



On the Knowability Asymmetry of Theism¹

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Abstract

The knowability asymmetry of theism (KAT) is based on a revived version of Pascal's wager inspired by pragmatic encroachment (a recent thesis on the stand of pragmatic considerations in epistemology). According to KAT, as the practical costs of being wrong in believing in God far outweigh the (infinite) costs of believing in atheism if false (due to being deprived of the infinite gains of eternal life), arguably theistic knowledge is far easier to come by than its atheistic counterpart since it requires weaker justificatory support than atheism. In this paper we seek to criticize KAT arguing that it unjustifiably favors theism and oversimplifies the nature of stakes. Drawing from the debates on the axiology of theism and its implications about the axiological dimensions of stakes, we contend that the practical significance of being wrong about theism is not necessarily overriding to atheism. Finally we suggest that instead of laying the emphasis on pragmatic encroachment which is based on mere personal practical preferences, what seems better to be prioritized is moral encroachment. In conclusion we make an effort to rehabilitate KAT on the basis of moral rather than personal practical advantages/disadvantages of theism.

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1. Introduction

Historically, among the multitude of arguments that have been proposed in defense of the rationality of religious beliefs, some have been constructed on the basis of practical outcomes and benefits of such beliefs. The most prominent examples of this kind of arguments are no doubt, Pascal's wager on the prudential rationality of theism and William James's emphasis on the crucial role of religious hope and religious passions.

Such practical arguments though notable have been criticized on the ground that they refer solely to the prudential and beneficial outcomes of religious beliefs which are irrelevant to truth, rationality or the justificatory status of these beliefs. Accordingly, due to these critics there is a gap between the practical rationality employed in this kind of arguments and the epistemic rationality or the justificatory status of their pertained beliefs which cannot be filled (or compensated) by pragmatic considerations. Practical reasons in this context is claimed not to be truth-conducive but reasons which one has to prefer or desire a proposition's truth. Hence it seems that finding a way to indicate the connection between practical and epistemic rationality, would be helpful in seeking a solution to save practical arguments from this sort of charges.

In recent years some philosophers have proposed that the thesis known in current epistemology as *pragmatic encroachment*, might provide the defenders of practical arguments with a means of responding to their critics on the alleged gap (Rizzieri, 2013, Eaton and Pickavance, 2018, Benton, 2018). The theorists of pragmatic encroachment argue that practical stakes affect the threshold of the evidence required for epistemic justification (Fantl & McGrath, 2002, Fantl & McGrath 2009, Owens, 2000). On this view, whether a belief *p* is justified or qualifies as knowledge depends partly, on the practical stakes of holding *p* if false. Drawing on this insights, the proponents of theistic practical arguments maintain that since atheistic belief if false contains infinite losses that would far outweigh the costs of falsely believing in theism, then, if (as pragmatic encroachment claims) stakes are relevant in determining the threshold for adequacy of a belief's evidential justificatory support, due to this asymmetry a weaker (or a lower amount of) evidential justificatory support for one's religious beliefs is adequate for those beliefs to be rendered as knowledge. Accordingly, one can conclude that theistic knowledge is far easier to come by than its atheistic counterpart

since it requires a weaker justificatory support than atheism. Thus if conclusive evidence pro or con of theism is not accessible (because of divine hiddenness or religious ambiguity), then the high stakes of the error costs involved in the decision over atheism (in addition to the practical benefits of belief in theism which outweigh those of disbelief), lead one to conclude that belief in theism could amount more easily to knowledge if it is true. On the other hand, belief in atheism could not easily amount to knowledge even if true. This line of reasoning is in short dubbed as the *knowability asymmetry of theism* (here after KAT) (Benton, 2018, p272).

