

(penultimate version; final version to appear in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association 2019*)

The 2019 Sanders Lecture  
Morally Loaded Cases in Philosophy<sup>1</sup>

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1. *The question*

Dialectical effectiveness in philosophy can pattern in surprising ways. For instance, when apparently morally neutral issues are debated in epistemology and metaphysics, philosophical logic and philosophy of language, morally loaded examples sometimes have greater dialectical power than morally neutral examples based on knowledge from ordinary life or natural science. One might have expected it to be the other way round, given the contested status of moral knowledge. By ‘morally loaded’ I mean cases explicitly described in moral terms, or at least in ways which make moral matters very salient, as with Holocaust denial. Such cases seem to be so dialectically powerful *because* they are so highly emotive. That raises an obvious question: is this dialectical power legitimate, or does it involve a kind of *cheating*, getting readers or hearers worked up to a point where they are in no mood to apply subtle but necessary distinctions? We are usually supposed to be best at assessing philosophical claims in a cool hour.

2. *Three classes of example*

Before addressing the main question, we should look more closely at the phenomenon to be understood. I will sketch three classes of philosophical view which seem vulnerable to such moralizing critiques. The list is far from exhaustive.

Relativism

I have in mind full-blown relativism about truth, the idea that when you and I seem deadlocked in disagreement, the bottom line is that some things are true for me but not for you, while other things are true for you but not for me; there is no question of one of us being *really* or *absolutely* right and the other *really* or *absolutely* wrong. Such a view is hard to articulate in a coherent or even fully intelligible way, for reasons going back to Plato. Nevertheless, in more or less radical forms, it has a massive cultural presence in many contemporary societies, including our own, outside as well as inside academia. For confused reasons, many people treat relativism as the required intellectual basis for tolerance of diversity (fortunately, there are better non-relativist reasons for tolerance). Although few analytic philosophers take it seriously, most have encountered it in their students. Elsewhere in the humanities, it is widely taken as the default metatheory, however unsuited such an elusive doctrine is to informing day-to-day practice. It survives rigorous criticism by Protean shapeshifting.

Extreme relativists are often unperturbed by the usual counterexamples from common sense or natural science. ‘Anyone who thinks the Earth is flat is simply wrong.’ ‘That’s just your point of view.’ They are more likely to start ducking and weaving when faced with morally loaded cases. In response to ‘Anyone who thinks the Holocaust never happened is simply wrong’, a plain ‘That’s just your point of view’ seems to cast the relativist in the uncomfortable role of defending Holocaust deniers. Expect some convoluted special pleading. The difference in response does not come from a difference in the strength of evidence. Decisive though the evidence for the Holocaust is, it is not more decisive than the evidence for the roundness of the Earth. Rather, the difference comes from the moral wrong-footing of the relativist in one case and not the other. Few relativists rushed to the defence of U.S. Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway when she was widely derided for using the phrase ‘alternative facts’ in explaining White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer’s false statements about attendance numbers at Donald Trump’s inauguration as President.

In the heyday of post-modern Theory, its protagonists flirted with relativism, though they may have had a commitment problem. Within that intellectual environment, the pushback to relativism came not so much from defenders of common sense or natural science as from Marxists, concerned that relativism would undermine the imperatives of political action. That concern was not morally neutral: they feared that the political effect of relativism would be to reduce the pressure to do what (they thought) ought to be done.

Although Richard Rorty disliked being described as a relativist, he was at the very least an anti-absolutist. But he was much more comfortable disparaging the absoluteness of truth than the absoluteness of justice, no doubt with an eye to the moral and political repercussions. Relatedly, in discussing Orwell’s *1984*, Rorty allows him the distinction between cruelty and kindness, but dismisses his appeals to the distinctions between truth and falsity and between appearance and reality as contributing nothing of substance to his critique of totalitarianism (1989: 173). Of course, Rorty was right that making the latter distinctions is not *sufficient* for

adequately reasoned resistance to tyranny, but Orwell makes a strong case that it is *necessary*. Indeed, how effectively can we oppose cruelty, if we cannot distinguish its real absence from its apparent absence?

