

Knowing What We Can't Believe

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Abstract:

The aim of this thesis is to examine what affect, if any, finding an argument both unanswerable yet unbelievable has on three purported first-person doxastic constraints. The three proposed constraints are *the principle of truth*, *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation*. In Chapter 1, I lay out the claim of each of these constraints; differentiate them from one another, examine under what conditions they can be said to apply and provide what I take to be the strongest arguments for each of them. In Chapter 2, I explicate what I mean by finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I detail how it is that finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable could constitute a threat to each of these constraints. I conclude that while *the principle of adequate reason* is undermined in the face of this threat, both *the principle of truth* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* fail to be undermined by this challenge.

Table of Contents:

Abstract:	ii
Table of Contents:	iii
Acknowledgements:	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Three First-Person Doxastic Constraints	3
Chapter 2: Finding an Argument Unanswerable yet Unbelievable	29
Chapter 3: Examining <i>The Principle of Adequate Reason</i>	46
Chapter 4: Examining <i>The Principle of Epistemic Explanation</i>	63
Chapter 5: Examining <i>The Principle of Truth</i>	76
Conclusion:	88
References:	89

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine what affect finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable has on three purported first-person doxastic constraints. Each of these constraints, *the principle of truth*, *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* claims that there are certain things that we cannot believe about our beliefs.

What is so interesting about these constraints, in my opinion, is that if they are true, then there are certain second-order beliefs that we can *never* have. *The principle of truth*, for example, claims that I can never believe of one of my beliefs that it is false. While *the principle of adequate reason* states that if I attend to one of my beliefs, I can never believe that it is insufficiently supported by evidence. If *the principle of adequate reason* is correct then what this means is that for every belief I have, if I examine it, I will discover that I believe that I have good reasons to believe it.

Given the ubiquity of good arguments for unacceptable positions, I found this latter claim a little hard to believe. It seemed to me that there are times when despite finding an argument unanswerable, I was nevertheless unable to believe the conclusion. Given this it seemed hard to believe that we always believe that we have good reasons for any belief that we examine.

As a result, the main claim of my thesis is that finding an argument unanswerable and yet unbelievable challenges all of the above three proposed first-person constraints. Furthermore, while there has been some work done on the possibility of finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable, there is a gap in the literature on the effect that this would have on first-person doxastic constraints.

The aim of this thesis is to attempt to fill this gap in the literature. While there has been some work done on first-person doxastic constraints, none of the papers I have examined explores what affect finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable would have on these constraints.

Chapter 1: Three First-Person Doxastic Constraints

A first person doxastic constraint represents a first person, necessary limit on what it is possible for us as doxastic agents to believe about our beliefs. In other words, to say of x that it is a first person doxastic constraint is to claim that x represents a necessary restriction on what it is possible to believe.

One proposed example, which I term *the principle of truth*, is that it is necessarily impossible to believe that one of your beliefs is false. If we assume the veracity of this claim, then there is a first person constraint on what it is possible for us as doxastic agents to think about our beliefs. In this case, the constraint is that I cannot believe that p and at the same time believe that my belief that p is false. What this constraint is *not* saying is that we cannot believe something that is false, for it is clear that people believe false things all the time. Rather, what this constraint is saying is that should I recognise, or come to believe, that one of my beliefs is false I cannot continue to hold onto that belief.

Furthermore, this constraint is not a normative one but rather a necessary one. Rather than making the normative claim that ‘we ought not to have beliefs that we see as false’, the constraint claims that ‘we *cannot* believe p and believe that our belief that p is false’. The claim here is not that we should strive to become better epistemic agents, but rather that it is impossible to believe that one of your beliefs is false.

In this Chapter, I examine three purported first-person doxastic constraints. My own, what I have termed *the principle of truth*, Jonathan Adler’s *subjective principle of sufficient reason* and Ward Jones’ *first-person constraint on doxastic explanation*. *The principle of truth*, as we have seen, states that I cannot believe that p and believe that my belief that p is false. Adler’s proposed first-person doxastic constraint, the *subjective principle of sufficient reason* (hereafter *the principle of adequate reason*) claims that: “When one attends to any of one’s beliefs, one must regard it as believed for sufficient or adequate reason.”¹ While Jones’ *first-person constraint on doxastic explanation* (hereafter *the principle of epistemic explanation*) can be roughly spelled out as “I cannot believe that p and also accept a non-epistemic explanation for my believing that p .”²

¹ Adler, J.E. (2002) *Belief’s Own Ethics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, p. 27

² Jones, W.E. (2002) ‘Explaining our own Beliefs: Non-Epistemic Believing and Doxastic Instability’ *Philosophical Studies* 111: pp. 217-249, 217

The aim of this chapter is to examine these doxastic constraints and try to answer four main questions relating to them. 1) What is the difference between them? 2) How do they arise, and is it true that these constraints represent a *necessary* limitation on what it is possible for us as doxastic agents to believe? 3) Under what conditions can they be said to apply? Finally, and possibly most importantly, 4) what are the arguments that support the respective conclusions of *the principle of truth*, *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation*?

To answer these questions, I lay this chapter into four main sections. In Section 1, I explicate the difference between all three of the purported first-person doxastic constraints. In Section 2, I examine how these necessary constraints arise and lay out the significance of the necessary nature of these constraints. In Section 3, I examine under what conditions these constraints can be said to apply. Finally, in Section 4, I examine the arguments for each of the three constraints laid out above.

Section 1

All three first-person doxastic constraints claim that there are certain things that we cannot think about our beliefs. *The principle of truth* claims that I cannot believe that *p* and at the same time believe that my belief that *p* is false. *The principle of adequate reason* claims that when we examine any one of our beliefs we must see it as based upon sufficient or adequate reason(s). Finally, *the principle of epistemic explanation* claims that I cannot accept a non-epistemic explanation for one of my beliefs. At first blush, it is hard to see how these constraints differ. The aim of this section is to explicate the difference between the three purported first-person doxastic constraints.

The difference between the three purported constraints is perhaps best borne out by an example. Imagine Jane, who while playing Scrabble, believes that she is faced with two options. She believes that she has the option of either putting down a short word which, while scoring quite highly will endanger her points lead, or she can put down a longer word and score enough points to ensure her victory. Furthermore, Jane believes that she has the spelling of both of the words correct. What *the principle of truth* claims, is that Jane cannot believe of either of her beliefs that they are false. In other words, while Jane is pondering which of the two words to put down, she cannot believe that she

is wrong about the spelling of either of the two words. Given that Jane believes that she has the spelling of both words correct, *the principle of truth* denies that she can believe that either of these beliefs are wrong.

What *the principle of epistemic explanation* requires of Jane, is that should she be asked to provide an explanation for her belief that p_{lw} (were p_{lw} stands for ‘the longer word is correctly spelt’), she cannot claim that she believes that p_{lw} because she wants to win the game. While Jane may desperately want to win the game, if *the principle of epistemic explanation* is correct, she cannot think that her belief that p_{lw} is based upon this desire, or any other non-epistemic determinant. Rather, if she is pushed to explain her belief, her explanation must be an epistemic explanation—for example, ‘I have seen the word before’.

What *the principle of adequate reason* requires, alternatively, is that if Jane attends to her belief that p_{lw} she must think that the reason(s) for her belief are sufficient to justify the truth of her belief. In other words, not only must she be able to give an epistemic explanation for her belief, she must furthermore believe that the reasons she has for her belief are sufficient to back up the truth claim of the belief. In this case, these reasons may be things such as; she uses the word regularly and knows that this is how the word is spelt, she recently looked it up in the dictionary and remembers the correct spelling and so on. Thus, while *the principle of epistemic explanation* requires that we give an epistemic explanation when asked, *the principle of adequate reason* demands that should we attend to our belief we must be able to give an explanation of that belief such that we feel happy that our reasons are sufficient to warrant the existing belief.

The principle of truth therefore, denies that we can ever think that a belief that we hold is false, while *the principle of epistemic explanation* demands that every time we provide an explanation for a belief we provide an epistemic explanation for that belief. Finally, *the principle of adequate reason* claims that if I think about my belief I must see that the reasons that I have for that belief are sufficient to justify the truth of that belief.

Section 2

As mentioned earlier, first-person doxastic constraints are *necessary* constraints upon what it is possible for us, as doxastic agents, to think about our beliefs. The aim of this

section is to show how it is that there can be a *necessary restriction* upon what it is possible for us to think about our beliefs.

The claim to necessity that each of the three first-person doxastic constraints makes, is that we cannot believe certain things about our beliefs as a result of the concept, or definition of belief. In other words, we are constrained from thinking certain things about our beliefs as a result of what it is to have a belief. While the argument from the definition of belief to the claim that there are certain necessary restrictions upon what we can think about our beliefs will become clearer, in Section 4, I devote some time here to briefly sketch out how the arguments, in principle, work. Before I begin, it is important to note that it is undoubtedly true that in addition to myself, both Adler and Jones see their constraints as stemming from this definition of belief, and hence as necessary constraints upon doxastic agents. As Adler notes, concerning *the principle of adequate reason*, if “we know that we do not have adequate reasons for believing that [*p*], then we *cannot*, in continuing awareness of that knowledge, believe that [*p*] ... because it is a *conceptual impossibility*.”³ Similarly, Jones notes that the ‘cannot’ contained within *the principle of epistemic explanation* is not merely a contingent, or context dependent, one, but a necessary restraint about what it is possible for doxastic agents to believe.⁴

The argument for these constraints, in general, runs as follows. As Bernard Williams puts it, “to believe that *p* is to believe that *p* is true. To believe that so and so is one and the same thing is to believe that that thing is true.”⁵ To put it another way, beliefs are mental states that we think are true, or when I believe that *p*, as far as I am concerned *p* is true. This definition of belief, as Williams’ notes, can be summarised as “beliefs aim at truth.”⁶ Given this definition, the argument states that there are certain things that we cannot think about our beliefs. The reason for this is that beliefs, *viz.* beliefs, have certain properties *p*, and that to believe *these* certain things about our beliefs necessarily entails a situation such that we are trying to believe both *p* and not-*p*. Given that *p* is necessarily incompatible with not-*p* one can never be in such a situation. In other words, if it is necessarily the case that explaining one of our beliefs, non-epistemically, represents a

³ Adler (2002) pp. 25-26

⁴ Jones (2002) pp. 233-236

⁵ Williams, B. (1973) ‘Deciding to Believe’ *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge: CUP pp. 136-151, 137

⁶ Williams (1973) p. 137

case in which we directly contradict the definition of what it is to have a belief, we can never believe that p and explain that belief non-epistemically. To use another example, *if* it is part of the concept of responsibility that the agent must have been able to do otherwise, then any theory that claims that S was responsible despite the fact that S could not have done otherwise, represents a situation in which we are claiming ' p , but not- p '. To elucidate *if* responsibility requires that S could have done otherwise, then any agent S who could not have done otherwise is not responsible. Claiming that S is responsible despite being unable to do otherwise takes the form: 'In order to be responsible S must have been able to do otherwise (p), S could not have done otherwise but S is responsible (not- p)'. Since this is logically contradictory, it represents an impossible situation. The only way to resolve this is to give up one of our claims. In the example above, either that the concept of responsibility requires that S could have done otherwise, or that S was responsible. In the same way, the definition of a square entails that it has certain properties, p . As a result, the reason that one cannot have a square-circle is that the properties of circles necessarily entail that not- p . Trying to combine the two necessarily leads to a situation in which you are trying to create an object whose properties are both p and not- p at the same time, and this is necessarily impossible. Similarly, *the principle of truth*, *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* claim that given the definition of belief one cannot accept certain things about one's beliefs.

The significance of this claim is that, if it is correct then we can never contravene these constraints. In other words if *the principle of truth*, *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* are in fact necessary constraints, then I can never violate them, since any proposed counterexample ends up representing a logically contradictory, and therefore logically impossible situation.

First-person doxastic constraints, therefore, rather than representing some sort of circumstantial or contingent doxastic incapacity, prevent us from thinking certain things about our beliefs as a result of the very concept or definition of belief. Medieval Mary, for example, could not have had any beliefs about television programming—barring some sort of reliable soothsaying. But this constraint upon Medieval Mary's doxastic life is a merely circumstantial or contingent one. There is nothing about the *definition* of belief, or the definition of television for that matter, that stopped Medieval Mary from

being able to have any beliefs about television programming. While we may want to claim that Medieval Mary has *some sort of* doxastic constraint, the constraint is not a necessary one. Similarly, concerning action, while I am currently constrained from writing a thousand words a minute, this is a contingent fact about my current situation and me. There is nothing about the concepts of action, writing, time or human physicality that prevents me from writing at this speed. Rather it is my contingent physical make-up that prevents me from doing so. As a result finding a counterexample in no way undermines any of the concepts involved. Alternatively, should an occurrent counterexample be found for any of the above three first-person doxastic constraints, this serves to undermine the claim that the constraint is a necessary one. Given that first-person doxastic constraints, by definition, are necessary constraints, finding a counterexample undermines the claim that the constraint is a first-person doxastic constraint. And, for the same reason, any purported first-person doxastic constraint must show that the reason we cannot think certain things about our beliefs is that, in doing so, we would create a situation that was necessarily incompatible with the definition of belief.

Now if Jones, Adler and I are correct, then there are a number of things that we cannot think about our beliefs. Once again, the claim here is not that we ought not to think these things but rather that we cannot, and never will be able to, think any of these things.

Before I get to the arguments that support *the principle of truth*, *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation*, some clarification of the limits of these constraints need to be clearly laid out. I turn now to Section 3 in which I examine the conditions under which these constraints can be said to apply.

Section 3

All three first-person doxastic constraints purport to show that there are certain second order thoughts that we cannot possess in full consciousness. In other words, *the principle of truth*, *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* all dictate that we cannot have certain thoughts about other beliefs that we possess. Following from the fact that these are first-person doxastic constraints, there are certain

conditions under which these constraints can be said to apply. In this section, I lay out six conditions under which these constraints apply.

1. *First-person doxastic constraints apply only to particular beliefs.*

This first condition states that none of the above constraints can be said to apply if we apply them in general to our beliefs. *The principle of truth* comfortably allows me to say that I have some false beliefs—admitting to this, is simply admitting to the fact that I am a fallible epistemic agent. What I cannot do, if *the principle of truth* is correct, is believe of a *particular* belief that it is false. Similarly, *the principle of epistemic explanation* is not saying that I cannot think that I have beliefs that are non-epistemically determined, only that I cannot explain a certain belief of mine non-epistemically. As Barbara Winters notes: “it seems possible for me to believe that one of my beliefs is not sustained by truth considerations, so long as I remain ignorant of which belief it is.”⁷ And the same applies to *the principle of adequate reason*. It seems perfectly acceptable for me to say that I must have beliefs that are not based upon sufficient reasons so long as I am not talking about any particular belief.

2. *First-person doxastic constraints apply only to first person beliefs.*

As this second condition notes, while it is possible for me to attribute false, insufficiently supported and non-epistemically explained beliefs to other people, these three constraints apply only to my own explanation, thoughts or beliefs *about* my own beliefs. None of the above constraints set any limit to the judgements I make regarding any other agents’ beliefs. Rather, given that all of these constraints purport to be first-person doxastic constraints, these constraints only apply to judgements that I make regarding my own beliefs. So for example, when I examine a friend of mine’s beliefs, I am able to say any number of things regarding his/ her belief(s) without involving any of the above three constraints. However, whenever I attempt to explain, or make a judgement of one of my own beliefs, *the principle of epistemic explanation*, assuming its veracity, prevents us the use of non-epistemic reasons in the first person explanation of that belief. Similarly, while I can comfortably ascribe false, or unsubstantiated, beliefs to someone else without violating the respective constraints, both *the principle of truth* and *the principle of*

⁷ Winters, B. (1979) ‘Believing at Will’, *Journal of Philosophy* 76, pp 243-256, 245-246

adequate reason, if they are correct, prevent us from describing our own beliefs as false or evidentially unfounded.

3. *First-person doxastic constraints apply only to beliefs held in full consciousness.*

Given that first-person doxastic constraints are judgements about particular beliefs, it is clear that first-person doxastic constraints only apply to beliefs that I hold in full consciousness—i.e. beliefs that I am fully aware of, conscious of *et cetera* at the time. While I may make inferences to unconscious motives that I or another agent holds based on actions, desires and/ or other beliefs I observe, these judgements are not affected by any first-person doxastic constraint. For example, we can imagine a case in which Mr. Smith sincerely asserts that he does not have a racist belief, since by his own lights, racism is evidentially unfounded. However, when we examine Mr. Smith's actions, he regularly treats people of different race in such a manner as to suggest underlying racist beliefs. In this case however, none of the three constraints mentioned above is violated, since even if Mr. Smith has an unconscious racist belief he is unaware of this belief. Similarly, while I may suspect that I hold some belief that *p*, on the basis of my observed actions, unless I examine this belief in full consciousness it does not fall within the domain of first-person doxastic constraints.

4. *First-person doxastic constraints apply only to current beliefs.*

This fourth condition, similar to the second condition, states that the judgements I make concerning beliefs I previously had are in no way governed by any of the above three first-person doxastic constraints. It is quite conceivable for me to say of a past belief that:

I used to believe that my son was innocent, and that was because I loved him and could not face the fact that he is really guilty. I now believe that he is guilty.⁸

Should my previously motivated belief now find itself substantiated by the evidence I could say:

I used to believe that my son was innocent because my love for him blinded me to any evidence, but that is not true anymore. Now I clearly see that the evidence for his innocence is conclusive.⁹

⁸ Jones (2002) p. 224

⁹ Jones (2002) p. 224

In both of the above cases, I am able to make these claims without involving any of the above three first-person doxastic constraints. First-person doxastic constraints only apply to claims about beliefs that we currently hold.

5. *First-person doxastic constraints apply only to the actual thoughts, explanations or beliefs that S has for her belief, and not to the speech acts S makes about those beliefs.*

Fifthly and closely related to the second condition, is that first-person doxastic constraints apply to the actual judgements that S has made about her belief and do not apply to the speech acts that S makes regarding her belief. In other words, we must separate what S says about her belief from what she actually thinks, or believes, about her belief. What S claims is the explanation for her belief, from S's actual first-person explanation of that belief, must also be separated. For example, we can imagine a case in which John claims that he believes that female circumcision is wrong because he went to Nigeria. Or similarly we can imagine a case in which Jane claims that the reason that she believes her son is innocent is because she loves him. In these cases, we must be careful to separate the stated explanation from the actual explanation that Jane and John have for their beliefs.