KAT states that if one is entitled to believe in atheism rather than theism, the error costs of such a belief are very high, and thus the level of evidence required to support atheism is high as well. Therefore, concerning the costs of atheistic belief, having knowledge that God does not exist even if God actually does not exist, becomes more difficult. In the extreme case of there being eternal suffering for disbelievers¹, the practical costs of falsely believing in atheism are so high that atheistic knowledge would require absolute certainty about God's non-existence, something which seems inaccessible. On the other hand, if one is entitled to believe theism, knowledge of God's existence can be easily achieved if theism is true since its practical costs in comparison with its practical benefits are not considerably high. Whereas our beliefs and all our epistemic endeavors aim at acquiring knowledge (due to different debates on the value of knowledge in epistemology), this asymmetry would provide one with a kind of epistemic reason to prioritize believing in theism.²

In this paper we seek to criticize KAT by drawing intuitions from the axiological debate over theism and atheism. In the first step we briefly explain pragmatic encroachment and how this thesis might aid reviving Pascal's wager to overcome the epistemic gap. Next, we focus on the line of

¹ . The debate about KAT focuses on theism/atheism controversy in its traditional understanding of the terms. We are aware that there are several alternatives to the classical dichotomy of theism/atheism such as the deviant Gods suppositions or other religious approaches which we ignore in this paper to hold our focus on criticizing KAT as the main basis of a new practical argument in favor of classical theism.

² . Suspending belief in this case also leads us to no knowledge. If our epistemic aim is to maximize our knowledge, then agnosticism is not the wisest option. If our epistemic aim is to minimize our false beliefs, then suspending belief seems a better way; however, in the case of theism since the pragmatic costs of disbelief and non-belief are the same we think agnosticism also requires sufficient evidence.

reasoning which applies pragmatic reasons in support of KAT. Our main aim is to show that KAT is based on a narrow stance on the nature of stakes. Furthermore, applying mere personal practical concerns and preferences in support of KAT is problematic since in this vain KAT cuts in both ways somehow parallel practical arguments can be developed in favor of the rationality of atheistic belief as well. In the last part of the paper we will show that emphasizing moral encroachment rather than pragmatic encroachment and the undeniable fact of the global axiological preference of theism establishes a kind of moral asymmetry of theism that seems more appealing to support KAT. The upshot: KAT is tenable based on moral rather than practical concerns.

2. Practical Rationality and Knowledge

The possible role of practical concerns in knowledge has recently gained a good deal of attention in analytic epistemology. Amongst these debates particular attention has been paid to the thesis known as pragmatic encroachment. The main idea of pragmatic encroachment is that in addition to truth-related desiderata, practical considerations influence the conditions under which a true belief amounts to knowledge by relating knowledge to the rationality of action arguing simply that if one knows that *p* then one is rational to act as if *p* (Fantl & McGrath, 2007). A confirmation of this kind is controversial since it is a radical departure from the established tradition in epistemology namely *epistemic purism* or *intellectualism*. By endorsing the main aim of epistemology, namely seeking truth and avoiding falsehoods, epistemic purism would insist that exclusively truth-related desiderata (which influence the probability of truth of a belief), such as evidence, safety, sensitivity, reliability, etc., can render beliefs known. As a denial to epistemic purism, however, the theorists of pragmatic encroachment argue that provided we accept fallibilism in knowledge (the thesis that knowledge is compatible with a chance of error¹) it is possible under certain conditions that two subjects in the same epistemic position regarding their evidential status, can fail to be in the same position to know that proposition since they are not equally rational to act as if the proposition in question is true.

¹ . How to define fallibilism is by itself a controversial issue which is however out of the main concerns of this article thus we do not engage in further. For useful details on this see Fantl & McGrath, 2009.

Typically, the proponents of pragmatic encroachment cite conceivable scenarios¹ in which, two possible subjects (which can be the same subject in two different situations concerning her practical stakes) are in the same epistemic position (namely exclusively truth-related factors) regarding the truth of the proposition *p*, yet one of them is in a high-stakes situation concerning the practical consequences of knowing that *p* while the other is in a low-stakes situation. Since fallible knowledge is compatible with a chance of error, provided this chance is not *idle*² due to the costs of being wrong, since the high-stakes subject is not rational to act as if (or rely on) *p* therefore does not know *p* whereas the low-stakes subject, since rational to act as if *p*, does know that *p*. Put it different, knowledge seems harder to come by when the practical stakes go up while far easier to reach when the stakes are low, despite holding constant all truth-related parameters regarding the true belief. Possible scenarios of this kind, as well as new versions constantly being proposed (Blake, 2018, p506) provide counter examples to purism and indicate the possible connections between practical and epistemic rationality.³

Is pragmatic encroachment a proper account about epistemic justification? To answer this question a battleground of opinions has emerged.⁴ To deal with this battleground in detail is beyond the aim of this article thus we limit ourselves to a sketch of what we believe to be the chief insights of this theory. The basic idea behind pragmatic encroachment arises from an intuition of there being a firm relation between our rational actions (or more broadly goals and preferences) and knowledge. In other words, concerning the aim of our actions is to say that we act upon what we know namely knowledge of what we aim at. Acting on our knowledge likewise assures us to reach the goal of our actions. Every rational action consists of a goal (e.g. to reach the highest expected utility) and we act rationally only when we know that the action is a way to reach that intended goal. If in a situation we are not rational to act (for example: to go home today) upon what we supposed to know (that

¹ . The most cited and discussed scenario is De Rosé's bank case (De Rose 1992).