### Scepticism

The sceptic rejects claims to knowledge, and even to epistemically justified belief, either globally or over some large domain, such as morality, about which we usually take ourselves to have significant knowledge.

What could be more academic in the pejorative sense than the problem of scepticism? What theory could be further from practical consequences? It does not interfere with a game of backgammon, even if neither player knows that the other exists. The sceptic feels comfortably at home disavowing knowledge that he has hands, that he is not dreaming, that he is not a brain in a vat. He takes the moral high ground, as the open-minded inquirer, quite willing to believe if only someone would show him a good reason to do so. But when sceptical arguments are deployed against scientific studies of climate change, the philosophical sceptic becomes uneasy. Again, the difference is not evidential. Those studies are no *more* resistant to radical sceptical scenarios than is anything else. It is just that philosophical sceptics do not want to find themselves fighting on the same side as climate change sceptics when there is a danger of their arguments being taken seriously and applied to a specific case, perhaps with the effect that policy is no longer made on the basis of (supposed) scientific knowledge. For when philosophical sceptics are off-duty, their political and scientific beliefs are very little different from those of their non-sceptical fellow-academics.

The slogan 'Doubt is our product' goes back to public relations consultants on behalf of the tobacco industry (<https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/#id=psdw0147>). The strategy is not to try to prove that smoking has no harmful effects on health, but merely to create enough doubt in people's minds about the scientific evidence to make them feel licensed to ignore it and follow their inclination to smoke. That strategy is closely related to the 'post-truth' atmosphere of current politics, which makes scepticism look a rather less benign intellectual force. Create enough confusion and doubt, and people will fall back on believing what they would anyway like to believe.

Sceptical arguments in political and commercial advertising are not somehow of a fundamentally different kind from philosophical arguments for scepticism. They make standard sceptical moves, appealing to sceptical scenarios and shifting the burden of proof to their anti-sceptical opponents, but in concrete, localized applications, which obscure the very general form of the underlying arguments.

When the United Kingdom participated in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, justified the action by appeal to the existence of weapons of mass destruction

(WMD) in Iraq. After it became clear that there had been no WMD there at the time, Blair said in a 2004 speech to his party conference: "I'm like any other human being - fallible. Instinct is not science. I only know what I believe"

(<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/sep/28/labourconference.labour1>). In the last sentence, was he just making the point that knowledge entails belief, so if in 2003 he lacked the belief that there were no WMD in Iraq he also lacked the knowledge? That entailment has nothing to do with fallibility. The context suggests another interpretation: all he could really know at the time was that *he believed that* there were WMD in Iraq. He could know his own current mental states, but not the states of affairs on the ground in Iraq to which they were supposed to correspond. Perhaps scepticism about the external world is not the best basis for deciding foreign policy. Of course, Blair was not really a philosophical sceptic, but as a practical politician he was able and willing to take opportunistic advantage of the cultural credibility of implicitly sceptical moves.

In brief, local sceptical moves made for bad political or commercial reasons look much more sinister than globalized versions of the same sceptical moves made for bad epistemological reasons.

### Internalism

Here is a still-influential view in epistemology; for short, we may call it 'internalism': The key normative status for belief is *justification*. Whether a belief is justified at a time depends on its coherence with the internal consciously introspectible mental states of the subject at that time, especially *seemings*, and perhaps other beliefs too. Seemings are pre-doxastic; they are neither beliefs nor inclinations to believe. You have a seeming when things seem to you a certain way, either sensorily or intellectually. Seemings can be false: sometimes things seem to you to be some way even though they are not in fact that way. Still, when it seems to you that P, you are at least *prima facie* justified in believing that P. You are all-things-considered justified in believing that P when so believing also coheres with your other relevant mental states, especially your seemings. Consequently, false beliefs are sometimes justified. For example, a standard brain in a vat has a justified belief that it has hands, because that belief coheres with how things seem to the brain. The internalist regards that consequence of the view as a benefit, not a cost.

