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Judgment Puzzles. In Conversation With Pascal Engel

Ernest Sosa

Department of Philosophy, Rutgers University (USA)

Résumé : C'est un plaisir de poursuivre une conversation de longue date avec la personne qu'on honore, au sujet de questions relatives à la nature de la croyance et de la manière dont elles affectent la théorie de la connaissance :

- La croyance peut-elle être de l'ordre de la performance ?
- Peut-elle être vraiment motivée, beaucoup moins motivée de manière appropriée, par des raisons qui sont pragmatiques plutôt qu'épistémiques ?

Ce sont des questions sur lesquelles nous sommes en désaccord et que Engel inscrit dans un conflit plus général sur la sorte de normativité qui convient à l'épistémologie. Il m'attribue une sorte de normativité téléologique-axiologique, tandis qu'il opte plutôt pour une normativité qui est déontique. Selon lui, il existe des normes de croyance, au minimum une norme de vérité, et aussi une norme de connaissance. Vous devez ne pas croire ce qui n'est pas vrai, et même ce dont vous ne savez pas s'il est vrai, voir [Engel 2013], [Sosa 2013].

Abstract: It is a pleasure to continue a longstanding conversation with our honoree on questions about the nature of belief and how that bears on the theory of knowledge.

- Can belief be a sort of performance?
- Can it be motivated at all, much less *properly* motivated, by reasons that are pragmatic rather than epistemic?

These are questions on which we disagree, under what Engel considers a more general clash over the sort of normativity that is proper to epistemology. He attributes to me a kind of teleological/axiological normativity, whereas he opts rather for a normativity that is *deontic*. In his view there are norms of belief, at a minimum a truth norm, and also a knowledge norm. You ought not to believe what is not true, nor even what you do not *know* to be true, see [Engel 2013], [Sosa 2013].

What follows will continue our conversation on these issues, which I will combine with a discussion of further, related issues concerning a proper epistemology of judgment.

We will explore the epistemology both of judgment and of the corresponding disposition, judgmental belief. Two epistemic puzzles will occupy us, each of which has a plausible resolution through an account of the act of judgment and of the disposition to perform that act. This helps to make judgment interesting and worthy of more attention in epistemology, given also its importance for a cooperative social species. After offering judgment-theoretic solutions for our two puzzles, we then develop an epistemology of judgment, and consider implications for the epistemology of memory. A further section briefly considers the relation of judgment to competence and reflection, and the suitability of free judgment to constitute objective knowledge.

In all of this I will be trying to buttress my own teleological/axiological approach to epistemic normativity. My hope is to open logical space for a rapprochement between that approach and the deontic approach favored by Engel.

1 Two puzzles

1.1 Reasons to believe

Reasons to believe are epistemic reasons, dedicated reasons for belief. Strictly speaking one cannot really believe for any other sorts of reasons, such as those of practical advantage.

Some have reasoned thus, but others disagree. Centuries ago, another Pascal, Blaise, argued for belief based on a high-stakes wager, and more recently William James added his reasons in favor of willful belief.

Certainly one can be better off for holding a certain belief. What can possibly be wrong with believing for that reason? If one can believe for reasons at all, why not for that sort of reason? This is puzzling. Is it perhaps just that one is *unable* to believe thus at will? Perhaps what is wrong with the idea of believing for advantage is that it is impossible to believe based on practical reasons *simply because it is impossible to believe by choice, at will*. Maybe so, but this bears scrutiny.

Before delving into that, we turn next to our second puzzle.

1.2 Synchronic rationality versus diachronic reliability

A belief might be acquired based on excellent perception, and then stored through excellent memory. Such combined perception and memory might be

extremely reliable. Compatibly with this, however, one might eventually forget how one acquired and retained one's belief. What if at that later juncture one even acquires some direct evidence against its content?

Consider how irrationally stubborn it might be to retain one's belief in the teeth of synchronic evidence arrayed against it. Suppose the contrary evidence is at least a match for whatever reason derives from the mere fact that one then believes as one does. If so, one cannot just stamp one's foot and keep on believing just the same, not rationally.

What if the perception-cum-memory that accounts for one's stored belief is far more reliable than is a synchronic rationale that now speaks *against* its content? Isn't epistemic normativity determined by a truth connection? Why should the more truth-reliable process yield to the less reliable? A puzzle remains.

