

Teaching & learning guide for: The relationship between belief and credence

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This guide accompanies the following article(s): Jackson, E., *Philosophy Compass* X/X (Forthcoming) pp. XXX-XXX
10.1111/phc3.12668.x

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Sometimes epistemologists theorize about *belief*, a tripartite attitude on which one can believe, withhold belief on, or disbelieve a proposition. This belief framework underlies traditional epistemology. In other cases, epistemologists theorize about *credence*, a fine-grained attitude that represents one's subjective probability or confidence level toward a proposition. The credence framework is utilized in formal epistemology. But how do belief and credence relate to each other? Two types of connections have been proposed: descriptive and normative. Descriptively, one attitude might reduce to the other, or both attitudes may be equally fundamental. Normatively, the most commonly-positated connection between belief and credence is called *The Lockean Thesis*, on which rational belief is rational credence above some threshold. Various objections have been raised to both normative and descriptive connections between the attitudes, causing some to affirm that the attitudes are independent.

AUTHOR RECOMMENDS

Christensen, D. (2004). *Putting logic in its place*. Oxford: OUP

This book explores and contrasts binary and probabilistic ways of modelling beliefs. Ultimately, Christensen argues for a normative thesis: that epistemic rationality is a matter of probabilistic coherence, rather than deductive consistency. I especially recommend chapter 2 for those interested in the relationship between belief and credence.

**Eriksson, L. & A. Hájek. (2007). What are degrees of belief? *Studia Logica* 86(2), 183–213.
doi: 10.1007/s11225-007-9,059-4**

This paper is a history and overview of the nature of credence. Eriksson and Hájek raise important and influential objections to many of the orthodox views of credence.

Huber, F. & C. Schmidt-Petri (eds.). (2009). *Degrees of belief*. New York: Springer

This edited collection brings together a number of papers on credence. Part 1 is on the relationship between belief and credence. Two chapters are especially relevant. The Frankish chapter raises one of the most influential

objections to the belief-first view to date. The Foley chapter introduces the Lockean thesis and discusses issues for the Lockean thesis raised by the preface and lottery paradoxes.

Buchak, L. (2014). Belief, credence, and norms. *Philosophical Studies* 169, 285–311. Doi: 10.1007/s11098-013-0182-y

This paper raises a central objection to the Lockean thesis, based on problems created by cases of “naked statistical evidence.”

Leitgeb, H. (2017). The stability of belief: How rational belief coheres with probability. Oxford: OUP

This book gives an influential theory of the relationship between rational belief and rational credence, arguing that an agent rationally believes a proposition just in case they assign it a stably high credence.

Moss, S. (2018). *Probabilistic knowledge*. Oxford: OUP

This book argues that credences can be knowledge, and that probabilistic contents should replace propositional contents as the objects of belief. Especially relevant to belief and credence are sections 1.4 and especially 3.6, in which Moss argues that the relationship between credence and belief closely parallels the relationship between strict and loose contents of belief.

ONLINE MATERIALS

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/belief/>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/formal-belief/>

<https://philpapers.org/browse/belief>

Sample Syllabus.

Week 1: Introduction & overview.

What is Belief?

Schwitzgebel, E. (2019). “Belief.” In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. by Edward N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/belief/>

Moon, A. (2017). Beliefs do not Come in Degrees. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 47(6), 760–778.

What is Credence?

Eriksson, L. and A. Hájek. (2007). What are Degrees of Belief? *Studia Logica* 86(2), 183–213.

Week 2: Belief, credence, and reducibility.

The Belief-First View.

Moon, A. and E. Jackson. (Forthcoming). Credence: A Belief-First Approach. *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy*.

Holton, R. (2014). “Intention as a Model for Belief.” In: *Rational and Social Agency: Essays on the Philosophy of Michael Bratman*. Ed. By Manuel Vargas and Gideon Yaffe, pp. 12–33. Oxford: OUP.

The Credence-First View.

Greco, D. (2015). How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Probability 1. *Philosophical Perspectives* 29, 179–201.

Lee, M. (2017-b). On the Arbitrariness Objection to the Threshold View. *Dialogue* 56, 143–158.

Dualism.

Ross, J., and M. Schroeder. (2014). Belief, Credence, and Pragmatic Encroachment. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 88(2), 259–288.

Staffel, J. (2019). How Do Beliefs Simplify Reasoning? *Noûs* 53(4), 937–962.

Weisberg, J. (2020). Belief in Psyontology. *Philosopher's Imprint* 20(11), 1–27.

Week 3: The Lockean thesis: for and against.

Arguments For the Lockean Thesis.

Foley, R. (1993). "The Epistemology of Beliefs and the Epistemology of Degrees of Belief." In: *Working without a Net*, ch. 4. Oxford: OUP.

Locke, D. (2014). The Decision-Theoretic Lockean Thesis. *Inquiry* 57, 28–54.

Arguments Against the Lockean Thesis.

Buchak, L. (2014). Belief, Credence, and Norms. *Philosophical Studies* 169, 285–311.

Week 4: Why this matters.

Jackson, E. (2019). Belief and Credence: Why the Attitude-Type Matters. *Philosophical Studies* 176(9), 2,477–2,496.

Hájek, A. and H. Lin. (2017). A Tale of Two Epistemologies? *Res Philosophica* 94(2), 207–232.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- 1 What is belief? What is credence? How does the way we define each attitude affect our understanding of their relationship?
- 2 Explain the difference between an eliminativist about belief and a view that reduces belief to credence.
- 3 How would an advocate of the belief-first view analyse "Sarah has a 0.9 credence that it will rain tomorrow"? Where would an advocate of credence-first view disagree?
- 4 What are some differences between the threshold view (a descriptive claim) and the Lockean thesis (a normative claim)? Do the lottery and the preface paradoxes create problems for both views?
- 5 Can you think of any other ways that rational belief and rational credence might be connected, besides the Lockean thesis?

How to cite this article: Jackson E. Teaching & learning guide for: The relationship between belief and credence. *Philosophy Compass*. 2020;15:e12670. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12670>