

Clifford's Ethics of Belief

African leaders are making claims such as:

- Africans should not wear condoms because "white people" are lacing them with the AIDS virus to kill off the "African race".
- Africans should not wear condoms because it is just an attempt by "white people" to keep the "African race" from propagating.

Is it moral *to believe* these propositions?

Evidentialism

"It is wrong, always, for anyone to believe without sufficient evidence."

I. Belief and action

- a. Beliefs are not entirely private.
 - i. Beliefs are guides to action individually and socially.
 1. Bethel Baptist Church and Pastor Jack Hyles—"We guide our lives according to the Bible, not (Children and Family Services)," Sutton said. "We believe (CFS) was wrong."
"It (spanking) should be painful and it should last until the child's will is broken. It should last until the child is crying, not tears of anger but tears of a broken will. As long as he is stiff, grits his teeth, holds on to his own will, the spanking should continue." ~ Pastor Jack Hyles
- b. Not all beliefs lead to public (moral) consequences
 - i. "I believe FLAC is the best quality digital audio file format."

II. Belief and evidence

- a. Epistemic rationality
 - i. Evidence is the link between the belief's claim to truth and the condition of the truth of the belief
 1. Whenever someone asks "Why do you believe that-*p*?" the question being asked is "What is your evidence that-*p* is the case?"
E.g., "Do you believe Oswald alone killed Kennedy?"
 - ii. Pragmatic reasons are not indicators of truth (but *may* be of falsity).
- b. Belief is an epistemic achievement—moving away from a state of ignorance towards a state of knowing.
 - i. Ignorance → Belief → Knowledge
 - ii. Moore's Paradox (aka, the Incoherence Test)
 1. statements of the form "*p*, but I do not believe *p*" are *interpreted* as contradictions
 - The contradiction is heard because belief requires evidence; otherwise, the contradiction would not be interpretable at all.
 2. statements of the form "*~ p*, but I believe *p*" are *interpreted* as contradictions
 - "There are no stars, but I believe that there are stars."
 3. Therefore, believing requires evidence *and* the evidence determines what one must believe.
 - i. Belief *formation* without evidence is epistemically wrong (unjustified).

III. Belief and morality

a. Investigator's bias argument

- i. Whenever we judge the moral value of an action we tacitly judge the moral value of the belief that resulted in the action.
- ii. A fair investigation into the *truth* of the belief (*p*) requires evidence that is assessed impartially
 1. A fair investigation is impossible when the person is "perfectly certain" about *p*. ([G. W. Bush](#))
- iii. Limiting moral judgments to actions alone entails allowing beliefs to be formed in whatever way.
 - What of the African leaders if no one used condoms but abstained?

b. Stores of knowledge argument

- i. Nonevidential doxastic standards permits false beliefs to be incorporated.
- ii. Nonevidential doxastic standards are not consistent with a duty to minimize risks (the ship captain).
- iii. Nonevidential doxastic standards results in doxastic recklessness and a contaminated body of knowledge.

c. Reasonable Person Standard

- i. Clifford's view (*I*, *II*, and *III a* and *b*) is consistent with the legal standard within tort law.
- ii. A nonevidentialist policy is always morally wrong irrespective of the consequences of acting on the belief
 - It damages one's character in 3 ways (the Argument from credulity)
 1. Diminishes my own critical powers (Galileo quote).
 2. Allows others to deceive me with no detection on my part (Lewis' tricksters).
 3. Kantian universalizability—if nonevidentialist doxastic standards are universalized then "the corruption spreads to the town".
[Example #1](#) [Example #2](#)
- iii. Therefore, "It is wrong, always, for anyone to believe without sufficient evidence."
because of *how* one *acquired* the belief—i.e., one's doxastic management is needlessly reckless.
 1. Guilt of moral wrongdoing does not follow from believing wrongly—fallibility is not immoral.

- Why is it immoral, according to Clifford to believe the original propositions?
(potential exam-type question)
- How is belief in a deity *the same*, according to Clifford?
(potential exam question)
- What would Clifford say in response to Lewis regarding his analysis of “scientists at-home”?
(potential exam question)

Criticisms:

William James' *The Will to Believe*

1. It is sometimes permissible—epistemically and morally—to decide irrespective of the degree of evidence at hand:
 - a. personal relationships
 - b. questions of goodness (the truth-value of moral preferences)
 - i. (The vast majority of ethicists today disagree on this count.)
 - ii. James says about *b* that believing contributes to it being so.
 - iii. In relation to *a*, James says “believing makes it so”.
2. Belief management entails securing truths, not just error avoidance. (They agree here.) However, securing truths sometimes requires “running ahead of the evidence”.
 - a. Forced, momentous, and live choices
 - i. Belief in god
 - ii. Some personal relationships