the observation that morally vicious people can manifest a vice even when doing what's right for the right reasons. Bad beliefs are a special case of this phenomenon: some true and well-evidenced beliefs can manifest vice even when true and well-evidenced. According to the view advanced here, attitudes like the Cosmos Club woman's belief are bad when they are badly premised or 'based' on good reasons. This account has three advantages over the explanation provided by moral encroachment: (i) explanations of this general type are already widely accepted; (ii) the explanation generalizes to attitudes that don't clearly involve epistemic justification; and (iii) it accounts for the moral, not merely epistemic, badness of bad beliefs.

I conclude by contrasting the differing implications of moral encroachment and the proposed account for practices of praise, blame, resentment, and punishment. According to moral encroachment, certain beliefs are, by their morally fraught nature, bad to have. As a result, bad beliefs' badness explains why individuals are made worse by those beliefs, perhaps to the point where the individuals themselves deserve blame or sanction. In contrast, the account I propose reverses this relationship. According to it, the badness of *people*, very roughly, explains why their beliefs are sometimes bad. This metaphysical difference between the two accounts implies a difference in what grounds blame for bad beliefs. According to advocates of moral encroachment, that a person has a bad belief is non-circular grounds for blaming them. In contrast, bad beliefs *all by themselves* do not license blame according to the account I propose. Rather, that license comes from cues about the blameworthy person's bad character.

2 Stage Setting: From Pragmatic Encroachment to Moral Encroachment

Cases like the following drove important debates in the 90's and 00's about the semantics of knowledge attributions, whose influence still shapes epistemology:

Bank Case 1. My wife and I are driving home on a Friday afternoon. We plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit our paychecks. But as we drive past

the bank, we notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Although we generally like to deposit our paychecks as soon as possible, it is not especially important in this case that they be deposited right away, so I suggest that we drive straight home and deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning. My wife says, “Maybe the bank won’t be open tomorrow. Lots of banks are closed on Saturdays.” I reply, “No, I know it’ll be open. I was just there two weeks ago on Saturday. It’s open until noon.”

Bank Case 2. My wife and I drive past the bank on a Friday afternoon, as in Case 1, and notice the long lines. I again suggest that we deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning, explaining that I was at the bank on Saturday morning only two weeks ago and discovered that it was open until noon. But in this case, we have just written a very large and very important check. If our paychecks are not deposited into our checking account before Monday morning, the important check we wrote will bounce, leaving us in a very bad situation. And, of course, the bank is not open on Sunday. My wife reminds me of these facts. She then says, “Banks do change their hours. Do you know the bank will be open tomorrow?” Remaining as confident as I was before that the bank will be open then, still, I reply, “Well, no. I’d better go in and make sure.” (DeRose (1992 : 913))

The agents plausibly satisfy ‘knows’ in Case 1 but not Case 2. But Case 1 and Case 2 differ only in whether the agents have written a large check, not in their evidence. This difference between Case 1 and Case 2 has come to be called a difference in practical stakes. So it appears that practical stakes affect whether one knows, or at least whether one satisfies ‘knows’.

A prominent explanation of this phenomenon is *pragmatic encroachment about propositional justification*, the kind of justification sensitive to the strength of my evidential reasons for a belief. For example, if I believe that Garfield is a cat, I’m *propositionally* justified, other things equal, in believing that he’s a mammal because my evidential reasons for believing that he’s a

mammal are very strong. Doxastic justification implies propositional justification and a further condition: that I've correctly based my belief on sufficient evidence. For example, if I've used a deviant inference rule in the formation of my belief that Garfield is a mammal -- such as the rule that I should form the belief that Garfield is a mammal in response to any other belief whatsoever -- then my belief, while *propositionally* justified, is not *doxastically* justified.

Pragmatic encroachment appears well motivated. There is more at stake for some beliefs than others. For example, there is more at stake in my belief that my recent spider bite *isn't* a black widow bite than my belief that the Raptors won the NBA championship. Only one belief implies that I need immediate medical attention if false. According to advocates of pragmatic encroachment, since the practical stakes are higher for my black widow belief than for my Raptors belief, the former requires more evidence to be justified than the latter even when both beliefs are equally likely to be true, given my evidence. Likewise, though the protagonists' evidence is the same in Case 1 and Case 2, the practical stakes are higher in the second than in the first. That's why the two agents satisfy 'knows' only in the first case -- only in the first case are the practical stakes for false belief low enough for the belief to be justified, given their evidence. Pragmatic encroachment is thus the view that, the higher the practical stakes for a believer getting a belief wrong, the higher the threshold for that belief's propositional justification, relative to that agent.