A similar consequence of internalism is that an unconscious bias can result in a bigoted false seeming and so, provided that coherence is maintained, in a bigoted but justified false belief (compare Siegel 2017). We may as well use the familiar figure of the consistent Nazi. I call him (or her) a *neo-Nazi* to emphasize that such people are alive and active, politically and criminally, in contemporary society. Of course, in practice neo-Nazis no doubt tend to be inconsistent, but the same goes for other people too. The paradox of the preface, sorites

paradoxes, and Liar-like paradoxes all show that it is very hard for *anyone* to maintain consistency amongst their beliefs. Nevertheless, in principle, someone can have a mass of the most obnoxious neo-Nazi beliefs while still maintaining consistency, and indeed coherence: their beliefs are mutually supporting. In effect, difficulties about consistency are only a delaying tactic. The internalist must eventually face the question: what to say about the consistent neo-Nazi?

Suppose that it seems to the consistent neo-Nazi that he ought to kill *such people*, with reference to some totally innocent members of one of the many groups neo-Nazis target, just because they belong to that group. Moreover, that intellectual seeming perfectly coheres with all his other seemings and beliefs, thanks to the harmonizing effects of his unconscious biases. As a result, he goes ahead and forms the belief that he ought to kill such people. By internalist standards, the neo-Nazi is justified in believing that he ought to kill such people. Of course, the internalist will emphasize, it does not follow that the neo-Nazi *in fact* ought to kill such people, for justified beliefs may be false. The point is 'merely' that, by internalist standards, the neo-Nazi's belief is justified, and so possesses the key normative status for belief. For the internalist, the neo-Nazi is a moral brain in a vat. But is that really an appropriate way to view a consistent neo-Nazi? There is something dodgy about the way in which internalism of the sort described makes unconscious biases self-laundering, manufacturing the very seemings that justify the corresponding belief.

In a fascinating recent paper, 'Radical Externalism', Amia Srinivasan has used related cases to argue against internalist accounts of justification (Srinivasan 2019). The titles of her three main examples convey their flavour: 'Racist Dinner Table', 'Classist College', and 'Domestic Violence'. The idea is that if internalists appeal to pre-theoretic verdicts on sceptical scenarios in support of their view, they are in trouble when pre-theoretic verdicts on Srinivasan's cases go against them. Readers can judge her cases for themselves, but for better or worse they certainly seem to derive some of their dialectical force from their moral loading.

No two of relativism, scepticism, and internalism are mutually equivalent. Nevertheless, there are structural similarities between them. They share a tendency to assign the same cognitive status in some important respect to both parties in a deadlocked dispute. For the relativist, there is no absolute truth of the matter, but each side's view is justified and true by its own lights. For the sceptic, there may be an absolute truth of the matter, but neither side knows what it is, or even has a justified belief in it. For the internalist, there is an absolute truth of the matter, but both sides may be justified in their internally consistent, mutually inconsistent beliefs as to what it is.

### 3. *Emotive cases*

Is the use of morally loaded examples against relativism, scepticism, and internalism cheap, or even cheating? In a morally heated exchange, one may well be reluctant to concede anything at all against the good guys, or in favour of the bad guys. When the red mist of righteous indignation descends on us, we lose sight of nuances. Perhaps the loaded cases gain their boost in effectiveness by illicitly bringing down moral and political opprobrium on one's opponents. They have to shift their ground to avoid guilt by association.

Autobiographical confession: I was brought up in a family which had a plentiful supply of moral outrage, usually directed not at family members but at various politicians, policies, and political arrangements. Probably, most philosophers, both now and then, would find the outrage appropriately or at least defensibly directed. However, it has left me with a lifelong suspicion of moral outrage, as likely to direct all the critical scrutiny in one direction, and to obscure the messy, paradoxical complexity of real political problems. For that reason, I give considerable weight to concerns about the philosophical use of morally loaded examples.