To begin with, first-person doxastic constraints do not deal with insincere assertions, since these speech acts fail to provide an explanation for a belief that S has. If John is lying, then his stated explanation is no explanation at all, since John does not have a belief to which the stated explanation corresponds. Secondly, sincere assertions of belief typically contain no reason(s) as to why S holds a certain belief. For example, statements such as 'I believe that *p*', or more routinely '*p*', are made all the time without ever highlighting the reason(s) that S has for that belief. Given that first-person doxastic constraints apply to judgements made about certain beliefs, they do not apply to statements in which there are no overt judgements made about that particular belief. Thirdly, in those cases in which S's reasons are either stated or discovered, we must distinguish between two separate types of assertion. (1) Those assertions in which the reason(s) that S holds the belief is immediately clear to us and (2) those assertions in which the reason(s) that S holds the belief is not clear to us. In other words, in a case in which S's stated reason(s) for her belief that *p* is *n* there are at least three possible ways in which we can make sense of S's assertion. 1) *n* is able to immediately provide us with a

full and accurate picture of S's thoughts, beliefs and explanations for her belief that *p*. 2) *n* provides us with a full picture of S's judgements about her belief that *p*, but for some reason our interpretation of S's judgements is dissimilar from her own. In other words, we have misunderstood *n*. 3) *n* is unable to immediately provide us with an explanation as to why S holds the belief that she does; we do not understand *n*, *n* needs some clarification and so on. First-person doxastic constraints only apply to option 1). In other words, John and Jane are only providing us with a counter example to *the principle of epistemic explanation* if his/ her stated reason is the full and accurate explanation for his/ her belief. In cases such as these, we tend to assume that the stated explanation is only a part of the explanation for his belief; that John and Jane are tacitly smuggling in epistemic reasons for their beliefs. Thus the assertion 'I know my son is innocent because I love him', is probably better cashed out as 'I know my son. He has never done anything wrong and so I therefore find the implication that he is guilty to be untenable.' While the reason asserted was non-epistemic, the actual reason(s) for the belief was epistemic. In this case, inductive evidence based upon Jane's experience of her son. Though these reasons may not convince a Judge, or anyone else for that matter, it is clear that by her own lights, this reason would count as an epistemic reason. Similarly, John fails to offer a counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation* if the actual explanation for his belief is something like 'In the past I had not been exposed to certain evidence, and this was due to my context. However the change in context has concurrently led me to other evidence and this is the reason that I have subsequently revised my belief(s).' Thus as Jones' notes: "[what] looks like a non-epistemic explanation may actually turn out to be part of an epistemic one."¹⁰

6. *First-person doxastic constraints apply only to beliefs rather than some other mental state.*

Sixthly, finally, and perhaps most obviously, all three of the first-person doxastic constraints mentioned above, apply only to beliefs. While it may be the case that there are certain conceptual constraints upon what we can imagine, desire and so on, these mental states are not beliefs and, as a result, do not fall in the realm of first-person doxastic constraints. We must distinguish between claims such as: 'I like *p*, because of some non-

¹⁰ Jones (2002) p. 245

epistemic reason', from claims such as: 'I believe that *p*, because of some non-epistemic reason'. Claims such as the former are legitimately made all the time without having any effect on *the principle of epistemic explanation*: 'I dislike a certain type of American literature and this is because my English teacher liked American literature.' Or 'I like Chagall more than I like Monet, and I recognise that this is because my friends are fans of Chagall and not of Monet.' In these cases, not only do we have a mental state that is clearly held for non-epistemic reasons but, furthermore, we can happily acknowledge this fact. However, as I mentioned, these are not beliefs but something else. While our assertions of our tastes come from further second-order beliefs regarding these mental states, the original mental states themselves are not beliefs and as a result do not fall under the province of first-person doxastic constraints.

These six conditions far from representing an argument in support of any of the above three first-person doxastic constraints merely represent the limits within which any true first-person doxastic constraint operates. These limits arise out of what it is to be a first-person doxastic constraint *viz.* they deal with beliefs and not desires, current rather than past beliefs and so on. To recap, the six conditions under which first-person doxastic constraints apply are:

1. Thoughts, beliefs or explanations (judgements) of *particular* beliefs.
2. *First person* judgements of our beliefs.
3. Beliefs *held in full consciousness*.
4. *Current* beliefs.
5. First-person doxastic constraints apply only to *the actual thoughts, explanations or beliefs that S has* for her belief, and not to the speech acts S makes about those beliefs.

And finally

6. *Beliefs* rather than some other mental state.

All six of these conditions are necessary conditions under which first-person doxastic constraints can be said to apply. Thus, I can only be said to be offering a counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*, for example, if the belief that I think is to be non-epistemically explained fulfils all six of the above conditions and yet despite this, is still a belief that I think is to be non-epistemically explained.

With these conditions in mind, I turn now to laying out the arguments that support the three first-person doxastic constraints as conceptual constraints discussed in this Chapter.

Section 4

Before I lay out the arguments for the three first-person doxastic constraints, let us briefly recap. *The principle of truth* claims that I cannot believe that p and believe that my belief that p is false. *The principle of adequate reason* claims that “When one attends to any of one’s beliefs, one must regard it as believed for sufficient or adequate reason.”¹¹ *The principle of epistemic explanation* claims that “I cannot believe that p and also accept a non-epistemic explanation of my believing that p .”¹² All of these constraints apply under certain conditions. In order for a belief to fall under one of these first-person doxastic constraints, it must be the case that we talking about a specific, current, first person, *belief* that is held in full consciousness by that agent S . Further, this entails that any proposed counterexample to any of the above constraints, can succeed as a counterexample if, and only if, all of the above six conditions have been fulfilled.

Having said this, let us turn to defending these constraints. I begin with a defence of *the principle of truth*. I then examine the arguments defending *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* respectively.

Defending the principle of truth

As I mentioned in Section 2, any true first-person doxastic constraint prevents us from thinking certain things about our beliefs. This doxastic restriction, rather than representing a normative claim, spells out an inability to accept certain things about what we believe. Furthermore, this restriction arises from the definition or concept of belief. This inability occurs because in order to be able to accept these things about our beliefs, we would have to accept a logically contradictory claim and this is impossible. If the concept c entailed that q , and trying to do z entailed both that q and that not- q , then it would be impossible for z to occur. Given that z leads to a logically contradictory state of affairs, z is impossible. For example, the concept square in virtue of being a square has

¹¹ Adler (2002) p. 27

certain properties, q . Furthermore, these properties are entailed by what it is to be a square—i.e. the properties are necessarily entailed by the definition of square. Making a square-circle necessarily entails both that q and that not- q , since the properties of a circle are such that they are not- q . In trying to create a square-circle, therefore, we would be creating something whose properties were both q and not- q . However, a single thing cannot have both these properties. While circles and squares can exist independently of one another, trying to combine them creates a logically impossible situation. In this case, a single object whose total properties are both q and not- q . Given that a square-circle necessarily entails both that q and that not- q , a square circle is impossible. Any proposed first-person doxastic constraint, therefore, must show that the reason that we cannot believe certain things is not as a result of contingent fact, but rather a necessary restriction that arises out of the very concept of belief. Furthermore, this constraint is necessary in virtue of the fact that any attempt to violate it details a logically contradictory and therefore logically impossible situation.

Of all the proposed first-person doxastic constraints I have mentioned, *the principle of truth* is the easiest to defend. To begin with, as has been noted, when one believes that p , one also believes that p is true. As Adler puts it, “belief is the holding true of a proposition.”¹³ This stems from what it is to have a belief, as opposed to some other mental state. Furthermore, while it may be possible to have false beliefs lingering in the unconscious, or beliefs that are objectively false, if S and S 's belief meet the six conditions laid out above, S cannot believe that her belief that p is false.

The reason for this is that any belief of this nature requires one to believe that a logical contradiction is true. In the statement below the part of the sentence in bold represents a first order belief and the part in italics represents a second order belief.

I **believe that p** and I *believe that* [my **belief that p** is false]

To contravene *the principle of truth*, I must be able to believe the part in brackets. The part in brackets, however, represents a logical contradiction. If I believe that p , then I believe that p is true. To sincerely make the statement ‘my belief that p is false’ is to claim that you think it true that p and that you think it true that p is false—i.e. you think it

¹² Jones (2002) p. 217

¹³ Adler (2002) p. 30

true both that p and that not- p . This is impossible, since to believe this is to believe in full consciousness both that p is true and that not- p is true simultaneously. The second order belief that *the principle of truth* denies that we can ever have, is that this logical contradiction in brackets is true. In other words, *the principle of truth* denies that I can believe that [p and not- p] and this is clearly right. Asking S to believe the part in brackets is asking S to believe both that p is true and that not- p is true; that there are square-circles, or that Johannesburg exists and does not exist. One simply cannot believe, in full awareness of the fact, that a logical contradiction is true. In attempting to believe, in full consciousness, something that is logically contradictory, we are in fact trying to do something that is impossible, since any attempt to sincerely believe something that is logically contradictory is logically impossible.

The principle of truth, therefore, is a first-person doxastic constraint. I am unable to believe that p and believe that my belief that p is false, because in trying to do so we are asked to believe that a logical contradiction is true. Furthermore, it is clear that this logical contradiction arises out of the concept, or definition, of belief. Given that beliefs are mental states that aim at truth, we are unable to think that any logical contradiction is true since it is impossible to believe both that p is true and that p is false simultaneously.

Defending the principle of adequate reason

Before I examine the arguments for *the principle of adequate reason*, it is important to note that I will be using the terms 'justified' and 'unjustified' to mean 'supported by', or 'unsupported by', sufficient or adequate reasons, respectively. While Adler does not talk about beliefs in terms of justification, I believe that the terms, defined in this way, can be used here without affecting either Adler's main claim or his main argument.

As mentioned, *the principle of adequate reason* states that: "When one attends to any of one's beliefs, one must regard it as believed for sufficient or adequate reasons."¹⁴ The claim here is not that the facts must, objectively, be sufficient in order to provide adequate reasons for the belief, but rather that the believer herself takes the reasons she has for her belief to be sufficient or adequate reasons for her belief. For example, in the case of Medieval Mary, who believes that epileptic fits are caused by demons, even

¹⁴ Adler (2002) p. 26

though her belief is objectively false, it is enough to satisfy *the principle of adequate reason* if Medieval Mary *believes* that she has good reason to believe that demons are the correct explanation for epileptic seizures. Alternatively, *the principle of adequate reason* fails to be satisfied if, for some reason, Medieval Mary thinks that demons do not provide a sufficient or adequate reason for the phenomena of epileptic seizures and yet despite this, continues to believe that demons are the cause of epileptic seizures. What *the principle of adequate reason* defends is the claim that we cannot, subjectively, simultaneously believe that *p* and believe that *p* is held for inadequate reasons.

As *the principle of adequate reason* suggests, when I examine a belief that I hold in full consciousness, I *must* regard the belief as believed for sufficient or adequate reasons. If I acknowledge that my belief is as unjustified as an incompatible alternative, I am acquiescing to the fact that my belief is not held for sufficient or adequate reasons. If my belief is not based upon adequate reason, then according to *the principle of adequate reason* my belief disappears. As part of the concept of belief, Adler claims we cannot hold onto a belief that we take to be unsupported by sufficient reasons or evidence.¹⁵

Adler's claim, thus construed, holds a lot of intuitive appeal. When we find ourselves with what we take to be an unjustified belief it is not just that we think to ourselves, 'oh this belief is irrational'. Rather, our belief disappears. As Adler remarks: "The main reason to believe that [*the principle of adequate reason*] is a fact is that we find ourselves compelled to follow it."¹⁶ As this remark demonstrates, when we think one of our beliefs is unjustified, either our belief changes to the contrary, or we withhold our judgement. Saying that we 'ought to change our belief if we are to be rational' seems like prevarication: it simply fails to capture what it is to believe. In other words, when we are faced with counter evidence that we believe undermines the justification for our belief, we do not *will* some change such that our belief changes to fit in with what we perceive is rational. Rather, our beliefs change of their own accord when faced with compelling counter evidence.

However, none of what has been said so far indicates that the constraint upon us is a necessary constraint. While we may all accept that we would find it difficult, or even

¹⁵ Adler (2002) p. 25-26

¹⁶ Adler (2002) p. 27

impossible in practice to believe something that we simultaneously believe to be insufficiently supported by epistemic reasons, this does not entail that the constraint is a necessary constraint. Instead, this constraint may simply represent a contingent truth about us as doxastic agents. In fact, this is what I will defend in Chapter 3, but for now I will lay out the argument for *the principle of adequate reason* as a first-person doxastic constraint.

In order to show that *the principle of adequate reason* is a necessary constraint upon what we can accept about our beliefs, it must be shown that believing p and believing that p is, by our own lights, insufficiently supported by the evidence represents a logical contradiction. In other words, in order for Adler to show that his doxastic constraint is a conceptual, rather than circumstantial or contingent, constraint Adler must show that when I believe that p and simultaneously accept that my belief that p is unjustified I am actually believing both p and not- p .

Adler's argument runs as follows. Whenever you examine a belief you hold, in order to see your belief as aiming at truth, it is necessarily the case that you must also see that the reasons you have for holding the belief are sufficient to warrant the truth of that belief. Thus, if I believe that p , then upon reflection I must also believe that p is true or aims at the truth. Further, Adler claims, in order to believe that your belief does in fact aim at truth you must see your reasons for that belief as sufficient to justify the truth of that belief. As Adler puts it:

I believe that [p]. All that can secure for me the belief's claim of truth is adequate evidence (reason) of its truth. I lack adequate evidence. So I am not in a position to judge that [p]. So I do not judge it true. So I do not believe that [p].¹⁷

This seems to be right. To begin with, we seemingly cannot believe something if we acknowledge that we do not have sufficient or adequate reasons to believe it. As Adler notes, when we consider the challenge to believe that "the number of stars is even"¹⁸ we find ourselves unable to do so. The reason for this is that we do not believe that we have sufficient evidence to judge that the belief we form, either way, is true. What this failure suggests is that at the very least when we are aware of forming our beliefs, we must see

¹⁷ Adler (2002) p. 30

¹⁸ Burnyeat, M.F. (1983) 'Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?' In *The Skeptical Tradition*, Myles Burnyeat, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 117-148, 132

the evidence as being sufficient to form the belief in question. If we do not then it seems as though we cannot be sure that our belief aims at truth.

Similarly, should I discover myself with a belief that, by my own lights, is unjustified I have no way of knowing that my belief actually aims at truth and as a result, my belief disappears. So, for example, if I believe that my computer is on, I also believe that it is true that the computer is on. Furthermore, in order to think that my belief actually is true, I must think that I have good reasons to believe that the computer is on; I can hear the noise, see the lights flashing; and so on. Once again, even if I am in fact wrong about the computer being on, so long as I believe that it is on, and so long as I attend to this belief, I must think that I have good, or at least sufficient, reason(s) for holding this belief. Should I discover that I do not have good reason; I cannot hear noise or that the computer fails to respond when I move the mouse my belief disappears.

To lay the constraint out formally, *the principle of adequate reason* denies that I can ever have the belief below.

I believe that p and *I believe that [my belief that p is unjustified]*

As with *the principle of truth*, the section in bold represents a first order belief and the section in italics represents a second order belief. As I mentioned earlier, Adler claims that seeing one's belief as unjustified necessarily entails that cannot believe that one's belief is true—in other words one must accept that one's belief is false. In Chapter 5, I argue that Adler is wrong about this. That in fact the entailment from justification to truth, is a contingent rather than a necessary one. However, for the sake of this chapter let us assume that this entailment is necessary. Assuming that Adler is correct then the part in brackets can be spelt out as [my **belief that p is false**]. As we saw with *the principle of truth*, this part, in brackets commits one to claiming both that one believes that p is true and that one believes that p is false, and this, given the definition of belief, is necessarily impossible. Furthermore, any attempt to *believe that [my belief that p is false]* requires that one must believe a logical contradiction. In other words, one must believe both that one thinks it true that p and that one thinks it true that not- p . Once again, given what it is to believe, we cannot do this.

Assuming that Adler is correct then *the principle of adequate reason* does represent a first-person doxastic constraint. Any attempt to violate it represents a

necessary contradiction that arises as a result of the very concept of belief. In other words given what it is to believe we are curtailed from believing that we have a belief that is unjustified, since doing so always entails a logical contradiction.

As I have mentioned, I believe that Adler is wrong. I argue in Chapter 3 that there is a tenable counterexample to Adler, which undermines the claim that *the principle of adequate reason* is a necessary constraint. Furthermore, I explain where Adler's reasoning, above, has gone wrong such that it admits to this counterexample. However, before I get there, I wish to steer Adler's claim past one other objection which, while at first glance appears to undermine *the principle of adequate reason*, in fact can be dealt with.

The objection to *the principle of adequate reason*, that I wish to explore, is that we can drive a wedge between claiming that our belief is unsupported by the evidence and having that claim represent a logical contradiction. In other words, there do appear to be times in which we claim to hold a belief that is unsupported by the evidence and yet despite this, these claims do not appear to be logically contradictory claims. In the following four sentences, presented by David Owens, at least two of the sentences appear to be ones in which S is claiming to believe that *p* and at the same time asserting that her belief that *p* is unjustified.

- (1) I believe Jones is innocent but this belief is based on insufficient evidence.
- (2) I believe Jones is innocent but he is guilty.
- (3) The evidence is sufficient to establish Jones's guilt but I just can't believe that he is guilty.
- (4) Jones is guilty, but I don't believe it.¹⁹

In the above four sentences, options (2) and (4) are first person logically contradictory statements, if and only if S is simultaneously asserting both parts of each sentence as a belief that she currently holds in full consciousness and, furthermore, assuming that this assertion of S's belief includes the full range of epistemic reasons that S has for holding this belief. If this is true then S cannot hold either option (2) or option (4) as a belief since to do so represents a logically impossible and therefore untenable belief as spelt out by *the principle of truth*. However neither option (1), or option (3) are so easily dismissed.

¹⁹ Owens, D. (2002) 'Epistemic Akrasia' *The Monist*, Vol. 85, No. 3, pp. 381-397; 382-383

To begin with, both options (1) and (3) appear to be perfectly ordinary assertions. In other words, even if we ourselves have never uttered such a sentence we can quite easily imagine someone who has. With respect to option (3), Owens remarks: “[Option (3)] does indeed report an unhappy state of mind but not an impossible one. Most of us have had occasion to utter a sentence like (3) at some point in our lives.”²⁰ Furthermore, both appear, *prima facie*, to be claiming that S believes that *p* and furthermore that S concurrently acknowledges that her reasons are not sufficient to warrant her belief that *p*.

However, despite their initial plausibility as objections to *the principle of adequate reason*, both option (1) and option (3), on closer inspection, in fact fail as objections. To begin with, option (3) must be distinguished from option (1). While option (1) represents the clearest case of a potential counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*, all that option (3) is strictly committed to is something like ‘the evidence of Jones’s guilt is sufficient to satisfy some conventionalist norm of guilt’. In other words, the first part of the sentence ‘The evidence that is sufficient to establish Jones’ guilt’ details S’s belief that the evidence is sufficient for some observer to judge that Jones guilty. What option (3) *is not committed to saying* is that S believes that the evidence to establish guilt is subjectively sufficient to establish Jones’s guilt. For example, imagine that you are about to watch two of your friends, Jane and Mary, play chess. Before the game starts, Mary confides in you that she has learnt a cunning new opening in which it appears to the opponent that she will win but that at the last moment the trap will be sprung leaving the opponent in checkmate. While you are watching, another friend of yours, Bob appears and starts watching that game with you. After viewing the play Bob exclaims that Jane will probably win the game. If someone were to stop and ask why Bob believed that Jane would win while you did not, you might claim that ‘the evidence is sufficient to show that Jane will win, but I don’t believe that she will’. What this claim highlights is that while you can see why someone *would* believe that Jane would win you, given the knowledge that you have of the situation, do not. Similarly, claims such as option (3) above highlight the difference between the evidence S believes would justify some other person’s belief in Jones’ guilt from the evidence needed to cause her to believe that Jones is guilty.

²⁰ Owens (2002) p. 383

The answer to the threat posed by option (3) to *the principle of adequate reason* succeeds because the agent appreciates that there is a difference between the evidence required to satisfy her justificatory standards, and the evidence needed to satisfy other people's justificatory standards. In option (1) however, it is the same agent who states that she holds a belief p and furthermore that her belief p is evidentially unjustified. Furthermore, while certain instantiations of option (1) may fail to meet the fifth condition laid out in Section 2, we can imagine cases in which this assertion fully captures the belief it represents. If this is the case then it seems as though there can be times in which S holds a belief that remains despite being in contravention of *the principle of adequate reason*. If this is correct then *the principle of adequate reason* cannot be a first-person doxastic constraint, since, as mentioned, these constraints cannot admit to counterexample.

One possible way out of the challenge posed by option (1) is to assert that S is misguided. In other words S does have evidence for p but fails to recognise that she does so. For example, S may feel that the justification for her belief in Jones's innocence needs to cohere with evidence that would convince a judge. S however feels that she has no such evidence, but believes that Jones is innocent due to some other reason. One example of such a reason could be S has known Jones for a long time and does not think that Jones is capable of such an action. However, despite having this evidence S thinks that because this evidence is insufficient to persuade a judge it fails to be evidence simpliciter. Unlike examples which fail to meet the fifth condition, the situation above represents more worrying cases in which S may have no articulable evidence at all, but nevertheless still believes that Jones is innocent. In these types of cases, we imagine S to claim of her belief something along the lines of: 'I can't say why but I have the strongest feeling that Jones is innocent.'