² . A technical term used by the proponents of pragmatic encroachment as a non-arbitrary standard in providing a response to the threshold problem in fallibilism concerning the amount of error compatible with knowledge. For more details on this see Fantl & McGrath 2009.

³ . This may include different action-based principles (Fantl & McGrath 2009) or the knowledge norm of practical reasoning (Brown 2008).

⁴ . Among others see.

the bank is open tomorrow), this signifies that we lack knowledge. Thus it seems that the proponents of pragmatic encroachment tie knowledge to the rationality or propriety of action.¹

According to this gloss on pragmatic encroachment it seems that this thesis is pointing to a dimension of knowledge namely a subjective epistemic commitment or a degree of assurance we need in reaching our goals through specific actions. Accordingly, pragmatic encroachment recalls changing our mind about the dominant account of the nature of knowledge namely purism. In this respect knowledge is not presented as a state that can be achieved only by conforming to some objective desiderata like truth-related safety or reliability; but there are also certain subjective desiderata that must be satisfied in order for one to gain knowledge.² If acting upon one's knowledge may affect one's life crucially, then one starts thinking whether she really knows it or not. In other words, is one sure enough to be able to claim knowing it? Scenarios concerning pragmatic encroachment indicate that how sure we need to be is directly associated with our possession of knowledge, as soon as our assurance about a proposition becomes less crucial for our life (practically important), then knowledge is more easy for us to come by. Hence, practical concerns encroach on the conditions of gaining knowledge through varying the requirements for the amount of assurance we need for claiming to possess knowledge. In high-stakes scenarios one needs to be surer about or more firmly committed to a proposition in order to know it,

¹ .The opponents of pragmatic encroachment insist that the ultimate concern of knowledge is the epistemic goal of seeking truth and avoiding falsehood in our belief system, and practical concerns affect neither the relevant probability of the truth of our beliefs nor our chance of avoiding falsehood, thus these kind of concerns are epistemically irrelevant. But, it is noteworthy to distinguish between the claim that practical interests could provide the required evidence for or against a proposition (where the evidence remains the same in both low- and high-stakes cases), and the claim that they merely can affect the amount of evidence required for a belief to be warranted. This latter claim is what pragmatic encroachment concerns. Accordingly, practical factors do not affect the mere reason or justification for a belief, but do alter the threshold of strength of justification required for a belief to be known. This latter influence is what makes practical concerns epistemically relevant. This influence subsequently is affective in determining whether a subject possesses knowledge or not. On challenging pragmatic encroachment in defense of purism see Vahid 2014.

² . Here it is notable to figure on the difference of pragmatic encroachment and relativism. Unlike relativism, pragmatic encroachment rejects relativizing epistemic norms to different frameworks or contexts. For more details, see Kim (forthcoming).

even if when the stakes were lower there was no need for such an amount of assurance or firm commitment. Moreover, in high stake scenarios we doubt that our evidence is enough since we may not be sure enough to act rationally upon the proposition based on the same body of evidence as in low stake, thus we conclude that we lack knowledge of that proposition.

Bearing these clarifications in mind, we proceed to illustrate how pragmatic encroachment has been applied to revive traditional theistic practical arguments such as the wager.

3. The Knowability Asymmetry of Theism (KAT)

Pascal's wager as one of the most prominent theistic practical arguments, in its traditional formulation insists on the infinite benefits of belief in God and the infinite disadvantages of disbelief. From the time of its articulation, disputes over Pascal's wager have been ongoing. Along one line of discussion for example, critics have found the notion of infinite value in the wager problematic (Jordan2006). In response, new versions of the wager have been proposed in which the notion of infinite value is replaced by notions such as 'large enough finite values' (Benton2018), or 'values incommensurably greater than any finite good' (Jordan, 2006), or a 'gain that is vastly greater than any of its rivals even if it is not an infinite gain' (Jordan, 2006). Other responses refer to assumptions they claim to be plausible such as: 'there are no humanly achievable baddies worse than those of hell and no humanly achievable goodies greater than heaven' (Eaton and Pickavance, 2017).