Perhaps partly for path-dependent reasons, early discussion of cases like 1 and 2 focused on how certain beliefs, when false, endanger the believer's interests. Recent scholarship questions this focus.⁴ If interests affect the threshold for a belief's justification, why should only the believer's interests matter? According to *moral encroachment*, harms to *others'* interests by a belief's possible falsehood raise the threshold for justifying that belief. If pragmatic encroachment is plausible in some cases, then so too is moral encroachment: it doesn't matter if you or I got bit by the spider, my belief that it wasn't a black widow bite appears harder to justify than my belief that the Raptors won the championship, even if my evidence equally supports each belief.

⁴See, for example, Fritz (2017), Schroeder (2017), Bolinger (2018), Moss (2018; fc), Basu (2018), and Basu and Schroeder (2018).

Philosophers like Basu, Bolinger, Moss, and Schroeder have appealed to moral encroachment, or to closely related phenomena, to explain the badness of bad beliefs. According to moral encroachment, the belief that Franklin is an attendant, when based on the fact that Franklin is Black, harms Franklin's interests, broadly construed. There are competing theories about why such a belief might be harmful. Perhaps it is so because it is an instance of what Basu and Schroeder (2018) call *doxastic wrongdoing*⁵, the idea that believing certain fraught claims about an individual can wrong them, or perhaps, as Bolinger (2018) suggests, it risks a more conventionally wrong action --- I'll stay neutral on this question. Exponents of moral encroachment allege that because beliefs are morally fraught, the moral stakes in having them are higher than they would be otherwise. Because the moral stakes are high, the threshold for their justification is correspondingly high. So the bad beliefs are bad because they are not propositionally justified.

The moral encroachment explanation of bad beliefs is the conjunction of two claims: moral encroachment about propositional justification and that bad beliefs enjoin high moral stakes. As such, we can resist the explanation by resisting either conjunct. For example, some resist the very idea that stakes, whether prudential or moral, can affect justification on the grounds that stakes do not bear on truth and that only considerations bearing on truth can affect justification.⁶ Others do so, for encroachment violates certain plausible epistemic principles like closure.⁷ Or we can resist the claim that bad beliefs enjoin high moral stakes by harming certain interests, broadly construed.⁸

My line of argument against moral encroachment differs from these potent objections. I will not argue against moral encroachment directly. Rather, I will advance an independently motivated

⁵ See also Marusic (2018).

⁶ For defenses of the view that only truth-related considerations affect justification see, *inter alia*, Conee and Feldman (1985), Shah (2006); Shah and Velleman (2005) and Worsnip (2015). It is largely taken for granted that stakes are not truth-related considerations.

⁷ See Anderson and Harthorne (forthcoming).

⁸ See Begby (forthcoming) and Baumann (2018).

alternative explanation of bad beliefs' badness that enjoys several advantages over the moral encroachment explanation. In addition to being independently motivated, this account extends to non-doxastic attitudes. Views like moral encroachment *cannot* extend to non-doxastic attitudes since they concern the relationship between moral stakes and evidence.⁹ The proposed explanation therefore generalizes in a way that moral encroachment, by its very nature, cannot. Second, the proposed explanation enables a relatively straightforward account of why bad beliefs are both *morally* and *epistemically* bad, not merely the latter, by tying bad beliefs to bad character. Bad beliefs, on the view proposed, are derivatively bad because they derive from the believer's bad character. That's why they license blame in a way that other under-evidenced beliefs do not.

3 Bad Hopes and Dreams

Belief is plainly not the only propositional attitude that can be bad or objectionable in some sense, but we must be careful to distinguish objectionable attitudes in general from those that are bad in the manner of bad beliefs. For example, the hope that Franklin is an attendant is also bad --- very bad indeed --- when one's reason for hoping that Franklin is an attendant is, for example, the deeply racist belief that it is fitting or good for African-Americans to be attendants. However, this hope's badness is not puzzling: it is based on the deeply racist, unevidenced belief that it is fitting or good for African-Americans to be attendants. The normative reasons for the hope, insofar as there are any, are clearly not strong enough to license the hope. It's not puzzling why the hope is bad. In contrast, what makes bad beliefs puzzling is that the reasons on which they're based, their 'motivating' or 'optative' reasons, provide them apparently adequate evidential support. So this bad hope is structurally disanalogous to the bad beliefs with which we're concerned.

⁹ Indeed, on this point, Basu (forthcoming) clarifies, "Moral encroachment wouldn't be relevant in these further cases of doxastic wrongdoing because other mental states like perceptions and desires don't function to be justified by the evidence at all. That is, morality can't bear on the justification of these states because justification itself arguably doesn't apply to these states. In summary, moral encroachment and doxastic wrongdoing are not only conceptually distinct views, but views that plausibly apply independently to token psychological state formation" (14-15).

However, as I'll now show, we can construct analogous cases using non-doxastic attitudes like disappointment and excitement. They are structurally analogous, unlike the case of hope above, in the sense that their motivating reasons apparently provide adequate normative support, just as bad beliefs' supporting evidence is apparently adequate. Disappointment and excitement are not doxastic attitudes, so moral encroachment's evidence-based explanation of bad beliefs does not clearly extend to these attitudes. Nevertheless, the sense in which they're bad --- *i.e.*, by tokening a bad attitude, the tokener is liable to moralized blame --- closely resembles bad beliefs' badness, crying out for a more general explanation than moral encroachment, as a view about evidence, can provide.