Nevertheless, something else may be going on. One hypothesis is that it is *moral encroachment*, roughly, the hypothesis that high moral stakes raise the standard for what it takes to know, or to have a justified belief (Moss 2018). However, that does not fit the role of morally loaded cases as counters to scepticism. For the point of mentioning climate change scepticism and attempts to create a cloud of doubt around the health hazards of smoking is to warn *against* raising epistemic standards too high. Indeed, raising the moral stakes can have the effect of *lowering* epistemic standards, at least those *perceived* as appropriate: 'This is so morally urgent, we don't have time to examine the evidence carefully.' By contrast, the role of morally loaded cases as counters to internalism can be to put pressure in the opposite direction: the point of mentioning the consistent neo-Nazi is to warn against setting epistemic standards so low that his terrible beliefs count as justified. Even if moral encroachment occurs, it does not provide a uniform explanation of the dialectical effectiveness of morally loaded cases. A different approach is needed.

In all three classes of example—concerning relativism, scepticism, and internalism—the morally load cases make salient the potential connections between an abstract philosophical issue and serious practical and political problems: how to deal with those who deny the Holocaust, man-made climate change, the health hazards of smoking, and so on. Such connections pose a threat to one popular strategy for defending what on first hearing may sound like wildly radical philosophical ideas. We may call it the strategy of *intellectual isolationism*. It involves cutting those ideas off from their apparent practical consequences. The reassuring message is: don't worry, if these philosophically radical ideas are accepted, for all

practical purposes life will go on just as before (though with a better intellectual conscience, or in a more ironic spirit). Science funding will not be cut; educational policy will not be changed; you should treat other people just as you always did. This quietism may be connected to the 'playful' or 'ludic' aspect of some postmodern discourse: play Theory as freely as you like, because there will be no serious consequences.

The morally loaded cases call into question the supposed practical neutrality of such radical philosophical ideas. They indicate that glorious intellectual isolation has not been fully achieved. Those ideas may have practical consequences after all. The playful attitude starts to look irresponsible.

Of course, the isolationist can try to execute the strategy more completely, cutting any remaining links between theory and practice. The next section considers that approach in more detail, with special reference to internalism in epistemology.

#### 4. Case study: internalism and isolationism

We are considering the epistemological internalist who asserts (1), but of course denies (2)—we may assume that the internalist is not himself (or herself) a neo-Nazi:

- (1) The consistent neo-Nazi is justified in believing that he ought to kill such people.
- (2) The consistent neo-Nazi ought to kill such people.

The reader can substitute 'Jews', 'Muslims', 'homosexuals', 'Romani', or 'disabled children' for 'such people'.

To fill out the case: The envisaged neo-Nazi *does* believe that he ought to kill such people, and he bases his belief on the coherence of its content with his other beliefs and seemings in the prescribed internalist way. The internalist will therefore say, in the jargon of epistemology, that (1) is true on the *doxastic* as well as the *propositional* sense of 'justified' (the latter does not even require the subject to have the belief). For definiteness, 'justified' in (1) will be understood in the doxastic sense.

One natural-looking way to implement the isolationist strategy is by making a clean break between the justification of belief and the justification of action. In particular, this internalist will deny (3) as well as (2):

- (3) The consistent neo-Nazi is justified in killing such people.

For commensurability with (1), we may suppose that the neo-Nazi *does* kill such people, and that his action is based on his belief that he ought to kill them, and coheres with all his other beliefs and seemings. Accordingly, ‘justified’ in (3) will be understood as applied to that token of the action type, *killing such people*, rather than to the action type in general.

How comfortable is the internalist’s position? Of course, one would expect any decent person to deny (2). The issue is the tenability of the combination: asserting (1) while denying (3). For if (1) holds while (3) fails, someone can be justified in believing that they ought to do something, yet at the same time *not* justified in doing it.