The question now remains whether or not these hunches or intuitions can count as adequate or sufficient reason(s) for our beliefs. If they cannot then *the principle of adequate reason* cannot be a conceptual constraint, since it admits to logically possible counterexamples. As mentioned at the beginning of Section 1 of this chapter, the reason that conceptual truths admit to no counterexample, thereby gaining their indubitable status, is because any proposed counterexample ends up representing a logically

contradictory, and therefore impossible situation. Given that certain formulations of option (1) appear to represent a logically possible counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*, *the principle of adequate reason* cannot be a first-person doxastic constraint. However, I am inclined to believe that these hunches and intuitions can count as evidence for our beliefs. As Owens remarks: "One can judge that one is believing either against, or regardless of, the evidence without judging that one is believing against the facts."²¹ What Owens' remark highlights is that when we appeal to an intuition or hunch we automatically, and implicitly, bring in that this hunch or intuition points towards the truth. In other words, beliefs based on our hunches are nevertheless beliefs that we feel aim at the truth.

One objection to what I have said is that all I have done so far is to show that we must take our beliefs to be true or truth directed, and this, while satisfying *the principle of truth*, does not satisfy *the principle of adequate reason*. In order to satisfy *the principle of adequate reason* it must be the case that our hunches count as sufficient or adequate reason(s) for our belief(s). This objection fails, however, because it fails to distinguish between those reasons that will be sufficient to justify beliefs simpliciter, and those reasons that I take to be sufficient to justify my own belief. Once we have made this distinction, it is much easier to see how or why hunches and intuitions could count as sufficient reason to believe any proposition. Having a strong feeling that you are correct, or that one's belief aims at the truth seems to represent good reason for believing that your belief is true.²² Furthermore, it is important to note that because the content of your hunch or intuition is that your belief aims at truth, this hunch, or intuition, clearly counts as an epistemic reason from your perspective.²³

The answer to the challenge posed by option (1) then is that, while S may not have any articulable reason, if S has a strong feeling that her belief that *p* is correct this

²¹ Owens (2002) p. 382

²² I discuss this notion of epistemically justifying hunches in more depth in Chapter 3.

²³ It is interesting to note that hunches, or intuitions, can be objectively epistemically justified, either from an externalist or internalist position. Very simply put, a hunch is epistemically justified from an externalist position if S's hunch that \emptyset accurately corresponds with some fact \emptyset in the world. From an internalist position S's hunch, or intuition, that \emptyset is objectively epistemically justified if S's hunches or intuitions generally map onto the truth and S is aware of the correlation and consistency of her hunches to the truth. For a clear and simply exposition of these terms see Jay F. Rosenberg (2000) *Three Conversations about Knowing*, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. Indianapolis/ Cambridge, pp. 27-30

feeling, hunch, intuition, or appeal to instinct can serve as an epistemic and justificatory reason for S's belief that *p*.

I argue nevertheless that *the principle of adequate reason* does admit to counterexample, but for now I turn to the argument for *the principle of epistemic explanation*.

Defending the principle of epistemic explanation

The first argument for *the principle of epistemic explanation* stems from how difficult it is to believe anyone who claims that they believe that *p* and furthermore know that their belief is determined by non-epistemic determinants. As Winters elucidates:

Imagine an experiment in which the subject is truthfully informed that either a gentleman or a hungry tiger waits in the next room and that the outcome has been decided by the concealed flip of a fair coin. She is asked to believe at will that the gentleman is behind the door and is offered a choice of entering the room either (a) with a loaded revolver or (b) empty-handed. Suppose that after a suitable interval she cheerfully exercises option (b). We might conclude that she does believe that a gentleman is in the room. But we can take her to believe that she has this belief only by assuming that she is taking something as [epistemic] grounds for its truth, e.g., the lack of growling from behind the door, or that she believes that she once had such evidence and has forgotten it (or that she has severely limited knowledge of tigers). Only through such suppositions can we think she regards herself as having succeeded in believing that there is a gentleman in the room ...²⁴

As Winters' example shows, we seemingly cannot believe someone who espouses non-epistemic reasons as the cause of her belief. We tend to think that anyone who does so is simply being insincere; either about the fact that she believe that *p*, or about the fact that she thinks that her belief that *p* is non-epistemically determined. Furthermore, if we do come across someone who sincerely states: 'I believe that *p* and furthermore believe that my belief that *p* is non-epistemically determined,' we assume that they have mistakenly attributed to themselves a belief where there is in fact none. In the case of Jane, for example, who sincerely claims that she believes in God because she wants to go to heaven, we tend to say of Jane that she has no belief in God at all, rather she has some other mental state that she has mistaken for a belief. While Jane may hope that God exists

because she wishes to have a meaningful life, or lessen her fear of death, hopes do not equal beliefs. Jane may claim that she has a belief in God but in this case she has simply mistakenly attributed to herself a belief when in fact all there is, is some other mental state—in this case a hope.

However, as in the case of *the principle of adequate reason*, this does not show that *the principle of epistemic explanation* is a conceptual constraint. All that I have shown so far is that we would find it difficult to believe anyone who claimed to have a belief that was non-epistemically determined. In order to show that *the principle of epistemic explanation* is a conceptual constraint we must look at the claim 'I believe that *p*, but I don't believe that I have an epistemic explanation for my belief that *p*'. If this claim is reducible to 'I believe that *p*, but I believe that not-*p*', then we can claim that *the principle of epistemic explanation* is a first-person doxastic constraint. Alternatively, should the former statement not reduce to the latter one, then while *the principle of epistemic explanation* may represent a constraint upon what we can believe, it is not a conceptual one.

The strongest argument for *the principle of epistemic explanation* comes from an extrapolation of Williams's argument in his paper 'Deciding to Believe'. As we have seen, Williams claims that it is part of the concept of beliefs that when S believes that *p* S believes that *p* is true. Or more simply, I must see that my "beliefs aim at truth."²⁵ Thus, if in full consciousness I think that *p* is false I cannot continue to hold the belief that *p*. Extrapolating from this reasoning Jones argues:

The notion of a belief tells us that to believe that *p* is to think that *p* is true. It follows that in thinking about one of my beliefs, I must see it as an attempt to grasp some truth about the matter at hand. I have to see my beliefs as – in a phrase from Bernard Williams – 'aiming at truth'.... William's slogan is correct if understood as saying that any believer – including a wishful thinker – must view her belief as truth-aimed.... Thus, in acknowledging that I have a belief that *p*, I characterise myself as being in a state *only* for the purpose of being committed to the truth about the subject matter at hand. However, this view of my own beliefs is incompatible with explaining my belief non-epistemically. If I explain my doxastic commitment to *p* non-epistemically, then I am seeing my commitment as aiming for some goal other than truth, or for no goal at all.... Therefore,

²⁴ Winters (1979) p 250

²⁵ Williams (1973) p. 136

holding a doxastic commitment is essentially incompatible with non-epistemically explaining why one has that commitment; the two cannot exist, in full force, together.... [Given the veracity of this,] I *cannot* see a state as doxastic while fully endorsing a non-epistemic explanation of it. It simply does not make sense to see myself as both believing that *p* is true and being convinced that I do so because of factors that have nothing to do with *p*'s being true.²⁶ (My italics)

Jones' argument here seems correct. If 'beliefs necessarily aim at truth' then it appears to follow that one cannot see one's own belief as aiming at some goal other than truth or no goal at all. Doing so fundamentally undermines the very concept of belief and is therefore impossible.

Put another way, in order to contravene *the principle of epistemic explanation* S would have to **believe that *p*** and *believe that* [her **belief that *p***, was to be non-epistemically explained]. Given the definition of belief, the part in brackets can be spelt out as [I **believe that *p*** (*p* aims at the truth), my **belief that *p*** is to be non-epistemically explained (*p* aims at some goal other than truth)]. However, this part in brackets details a logical contradiction. As such, we cannot ever believe it. Asking us to believe this is asking us to believe that square-circles exist or that I exist and do not exist at the same time. As a result, *the principle of epistemic explanation* is a necessary constraint upon what we can believe.

One objection to this, as Jones himself notes, is that there do appear to be times when we ascribe a non-epistemic determinant to our own beliefs. As Jones points out, "The following story looks like a straightforward violation of [*the principle of epistemic explanation*]."

Mr. Cherry works at a bank. One day, in a reflective mood, Mr. Cherry thinks about his behaviour towards his customers. He realises that he treats his women customers pedantically. He concludes from this that he believes that all women are inferior. This is so in spite of the fact that he takes himself to have no evidence for this belief, and would never assent to it. He concludes that this belief is non-epistemically determined, perhaps by the social environment in which he was raised.²⁷

This seems to be a damning objection. To begin with, this sort of situation clearly does occur. While Mr. Cherry's plight is not an everyday occurrence, it is not so far fetched as

²⁶ Jones (2002) pp. 233-236

²⁷ Jones (2002) p. 239

to be impossible. Simply put, people do find themselves doing things that run directly against their own self-ascribed beliefs. Given that action is indicative of belief, these people, quite reasonably, conclude that they have beliefs that run counter to other beliefs that they hold. Furthermore, if this objection to *the principle of epistemic explanation* works, it undermines not only *the principle of adequate reason*, but *the principle of truth* as well. For given that Mr. Cherry has two opposing beliefs, one of them must be insufficiently supported by the evidence, and one of them must be false.

However, I think that this objection fails to undermine any of the first-person doxastic constraints we have discussed. It seems that in this case Mr. Cherry has mistakenly ascribed to himself a belief that he in fact does not have. For while it is true that some behaviour is indicative of underlying corresponding beliefs, not all behaviour is like this. While behaviour is a sufficient indicator of a corresponding belief not all behaviour is indicative of corresponding beliefs. For example, when I pull the hair of the girl in front of me, this behaviour (while it is clearly indicative of my beliefs that she has hair, is in front of me and so on) does not necessarily correspond to a belief that I dislike her. Should I, for some reason, conclude on the basis of my actions that I hold a non-epistemically determined belief, as Mr. Cherry has done above, what I have done is mistakenly attribute to myself a belief that I in fact do not hold at all.

Examples that are more difficult however, are things such as 'I have never invited my domestic worker to supper'. While this behaviour, in some cultures, may be construed as indicative of a corresponding belief that my domestic worker is inferior to me, this behaviour is purely a result of my social upbringing. It has not even occurred to me to invite my domestic worker for supper and yet neither myself, nor hopefully my domestic worker, feel as though this has anything to do with any underlying belief I have regarding her status as a human being. As Jones notes in answering his own objection

We can avoid attributing to Mr. Cherry such a peculiar belief were we simply to conclude that Mr. Cherry has a socially determined tendency to behave in certain ways towards women.²⁸

However, even in the case in which *we would* hold that my behaviour to my domestic worker is discriminatory, this does not necessarily indicate that I myself *believe* that my domestic worker is inferior: the practice may be based upon a belief that I no longer hold.

²⁸ Jones (2002) p. 240

If this is correct, then the example of Mr. Cherry fails for two possible reasons. His behaviour, far from highlighting that he holds onto the belief that women are inferior, is either residual behaviour based upon his past belief that women are inferior, or a result of his social upbringing which generally treats men and women in two different ways. It seems that should Mr. Cherry reflect upon the source of his behaviour it is likely that he would find one of two things. Either, 1) that the behaviour, but not the belief, is socially determined, or 2) that his behaviour is residual action based upon a previously (but no longer) held belief.

Importantly, I must once again note that the claim here is not that Mr. Cherry does not in fact have a sexist belief. All that *the principle of epistemic explanation* is claiming is that he cannot believe that he has one while sincerely asserting that this belief is based upon his social upbringing. If this scenario is correct, then it seems as though *the principle of epistemic explanation*, in addition to *the principle of truth*, is necessarily entailed by the very concept of belief. *The principle of truth* states, assuming that all six of the conditions laid out in Section 2 above obtain, that, given the very concept of belief, I cannot believe that p and believe that my belief that p is false. To be able to do so would require that one believes a logical contradiction namely *I believe that* [p , and that not- p]. This belief represents a logically contradictory state of affairs and is therefore impossible. Similarly, *the principle of adequate reason* claims that I cannot believe that p , and believe that I do not have sufficient evidence for p . Like *the principle of truth* above, the argument goes that, given the concept of belief, attempting to believe that we have a belief that is unjustified ends up representing a logically contradictory state of affairs: namely, '*I believe that* [p , and that not- p]. Finally, Jones' argument claims that, given the concept of belief, I cannot believe that p and believe that this belief is to be non-epistemically explained. To do so means accepting that my belief aims at some goal other than truth, which like *the principle of truth*, ends up representing a logical contradiction: namely *I believe that* [p , and that not- p].

Given that each of these constraints claims to be a necessary constraint, we can *never* contravene them since to do so places us in a logically impossible situation. However, despite the above reasoning I believe that at least *the principle of adequate reason* admits to counterexample. I turn now to Chapter 2 in which I will argue that if

there is even one agent who finds an argument, as Brian Ribeiro puts it, “unanswerable, yet unbelievable”²⁹, *the principle of adequate reason* is undermined as a proposed first-person doxastic constraint. I will then examine the effect that this counterexample has on both *the principle of epistemic explanation* and *the principle of truth* in chapters 4 and 5 respectively. I ultimately conclude that while *the principle of adequate reason* is undermined as a first-person doxastic constraint, both *the principle of epistemic explanation* and *the principle of truth* are saved.

²⁹ Ribeiro, B. (2002) ‘Epistemological Scepticism(s) and Rational Self-Control’ *The Monist*, vol. 85, no 3, pp. 468-477, 469

Chapter 2: Finding an Argument Unanswerable yet Unbelievable

In Chapter 1, I laid out three proposed first-person doxastic constraints; *the principle of truth*, *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation*. Each constraint claims that given what it is to believe, there are certain things we cannot believe about our beliefs. *The principle of truth* claims that we cannot believe that *p* and believe that our belief that *p* is false. *The principle of adequate reason* claims that if we attend to a particular belief we possess we cannot see it as unjustified.³⁰ And *the principle of epistemic explanation* claims that we cannot accept a non-epistemic explanation of any belief we hold. I noted that what was significant about these constraints was that if they are true first-person doxastic constraints they cannot admit to counterexample. For if these are first-person doxastic constraints, than any proposed counterexample that meets the six conditions under which these constraints apply (in Section 2 of Chapter 1) necessarily represents a logically impossible state of affairs. Since logically impossible things are impossible *simpliciter*, it follows that if all three constraints are first-person doxastic constraints then there could never be a counterexample to any of the three.

However, there is a counterexample that challenges these constraints, namely when an agent finds some argument as Brain Ribeiro puts it, “unanswerable, *yet unbelievable*”³¹. The argument against these constraints takes the form of a *modus tollens*.

1. If *the principle of truth*, *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* are *conceptual* constraints, then they cannot admit to counterexample(s).
2. (i) There are cases of persons’ finding an argument both unanswerable and unbelievable. (ii) This provides us with a counterexample to *the principle of truth*, *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation*.

Therefore,

3. These constraints are not *conceptual* constraints upon what we can believe.

³⁰ Once again, the terms justified and unjustified within the context of this thesis means supported by or unsupported by adequate reasons.

³¹ Ribeiro, B. (2002) ‘Epistemological Scepticism(s) and Rational Self-Control’ *The Monist*, vol 85, no. 3, pp 468-77, p 469

Whether or not the argument succeeds, is the work of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 respectively. The aim of this chapter is to examine what exactly this challenge, posed by finding any argument unanswerable yet unbelievable, amounts to. In other words, the aim of this chapter is to examine the validity of the first part of the second premise above.

To fulfil the aims of this chapter, I explore the notion of what it is for an argument to be both unanswerable and yet unbelievable in Section 1. Having defined this notion in Section 1, I then examine three arguments that have been seen by some as both unanswerable and unbelievable in Section 2. This will lay the groundwork for Chapters 3, 4 and 5 in which I examine what effect finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable has on *the principle of adequate reason*, *the principle of epistemic explanation* and *the principle of truth* respectively.

Section 1

The notion of finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable, in the sense required to fulfil the aims of this second chapter, must be distinguished from other ways in which an agent can respond to an argument. In responding to any argument, it seems as though there are at least six different options for how one may respond.

1. The reasoning in this argument does not convince me because I do not understand it. (I need to do more work to understand it).
2. The reasoning of the argument does not convince me because I can see exactly what is wrong with it.
3. I cannot see anything wrong with the argument, but it does not convince me. I suspect that this is because such arguments even if they are valid and sound, *cannot* convince.
4. I cannot see anything wrong with the argument but it does not convince me, so there must be *something* wrong with it.
5. I cannot see anything wrong with the argument, but the conclusion cannot be correct, so there must be something wrong with the argument. (Reductio ad absurdum.)
6. I cannot see anything wrong with the argument, in fact I think that this argument ought to persuade me. However, I do not believe the argument or its conclusion. (Unanswerable yet unbelievable.)

Of the six options above, two other options, other than option 6, can be said to represent a state in which S finds the argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable, namely

options 1 and 3. While option 4 represents a state in which S is seemingly unable to articulate her reasons for finding the argument answerable, it nevertheless remains the case that in option 4, S believes that the argument is answerable and should, therefore, be unbelievable. In all the other options, save for options 1, 3 and 6, S finds the argument presented to her answerable in some way. Option 2 is self-explanatory. And in option 5, S finds the argument's conclusion so ludicrous as to undermine the argument that supports it. While both options 1 and 3 spell out a situation in which S finds the argument both unanswerable yet unbelievable, the aim of this section is to spell out option 6 and to show exactly what finding an argument unanswerable and yet unbelievable, in this sense, amounts to.³²

As Ward Jones points out in the introduction to his paper 'Norms, Goals, and the Explanation of Beliefs', "[giving] an explanation of someone's belief involves having certain expectations of how she (or her belief) will behave in the face of counterevidence."³³ With respect to the epistemic norm regarding counterevidence, the standard expectation is that, *ceteris paribus*, should S believe that *p* and then encounter evidence that seems to entail that not-*p*, S either suspends her belief, or should the counterevidence prove conclusive, change her belief(s) accordingly. In order for an argument to be considered as both unanswerable and unbelievable, S must violate this epistemic norm. In other words in order for any argument to be both unanswerable and yet unbelievable, it must be the case that S meets certain conditions such that S violates the epistemic norm regarding counterevidence. One way of spelling these conditions out is as follows:

1. S believes that *p*.
2. There is an argument *A* whose conclusion *q* targets, or represents a challenge, to *p*.
3. S appreciates *A*.
4. S believes that *A* is true, S believes that there is nothing wrong with *A*, S cannot refute, undermine or defeat *A*.
5. Despite this, S is nevertheless unmoved by the argument, i.e., S still believes that *p*.

³² In Chapters 3 and 4, I examine whether or it is the case that all arguments that fit into option 6 are more rightly seen as fitting into option 3.

³³ Jones, W.E. (2002) 'Norms, goals, and the explanation of beliefs' p. 1 Unpublished

This notion of appreciation needs some spelling out. To begin with, it is clear that the agent must have encountered and understood the argument. If S has never seen the argument, or if S fails to grasp what the argument is about, neither she nor us is in a position to adjudicate what doxastic response S will have towards the argument. Furthermore, this notion of appreciation is a weaker notion than to be convinced by something. To be convinced of *A* is to appreciate the veracity of *A* and furthermore come to believe that *q* as a result of *A*. To appreciate *A* on the other hand is to recognise the force that *A* should have on your belief(s) if *A* is true.

In cases in which S finds *A* unanswerable yet believable the last three conditions can be spelt out as:

3. S appreciates *A*.
4. S believes that *A* is true, S believes that there is nothing wrong with *A*, S cannot refute, undermine or defeat *A*.

While the fifth condition becomes,

5. S believes *q*.

Similarly, in cases in which S finds the argument answerable or defeasible the last three conditions can be spelt out as:

3. S appreciates *A*.
4. S believes that there is something wrong with *A*; *A* is unsound, invalid, wrong and so on.

While the fifth condition becomes,

5. S believes that *p*, or that *q* is false.

Finding an argument unanswerable, and yet unbelievable, occurs when the agent both appreciates *A*, believes that *A* is true (or perhaps believes that there is no fault with *A*), and yet despite this is neither able to believe *q* or answer (defuse, undermine, defeat etc.) *A*. In other words, the fourth condition for an unanswerable, yet unbelievable, argument spells out a situation such that despite S having come to appreciate the force of the argument *A*, S is nevertheless unable to believe the conclusion of the argument *q*.

