REFRAMING EPISTEMIC PARTIALITY

A CASE FOR ACCEPTANCE

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Y OUR FRIEND has been accused of something serious, and the evidence is not in their favor. Or perhaps they are undertaking a difficult endeavor, and their chances of success look slim. When the epistemic chips are down, can friendship make demands on our beliefs?[1] The default response is no. Traditional evidentialism in epistemology holds that rational agents ought to believe only as their evidence warrants. In cases where being friends with someone is not evidentially relevant to a belief regarding them, the traditional view maintains that one's beliefs ought not change merely because someone is a friend. Perhaps we ought to alter our behavior regarding our friends or even practices of inquiry and evidence gathering—but not our actual beliefs. *Contra* this default view, some have argued that friendship can make demands not only on how we treat our friends but also on how we believe about them.[2] These "epistemic partialists" argue that in at least some cases, we can owe our friends *belief against the evidence*—claiming that friendship is manifested not only in our actions but also in our thoughts.

Each perspective seems to get something right (and something wrong). Partialism captures the psychological dimension of friendship: we really do seem to care not only how our friends act but also how they think about us— even (or perhaps especially) when things do not look good. But partialism faces challenges regarding its prescription to believe for moral reasons and worries about preserving honesty and authenticity in friendship. Traditional evidentialism avoids these issues—though (arguably) at the cost of a story about the cognitive demands of friendship.

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1   I follow the literature in talking about friendship, though the discussed considerations plausibly apply to a variety of close relationships. Some may find the motivations of partialism even more compelling for relationships such as romantic partnerships or parent-child relationships. For these reasons, Dormandy situates her discussion of doxastic partiality in terms of love rather than friendship ("Loving Truly," 218).

2   Notably, Stroud, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship"; and Keller, "Belief for Someone Else's Sake" and "Friendship and Belief."

Here, I propose an account that carves a middle ground: friendship gives us reasons not of belief but of *acceptance*. I draw on a specific account of acceptance understood as regulating the characteristic role that beliefs play in guiding cognition, reasoning, and action—a profile I develop and motivate by highlighting its structural analogy to familiar mechanisms of emotion regulation. I argue that acceptance can capture the cognitive dimension of friendship while avoiding worries about positing obligations to believe against the evidence and prescribing direct epistemic irrationality.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I lay out the two poles of the epistemic partiality debate (section 1): simple evidentialism and full-blown partialism. I then introduce my account of acceptance (section 2) and propose it as a novel position within the debate (section 3). Subsequently, I more thoroughly canvass the various objections against the standard views and argue that acceptance avoids these challenges (section 4). I then address some worries (section 5) and conclude (section 6).

This article has three interrelated motivations: (1) a *normative* motivation to follow the literature in aiming to give an account of what good friends *should* do when the epistemic chips are down; (2) *diagnostic* motivation to give a psychologically plausible model of the cognitive mechanisms we may actually use in such cases; and, because within the ethics of belief, acceptance is often dismissed out of hand as an unsatisfying cousin of belief, (3) a *programmatic* motivation to demonstrate that a thorough analysis of the psychological dynamics of acceptance can vindicate its theoretical usefulness. Crucially, my proposal is a fundamentally conditional one: *if* there are indeed times when considerations of friendship conflict with epistemic rationality, then (I argue) acceptance is our best resource in these cases. My aim here is not to offer a novel defense of the antecedent.

1. EVIDENTIALISM AND PARTIALISM

Consider the following case.

> *Cheating*: Mateo has good evidence that his best friend Shelby may have cheated on her final statistics exam. A reliable teaching assistant insists she saw Shelby staring suspiciously at her inner arm, where she now has a smudge of ink, too obscured to tell what was written. Shelby has gotten in trouble for cheating once in the past and lied about it at the time. And Shelby's performance on this final exam was quite a bit better than her performance on past exams in the class. Although Shelby told the teaching assistant she studied extra hard, Mateo has been busy with

his own finals and cannot verify that.[3] Mateo feels torn: he feels his
evidence suggests that Shelby likely cheated, but he also feels he owes
it to her as her friend to believe she did not.

What we want from Cheating is a case of the following shape: an agent takes
themselves to have evidence supporting a particular belief state, but we can
imagine them feeling pulled from the perspective of friendship to believe some-
thing different. Various cases have been proposed in the literature, for instance
regarding a friend's chances of success in a difficult endeavor or whether a friend
spurned a romantic partner.[4] Readers should pick whatever case they find most
compelling: perhaps your friend is entering their fourth stint in rehab, and you
feel you owe it to them to believe this time they will succeed (despite no nota-
ble differences in circumstance); perhaps your friend has accused someone you
like of some misconduct, and you think the evidence is ambiguous, but you feel
you owe it to them to believe their claim despite your doubts. Notably, the most
compelling examples are those that involve not everyday unfavorable beliefs
about our friends but rather more exceptional cases in which a friend finds
themself in an especially difficult situation and in need of a friend's support.

The question of interest is: What should Mateo, *qua* friend, believe about
Shelby?

1.1. Two Poles of the Debate

The possible responses to this question can be positioned along a spectrum
whose endpoints represent the two clearest conceptual poles of the debate.
On one end is s*imple evidentialism*; on the other, *full-blown partialism*. (As I
discuss below, various subsequent views have been offered that fall somewhere
in between these poles.)

Simple evidentialism represents the default epistemological response to our
question of interest. Simple evidentialism holds that there is nothing epistem-
ically special about cases like Cheating; what we should believe is, as always,
determined by the norms of epistemic rationality. According to the traditional
evidentialist (or "purist") framework, only evidential reasons (i.e., information
that bears on the likely truth or falsity of a proposition) are (rational) reasons

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3   I focus for simplicity on cases where the friend's testimony is not part of the evidence.
     Goldberg argues that friends' testimony can provide us with strong (though not insur-
     mountable) evidence, especially in high-stakes cases, because lying would compromise
     trust and damage friendship ("Against Epistemic Partiality in Friendship," 2227–34). But
     sometimes we lack testimony, and sometimes testimony cannot settle the matter (such as
     in beliefs about future success). (Though Goldberg claims his explanation applies equally
     well to cases that do not involve testimony, his exploration of such cases is limited.)

4   Keller, "Friendship and Belief," 331–32; and Stroud, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship," 508.

to believe.[5] Mateo ought to believe in Cheating what he ought to believe in any other situation: what his evidence warrants—in this case, that Shelby likely cheated. Their friendship is not evidentially relevant to whether she cheated; thus, there is no difference between what Mateo ought to believe *qua* friend and *qua* epistemically rational agent (hence the 'simple' label: on this view, there is no special answer to the question of what to believe).[6]

Proponents of simple evidentialism hold that any norms of friendship bear only on action, not belief. We might have reason to support our friends in speech and action: to say we have their backs or do not think they cheated, to defend them to others, and so on. But such acts are *in spite of* what we believe— and like good rational evidentialists, our beliefs are still determined (only) by our evidence. Simple evidentialism says, at most, for the sake of your friend, you should act as if *p*—but do not actually believe *p* (when *p* is unsupported by your evidence).

An alternative perspective has emerged arguing that friendship can shape how we ought to *believe* about our friends. The strongest version of this view represents the other end of our spectrum: *full-blown partialism* holds that in the cases of interest, good friendship can involve *belief against the evidence*.[7] Against the background of evidentialism, partialists propose that "there are cases in which an agent cannot meet both the highest standards of friendship and the highest standards of epistemic responsibility."[8] Because motivations of friend-ship, in these cases, have nothing to do with making our beliefs more accurate, what we ought to believe *qua* friend can be different from what we ought to believe *qua* epistemically rational agent.[9] Regarding Cheating, a partialist might say Mateo owes it to Shelby to believe her innocence (or at least not believe

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5   E.g., Feldman and Conee, "Evidentialism"; and Shah, "A New Argument for Evidentialism."

6   A related claim here is that friendship and other practical motivations are the *wrong kinds of reasons* for belief. For discussion of this in the context of belief about others, see Enoch, "What's Wrong with Paternalism." For a defense of the notion, see Hieronymi, "The Wrong Kind of Reason." And for an overview, see Gertken and Kiesewetter, "The Right and the Wrong Kind of Reasons."

7   Keller, "Friendship and Belief"; and Stroud, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship." See also Baker, "Trust and Rationality"; Hazlett, *A Luxury of the Understanding*; Rioux, "On the Epistemic Costs of Friendship"; and Woodcock, "If Epistemic Partialism Is True, Don't Tell Your Friends."

8   Keller, "Friendship and Belief," 330.

9   We sometimes believe more favorably about our friends than a detached observer would because we have more evidence about them; the cases of interest are those where we owe our friends epistemic and doxastic duties that are not justified by this further evidence.

her guilt), despite the unfavorable evidential situation.[10] Partialists take these doxastic patterns to be deeply important to (even constitutive of) friendship: friendship is manifested through not just how we treat our friends but how we believe about them. Crucially, for a full-blown partialist, it is the *content* of the belief that matters—such that sometimes, when the evidential situation is bad, the beliefs we owe our friends are not be supported by our evidence.[11]

I discuss below various intermediate positions that have been offered between these two poles of the debate. But first, let us discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of these anchor positions; this will highlight what features intermediate accounts aim to capture and what problems they aim to avoid.