Another standard distinction in epistemology between different senses of ‘justified’ gives initial hope to this way of implementing the isolationist strategy. For epistemologists typically explain that when they apply the term ‘justified’ to beliefs, they mean *epistemically justified*, rather than *pragmatically justified*. Pascal’s Wager provides a standard example of the distinction. It is intended to give a pragmatic justification for believing that God exists, by showing that having the belief maximizes expected utility. It is not intended to give an epistemic justification for believing that God exists; it involves no attempt to provide proof or evidence of any kind that God exists. Similarly, if someone is about to undergo a medical intervention, which has a 20% chance of success for those who lack the belief that it will succeed, but a 40% chance of success for those who have the belief that it will succeed, she has a pragmatic justification for believing that it will succeed, but not an epistemic justification for so believing—even for those who have the belief, the intervention is more likely to fail than to succeed. Thus the internalist can say: ‘justified’ in (1) means *epistemically justified*, whereas ‘justified’ in (3) does not mean *epistemically justified*, instead it means *morally justified*, or *pragmatically justified*, or *all things considered justified*, or something else action-oriented like that; thus it is not at all surprising for (1) to be true while (3) is false.

However, merely distinguishing senses of ‘justification’ is not enough to make the isolationist strategy work. For the distinction does not guarantee that norms of belief and norms of action are quite independent of each other. After all, the nature of a belief is that the believer is disposed to act on it. That is what makes the difference between believing a proposition and just warmly entertaining it. Given that connection with action in the nature of belief, we can expect it to be reflected in norms for belief. According to epistemological internalists, justification is the key normative status for belief; by ‘justification’ there they normally mean *epistemic* justification. For epistemic justification to merit being the key normative status for belief, it should somehow reflect the nature of belief as that on which the agent acts.

Such a connection between belief and action is manifest in standard decision theory. One’s epistemic state is taken to be encoded in one’s probabilities. Those probabilities, combined with one’s utilities or preferences, are then used to calculate the expected utilities of



actions. When pragmatic justifications are in play, those actions include getting oneself (perhaps by indirect means) to form a belief, such as the belief that God exists, or the belief that the medical intervention will succeed. Such calculations of the expected utilities of various potential actions are in turn used to determine which of those actions are rational—and which beliefs one is pragmatically justified in getting oneself to form. Thus one's epistemic state plays a key role in determining pragmatic justification. For epistemological internalists, epistemic justification is in turn a central determinant of one's epistemic state. Thus epistemic justification is in turn a major determinant of pragmatic justification.

States of knowledge or belief play a fundamental role in other forms of decision theory too. Presumably, a central norm for belief should reflect which states are well fitted to have the connection to action which a good decision theory assigns to belief states.

Indeed, epistemic and pragmatic justification can be expected normally to go together. For, normally, if it is the case that P, then it is useful to believe that P, while if it is not the case that P, then it is not useful to believe that P. Moreover, we normally seem to be epistemically justified in believing such conditionals. Thus there is some presumption that if one is epistemically justified in believing that P, then one is epistemically justified in believing that it is useful to believe that P. Conversely, there is a similar presumption that if one is epistemically justified in believing that it is useful to believe that P, then one is epistemically justified in believing that P. Moreover, being epistemically justified in believing that it is useful to believe that P seems quite close to being pragmatically justified in believing that P. Such considerations suggest a strong correlation between epistemic and pragmatic justification. The correlation is not perfect, as the previous examples showed, but they depend on quite unusual conditions. Although the presumptions of the argument are defeasible, and some other aspects of it are not watertight, they suggest that the default is for epistemic and pragmatic justification to go together. Those considerations in favour of the default are available to the internalist.

To get more specific, such connections between belief and action are also discernible in an internalist treatment of the favoured case of a brain in a vat. Why is the brain not justified in taking steps to drop its belief in the false proposition that it has hands? By internalist standards, the brain is epistemically justified in believing that it has hands. Similarly, it is epistemically justified in believing that its belief that it has hands is both true and useful, and in believing that it would be worse off without its belief that it has hands. For reasons like that, the brain is not justified in taking steps to drop its belief that it has hands.