Here is, in a nutshell, the account that I develop over the next few pages. Earlier I distinguished between propositional and doxastic justification. A belief is propositionally justified when there is sufficient evidential reason for it and doxastically justified when it is properly based on those reasons. This distinction is a species of a broader genus. The broader distinction --- between *ex ante* and *ex post* justification --- applies to all reasons-responsive attitudes:¹⁰ an attitude *A* (perhaps relative to an individual *X*) is *ex ante* justified just in case there is sufficient reason (for *X*, perhaps) to have *A* and *X*'s attitude *A* is *ex post* justified just in case it is *ex ante* justified and properly based.¹¹ For example, we might hold that desiring an ice cream cone is *ex ante* justified just when there is sufficient reason to desire the ice cream cone and someone's desire for that ice cream cone is *ex post* justified when it is *properly based* on those reasons.¹²

Generalizing the propositional/doxastic distinction to the *ex ante/ ex post* distinction illuminates two strategies for offering a fully general account of bad attitudes. It may be that bad attitudes

¹⁰ I'm following Goldman (1979)'s distinction between *ex ante* and *ex post* justification, but like recent authors such as, Lord (2018) and Neta (2019), I apply the distinction as I do, to the rationality of reasons-responsive attitudes more generally.

¹¹ I am using 'ex post justified' in the way that others use 'fitting' --- see, for example, McHugh and Way (2016) and Howard (forthcoming).

¹² I am assuming that non-cognitive attitudes like desires can be justified in the sense of supported by normative reasons to desire. This assumption conflicts with a broadly Humean approach to such attitudes that rejects the idea that desires can be evaluated --- "Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" they might say. I don't have space to argue against Humeans here, so I will simply note that my assumptions are not wholly uncontroversial.

are bad in general because they are *ex ante* unjustified (that is, insufficiently supported by reasons for those attitudes) or because they are merely *ex post* unjustified (that is, they are improperly based). Since *all* reasons-responsive attitudes can be improperly based, a general account of how a wide range of attitudes can be bad in the way that the Cosmos Club woman's belief is bad, which is premised on claims about basing, is not just possible but appealing. I will criticize the first strategy and develop a version of the second.

I'll focus on the reasons-responsive attitudes of excitement and disappointment to make my case. For example, when your friend does well on the SAT, you are excited for them. When they do poorly, you are disappointed for them. (You may also be disappointed *in* them, but that's something different.) Whether you are excited or disappointed is generally a function of their actual SAT score and your expectations about their SAT performance. If someone scores 1000 on their SAT, that may be a reason to be excited *or* disappointed for them, depending on these background factors.

According to statistics for 2017 provided by the National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES), students declaring a 'Black' ethnicity score an average of 941 and students declaring an 'Asian' ethnicity score an average of 1181.¹³ Why this is so is a tragic, tangled mess, at least partly involving structural discrimination and many correlated factors such as affluence, structural racism, and the availability of tutors. It is far, far beyond the scope of this paper to sort out this mess. It suffices for my purposes that the statistics provided by the NCES are, regrettably, facts, which I shall assume going forward.

Now imagine two agents, Clara and Donna. Clara and Donna are friends with Alvin, someone of Asian ethnicity, and Brian, someone of African-American ethnicity. Clara and Donna know the same things. In particular, both know the NCES statistics and that Alvin is hoping to get at least 1100 on the SAT and that Brian is hoping to get at least 900. Suppose that Donna and Clara learn

¹³ <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=171>

that both Alvin and Brian scored 1000 on the SAT and have the same reactions: excitement for Brian and disappointment for Alvin.

The case involves the following facts:

1. The NCES statistics.
2. Brian is hoping to get a 900 and Alvin an 1100.
3. Brian and Alvin both score 1000.
4. Clara and Donna know (1) and (2).
5. Clara and Donna are each excited for Brian and disappointed for Alvin when learning (3).

When Clara and Donna learn (3), this motivates them to be excited for Brian and disappointed for Alvin.¹⁴ Their motivating reason for being excited and disappointed, therefore, is (3) --- if this claim is not intuitive, treat it as a stipulation.

Given (1-5), it is *possible* for one of the agents, say, Clara, to be unobjectionably excited for Brian and disappointed for Alvin. After all, there is good reason for excitement and disappointment, given Brian and Alvin's hopes. As a result, Clara's excitement and disappointment could be perfectly *ex ante* rational. So I'll stipulate that it is. This is an important difference from the Cosmos Club case where, according to Moral Encroachers, there is *not* sufficient reason for the woman's belief, so it is not *ex ante* (that is, propositionally) justified.