2 Judgment and our two puzzles

It will help with these puzzles to focus next on *judgment*. By this I mean a certain act of affirmation or the disposition to perform that act. But it needs to be a particular sort of disposition to so affirm. It must not be a disposition to affirm just for practical advantage. Such a merely pragmatic disposition would amount to "make belief". By contrast, *real belief* requires that one be disposed to affirm even when simply endeavoring to answer the relevant question correctly. Moreover, the *act* of affirmation amounts to an act of *judgment* only if it is performed in the endeavor to affirm correctly, with truth.

There is of course the act of public assertion in a natural language. And there is very often the intention simply to inform—to inform and not to misinform—as a dominant aim in human communication. In addition, given our capacity for strategic self-deception, a similar distinction is in order for judgment and belief as for assertion. Despite how susceptible we can be to epistemically irrelevant pragmatic factors, there is at least the concept of *disinterested* affirmation, influenced purely by the aim to get it right, to believe correctly. Relatedly, there is also the disposition to affirm even when no practical or other non-epistemic factors are operative. And this is the true belief, by contrast with mere make-belief.

One can assert in the endeavor to mislead, of course, as when one lies. Insincere assertions, moreover, are those that do not correspond to the speaker's beliefs. And something similar can occur even when the affirmation is private, to oneself. Consider phenomena such as self-deception, and wishful thinking. Consider in general affirmation out of the desire for psychological comfort and avoidance of dissonance. In these cases again it seems plausible that one affirms in a way that does not correspond to what one really believes. One tries to fool oneself into affirming what one does not *really* believe. What

then is this “real belief”, if it is not what one affirms even to oneself, *in foro interno*? My suggestion is that what is really believed is what one would affirm in the endeavor to get it right, to answer the relevant question correctly. Clearly there can be a disparity between what one would affirm thus and what one actually affirms in the endeavor to gain some practical advantage.

2.1 Dedicated epistemic reasons

a. We can now see why it might be thought that there cannot be practical reasons for belief, why it is so plausible that belief can be based only on epistemic reasons. We can make-believe for practical reasons, but we cannot really believe for such reasons. This is because of how real belief requires endeavoring to get it right. No other aim is constitutively relevant to real belief, as opposed to make-belief. Reasons distinctively pertinent to real belief, reasons thus distinctively appropriate, must therefore be truth-directed reasons. These are the reasons that will bear on the objective constitutive of real belief, namely the objective to get it right, to affirm *with truth*. Consider affirming in a way that will bring some other advantage, such as psychological comfort, athletic confidence, etc. No such affirming is pertinent to real judgmental belief. Consider next reasons that pertain to whether affirming will secure *such* advantages *without* pertaining to whether affirming will get it right. No such reasons can then bear distinctively on real believing, since no such reasons bear on one’s securing the objective constitutive of real believing.

That suggests a way to understand why the fact that believing would secure advantage does not provide a reason of the sort “dedicated” to believing, a true epistemic reason. Epistemic reasons pertain to the objective constitutive of real believing. Practical reasons do not pertain to that objective. In this way, only epistemic reasons, and not practical reasons, distinctively pertain to believing.

b. Of course, when one believes judgmentally one does affirm: it is *by* affirming that one so believes. One must affirm in a certain way, however, in order to *judge* or to *believe (judgmentally)* by so affirming. One must affirm in the endeavor to affirm correctly. Only such affirmation is truly judgment, and only the *disposition* to so affirm counts as judgmental belief. But now consider a subject who deliberates epistemically on the question whether *p*. He is pondering how to *judge* on that question. This means that he is pondering how to affirm, in the endeavor to affirm correctly. Of course, he might deliberate on how to affirm in pursuit of other aims, or he might be subject subconsciously to the attraction of other objectives in determining (still subconsciously) how it seems to him on the matter whether *p*. He might become very confident that *p* for reasons that pertain to practical objectives such as psychological comfort. These processes *are* fueled by practical concerns and they eventuate in degrees of confidence concerning the question whether *p*. That this can and

does happen seems undeniable, just commonsensically, and is a well-known fact of social psychology. But compare how plausible it also seems, nevertheless, that one cannot consciously *judge* based on practical reasons, and that one cannot *believe judgmentally* based on such reasons.