This represents an unusual doxastic state. You think that your belief should change in the face of the argument, given the epistemic norm regarding counterevidence, yet despite recognising this your belief fails to change. Spelt out in this manner it seems hard to imagine that this state can in fact obtain.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the reason why it seems so difficult to imagine, as Ribeiro points out, is that normally “as the evidence for *P* increases, so does my degree of assurance in *P*; and of course, as the evidence for *P* decreases or is problematized, my degree of assurance in *P* weakens accordingly.”³⁴ What Ribeiro’s remark illustrates is that when one of our beliefs is challenged with counterevidence, unless we can defuse the threat, our challenged belief is weakened or undermined completely. The stronger the unanswered challenge the weaker the belief that is being challenged. For example, my belief that Real Madrid is the best football side in Europe is weakened when they are beaten by lowly AEK Athens in the group stage of the UEFA champions league. This counterevidence gives me pause. While I may still assert that they are the best side in Europe I am now more likely to qualify my assertion of this belief with something like ‘but they can be beaten by any side on the day’. Furthermore, I may wonder from time to time if this is in fact correct. Alternatively, if my belief is that Real Madrid is unbeatable this counterevidence, assuming I become aware of it, completely undermines my belief. I can no longer hold it. While I may hold a similar belief such as Real Madrid have only lost a single game, I cannot continue to hold onto the previous belief while acknowledging the counterevidence. Furthermore, there is no voluntarism here. When I am presented with sufficient, or correct, counterevidence to one of my beliefs this belief changes, whether I want it or not.

However, in the case of an argument that is unanswerable and yet unbelievable this fails to happen. Despite acknowledging that there is strong counterevidence to your belief, your belief fails to change, and it is this that seems strange.

As it stands, finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable requires that *S*, and *S*’s belief, meets five conditions. Those conditions are:

1. *S* believes that *p*.
2. There is an argument *A* whose conclusion *q* targets, or represents a challenge, to *p*.
3. *S* appreciates *A*.
4. *S* believes that *A* is true, *S* believes that there is nothing wrong with *A*, *S* cannot refute, undermine or defeat *A*.

³⁴ Ribeiro (2002) p. 473

5. Despite this, S is nevertheless unmoved by the argument, i.e., S still believes that *p*.

Furthermore, this notion of appreciation in 3 spells out a situation in which S recognises the force that *A* should have on her belief(s) if *A* is true. Concerning the six ways in which S could respond to *A*, this notion of appreciation is instantiated in all of them except for options 1 and 3. In option 1, S does not appreciate the force that *A* should have on her belief because she does not understand *A*. And in option 3, S thinks that there is something about the nature of *A* such that it can *never* have any force on her belief. The further question is whether or not the five conditions, which spell out option 6, can in fact obtain? In other words, is it conceivable that any agent could find himself or herself in a position in which they are faced with an argument that they find both unanswerable and yet unbelievable?

I turn now to Section 2 in which I examine three arguments that have been seen to be both unanswerable and yet unbelievable.

Section 2

In this section, I briefly examine three arguments that have been seen by some as both unanswerable and yet unbelievable in the sense captured by option 6 above. These arguments are Descartes' Dream argument, Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument and an argument against the possibility of freewill. It is important to note that I do not need to persuade the reader that any of these arguments are in fact unanswerable. All I need to do to fulfil the aim of this chapter is show that being in a position of finding an argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable is tenable. I am not interested in getting the reader to a position in which he or she finds any of the above three arguments unanswerable, yet unbelievable. All I want to show is that the position of finding an argument unanswerable and unbelievable in the sense defined above is understandable. That is, it seems as though the reader could find him/ herself in this position, or may very well have been in such a position at some time in his/ her life.

The aim of this section, therefore, is to show that finding an argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable can in fact obtain—is understandable. I examine three arguments in which it is understandable that such a situation could arise, namely finding

an argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable. It is important to note two things. a) While all three of these arguments have been seen as unanswerable and yet unbelievable, they do not represent an exhaustive list of arguments that have been, or could be, seen as unanswerable and unbelievable. And b) I am not trying to bring anyone into a position in which one finds any of these arguments unanswerable yet unbelievable. All I am trying to accomplish is to show that it is possible to find an argument that fulfils the five conditions above. That being said, I turn now to Descartes' Dream argument.

Descartes' Dream argument

Roughly put Descartes' Dream argument attempts to undermine all beliefs based upon perception. Broadly put the argument runs as follows:

1. In order to come to know anything (perceptually) about the world, I must know that I am not dreaming.
 2. I do not know that I am not dreaming
- Therefore,
3. I do not know anything.

Even in this simple form, Descartes' sceptical challenge is obvious. If we cannot rule out the possibility that we are dreaming, then it seems as though we cannot claim to have knowledge about anything. As Jay Rosenberg notes: "It might seem to you that you are seated beside me in front of a computer, that we're both wearing blue shirts, and so on, while in reality you're wearing a nightgown and lying in your bed asleep"³⁵

Furthermore, as Rosenberg goes on to note, unless we can rule out the possibility that we are dreaming, it seems as though we can *never* be said to have knowledge about anything, since this sceptical challenge not only undermines the current set of perceptual beliefs we hold but in addition precludes the fact that we will ever have justified perceptual beliefs. If I cannot rule out the possibility that I am dreaming, then I cannot know that my perceptual faculties are reliable.³⁶

This seems right. If I do not know whether or not I am dreaming then it would seem presumptuous of me to make any knowledge claims about my perceptual beliefs. Doing so would mean that I was ruling out the possibility that I was dreaming. If this

³⁵ Rosenberg, J.F. (2000) *Three Conversations about Knowledge*, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. Indianapolis/ Cambridge, p. 6

³⁶ Rosenberg (2000) p. 6

cannot be done, then how can I rule it out? Any claim I make stands as much chance of being false as it does of being true.

It may be questioned that all we need to make knowledge claims is for our beliefs to be true. However, it seems as though we can imagine someone making a true claim without our wanting to ascribe knowledge to her. So for example, it may be contingently true that as you are dreaming about *A* you are in fact actually doing *A*. As G.E. Moore's example goes, there once was a Duke of Devonshire who dreamt he was speaking in the House of Lords and woke up to find that he actually *was* speaking in the House of Lords.³⁷ As this example illustrates, just because you are doing the same thing in actuality as in your dream, this does not mean that you *know* that you are doing it. It is pure serendipity. In the same way we would not ascribe knowledge to a pre-Copernican lunatic, who claimed the earth was round.

The best way to undermine Descartes' Dream argument, and thereby undermine the possibility that it is unanswerable, is to show that we can know when we are not dreaming. However, as Barry Stroud points out, the reason that Descartes' Dream argument is so powerful, and therefore seemingly both unavoidable and unanswerable, is because it seems impossible to find a way out of the possibility that we are dreaming.

As Stroud remarks:

Let us suppose that there is in fact some test which a person can perform successfully only if he is not dreaming, or some circumstance or state of affairs which obtains only if that person is not dreaming. Of course for that test or state of affairs to be of any use to him [that person] would have to know of it. He would have to know that there is a such a test or that there is a state of affairs that shows that he is not dreaming; without such information he would be no better off for telling that he is not dreaming than he would be if there were no such test or state of affairs at all. To have acquired that information he would at some time have to have known more than just something about the course of his sensory experience, since the connection between the performance of a certain test, or between a certain state of affairs, and someone's not dreaming is not itself just a fact about the course of that person's sensory experience; it is a fact about the world beyond his sensory experiences. Now strictly speaking if it is a condition of knowing *anything* about the world beyond one's sensory experiences that one know that one is not dreaming, there is an obvious obstacle to [that person's] ever

³⁷ G.E. Moore, *Philosophical Papers* (London, 1959), p. 245

having got the information he needs about that test or state of affairs. He would have to have known at some time that he was not dreaming in order to get the information he needs to tell at *any* time that he is not dreaming—and that cannot be done.³⁸

If Stroud is right then we cannot be said ever to know anything, since we cannot ever know whether or not we are dreaming. If it is always possible that we are dreaming, then not only can we can never be sure whether anything is true, but furthermore even if it coincidentally happens to be true, we can never be sure of this.

For anyone persuaded by this argument, it might seem that the argument is unanswerable. However, finding an argument unanswerable as mentioned, may mean a number of different things. The further question is, even if the same person finds the argument unbelievable, is this the right type of unbelievable to satisfy the five conditions laid out above? In other words, is it even possible for an agent to find an argument unanswerable and yet unbelievable in the sense required to fulfil the aims of this chapter?

In short, the answer is yes. However, before I examine Plantinga's Ontological argument and the argument against freewill, it must be noted that while it may well be the case that in the majority of the cases we examine, that it is one of the first five options that obtains, all I need to do to make my case is to show that one person fulfils the sixth option. What I wish to examine is whether or not it is ever possible to find this argument, or one like it, both unanswerable and yet unbelievable.

One possible example appears to be Stroud's claim

I would grant—indeed insist—that philosophical scepticism is not something we should seriously consider adopting or accepting (whatever that means). But does that mean that it is silly to worry about scepticism? I think it does not.³⁹

While Stroud is clearly not convinced by the argument, in fact he advocates against it, it seems clear that he does not think that sceptical arguments, such as Descartes' Dream argument are examples of arguments that reduce themselves into absurdity. Nor, does it appear as though Stroud believes that there is something about the argument such that even if it is valid it cannot convince. However, far from defusing the challenge laid down by the argument, this remark seems to suggest that Stroud, despite appreciating the

³⁸ Stroud, B. (1984) *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p. 21

³⁹ Stroud, B. (2000) *Understanding Human Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p. 1

argument, does not find himself convinced by it. Given the fact that Stroud appears not to fall into any other category it seems as though Stroud fulfils the five conditions needed for the sixth option to obtain. In other words, Stroud not only appears to find the argument unanswerable he also finds the argument unbelievable. Similarly, David Lewis remarks at the beginning of his paper, 'Elusive Knowledge':

We know a lot. I know what food penguins eat. I know that phones used to ring, but nowadays squeal.... I know that here is a hand, and here is another.

We have all sorts of everyday knowledge, and we have it in abundance. To doubt that would be absurd.⁴⁰

As Lewis' remark highlights he *believes* that he has knowledge. However, as Lewis goes onto point out "no sooner do we engage in epistemology... than we meet a compelling argument that we know next to nothing."⁴¹ In attempting to find a solution, thereby substantiating his belief that he has knowledge, Lewis ultimately concedes that his attempt to make the sceptical challenge answerable fails. As he puts it:

I said: *S* knows that *P* iff *S*'s evidence eliminates every possibility in which not-*P* – Psst! – except for those possibilities that we are properly ignoring. That 'psst' marks an attempt to do the impossible – to mention that which remains unmentioned.⁴²

As this remark from Lewis suggests, despite his efforts to substantiate his belief that he has knowledge, he is unable to do so. As a result, it appears as though Lewis must acknowledge the sceptical challenge as both unanswerable and yet unbelievable.

Perhaps the two clearest examples of people who appear to fall into the sixth option listed above are Richard Foley and Ribeiro. As Ribeiro notes regarding scepticism:

I am quite convinced that this argument is unanswerable. Indeed, I have been convinced of this for quite some time. I have considered all of its facets and many of the objections which people will be inclined to make against it, and I feel satisfied in a deep and abiding sense that it is a good argument. Strangely though, this argument does not move me in the least.⁴³

While Foley remarks:

⁴⁰ Lewis, D. (1996) 'Elusive Knowledge' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 74, No. 4 pp. 549-567, p. 549

⁴¹ Lewis (1996) p. 549

⁴² Lewis (1996) p. 566

⁴³ Ribeiro (2002) p. 475

[There] can be no non-question-begging guarantees that our opinions are true, and no non-question-begging guarantees that they are largely reliable....Skeptical worries are inescapable.... Accordingly, significant intellectual projects always require correspondingly significant leaps of faith.⁴⁴

Given the examples, it seems possible for us to find an argument unanswerable and yet unbelievable, though in doing so we must acknowledge that we violate the epistemic norm regarding counterevidence.

I turn now to Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument.

Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument

Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument is an argument whose conclusion is such that we must accept that God exists. Furthermore, like Descartes' dream argument above, and the argument against free will below, Plantinga's argument relies solely on deductive reasoning, which traditionally produces the strongest results. While inductive reasoning admits to the possibility of future counterexamples, and while abductive reasoning tacitly admits to the possibility of ignorance, deductive reasoning logically entails the conclusion. Thus, in order to undermine the conclusion of a deductive argument one must find, either something wrong with one of the premises, or show that the premises do not entail the conclusion. If on the other hand one is unable to either find something wrong with the premises, or show that the premises do not in fact entail the conclusion the argument becomes unanswerable. As I have noted, typically unanswerable arguments are believable. So, for example, when I show deductively that from $2x + 4x = 24$, $x = 4$, assuming that you appreciate, in the sense noted at the beginning of this section, the reasoning you come to believe that $x = 4$. Furthermore, this is not a situation in which you wonder whether or not you should or ought to believe that $x = 4$. Once you have seen the reasoning process behind it you automatically believe that $x = 4$. Given this, it seems hard to see how it is possible to see an argument as deductively sound and yet still find it unbelievable. On the face of it, either you should be able to find something wrong with the argument, in those cases in which you find the argument unbelievable, or you should believe the conclusion if you cannot undermine the argument. As J.L. Mackie puts it:

⁴⁴ Foley, R. 'Three Attempts to Refute Skepticism and Why They Fail', *From S. Luper (ed.) The Sceptics: Contemporary Essays* (Ashgate: 2003) pp, 61-73, 72-73

Ontological proofs of the existence of a god... purport to show that once we even entertain the relevant notion of a god we cannot deny his real existence. But they maintain that it is a mere logical coherence that requires this, so that we need no causal or quasi-causal inference to reach this conclusion. They make, therefore, very strong claims to rational cogency which it should be possible to settle definitely one way or the other.⁴⁵

However, despite this Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument has been found to be both unanswerable, and yet unbelievable. Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument can be spelt out as:

1. If a being is a perfect being, then it has all perfections essentially, i.e. in all possible worlds.
2. Necessary existence is such a perfection, i.e. A perfect being will have necessary existence in all possible worlds.
3. If a perfect being is possible, then that being has necessary existence in at least one possible world.
4. If a perfect being has necessary existence in at least one possible world, then it has necessary existence in all possible worlds.
(There is no possible world in which a perfect being can fail to have necessary existence, because that is what is meant by saying that it has necessary existence essentially. So if it has necessary existence in one possible world then it has it in all possible worlds. Think of iron: it possesses 26 protons essentially, i.e. in all possible worlds in which iron exists. There is no possible world in which iron exists and in which it fails to have 26 protons. Similarly, there is no possible world in which a perfect being can fail to have necessary existence).
5. There is a possible world in which a perfect being exists, i.e. a perfect being is not impossible.
6. Therefore, a perfect being exists in all possible worlds (by 4).
7. This world, the actual world, is a possible world.
8. Therefore, a perfect being exists in this world.
9. Therefore, there is a necessary being.⁴⁶

Formulated in this way, the argument looks difficult to undermine. Premise 1 seems to be entailed by the definition of a perfect being. As Peter van Inwagen points out:

⁴⁵ J.L. Mackie's (1982) *The Miracle Of Theism Arguments for and against the Existence of God*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 41

⁴⁶ This formulation of the Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument is Francis Williamson's. For an exposition of Plantinga's argument, see J.L. Mackie's (1982) *The Miracle Of Theism Arguments for and against the Existence of God*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 55-63. Plantinga's original argument appears in Plantinga, A. (1974) *The Nature of Necessity* Oxford University Press, especially Chapter 10.

Let us consider two (equally) wise beings, one of which has its wisdom essentially and the other of which has its wisdom only accidentally. This means that while one of the two beings would have been wise no matter what... the other might have been unwise. The nature of the former being is incompatible with un wisdom, and the nature of the latter is compatible both with wisdom and with un wisdom.

Now... which of our two beings is a better candidate for the office of perfect being? The example seems to offer fairly strong support for the thesis that the essential possession of a perfection brings a being closer to the status of "perfect" than does the merely accidental possession of that same perfection.⁴⁷

Premise 2 seems equally strong for surely something that exists necessarily is more perfect than something that exists as a matter of chance. As van Inwagen puts it "this does not seem to be an implausible assumption.... [A] being that has necessary existence is not dependent on the vagaries of chance, for its existence is absolutely inevitable."⁴⁸

Premise 3 looks equally secure. For anything that is not logically impossible is possible in some possible world and there seems to be nothing logically impossible about the notion of a necessarily existent being. Premise 4 explains itself, while if there are an infinite number of possible worlds premise 5 seems secure, since it seems that in one of them there is a necessary being. Premise 6 follows from premise 4, while premise 7 seems to be a truism. If this is correct then 8 follows from 1 through 7 and 9 follows from 1 through 8.

If this argument is correct there is a necessary being. Anyone who is unable to find any flaw in this argument finds the argument unanswerable. The argument is deductively valid and anyone who accepts that the premises are in fact true is logically entailed to accept the conclusion. The further question is whether or not someone who finds this argument unanswerable can also find it unbelievable.

As I have mentioned, I believe that it is. While some such as Mackie have found the argument answerable. Others have not. Sam Vice, for example, (a post-doctoral fellow at Rhodes University) admits to having been in a position such that she was unable to find anything wrong with argument, and yet despite this was unable to believe the conclusion. It is not the case that Vice has found herself with a belief in a necessary being which she would rather not have—for whatever reason. Rather, despite appreciating the

⁴⁷ van Inwagen, P. (1993) *Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 84-85

⁴⁸ van Inwagen, P. (1993) p. 85

argument and finding it unanswerable Vice still did not believe that a necessary being exists.

I turn now to one final example of an argument that has been found to be both unanswerable and yet unbelievable.

The argument against freewill

I think that it is fairly safe to say that all of us believe that we have a certain degree of freedom over our own actions. It seems to me that I can drink this glass of water in front of me or not—as I choose. Furthermore, that these actions are a direct result of that choice, and that choice is made in such a way such that if I rolled back time I could have done otherwise if I had chosen differently. As Thomas Nagel puts it, part of the notion of freedom is that “Nothing up to the point at which you choose determines irrevocably what your choice will be. [That] it remains an open possibility that you will choose [z] until the moment when you actually choose [y]. It isn’t determined in advance.”⁴⁹ This basic notion of freedom seems right. Most of us believe that when we want to perform z we can, but despite this it is still possible to have performed y, if we choose to, even if the circumstances leading up to our choice are exactly the same. The thesis of determinism however, seems to entail that this is false.

As van Inwagen defines it:

Causal determinism is the claim that a complete statement of the laws of nature and a complete description of the facts about the world at some time t_0 together entail every fact about the world after t_0 . If determinism is true, then all of our choices and actions are a *consequence* of the laws of nature and events in the distant past. But no one has, or ever had, any choice about what the laws of nature are; and similarly no one has, or ever had, any choice about what the facts of the world were at some time t_0 in the very remote past. Therefore, if determinism is true, then it follows that no one has, or ever had, any choice about any fact about the world after time t_0 —that is, no one has, or ever had the ability to do, or to choose, otherwise.

If this is correct then it is hard to see how we can be said to be free. If one of the facts in the world after time t_0 is that I will choose z, then it cannot be the case that I could have chosen y at all. I feel as though I could have done otherwise, but this is a mere illusion.

⁴⁹ Nagel, T. (1987) *What does it all mean?* Oxford University Press, New York, p. 49

For those committed to a mechanistic view of the universe in which everything in the world, including human beings, are material beings subject to the laws of nature, it is clear that determinism presents a fairly convincing argument. If you believe that there are no souls, and that ultimately everything in the world including yourself is a physical being subject to the laws of nature, then the argument above is going to be very strong indeed. However, while there may be some who believe that their every action is determined, there will be others who, despite appreciating the argument to the extent that they cannot answer it, or do not believe that it should be answered, will nevertheless be unable to rid themselves of the belief that they are free agents.

While there have been a number of attempts to reconcile these two notions—broadly defined as the thesis of compatibilism—many find this proposed solution untenable. As Nagel remarks:

According to this position, causal determination by itself does not threaten freedom—only a certain kind of cause does that....
I myself can't accept this solution.⁵⁰

While as van Inwagen, who accepts a libertarian notion of freewill, remarks concerning compatibilism “in my view it is a greater, deeper mystery that the one I accept.”⁵¹

Once again, I am not trying to persuade anyone that the compatibilist solution is wrong. All I am highlighting is that finding the determinist argument against the possibility of freewill both unanswerable and unbelievable is possible. While some such as Harry Frankfurt believe that the conflict is resolved by compatibilism, others as I have mentioned are not.⁵² Furthermore, some of these people still believe that they have freewill despite finding the argument against this possibility unanswerable.