1.2. Strengths and Weaknesses

Simple evidentialism and full-blown partialism each capture and each miss something significant about the landscape of cases like Cheating. (I offer an overview of the worries here; we revisit them in detail in section 4.) Simple evidentialism highlights that the importance of epistemic rationality does not go out the window in contexts of friendship. To help us successfully navigate the world, our beliefs need to be evidence responsive; locating the domain of friendship only in external action but not in belief avoids consequences of taking on irrational beliefs. But if simple evidentialism ends up prescribing outwardly acting one way towards our friends while internally believing another, worries arise about deception and sincerity. If I ought to tell my friend that she is going to do well in her upcoming audition even if I do not believe it, or ought to defend her innocence to others while privately stewing on her guilt, then my friendship risks seeming duplicitous and insincere. As Simon Keller notes, "you want a friend who's on your side, not one who's good at faking it."[12] These worries about insincerity are a specific manifestation of a more general worry for simple evidentialism: that it does not capture the crucial insight that friendship has a robust psychological dimension—that our mental states matter to our friendship just as our acts do.[13] We can really imagine, for instance, Mateo

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10 Rioux focuses on suspension of judgment and disbelief in a friend's guilt rather than on positive belief in their innocence ("On the Epistemic Costs of Friendship"). The positive view I propose understands the same basic mechanisms as operative in both scenarios. See Soter, "Acceptance and the Ethics of Belief," 2233–34.

11 For relevant discussion of this feature in the morality of belief more generally, see Basu, "What We Epistemically Owe to Each Other" and "The Morality of Belief 1."

12 Keller, "Friendship and Belief," 335. See also Hazlett, *A Luxury of the Understanding*, 100–2.

13 Hazlett defends this idea more broadly, writing, "We should not construe morality narrowly so that it pertains only to our actions.... We can owe it to [people] to *think* about them in certain ways" (*A Luxury of the Understanding*, 101, emphasis added).

feeling torn about what to believe—feeling like he owes Shelby belief in her innocence despite the bad evidence.

Full-blown partialism targets the cognitive dimension of friendship, taking seriously that we want our friends to be on our side psychologically, even (and perhaps especially) when things do not look good for us. Various philosophers defend the felt tension in such cases, and this instinct even has some empirical support. Some studies have found that participants say that a close friend should, when faced with someone's wrongdoing, believe not only more optimistically about their friend than an acquaintance, but (crucially) more optimistically than they themselves say is rationally permitted by the evidence.[14] In a familiar domain like friendship, it seems reasonable to take such widespread folk and philosophical intuitions seriously, at least as a starting point. Other partialists appeal to more theoretical grounds. For instance, Keller argues that we have a stake in what our friends believe about us, proposing that our friends' beliefs can make a difference to our well-being according to many theories.[15] In a slightly different vein, Sarah Stroud argues that friendship constitutively involves a commitment to believing in the goodness of our friends.[16] Whatever the precise motivation, partialism captures that friendship makes demands not only on how we treat our friends but also on how we *think* about them.

But full-blown partialism faces problems of its own. One kind of problem arises from appreciating that some goods of friendship seem to require evidentially grounded beliefs. Perhaps giving advice about life decisions or showing friends appropriate care requires a clear-eyed view of our friends.[17] Others emphasize the value of honesty and knowing our friends for who they really are: they argue that having fitting emotions towards our friends requires accurate beliefs about them, or they worry that it is inauthentic to believe well about our friends because we think that is what a good friend does rather than because we are attuned to evidence of their positive qualities.[18] These worries each highlight the cost of prescribing irrational belief—especially systematically irrational beliefs— in friendship and thus offer motivations for evidentialism

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14 Cusimano and Lombrozo, "Morality Justifies Motivated Reasoning in the Folk Ethics of Belief," 5–13.

15 Keller, "Belief for Someone Else's Sake," 20–24.

16 Stroud, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship," 501–2.

17 Arpaly and Brinkerhoff, "Why Epistemic Partiality Is Overrated," 43; Kawall, "Friendship and Epistemic Norms," 357; and Dormandy, "Loving Truly," 15–18.

18 Kawall, "Friendship and Epistemic Norms"; Mason, "The Epistemic Demands of Friendship" and "Epistemic Partialism and Taking Our Friends Seriously"; Dormandy, "Loving Truly"; and Crawford, "Believing the Best."

that are rooted in the nature of friendship (rather than in more general epistemological principles).

Perhaps the most poignant worry for full-blown partialism is its prescription that we ought to believe for nonevidential reasons and *against* our evidence. Standard accounts hold that we do not have direct voluntary control over our beliefs; specifically, we cannot choose to believe something unsupported by our evidence directly for practical or moral reasons.[19] Assuming an ought-implies-can constraint on our obligations of friendship, this worry threatens to completely head off the possibility of doxastic obligations of friendship. So although full-blown partialism better captures the cognitive dimension of friendship, it comes with worrisome theoretical baggage and risks overcorrecting from simple evidentialism to the point of devaluing rationality in friendship.

1.3. Intermediate Positions

As this debate has unfolded, more nuanced views have been proposed that fall somewhere between these two dialectical poles. I highlight two intermediate routes here. Each holds onto a broadly evidentialist background but moves beyond the "simple" view by considering other potential resources for evidentialists to make sense of partialist intuitions.[20] In virtue of this, each also represents a retreat from full-blown partialism; I thus briefly offer reasons to think these strategies might not satisfy someone compelled by partialist motivations. I do not intend these as definitive arguments against these intermediate positions, which I think capture important components of the epistemic landscape of friendship. Rather, I offer these as reasons to think that neither route settles the debate about partialism, and thus, it is worth pursuing further potential accounts.

The first (and commonly appealed to) route points out that even if friendship cannot directly bear on belief, there are myriad "upstream" epistemic practices that shape what we ultimately come to believe—such as how we inquire, gather evidence, verify information, and think through a problem—and friendship

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19 E.g., Alston, "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification"; Hieronymi, "Controlling Attitudes"; and Williams, "Deciding to Believe."

20 Another possible route is to deny the background commitment to evidentialism altogether. This is the route favored by proponents of encroachment, which holds that moral and practical considerations can affect what it is epistemically rational to believe. (For an overview, see Bolinger, "Varieties of Moral Encroachment.") For present purposes, I set encroachment strategies to the side and accept a background of evidentialism; given its heterodox status, it is a benefit if our solution to the puzzle of partialism does not rely on embracing encroachment. Moreover, for an argument that encroachment fails to resolve the puzzle of partialism, see Rioux, "On the Epistemic Costs of Friendship."

can clearly impact how we should structure these upstream practices.[21] This approach amounts to a retreat from full-blown partialism to a weaker position (what Mason calls *indirect partialism* and Apraly and Brinkerhoff call *partialism-light*), which locates epistemic considerations of friendship in these actions instead. This solution, however, is vulnerable to the worry that no amount of altering upstream practices can guarantee that any *particular* belief state will ultimately be achieved; this is the familiar problem for appeals to "indirect" doxastic manipulations aimed at producing a desired belief state.[22] For some, this may be enough: they may think that partialist motivations can be satisfied just via alterations of upstream practices. However, this may not satisfy more committed partialists; some—particularly those motivated by the proposal that it is *especially when* the epistemic chips are down that we most want our friends to believe favorably about us, when others might not—may still think that it matters what belief you end up with.[23]

Another route is to argue that we can capture partialist motivations without prescribing anything as strong as belief against the evidence or even irrational belief: perhaps all we owe our friends is a "modest epistemic bias" in their favor—one that does not reach the level of irrationality.[24] One way to spell this out is via *epistemic permissivism*, which holds that there is not one unique belief or confidence state that is rationally required by any given body of evidence.[25] On this view, friendship can influence which beliefs we adopt from those that fall within the rationally permitted range, thus allowing friendship to be a reason to believe without requiring irrationality or beliefs against the evidence. This reveals two choice points for partialist sympathizers. First, this route is most natural to those independently sympathetic to epistemic permissivism, but it

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21 Arpaly and Brinkerhoff, "Why Epistemic Partiality Is Overrated"; Brinkerhoff, "The Cognitive Demands of Friendship"; Goldberg, "Against Epistemic Partiality in Friendship"; and Saint-Croix, "Rumination and Wronging."

22 See Hieronymi on belief management ("Controlling Attitudes," 54–56). Apraly and Brinkerhoff also note that philosophers sometimes seem overly optimistic about how much precise control can be exerted via indirect manipulation ("Why Epistemic Partiality Is Overrated," 42).

23 For discussion of this idea for doxastic wronging more generally, see Basu, "Morality of Belief II": Although appealing to upstream practices very plausibly is part of the morality of belief, it may not be the whole story.

24 Kawall, "Friendship and Epistemic Norms," 351.

25 Kelly, "Evidence Can Be Permissive"; and Schoenfield, "Permission to Believe." For discussion, see also Goldberg, "Against Epistemic Partiality in Friendship." For a broadly permissivist account developed in terms of "epistemic policies" rather than individual beliefs, see Paul and Morton, "Believing in Others."

may be less attractive to those who favor uniqueness.[26] Second, this does not satisfy partialist sympathizers who really do think that reasons of friendship and reasons of epistemic rationality can come into conflict with each other—that, as Keller says, we cannot always meet both the highest standards of epistemic rationality and the highest standards of friendship.[27] For some, this may be an acceptable sacrifice to the partialist agenda; but others may want to account for conflicts between norms of epistemic rationality and friendship.[28]

In what follows, I offer a novel positive alternative that also aims to fall between the two poles of simple evidentialism and full-blown partialism and tries to capture the motivations but avoid the key problems of each. I also show that it can pick up some of the slack that the routes just discussed leave open: it offers an alternative for cases in which the evidence does not plausibly support the desired belief about our friends or in which upstream modifications are not enough. Ultimately, my proposal is compatible with the upstream practices route and modest epistemic bias route; each may capture a different piece of the epistemic landscape of friendship. Given the various choice-points laid out here for partialists, I note once more that the argument I give is a conditional one: *if* one wants to rescue partialist motivations, I offer another potential resource to do so—but I do not here aim to offer new arguments in favor of partialism or to take a stand on how strong of a partialist one should be.