Despite these revisions, the crucial supposition remains the same; since the value gained by believing in God is considerably greater than that of not believing, the loss entailed by falsely believing atheism exceeds that of falsely believing in theism. The argument concerns only the gains and losses associated with belief and non-belief therefore, can establish at most that one is prudentially rational to believe in God's existence rather than not believe in it. Still, then, the alleged gap between prudential rationality and epistemic rationality has not been filled in this formulation since it does not indicate that we are rational or justified in believing in God. Thus even if we accept that belief in God is prudentially rational still more is needed to show that this belief is epistemically rational as well.

Here pragmatic encroachment gets involved to reveal the epistemic dimension of the wager. Before proceeding, one important question to settle is that, are pragmatic encroachment and the wager committed to the same kind of doxastic norms? Is applying encroachment on the wager an

appropriate and fitting strategy? To deal with these questions it seems that an important aspect they share is a common intuition about the role of practical stakes of being wrong in believing *p*. In the case of the wager this justifies believing not *p* but in encroachment it affects the evidential threshold required for being justified in believing *p*.

Back to the step of reviving the wager. Following the considerations in previous section, one might claim that by applying encroachment's insights and contributions to the justificatory status of true beliefs in religious beliefs entails conceding that the threshold of evidence required for justifying religious beliefs to be rendered as knowledge can vary in respect to the practical concerns of holding such beliefs. Hence according to the wager by referring to the positive practical outcomes of religious beliefs which outweigh the costs of falsely believing in them, the threshold of justification these beliefs require, is lower than what is required by their atheistic counterparts concerning the high costs of falsely believing atheism. In short by applying pragmatic encroachment on the wager it is argued that theism has epistemic priority over atheism and that it gets a kind of epistemic insurance from pragmatic factors.

In this manner Pascal's wager can be reviewed as arguing that in the absence of conclusive evidence in support of either theism or atheism, one is confronted with a decision over two options: to bet on the existence of God or to bet on His non-existence. By betting on God, one is betting on eternal life (or due to some versions of the wager on an eternal pain/pleasure dichotomy). Thus wagering on God is somewhat substantial that if one is intended to bet on God's non-existence one needs to possess a high degree of assurance. On the one hand, the practical benefits of belief in God lower the required threshold for the belief in God to be justified, while the practical downsides of non-belief are so high that one needs to possess a high degree of assurance or even be certain about God's non-existence to be a non-believer and shape one's life on accordingly. On the other hand, certainty about God's existence or non-existence cannot be attained in our world due to the so-called *balance of evidence* or *hiddenness* problem, regarding His existence. To conclude, since believing in theism contains less harmful consequences in compare to atheism, we are rational to act upon our belief that God exists and knowledge of God can be attained more easily, thus perhaps the prominent arguments in favor of theism suffice to render our theistic beliefs warranted. In other words, to believe in God's non-existence one requires plenty of strong evidence, or cogent arguments in support of

atheism. Furthermore, it should be noted that the balance of evidence in favor of either theism or atheism could not provide reason for agnosticism since to be an agnostic entails as much practical costs as non-belief thus one needs more evidence in favor of agnosticism rather than theism. Therefore, people are normally warranted (i.e. have epistemic ungettiered justification)¹ to believe in God, even if there is a balance of evidence for or against theism. According to this asymmetry of the knowability of theism versus atheism, namely KAT, one can conclude that atheistic belief even if true cannot be knowable, but belief in theism is at least eligible to be counted as knowledge, if true (Benton2018,p280). This might indeed be a notable achievement for practical arguments; an achievement we try to criticize in proceeding.