Again, we need to distinguish between mere affirming and the affirming that constitutes judgment and, indirectly, judgmental belief. Judgment is constituted not just by affirming but by affirming in the endeavor to get it right. Consider *aimings* in general. Consider even consciously intentional aimings, i.e., *endeavors*. When one's action takes the form of an *endeavor*, it is a means-end action. Insofar as one is choosing certain means towards a certain end, one properly weighs only considerations that concern the effectiveness of one's means towards the attainment of one's end. True, what one does can no doubt have many other effects, and these not only can but *must* presumably be taken into account in one's final decision.

So, consider an assassin's shot. He takes that shot as a means to killing his victim. He shoots in the endeavor to assassinate. *Insofar as that is his endeavor*, then, his relevant reasons are those relevantly related to the attainment of his aim. Consider how he must deliberate in a way that will bear on his intentional means-end action. He must consider what bears on the effectiveness of the available means towards attainment of his aim. As for further effects that might flow from his taking certain means, these are not relevant to the aim that he is endeavoring to attain. But of course they do bear on his shooting as he does, and he must take them into account in his all-things-considered decision whether to then shoot as he does.

Similarly, one can and does allow practical considerations to bear on what one is willing to affirm, especially in public assertion, but even in private assent. All sorts of practical concerns can bear, properly so, on the propositional attitudes that one thereby hosts. If some such concerns do not bear on how one *judges*, nor on what one *judgmentally believes*, that is because judgment is not just affirmation but affirmation in the endeavor to get it right. And there are limits to what can be rationally allowed to bear on one's pursuit of *that* objective.

c. It might be replied that not only can one not *judge* based on practical reasons. One cannot even *affirm* for such reasons. And this has some plausibility. Yet *this* intuition cannot be explained by appeal to the difference between affirming and judging. This does seem quite plausible as well. But our explanation of why one cannot *judge* for practical reasons is of course inapplicable to the fact, if it is a fact, that one cannot *affirm* for practical reasons. It might be thought that if we can really know in the armchair that one cannot affirm for practical reasons, this must then be a necessary truth of some sort, one accessible to *a priori* insight or argumentation. But consider the following alternative: Why can't our knowledge that we cannot affirm for practical reasons be rather like our knowledge that we cannot jump over tall

buildings, or even like my knowledge that I cannot now choose to bury my pen deep into my right eye. These impossibilities pertain not to categorical metaphysical necessities but only to metaphysical necessities relative to our actual constitution. Our inability to jump over buildings is relative to our physical constitution, which might have been different, and relative also to our location on the surface of a massive planet. And something similar seems true of one's inability to choose to stab one's own eye, this being an inability that need not even be shared by every human at all times, not by Vincent Van Gogh for one. I see no reason why our knowledge that we are unable to affirm for practical reasons could not be similar. Perhaps there is a good reason why humans find it so difficult to affirm (even to oneself) for advantage. Perhaps there are good evolutionary reasons why neither stabbing oneself in the eye nor believing for advantage is something we go in for, nor even something most of us *could* go in for, if we tried. Moreover, we might be able to know in the armchair that we are thus constituted in the same sort of way that we can know in the armchair, just by drawing on our commonsense background knowledge, that we *cannot* jump over tall buildings.

So, I do share the attraction to the thought that we are unable not only to judge for practical advantage but even to affirm for practical advantage. However, the latter, and the way in which we know it, is not something that we can explain philosophically in the way we can explain why it is, and how we can know, that we cannot *judge* for advantage. So it is the latter intuition, which *is* amenable to philosophical explanation, that I have mainly addressed here. Still, comparisons with choices and physical actions beyond our ability help us understand how we could know that we lack such an ability without any great philosophical mystery. On this suggestion, our inability derives from being constituted in a certain way, such that it is not physically possible to be so constituted and yet attain the outcome that we take to be beyond our reach.

d. Nevertheless, there is a way in which practical reasons *can* still bear importantly on what one believes. Thus, one may form a belief at all on the weather forecast because one prefers not to get wet. In this sort of way practical reasons *can* pertain importantly to real believing. A hired assassin shoots as he does for the reason that he wants to get paid, even if getting paid does not bear on the success of that shot in killing his victim. In this sort of way, we might need to believe with truth for many diverse practical reasons. We may need to get it right as to the best means to secure our ends. This does of course provide important practical reasons for much real believing. This sort of practical reason lies behind much of our inquiry and judgment on a great variety of topics. We still need distinctively epistemic reasons, however, ones dedicated to real belief, epistemic reasons with their indispensable role in proper real believing, a role that cannot be filled by practical reasons.

e. So much for our first puzzle, concerning reasons for belief. We turn next to the second, involving a contrast between synchronic rationality and diachronic reliability.