2. A NEW OPTION: ACCEPTANCE

My proposal is this: what we owe our friends in cases like Cheating is not belief but rather *acceptance.* I rely on a specific account of acceptance characterized as suppressing belief's default guiding influence across reasoning, cognition, and action—a notion best understood by its analogy to familiar strategies of emotion regulation. I then discuss how acceptance can help us capture the rich doxastic landscape of friendship in target cases while avoiding the worries plaguing simple evidentialist and full-blown partialist views. A central goal is to motivate that acceptance is a more powerful tool in the ethics of belief than is often appreciated.

Beliefs are states of epistemic confidence concerning the truth or falsity of some proposition: they are our representation of how we take the world to be, given our evidence. But belief states, once formed, do not just sit inert in

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26 Uniqueness denies epistemic permissivism and holds that for any body of evidence, there is exactly one rational doxastic attitude. For discussion, see Kopec and Titelbaum, "The Uniqueness Thesis."

27 Keller, "Friendship and Belief," 330.

28 E.g., Vahid, "Friendship and the Grades of Doxastic Partiality."

our minds: they also serve to guide our processes of reasoning, cognition, and action, shaping a wide range of mental and behavioral processes in belief-congruent ways.[29] Beliefs are thus, in Michael Bratman's terms, our "default cognitive background": they direct (in conjunction with other mental states) our patterns of thought, goal selection, action, attention, and so on)—and they do it spontaneously and non-inferentially (that is, by default, without our need for conscious oversight).[30]

Sometimes, however, we do not want to let some belief play its usual role in structuring our deliberation and action. In domains far removed from epistemic partiality, some philosophers propose that in such circumstances we can instead *accept* some alternative—where accepting involves taking some proposition as a premise in practical deliberation and action, even though we do not strictly speaking believe it. In accepting, we thus depart from our default cognitive background of belief: we intervene to prevent belief from playing its characteristic role in guiding reasoning, cognition, and action.[31] A lawyer, for instance, might have high confidence that her client is guilty but nonetheless accept the client's innocence on professional grounds, committing to a policy of reasoning and acting on the basis of the client's innocence. While belief is often characterized as involuntary and (rationally and psychologically) determined by the evidence, acceptance is proposed to be more clearly under our

29 This is a reasonably well-accepted characterization of the two central functional roles of belief: evidence responsiveness, and guiding inference and action. Notably, if one thinks that it is *only* the output-side guidance function and not an input-side evidence-responsiveness function that characterizes belief (as is arguably the case for some kinds of dispositionalism), then one might not buy the present distinction between belief and acceptance. I consider how such theories of belief interface with the mechanisms discussed here in Soter, "A Defense of Back-End Doxastic Voluntarism." However, specifying the puzzle of partiality in the first place seems to depend on a notion of belief that understands it as centrally an evidence-responsive state: otherwise, we would not face a puzzle about how to think about these apparent nonevidential motivations for belief.

30 Bratman, "Practical Reasoning and Acceptance in a Context," 10. See also Railton, "Reliance, Trust, and Belief," 139. For more discussion of the guidance role and its mechanisms, see Soter, "A Defense of Back-End Doxastic Voluntarism" and "Belief's Guidance Function," 4–5. Specifying exactly how any given belief state shapes these various mechanisms is hard to do with much generality, as it depends on both the content of the belief state and how that interacts with an agent's other mental states, such as their goals, desires, and other beliefs.

31 Acceptance has been discussed by a number of authors (e.g., Bratman, "Practical Reasoning and Acceptance in a Context"; van Fraassen, *Images of Science*; Engel, "Believing, Holding True, and Accepting"; Cohen, "Belief and Acceptance" and *Essay on Belief and Acceptance*). Though there are important differences between these accounts, there is also much overlap. Here, I focus on Bratman-style accounts.

direct voluntary control: we can choose to accept for practical goals, in specific contexts, and in response to nonevidential considerations.

Standard accounts of acceptance are often pitched in these epistemological terms. Elsewhere, I argue that more precisely spelling out the specific cognitive mechanisms that instantiate acceptance offers better insight into its psychological profile.[32] I here outline the basics of that proposed account and then turn to the central goal of applying the general account to the specific case of epistemic partiality.

If acceptance involves reasoning, deliberating, planning, thinking, and acting on the basis of something other than what one believes, this requires a monitoring of one's cognition, reasoning, and behavioral processes to identify the various ways in which the unwanted target belief state (or set of beliefs) is active and influencing one's cognition and action, and then intervening to block the usual inferences, actions, patterns of reasoning, thinking, and other downstream effects caused or licensed by the target belief.[33] We can characterize this intervention as a *cognitive gating operation*, through which we prevent the target belief state from having its usual downstream role in cognition, deliberation, and action, and then restructuring the deliberative and inferential landscape accordingly.[34] Patterns of thinking, reasoning, and acting that would be licensed (or inhibited) by the belief must now be blocked (or are now permitted) by acceptance.

Why should we think we have such a cognitive gating capacity? I propose that this account inherits theoretical and empirical plausibility via its mechanistic similarity to well-studied emotion regulation strategies; appreciating this can give us a better grip on the cognitive profile of acceptance.[35] One prominent class of emotion regulation techniques is *response modulation* (also called *suppression*), which seeks to regulate the characteristic verbal, behavioral, and

32 Soter, "Acceptance and the Ethics of Belief."

33 Existing epistemological notions of acceptance differ in whether they specify that acceptance involves *departing* from one's underlying belief (e.g., Bratman, "Practical Reasoning and Acceptance in a Context") or whether what we reason/act on is what we accept *whether or not we believe it* (e.g., Cohen, "Belief and Acceptance"). I focus on the former because when belief itself guides reasoning/action, there is no explanatory psychological gap to fill: belief is just playing its usual guiding role. For discussion, see Soter, "Acceptance and the Ethics of Belief," 2219–20.

34 Importantly, acceptance does not mean we stop relying on our beliefs *wholesale*. It simply means that there is some *target* belief (or perhaps set of beliefs) whose guiding role we block; of course, we will still be guided by many other beliefs.

35 Soter, "Acceptance and the Ethics of Belief," 2225–31.

cognitive consequences of an elicited emotion.[36] Such strategies target the characteristic downstream effects of an activated emotion state—for instance, facial expressions of disgust or vocalizations of fear—without directly targeting the underlying emotion state itself.

I propose that accepting deploys the same cognitive mechanisms at work in emotional response modulation against belief states: acceptance is *doxastic response modulation* (or *doxastic suppression*). With both emotion and belief, an agent seeks to suppress the target mental state by blocking its characteristic cognitive and behavioral effects: these suppression efforts target the consequences of the state rather than directly targeting the underlying state itself. In both domains, we must deploy these regulatory mechanisms for as long as the target state remains intact, and we must remain committed to suppressing it. And crucially, in both the emotional and doxastic domains, response modulation allows an agent to regulate a mental state in response to practical and moral considerations that are not themselves the right kind of reason on which to form the underlying mental state. That is, just as emotion regulation allows us to, for instance, suppress our anger in situations where anger is practically disadvantageous *even if the anger has been fittingly elicited*, so too can doxastic response modulation (i.e., acceptance) allow us to suppress the effects of a belief that is practically or morally undesirable, *even if the belief has been well formed and evidentially justified*. In both cases, we can regulate the underlying states without compromising the proper functioning of the state-elicitation processes.

This account reveals some central psychological characteristics of acceptance, which are familiar in the emotional domain but less appreciated in the doxastic one. First, acceptance is cognitively effortful and demanding on executive processes, of which we have limited capacity: these suppression processes involve effortful inhibition of default patterns of thinking and acting. Second, acceptance turns out to be not a one-off action but rather a temporally extended sequence of specific mental acts. Accepting, in other words, involves committing to gating and restructuring over time: for however long and in whatever contexts an agent is trying to accept (and so long as the underlying belief state remains), she must block and redirect the characteristic downstream effects of her target belief state in cognition and action. This is something the agent can choose to do, but notably, the control profile here is one of effortful regulation over time—a very different control profile than we might initially imagine for

36 Gross, "The Emerging Field of Emotion Regulation" and "Antecedent- and Response-Focused Emotion Regulation"; and McRae, "Cognitive Emotion Regulation." These are classically contrasted with *antecedent-focused* strategies, which seek to prevent the elicitation or activation of an emotion state in the first place or otherwise intervene upon the generation of the emotion state (akin to "upstream" doxastic intervention).

acceptance. Finally, these response modulation mechanisms can be deployed against any underlying belief or confidence state—that is, one can regulate the default effects of high confidence or belief, or uncertainty. We can thus deploy the acceptance mechanisms discussed here in any context in which the default cognitive and behavioral effects of our underlying belief state are at odds with moral or practical motivations.