While this clearly does not even begin to touch the complexity of the arguments for or against determinism, nor the various compatibilist attempts at a solution, I hope that the gist of the determinist challenge has been spelt out. If everything in the universe is physical then everything must react according to physical laws. Since we have no control over physical laws, ultimately, we have no control over what we can and cannot do. If you have no control over these things then you cannot be said to be free. If you

⁵⁰ Nagel (1987) p. 58

⁵¹ van Inwagen (1993) p. 198

⁵² For a fuller account of Frankfurt's compatibilist solution see Frankfurt, H.G. (1987) *The Importance of What we Care About*, Cambridge University Press, Chapters 1 and 2

accept the first premise, the rest seems to follow. And if you cannot deny this, but cannot believe this, then you are in a position of finding the argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable. Furthermore, while it may be the case, either that you find this argument answerable or that you find it believable, all I wish to have shown is that being in a position in which one finds the argument unbelievable and yet unanswerable is a tenable one.

Conclusion

If this is correct, then there do appear to be times in which it is possible to believe that p and yet find a challenge to the effect that not- p , unanswerable. Should you believe that your perceptions of the world are caused by the real world, the sceptical argument concludes that this belief is no more reasonable or justified than the belief that your perceptions are caused by a dream. Should you find this argument unanswerable we generally expect you to give up your former belief. However, if your belief remains despite the fact that the sceptical argument, by your own lights, is unanswerable it is clear that you are in a position of finding the argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable. Similarly, should you find Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument, or the argument for determinism, unanswerable we expect your beliefs to change accordingly. However, if your atheist belief, or your belief that you are a free agent, remains unchanged, even though, by your own lights, the challenge is unanswerable you are in a doxastic position of finding something both unanswerable and yet unbelievable. While this doxastic state is an unusual one it is nevertheless an understandable one.

It is equally important to note that these three arguments do not exhaust the list of possible arguments that one might find both unanswerable and yet unbelievable. Any argument, I take it, can have this peculiar effect upon an agent. One of my peers Gareth Watkins, for example, finds William Dempski's arguments for Intelligent Design both unanswerable and unbelievable, while many undergraduates who I have tutored find Peter Singer's argument for animal rights to be equally unanswerable and yet unbelievable. Other examples may include George Berkeley's arguments against materialism and F.H. Bradley's arguments against metaphysical pluralism. I have chosen to explicate these particular arguments, as I believe that they represent some of the

strongest arguments for some of the most unbelievable conclusions. Scepticism, for example, seems wholly unbelievable and yet the arguments for scepticism are particularly strong and difficult, if not impossible, to undermine.

Finally, it must be noted that given the nature of philosophy, finding certain arguments unanswerable yet unbelievable is even to be expected. In philosophy we deal with (and have done for hundreds of years) difficult problems which are often worded in terms of arguments for unacceptable positions. And it is doubtful that we would have an answer to every such argument that we encounter. Furthermore, while it may well be the case that in responding to these arguments we, for the most part, find ourselves in one of the first five options laid out above, it is understandable that in some cases we will meet the criteria for option 6. Namely, that there will be times in which, in coming to appreciate an argument, we find it both unanswerable and yet unbelievable.

I turn now to Chapters 3, 4 and 5 in which I examine what affect, if any, finding an argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable has on *the principle of adequate reason, the principle of epistemic explanation and the principle of truth* respectively.

Chapter 3: Examining *The Principle of Adequate Reason*

As I laid out in Chapter 1 *the principle of adequate reason* is a purported first-person doxastic constraint that claims that when I examine a particular belief that I hold I must see that belief as being held for sufficient or adequate reasons. Furthermore, in virtue of being a first-person doxastic constraint this inability, rather than a contingent inability, represents a necessary constraint upon what we can believe. In the case *the principle of adequate reason*, it was argued that seeing one's belief as true, or aimed at truth, necessarily entailed seeing one's belief as justified. Given the nature of this constraint, there can never be a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*.

In Chapter 2, I laid out what I take to be a possible counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*, namely finding an argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable. The purpose of Chapter 2 was to show that finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable was an understandable position. To show, in other words, that the position of finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable does and can exist.

The aim of this chapter is to show that being in a position in which one finds an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable represents a valid counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*. I argue that since this represents a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*, this principle cannot be a conceptual constraint. In this chapter, I do not show *how* the reasoning to support *the principle of adequate reason* in Chapter 1 has gone wrong—I leave that for Chapter 5. At present, all I want to show is that the argument for *the principle of adequate reason* *must have* gone wrong by showing that a tenable counterexample to this constraint exists. In Section 1, I explicate how it is that finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable provides us with a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*. In Section 2, I lay out how, in providing us with a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*, finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable undermines the principle's claim as a *conceptual* doxastic constraint. Finally, in Section 3, I examine if there is any way in which *the principle of adequate reason* as it stands, can be saved as a conceptual doxastic constraint.

Section 1

As I laid out in Chapter 1, *the principle of adequate reason* claims that “When one attends to any of one’s beliefs, one must regard it as believed for sufficient or adequate reasons.”⁵³ What *the principle of adequate reason* amounts to is the claim that when I examine any one of my beliefs, I must see this belief as being supported by epistemically valid reasons that warrant the truth of the belief. Once again, it is important to note that this restraint is restricted to first-person examinations of beliefs such that when S examines her belief that *p*, S *must* believe that her belief that *p* is justified.⁵⁴ The claim here is not that the facts must, objectively, be sufficient in order to provide adequate reasons for the belief, but rather that the believer herself takes her reasons to be sufficient or adequate reasons for her belief. For example, Medieval Mary, who believes that the earth is flat, satisfies *the principle of adequate reason* if she *believes* that the reasons she has are sufficient to justify her belief that the earth is flat. The fact that Medieval Mary’s belief is objectively false is irrelevant to *the principle of adequate reason*. So long as Medieval Mary believes that her belief is justified *the principle of adequate reason* is satisfied. On the other hand, *the principle of adequate reason* is contravened if Medieval Mary thinks that she has inadequate reason(s) for her belief that the world is flat, and yet continues to believe that the world is flat. As I mentioned above, finding such a counterexample would undermine the claim that *the principle of adequate reason* is a first-person doxastic constraint.

Finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable represents a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*. Simply put, finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable represents a situation in which we find ourselves holding onto a belief that we acknowledge to be undermined by the argument we find unbelievable.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable can be categorised as an unusual doxastic state in which five conditions obtain. These conditions are:

⁵³ Adler, J.E. (2002) *Belief's Own Ethics*, Massachusetts institute of Technology; Cambridge, Massachusetts. p. 26

⁵⁴ As in Chapter’s 1 and 2, I use the terms ‘justified’ and ‘unjustified’ to mean supported by or unsupported by sufficient or adequate reasons respectively.

1. S believes that p .
2. There is an argument A whose conclusion q targets, or represents a challenge, to p .
3. S appreciates A .
4. S believes that A is true, S believes that there is nothing wrong with A , S cannot refute, undermine or defeat A .
5. Despite this, S is nevertheless unmoved by the argument. i.e. S still believes that p .

As I went on to mention, this notion of appreciation is a weaker notion than the notion of conviction. To be convinced of A is to appreciate the veracity of A and furthermore come to believe that q as a result of A . To appreciate A on the other hand is to recognise the force the evidence should have on your belief(s) if A is true. In a case in which S finds A unanswerable yet believable S appreciates A , cannot find anything wrong with A and comes to believe A 's conclusion, namely q . In a case in which S finds the argument answerable or defeasible S appreciates A , finds that there is something wrong with A such that she is unmoved by A and continues to believe that p or believes that q is false.

Finding an argument unanswerable and yet unbelievable occurs when the agent not only appreciates A , but furthermore cannot refute A , believes A is true and so on and yet is neither able to believe q , or answer (defuse, undermine, defeat etc.) A . In other words, the five conditions for finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable spell out a situation such that despite S having come to appreciate the force of the argument A , S is nevertheless unable to believe the conclusion of the argument q nor defuse the threat posed by A . One other way to spell out this notion is to note that any argument that challenges any one of our beliefs represents a sceptical challenge to that belief. As Ward Jones notes, most sceptical challenges to our beliefs can be laid out into this form:

For each proposition in some group $p_1, p_2, p_3 \dots, p_n$ there is another group of propositions $q_1, q_2, q_3, \dots, q_n$ such that p_1 and q_1 are incompatible, and yet q_1 is as well supported ... [as] p_1 . Therefore for each member in the p -set we have no more reason to believe that it is true than we have to believe that the... q -set is true.⁵⁵

In answerable or defeasible arguments, such as doubt about our own existence, this competing q -set can be ruled out. Alternatively, in cases in which we are convinced by

the counterevidence S comes to believe this q -set. In those cases in which S finds the argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable, S sees that her evidence for the p -set, is no more justified than her evidence for the q -set and yet can neither believe the q -set, nor relinquish her belief in the p -set. In other words finding an argument, both unanswerable yet unbelievable means that we acquiesce to the fact that the q -set, is as justified as the p -set. As Jones puts it: "Given our evidence, we have no reason to believe that the q -set is not correct."⁵⁶ In admitting to this fact, we must also admit that we do not have adequate or sufficient reasons for our belief.

For example, imagine that Jane has examined Descartes' Dream argument. Further, Jane has tried to refute the argument, and yet, despite her efforts, finds the argument unanswerable. However, despite having recognised this, Jane still finds herself with the belief that naive realism is in fact correct. Once she has weighed up the evidence, Jane accepts that she holds a belief in naive realism despite the fact, that by her own lights, this belief is no more justified than the competing alternative; namely, that she is dreaming. What this entails, is that Jane in full awareness of the fact believes that p and yet acknowledges that her belief that p is unjustified. Jane knowingly holds a belief that she takes to be unjustified. Should Jane attend to her belief that p , given that she is unable to undermine q , she finds herself acknowledging that she believes that p , but that she has no good reasons for doing so. In acknowledging that she holds an unjustified belief, Jane contravenes *the principle of adequate reason*. Furthermore, it is important to note here that this contravention of *the principle of adequate reason* is not restricted to people who find Descartes' Dream argument unanswerable and unbelievable. Any argument that an agent finds both unanswerable and unbelievable puts S into a position in which it seems as though she must acknowledge that she believes that p , despite the fact that she simultaneously accepts that she has no good reason to believe that p . Should any agent find themselves acknowledging this then he or she clearly represents a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*. Given that *the principle of adequate reason* claims that one cannot ever both believe that p and accept that one's belief that p is unjustified, admitting to having a belief that we accept is unjustified, clearly

⁵⁵ Jones, W.E. (2000) 'Can we Infer Naturalism from Scepticism'. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol 50, No. 201, pp. 433-451, 434

⁵⁶ Jones (2000) p. 434

contravenes this principle. I turn now to Section 2, in which I lay out why it is that finding a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason* undermines its claim as a conceptual doxastic constraint.

Section 2

As I discussed in Chapter 1, first-person doxastic constraints differ from contingent or circumstantial doxastic constraints in that these constraints stem from what it is to have a belief. While contingent doxastic constraints can be violated once the constraining circumstances change, doxastic constraints that stem from the concept of belief cannot ever be violated. The reason that we can never violate a conceptual constraint, as I argued in Chapter 1, is that violating a conceptual claim is logically impossible. For example, *if* it is part of the concept of suffering that the agent who is suffering feel some sort of pain, whether it be emotional, physical or some other type of pain, then if S does not feel any sort of pain we cannot say of S that S is suffering. In other words, a necessary condition for S to be suffering is that S is feeling some sort of pain. Furthermore, any attempt to claim that any agent S was suffering but did not feel any sort of pain would detail a logical contradiction. S is suffering (p), S does not feel any sort of pain ($\text{not-}p$). Any sincere attempt to assert this type of logical contradiction is logically impossible, since you are simultaneously attempting to assert both that p and that $\text{not-}p$.

As I noted in Chapter 1, given that any sincere logically contradictory claim is logically impossible, and therefore impossible *simpliciter*, there cannot be a counterexample to any true conceptual constraint. In other words, if l is logically impossible there will never be an instantiation of l since l cannot occur. We will never discover a round-square or something that is both red and green all over; these things cannot occur. The reason for this is that the concept of roundness has certain properties p , while the concept of squareness has certain properties such that it is necessarily the case that $\text{not-}p$. If this is correct, then should we discover a counterexample to any proposed conceptual claim we must accept the fact that the claim is not a conceptual one.

The principle of adequate reason claims that if we are examining any one of our beliefs we must see it as justified. To do otherwise, *the principle of adequate reason* claims, necessarily entails that we have to accept that we have a belief (a mental state that

aims at truth) that aims at some goal other than truth. If this is a true first-person doxastic constraint, then it will necessarily be the case that whenever S attends to her belief, S will see her belief as being based upon sufficient or adequate reasons to warrant the truth of that belief. Should we discover a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*, then we must accept that although we do, as Adler notes, “find ourselves compelled to follow [*the principle of adequate reason*]”⁵⁷ this is merely a contingent psychological fact about us and not a necessary constraint upon what we can believe. In other words, for the most part, if I attended to my belief that *p* I would still find myself with the further thought that my belief that *p* is justified, even though this is not a necessary constraint.

As I have laid out in Section 1, it is possible for me to think of my belief that it is unjustified—as in the case in which, by my own lights, I find a certain argument unanswerable yet unbelievable.⁵⁸ Should I find myself accepting that I have an unjustified belief I have clearly contravened *the principle of adequate reason*. Given that I have done so, *the principle of adequate reason* cannot be a necessary constraint since by their very nature conceptual constraints do not admit to counterexamples.

What has gone wrong with Adler's argument is that entailment from justification to truth is a contingent, rather than a necessary one. As I laid out in Chapter 1, Adler argues that seeing one's belief as true necessarily entails seeing one's belief as justified. However, this claim is false. Seeing one's belief as true is clearly necessary because of the very definition of belief. Seeing one's belief as justified, on the other hand, is a contributory and sufficient factor to seeing one's belief as true—though not a necessary one. In other words, our reason for thinking that a particular belief of ours is true is if we believe that we have adequate or sufficient reasons for that belief. However, we can see our beliefs as true without necessarily seeing that this contributory factor has been fulfilled. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable means contravening the epistemic norm regarding counterevidence. Similarly, while seeing one's belief as justified represents an epistemic norm, it is not one that we have to fulfil in order to believe that our belief is true. While fulfilling these

⁵⁷ Adler (2002) p. 27

⁵⁸ It is important to note that there is no question of voluntarism here. I am not suggesting that we can choose believe that certain of our beliefs are unjustified. Rather what I am saying is that there do appear to



norms, I believe, represents a healthy doxastic state, it is not necessary for us to believe that they have been satisfied in order to continue believing something—as the counterexample above demonstrates. I discuss this again in Chapter 5 in greater detail, but for the moment I turn to Section 3, to see whether there is any way in which the necessary status of *the principle of adequate reason* can be saved. I examine three possible answers to the argument against the constraint.

The first is whether or not finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable necessarily falls outside the conditions under which first-person doxastic constraints apply. The second examines whether all arguments that have been seen as unanswerable yet unbelievable fall into the third option for how an agent could respond to an argument. Finally, the third attempted solution explores whether we can use the notion of first-person hunches or intuitions as a possible way of saving the necessary status of *the principle of adequate reason*.

Section 3

The aim of this section is to examine whether there is any way to save *the principle of adequate reason* as a first-person doxastic constraint. In this section, I examine three possible solutions. The first solution I examine is whether it is always the case that unanswerable yet unbelievable arguments fail to meet one or more of the six conditions, laid out in Chapter 1. These conditions lay out under what circumstances first-person doxastic constraints apply. If it is the case that finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable will always fail to meet one or more of these conditions then *the principle of adequate reason* is saved as a first-person doxastic constraint. The second solution I examine is to see whether or not it is the case that all arguments that could be seen as unanswerable and yet unbelievable necessary fall into the category, or type, of argument that cannot convince. If it is the case that these arguments by their very nature cannot convince, then there is no reason to think that our beliefs should change in the face of this counterevidence. Our epistemic reasons for believing that *p*, are no longer undermined, since there is something about these arguments such that they can never convince. The

be times in which we find ourselves with a second order belief to the effect that one of first order beliefs is unjustified.

third and final solution I examine is whether it is the case that finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable is in fact impossible. The argument here is those arguments that are *prima facie* unanswerable and unbelievable are in fact unbelievable in virtue of the fact that S always has an intuition or hunch to the contrary. In other words, in all cases in which S claims to find an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable, S is in fact being insincere. S in fact always believes that her belief that *p* is justified in virtue of some intuition, or hunch, that *p* is in fact correct. What each of these solutions amount to will become clearer as we go along.

For some concepts, there are certain conditions under which they can be said to apply. For example, *if* one needs to have been able to do otherwise in order to be said to be responsible, then it is part of the concept of responsibility that one must have been able to do otherwise. Furthermore, if one could not have done otherwise then one cannot be held responsible. In other words, finding out that S could not have done otherwise is an excusing factor. As I laid out in Chapter 1, first-person doxastic constraints only apply under certain conditions. Should we discover that one or more of these conditions have not been met then we can say that S need not have fulfilled that particular first-person doxastic constraint. One way of saving *the principle of adequate reason*, therefore, is to show that finding an argument unanswerable and yet unbelievable always represents a case in which S fails to meet one or more of these conditions. To recap, the conditions under which first-person doxastic constraints can be said to apply are:

1. Thoughts, beliefs or explanations (judgements) of *particular* beliefs.
2. First person judgements of our beliefs.
3. Beliefs held in full consciousness.
4. *Current* beliefs.
5. First-person doxastic constraints apply only to *the actual thoughts, explanations or beliefs that S has* for her belief, and not to the speech acts S makes about those beliefs.
6. *Beliefs* rather than some other mental state.

Should any proposed counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason* fail to meet one of these six conditions, then that counterexample fails to constitute a challenge to *the principle of adequate reason*. However, it is important to note that for this

objection to work it must show that whenever S finds an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable she *always* fails to meet one of the six conditions above. While it may be the case that some, or even most, of the potential counterexamples we examine fail to meet one or more of these conditions, all that is needed for *the principle of adequate reason* to be undermined is a single counterexample that satisfies all the conditions. In order for the objection against unanswerable yet unbelievable arguments to work, it must be shown that it is always the case that when S finds an argument unanswerable, yet unbelievable, S fails to meet one of the six conditions above.

For example, we can imagine a situation in which Jane, having examined Descartes' Dream argument comes to the conclusion that all of her perceptual beliefs are unjustified. In this case it may be argued that since Jane is not targeting a particular belief this counterexample fails to undermine *the principle of adequate reason*, since it does not meet the first condition under which first-person doxastic constraints apply. However, this will not always be the case. We can imagine that Jane having examined Descartes' Dream argument comes to the conclusion that her *belief* that she has knowledge is unjustified. In this case, given that Jane has met the first condition, it seems as though we have a counterexample to the principle of adequate reason. Even if Jane fails to meet one of the other conditions in this example, there will be examples in which Jane meets all of the six conditions. Similarly, it may be objected that in some cases Jane's mental state is not in fact a belief. Instead, Jane has a wishful thought, or desire, that she has knowledge. If this is the case, then it seems as though Jane does not have a belief that represents a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason* since Jane, rather than having a belief, has some other mental state. However, while it may sometimes be the case that Jane does not have a belief, there will also be times in which Jane clearly does hold a belief. While it may be difficult to know, or spell out, how we test Jane for beliefs such as 'I believe that I have knowledge of the world based on perception', there are other less difficult cases.