2.2 Storage of beliefs in memory

a. What is it that one retains when one acquires and stores a belief? Is it a certain degree of confidence, a resultant seeming strong enough to enable one to affirm? Can that possibly be retained no matter what may come to light epistemically in a later situation? Well, now there are two possibilities. Either the new situation contains determinative contrary reasons, which require relinquishing one's supposedly stored belief, or it does not. If it does, then of course one must give up one's belief. Supposing the new situation does not contain any such fresh reasons, however, what then can one properly retain? Is it the same degree of confidence that one enjoyed as one acquired the belief perceptually? Not necessarily, even if no fresh contrary reasons later come into view. For example, one's epistemic situation changes dramatically as an excruciating headache recedes into the past. It is one thing to suffer the headache and believe accordingly at that very moment, and it is quite another to believe that one did suffer that headache in the past. As time passes one's stored confidence that one then suffered a headache dwindles, properly so. Seconds later one is still in a position to affirm that one did have that headache. But that eventually lapses with the steady loss of confidence, even when no *contrary* reasons ever come into view.

As one forgets the details of a given belief's acquisition, that belief may be greatly reduced in its reflective standing. Suppose it is now in storage, with the believer no longer able to endorse it reflectively with conviction. Suppose even that some evidence now comes to light against its content. This evidence need not be compelling in order to create a problem. It might counter the belief either by rebutting it (while providing evidence for its denial) or by undercutting it (while providing evidence that one is ill-placed or ill-equipped to hold it). Either way, the evidence that comes to light may suffice to preclude proper endorsement of that belief. After all, the believer may now be reduced to relying simply on his having that belief in storage. And, although it does give him some reason to believe accordingly, in line with "methodological conservatism", such evidence may provide slim justification by comparison with the initial, acquisitional evidence. A belief's continuing justification might thus diverge wildly from the reliability of the diachronic process that secures its continuing storage in memory. Consider the standing provided at that later time by the total evidence then available, including the presence of the belief in the believer's memory. How the belief then fits the new total evidence will surely trump its diachronic reliability. It will defeat any such mere reliability in determining what that subject should then believe judgmentally.

In this light, let us now reconsider what it is proper for one to store, both in the way of (a) functional seemings, inclinations, and credences; and also in the way of (b) judgmental beliefs. What one stores either way will be dispositional, in some important respect.

Consider then the dynamics of dispositions. Take a pot of boiling water, with its disposition to burn your hand upon immersion. In a pot taken off the fire, that disposition wanes steadily as the water cools. It *will* be sustained indefinitely so long as the pot is kept on a strong enough fire. As it is moved steadily away from the fire, however, its disposition to burn weakens and eventually disappears.

Is that not the normal fate of a dispositional belief put in storage? As it loses contact with the initial evidence, the relevant credence weakens with increasing distance, and the disposition to judge is eventually lost. At any later time one will be properly disposed to judge only if one is then confident enough. Loss of confidence will thus eventually entail loss of judgmental belief.

What is properly stored is hence *not* a persisting degree of confidence, along with a persistent disposition to judge accordingly. What is properly stored is *rather* a changing degree of confidence eventually dependent just on the continuing confidence *itself*, with no ulterior synchronic basis. Moreover, this degree of confidence must be high enough to sustain properly a disposition to judge, a judgmental belief. This is what really matters in belief storage. What we want to draw from storage—our own or a neighbor's—is judgments and assertions with proper epistemic status, i.e., ones reliably enough acquired and stored. That is how we can put information to work in our practical or theoretical reasoning, and that is also how we can share information and collaborate epistemically. Judgments and assertions have pride of place for epistemic purposes.

b. We humans need a store of dispositions to affirm, whether to oneself or to others, in ordinary settings of reasoning or communication. We cannot often store awareness of how our beliefs were initially acquired, nor can we retain a running awareness of their continuing basis. Most relevant to our epistemic welfare and cooperation, moreover, are acts of judgment or of assertion. It is through such acts that propositions can figure as premises of reasoning, practical or theoretical. Human cooperation requires sincerity, moreover, sincerity to oneself (avoidance, for example, of wishful thinking) and sincerity to interlocutors.