Consider a more straightforward case of action. The brain seems to itself to see a baby drowning in a shallow pond. That all coheres with the brain's other seemings and beliefs. On that basis, it believes that it sees a baby drowning in a shallow pond. That belief is epistemically justified, by internalist standards. Presumably, the internalist also thinks that the brain is justified in trying to rescue the baby (the actual effects of its action will depend on how the mad scientist has wired up the vat). In explaining why that action is justified, the internalist will

appeal to the brain's epistemically justified beliefs. Such an appeal will not be avoided by citing the brain's *pragmatically* justified beliefs, because such pragmatic justifications eventually trace back to epistemic justifications.

The envisaged internalist cannot reject the distinction between epistemic and pragmatic justification, because it is being used as the main obstacle to moving from (1) to (3). The trouble is that the internalist seems quite happy to move from (1\*) to (3\*), even though 'justified' means *epistemically justified* in (1\*) and not in (3\*):

(1\*) The brain is justified in believing that it ought to try to rescue the baby.

(3\*) The brain is justified in trying to rescue the baby.

But the moves from (1) to (3) and from (1\*) to (3\*) instantiate the same relevant pattern: from 'S is justified in believing that he/she/it ought to  $\phi$ ' to 'S is justified in  $\phi$ ing'. Moreover, from an internalist perspective, nothing seems to disrupt the analogy between the consistent neo-Nazi and the consistent brain in a vat. The internalist was trying to make a clean break between the justification of belief and the justification of action, and so between (1) and (3). But presumably the internalist does not want to make the analogous clean break between (1\*) and (3\*). Even from the internalist perspective, the attempt to have (1) without (3) is not looking very unpromising.

Someone might argue that the word 'ought' is not strong enough in meaning to force the move from 'S is justified in believing that he/she/it ought to  $\phi$ ' to 'S is justified in  $\phi$ ing'. After all, it is sometimes reasonable to say things like 'I ought to go to the lecture, but I'm just too busy'. However, that point will not help the internalist. For the example can simply be set up from the beginning with a stronger deontic operator in place of 'ought'. For instance, the consistent neo-Nazi may believe that he has an indefeasible duty of the most imperative kind to kill such people. Such a belief may fully cohere with his other beliefs and seemings, and so be epistemically justified by internalist standards. Then the relevant move is from 'S is justified in believing that he/she/it has an indefeasible duty of the most imperative kind to  $\phi$ ' to 'S is justified in  $\phi$ ing'. Perhaps the dial can be turned even higher on the content of the belief. Even if no strength of the operator can make the move purely logical, it is still hard to resist. For convenience, I will continue to use 'ought', but the reader should bear in mind that it can be strengthened if required.

Suppose that the internalist gives up on the attempt to drive a wedge between the justification of belief and the justification of action, between (1) or (1\*) and (3) or (3\*) respectively. What if the internalist simply allows the move from 'S is justified in believing that he/she/it ought to  $\phi$ ' to 'S is justified in  $\phi$ ing', at least in the cases at issue, and *accepts* (3), as well as (3\*)? That would smooth the internalist's analogy between the consistent neo-Nazi and

the consistent brain in a vat. It also looks more faithful to the internalist's underlying motivation. For the internalist picture is that justification depends solely on factors directly accessible to consciousness, the first-person present-tense perspective; hence the focus on seemings and internal coherence. That picture seems equally applicable to the justification of belief and the justification of action. To apply it to one while refusing to apply it to the other looks unmotivated.