2.1. A Question About Doxastic Ontology

This last point—that response modulation can be deployed against any under-lying state of confidence—might raise a question about how acceptance fits into broader debates about doxastic ontology, particularly the distinction some have proposed between belief and credence. Though a full treatment of this question is beyond the scope of this article, I here offer some initial thoughts on the matter, given that this distinction has garnered recent attention within the ethics of belief.[37]

   In sections 3 and 4 I will make the case for understanding epistemic partial-ity in terms of acceptance. Still, readers can presumably already see where I will be going: I will argue that in cases like Cheating, what we should do as friends is not believe against the evidence but rather *accept*: intervene in order to block the underlying belief state from playing its characteristic guiding role. In setting this up, I characterize the agent's belief state as the evidence assessment/state of epistemic confidence that, by default, guides reasoning, cognition, and action.

   Recently, some have posited a distinction in doxastic ontology between *credence* as a degreed state of confidence or subjective probability and *belief*, an all-out, categorical, settled state (usually considered one of a tripartite set, along with disbelief and withholding). There is ongoing debate about how best to characterize the relationship between these attitudes, but some suggest that belief plays a distinctive role in guiding inference and action—a role that (even high) mere credence does or should not play.[38] Precisely what this distinctive role is varies across accounts. Proposed functions include: guiding reasoning and action, especially in high-stakes contexts; justifying blame; simplifying reasoning by ruling out small error possibilities; and closing inquiry.[39] Most relevant for present purposes, some have leveraged the belief/credence distinc-tion to address questions in the ethics of belief—for instance, in explaining why

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37   Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to discuss this.

38   For an overview, see Jackson, "The Relationship Between Belief and Credence."

39   Fantl and McGrath, "Evidence, Pragmatics, and Justification"; Jackson, "How Belief-Cre-dence Dualism Explains Away Pragmatic Encroachment"; Buchak, "Belief, Credence, and Norms"; Staffel, "How Do Beliefs Simplify Reasoning?"; and Friedman, "Inquiry and Belief."

statistical evidence cannot justify belief about individuals or by highlighting a posited distinctive relationship between beliefs, blame, and inquiry.[40]

Here is the worry: If full belief is distinguished from credence by how it shapes downstream thought and action, and if I say that acceptance involves suppressing the guidance function of an agent's evidence-responsive epistemic assessment, does my proposal just collapse into the belief/credence distinction, and does this therefore render the proposal to be delivered in sections 3 and 4 a redundant move in the debate?

I think not (or at least not obviously). My account of acceptance provides a specific mechanistic story about doxastic regulation and diagnoses a distinctive psychological profile (discussed above and in the subsequent sections). Moreover, my account appeals to independently plausible, well-studied mechanisms of emotion regulation. The debate about credence and belief as two distinct doxastic kinds has largely unfolded from an epistemological perspective; whether and how this distinction can be vindicated cognitive-scientifically, as well as the mechanistic architecture of these two states, are areas of open inquiry in early stages.[41] If the distinction *is* ultimately vindicated as part of an empirically plausible mental architecture, one possibility is that doxastic response modulation is a mechanistic instantiation of this distinction—for instance, if you think that normally, credence guides reasoning and action, but in cases where we have high credence but want to withhold belief, we need to suppress these default effects. But this might not be the right account. Some dualists (such as Elizabeth Jackson) argue that belief and credence are two fundamentally distinct doxastic states, which form in response to different kinds of reasons (e.g., Lara Buchak argues that naked statistical evidence justifies credence but not belief) and potentially enter into mental computation in different ways (e.g., Julia Staffel's account of credence versus belief in reasoning).[42]

So, there are two possibilities. The first is that the mechanisms of acceptance are a plausible instantiation of the relationship between credal confidence states and all-out doxastic states, in which case the account I provide here goes far beyond what any existing dualist account says about the psychological profile of all-out belief. The second possibility is that acceptance/doxastic response modulation is just an entirely distinct component of our cognitive economies, in which case working out how these mechanisms interface with both belief

40   Buchak, "Belief, Credence, and Norms"; Moss, "Knowledge and Legal Proof"; and Quanbeck, "Belief, Blame, and Inquiry."

41   See Ballarini, "Credences in Active Reasoning"; Jackson, "The Cognitive Science of Credence"; and Weisberg, "Belief in Psyontology."

42   Jackson, "Why Credences Are Not Beliefs"; Buchak, "Belief, Credence, and Norms"; and Staffel, "How Do Beliefs Simplify Reasoning?"

and credence is an open question for future work. Either way, applying doxastic response modulation to issues of epistemic partiality contributes something new to the landscape of the debate.[43] With that laid out, let us turn back to partiality.

3. PARTIALITY AND ACCEPTANCE

We can now offer a new alternative to full-blown partialism and simple evidentialism. The *acceptance view* proposes that in cases where an agent seems pulled in one direction by the evidence and in another by reasons of friendship, what she owes her friend is not belief but acceptance. That is, rather than adopting a belief state inconsistent with the evidence, she has reasons of friendship to regulate the guiding role of a (set of) belief state(s)—to block the characteristic downstream effects of the (well-formed and evidentially justified) belief and commit herself to restructuring her reasoning, thinking, and acting accordingly. Mateo might thus assess that his evidence suggests that Shelby cheated but nevertheless accept that she has not been shown guilty—blocking his assessment of the evidence from guiding his patterns of reasoning, cognition, and action.

The acceptance view carves a middle ground between full-blown partialism and simple evidentialism. It captures that there is something genuinely cognitive and doxastic about the cases at hand, but the obligations involved are not (quite) located in belief formation itself. In section 4, I argue that this approach thus avoids the challenges facing each of the standard views. First, however, let us dive deeper into what the acceptance view suggests about the landscape of cases like Cheating. Specifically, I highlight two key components of the acceptance view: it prescribes cognitive regulation of diverse psychological mechanisms, and it paints a rich diachronic picture of commitment and cognitive work.

3.1. *The Richness of Response Modulation*

Acceptance involves the restructuring of diverse psychological and behavioral processes, blocking belief from guiding these processes as it normally would. Some behavioral manifestations of acceptance are outward and familiar: when Mateo accepts that Shelby did not cheat, he might say supportive things about her to others, give her an important role in the next group project, etc. But this extends inward too: he will also have to prevent himself from reasoning

43 Additionally, in the existing literature on epistemic partiality, it is not clear that authors' discussion of what a friend should believe is specifically meant to be understood in terms of *full/outright belief* (as contrasted with credence by dualists). Rather, the question of interest is whether one's characteristically evidence-responsive doxastic state—which they and I call the agent's belief state—should also be influenced by reasons of friendship.

based on her guilt—for instance, he might prevent himself from concluding that because she cheated, her class grade is going to suffer or that because she cheated on this exam, she might be more likely to cheat on the next one. But once we start to consider these internal dynamics of acceptance, we appreciate that beliefs normally guide a host of cognitive activities: in addition to guiding reasoning, planning, and action, they also guide our patterns of thought, attention, memory, and other various processes. Acceptance involves intervening on these myriad processes. Beyond just avoiding planning and reasoning on the basis of Shelby's guilt, Mateo might also prevent himself from spending time thinking or ruminating about her guilt (e.g., avoid mulling "Why would she do that?"), prevent his worries about her guilt from affecting his patterns of attention (e.g., not focusing on how his text messages about her studying progress went unanswered and instead attending to how determined she was to do well), prevent himself from recalling memories of other times she was guilty (e.g., striving not to dwell on memories of the last time she cheated and instead recalling other times she has surpassed expectations), and so on.

Drawing out these diverse regulatory consequences of acceptance—many of which feel like familiar parts of trying to be a good friend—reveals that acceptance accounts for a variety of ways in which we might think a friend ought to respond cognitively in these kinds of situations. Acceptance thus unifies what might otherwise appear to be a set of independent cognitive duties of friendship and captures the idea that friendship has a significant "internal" or cognitive dimension of maintaining a particular way of thinking about one's friends.

3.2. Acceptance and Attention

Let us pause to consider how acceptance interacts with recent proposals that friendship should shape our patterns of *attention* specifically. Anna Brinkerhoff and Catharine Saint-Croix both argue that what we owe our friends is favorable patterns of attention: we owe it to a friend to focus on the good things about them, not to dwell on unfavorable evidence or their bad qualities, and so on.[44] This approach offers the key insight that attention processes feed into belief in an important way, capturing that there is more to the psychology of friendship than belief itself. The acceptance view agrees with this and even agrees that restructuring patterns of attention is a key part of the landscape—but it goes beyond the (mere) attentional accounts in several ways.

Attention is sometimes talked about (not necessarily by these authors) primarily in its capacity as a process that is "upstream" of belief: what we attend to

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44   Brinkerhoff, "The Cognitive Demands of Friendship"; and Saint-Croix, "Rumination and Wronging."

affects belief formation. As with all upstream manipulations, reshaping patterns of attention may indeed affect what beliefs we form—but it cannot be guaranteed to result in any particular belief state. A partialist, then, may still worry about cases in which attention redirection does not result in the favorable belief. Alternatively, we might appreciate attention as something that can be upstream *or* downstream of belief formation: beliefs (especially about something like a friend's misconduct) affect our patterns of attention in various ways—but we can override that and redirect attention in a way that is more favorable to our friend. This captures a more dynamic interaction between attention and belief and is precisely what the acceptance view agrees with—except the acceptance approach holds that attention is just one of the many cognitive processes that beliefs affect, and thus, we might regulate out of concern for our friends.