What we can properly “store”, then, what we can retain with epistemic propriety, is a disposition to affirm, and a corresponding confidence, provided we are steadily sensitive to incoming fresh evidence and also to loss of reliability with passage of time, which varies both with subject matter and with quality of relevant memory. One must be sensitive to all these factors in regulating one's degree of confidence and one's corresponding willingness to affirm.

Once we see the complexity involved in proper “retention” of stored beliefs, the supposed clash between synchronic rationality and diachronic reliability seems less puzzling. At *any* time, one must judge in line with the total evidence in one’s possession at that time. This will of course include the fact that one then has a certain degree of resultant confidence on the relevant question. This degree of confidence results from the various evidentially relevant factors that bear on the matter, such as perception, testimony, inference, etc. Among these will of course be found the sheer mnemonic seeming, *how it seems to oneself that the question is to be answered if one puts aside all other sources involved*. At any given juncture various sources of evidence may be operative, the mnemonic appearance being only one of them. No matter how strongly it may mnemonically seem that the question is to be answered, that cannot be the *only* factor that bears properly on how one is now to judge on that question. In addition to whatever fresh perception or testimony may be relevant, one needs to consider the meta-question as to how reliable one’s mnemonic seemings of that sort are, in light of the subject matter, the length of time involved, et cetera. Surely such assessment will always be relevant to how one can properly judge given the mnemonic appearances, along with other pertinent factors.

Since at any given time nearly all of one’s knowledge is “stored”, our reasoning concerning proper storage highlights the importance of *reflective* knowledge specifically. Nearly all of one’s knowledge must involve a competent meta-assessment of competence, and a judgment, or a disposition to judge, that manifests such meta-competence. Accordingly, nearly all of one’s knowledge requires ascent above the animal level, to the level of reflective knowledge. This is so at least for one’s judgmental knowledge at any given juncture. What one judgmentally knows at *t* is what one knowledgeably judges or is disposed to judge at *t*. And this will depend not just on the mnemonic appearances at that time but also on every other relevant source, including one’s meta-competence to assess one’s relevant first-order competences, mnemonic and otherwise.

Accordingly, there is no real clash between diachronically competent stored belief and synchronically rational judgment. What is properly stored is not really a judgmental belief, a disposition to judge, *no matter what ensues*. What is properly stored is rather a mnemonic seeming of a certain magnitude. But at any given later juncture this cannot automatically determine how the subject should then judge. That would seem absurd given the many other sources that may later be operative, which must also be given their due. To suppose that retentive memory must trump all other sources whenever there is a clash would be as arbitrary as the selection of any other distinctive source for the place of honor. Why not select testimony? Or perception? No such single-minded selection can be plausible. There is no substitute for a balanced approach. But this approach must be implemented at a given juncture, when a judgment is to be rendered. The balance to be struck accordingly involves the synchronically operative factors, all of them, including not only memory but also testimony, perception, etc. All of these sources will deliver seemings,

vectors that must be summed for a resultant credence, which if high enough can then also yield judgment with epistemic propriety.

3 More on the epistemology of judgment and of memory

1. Judgments manifest the subject's freedom, being endeavors determined by free choices and intentions. They are *fully attributable* doings, by contrast with one's reflex kick under the doctor's mallet; with one's walking onto a mined field, unknowingly; and with one's experiencing a checkerboard pattern as one sees a chess board in good light from above. Judgments stand in contrast even with one's being *inclined* to assent accordingly. This inclination can of course derive from the proper functioning of one's cognitive systems, including prominently the visual system. But it would not derive from a free, voluntary rational assessment and choice. In this hierarchy—from experience, to seemings, to resultant seemings (or credences)—only judgment in the endeavor to judge correctly is a doing fully attributable to oneself as free agent. Such judgment is epistemically proper if and only if rendered *competently enough*.

As we complete a process of addition in one's head, we may be free to judge either way without fault. If we judge affirmatively, moreover, we may thereby acquire a "judgmental" belief. This is a belief constituted by a disposition to affirm upon considering the relevant question when one endeavors to answer it correctly. Thus might a belief be acquired freely, voluntarily; and it might then be stored long enough that one forgets how it was acquired.