Despite the fact that there is sufficient reason for these reactions, it can be bad in the manner of bad beliefs to feel excitement for Brian and disappointment for Alvin. For example, while Clara and Donna's expectations can both be informed by the NCES statistics, those statistics can play a greater role in Donna's excitement for Brian and disappointment for Alvin. In particular, the NCES statistics can play an inappropriate background role in Donna's reactions, setting her

¹⁴ I am assuming a broadly Davidsonian causal conception of motivating reasons for action and extending it to motivating reasons for beliefs, actions, and sentiments. However, followers of Wittgenstein and Anscombe who doubt that the relation between motivating reasons and reaction is causal are free to interpret 'motivates' according to their preferred theory.

expectations for what's statistically normal for Alvin and Brian.¹⁵ In that case, they help explain why she was moved to excitement and disappointment by news of Alvin and Brian's scores: Brian scored above his ethnic group's expected average! Alvin scored below his ethnic group's expected average!

Given the role that the NCES statistics play in Donna's reactions, I submit that they are inappropriate. For example, there's nothing wrong with Donna's being excited for Brian because he scored a 1000 on the SAT all by itself. However, if the further explanation of why that score moved Donna to excitement is that African Americans average a 941, then there's something upsettingly *patronizing* about Donna's reaction, in much the same way that the perhaps well-intended remark that Brian is "well-spoken" or "articulate" can be objectionably patronizing. We might hold something similar for Donna's disappointment for Alvin. It's fine to have high hopes for Alvin's SAT scores. But having those high hopes because of the NCES statistics is bad --- bad in the way that bad beliefs are bad.

Consequently, with these details made explicit, it's clear that Clara's reactions are not bad and that Donna's are. However, because Clara's reactions are not bad, that suggests that there is sufficient reason to have those reactions. Therefore, the explanation of why Donna's reactions are bad *cannot* be that those reactions are not *ex ante* justified or lack sufficient reason. As a result, we cannot apply the kind of explanation that exponents of moral encroachment advocate to the case of Clara and Donna, for it falsely implies that Clara's reactions are inappropriate. Cases like these demonstrate that we need a different kind of explanation of how an attitude that enjoys apparently sufficient support by reasons can be bad.

4 Responding to the Right Reasons with the Right Attitude in the Right Way

As I'll now argue, there is independent motivation for accepting an alternative explanation of attitudes' badness. I'll begin by motivating this account (section 4) and defending it from various

¹⁵ I'm implicitly appealing to Schroeder's notion of a 'background condition' here --- see Schroeder (2007: Ch.2) --- but while Schroeder focuses on background conditions for normative reasons, I'm extending the notion to motivating reasons.

objections (section 5). I'll then (section 6) contrast moral encroachment and the alternative explanation's implications for practices of blaming for bad beliefs.

Bad beliefs' badness is puzzling because such beliefs are true, (apparently) well-evidenced, and bad all at the same time. Restricting ourselves to those three elements forces us to argue that either the belief itself or its evidence or their combination is the source of the badness. Proponents of moral encroachment choose the second disjunct and argue that bad beliefs aren't so well-evidenced after all -- bad beliefs' high moral stakes make them very hard to justify.

But bad attitudes have proved puzzling because of an overlooked fourth element: how one's reaction is based on a reason, which is distinct from the reasons themselves, and from the reactions they favour such as belief, excitement, disappointment, etc. Overlooking this fourth element leads to the false assumption that attitudes based on sufficient reasons are unobjectionable. But this assumption is false. Attitudes can be bad in virtue of being badly based on sufficient reasons. Consequently, because reasons-responsive attitudes are attitudes that are based on reasons, *any* reasons-responsive attitude has the capacity to be bad in virtue of being badly based.

I have already described one badly based attitude. When I know that Garfield is a cat and that all cats are mammals, I am in a position to know that Garfield is a mammal. However, my belief that Garfield is a mammal is badly based when it is formed on the basis of the invalid inference rule *from any combination of beliefs whatsoever, infer that Garfield is a mammal*. Although use of invalid inferences rules suffices to make a belief badly based, it is not necessary. For example, when I see that it's raining and you, a reliable testifier, tell me "It's raining", it would be odd, other things equal, to base my belief that it's raining on your testimony rather than my own two eyes.¹⁶ Perhaps it wouldn't be odd if I have bad eyesight or that I'm remarkably unreliable at discerning the weather, but things aren't equal in that case. Although my belief is odd in some

¹⁶ Although his diagnosis of the case differs from mine, Muñoz (2018) argues that beliefs formed under these circumstances are at least partly defective.

sense, I have formed it in a valid way, based on testimony, which we may assume is sufficient evidence for the belief in this case.