The acceptance view, in other words, shares the motivations behind attentional views (and so is friendly to and compatible with them)—that there is something cognitive, but it is not quite belief—but expands on and encompasses these views, highlighting that attention is just one piece of a bigger picture of cognitive regulation. This leaves us on surer footing to tackle the underlying goal: giving a cognitive diagnosis for partialism cases without locating the demands in belief itself. The acceptance view emphasizes that just as there are various things we can do to intervene upstream of belief—including evidence-gathering, attending, rethinking, and so on—there are also things we can do immediately downstream of belief: we are not just at the mercy of our assessments of the evidence once they are formed.

3.3. Acceptance over Time

Another core feature of the acceptance view is the rich diachronic story it diagnoses for partiality cases. First, it captures a profile of *cognitive effort* and *commitment*. Acceptance involves a series of effortful mental control actions deployed over time. Suppressing belief's guidance across psychological mechanisms is not simply willed and therefore completed; it involves continuous maintenance for as long as the underlying belief remains intact, and the agent remains committed to regulating it. This takes extended cognitive effort due to engagement of executive control processes—thus requiring a real psychological commitment on behalf of the friend, especially if the belief is frequently activated.

I think this rightly captures how we imagine cases like Cheating playing out: as long as Mateo takes his evidence to speak in favor of Shelby's guilt, his "taking her side" psychologically will involve this psychological effort and commitment. Indeed, accepting can be a psychological burden. In the emotional domain, suppression strategies can over time lead to negative psychological

consequences, including stress, anxiety, and reductions in well-being.[45] Though it has not been empirically tested, we might predict similar effects in the doxastic domain: acceptance may have psychological costs. But there is nothing mysterious about the idea that friendship can motivate costly actions. We frequently do difficult things for our friends that we might not do for just anyone. Acceptance is another kind of burden we might bear for our friends' sake. This is particularly fitting given what we noted earlier—that the cases that demand thoroughgoing acceptance are not everyday cases but rather particularly challenging ones in which our friends need us "on their side." It should not be surprising that such cases are psychologically burdensome to us as friends.[46]

That acceptance is constituted by an extended pattern of effortful mental actions also means there are many opportunities for the accepting agent to fail to suppress the downstream effects of their belief. There is a nonzero probability of error (whether of monitoring or of suppression) for each effort to block a downstream effect of belief, and the likelihood of such error increases when an agent's executive processes are engaged elsewhere.[47] But this possibility of suppression failure also reflects how we might imagine the scenario playing out: we can imagine that when Mateo is overwhelmed by other demanding tasks or distracted (or even drunk!), he might slip up and find himself thinking, acting, or saying something that reveals his underlying assessment of Shelby's guilt. On this picture, accepting can be difficult. But rather than being a problem for the view, I think this gets things exactly right: when the epistemic chips are down, being a good friend can be hard work.

Together, these features reveal something about the action profile of acceptance: it should be understood as an exercise of *self-control*, of regulating behavior and cognition to align with practical commitments. Conceiving of things in this way has normative implications: our moral assessment of an accepting agent should be sensitive to this control profile. For instance, given the difficulty of perfect success in acceptance over long periods of time, an agent may

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45   Butler et al., "The Social Consequences of Expressive Suppression"; John and Gross, "Healthy and Unhealthy Emotion Regulation"; and Moore et al., "Are Expressive Suppression and Cognitive Reappraisal Associated with Stress-Related Symptoms?"

46   Of course, this can go too far—there could be cases where the burden is so psychologically demanding that cost of this acceptance becomes too high, and reasons of self-preservation may outweigh reasons of friendship. As I emphasize throughout, my claim is not that one should always accept in the way I propose, only that there are some cases where being a good friend can give us reasons to accept. I also do not claim that acceptance is always a psychological mechanism used for good; clearly, it can be misused in unhealthy interpersonal relationships as well.

47   For relevant discussion, see Sripada, "Addiction and Fallibility" and "The Atoms of Self-Control."

not be fully culpable for each of these slips, particularly if she is engaged in other cognitively demanding tasks that leave fewer resources available for upholding acceptance.[48] Of course, a friend might still feel upset about such slips, and the agent might in some sense be answerable for them. Nonetheless, it seems we ought to recognize that an agent who commits to accepting something on behalf of her friend is doing something morally serious, even if—given her cognitive limitations—she does not do so perfectly.[49] This point also highlights something significant about the broader project here: better understanding the cognitive dynamics of the cases of interest can reveal normative complexity that may not have been antecedently apparent.

Finally, reflecting on sustained acceptance highlights that the interaction between acceptance and belief is highly dynamic: in particular, acceptance might eventually shape belief. Restructuring thought, reasoning, attention, and action as guided by belief at one point in time may well lead to changes in how an agent acquires and understands information and evidence, which inferences she does (not) draw, and so on—in a way that may ultimately influence her underlying belief states. So although on the acceptance view, the stated goal is not to alter a particular belief state (on pain of being self-undermining), acceptance over time may well eventually alter our beliefs—and the line between acceptance and belief may blur over time, especially if patterns of acceptance become learned and habitual. (In section 5, I consider whether this is a problem for the account.)

4. AVOIDING OBJECTIONS TO THE STANDARD VIEWS

The preceding section aimed to describe the novel features of the doxastic landscape of friendship drawn out by the acceptance view. Let us now revisit some of the problems for full-blown partialism and simple evidentialism raised in section 1. As we return to these, it is useful to keep in mind exactly where the acceptance view aims to intervene in the dialectic. First, it aims to capture the strong partialist intuition that there can be substantial conflicts between the norms of friendship and epistemic rationality, and these are not exhausted merely by modifications in upstream epistemic practices or plausibly captured

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48　For discussion in the context of addiction, see Sripada, "Addiction and Fallibility."

49　Further, our friend might recognize this: that you are putting in the (cognitive) work for their sake. This point stands in interesting tension with the methodology used in some accounts of doxastic wronging (e.g., Basu and Schroeder, "Doxastic Wronging"), which appeal to feeling *owed an apology* for unfavorable beliefs. Perhaps if we recognize our friend's evidential situation, the story about owing apology is not so simple—we might recognize that it is hard to block one's beliefs in this way and that a friend's doing so is a sign of their commitment to us.

by a "modest epistemic bias." We are setting aside views that deny the need to capture this strong partialist intuition regarding genuine conflicts between what our evidence supports and what we feel we should believe as friends. Second, however, the acceptance view wants to hold on to a broadly evidentialist orthodoxy that although there seems to be a real conflict here, we cannot just believe directly in response to nonepistemic reasons of friendship. Thus, the acceptance view ultimately is an evidentialist view (or at least, is compatible with evidentialism, hence my setting aside encroachment views); but it aims to do more to satisfy those with strong partialist intuitions than the simple evidentialist position traditionally captures. It does so by pointing out that there is a lot of internal psychological regulation we can do on behalf of our friends via acceptance—even if this regulation falls short of directly modifying belief formation.

4.1. Challenges for Simple Evidentialism

Recall that the simple evidentialist pole of the partiality debate holds that reasons of friendship cannot bear directly on belief; they can bear only on action. With this as the starting point, one way simple evidentialists could try to account for motivations of friendship is to say that as a friend, we should *act as if* we believe something about our friends—but we should not *actually* believe it. (This strategy is perhaps not actually defended by anyone in print, but it is a clear possibility in the space of the debate.) This approach brings up two related worries. First, it elides a key psychological dimension of friendship; second (and partly in virtue of the first), if it locates the influence of friendship only on outward action, it risks prescribing a kind of pretense towards our friends that is insincere or deceptive.[50]

Regarding the former, we have seen that the acceptance view diagnoses a rich psychological landscape for partiality cases. Without positing direct obligations to form beliefs against the evidence, the acceptance view nonetheless acknowledges the importance of beliefs in our cognitive economies and prescribes robust regulation of those beliefs, thus avoiding simple evidentialism's naive suggestion that only our outward behavior needs modifying.

But the insincerity concern remains worrisome for the acceptance view. Is acceptance as I defend it so different from the "acting as if" approach for

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50 Views by authors like Mason ("The Epistemic Demands of Friendship" and "Epistemic Partialism and Taking Our Friends Seriously"), Crawford ("Believing the Best"), and Dormandy ("Loving Truly") avoid this worry by saying that there *is* a robust psychological dimension to friendship, but it is not a *partial* one—it is instead manifested via our accurate knowledge of our friends. They thus avoid the worry about prescribing pretense—but they also deny the strong partialist intuition about the possibility of *conflict* between epistemic and friendship motivations, which I here aim to capture.

which I criticize simple evidentialism? This question reveals that the "acting as if" locution is often vague: it underdescribes an agent's psychological profile. Distinguishing between different precisifications of this notion reveals that worries about insincerity have more bite against some versions than others.

There is a possible "thin" version of acting as if that is located entirely in the agent's external behavior and includes nothing "in the head." This is the version I presented for "simple" evidentialists at the start, casting them as a foil to psychologically focused partialists. On this thin profile, the agent continues to let belief (e.g., in her friend's guilt) drive her inner life—intervening only right before she hits the point of external behavior or speech. This profile involves a dramatic mismatch between the agent's internal life and external actions. Alternatively, we can conceive of acting as if in a "thick" sense, in which the agent intervenes far earlier in the process, on her cognitive as well as behavioral dynamics, redirecting her patterns of thought, attention, reasoning, and so on. On this version, there is a lot going on psychologically—she is just not altering the underlying *belief* itself. But this thick notion of acting as if just looks like what I am calling acceptance.