3.1.Rejoinder to KAT

As a substantial presupposition in Pascal's wager and respectively in KAT, there are pervasive directions shared by atheists as well as theists in support of the idea that the utilities and benefits of believing in God outweigh disbelieving anyway. The exceeding benefits of theistic belief are mostly associated with God's good-making properties such as Omni-benevolence and perfect goodness and the very value of relationship with God. Theism grounds moral objectivity, meaning or ultimate value. Despite widely held directions of this kind, there are however some credible voices that lament the existence of God, emphasizing its dangers and disadvantages. Nietzsche thinks that the idea of God makes us docile, defiled, and dishonored, like Don Quixote. For him belief in God is like an injection which leaves in us a lifelong sense of being sinful and guilty, and this is a source of fear and discontentment. If we could free ourselves from this idea, then we could stand on our feet and become our own hero. He says: "The Christian who compares his nature to God is like Don Quixote, who underestimates his own bravery because he is preoccupied with the miraculous deeds of heroes out of chivalric novels; in both cases, the standard of measure being used belongs to the realm of fable. But if the idea of God disappears, so too does the feeling of "sin" as a transgression against divine precepts, as a stain on a creature consecrated to God" (Nietzsche, 1986, sec.133).

In the same vein, Thomas Nagel writes: "In speaking of the fear of religion, I don't mean to refer to the entirely reasonable hostility toward certain

¹ . In this paper we use the terms warranted, epistemically justified and rational interchangeably. In a strict sense 'being warranted' is defined as ungettiered epistemic justification that constitutes knowledge when a belief has this property.

established religions and religious institutions, in virtue of their objectionable moral doctrines, social policies, and political influence. Nor am I referring to the association of many religious beliefs with superstition and the acceptance of evident empirical falsehoods. I am talking about something much deeper—namely, the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that" (Nagel, 1997, p130).

Guy Kahane explains Nagel's hope as an atheistic direction he labels anti-theism. Unlike atheism which consists of denying God's existence, anti-theists despite confirming God's absolute goodness, try to provide a coherent and intelligible picture of a God-containing world compromising of numerous losses. The former is an ontological direction while the latter an axiological. Atheists claim that God does not exist but anti-theists prefer God not to exist since they find a God-containing World undesirable.

Against anti-theists stand pro-theists who insists that a world in which God exists is for sure a better world than that without God, whether or not they believe in God. This means that whether you belief in God or not, you can be a pro or anti-theist. Diverse novel classifications appear here. More interesting among them are anti-theist theists and pro-theist atheists. Atheists who lament the non-existence of God are pro-theists, or the problem of evil and the problem of divine hiddenness both are pro-theistic directions. The former holds that a world in which God exists is devoid of evil and the latter insists on the value of relationship with God.

Bearing this clarifications in mind, Kahane tries to provide a reasonable sketch of Nagel's anti-theistic hope. Kahane claims that for anti-theists like Nagel who want God not to exist, God's existence is logically incompatible with the full realization of certain values so substantial that give meaning to their lives; an incompatibility which arises inevitably from God's essential attributes. He enumerates at least four reasons why anti-theists prefer God not to exist. He argues that: "A world in which God exists is a world where we would not be the moral equals of all other rational beings—equal members of a kingdom of ends that has no ruler. Such a world seems incompatible with complete independence, or with complete privacy and genuine solitude. And it might also be a world where it would be pointless

for us to strive for a complete and unqualified understanding of the universe” (Kahane, 2011, p682).

Anti-theists might think that as free and autonomous rational agents, we ought to follow universal moral norms rather than the commands and inclinations of any ruler. More important, for some of them eternal life might not be an incomparably great reward of believing in God but an unbearable eternal stand (Kahane, 2011, p680). These pictures provide a strong contrast with the proposed usage of KAT as the key premise in the new Pascalian argument which portrays God-containing-world properties as desirable values in general; values typically claimed to be the source of practical benefits of theistic belief. Here applying axiology helps to expose hidden assumptions about the context and the nature of stakes and to expand its framework into value-theoretic stakes of worldviews. Considering atheism as a kind of safe default neglects an axiological evaluation.

Clearly an anti-theistic perspective as an atheistic preference undermines the generality of KAT by providing practical stakes concerning the existence of God and theistic belief. For anti-theists living in a God-containing-world is practically intolerable since their life would entirely lose its meaning. Hence against KAT, anti-theists can claim that comparing the gains and losses associated with theism and atheism for them, atheistic knowledge is far easier to come by than its theistic counterpart. This yields that the asymmetry in KAT can be overturned in favor of atheism which at the same time means that by emphasizing practical preferences, KAT cuts in both ways.