That again leads to our stand on what constitutes a dispositional belief. As was argued earlier, not all forces that affect one's willingness to affirm also plausibly affect one's judgmental belief. Desire for mental comfort and need to avoid dissonance might remove my willingness to affirm without much affecting my judgmental belief. Other non-epistemic factors might have a similar effect: wishful thinking, for one. These factors might even install a willingness to deny, again without much affecting my judgmental belief. On the present view, such manipulation might yield *make-belief*, but not real belief. Put aside such manipulation, whether conscious or subconscious, and consider only what one would affirm if one endeavored to affirm with truth. Barring sheer epistemic defect, one would then likely affirm based on evidence, or on whatever other epistemically proper factors may be operative. Real judgmental belief requires the disposition to affirm *in the endeavor to answer the pertinent question correctly*. Pragmatic factors influence one to affirm or deny or suspend in ways independent of this endeavor. What one affirms under such influence does not reveal one's true belief; it reveals rather how one is willing to *make-believe*. But note well: "in the endeavor" does not mean just

“while endeavoring”. Rather it means something like “exclusively through the effect of this endeavor, discounting other influences”.

2. What then is it that we store by way of *judgmental belief*? It would be a disposition to judge, of course, but what might be its content? Suppose I am convinced that it is unbearably hot in Havana in the early afternoon of a certain day. I store this conviction and the disposition to judge accordingly, in the endeavor to answer that question correctly. What exactly does this latter disposition amount to? I will hardly retain this disposition indefinitely as my relevant memories fade. If, after a few days, someone disputes the claim, I may well give up affirming it. My disposition was not a disposition to continue to be attracted indefinitely, even as the positive evidence recedes and contrary evidence appears. It is more qualified than that. It involves a gradually diminishing disposition to be *attracted* to assent to that propositional content *provided no sufficient contrary evidence comes into view*, and it involves also a corresponding disposition to judge accordingly *provided one’s degree of confidence remains at a certain (high enough) level*.

Consider now the latter judgmental disposition, the disposition to judge affirmatively at any arbitrary later time when one considers the question, provided one’s confidence then remains at a certain (high enough) level. This seems a will-based policy, given that such judgments are free and voluntary. What is its content?

Recall our stance on the question of heat in Havana. This stance amounts to a policy to answer affirmatively in the endeavor to answer correctly, provided one’s confidence remains at a certain (high enough) level. But is this not just a special instance of a quite general policy? I mean the general policy, concerning *all* questions, to affirm at *any* given time provided one’s credential confidence is then high enough? Yes, fair enough. So, what is really distinctively stored as one learns that *p* is rather a certain distinctive mnemonic seeming, one that does not need any further boost from any other source, whether perceptual, or testimonial, or of whatever sort. This distinctive mnemonic seeming may of course vary in magnitude, and its continuing magnitude will properly depend on one’s meta-assessment of the reliability of one’s mnemonic seemings of that sort (in respect of subject matter, length of time, etc.).

3. Something else *is* also stored once one learns that *p*, in addition to the lingering mnemonic seeming of a certain magnitude. I mean the policy to affirm that *p* when the question comes up, at least to oneself, provided one’s resultant credence continues to be high enough.

Still, what is the full content of that policy? What in particular is “high enough” confidence? What is the degree of confidence required, other than confidence that meets the required threshold? If we do not have an independent conception of that threshold, can we really have a policy in place that explains what it is to believe judgmentally?

4. Can there be policies that are not articulable except trivially? Compare riflemen with archers. A rifleman may have a policy that he can formulate linguistically as "Shoot if and only if the (already chosen and addressed) target is in the crosshairs". There is nothing quite like that for the archer. There are no crosshairs in archery. But is there not a will-based policy that the archer follows similarly nonetheless? The good archer takes careful aim and releases only when he judges that the moment is right. Presumably he is guided by some perception of an appropriate combination of factors like the following: the orientation of the arrow, the tension of the bow, the perceived distance of the target, the sensed wind across the relevant space, and so on. Clearly, the relevant combination of factors is beyond any human's ability to articulate fully (except trivially as "when the moment is right in all relevant respects, or in such and such respects"). Nor does it seem plausible that the archer will have some ability to conceptualize the relevant combinations of factors independently of "the combination, or *a* combination, that makes it appropriate now to release the arrow". In *this* respect there is no difference between the expert and the beginner. Neither has the ability to formulate their basis for action except thus trivially. Yet there is much more to the relevant conscious contents of the expert archer's mind as he takes a shot, than there is to the contents of the rank beginner as he takes his shot. Both of them may shoot in the belief that "the moment is right in all relevant respects". Yet the expert is responding to certain factors systematically in a way that helps explain his expertise. For the beginner there is no such sensitivity, since there is no such expertise.