Let us thus distinguish acceptance (the thick psychological profile) from "mere" acting as if (the thin, entirely behavioral profile). Worries about insincerity and deception really hit home against "mere" acting as if, but they have less force against acceptance because the former, but not the latter, involves a split between the agent's inner and outer lives. Mere acting as if is brittle, both normatively and practically: the agent seems insincere both due to the mismatch between how she thinks and how she acts and because she always seems just one missed action away from revealing how she is really thinking about her friend. In contrast, precisely what is distinctive and attractive about acceptance is its thoroughgoingness: accepting involves a real commitment to restructuring one's internal mental life. Acceptance captures the cognitive faith in our friends that partialists are after: we are taking a risk, on behalf of our friend, of thoroughly altering how we act *and think* about our friend despite unfavorable evidence—and so broadcasting a genuine commitment to our friend. This involves significant cognitive work—just not work that is (directly) belief altering. Thus, the rich psychological story of acceptance helps alleviate worries about sincerity: an agent can recognize that her evidence looks bad for her friend but nonetheless decide that because of friendship, she is not going to let that assessment of the evidence dictate how she thinks (and acts).[51]

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51   We might even grant that the agent can be transparent with her friend about this. We can imagine Mateo saying to Shelby, "Look, we both know the evidence looks bad. But you're my friend, so I'm committed to not letting that assessment of the evidence influence how I think and act." I have intentionally (though somewhat awkwardly) avoided using the

4.2. Challenges for Full-Blown Partialism

The objections against full-blown partialism fall into two main categories: those that target the friendship part of the thesis, and those that target the belief part. Let us begin with the latter.

4.2.1. Objections from Belief

The most obvious objection to full-blown partialism is the problem of doxastic control. On standard philosophical accounts, we lack direct voluntary control over our beliefs, which are thought to be rationally and directly responsive only to evidence—that is, we cannot choose to believe something unsupported by our evidence directly on the basis of practical or moral reasons that we take to have no bearing on the truth of the claim in question.[52] This orthodoxy threatens to entirely undercut full-blown partialism: we do not owe epistemic partiality because we *cannot* believe against the evidence for reasons of friendship.[53] Importantly, some authors talk about partiality in terms of what we *owe* our friends and what friendship *demands* of us: for instance, Keller writes that "the tendency to treat us sympathetically [through their beliefs] is not just one that we think likely to be manifested in our friends, it is one that we can *want* them to manifest."[54] At least some versions of partialism are thus framed as telling us what we ought to do to be good friends (more on this shortly)—making the ought-implies-can–style worries pressing.

Of course, even if we cannot believe *directly* in response to nonevidential reasons of friendship, no one denies that we have various kinds of *indirect* control over our beliefs: we can shape what beliefs we come to have through what evidence we gather, who we spend our time with, how we inquire, and so on. This takes us back to the route of upstream epistemic practices discussed in section 1.3. But this may not really satisfy partialists: as Arpaly and Brinkerhoff point out, philosophers are sometimes a bit too happy to throw around the idea that we can cultivate specific mental states in ourselves—this is actually quite

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words 'acceptance' and 'belief' here because I do not think that the colloquial/folk uses of those terms are well defined enough to capture the precise way in which we are carving things up here.

52   Classically, among many others, Alston, "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification"; and Williams, "Deciding to Believe." For helpful discussion, see Hieronymi, "Controlling Attitudes," who argues that belief is responsive specifically to reasons that *bear on the question of whether p* (50–52).

53   Arpaly and Brinkerhoff, "Why Epistemic Partiality Is Overrated," 40–41; and Goldberg, "Against Epistemic Partiality in Friendship," 2230n17.

54   Keller, "Friendship and Belief," 338.

difficult to do with much precision or reliability.[55] This worry is particularly bad for belief: if we alter our epistemic practices with the stated goal of trying to bring about a particular belief in ourselves that we do not take to be supported by our evidence, this processes risks becoming self-undermining.[56]

The acceptance view straightforwardly meets the challenge of doxastic control. Acceptance provides us with an account of how friends ought to respond when evidential reasons for belief and reasons of friendship conflict, without forcing us either to deny the orthodox view that we cannot choose to believe for practical/moral reasons or to retreat to indirect methods of belief manipulation that may be at best unreliable and at worst self-undermining. Acceptance takes seriously the limits of our control over belief formation but highlights the substantive regulatory control we have over the role that beliefs play in our cognitive economies.

In section 1.3, we considered a possible intermediate position between simple evidentialism and full-blown partialism: the argument that perhaps friendship does not actually generate *conflicts* with our evidence but instead merely requires a "modest epistemic bias."[57] Though this is a plausible piece of the epistemic landscape of friendship, I noted that it may not satisfy those who want to capture the idea that friendship and epistemic rationality can be at genuine odds with each other.[58] The problem with this approach is that a partialist can always continue presenting cases that further stack the evidential deck against the friend. Absent a principled argument as to why reasons of friendship and epistemic rationality can never conflict, our goal should not be to explain why some particular belief is actually rational but rather should be to make sense of the cases in which friendship and epistemic rationality conflict—whatever those cases may be.[59] Acceptance explains how we can respond doxastically in cases where the evidence, by stipulation, does not rationally or psychologically permit a positive belief in our friends. In doing so, it may help alleviate the temptation to try to explain away all cases of apparent evidential irrationality in terms of, for instance, permissive standards of belief—because one (perhaps implicit) motivation for appealing to permissivism may precisely

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55 Arpaly and Brinkerhoff, "Why Epistemic Partiality Is Overrated," 42. See also Hieronymi, "Controlling Attitudes."

56 Williams, "Deciding to Believe," 148–49.

57 Kawall, "Friendship and Epistemic Norms."

58 For a recent characterization that frames the debate in these terms, see Woodcock, "If Epistemic Partialism Is True, Don't Tell Your Friends."

59 In general, I am skeptical of attempts to show that (even permissivist accounts of) evidentialism can *always* explain away conflicts between morality and epistemic rationality. See Traldi, "Uncoordinated Norms of Belief."

be to avoid running into worries about doxastic control. So although permissive epistemic standards, perhaps coupled with altered upstream epistemic practices, may well account for many cases where we believe differently about our friends than a disinterested observer would, we need not (and, I think, should not) assume that there can *never* be dilemmas that pull us between epistemic norms and moral ones. Acceptance—which is responsive to a wider range of reasons than the merely evidential—gives us the resources to explain what we owe our friends in those cases where what seems doxastically demanded by friendship also seems genuinely outside of what it is rationally permissible to believe based on our evidence.[60]

These arguments that the acceptance view can avoid worries of doxastic control or prescribed belief against the evidence draw our attention to another possible response to such worries—and a bigger issue in the background of the partialism debate. This is the question of what kind of normativity is at stake for partialist epistemic claims. Are partialists aiming for a *prescriptively* normative story that tells us, in a guidance-giving way, what we ought to do as friends? Or are they instead after a merely *evaluatively* normative claim that delivers assessments of how it would be *good* for friends to believe? Though I flagged above that some authors (arguably Keller and Stroud) talk in terms of what friendship can *demand* of us or what we can *owe* them, which suggests a prescriptive account, others explicitly offer merely evaluative assessments of friendship-beliefs.[61] This route may be less susceptible to worries about doxastic control, as it can plausibly be good for us to do things even if they are not under our voluntary control.

Whether to offer a prescriptive versus merely evaluative account represents another choice point for partialists. I take it to be an advantage of the acceptance view that it offers the possibility of a prescriptive story, appealing to the kind of (mental) action we can choose to deploy on behalf of our friends. Still, this is compatible with a merely evaluative assessment that sometimes our tendency to accept on behalf of our friends is good (at least from the perspective of friendship) without the stronger commitment that there are cases where we are *obligated* to do this. But for those sympathetic to the goal of explaining what an agent can decide to do when they find a conflict between what their evidence

60 There are big-picture questions in the background about rationality conditions for acceptance, including whether they should be understood in terms of merely practical or also partly epistemic rationality. This is an important theoretical question for the view, which I do not try to settle here. The key point is just that appealing to acceptance does not run into the *same* kinds of issues of irrationality that prescribing belief formation against the evidence does.

61 Crawford, "Believing the Best"; and Dormandy, "Loving Truly."

supports and the needs of their friend, acceptance offers us an actionable route towards navigating such situations.[62]

4.2.2. Objections from Friendship

The second group of challenges for the partialist view includes worries that we *should not* believe partially about our friends because some important goods of friendship require our beliefs to be rational and evidentially grounded.

There are several versions of this worry. First, in some contexts, having an irrationally partial view of our friends might interfere with fulfilling certain roles of friendship, such as giving good advice when friends face big life choices or risky decisions.[63] Sound advice-giving depends on having sufficiently accurate views of our friends; in this respect, irrationally favorable beliefs could make us *worse* friends. But all this shows is that we *sometimes* need honesty from our friends' beliefs. This does not rule out that in other contexts, we need partial beliefs—such as when our friends need support—rather than frank advice. Yet this maneuver poses its own problem for partialism: on standard accounts, beliefs are characteristically stable across contexts (barring changes in one's evidence). Thus, a friend who succeeds in adopting an irrationally favorable belief about my chances of business success in one context cannot simply discard that belief in a context where evidentially justified beliefs become important.