We can imagine a case in which Mary, having examined Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument finds the argument both unanswerable yet unbelievable. In other words despite thinking that the argument ought to effect her belief she nevertheless still continues to believe the contrary belief, despite the fact that her belief, by her own lights,

is unjustified. Given that Mary does in fact have a belief, it seems clear that in this situation all six of the conditions above are satisfied. Mary's belief is a particular belief. In this case, the belief that there is no necessary being. Mary's belief also meets the second condition since Mary is examining her one of her own beliefs. The third condition, fourth condition and fifth condition are satisfied since Mary is examining a belief that she holds at *this* moment. And given that Mary still holds the belief that there is no necessary being, then it is clear that she meets the sixth condition.⁵⁹

In this case, given that Mary meets all six conditions, it seems clear that Mary represents a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*. Mary continues to hold a belief despite the fact that, by her own lights, her belief is unjustified. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, to save *the principle of adequate reason* (by claiming that unanswerable yet unbelievable arguments fail to meet one or more of the six conditions above) it must be shown that there is something about finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable, such that it is necessarily entailed that every proposed counterexample will fail to meet one of the six conditions. While it may be the case that in some, or even most, of the potential counterexamples one or more of these conditions has failed to be met, all that is needed for *the principle of adequate reason* to be undermined is a single counterexample that satisfies all the conditions. The example of Mary above seems to be just such an example.

The second way in which we might save *the principle of adequate reason* would be to claim that all seemingly unanswerable yet unbelievable arguments have these properties in virtue of the fact that these arguments, while sound, admit of no conviction. As I noted in Chapter 2, of the six ways in which an agent could respond to any argument, three of these options could be described as instances in which S finds the argument both unanswerable yet unbelievable.

1. The reasoning does not convince me because I do not understand it. (I need to do more work to understand it).

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that the example of Mary is almost exactly how Vice describes her reaction to Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument. Vice admits that she felt as though the argument ought to have convinced her, but that despite thinking this she still found herself with the belief that no necessary being existed.

2. I cannot see anything wrong with the argument, in fact I think that this argument ought to persuade me. However, I do not believe the argument or its conclusion.

And,

3. I cannot see anything wrong with the argument, but it does not convince me. I suspect that this is because such arguments, even if they are valid and sound, cannot convince.

The objection to the proposed counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason* is to claim that any argument that we understand, and yet continue to find both unanswerable yet unbelievable necessarily falls into the third category above and not the second. If this is correct, then the proposed counterexample to *the principle to adequate reason* seemingly fails. In order for the counterexample to go through it must be the case that the agent understands the argument and yet despite this, the agent's response to the argument is the response detailed in 2 above. If it is necessarily the case that all arguments that have the properties of being both unanswerable yet unbelievable, and that S understands, fall into this third category then *the principle of adequate reason* is saved. This is because if these arguments *by their very nature* cannot convince, then there seems to be no threat to the reason(s) for our belief—since there is something about these arguments such that they *necessarily* fail to have any effect upon our beliefs. These arguments by their very nature are unable to undermine the reason(s) we have for our beliefs. Backing up this argument is the fact that, while arguments such as Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument appears to be sound, few people, if any, have been convinced by it. Similarly, there appear to be no examples of people who have relinquished their belief in the external world as a result of some global sceptical thesis. Furthermore, some philosophers such as David Hume, for example, appear to think that there is something about sceptical arguments such that they *cannot* bring about a change in our beliefs. As Hume remarks, in a footnote discussing Berkeley's arguments, that although otherwise intended

[Berkeley's arguments] are in reality, merely sceptical... *that they admit of no answer and produce no conviction.* Their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of scepticism.⁶⁰

While as Blaise Pascal notes regarding arguments for the existence of God:

⁶⁰ Hume, D. (1977) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/ Cambridge, p. 107

The metaphysical proofs for the existence of God are so remote from human understanding and so involved that they make little impact, and, even if they did help some people, it would only be for the moment during which they watched the demonstration, because an hour later they would be afraid they had made a mistake.⁶¹

As these remarks suggest both Hume and Pascal believe that there is something about these arguments such that they cannot convince us. If this is the case then these arguments in virtue of the fact that they cannot convince do not undermine the reason(s) that we have for our belief.

There are, however, at least three problems with this argument, two of which I will mention but not explore. 1) It is hard to know how to make sense of an argument that can be seen as both sound and unconvincing. In other words, if we acknowledge that a certain argument is sound what reason can there be for it not to be convincing? 2) Even if it is the case that these arguments are by their very nature unconvincing, does this mean that they fail to undermine the reason(s) that we have for the challenged belief? Simply because I am not moved by an argument does not necessarily entail that the argument fails to undermine the reason(s) that I have for that belief. However, I leave these questions unanswered. The third and more damning objection to this attempt to save *the principle of adequate reason* is that not all arguments that can be seen as both unanswerable yet unbelievable are going to fall into this category. While it may be the case that no one can become convinced that the external world does not exist, or that a necessary being exists as a result of these arguments, if one found any argument that had previously convinced someone of its conclusion both unanswerable yet unbelievable we would have a tenable counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*. For example, imagine that Jane's belief 'that racism is acceptable' changes in the face of a certain argument. Bob then examines the argument and yet despite understanding the argument he finds it both unanswerable and yet unbelievable. In other words, despite the fact that the argument, by Bob's own lights, undermines the reasons for his racist belief, Bob nevertheless continues to believe that certain people are inferior as a result of their race. In this case, given that the argument had previously had an effect on Jane's belief, Bob's belief, and his acknowledgement that it was unjustified, would count as a counterexample

⁶¹ Pascal, B. (1966) *Pensées*, Penguin Books, London, England, p. 86

to *the principle of adequate reason*. Similarly, if Bob were to find any argument *A* both unanswerable yet unbelievable, and if *A* had ever convinced anyone of its conclusion, the move above fails.

The third and final attempt I examine to save *the principle of adequate reason* is the claim that in every case in which *S* claims to find an argument unanswerable and yet unbelievable, *S* is misguided. In other words, *S* does have evidence for *p*, but either, fails to tell us what her evidence is, or fails to see her evidence as evidence. In the case that I am imagining, in which *S* is misguided, *S* has evidence but fails to recognise her evidence as providing sufficient or adequate reasons for her belief. For example, *S* may feel that the justification for her belief that *p* needs to cohere with evidence that would convince an impartial observer. *S* however, feels that she has no such evidence, but believes that *p* due to some other reason. We can imagine a case in which *S* believes that *p* because of *q*, however *q* represents some non-verifiable evidence; a divine visitation, an intuition, hunch and so on. In these sorts of cases, we could imagine that *S* might feel that since her evidence (*q*) is unlikely to convince anyone else that *p*, *q* fails to count as evidence simpliciter. In these cases, when *S* claims that she has no adequate reason for her belief that *p*, *S* is in fact misguided. As I discussed in Chapter 1, *the principle of adequate reason* deals only with first person justification of beliefs. Furthermore, I claimed that given that *the principle of adequate reason* deals only with first person justification for beliefs, a strong feeling, or intuition that *p* was correct, can be a sufficient or adequate reason to support *p* and therefore to satisfy *the principle of adequate reason*.

If this is correct, then is this not what occurs in the face of seemingly unanswerable and yet unbelievable arguments? Despite the fact that our belief(s) in naive metaphysical realism, atheism and free will are seemingly completely undermined by the respective arguments, upon examination we find that our belief(s) are in fact justified by our own lights. In virtue of the fact that we have a strong hunch or intuition that these beliefs aim at the truth they, therefore, satisfy *the principle of adequate reason*. In other words, we have an inarticulate feeling that there is something wrong with the argument, and that our belief(s) are in fact correct. Furthermore, it seems as though we have all been in a situation like this. Situations where, despite being unable to articulate what we find wrong with the argument, we nevertheless feel as though there is something wrong with

the argument, such that we are justified in continuing to hold a belief (or beliefs) in the face of this argument. I, for example, have this response when I examine Hume's argument against the reliability of induction. Despite being unable to find anything wrong with Hume's sceptical challenge, I nevertheless believe that induction is in fact reliable. Furthermore, when I examine this belief I discover that I have a strong feeling that there is something wrong with Hume's argument; I am just unable to articulate what that is. One way of cashing out these types of beliefs would be: 'I believe there is an answer to the challenge presented by this argument, but I don't know how to spell it out, articulate it, explicate it etc. As a result of this incommunicable reason I do not believe the conclusion of the argument and therefore, continue to hold the belief that *p*.

Bolstering this objection is the fact that it seems as though we have all been in a position like this, or at the very least, it is easy to see how this position is tenable. The woman who believes that her son is innocent, despite the fact that all the evidence points to his guilt. The man who continues to believe his wife is faithful to him, despite the evidence of her infidelity, represent, if not commonplace examples, then at least occurrent examples of beliefs that people have. And while it may be easy from a third person perspective to see these beliefs as motivated by some non-epistemic reason, it seems clear that, subjectively speaking, a strong feeling that one's belief is true seems sufficient to justify the belief. 'I don't know why but I have the strongest feeling that this is true.' These types of statements clearly indicate that the agent sees his/ her belief as aiming at the truth. As a result, this strong feeling is what subjectively does the justificatory work.

However, despite the plausibility of this attempt to save *the principle of adequate reason*, I believe that there are two main problems with it. The first is that not all intuitions, hunches and so on will be justifying intuitions. While there may be times in which S has an intuition that her belief that *p* is epistemically warranted, without being able to explicate her reason(s) for why this is so, there will be other times in which S has a feeling that *p* is true but also acknowledges that this feeling is nothing more than a wishful thought, or some non-epistemic reason. In these latter cases, S cannot appeal to her feeling to justify her belief, since wishful thoughts, hopes *et cetera*, do not count as epistemic reasons. The second problem with this objection is that it requires too much.

While it might be the case that in those situations in which we find ourselves faced with an argument for which there is no apparent answer we generally have a strong intuition or feeling that our contrary belief is correct, this is not always the case. In other words, to find an argument unanswerable can mean one of three things:

1. I do not have an answer and my belief(s) change accordingly; I am convinced.
2. I do not have an answer yet, but I think (have a hunch, intuition) that an answer exists such that I continue to hold the challenged belief.
3. I do not have an answer and furthermore I have a feeling that this argument is correct such that I find myself with an unjustified belief.

Option 1, represents a situation in which S finds the argument unanswerable but believable, while only options 2 and 3 represent possible situations in which an agent can be said to find the argument both unanswerable, yet unbelievable.⁶² In order to save *the principle of adequate reason*, we must show that in *every* instance in which an agent claims to find an argument unanswerable, and yet unbelievable option 2 has obtained. Furthermore, in order to show that option 2 always obtains, in those cases in which an agent finds an argument unanswerable and yet unbelievable, we would have to show that option 3 is impossible. Showing that option 3 is impossible means denying that anyone could ever be in such a situation. However, as I mentioned, while option 3 does not appear to be a commonplace doxastic occurrence, it does appear as though it does happen. As Brian Ribeiro confesses with regards to the argument for external world scepticism:

I am quite convinced this argument [for external world scepticism] is unanswerable. Indeed, I have been convinced of this for quite some time. I have considered all of its facets and many of the objections which people will be inclined to make against it, and I feel satisfied in a deep and abiding sense this it is a good argument. Strangely though, this argument does not move me in the least. (Though it is a strange personal confession to make) I have tried, quite seriously, to allow myself to be moved by it....

⁶² It is interesting to note that in cases such as these it may be objected that because S believes that *p* in virtue of a strong feeling that *p* is true, S actually believes that the argument is answerable, or that there is something wrong with the argument. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, one way of responding to any argument would be to claim that I cannot see anything wrong with the argument but it does not convince me, so there must be something wrong with it. Whether or not there is anything substantially different between this response and option 2 above is debatable. However, I believe that the objection to my claim fails either way.

But I am not moved. I still believe that I have a body and that my wife is real, that the floor before me really is there, and that I should act to insure the continued health of this apparent mortal coil. And yet I recognize that, by my own lights, I have no appropriate (justifying) reasons for believing any of these things.⁶³

As the above passage indicates, Ribeiro finds the argument for external world scepticism both unanswerable and yet unbelievable. Furthermore he is completely satisfied that this argument is unanswerable. In cases in which we find ourselves embracing something like option 2 above, part of what comes along with this feeling is that there is something wrong with the argument such that we are justified in maintaining our challenged belief. In the case above, Ribeiro has no such intuition.

While it may be objected that Ribeiro is being insincere, this objection does not rule out the possibility that all such assertions will be insincere. In other words, while it *may* be the case that Ribeiro has a hunch that justifies his belief, this does not rule out the possibility of some agent finding an argument unanswerable in the sense detailed in option 3 above. As I argued in Chapter 2, it seems that there can be arguments that, by our own lights, admit to no answer. Furthermore, admitting to no answer in these cases does not mean 'I feel as though there is an answer I just don't know what it is yet'—as in option 2 above. Unanswerable in these situations means that the agent is convinced that there is no answer to this argument and yet despite this she nevertheless finds the argument unbelievable.

If what I have argued in this chapter is correct, then *the principle of adequate reason* is undermined as a first-person doxastic constraint. If *the principle of adequate reason* was a necessary constraint upon what we could believe, then *the principle of adequate reason* would not admit to counterexample; since any proposed counterexample to a conceptual constraint represents a logical contradiction. Given that logical contradictions are logically impossible and therefore impossible simpliciter, we cannot have a counterexample to any true first-person doxastic constraint. However, *the principle of adequate reason* does admit to counterexample. Finding an argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable details a position in which S, by her own lights, holds a belief despite acknowledging that her belief is unsupported by sufficient or adequate

⁶³ Ribeiro, B. (2002) 'Epistemological Scepticism(s) and Rational Self-Control' *The Monist*, vol 85, no 3

reasons. Furthermore, attempts to save *the principle of adequate reason* fail. Given this then *the principle of adequate reason* cannot be a first-person doxastic constraint. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the reason that *the principle of adequate reason* fails is because the entailment from truth to justification is a contingent rather than a necessary one. What this means, exactly, will become clearer in Chapter 5. I turn now to Chapter 4, in which I examine whether finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable has any ramifications for *the principle of epistemic explanation*.

Chapter 4: Examining *The Principle of Epistemic Explanation*

In Chapter 3, I argued that finding an argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable, represents a counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*. I argued that since first-person doxastic constraints cannot admit to counterexample, finding an argument both unanswerable yet unbelievable effectively undermines the claim that *the principle of adequate reason* is a first-person doxastic constraint.

One way to spell out the counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason* is as follows.

1. Any argument *A* whose conclusion *q* represents an incompatible alternative to S's belief that *p*, challenges S's reasons for believing that *p*.
2. In cases where S finds *A* unanswerable we expect to find that S's belief that *p* will change to a belief that *q*, or at the very least that S will suspend her belief that *p*.
3. However, in some cases, despite S acknowledging that *A* is unanswerable S nevertheless finds herself with the continued belief that *p*. i.e. S finds the argument both unanswerable yet unbelievable.
4. Given that S's reasons for her belief(s) have been undermined, *to her own satisfaction*, S concludes that she now holds a belief (that *p*) that is based on insufficient, or inadequate, reasons—S acknowledges that her belief is unjustified.

Given that *the principle of adequate reason* is the claim that “[when] one attends to any of one's beliefs, one must regard it as believed for sufficient or adequate reason”⁶⁴, it is clear that the above represents a counterexample to the principle. The aim of this chapter is to examine whether or not finding an argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable, in the sense discussed in Chapter 2, represents a counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*.

In Section 1, I briefly recap the main claim of *the principle of epistemic explanation*. In Section 2, I lay out the challenge that finding an argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable poses to this principle's claim as a first-person doxastic constraint. Finally, in Section 3, I explore an attempt to save *the principle of epistemic explanation* as a first person conceptual doxastic constraint. I conclude, in this chapter, that as it stands *the principle of epistemic explanation* is seemingly undermined.

⁶⁴ Adler, J.E. (2002) *Belief's Own Ethics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, p. 26

Section 1

Roughly put, *the principle of epistemic explanation* is the claim that “I cannot believe that *p* and also accept a non-epistemic explanation of my believing that *p*.”⁶⁵ The reason for this, as Ward Jones elucidates, is that:

The notion of a belief tells us that to believe that *p* is to think that *p* is true. It follows that in thinking about one of my beliefs, I must see it as an attempt to grasp some truth about the matter at hand. I have to see my beliefs as – in a phrase from Bernard Williams – ‘aiming at truth’.... [This] view of my own beliefs is incompatible with explaining my belief non-epistemically. If I explain my doxastic commitment to *p* non-epistemically, then I am seeing my commitments as aiming for some goal other than truth, or for no goal at all.⁶⁶

The claim here is not that our beliefs cannot sometimes be non-epistemically determined. Nor is it that we cannot admit about our beliefs in general that some of them are non-epistemically determined. Rather *the principle of epistemic explanation* claims that given the nature of belief(s) we can *never* claim about a particular belief we hold that it is non-epistemically determined. The reason for this is that in doing so we are claiming that we have a belief (a truth-directed mental state) whose explanation is some non-truth directed cause, and this seems impossible. While we can imagine a case in which S clearly has a motivated belief, *the principle of epistemic explanation* demands that, given the nature of beliefs S in these situations will provide some sort of epistemic explanation of her belief. Furthermore, the claim is that S can *never* contravene *the principle of epistemic explanation*. If *the principle of epistemic explanation* is a true first-person doxastic constraint, then no one can *ever* believe that *p* and simultaneously provide a non-epistemic explanation for his/ her belief that *p*.

I turn now to Section 2, in which I examine whether finding an argument unanswerable, yet unbelievable represents a counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*.

⁶⁵ Jones. W.E. (2002) ‘Explaining our own Belief: Non-Epistemic Believing and Doxastic Instability’ *Philosophical Studies* 111: pp. 217-249, 217

⁶⁶ Jones (2002) pp. 233-235

Section 2

The proposed counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation* runs as follows. Some agent S, having examined some argument *A* with conclusion *q*, acknowledges that given *A* she has no reason to continue to believe that *p* rather than the incompatible alternative *q*, i.e. S finds the argument unanswerable. S acknowledges that her belief that *p* is therefore unjustified, where ‘unjustified’ means ‘unsupported by adequate or sufficient reason(s)’. However, despite S’s acknowledgement that her belief that *p* is unjustified S’s belief remains. S therefore deduces that her belief that *p* is non-epistemically determined and/ or sustained. In other words, in the face of an unanswerable yet unbelievable argument S infers that her reason(s) for holding onto the targeted belief(s), if the weight of the argument is appreciated, is non-epistemic. As Brian Ribeiro points out:

[Imagine our belief as] a table resting on four visible legs..., and think of the four visible legs as representing what you believe are the [epistemic] causes of that belief.... Now imagine being shown to your complete satisfaction, that none of your reasons were reasons at all, that none of them were any good. You would then imagine that the belief should “collapse” in just the same way we would imagine the tabletop smashing to the floor.... Now suppose that your belief *doesn't* collapse: What would you think? Presumably that there must be some other cause of you holding this belief, something which—though perhaps still not visible—was supporting the weight of the table top.... Can't be any form of [epistemic reason], so there must be a secret leg in the center supporting the whole thing—custom or habit.⁶⁷

As this passage suggests, finding an argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable, in undermining the epistemic reason(s) we have for our belief(s), forces us to accept a non-epistemic explanation for our belief. If this is correct, then we have a counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*. The counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*, hereafter **TCE**, can be laid out as follows:

TCE:

1. An unanswerable argument undermines the justification we have for a belief.

⁶⁷ Ribeiro, B. (2002) ‘Epistemological Scepticism(s) and Rational Self-Control’ *The Monist*, vol 85, no 3 pp. 468-477, 471. Ribeiro, in line with Hume uses the terms ‘custom’ and/ or ‘habit’ to refer to non-epistemic determinants or causes.

2. However, despite this challenge we are unable to give up the belief that the argument challenges. In other words, we find the argument both unanswerable and unbelievable.
3. Given that we cannot provide an epistemic explanation for our belief, the inference to the best explanation is that the persisting belief is, by our own lights, to be explained as non-epistemically determined. However, despite this admission we continue to hold the original belief.

If 1 through 3 represents a tenable position, then *the principle of epistemic explanation* cannot be a conceptual truth about us as doxastic agents. Rather *the principle of epistemic explanation* represents the way we commonly tend to respond if we discover ourselves with, or are accused of, having non-epistemically determined beliefs.

