



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI TORINO

Theoretical philosophy: The ethics of belief

Gabriele Gava

CFU 6 - A.A. 2022/23 – 8

Philosophy International Curriculum



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- Richard Foley and Thomas Kelly agree that, given our nature, only evidence in favour of a proposition can lead us to believe it.
- Foley, however, defends a non-evidentialist view.
- Kelly tries to show that once the first thesis is accepted, an evidentialist position follows because non-epistemic reasons cannot be the 'basis' of belief.
- Possible criticism of Kelly: he confuses the normative and the descriptive level.
- Shah defends a position similar to Kelly, but capable of responding to this criticism.



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- Nishi Shah, 'A New Argument for Evidentialism,' *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 56(225): 481-498, 2006.
- Transparency: 'To be clear, the feature that I call transparency is this: the deliberative question whether to believe that p inevitably gives way to the factual question whether p , because the answer to the latter question will determine the answer to the former.' (481-482)
- Aim: to show that, given an adequate (and normative) understanding of Transparency, assuming Transparency implies an evidentialist stance.



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- Strategy:
 1. Given the 'deliberative constraint' on reasons and Transparency, evidentialism follows.
 2. The simplest way to explain Transparency involves the 'deliberative constraint'.
- Result for the non-evidentialist: she must abandon Transparency or offer an explanation that does not require the 'deliberative constraint'.



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- The ‘deliberative constraint’:
 1. R is a reason for X to believe that p only if R is capable of being a reason for which X believes that p.
 2. R is a reason for which X believes that p only if R is capable of disposing X towards believing that p in the way characteristic of R’s functioning as a premise in doxastic deliberation.
 3. Therefore R is a reason for X to believe that p only if R is capable of disposing X towards believing that p in the way characteristic of R’s functioning as a premise in doxastic deliberation.



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- When you combine Transparency and the 'deliberative constraint', evidentialism follows:
- 'Transparency, when combined with the deliberative constraint on reasons, thus rules out pragmatic considerations from being our reasons for belief. Crucial to this deliberative constraint on reasons is the claim that if there are unalterable features of X's psychology that prevent a consideration from entering X's deliberation about whether to ϕ , the consideration is not a reason for X to ϕ .' (486)
- If a non-evidentialist accepts Transparency, he must reject the 'deliberative constraint'.



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- How to explain Transparency:
- ‘My hypothesis is that the concept of belief includes a standard of correctness. When one deliberates whether to have an attitude conceived as a belief that p , one deliberates about an attitude to which one already applies the standard of being correct if and only if p is true, and so one is already committed to considering it with an eye exclusively to whether p is true.’ (488)



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- Transparency and the deliberative constraint:
- The norm of belief: believing that p is correct if and only if p is true.
(489)
- The norm guides deliberation as to what we are to believe.
- Transparency, understood in this way, requires the deliberative constraint. It is simply the norm that governs deliberation concerning what to believe.



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- Some consequences:
 - Transparency depends on a conceptual truth: 'It is a conceptual fact about belief that truth is its sole norm'. (490)
 - Transparency is normative, not descriptive: 'According to my account of transparency, the evidential nature of doxastic reasons is due not to the fact that we are psychologically incapable of believing for non-evidential reasons (although this is true), but to the fact that belief is subject to the standard of correctness of truth.' (493)



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- What is left for the non-evidentialist to do?
 1. She can offer an alternative explanation of Transparency;
 2. She can abandon Transparency.
- It does not seem that 1. is viable, since the pragmatist explanations of Transparency are unsatisfactory;
- 2. is not really an option.



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- Pragmatist explanations of Transparency are unsatisfactory.
 - First possibility: We all have a desire for true beliefs.
 - ‘First, he might claim that we all have a desire to have true beliefs, or better, that we all have a desire to have true beliefs about those matters of which we desire to have beliefs at all.’
 - ‘While this explanation might account for why truth is relevant to doxastic deliberation, it cannot account for the fact that truth is hegemonic with respect to doxastic deliberation.’ (490)



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- Pragmatist explanations of Transparency are unsatisfactory.
- Second possibility: Transparency is just a fact about our psychology.
- ‘It is not as though, in deliberating about whether to believe that p, the reason why one focuses on whether p is the case is that one has noticed that as a matter of psychological fact one has come to believe only what one has ascertained to be the case.’ (491)
- ‘This flies in the face of the platitude that evidentially insensitive processes such as wishful thinking sometimes influence beliefs’. (492)



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- Susanna Rinnard, 'No exception for Belief', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 94: 121-143, 2017.
- Shah's argument for evidentialism presupposes that a non-evidentialist accepts Transparency.
- Rinnard's response: 'In short, if by "the deliberative question whether to believe that P" Shah means the question "Should I believe P?," then to begin an argument against Equal Treatment by asserting Transparency, without any further argument for it, is question-begging.' (139)



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- Miriam McCormick, *Believing Against the Evidence*, Routledge 2015.
- ‘...is deliberation really best understood as an argument with the conclusion being an action or belief?’ (28)
- ‘In thinking about practical deliberation, it seems we deliberate when it is not immediately clear what to do; it is usually when there are reasons supporting different, often conflicting, actions. I have to decide whether I should stay home and grade, or go see my friend’s band play. What goes on when I deliberate about this? It seems I make a kind of list of considerations in favor and opposed to each course of action. If I decide to stay home and grade, it seems anything that came up in that list can be a reason for my staying home. But did it function as a premise?’



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- Carl Ginet, 'Deciding to Believe', in *Knowledge, Truth and Duty*, ed. by M. Steup, OUP, 2001.
- 'Sam is on a jury deliberating whether to find the defendant guilty as charged; if certain statements of a certain witness in the trial are true, then the defendant cannot have done what he is charged with; Sam deliberates whether to believe those statements, to believe the prosecutor's insinuations that the witness lied, or to withhold belief on the matter altogether. He decides to believe the witness and votes to acquit.'



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- ‘Sue is in a poker game of seven-card stud. After all cards have been dealt, everyone folds except Sue and Hank. Sue has three aces showing and two kings in the hole. The fourth ace was seen in an already folded hand. Hank has three jacks showing. If he has a fourth jack in the hole, he beats Sue's full house. Hank raises by a fairly substantial sum. Sue asks herself, “Shall I see him or fold? Does he have a Jack in the hole or is he bluffing? I detect a certain subtle nervousness in Hank's manner. Of course, he could be pretending to be worried so as to lure me into betting, but I've played with him a number of times and don't recall his having tried that sort of pretence before....” So...she decides to believe that he does not have a jack in the hole and meets his raise...-’



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- ‘Before Sam left for his office this morning, Sue asked him to bring from his office, when he comes back, a particular book that she needs to use in preparing for her lecture the next day. Later Sue wonders whether Sam will remember to bring the book. She recalls that he has sometimes, though not often, forgotten such things, but, given the inconvenience of getting in touch with him and interrupting his work and the thought that her continuing to wonder whether he'll remember it will make her anxious all day, she decides to stop fretting and believe that he will remember to bring it.’



Shah, A New Argument for Evidentialism

- ‘We have started on a trip by car, and 50 miles from home my wife asks me if I locked the front door. I seem to remember that I did, but I don't have a clear, detailed, confident memory impression of locking that door (and I am aware that my unclear, unconfident memory impressions have sometimes been mistaken). But, given the great inconvenience of turning back to make sure and the undesirability of worrying about it while continuing on, I decide to continue on and believe that I did lock it.’