Neither the Garfield belief nor the rain belief is *morally* bad, in the way that the Cosmos Club woman's belief is bad. They are simply malformed. But some ways of basing an attitude on a reason are morally bad. For example, the *moral worth* of an action --- the special value that an action has when it is non-accidentally right --- also depends not just on whether the action is right or whether the action's motivating reasons are good, but also on *how* the agent has based their right action on those good motivating reasons.¹⁷ Consider a well-known case from the *Groundwork*. Kant describes a grocer who always does the right thing while running his business. For our purposes, imagine that he always does the more right thing when managing his store, returning the correct change in every transaction. This the grocer doesn't return the correct change out of concern for what's right or being honest. He is indifferent to morality as such and cares only for himself. Rather, he is instead moved to give correct change by his belief that his shop will be profitable only if he has a reputation for being honest. It is only due the lucky coincidence of what's prudent and what's right that the grocer does what's right. As a result, he doesn't act with moral worth.

As several commentators have noted, although the grocer is indifferent to morality as such, he can nevertheless base his actions on morally good reasons.¹⁸ For example, the fact that a customer had paid a dollar for a seventy-cent item is a morally good reason to return thirty cents; it expresses a right-making feature of returning thirty cents in that circumstance. But our selfish shopkeeper, whose acts lack moral worth, can still act for that morally good reason when doing what's right. Though the shopkeeper does what's right for the right reason, his act isn't properly based on moral reasons and, as a result, it lacks the distinctive goodness of moral worth. Attitudes can be made morally worse, therefore, in virtue of being badly based.

¹⁷ C.f., Arpaly (2000; 2002), Markovits (2010), Lord (2018), and Isserow (2019), among many others.

¹⁸ C.f., for example, Lord (2018: Ch.6).

The case raises a second question: why is the grocer's intention or action improperly based? I won't advance a theory of proper basing here.¹⁹ However, whether an attitude is properly based on a set of reasons at least partly depends on the agent's other mental states. For example, the grocer's uniquely self-interested desires clearly undermine the moral worth of his actions. Those desires explain why the grocer intends to return thirty cents when an agent has paid a dollar for a seventy-cent item. But that explanation isn't of the right type to endow the grocer's behaviour with moral worth.

The analogy with Kant's grocer reveals that something similar is going on with Clara and Donna. Both have the correct reactions --- namely, disappointment for Alvin and excitement for Brian -- in response to a good reason for those reactions --- namely, that Alvin and Brian both scored 1000. But Donna's reactions are objectionable while Clara's are not. I attributed this difference, in the previous subsection, to the inappropriate 'background role' that the NCES statistics play in Donna's beliefs but not in Clara's. We're now in a position to flesh out this background role somewhat. Just as the grocer's selfish desires explain why he acts rightly for good moral reasons, Donna's (but not Clara's) belief in the NCES statistics explains why she is disappointed for Alvin and excited for Brian in response to learning their scores. In both cases, the background attitude explains why the individual bases their attitude on a certain set of reasons and having that attitude in a non-objectionable way requires a different explanation.²⁰ It would require Kant's grocer to desire something other than his own gain and it would require Donna to attend more to Alvin and Brian's expectations for the SAT, and less on the NCES statistics, just as Clara does.

To complete my case, I'll need to argue that the woman in the Cosmos Club has formed her true belief badly. In doing so, I'll assume that the Cosmos Club case is under-described for it assumes facts about the woman's desires, broadly construed, to argue that she forms her belief

¹⁹ That said, I am sympathetic towards the (distinct) accounts of Neta (2019) and Lord and Sylvan (2019).

²⁰ Something similar is true in the case of belief. When updating one's credences in light of new evidence, one conditionalizes against the background of other beliefs and evidence.

that Franklin is an attendant badly. I'll discuss these assumptions' consequences in the final section.

When we judge that the woman in the Cosmos Club has a bad belief, I conjecture that we're filling in certain background details. In particular, I think that, on the reading of the case where her belief is bad, we see her as a kind of *wishful thinker* --- a person whose background desires have compromised her ability to evaluate evidence.²¹ The paradigm wishful thinker's desires for certain outcomes override her evidence that those outcomes obtain. She is the person who is sure, for no particular reason, that this lottery ticket is a winner --- she can just feel it.

But other kinds of wishful thinking exist: she may convince herself that this ticket is a winner because she's played the lottery so many times and lost. This is the familiar gambler's fallacy, a subtler form of wishful thinking. The reason it's subtler than the first form is that in the latter case but not the former, the wishful thinker has a reason for thinking that her ticket is a winner -- namely, that she's played *so* many times. It just happens to be a bad reason. But we can be wishful thinkers with good reasons as well: imagine that, unbeknownst to the gambler, the tickets she buys each week are from a big finite pool, which shrinks after each drawing. In that case, that she's played *so* many times is *in fact* a good reason to increase her confidence that this week's ticket is a winner. However, despite having the right response to a good reason, the wishful thinker's belief is no better than in the first case. After all, her wishful thinking, rooted in her desire to win, causes her to have the wrong dispositions: even if she were to learn that the rules of the lottery had changed and that the pool of tickets would be refilled after each drawing, she should still draw the inference that this week's ticket is a winner from the fact that she's played so many times. Just like the selfish grocer, the wishful thinker starts with a good reason and ends with the right attitude but goes wrong along the way by basing her attitude on that reason in the wrong way.

