## Belief and Credence: Why the Attitude-Type Matters

There are two doxastic building blocks that epistemologists tend to concern themselves with: beliefs and credences. Beliefs are a categorical state, and it is generally assumed there are three primary belief-attitudes one can take toward a proposition p: believing p, withholding, and believing ~p. Credences, on the other hand, are something like subjective probabilities. They are not categorical but come in degrees, are much more fine-grained than beliefs, and are often assumed to be representable as a value on the [0,1] interval.

There are many debates in epistemology today that can be framed in terms of either belief or credence. I will focus on five: permissivism, disagreement, pragmatic encroachment, doxastic voluntarism, and doxastic attitudes and rational action. I will argue that, in these five areas (and probably in many other areas too), our verdicts will change, often in significant ways, if we think about the debate in terms of belief or in terms of credence. One interesting feature of many of these current literatures is that authors tend to pick one attitude seemingly randomly to focus on, or even slide between the two attitudes. However, these moves are not inconsequential, as they can change the entire outcome of the debate. Additionally, if we choose to reduce belief to credence or credence to belief, this will have major implications for other debates in epistemology.

Consider the Permissivism debate. Permissivism is the view that there is more than one rational doxastic attitude, given a body of evidence.[1] Those that deny Permissivism subscribe to Uniqueness.[2] Credal Uniqueness, the view that there is one rational credence for a body of evidence, is very implausible; it seems overly demanding to insist that I am irrational if I don't adopt a credence of, i.e., 0.675, given my evidence. For this reason, many defenders of Uniqueness want to appeal to more coarse-grained attitudes.[3] Suppose beliefs reduce to credences, and credences are the only metaphysically real attitude. Then, given that Uniqueness about credences is extremely implausible, we will have a strong reason reject Uniqueness and embrace Permissivism. Alternatively, suppose that we are pluralists about belief and credence; it would seem like belief-permissivism and credal-permissivism are two separable views, and one could be correct and the other incorrect.

Second, consider the epistemology of disagreement. Conciliationists maintain that the mere fact a peer disagrees with you is a reason to change your doxastic attitudes in some way; Steadfasters deny this.[4] If we reduce credence to belief, and maintain that beliefs are the only fundamental doxastic attitude, it becomes unclear what conciliating would look like. Presumably, if I believe p and you, my peer, believe ~p, and conciliationism is true, in many cases, we should both withhold. But what if I believe p and you withhold? Or I withhold and you believe ~p? It is unclear how conciliationism would work, given a framework with very coarse-grained attitudes. Suppose instead we are in an extremely fine-grained credence framework. This can also lead to peculiar results about disagreement – suppose I have credence 0.97 in p, and I find out you, my peer, have a 0.94 credence in p. Technically, we are disagreeing, but it seems like I should maybe be MORE confident in p, not less.[5] This is one of the odd features of extremely fine grained credences. Thus, the relationship between belief and

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[1] Main defenders are Ballentyne and Coffman (2011), Kelly (2013), Meacham (2014), Schoenfield (2014).
[2] Main defenders are White (2005, 2013), Feldman (2007), Hedden (2015).
[3] See Kelly (2013), Douven (2011), Schoenfield (2014), Decker (2012).
[4] See Kelly (2005), Christensen (2007, 2009, 2016).
[5] See Christensen (2009).

credence bears in many important ways on the peer-disagreement debate in many ways, including defining what counts as disagreement, and explaining what it would mean to conciliate.

Pragmatic encroachment is the view that sometimes, pragmatic factors alone can make a difference to whether one knows or not, and most pragmatic encroachers maintain this is because pragmatic factors can make a difference to which doxastic attitudes are justified for one to hold.[6] Suppose pragmatic encroachment is true; is there pragmatic encroachment on beliefs, credences, or both? Suppose that belief just is credence above some fixed threshold. Then, it doesn't seem like there could be pragmatic encroachment on belief without there being pragmatic encroachment on credences as well.[7] If, alternatively, credences reduce to beliefs about probabilities, then it seems like pragmatic encroachment about belief would lend itself to pragmatic encroachment about credence.

Doxastic voluntarism concerns the question of whether we have direct control over our doxastic attitudes, in the same way we have direct control over raising an arm. The question of whether we have control over our beliefs has been explored much more than the question of whether we have control over our credences.[8] However, it seems that if we reduce attitude A to attitude B, then if we have control over B, we will have control over A. So, suppose you are wondering if whether doxastic voluntarism is true of beliefs, but you think that belief is credence above some threshold. Then, the question of whether belief-voluntarism is true seems to collapse into the question of whether credal voluntarism is true. At the same time, if belief and credence are ontologically independent, then we may have control over one attitude but not the other.

Finally, consider the question of how one's doxastic attitudes relate to how one ought to act. Suppose one has both a credence 0.8 in p and believes p, and suppose p is relevant to some action one will take. In deciding how to act, should one rely on one's credence in p, one's belief that p, or both? If using credence-reasoning and belief-reasoning would offer different verdicts about rational action, and it is unclear which one we should rely on, it might be unclear what one ought to do.[9] *Prima facie*, this puzzle might motivate a reduction in one direction or another.[10]

The main conclusions I draw are as follows. One, we ought to be careful and intentional about whether we think of some debate in terms of belief or in terms of credence, because this decision can drastically affect the outcome of the debate. Two, the relationship between belief and credence, and whether one attitude reduces to another, is a question central for epistemology generally, as it will have implications for a vast number of other epistemic disputes.

**Works Cited**

[6] See Stanley (2005), Fantl and McGrath (2010), Ross and Schroeder (2014).
[7] Some, friendly to pragmatic encroachment and reducing belief to credence, have suggested a picture on which pragmatic factors can vary the threshold for belief. See Weatherson (2005), Ganson (2008), Fantl and McGrath (2010), Pace (2011). [Acknowledgement omitted for blind review].
[8] See Williams (1973), Alston (1988), Ginet (2001), Hieronymi (2006, 2009), Steup (2008).
[9] See Weisberg (forthcoming).
[10] However, some have offered creative non-reductive solutions to this problem. See Wedgwood (2012), Ross and Schroder (2014).

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