The proponents of KAT might try to respond to the anti-theist's charge by appealing to a distinction between the global and the personal advantage/disadvantage of belief in theism. They might concede that although there are some people who are unsatisfied with God's existence, and perhaps His existence would rob the meaning from their lives as they confess¹, globally speaking, belief in God can nonetheless help many people to find a deeper meaning in their lives and to live morally, purposefully, and spiritually in this world. This indicates that the general advantage of belief

¹ . It might be objected that 'losing meaning' is not the same as 'robbing the meaning' since the former is a subjective stand while the latter an objective one. Thus losing the meaning of one's life might just appear to the anti-theist while it might not be the case. It seems to us however that what is considerable in this respect is that admissibly defining and specifying the status of the meaningfulness of life is more related with the subjective and personal perspective.

in God, in aggregate, can produce much more utility than disbelief, even if we accept that some persons feel in a God-containing world infelicitous. Respectively, anti-theists acknowledge that what they personally prefer may not be desirable from a global standpoint (Kahane, 2011, p688). This is to say that while personal anti-theism is the confirmed stand, global anti-theism is not. Here again we face another strict clarification about the stakes namely the different levels of stakes, personal, cosmic and moral.

However, it should be noted that this maneuver, even if true, cannot help the new Pascalian argument from this charge. For the key presupposition based on pragmatic encroachment upon which the argument is set, concerns the practical stakes and their pertained effects on a personal level. Hence for an atheist who thinks she will lose the meaning of her life if God exists, one cannot appeal to global utilities of belief in God in order to convince her to accept that theism is the more desirable stand.

These observations shed light on the fact that although pragmatic encroachment affirms that practical interests have epistemic relevance, such purported relevance does not always as it is claimed in the new Pascalian argument, tip the balance in favor of the of justificatory level religious beliefs must meet in order to be rendered as justified or rational, nor does it expand the range of the situations under which knowledge of these beliefs is easier to gain. The outcome is that defending KAT as a pivotal premise in the new Pascalian argument on the basis of the practical benefits of theistic belief is not tenable.

3.2. How to revive KAT

So far we have argued that simply by appealing to the practical costs/benefits of belief in God and the error costs of disbelief, one cannot secure the alleged premise of the new Pascalian argument that theistic knowledge is far easier to come by than its atheistic counterpart. Does this mean that for gaining theistic knowledge one must appeal merely to truth-conducive factors like evidence, safety, etc.? In other words, does this conclusion yields a triumph for purism? As mentioned before the cornerstone of pragmatic encroachment is an indication to the relation between knowledge and rational action mainly viewed as a kind of instrumental or prudential rationality. Pragmatic encroachment has made it clear that instrumental or prudential concerns affect the threshold of knowability. But as anti-theism has revealed, in the case of theism since the prudential/instrumental concerns of belief and disbelief compete, the knowability threshold does not change merely by

referring to purely prudential/instrumental concerns. This means that KAT does not hold. Is there a way to revive KAT? We believe there is.

The intimate relation between knowledge and rational action is not confined as it is claimed in pragmatic encroachment to the prudential/ instrumental norms of the rationality of an action but can be extended to the moral costs/benefits or moral demands of that action as well. Normally we act upon our knowledge of the prudential/instrumental goals of that action but as soon as these goals contain high practical stakes we refrain from acting since in this situation the threshold for knowability raises and we are not anymore rational to act which means by itself that we lack knowledge. There are however cases in which we stop or refrain action not due to the dictates of prudential/instrumental reasons but by considering our moral reasons. In some contexts, over and above prudential/instrumental norms of action, moral norms of action are relevant or even prevailing. Despite the practical benefits of an action we ought to stop acting because of the dictates of the moral norms at issue. In some situations, the moral features of an action forbid things practical rationality do not. Thus it seems that stakes are not necessarily bound to practical concerns but may consist of moral considerations as well. That is to say that being rational to act upon our knowledge is not determined merely by our personal practical preferences but by moral norms of what we ought to care about. This is the case as long as moral concerns are the main constituent of the stakes that affect the threshold of knowability at that context. Suppose two subjects in the same evidential justificatory support for their true belief that the bank is open tomorrow. For both the cost of the bank being closed the next day concerning their personal practical concerns is the same and not high but one of them has promised his friend to pay a bill on behalf of her the next day. In this case the subject who has promised his friend to do a favor clearly requires more evidence to be justified in believing that the bank is open tomorrow to satisfy his promise as a moral obligation he is responsible for (an obligation which prevails all other personal preferences). This scenario reveals how moral concerns can be relevant in determining the threshold of knowability; moral concerns tied with an action like prudential or instrumental concerns can encroach on the knowability criterion.¹