²¹ I'm not the first to ground the badness of certain attitudes in motivated reasoning. See, for example, Appiah (1990) and Arpaly and Schroeder (2013). My account offers an account of how motivated reasoning undermines an attitude's goodness, namely, by preventing the agent from properly basing her attitude on good normative reasons.

Features of the Cosmos Club case prompt assumptions, either rightly or not, about the woman's character. The case is set in the not-too-distant past, in a city in the American south with important ties to slavery, in an affluent, predominantly white club. The woman is the kind of woman who attends such clubs, and chooses to socialize with others who do, lives in that time and place, etc. In short, what I'm saying is that to a certain reader sensitive to these social cues, the woman sounds like a low-key racist, in a way that was widespread and normal in mid-century southern United States. When we read the case, we are not thinking of a woman ignorant of the tragic sociopolitical history that disproportionately forced African-Americans into employment as club attendants. We're thinking of someone who is aware of that disproportionate allocation of labour, and considers it morally unremarkable.

Low-key racists, in the sense that I intend, are wishful thinkers. For example, they are subject to confirmation bias, which undermines the quality of their beliefs. Just as the wishful lottery player's susceptibility to the gambler's fallacy undermines the quality of their belief that a particular ticket is a winner, even when that belief is (let's imagine) true and even when the fact on which they base their belief is sufficient evidence ("I've played *so* many times"), the Cosmos Club woman's susceptibility to confirmation bias undermines the quality of her belief that Franklin is an attendant even when the belief is true and based on strong evidence. We should attribute a similar flaw to Donna. Although her excitement and disappointment are the right attitudes to have, she has them in a bad way because she's badly based those attitudes on otherwise good reasons for them. Her undue attention to the NCES statistics taints the manner in which her good reasons support her correct attitudes.

5 Moral Encroachment Encroachment and Other Objections

I've just finished the case for my alternative, basing explanation of bad attitudes, of which the Cosmos Club belief is a special case. It draws on the thought that any reasons-responsive attitude can, in principle, be made morally worse by being badly based on good reasons. This alternative explanation is appealing because it generalizes across all reasons-responsive attitudes. In

contrast, the moral encroachment explanation does not generalize since it is predicated on claims about propositional justification, which apply only to doxastic attitudes like belief.

However, in presenting the basing account, I've foregrounded a potential strategy for generalizing moral encroachment across all reasons-responsive attitudes. Moral encroachment problematically involves claims about propositional justification, which applies only to doxastic attitudes. As a result, moral encroachment's explanation is too narrow to cover all reasons-responsive attitudes. However, as I claim above, propositional justification is a special case of *ex ante* justification, which applies to any reasons-responsive attitude when the attitude is adequately supported by reasons. As a result, it might seem that the moral encroachment explanation of bad beliefs could encroach on the badness of other attitudes as well. According to the view that I'll call *moral encroachment encroachment*, the high moral stakes associated with an attitude raise the bar for its *ex ante* justification.²² For example, according to this view, my excitement that the Raptors won the NBA championship may be justified when my excitement that Brian scored 1000 on the SAT is not, even if there is equally strong reason to be excited in either case, when the moral stakes engendered by my excitement are sufficiently high --- perhaps because, say, my excitement tacitly reinforces norms and expectations about Black SAT performance. In that case, the moral encroachment explanation of bad beliefs encroaches on the explanation of other bad attitudes, like bad excitement.

One difficulty with moral encroachment encroachment is not just that it falsely implies that Donna's excitement is bad just if Clara's excitement is, if they share all the same reasons --- we've just seen that this is false --- but that it does *not* generalize adequately, despite appearances. Moral or pragmatic stakes appear *not* to encroach on other forms of *ex ante* justification, raising the sufficiency threshold of reasons for non-doxastic attitudes.²³ For

²² In the following, I assume that stakes supervene on features wholly external to agents, like the facts. This assumption is contestable; it may be that the stakes engendered by an agent's beliefs are a function of partly internal features, like the agent's beliefs or their evidence. I assume the externalist account for simplicity. Thanks to Jessica Brown for discussion here.

²³ Indeed, as the discussion in Fritz (forthcoming) suggests, encroachment-based reasons seem like reasons of the wrong kind to bear on the fittingness of attitudes like fear.

example, suppose that Brutish Biff the Bully (being both brawny and bellicose) can smell fear and he picks on those who are afraid. That Biff can smell fear raises the pragmatic stakes of being afraid. But while it might make it imprudent to fear Biff, it doesn't make Biff any less fearsome --- that is, the fact that Biff can smell fear doesn't make fear of Biff any less warranted (though it might make fear worth avoiding if you can). Likewise, the fact that one more slice of cake might exacerbate your diabetes doesn't make it any less delicious; nor does the fact that by buying the slice, you support Blake the bigoted baker, diminish its tastiness. Consequently, *even if* encroachment offers the correct explanation of cases like DeRose's bank cases, its failure to generalize to non-doxastic attitudes should give us pause. The fact that the alternative explanation proposed above *does* generalize across all reasons-responsive attitudes is therefore a clear mark in its favour.