But is it not simply outrageous for internalists to claim that the consistent neo-Nazi is justified in killing such people? Of course, they can still deny that the neo-Nazi *ought* to kill such people. They can even insist that he ought *not* to kill them. Thus the idea is that the neo-Nazi is *justified* in doing things which he is in no way *permitted* to do. The difficulty for internalists is to maintain this line without either compromising their condemnation of the neo-Nazi or marginalizing the role of justification. They can try to downplay what they have conceded in saying that the neo-Nazi is justified in killing such people by emphasizing that justification is just a matter of consistency with the agent's perspective. But what is supposed to be so good about consistency with something bad? Unless consistency with the agent's perspective is supposed to bring something *else* good with it, such consistency does not seem to be what matters most. Despite internalist claims to the contrary, it does not look like the key normative status for either belief or action. Then justification as consistency with the agent's perspective is marginalized. But if consistency with the agent's perspective *is* supposed to bring something else good with it, then in evaluating the neo-Nazi's beliefs and actions as justified, because consistent with his perspective, internalists are implying that there is something else good about the neo-Nazi's beliefs and actions, which is where they risk compromising their condemnation of those beliefs and actions.

For example, if internalists take consistency with the agent's perspective to bring *blamelessness* with it, then in evaluating the neo-Nazi's beliefs and actions as justified, because consistent with his perspective, they are implying that his beliefs and actions are blameless. But the neo-Nazi *should* be blamed for killing those innocent people, which suggests that his belief that he ought to kill them is also blameworthy. That the brain in a vat's beliefs and actions are blameworthy is much less obvious, which may suggest some underlying asymmetry between the two cases.

No doubt there is much more to be said, both for and against internalist epistemology (for some of it see Boghossian and Williamson 2019). But the challenge to produce a morally decent account of the consistent neo-Nazi has turned out to be genuinely difficult for internalists; it is not just bluff by moral grandstanding. That it turns on the stock figure of the consistent (neo-)Nazi only makes it worse for internalists, by emphasizing how long they have had to work on their defence.<sup>2</sup>

The case of the neo-Nazi brings out general problems for the isolationist strategy. Given the close connection between belief and action, and so between norms for action and norms

for belief, it is rather unlikely that a philosophical theory will have radical implications for belief but no repercussions for action. In particular, when a dispute is assessed as involving some epistemic symmetry between the two views—which is what relativism, scepticism, and internalism in their different ways all involve—there is always the danger that a corresponding symmetry will be implied between actions based on the opposing views.

### *5. Conclusion*

Morally loaded cases serve a legitimate and distinctive function in areas of philosophy that are not distinctively moral, such as general epistemology. They highlight potential consequences of theories in such areas for action. Where those practical consequences are objectionable, so are the theories that entail them.

## Note

- 1 This article is based on the 2019 Sanders Lecture, delivered at the 2019 Central Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Denver. Earlier versions of the material were presented at these universities: Belgrade, Canterbury (Christchurch), Düsseldorf, Edinburgh, Oxford, and Yale. I thank audiences at all these events for their questions, and Paul Boghossian, Georgi Gardiner, Rae Langton, Sarah Moss, Jennifer Nagel, Jason Stanley, and Amia Srinivasan for discussion of relevant issues, all of which has been very helpful. The article inherits an intentionally broad-brush, big-picture quality from the lecture.
- 2 It has been suggested that non-internalist accounts of justification face similar problems in dealing with the consistent neo-Nazi. For even on views of evidence which award facts about appearances no special privilege in an agent's total evidence, the fact that it seems to the neo-Nazi that he ought to kill such people may still be thought to give him *some* evidence that he ought to kill them. But even if that point is granted, the evidential probability that he ought to kill them may still be negligible, given that evidential probability is not subjective probability (Williamson 2000). In any case, there is a stark asymmetry between internalist views on which justification, understood as internal coherence, is the central norm of belief and hardline externalist views which endorse a knowledge norm for belief (Williamson 2017), and in particular for belief *qua* premise in practical reasoning (Hawthorne and Stanley 2008). On that externalist view, since it is false that the neo-Nazi ought to kill such people, he does not know that he ought to kill them, so he is in no position to use the proposition that he ought to kill them as a premise in his practical reasoning.

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