1 and 2 seem secure. Unanswerable arguments clearly challenge the justification of the belief(s) that they target. Furthermore, as I laid out in Chapter 2, there are occasions where despite being unanswerable an argument remains unbelievable. As Ribeiro confesses; with faced with external world scepticism:

I have thought to myself, "BR, you yourself will say that you have no adequate grounds at all for believing, e.g., that you have a body. This belief of yours is not justifiable and this, as you commonly avow, is a serious objection.... You take the search for truth seriously and regard epistemic matters with great earnestness. Come now and be mobbed by what you take to be an unanswerable argument.

But I am not moved. I still believe that I have a body and that my wife is real.... And yet I recognize that, by my own lights, I have no appropriate (justifying) reasons for believing any of these things.⁶⁸

Given the veracity of 1 & 2, 3 appears to follow automatically. Given that we find the argument both unanswerable and unbelievable, in the sense detailed in Chapter 2, we admit to the fact that all of our epistemic reasons have been undermined. If all of our epistemic reasons have been undermined, then, if we still continue to believe that *p* despite acknowledging that we have *no* justification for that belief, the reason that we hold the belief must be a non-epistemic reason. Given that the belief is held non-epistemically, it seems as though any explanation of the remaining belief must be a non-epistemic explanation. If this is correct, then we have a counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*. Finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable means acknowledging that we have no epistemic reasons for believing what we believe. In

acknowledging that we hold an unjustified belief, if we follow the reasoning above, we must accept of the belief in question that it is to be non-epistemically explained. Given that we continue to hold the belief, despite acknowledging that we have no epistemic reasons for the belief, the inference to the best explanation is that we have a belief that is to be non-epistemically explained.

If the above represents a tenable counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*, then this principle is undermined as a conceptual constraint upon what we can believe. As I have laid out in Chapters 2 and 3, conceptual constraints cannot admit to counterexample, since any attempt to do so details a logically contradictory and therefore logically impossible situation. Given TCE, the claim that *the principle of epistemic explanation* is a conceptual constraint is undermined. I turn now to Section 3 in which I consider how proponents of *the principle of epistemic explanation* might reply to TCE.

Section 3

One way of saving *the principle of epistemic explanation* is to show that proposed counterexamples such as TCE always fail to meet one of the six conditions under which first person conceptual doxastic constraints can be said to apply. To recap these six conditions are:

1. Thoughts, beliefs or explanations (judgements) of *particular* beliefs.
2. *First person* judgements of our beliefs.
3. Beliefs *held in full consciousness*.
4. *Current* beliefs.
5. First-person doxastic constraints apply only to *the actual thoughts, explanations or beliefs that S has* for her belief, and not to the speech acts S makes about those beliefs.
6. *Beliefs* rather than some other mental state.

Perhaps the strongest objection that could be levelled against people, such as Ribeiro, is to claim that Ribeiro has mistaken some other mental state for a belief. That when Ribeiro claims of his belief that *p* that it is to be non-epistemically explained, *p* far from

⁶⁸ Ribeiro (2002) p. 475

representing a belief represents some other mental state. As I discussed in Chapter 3, in its strongest version the objection runs like this: while it is true that some, perhaps even most, behaviour is indicative of correspondent, underlying beliefs not all behaviour is like this. For example, I have never invited my domestic worker round for supper. This behaviour may be construed as indicative of a corresponding belief that I think my domestic worker is inferior. However, as far as I am concerned it is purely a result of my social upbringing. It has never occurred to me to invite my domestic worker for supper and yet neither myself, nor hopefully my domestic worker, feel as though this has to do with any underlying belief I have regarding her status as a human being. However, even in the case in which *we would* hold that my behaviour towards my domestic worker is discriminatory, this does not necessarily indicate that I myself *believe* that my domestic worker is inferior: the practice may be based upon a belief that I no longer hold. The objection levelled at Ribeiro then is that his behaviour, far from highlighting that he holds onto the belief that his perceptual experiences are veridical, is residual behaviour based upon that belief. However, this seems plainly wrong. People who are persuaded by the soundness of Cartesian scepticism, and yet continue to behave in a normal fashion, are not simply exhibiting behaviour based on a previous belief. In cases such as these, the reason for the behaviour is the belief. When I place my cup of coffee on the table, despite the fact that I am convinced of the soundness of Descartes' Dream argument, it is not because this is some left over behaviour based upon my previously existing belief that the table will support it. Rather, the reason that I place my mug on the table, often without thought, is because I *believe* that the table will support my cup.

Furthermore, this strategy fails to save *the principle of epistemic explanation* for much the same reasons that it failed to save *the principle of adequate reason*. While it may be the case that some, or even most, apparent counterexamples to *the principle of epistemic explanation* fail to meet one of the six conditions above, this will not always be the case. While we can imagine all sorts of examples in which S fails to meet one or more of the criteria above, there will be some cases in which S satisfies all of these criteria. If there is even one case in which S finds an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable *and* fulfils all six of these criteria, the claim that *the principle of epistemic explanation* is a first-person doxastic constraint is undermined.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, there do appear to be such examples. One of the post-doctoral fellows at Rhodes University, Sam Vice, in the face of Plantinga's argument describes her doxastic state as one in which despite thinking that Plantinga's argument was unanswerable she nevertheless found herself with the contrary belief. Furthermore, at the time, Vice was referring to a particular, present belief that she held in full consciousness, which she nevertheless felt was unjustified. In other words, given that Vice was referring to one of her own beliefs, all six of the above criteria were satisfied. Furthermore, Vice, having examined Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument, was satisfied that, by her own lights, the argument was unanswerable. Vice describes being upset by the fact that her belief failed to change in the face of an argument that she took to be sound. Despite this acknowledgement, however, Vice's belief that no necessary being existed was unaffected. Having acknowledged this, had Vice followed the reasoning in TCE above, it seems as though she would have to admit that she was left in a position in which she believed that p and simultaneously acknowledged that her belief that p must be non-epistemically explained, given that her epistemic reasons had been, by her own lights, undermined. With this in mind, it seems as though there can be counterexamples to *the principle of epistemic explanation*. Furthermore, if such counterexamples exist, then *the principle of epistemic explanation* is undermined as a necessary constraint upon what we can believe.

The second way that *the principle of epistemic explanation* could be saved as a first person conceptual doxastic constraint comes from Jones' 'Can we Infer Naturalism from Scepticism'.⁶⁹ In the paper, Jones argues that despite the seeming soundness of the move from scepticism to naturalism, we are unjustified in making the inference.⁷⁰ Jones' main contention is that the inference to a non-epistemic determinant is premised around the fact that our beliefs would not diminish even if we were to appreciate the sceptical thesis, and that this claim is dubious. The condition he sets up, (SC), similar to 2 in TCE above, states that:

⁶⁹ Jones, W.E. (2000) 'Can we Infer Naturalism from Scepticism'. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol 50, No. 201, pp 433-451

⁷⁰ Jones' use of the word naturalism, I take it, simply refers to non-epistemic determinants. Thus within the Jones is questioning whether we ought to infer that our beliefs are non-epistemically determined, even if, by our own lights, they are unjustified. For the sake of this chapter, the term naturalism will simply be shorthand for non-epistemic determinants.

Even if we were to appreciate Humean (or Cartesian or Goodmanian) wider-scoped sceptical theses, our beliefs would not diminish.⁷¹

Jones argues that (SC) seems problematic for three reasons.

- a) One worry is that it might be thought that the state of affairs described in (SC)'s antecedent is impossible, that it is not possible for someone to be *convinced* by a global sceptical thesis.⁷² (My italics).
- b) (SC) is unacceptable, not because its antecedent is impossible, but because it is outright false. [Given that our beliefs change when are convinced by narrow sceptical theses, and given that the] difference between narrow and wide-scoped sceptical these is merely a matter of degree, then there is every reason to think that [our beliefs in the external world, for example,] would weaken were we to become *convinced* of Cartesian scepticism.⁷³ (My italics).

Finally,

- c) [Even if] we had reason to accept (SC), then we would know that the *entirety* of our beliefs in the external world and unobserved facts would not weaken in the face of accepted global scepticism. However, in order to conclude from this that... naturalism is true, we would still need to decide whether this is due (a) to some property of the beliefs it targets, or (b) to a property of the sceptical thesis itself. It must be the former, if we are to conclude that these beliefs are non-epistemically determined.⁷⁴

The objection from a) much like the objection raised in Chapter 3 claims that, while arguments such as Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument appear to be sound, few people, if any, have ever been convinced by it. In other words, in all the examples of unanswerable yet unbelievable arguments that we have looked at, it seems as though, despite the fact that many people have seen these arguments as sound, few, if any, of these people are convinced by such arguments. David Lewis, Richard Foley and Barry Stroud, for example, in finding scepticism unavoidable, all appear to find various formulations of sceptical arguments sound, and yet despite this do not believe the conclusion.⁷⁵ Perhaps, as a) suggests, this is because it is impossible to be convinced by such arguments. Furthermore, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, even those who are convinced by conclusions such as 'there is a necessary being', do not appear to arrive at this conclusion as a result of arguments such as Plantinga's Modal Ontological argument. What this suggests is that even though the conclusions in unanswerable arguments are

⁷¹ Jones (2000) p. 447

⁷² Jones (2000) p. 448

⁷³ Jones (2000) p. 449

⁷⁴ Jones (2000) p. 450

⁷⁵ For full accounts see Lewis, D. (1996) 'Elusive Knowledge' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 74, No. 4 pp. 549-567, Stroud, B. (1984) *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Oxford University

tenable the arguments themselves cannot convince us. If this is correct, then TCE is undermined. For if we cannot be convinced by these arguments then there is no reason for us to expect our beliefs to change since these arguments cannot legitimately count as evidence against our beliefs.

Despite initial plausibility, however, this objection fails. To begin with, it seems as though a), like the objection from option 3 discussed in Chapter 3, at best, is only ever going to relate to arguments that traditionally fail to have any effect upon people's beliefs despite their apparent soundness and does not apply to other unanswerable arguments. While it may be the case that no one can become convinced that the external world does not exist, or that a necessary being exists as a result of these arguments, it seems that if one found any argument that had previously convinced someone of its conclusion both unanswerable yet unbelievable a) would not be able to account for this. For example, imagine that Jane's belief that racism is acceptable changes in the face of a certain argument. Bob then examines the argument and yet despite finding the argument unanswerable Bob's racist belief persists. In this case, we could not appeal to a) if Bob's belief 'that racism is acceptable' failed to change in the face of the same argument. If Bob were to find any argument *A* both unanswerable yet unbelievable, and if *A* had ever convinced anyone of its conclusion, then we cannot appeal to a) to undermine the possibility that Bob fulfils the conditions laid out in TCE above. If this is correct, and there is even one argument that has previously convinced someone of its conclusion, that one person finds, by their own lights, both unanswerable, yet unbelievable, then TCE goes through. If TCE goes through, then *the principle of epistemic reason* is undermined as a first-person doxastic constraint.

However, even if this response to the challenge presented by a) does not go through, a) and b) both fail to undermine TCE as set out in Section 2. The reason for this is that, in order for TCE to go through, I do not need to show that unanswerable arguments can ever *convince* anyone. All I need to show is that some agent *S* *appreciates* the sceptical thesis. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, what exactly 'appreciates' means is a little hard to define. To begin with, to appreciate something is a weaker notion than to be

Press, Oxford, New York and Foley, R. 'Three attempts to Refute Skepticism and Why They Fail', *From S. Luper* (ed.) *The Sceptics: Contemporary Essays* (Ashgate: 2003)

convinced by something. To be convinced of *A* is to appreciate the veracity of *A* and furthermore come to believe the conclusion of *A*, namely *q* as result of *A*. To appreciate *A* on the other hand is to recognise the force that *A* should have on one's belief(s) if *A* is true. Given this definition of 'appreciate' it seems as though both objections a) and b) above are on shaky ground. While a) denies that one could ever be convinced by global scepticism b) requires conviction in order to undermine the condition (SC). Furthermore, it seems clear that people like Ribeiro, do appreciate these arguments. In fact in correspondence with me, Ribeiro has gone one step further. He argues that to assume that one's belief must change should we become convinced of a certain arguments veracity begs the question of what it is to find something both unanswerable and yet unbelievable. In other words, Ribeiro claims that he *is* convinced by the sceptical argument and yet is surprised to find that despite this his belief does not change. However, whether or not one is convinced by Ribeiro's claim, is irrelevant. (SC), like TCE above, only requires that S appreciates the argument, while both objections a) and b) against (SC), and TCE require conviction in order to undermine the threat posed by (SC) and TCE.

Objection c) on the other hand assumes the veracity of (SC) and then questions whether or not it is the belief itself that is evidence insensitive, or whether the sceptical thesis counts as evidence. As Jones points out:

[While]... scepticism cannot affect my belief that the sun will rise tomorrow, if the astronomical community were to reach agreement that the sun is about to go supernova, then that very belief would no doubt be affected.⁷⁶

Jones' point here is compelling. To begin with, the beliefs, that epistemological scepticism(s) challenge, do weaken when faced with certain types of counter-evidence. In the case above, for example, it seems as though given the counter-evidence from the astronomical community my belief that the sun was going to rise would change. Alternatively, if the same belief were questioned in the lights of Humean scepticism, it seems as though my belief would remain: despite apparently sound reasoning to the contrary. Given the fact that our belief would change, when faced with the 'correct' counter evidence, it seems as though the explanation for my continuing belief, far from

⁷⁶ Jones (2000) p. 450

being some non-epistemic determinant, is simply because the sceptical thesis fails to be compelling.

One possible way out of the objection raised by c) is to suggest that by accepting the astronomers' evidence, we are already assuming an answer to the sceptical thesis and are therefore begging the question. Now while it is true that we beg the sceptics' question when we accept the astronomers' evidence, Jones is clearly not begging the question as to whether or not we should infer naturalism from scepticism. The belief in question is whether or not the sun will rise. Furthermore this belief responds to one type of evidence and yet fails to budge when faced with another, namely the sceptical thesis.

If c) is correct then TCE fails. Unanswerable arguments while initially plausible as a counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*, ultimately fail to undermine this constraint. If these arguments cannot motivate us then there is no reason to suspect that our belief is to be non-epistemically explained. With regards to Ribeiro, in the light of the above arguments, we conclude that despite the initial plausibility of naturalism as the explanation for his recalcitrant belief, the answer appears to be that his belief remains simply because the sceptical argument, he is faced with, appears not to have any motivational force.

There are two problems with c) however. The first is that while this argument appears to undermine the possibility that arguments, such as Descartes' Dream argument, can ever affect our beliefs, it cannot apply to arguments that are efficacious but, for some reason, unbelievable to S, despite S's acknowledgement that the argument is also unanswerable. For example, much like the response to a) above, if there is even one argument which has been found convincing in the past, which some other agent finds both unanswerable yet unbelievable c) will not be able to account for this. However, even if this problem fails to have weight, the further problem is that *the principle of epistemic explanation*, as laid out in Chapter 1, is a first-person conceptual truth. Thus *the principle of epistemic explanation* states that it is impossible for any agent S to make a sincere first person explanation about a particular belief, that it is non-epistemically determined so long as the six conditions laid out in Chapter 1 have been satisfied. However, if Ribeiro (or any agent who finds themselves in the grips of an argument that is to their minds both unanswerable, yet unbelievable) *is ignorant of c)* but makes the first person inference

from his unjustified belief, to a non-epistemic explanation of that belief, then this is a counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*, and is sufficient to undermine the necessary claim of this constraint. If this is correct then we do not require the inference from scepticism to naturalism to go through in order for TCE to go through. All that we require is someone who sincerely thinks that his/ her belief is non-epistemically explained. So if Ribeiro is being sincere, then it serves as an occurrent counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*.

If this is correct then it seems as though TCE goes through and *the principle of epistemic explanation* is undermined. *The principle of epistemic explanation* is the claim that "I cannot believe that *p* and also accept a non-epistemic explanation of my believing that *p*."⁷⁷ Finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable, however, undermines the reasons we have for holding that belief. Furthermore, should we find to our complete satisfaction that we cannot answer this argument, and yet continue to find ourselves with the contrary belief we must conclude that the reason that our belief remains, is a non-epistemic reason. If all of our epistemic reasons have been undermined, then it must be the case that the remaining belief is based upon some non-epistemic reason(s). Given the veracity of this, I now accept that I hold a belief that is to be non-epistemically explained, or is non-epistemically determined, and this clearly represents a counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*. Given that first-person doxastic constraints are necessary constraints upon what we can believe, they cannot admit to counterexample. Given that finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable represents a tenable counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*, this principle cannot be a first-person doxastic constraint.

In all honesty, despite the seeming veracity of this argument, there is something decidedly odd about someone saying something like: 'I believe that no necessary being exists but I accept that this belief must be non-epistemically grounded'. As Jones points out

We will tend not to believe someone when he presents us with a counterexample to [*the principle of epistemic explanation*], and will instead re-interpret anyone who appears to violate the principle of epistemic explanation in such a way that we

⁷⁷ Jones (2002) p. 217

understand him to be either (i) not asserting that *p*, or (ii) not asserting a non-epistemic explanation for his belief that *p*.⁷⁸

As this quote highlights, while it is easy to imagine someone telling us that her belief is to be non-epistemically explained it would be difficult for us to believe her. In the case of Ribeiro, while his reasoning to the conclusion that he has a non-epistemic belief seems valid, it is still a struggle to believe that he believes that his belief is to be non-epistemically explained. It may be argued however, given that *the principle of epistemic explanation* is a first-person doxastic constraint, whether or not *we* believe him, is irrelevant. So long as *Ribeiro* believes that one of his beliefs is to be non-epistemically explained we have a counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*. However, I believe that there is a good reason for our hesitancy in believing Ribeiro, though this needs some spelling out.

In Chapter 5, I argue that while it may be possible to accept that one of our beliefs is to be non-epistemically explained, we can never believe it. In other words, while Ribeiro may be able to say of his belief, with some justification, that it is to be non-epistemically explained Ribeiro will never be able to believe this. In order to explicate my position I briefly examine *the principle of truth* and defend it against the challenge posed by unanswerable, yet unbelievable arguments. Having done that, I examine the move that saves *the principle of truth* and argue that while it is able to save *the principle of epistemic explanation* it is unable to save *the principle of adequate reason*.

⁷⁸ Jones (2002) p. 232

Chapter 5: Examining *The Principle of Truth*

In Chapter 3, I argued that finding any argument both unanswerable yet unbelievable in the sense detailed in Chapter 2 undermines *the principle of adequate reason*. In Chapter 4 I argued that given that *the principle of adequate reason* had been undermined there was an argument to be made that *the principle of epistemic explanation* was similarly undermined as a first-person doxastic constraint. The argument against the two constraints was that finding an argument unanswerable, yet unbelievable seemingly represents a counterexample to both *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation*. Given that first-person doxastic constraints, by their very nature, cannot admit to counterexample, finding a counterexample to either *the principle of adequate reason* or *the principle of epistemic explanation*, undermines the claim that these constraints are necessary constraints upon what we can believe. In this chapter, I examine the effect, if any, that finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable has on *the principle of truth*. I argue that there is an argument from S's finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable to S's violation of *the principle of truth*. I conclude however, that the argument against *the principle of truth* is flawed, and that as a result *the principle of truth* remains. Having come to this conclusion, I explicate how it is that the same move that saves *the principle of truth* is able to save *the principle of epistemic explanation* as first-person doxastic constraint. Having done this, I then go on to show that, despite the fact that *the principle of truth* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* are saved as first-person doxastic constraints, the argument that saves these two constraints is unable to save *the principle of adequate reason*. In Section 1, I briefly recap *the principle of truth*, and lay out the challenge that unanswerable yet unbelievable arguments pose to the constraint. In Section 2, I explicate why it is that *the principle of truth* is unaffected by this challenge. Finally, in Section 3, I explicate how the move that saves *the principle of truth* can be employed to save *the principle of epistemic explanation* but fails to save *the principle of adequate reason*.

Section 1

The principle of truth states that S cannot believe that p and believe that her belief that p is false. In other words, *the principle of truth* denies that I can ever continue to hold a belief that p , and *simultaneously* believe that my belief that p is false. The reason that *the principle of truth* denies this, is that S must believe (think it true) that p , and yet believe (think it true) of her belief that it is false. In other words for S to violate *the principle of truth* she must be able, in all sincerity, to assert something like, 'I believe that I exist and I believe that my belief that I exist is false'. In Chapter 1 I presented an argument to the effect that this situation is impossible—S is claiming both that it is true that she exists and that it is true that what she holds as true (namely that she exists) is false.