A second challenge to the basing account holds that the account does not explain what needs to be explained, namely, the *moral* badness of bad beliefs. Being badly based undermines an attitude's *ex post* justification but being *ex post* unjustified is different from being morally objectionable. For example, my belief that Garfield is a mammal is *ex post* unjustified when inferred *via* a deviant inference rule. But it isn't morally objectionable. So one might doubt whether the observations about the basing relation offered above address the distinctively moral mystery posed by bad beliefs and other bad attitudes.

So far I've motivated the claim that badly based attitudes can be morally bad through an analogy with Kant's grocer. The grocer's intention is morally worse than it could be given the grocer's purely selfish desires. However, I don't claim that being badly based is *sufficient* for an attitude to be morally objectionable. Rather, whether an attitude is morally objectionable depends on *how* it is badly based. Employment of deviant inference rules doesn't, *ceteris paribus*, taint downstream beliefs with immorality. However, other attitudes do: for example, it is *bad, ceteris paribus*, to pay attention to the NCES statistics when celebrating or commiserating with a friend's SAT result. What matters in that situation is the friend's expectations and hopes. It may be worth appealing to the NCES statistics to temper the friend's self-directed disappointment or

deflate an inflating ego. But we're talking about reactions like excitement and disappointment based on NCES statistics, not those statistics perhaps salutary use in framing an SAT result. Likewise, susceptibility to thinking Franklin is an attendant grounded in wishful thinking taints the woman's downstream belief that Franklin is an attendant. The wishful thinking itself is morally objectionable, which infects the belief.

Consequently, the basing account attributes a kind of *derivative* badness to bad attitudes, which is grounded in the agent's character or, more narrowly, the dispositions that constitute their character. Whether particular consideration will move an agent to adopt a particular attitude is a function of those dispositions. But distinct dispositions can produce a particular attitude given a particular consideration. For example, an errant dog bark can startle two people, one because the bark was unexpected and the other because the bark recalled a traumatic dog attack in their youth. Likewise, though Alvin's SAT score can cause both Donna and Clara to be disappointed, different dispositions account for that disappointment. Moreover, it's clear that some dispositions are morally bad: cruelty, sloth, wrath, etc. Consequently, the basing account holds that an attitude is bad if an agent's bad character explains why an otherwise good reason moved the agent to adopt that attitude. The badness of bad attitudes is derivative of the more familiar badness of bad character.

This explanation contrasts favourably with moral encroachment's explanation. According to the latter, beliefs are bad because they lack propositional justification. The badness licences what some call 'epistemic blame', the kind of blame characteristically licensed by the culpable mismanagement of one's doxastic states.²⁴ As Bouldt (forthcoming) argues, epistemic blame is characteristically emotionally 'cool', in contrast to moral blame. For example, a doxastic agent can be liable to sanction when willfully and knowingly believing against the evidence. However, the nature of that sanction differs from when that agent willfully and knowingly violates the moral law. For example, in the latter case, but not the former, supposing that affront is sufficiently grave, *anger* is a fitting response. Similarly, in the former case, but not the latter,

²⁴ See Bouldt (forthcoming), Brown (2020; 2017), Rettler (2018), Nottelmann (2007), Peels (2016), Williamson (forthcoming), and Littlejohn (forthcoming).

diminishing epistemic trust in the truth of the agent's beliefs and assertions is fitting.²⁵ To be sure, this distinction isn't hard and fast, but "It seems one can make [judgments about others' culpable epistemic mistakes] without feeling any sort of emotion or concern for the matter. Meanwhile, it is perhaps more difficult to imagine making a moral judgment in a similarly cool fashion" (2).²⁶

The following is nothing more than a bare appeal to intuition, but it seems to me that the Cosmos Club woman's belief is blameworthy and *not* in a cool way. The woman hasn't merely mismanaged her evidence; her possession of that belief constitutes a moral failing. As such, it is subject to emotionally 'hot', not 'cool' blame. As such, she is subject to more than merely epistemic blame. But moral encroachment licenses only epistemic blame. As a result, the approach is ill-suited to explaining the intuitions that the Cosmos Club case vividly, at least to me, elicits. So, rather than being ill-suited to explaining some beliefs' badness, the basing approach is better poised to capture the relevant phenomena than its main rival since it connects the beliefs' badness to a familiar target of moral evaluation, namely, moral character.