5. Who would deny that it is possible to judge rashly, when one's confidence is too low? Appropriate judgment requires that the relevant confidence be high enough. Compare the expert archer. As we have seen, he hosts a *de re* "policy" of releasing his arrow provided the moment is right in certain respects. But no such policy is available to the beginner until he undergoes a period of training and practice. Something similar seems true for the judgmental believer who takes the bird in the distance to be a duck, not a goose. First, there is the well-based confidence that it is a duck; second, there is the well-based corresponding judgment. And this latter will require the believer to be sensitive to when the confidence is high enough to warrant judgment.

How then should we think of the stored judgmental belief that *p*? It is a disposition to freely judge affirmatively upon considering the relevant question in the endeavor to answer it correctly. Normally, that judgmental disposition will be conditional on the subject's retaining a strong enough confidence. Storage of judgmental belief will thus require corresponding storage of high enough confidence. This stored confidence is itself dispositional. It is a disposition to be (consciously) attracted to assent upon considering the question. If proper, it will not be a disposition to be so attracted *come what may*. Rather, it will be a disposition to continue to be so attracted absent

relevant change in the subject's epistemic situation. There must be no such change that tilts the balance against assenting.

It is not enough that one simply uphold a verbal or conceptual formula of the form:

I will sustain my degree of confidence provided there is no change that tilts the balance against the content of my confident credence.

This policy someone might endorse despite being *inadequately* sensitive to changes that tilt the balance, or to the need to adjust his confidence in response to such changes. It is the latter, *de re*, policy that the competent epistemic agent will uphold. And his upholding of it will amount to his being disposed, with regard to such changes (that tilt the balance of evidence, etc.), to change his degree of confidence in response to them.

4 Competence, suspension, and reflection

1. Given that judgments are free intentional actions, can they be responsive to the facts so as to constitute knowledge? Isn't true knowledge required to be more tightly bound to the objective facts? If knowledge is apt belief, belief that gets it right in a way that manifests the believer's competence, is this compatible with the belief's being a judgment, or a judgmental belief, a free intentional action, or a disposition to so act?

A competence is a disposition to succeed reliably enough upon aiming to attain a certain outcome. So, a disposition is a competence only if its triggers are attempts or aimings. Such a disposition amounts to a *competence* only with a sufficient yield of success.

We should distinguish functional from volitional—will-based—competences. A heart is normally competent to help move the blood. This competence is *functional*. *Volitional* competences are competences to succeed reliably enough in endeavors, in volitional attempts. For example, the competence of a good, safe driver is largely volitional. It is based on policies that he adopts and sustains voluntarily.

A good archer is competent to hit the mark with his arrows. A good driver is competent to drive safely and efficiently. However, these competences may be volitional in two importantly different respects. The *archer* shoots freely, at will. So, his performances are free acts, and his competence as an archer is a competence to succeed with such freely chosen and executed performances. The *driver* also exercises his driving competence through freely chosen and executed performances. But there is a further respect in which the driver's competence is volitional. His competence *itself* largely resides in his will. He adopts and sustains certain policies whereby he possesses his driving competence. A freely chosen and sustained policy can constitute, or help constitute, a (volitional) competence. Thus, consider the good driver's

freely chosen and sustained policy of stopping at red lights, or that of signaling his turns. There may thus be an important difference between the driver and the archer in respect of the seat of their respective competences. There is at least a notable difference of degree. We shall return to this in what follows.

Seemings, initial or resultant, are functionings. The subject's doings as he thus functions are in a way passive. They are not fully attributable to his person, as fully his own doings. Judgment, however, goes beyond passive seemings, even beyond confident credences (resultant inclinations that are vector sums of the various seemings with their respective sources). Thus, if one computes a long sum in one's head, which yields a seeming of some magnitude, one faces the choice whether to accept that seeming and judge accordingly. This seems a choice one may be free to make. And agents identically placed might here make opposing choices with no fault on either side.