The objection to *the principle of truth*, in its strongest form, looks like this. Imagine that S, having examined some argument A , finds herself in a position in which she recognises that the conclusion of A , namely q , undermines her belief that p . However, despite acknowledging this fact, S is unable either to answer A or believe that q . On the contrary, S discovers that despite feeling as though A *should* make her believe that q , she still believes that p . S now finds herself in the position discussed in Chapter 2, namely of finding an argument both unanswerable, yet unbelievable. Given that S cannot answer A , nor believe that q , S freely admits that her belief that p is insufficiently supported by adequate reasons (Chapter 3). Furthermore, given that she acknowledges that all her epistemic reasons have been undermined, S concludes that the reason she continues to believe that p must be some non-epistemic reason (Chapter 4). Given that S accepts that her belief is held for some non-epistemic reason it seems that S must accept that her belief aims at some goal other than truth. Given this, what reason does S have to believe that her belief is in fact true? The *prima facie* answer is none whatsoever. Given that S, by her own lights, has no epistemic reasons and given that *she* accepts that her belief is held for some non-epistemic reason, S has every reason to believe that her belief that p is false. Having gone through the reasoning, S admits that since the argument, by her own lights, undermines her epistemic reasons she must hold a belief that is non-epistemically determined. Given that her belief is to be non-epistemically explained S, in the face of this reasoning, is seemingly forced to admit that her belief aims at some goal other than truth. As a result, it seems as though S has every reason to believe that her belief that p is

false. If this is correct, then it seems as though finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable presents a counterexample to *the principle of truth*. Furthermore, given that necessary constraints cannot admit to counterexample it seems as though *the principle of truth* is undermined as a first-person doxastic constraint.

However, this cannot be right. Given that beliefs aim at truth then it seems certain that we cannot believe of one of our particular beliefs that it is false. Something in the above challenge, therefore, must be wrong. I turn now to Section 2 in which I explicate why the above reasoning fails to undermine *the principle of truth*.

Section 2

Despite the seeming validity of the above reasoning there is something that strikes us as deeply implausible. For those who find certain arguments both unanswerable yet unbelievable, while they may acquiesce to the fact that this highlights that they have an unjustified and therefore a seemingly non-epistemically determined belief, none of them feel as though they hold a false belief. In Chapters 3 and 4, the arguments to undermine *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* respectively were backed by the fact that there were examples of people who found themselves in these doxastic positions—in Chapter 3, Ribeiro, Foley and Stroud and in Chapter 4, Ribeiro. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, there seem to be no genuine examples of people who both believe that p and simultaneously believe that their belief that p is false. Given the argument in Section 1, however, it seems as though there should, or at least could, be such counterexamples. However, when we think about it, it is impossible to see how anyone could sincerely claim that they know of a specific belief they hold that they concurrently believe is false. There is a reason for this. If finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable undermines *the principle of truth*, then what we are saying is that there are times in which we can say of one of our beliefs: ‘I believe p , but I believe that my belief that p is false’. However, to sincerely assert this type of statement, under the right conditions, is impossible. As I discussed in Chapter 1, while I may be able to sincerely assert a sentence like the one above, I can only do so under certain conditions. So for example, the sentence is a tenable one if the two parts of the sentence represent two different time frames, or if one part of the sentence represents a belief, while the

other represents some other mental state. It is *impossible*, however, to sincerely assert 'I believe that p , and simultaneously, I believe that my belief that p is false'. The reason for this is that any statement of this nature requires one to think that a logical contradiction is true. In the statement below the part of the sentence in bold represents a first order belief and the part in italics represents a second order belief.

I **believe that** p and I *believe that* [my **belief that** p is false]

To contravene *the principle of truth* I must be able to believe the part in brackets. The part in brackets, however, represents a logical contradiction. To sincerely assert, 'my belief that p is false' is to claim that you think it true that p and that you think it true that not- p . This is impossible, since to sincerely claim this is to assert in full consciousness both that p is true and that not- p is true simultaneously. The second order belief that *the principle of truth* denies that we can ever have, is that the logical contradiction in brackets is true. In other words, *the principle of truth* denies that I can *believe that* [p and not- p] and this is clearly right. Asking S to believe the part in brackets is asking S to believe that there are square circles, or that Johannesburg exists and does not exist. As a result, there must be something wrong with the objection such that it fails to serve as a counterexample to *the principle of truth*. As it stands, the objection against *the principle of truth* (hereafter **OW**) seems valid.

1. A sceptical argument, whose conclusion represents an incompatible alternative to the belief we hold, undermines the reasons we have for the targeted belief.
2. Should we find the same argument both unanswerable and yet unbelievable, then it seems clear that we now hold an unjustified belief.
3. If we accept that all the epistemic reasons we have for our belief have been undermined, it is easy to see that the conclusion that our belief is to be non-epistemically explained follows.
4. We now hold a belief that, by our own lights, is both unjustified and non-epistemically explained.
5. Given that our belief is non-epistemically determined, we can conclude that our belief aims at some goal other than truth.
6. If we can accept this, it seems as though we should be able to believe that our belief is false.

However, we cannot accept 6, and so something in the above reasoning is wrong.

The answer, I believe, is that while S may *accept* that she has no reasons to think that her belief that *p* is true, she cannot *believe* that her belief is false. As I discussed in Chapter 2, to accept *A* is to see the force that *A* should have on your beliefs if *A* is true. In cases in which S finds an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable, while S may accept that she should think that her belief is false, she can never believe it. In other words, S may accept that *A* undermines all epistemic reasons for her belief. Further, S may acknowledge that in accepting that her epistemic reasons have been undermined, her belief must be non-epistemically explained. Having done so S may not be able to explain why it is that she believes that *p*. Or put another way, S may freely acknowledge that given her self-confessed lack of epistemic justification she has no reason(s) to believe that her belief is true. However, what S cannot do, if she is being sincere, is claim that she believes that her belief that *p* is false. She may not be able to tell us, or even understand, why she continues to believe that *p*, but if she believes that *p*, S, should she look, *will* find herself with the second-order belief that her belief that *p* is true. What has gone wrong with **OW** therefore, is that while **OW** may force S into a position in which she *may* feel that she has to accept that she has a false belief, what **OW** cannot do is convince S that her belief is false. **OW** fails to move us because the conclusion to **OW** asks us to believe a logical contradiction. Since we cannot believe a logical contradiction, **OW** will never be able to convince us.

If the above is correct, then *the principle of truth* remains. Simply put, the argument against **OW** runs as follows.

1. We cannot believe *p* and believe that our belief that *p* is false. Doing so asks us to believe a logical contradiction. E.g. to believe that there are square circles.
2. **OW** represents an argument whose conclusion is that in those instances in which we find an argument both unbelievable, yet unanswerable we ought to believe that *p* and believe that our belief that *p* is false.
3. Given 1, 2 is impossible.
4. Therefore, we cannot fulfil the conclusion to **OW**.
5. Furthermore, even though **OW** may well represent a valid argument, **OW** has a conclusion that is necessarily unbelievable.
6. Given that we can never believe the conclusion of **OW**, **OW** fails to undermine *the principle of truth* since it will never be able to make us believe

(convince us) that we hold a belief that p that we simultaneously, and in full consciousness, believe to be false.

If this is correct then *the principle of truth* is saved, and we can never believe that p and believe that our belief that p is false. *The principle of truth* then, is a first-person doxastic constraint, since the constraint arises as a result of the concept of belief.

While this seems undeniably correct, it must be noted that the argument used to save *the principle of truth* seems to be a variation of the type of argument made by proponents of both *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* laid out in Chapter 1. What this suggests, is that the arguments made against these two proposed constraints (in Chapters 3 and 4) are faulty. In section 3, I examine whether or not some mistake has been made in Chapters 3 and 4 such that *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* are saved as first-person conceptual doxastic constraints.

Section 3

I argued in Chapters 3 and 4 that finding an argument unanswerable, yet unbelievable effectively undermines both *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation*. In the case of *the principle of adequate reason*, finding an argument unanswerable and yet unbelievable undermines the reasons that we have for our belief that p . In Chapter 4 I argued that since the epistemic reason(s) for our belief that p have been undermined, the inference to the best explanation would be that our belief that p was non-epistemically determined. However, in Section 2 above, I argued that the reason that *the principle of truth* fails to be undermined by unanswerable yet unbelievable arguments is because while we may be able to accept that these types of arguments challenge *the principle of truth* we cannot ever believe it. In other words, the inference, from finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable, to the conclusion that the belief we have is false is itself *unbelievable*—no matter how sound the argument supporting that conclusion may prove to be. The reason that this inference fails, I argued, was that the conclusion to **OW** asks us to believe a logical contradiction, and this cannot be done. Believing that one's belief that p is true is a necessarily concomitant feature of believing that p .

However, as I noted at the end of Section 2, the move made to save *the principle of truth*, is similar to the move made by proponents of *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation*. And yet in chapters 3 and 4 I argued that, despite this move, both *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* were undermined as first-person doxastic constraints. If *the principle of truth* is saved using this approach, surely *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* can adopt the same approach in order to save themselves? In this section, I examine *the principle of adequate reason* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* individually and see whether or not the move made to save *the principle of truth* is able to save them. I conclude that while *the principle of epistemic explanation* is saved *the principle of adequate reason* is not. I show how it is that the argument made in Chapter 1, to the effect that *the principle of adequate reason* is a necessary constraint, has gone wrong.

The principle of adequate reason

The argument to save *the principle of truth* works by claiming that while we may be able to accept that we should believe of one of our beliefs that it is false, we can never believe this. Thus, in order to show that finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable undermines *the principle of adequate reason* I must not only show that we can sometimes *accept*, or *appreciate*, that we have beliefs which are unjustified, I must also show that we can actually *believe* this conclusion. Furthermore, I must show *how* it is possible that we can believe this conclusion.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, *the principle of adequate reason* claims that “When one attends to any of one’s beliefs, one must *regard* it as believed for sufficient or adequate reasons.”⁷⁹ (My italics.) The argument to support this claim, very briefly, was that in order to see one’s belief as true, necessarily entailed seeing one’s belief as justified. As I argued in Chapter 3, finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable clearly shows that we can *regard* a belief we hold as being held for insufficient or inadequate reasons, if we take Adler’s use of *regard* to mean *accept* or *appreciate*. When I examine an argument *A* whose conclusion *q* is inconsistent with my belief that *p*, and am

⁷⁹ Adler (2002) *Belief’s Own Ethics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, p. 27

satisfied that *A* completely undermines all the reasons I have for my belief that *p*, and yet cannot either answer *A* nor believe that *q*, I must admit of my belief that *p* is insufficiently supported by adequate reason(s). However, as I discuss above, while it is possible for us to accept something like this, is it possible for me to believe this? In other words, if we read the 'regard' in *the principle of adequate reason* as 'believe', does finding an argument unanswerable yet unbelievable so readily undermine *the principle of adequate reason*?

I believe that it does. As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 there do appear to be times when we not only believe that *p* but at the same time believe that our belief that *p* is unjustified. Furthermore, this does not seem to be an impossible state of affairs. It seems quite tenable for me to claim of my belief that *p* that I believe that it is, by my own lights, insufficiently supported by the evidence. As David Owens notes, while this "does indeed report an unhappy state of mind [it is] not an impossible one. Most of us have had occasion to [make such a claim] at some point in our lives."⁸⁰ The reason that it is possible to regard one of one's beliefs as unjustified, is that acquiescing to the fact that one of our beliefs is unjustified does not necessarily entail that the belief is false. In other words, there are times when I can believe that I have no good or even sufficient reasons for believing that *p*, since in doing so I am not believing *p* and believing that *p* is false. Believing that my belief that *p* is unjustified is possible since doing so, while it represents an uneasy doxastic state, does not spell out a logical contradiction.

What has gone wrong with *the principle of adequate reason* is that believing one's belief is true does not necessarily entail seeing one's belief as justified. While seeing one's belief as justified is sufficient for believing that one's belief is true, it is not necessary to believe that one's belief is justified in order to believe that it is true. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, seeing one's belief as true, or aiming at the truth, means seeing that one's belief meets one or more of the epistemic norms governing beliefs. Along with justification, other epistemic norms are things such as; eliminating alternative possibilities, being supported by evidence, gained through reliable epistemic practices, responsiveness to counterevidence, certainty and so on. Seeing one's belief as true or as aiming at truth, is a success term indicating that one, all or a number of epistemic norms

⁸⁰ Owens, D. (2002) 'Epistemic Akrasia' *The Monist*, Vol. 85, No. 3, pp. 381-397; 383

have been satisfied. However, fulfilling any one of these norms is not necessary for us to believe that our belief does in fact aim at the truth or is in fact true. In other words, in order for me to see my belief as true, or aimed at truth, I *do not have to* believe that I have fulfilled any of the above epistemic norms.

Believing that a belief one holds is unjustified is admitting to the fact that at best one's belief *might* be wrong, or at worst is probably wrong. However, even believing that one's belief is probably wrong, is not believing that one's belief is *de facto* false.

To lay it out formally, Adler argues that the claim I **believe that** *p*, and I *believe that* [my **belief that** *p* is unjustified] necessarily entails the claim I **believe that** *p*, and I *believe that* [my **belief that** *p* is false, or aims at some goal other than truth]. Given that the latter statement is impossible and given that this latter claim is necessarily entailed by the former claim, Adler argues that that the former claim is necessarily impossible. However, as I have argued above this entailment is contingent rather than necessary. I am able to claim I **believe that** *p*, and I *believe that* [my **belief that** *p* is unjustified] since in doing so, what I am doing is *believing that* [my **belief that** *p* could be, might be, is likely to be, wrong]. However, the part in brackets does not detail a logical contradiction. While this is may well be an uneasy, and sometimes even an uncomfortable, doxastic state, it is nevertheless a tenable one. As the examples I discussed in Chapter 2 show, there are times in which I can believe that I have no sufficient reasons for a belief, and yet nevertheless continue to hold it.

In order for *the principle of adequate reason* to be a first-person doxastic constraint, it must show that believing that one has adequate reasons for one's belief(s) is a necessary condition for seeing one's belief as being true. However, while this represents a healthy doxastic state, it does not represent a necessary one. I believe that there is a computer in front me despite the fact that, in the face of Descartes' Dream argument, I do not believe that I have sufficient reason for this belief. As a result, *the principle of adequate reason* fails to represent a first-person doxastic constraint. Similarly, in the face of an argument that S finds both unanswerable and yet unbelievable S is able to believe that *p* and simultaneously believe that her belief is unjustified. Given this, we have a tenable counterexample to *the principle of adequate reason*. Given that

first-person doxastic constraints cannot admit to counterexample, *the principle of adequate reason* cannot represent a first-person doxastic constraint.

The principle of epistemic explanation

As Ward Jones' formulates it, *the principle of epistemic explanation* is the claim that "I cannot believe that *p* and also accept a non-epistemic explanation of my believing that *p*."⁸¹ Furthermore, as I noted in Chapter 1, first-person doxastic constraints relate to second-order *beliefs* about our beliefs. Thus Jones' claim that we cannot 'accept' a non-epistemic explanation about our beliefs is better cashed out as, we cannot believe a non-epistemic explanation about our beliefs. In Chapter 1, it was argued that contravening this constraint was impossible since any attempt to do so requires that S believe a logical contradiction. In Chapter 4, I laid out a proposed counterexample to *the principle of epistemic explanation*. Very briefly, the argument against *the principle of epistemic explanation* was that being able to believe that we hold an unjustified belief allows us to believe that we have a belief that is non-epistemically determined.

1. I believe that my belief is unjustified. (My reasons for my belief have been undermined).
2. Given that I believe that all my epistemic reasons have been undermined the explanation for my continued belief must be a non-epistemic one.

As I mentioned, one person who seems to believe this conclusion is Brian Ribeiro. However, as I concluded in Chapter 4 while Ribeiro might be able to accept or appreciate this conclusion he could never believe it. As I mentioned then, this needs a little spelling out.

As I noted in Chapter 2, to appreciate *A* is to acknowledge the force that *A* should have on your belief if *A* is true. If we follow the reasoning above, it is clear why Ribeiro thinks, with some justification that he has a belief that is to be non-epistemically explained. If he believes that all of his epistemic reasons have been undermined, as a result of the sceptical argument, and yet nevertheless continues to find himself with the contrary belief, it seems as though he must accept that his belief is to be non-epistemically explained. However, as I have noted Ribeiro cannot *believe* this claim.

⁸¹ Jones, W.E. (2002) 'Explaining our own Beliefs: Non-Epistemic Believing and Doxastic Instability' *Philosophical Studies* 111: pp. 217-249, 217

In order to *believe* the conclusion to the above argument Ribeiro would have to **believe that p** and *believe that* [his **belief that p** , was to be non-epistemically explained]. However, as I argued in Chapter 1, this second order belief is impossible since it requires that we believe a logical contradiction. Given the definition of belief the part in brackets can be spelt out as [I **believe that p** (p aims at the truth), my **belief that p** is to be non-epistemically explained (p aims at some goal other than truth)]. The part in brackets details a logical contradiction. As such, we can never believe it. Asking us to believe this is asking us to believe that square-circles exist or that I exist and do not exist at the same time. As a result, the conclusion to the argument against *the principle of epistemic explanation* is a necessarily unbelievable one.

The inference from believing that a belief that you have is unjustified to the conclusion that the belief you have is to be non-epistemically explained, while an acceptable argument, cannot ever represent a convincing argument. In fact, this argument itself represents a contingently unanswerable yet necessarily unbelievable argument. Should we examine the inference and find it sound, we will discover that despite thinking that we ought to believe that we have a non-epistemically determined belief, we will discover that we do not believe it. For example, imagine that Jane having read the argument against free will, discovers that despite the fact that she thinks metaphysical determinism is correct, she nevertheless finds herself with the belief that she is metaphysically free. Furthermore, Jane is quite convinced that every reason she has for her belief is undermined by the argument for determinism. Jane then concludes that the inference to the best explanation is that her belief in free will must be a non-epistemically determined belief. However, no matter how hard Jane tries to convince herself of this conclusion she will never succeed. The reason for this is that in order to see our beliefs as true, we must see our beliefs as aiming at truth. If we must see them as aiming at truth then the conclusion to the above, against *the principle of epistemic explanation*, asks us to believe a logical contradiction in the same way that the conclusion to **OW** asks us to believe a logical contradiction.

1. In order to see my belief as true I must see my belief as aiming at truth.
2. When I examine one of my beliefs I find myself with the second order belief that my belief is true. (*the principle of truth*)

3. Given 1, when I examine my beliefs I also find myself with the second order belief that my belief aims at the truth.
4. The conclusion to the argument in Chapter 4, is there are times when we should believe that our belief aims at some goal other than truth. i.e. it is to be non-epistemically explained.
5. In order to believe this conclusion I must believe that my belief is non-epistemically determined.
6. Given 3, I cannot do this, since I am being asked to believe something that is logically contradictory. i.e. I **believe that** *p* and I *believe that* [my **belief that** *p* is to be non-epistemically explained] (*the principle of epistemic explanation*).
7. The conclusion in Chapter 4, therefore, asks me to believe something that cannot be believed.
8. Therefore, the argument against *the principle of epistemic explanation* fails to undermine *the principle of epistemic explanation*.

The argument above rests on the distinction between S being able to 'accept' or 'appreciate' an argument and S being 'convinced' by an argument. While it is clear to see how Ribeiro gets to the conclusion that his belief is to be non-epistemically explained he cannot ever believe this conclusion for the reasons cited above. The argument against *the principle of epistemic explanation* therefore, represents an argument whose conclusion is necessarily unbelievable.

Conclusion

As I hope I have shown, while *the principle of truth* and *the principle of epistemic explanation* are first-person doxastic constraints, *the principle of adequate reason* is not. In the case in which my belief that p is challenged with an argument that I take to be both unanswerable yet unbelievable, I am able to believe that I have no reasons to believe that p . What I cannot do however, is believe the further inference, namely that my belief is to be non-epistemically explained for the reasons cited above. While I appreciate that there is a thin line between being able to believe that my belief that p is unjustified and the further, seemingly logically following belief that my belief that p is to be non-epistemically explained, I nevertheless believe that while the former is possible the latter, for the reasons cited above, is impossible.

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