But there is a deeper version of the worry about rational belief in friendship: we want our friends to know and love us based on *who we really are*, not some fictionalized, idealized version of us.[64] And rational honesty may matter not only for assessments of our friends' flaws: Lindsay Crawford argues that even when we believe *well* about our friends, we should do so not because we think

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62 Another possible question about normativity concerns whether the normativity at stake here is epistemic, pragmatic, or a *sui generis* notion from friendship. See Stroud, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship," 502. This depends on one's views about these domains of normativity; I do not try to settle that here. Even whether the acceptance-mechanisms described here should be understood as epistemic or practical is a complicated matter; if one limits epistemic normativity to merely the norms that guide belief formation, acceptance could be categorized as practical, but one could reasonably also think that the question of whether a belief state plays its guiding role relates to questions of epistemic normativity.

63 Arpaly and Brinkerhoff, "Why Epistemic Partiality Is Overrated," 43; and Kawall, "Friendship and Epistemic Norms," 360. Both worry about such cases.

64 Kawall points out that if a friendship is based on systematic illusion about someone, we should worry that the friendship is flawed and "not a love of the friend herself, with her actual character and qualities" ("Friendship and Epistemic Norms," 361). Similarly, Mason proposes a Murdochian account of friendship that centers around knowledge of a friend's true character ("The Epistemic Demands of Friendship"). Both (but especially Mason) suggest that systematically irrational beliefs undermine the legitimacy of friendship, preventing one from loving and relating *to the person themself*.

that is how a good friend should believe but because we think those beliefs are rationally warranted—because we are attuned to the good qualities of our friends that justify those beliefs.[65] Crawford holds that this is necessary for authentic engagement with our friends.

Together, these worries charge full-blown partialism with undervaluing rational belief in friendship and—if partialists try to limit the scope of their claim to particular contexts—with being unable to explain how belief can be context dependent.

The acceptance view fares better on both fronts. It can handle the worries about honesty and authenticity related to knowing and loving our friends for who they really are, because the view recommends no *systematic irrationality* towards our friends. It makes no demands on the normal functioning of belief-forming mechanisms and so is compatible with thinking that having an accurate assessment of our friends is generally a component of friendship. The view merely holds that in some (exceptional) cases, we have reasons of friendship to prevent our beliefs from playing their characteristic guiding role in cognition, reasoning, and action—committing ourselves to a supportive stance towards our friends.[66] Further, the acceptance view holds up to Crawford-style authenticity worries: although it would perhaps be inauthentic to believe well only on the basis of reasons of friendship as a general matter, in the fraught cases at hand, reasons of friendship are precisely what we seem to be responding to. It is *because* of their friendship that Mateo accepts Shelby's innocence. This does not seem inauthentic; rather, acceptance explains how we can be responsive to reasons of friendship as such in these conflict cases.

The acceptance view also makes room for the idea that some contexts of friendship involve rational belief, and others involve partiality. Unlike belief, which is characteristically context stable, acceptance can be context dependent. Thus, explaining partiality in terms of acceptance gives us an important kind of discretion: we can accept when doing so would be beneficial for the friendship (e.g., when a friend needs someone to have their back) but not when rational belief is more valuable (e.g., when they need clear-eyed advice or an honest intervention). Keller too notes the need for this context sensitivity, writing, "Good friends treat each other differently under different circumstances, and a good friend often has the skill of being able to discern and respond to her friend's needs, as they are and as they change … and the same goes for belief

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65 Crawford, "Believing the Best."

66 On the role of acceptance in proleptic trust, see Frost-Arnold, "The Cognitive Attitude of Rational Trust." Frost-Arnold draws on Bratman's notion of acceptance in trust, where belief is not rationally permitted; the cognitive profile developed here works well with her account.

formation."[67] This feature, puzzling on the standard belief framing, is no problem for acceptance.

But perhaps there is a lingering worry about authenticity stemming from the lawyer example used above to introduce acceptance. Are the lawyer and the friend supposed to be the same—and if so, does this suggest another kind of inauthenticity from the friend? After all, we do not think of a lawyer accepting their client's innocence as being particularly authentic.

This worry allows us to spell out another nuance of the view: that the scope of the acceptance mechanism can vary across two key dimensions. The first is the range of contexts in which an agent deploys belief regulation mechanisms. A lawyer perhaps does so in professional or court contexts but seems limited to those—we would not think she should continue accepting when she is out socializing with her friends after the case has concluded. In contrast, friendship may motivate accepting across a much wider range of contexts. Second, there is the question of which characteristic effects of belief an agent regulates; someone can be more or less comprehensive on this dimension. The lawyer needs to change her patterns of courtroom speech and behavior but does not seem to owe her client a commitment to reasoning based on his innocence more broadly. In contrast, precisely what is attractive about acceptance in friendship is its thoroughgoingness: that it involves the regulation of a wide range of psychological responses. The comparison of the friend and lawyer holds a broader lesson: acceptance mechanisms can be deployed in a variety of ways, and how we *should* deploy them depends on the normative considerations in play. If we are accepting to fulfill the normative demands of a particular relationship, the scope of the acceptance mechanisms we should deploy depend on the nature of that relationship and what it takes to meet its demands. And friendship—or so partialists think—is a relational context in which the demands of acceptance can be particularly thorough.

But relational demands may not be the only considerations in play. Another worry for partialists concerns weighing reasons of friendship against other kinds of moral reasons. Consider, instead of cheating, an accusation of sexual assault: even if someone might in some sense be a good *friend* in accepting someone's innocence, they risk serious moral harm to the victim in doing so. This highlights that reasons of friendship are just one of the many considerations that govern acceptance. In deciding whether to accept, we must consider not only the needs of our friend but also various other kinds of moral factors, including

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67 Keller, "Belief for Someone Else's Sake," 28. Warman agrees, writing, "Friendship requires nuance. As friends we must master the fine art of recognizing when our friends need the benefit of the doubt, and when they need us to be especially cautious about the possibility of error" ("Epistemic Partiality and the Nature of Friendship," 386).

considerations of justice to others involved. In some cases (such as Cheating, which is relatively mild), reasons of friendship may dominate. In others, other moral concerns may outweigh friendship.[68] Figuring out when and whether acceptance is all-things-considered appropriate is part of the complex project of both friendship and morality. My goal here is not to defend whether acceptance is ultimately the right choice in any particular kind of case. Rather, as noted at the outset, I aim to show that *if* there are times when considerations of friendship seem to conflict with epistemic rationality, acceptance is a resource to explain how we should and potentially actually do handle these scenarios.

5. TWO WORRIES ABOUT COHERENCE

Let us briefly consider two worries regarding the coherence of an accepting agent.

5.1. Agential Incoherence

My argument contends that an agent can take a body of evidence to support a belief that p but also suppress that belief's guiding role. One might worry that this puts the agent in an oddly divided state: she concurrently takes herself to have sufficient reason to believe p (e.g., Shelby cheated) and also sufficient reason to act and reason on the basis of not-p (e.g., the case has not been made that Shelby cheated). Does this kind of internal division somehow threaten one's agential coherence?

The parallel to emotion regulation again helps us here. Emotions carry assessments of situations (even beliefs, on some views) and guide our downstream cognition and action. Yet it is uncontroversial that an agent can rationally appraise a situation as warranting an emotion—say, anger—but also recognize that expressing that anger outwardly or letting it structure her inner reasoning and thoughts is prudentially (or even morally) inappropriate. In other words, an agent can recognize anger as a *fitting* response to some situation—that it is "angersome"—and also recognize that she ought nevertheless to resist letting anger structure her reasoning, cognition, and action—because the anger is undesirable for reasons other than those relating to the fittingness or rationality of anger elicitation.[69]

This is a deeply familiar situation. A child might do something that rationally elicits their parent's anger; the parent might nonetheless have strong reason

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68   Baker (in "Trust and Rationality") and Rioux (in "On the Epistemic Costs of Friendship") agree that obligations of partial belief in friendship are *prima facie*.

69   D'Arms and Jacobson, "The Moralistic Fallacy."

to prevent that anger from affecting her cognition, reasoning, and action. A politician's opponent might say something angersome, yet the politician has strong reason to suppress her anger. And so on. The claim that an agent who prevents her anger from guiding her reasoning, thinking, and action as it would if left unchecked is somehow agentially incoherent simply lacks bite. Indeed, it seems a sign of her status as a globally integrated agent that she has the capacity to decide whether to let her emotions guide her or whether to override them.

My proposal is that emotion and belief are structurally and normatively analogous. We very often have strong reason to allow our beliefs to guide us; so too we often have strong rational reason to let our emotions guide us, especially when we have no reason to doubt that our affective systems are well attuned. But we do not and should not always leave our emotions—or our beliefs—unchecked. Just as we can appraise a situation as rationally warranting an emotion but nonetheless (for a different set of reasons) choose to suppress that emotion, so too can we assess a situation as rationally warranting a belief state but nonetheless (for a different set of reasons) choose to suppress that belief from having its usual cognitive and behavioral effects. This is not agentially suspect in the case of emotions; neither, I propose, is it for beliefs. In fact, our capacity to regulate these mental states actually expands our psychological agency rather than undermining it. And indeed, capturing this feeling of conflict is apt in the cases we are concerned with: these are precisely meant to be hard cases in which we feel pulled between competing significant values and considerations (e.g., rationality and accuracy versus friendship).