Suspension is not the mere omission of both affirmation and denial. Nor is it such double-omission while attending to the question. At least *proper* suspension must be an intentional double-omission that is adequately based (through risk assessment). But if suspension is thus intentional (at least when proper), then the counterpart judgment and denial must also be intentional (at least when proper). All three of these are hence actions (when proper) since intentional doings are actions. Moreover, some at least of these are free and voluntary actions. These are the free and voluntary judgments and suspendings (of judgment).

2. A driver can arrive safely in a way that manifests competence, surely, even when much of that competence is constituted by freely chosen policies. There is no apparent reason why a judgmental believer could not attain truth through a judgment whose accuracy similarly manifests competence, even if this competence too is importantly constituted by freely chosen policies.

In arriving thus at the correct attitude one does best to assess one's level of *complete* competence with respect to the question addressed. This includes three components. The first is one's basic constitutional competence, one's skill in answering such questions. The second is one's current shape for employing that skill. Is one awake, alert, sober, etc.? Third and last is one's situation, including any relevant external relations. Is the light adequate? How far is the object? And so on. All three of these—skill, shape, situation—are constitutively involved in one's complete competence. Only such complete SSS-assessment (however quick and subconscious) can properly determine whether one is likely enough to answer the question correctly. A negative conclusion would require one intentionally to forbear from answering. Instead one would need to suspend.

To affirm with full epistemic competence, one must competently assess the epistemic risk as low enough. One then affirms on a basis shared with the intention implemented: the basis provided by the favorable risk assessment. In so affirming one then falls short unless that basis amounts to knowledge.

It follows that the affirmation will itself fall short unless it amounts to reflective knowledge. One needs to answer the first-order question correctly, manifesting thereby one's relevant first-order competence. The exercise of that competence must itself be intentional, moreover, based on the second-order assessment of the relevant risk. Finally, *this* assessment must in turn manifest sufficient competence.

Above animal-level fixation of belief, no matter how reliable, one finds the reflective epistemic status. This calls for an epistemology with both animal and reflective components. Reflective competence is required for the higher status. We need not always seek that status, nor is it a status required for proper trust in our first-order beliefs. Despite our not needing to do so, however, we often do seek that level of scrutiny and endorsement, as we consider a question in a setting that requires reflection. Plausibly, a belief would always attain a higher epistemic status if it *did* gain proper endorsement through such scrutiny.

5 Concluding remarks

Our account of the act of judgment and of the disposition to perform that act enabled proposed solutions to our two puzzles: first, the puzzle of why reasons for belief must be distinctively epistemic; second, that of why synchronic rationale trumps diachronic competence, even when it is (by hypothesis) less truth-reliable. These proposed solutions led to further development of an epistemology of judgment, including implications for the nature and epistemology of retentive memory. And this led us finally to explore the relation of judgment to competence and reflection, and the suitability of free judgment to constitute objective knowledge.

How deep is my disagreement with Engel's ethics and epistemic psychology of belief? I suspect that it is not very deep. As he notes in our earlier exchange, there is no powerful reason for me to resist the idea that belief has an ethics, nor need I object to the notion that truth and knowledge are norms of belief. As for the broader framework within which we both write in epistemology, I very much agree with his minimalist account of truth, and much of his rationale for that account, and have myself defended in print such objectivist minimalism [Engel 2002].

Still I hope to have cleared logical and epistemological space for an account of belief, and of *judgmental* belief more specifically, according to which belief is after all a performance, one with an aim relative to which it can be teleologically assessed in terms of the normative categories of virtue epistemology. Thus, I submit that beliefs fall under such a AAA normative structure, since they can not only be accurate, and adroit or competent, but also their accuracy can manifest their competence, so that they can also be apt. Within the space thus cleared for a virtue epistemology, moreover, we can also answer plausibly the question of why and how belief admits only epistemic

and not pragmatic reasons. So, I hope to have promoted a true meeting of the minds, with a philosopher that I have long admired, whether in disagreement or in agreement.¹

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1. Here I have developed further the virtue epistemology expounded most recently and fully in [Sosa 2015].