6 Contrasting Accounts of Blame

I'll now focus on the final point of contrast between the proposed account and the moral encroachment account. Holding facts about evidence and putatively justification-affecting stakes constant, the moral encroachment account faults beliefs of a certain *type* --- that is, beliefs that share a certain content such as the proposition that Franklin is an attendant. In contrast, the proposed basing account faults particular belief *tokens*, since the fault it attributes to these beliefs depends on how the belief-token is formed. As such, holding facts about evidence and stakes fixed, the basing account affirms and the encroachment account denies that it's possible to believe that Franklin is an attendant without that belief being bad.

It seems to me that this difference is an advantage of the basing account. For example, we can imagine a doxastic agent who has been, through no fault of their own, isolated from American

²⁵ C.f., Kauppinen (2018).

²⁶ Bouldt (forthcoming).

history and the subtle but potent implications of being a Black man in a club like the Cosmos Club in the mid-twentieth-century South. Perhaps the individual was raised in a remote and foreign rural location that lacked the resources to teach American history. Perhaps they're a Martian. It doesn't matter. It seems to me that, given the evidence, this agent could hold the Cosmos Club belief without that belief being bad. However, if the moral stakes of this individual's belief are the same as those of the woman in the Cosmos Club, then the moral encroachment account falsely predicts that both beliefs are bad.²⁷

I don't offer this observation as an objection to the moral encroachment account. Experience has taught me that intuitions about the badness of the foreign individual's belief vary. Moreover, there is room for the proponent of moral encroachment to deny that the two beliefs involve the same moral stakes. Rather, I'll focus on an important metaphysical difference between how the two accounts ground blame for bad beliefs. In the abstract to *Beliefs that Wrong*, Basu states the motivation for her form of moral encroachment:²⁸

You shouldn't have done it. But you did. Against your better judgment you scrolled to the end of an article concerning the state of race relations in America and you are now reading the comments. Amongst the slurs, the get-rich-quick schemes, and the threats of physical violence, there is one comment that catches your eye. Spencer argues that although it might be "unpopular" or "politically incorrect" to say this, the evidence supports believing that the black diner in his section will tip poorly. He insists that the facts don't lie. The facts aren't racist. In denying his claim and in believing otherwise, it is you who engages in wishful thinking. It is you who believes against the evidence. You, not Spencer, are epistemically irrational. My dissertation gives an account of the moral-epistemic norms governing belief that will help us answer Spencer and the challenge he poses.

²⁷ Again, I'm assuming that stakes supervene on external facts. Were stakes to supervene on *internal* facts, such as an individual's beliefs about the riskiness of a belief, we might explain the acceptability of the foreigner's belief by his ignorance of the risks of his belief. Further argument is required, therefore, to rebut an internalist version of moral encroachment. Thanks to Jessica Brown.

²⁸ <https://philpapers.org/archive/BASBTW-2.pdf>

Basu is attracted to moral encroachment partly because it affords a response to Spencer: not so, Spencer, *you* believe against the evidence because no evidence can propositionally justify a sufficiently morally fraught belief, like the belief that the Black diner in his section will tip poorly. More generally, moral encroachment permits one to accuse someone of some degree of badness themselves because they possess a bad belief and to criticize them on that basis.

The account I've proposed does not license criticism of Spencer strictly on the content of his beliefs. That's because it's possible to believe what Spencer does in a neutral way when scrupulously attending only to the evidence and when the evidence sufficiently backs the belief. To use the bad belief as grounds for criticizing Spencer is then circular: if his belief is bad, it's because Spencer has based his belief on his evidence in a criticizable way. Claiming that the belief is bad, therefore Spencer is bad on the grounds that Spencer is bad, therefore his belief is bad is absurdly circular.

This may seem like a bad result for the view I've defended; it does not license blame based on facts about belief alone. Spencer seems worthy of criticism -- or, at least, the case is consistent with the possibility that Spencer merits criticism. But we can criticize him on the basis of facts other than his beliefs. For example, if an agent is willing to reach for racially charged beliefs when anodyne ones will do or if in response to an article on race relations in America, someone like Spencer engages in a tangential diatribe about how race is predictive of tipping behaviour, then their willingness to reach for such beliefs and engage in *non-sequitur* diatribe is itself evidence of the kind of bad underlying dispositions that taint otherwise well-evidenced belief. So it does not follow from the account that I've proposed that we *cannot* blame or criticize Spencer. It follows only that we cannot blame him *strictly* on the basis of his beliefs. Consequently, the approach sketched here nevertheless captures much of what's appealing about moral encroachment's explanation of doxastic blameworthiness.

7 Conclusion

I've argued that reasons-responsive attitudes can be bad when they are badly based in virtue of an agent's bad character. Importantly, the argument I've defended here doesn't establish that moral encroachment is false; it establishes only that bad beliefs' badness can be explained without it. It may turn out that there are *other* cases of bad belief that only moral encroachment explains. But even if that's so, my arguments here expand our ability to explain bad attitudes more generally by characterizing the moral badness of otherwise correct responses to good reasons.

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