¹. Michael Pace's suggestion that we should consider moral encroachment rather than pragmatic encroachment is highly insightful in this respect. See Pace 2011. More recently considerable attention has been paid on the crucial role of moral encroachment in settling

Hence if instead of pragmatic encroachment we prioritize moral encroachment based on the relation between the moral demands of our actions and knowledge, we can revive KAT by appealing to the moral asymmetry of theism. The moral asymmetry of theism can be supported on the ground that the moral values gained by believing in God if true exceeds the moral costs of falsely believing it since the former is globally valuable while the latter personally harmful. Here the underlying idea would be that since in a global scale a God-containing world is axiologically superior to a god-less world (a fact anti-theists neither deny otherwise they must undermine all the values theistic belief contains which is a tough task), morally speaking we ought to prefer believing in the former. This moral superiority can affect the evidential standards on the knowability of theism and confirm KAT.

The moral asymmetry of theism as a revised key premise in KAT can be supported on many grounds. For instance, in a God-containing world a supreme moral agent is the objective source of moral goodness and moral norms. In a God-containing world we can know that God is witnessing our actions and disapproves our bad deeds which encourages us decisively to be righteous. Obviously every virtuous person adds value to the world in which she lives. Since the theistic world contains an agent who is perfectly good, such a world is more valuable than a world devoid of a perfect good agent. In a God-containing world we are benefited from an extremely good, omnipotent and benevolent compeer who hears our prayers, and does what He/She can to help us and save us from our horrors and anxieties. This sort of relationship cannot be actualized in a god-less world. Among several commands God has authored, most of them are moral commands. It is not deniable that moral principles are accessible solely with the aid of our reason and moral intuitions but a sort of assurance can be gained when we realize that our moral maxims match with divine commands. Moreover, we can act upon our moral reasons with more confidence as long as these reasons are confirmed by God who is Good by its very nature. Based on these moral superiorities we think that KAT grounded on moral encroachment is tenable. KAT holds not because a God-containing world consists of prior practical benefits but since globally a world containing God is undoubtedly more

the debate on the issue of racial stereotypes or racial profiling. On this see Moss2018, Basu and Shroder2018, Fritz2019, Basu2019.

valuable than a god-less world, thus morally, believing in God is what we are rational to act upon. Therefore if KAT grounded on the moral asymmetry of theism is admissible, we can conclude that theistic knowledge is easier to come by than knowledge on atheism even in the balance of evidence pro and con of theism.¹

4. Concluding remarks

KAT is the thesis that theistic knowledge is easier to come by than atheistic knowledge. In this paper we argued that basing KAT on pragmatic encroachment is problematic since the epistemic advantage given to theism under pragmatic encroachment rests on unjustified axiological assumptions. Thus we rejected the alleged asymmetry in KAT by showing that both theists and atheists can contain pragmatically high stake situations depending on their value commitments. We argued that the practical stakes of being wrong about theism may be less decisive or less clear than often assumed. Not everyone values the goods promised by theism and some might find them existentially undesirable or trivial. Atheism also carries serious stakes, especially for those who find meaning, freedom or authenticity in a godless world. The loss of this existential orientation if theism is true creates comparable stakes. This means that a more fine-grained treatment of personal value systems in determining stakes is required. However, while the practical benefits of theism cannot outweigh its practical downsides generally, the moral benefits of theism can overcome its moral downsides, thus KAT can be revived on moral grounds. Therefore by referring to moral encroachment rather than pragmatic encroachment we can gain knowledge that God exists easier even in the balance of evidence pro and con of theism. Beyond this conclusion we believe that this treatment in applying axiology on the new wager and KAT carries further important insights and raises other important questions. By criticizing a misapplication of pragmatic encroachment and identifying its limits and blind spots, this maneuver bridges at the same time value theory and epistemology. Guides further question about comparing the importance of epistemic risk, in one hand and evidential support on the other. One may ask which can help us more in thinking about real-world epistemic dilemmas? Furthermore, it adds nuance to the wager's reasoning without depending on outdated and usual infinite utility models.

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