Is there still some remaining inauthenticity at stake here? Perhaps, insofar as there *is* a split between an agent's evidence assessment and how she decides to think and act. But the crucial thought is that the agent's doxastic intervention may well be more reflective of her values and commitment to her friendship than her mere evidence assessment is: she is, because of a commitment to her friend, intervening on the part of her belief process, over which she has control. This, I suggest, is not objectionably inauthentic or incoherent in quite the same way that the original concern worries about—because her commitment to her friend is entirely sincere. And this, I think, goes a long way towards getting us what we might want out of epistemic partialism.

5.2. Diachronic Incoherence

I suggest that acceptance avoids the partialist pitfall of directly prescribing belief against the evidence. But I also acknowledge that an agent who systematically redirects her patterns of thinking, reasoning, and acting may ultimately end up with different beliefs than she otherwise would have, as that restructuring affects the evidence she gets and how she understands it, what kinds

of inferences she does and does not draw, what questions she thinks through, and so on. This opens up a worry for the acceptance view regarding *emergent diachronic irrationality*: the accepting agent risks acquiring warped epistemic states down the line, ending up with beliefs that are less accurate than they could have been and that are inconsistent with her original beliefs—as a result of accepting for reasons of friendship rather than for truth-conducive reasons. In other words, even if acceptance does not prescribe immediate irrationality as full-blown partialism does, do its prescriptions nonetheless ultimately lead to irrationality, incoherence, or epistemic suboptimization down the line?

Such changes in underlying beliefs are indeed a possible consequence of sustained acceptance, as noted in section 3.2. However, I do not think this ultimately poses a serious problem for the acceptance view. First, there is the question of whether acceptance actually leads to belief change in any given case. It might or might not; this depends on how the agent's acceptance interacts with the evidence she has and continues to acquire. It is entirely plausible that if the evidential circumstances remain similar, the underlying belief itself will not actually change much.

But even when acceptance does lead to belief change, there are two key features about the way in which it does that help alleviate concern. First, the complaint against the full-blown partialist prescription of belief against the evidence is not a complaint about irrationality as such; rather, the problem is that it prescribes belief in response to reasons of friendship without offering a solution to the problem of doxastic control. Beliefs resulting from sustained acceptance (to the extent that they occur) avoid this issue because they are brought about via normal doxastic mechanisms—one does not accept with the stated goal of altering one's beliefs; rather, those changes result down the line from changes in the evidence that one has and how one understands that evidence. Because of this, we still avoid more the most pressing worries that face full-blown partialism about direct doxastic control and self-undermining in attempted belief manipulation.

Second, presumably, the beliefs likely to result from accepting on behalf of our friends are ones that are more favorable towards them. This may sometimes result in epistemic errors that we would not otherwise make—like if Mateo comes to really believe that Shelby is innocent when she is not. But other times, it may lead us towards accurate beliefs that we would not otherwise have—like if it turns out that Shelby really is innocent, despite the evidence being stacked against her. Notice that the pattern of errors this will bias an agent towards is consistent with partialist motivations: we might think that when it comes to our friends and loved ones, certain kinds of errors are more desirable than others—e.g., it might be better from the perspective of friendship

to believe a friend is innocent when she is guilty, than the reverse.[70] Though someone with no partialist sympathies at all might not find this an attractive result, to the extent that the acceptance view is trying to capture the intuitions motivating partialism, this pattern seems to be a virtue rather than a problem. So perhaps the accepting agent ends up with different beliefs and a different epistemic landscape than she otherwise would have. But whether this kind of incoherence is really a problem for the acceptance view is not obvious; to the extent that it is, it depends on the adjudication of more general debates about the importance of coherence, which will have to be met on their own terms.[71]

6. CONCLUSION

I have defended a novel position in the ongoing debate over epistemic partiality—namely, that in cases like Cheating, friends should *accept*. That is, they should regulate the characteristic guiding role of an unwanted belief across cognition, reasoning, and action. I have proposed that this offers a middle ground between the two traditional camps: simple evidentialism, which denies that friendship can give us reasons to believe (and thus which relegates any obligations of friendship to the domain of outward behavior), and full-blown partialism, which holds that we sometimes owe our friends belief against the evidence. I have suggested that the acceptance view captures the underlying motivations of each, highlighting the cognitive demands of friendship without eliding the value of rational belief, while being less susceptible to the most pressing objections against the standard views.[72] Whether acceptance is indeed enough to satisfy a

70 For a defense of this kind of idea for humanity more broadly, see Preston-Roedder, "Faith in Humanity."

71 See, e.g., Fogal, "Rational Requirements and the Primacy of Pressure"; Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" and "Why Be Disposed to Be Coherent?"; Lasonen-Aarnio, "Enkrasia or Evidentialism?"; and Worsnip, "The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence" and "Making Space for the Normativity of Coherence."

72 One could worry that acceptance still will not *really* satisfy partialists because partialists hold that our friends really want from us *genuine belief*, not belief-adjacent acceptance. We might imagine Shelby saying to Mateo, "I don't just want you to *accept* that I'm innocent. I want you to *actually believe* it." One tricky component of this is that 'belief' and 'acceptance' as used in this article are technical terms that may not map neatly onto folk language. (See also note 51 above.) For discussion of how these mechanisms relate to different conceptions of belief, see also Soter, "Belief's Guidance Function" and "A Defense of Back-End Doxastic Voluntarism." Let us redescribe this scenario without using either word. We could imagine Mateo responding, "Look, we both know the evidence looks bad [*showing his belief: assessment of the epistemic situation*], but you're my friend and because of that, I'm committed to not thinking that you're guilty even in spite of that evidence [*describing his acceptance*] and not letting this evidence shape how I think about or treat

committed partialist may depend on what precisely they think the psychological component of friendship demands; my goal has simply been to argue that acceptance can offer a much richer picture than we may have assumed, and I leave it to partialist sympathizers to decide whether they think this goes deep enough.

An additional goal of this article has been to show that acceptance can be a powerful tool for addressing questions in the ethics of belief. To that end, even if the acceptance view as a position within the epistemic partiality debate is not free from problems or limitations, I hope to have shown that when we dig down into the psychological profile of acceptance, we can see that it has more resources to diagnose the landscape of these cases than has often been appreciated.[73] Moreover, many of these insights come into focus specifically when we consider its cognitive dynamics—this angle, in particular, is a key novel feature of the present approach. That said, one possible upshot of this analysis is that closer consideration of the psychological demands of acceptance could lead to doubt regarding whether accepting really *is* a good thing to do in the end. As I have noted throughout, my aim here is thoroughly conditional: to offer a psychologically plausible account of an intuitive component of friendship but not to defend that we really do owe this to our friends. If it turns out that closer inspection of these psychological dynamics ends up leading us to doubt that acceptance is a healthy component of friendship in the end, then we have still made progress in the debate in a way that we would not have without thorough consideration of the psychological landscape.

A final theoretical advantage of the account defended here is that acceptance provides a unified framework for reframing diverse problems in the ethics of belief. Acceptance is not special to friendship; it is an independently plausible, general-purpose cognitive regulation strategy that we can deploy when we have moral or practical reason not to let belief play its default guiding role.[74] Accep-

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you at all." This, I think, strikes us as fair in the situation. Admittedly, it might not get us the strongest possible version of full-blown partialism, but as I say throughout, my goal is to offer an account of what we can actually do when we find ourselves in such unfavorable evidential situations regarding our friends.

73   Two notable exceptions to the tendency to dismiss acceptance as a solution are Jørgensen (published as Jorgensen Bolinger), "The Rational Impermissibility of Accepting (Some) Racial Generalizations"; and Begby, *Prejudice*. Jørgensen appeals to acceptance in the context of racial profiling-style generalizations, though the notion of acceptance she relies on is different than the one I develop here. Begby indicates his shared friendliness to acceptance as an approach to a range of puzzles in the ethics of belief. Though he does not develop the psychological profile in the way I do here, much about our views is compatible.

74   Similarly, Goldberg argues that a virtue of his account of how values can affect our upstream epistemic practices is its general theoretical soundness ("Against Epistemic Partiality in Friendship," 2235).

tance perhaps could help us understand a variety of tricky cases—for example, when an agent seems to have an evidentially justified but morally unsettling statistical belief or when accurate beliefs about one's chances of success are psychologically detrimental. That acceptance might help us in various issues with worries about doxastic control and practical reasons for belief at their heart is another consideration in favor of affording it a role in the epistemic partiality debate. Further, this account of acceptance strives to be psychologically plausible, aiming to describe processes that we *actually do undertake*. My hope is that acceptance thus described feels like a familiar part of our cognitive lives and of our friendships—that it captures a way of relating to each other that we really do deploy and that in at least some cases, it is good (from the perspective of friendship) that we do so.[75]

One of the central upshots of the acceptance view is that friendship can demand significant cognitive work. A commitment of partialists is that it is an essential component of being a good friend that we can think about friends in ways that we might not think about others. Though we may not be able to simply will away unwanted beliefs (or emotions) regarding our friends, we *can* exercise significant control over the ways in which these mental states structure our cognitive lives—and, at least sometimes, being a good friend involves making this effort. On the one hand, the fact that friendship requires this cognitive work is something that few likely want to deny. But on the other hand, working through this idea reveals something deeply important about the nature of our relationships to others: the needs and good of other people can make significant moral demands on how we structure our cognitive lives.[76]

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