

Believing as closing inquiry

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When does one count as believing some proposition P? And when is it rational to believe P? A natural answer might be to say that one believes P when one is sufficiently confident that P is true, and that it is rational to believe P when that high level of confidence is warranted by our evidence. However, such a simple view of belief that aims to reduce beliefs to facts about degrees of belief has recently received a lot of criticism.¹ But if we reject the simple, reductive view of belief, this leaves us with a problem: if facts about belief don't just reduce to facts about credences, then what are beliefs? What role do beliefs play in our mental economy? Recently the idea that the role of beliefs is closely tied to inquiry has become popular: Friedman (2019), Kelp (forthcoming), Hieronymi (2008) and Staffel (2019) all discuss a view of belief according to which it's a function of belief to close inquiry into questions that we are interested in solving. A view of belief along these lines seems to me both intuitive and explanatorily powerful. However, in the current literature the motivation for such a view has rested largely on our intuitions about different cases if it has been argued for at all. The problem with such an approach is that while it seems intuitive that believing involves closing inquiry in some cases, there are other cases (e.g. cases of double-checking) where it intuitively does not. The current literature also does not explore the consequences a connection between belief and inquiry would have for what it is rational to believe.

This paper thus has three aims: First, it aims to provide a new reason for accepting such an inquiry-based view of belief by considering the role that beliefs play in the formation of reactive attitudes. Second, the paper will draw on the connection between belief, inquiry and reactive attitudes to respond to what I call the double-checking objection. The third aim of this paper is to consider what kind of norms might govern belief if the inquiry-based view is true.

¹ For such a view, see for example Foley (2009) or Christensen (2004). I've spelled out some common criticisms of this view in the Introduction. For further criticisms, see also Kyburg (1970), Jackson (2019), or Weisberg (2020).

The paper proceeds as follows: In Section 1 I will spell out the inquiry-based view of belief and summarize some intuitive motivations for it. I will point out that the initial motivation (i.e. intuitions about cases) make it difficult for us to respond to a natural worry that the inquiry-based view might face. In Section 2 I will give a new argument for accepting the inquiry-based view. In Section 3 I will outline what I take to be the strongest version of the double-checking worry and show how (given my argument for accepting the inquiry-based view), we can respond to it. In Section 4 I show what kind of normative implications might flow from accepting the inquiry-based view. I will propose two norms for belief and show that they prove powerful in explaining a variety of different intuitions we have about what it is rational to believe.

Section 1: The inquiry-based view and some initial motivations

On the view of belief that I want to defend, beliefs are settled attitudes, such that an agent who believes *P* has in some sense a settled view on the matter. Furthermore, one has a settled view on a particular matter iff one has closed inquiry into that matter (in a special sense of inquiry that I want to make precise later on). In short, the view of belief I want to propose in this paper is the following:

Belief as closing inquiry (BCI): An agent believes some proposition *P* iff she has closed inquiry into some question *Q* (for which *P* is a complete answer) by concluding that *P*.²

Two clarifications are in order. First: **BCI** claims that an agent believes *P* iff she has closed inquiry into some question *Q* *by concluding that P*. There are several other ways in which one might end one's inquiry into some question *Q*, which do not result in a belief. I could end my inquiry into *Q* because I no longer want to know the answer to *Q*.

² Note that while Kelp (forthcoming) and Hieronymi (2008) specify that it's the question "Whether *P*?" whose settling leads to the belief that *P*, I do not want to commit to this. On my view the settling of any question *Q* of which *P* is a complete answer leads to the belief that *P*. One might thus ask for a particular agent who believes *P* *which question* they have settled — on my view this will be determined by which question or matter the agent is interested in.

Or I could end my inquiry because I conclude that there is nothing more to learn about Q and I won't be able to learn the right answer to Q. Of course, ending inquiry in either of these ways will not lead to a belief. Rather, a belief is a mental state that closes inquiry in a particular, positive way. More specifically, we form a belief just when we close inquiry by settling on a particular answer to the question Q we were inquiring into. This is what I mean when I say that an agent believes P iff she has closed inquiry into Q. Going forward, I will use the term "closing inquiry" to refer to this particular, positive way of closing inquiry that involves *settling* a question by reaching a particular conclusion.³

Second, while **BCI** claims that we believe P iff we have closed inquiry into Q, this does not mean that for every belief we form, we have to have been engaged in an extended *process* of inquiry beforehand. A particular mental state S could settle a question that I have not asked myself before. I might turn around and upon seeing a green wall form the belief "There is a green wall." I have thus settled the question of what color the wall is, even though I was not antecedently engaged in any extended process of inquiring into what color the wall is. But it is still true that in seeing that the wall is green and forming the belief, I have settled the question and so closed off inquiry (at least for the moment) into the question of what color the wall is.

BCI is a biconditional principle. One direction says that if an agent believes P, she has closed inquiry into some relevant question Q by concluding that P. The other direction says that if an agent has closed inquiry into Q by concluding that P, she has a belief that P. In the rest of this section I want to provide some intuitive motivations for both of these claims.

(i) Belief involves closing inquiry

One of the authors who argues for something like the idea that believing involves having closed inquiry is Jane Friedman. Friedman (2019) argues for the idea that there is a connection between beliefs and inquiry by considering examples of agents who

³ See also Hieronymi (2008) and (2014) for a view according to which beliefs involve settling a question.

hold a particular belief while inquiring and arguing that there seems to be something irrational about such agents. She considers for example something like the following case:

Inspector Morse: Morse wakes up with a headache, feeling disoriented. He cannot remember what he did last night or how he came home. He looks at his hands and notices that they are full of blood. With horror, thoughts of his killing his friend, the doctor, last night flood his mind. Morse's flat confirms his memories, with evidence that he committed the crime in plain view. Could the doctor really be dead, and could he, Morse, really have done it? His phone rings — the doctor has indeed been killed and Morse is called to the crime scene to investigate the crime. This confirms it, Morse thinks: I killed the doctor! (Adapted from an example in Friedman (2019), p. 9)

Friedman's intuition about this case is that there would be something odd about Morse showing up at the crime scene and genuinely inquiring into who killed the doctor, given that he believes that he killed him. That there would be something wrong about Morse's genuinely inquiring into who killed the doctor becomes even more obvious if we consider what genuine inquiry entails according to Friedman: An agent who genuinely inquires into some question Q will display a genuine desire to know the answer to Q. She will adopt what Friedman calls an "interrogative attitude" with respect to Q. Examples of such attitudes might be wondering about Q or being curious about Q. Another way to think about what inquiring really entails is that an agent who is genuinely inquiring has Q on their "research agenda".

We can get a clearer picture of Friedman's notion of inquiry and of interrogative attitudes by considering the following two cases:

Inquiring Morse: Morse shows up at the crime scene, ready to inquire into who killed the doctor. He wonders who might have done it, examines

the clues left behind and interviews the witnesses with a genuine desire to know who killed the doctor.

Non-inquiring Morse: Morse shows up at the crime scene, ready to do his job. He examines the clues left behind and interviews the witnesses — but he is doing these things merely to avoid suspicion and not to solve the question of who committed the crime.

In **Inquiring Morse**, Morse is genuinely inquiring, in Friedman's sense: he adopts a particular interrogative attitude with respect to the question of who killed the doctor and is trying to answer it. In **Non-inquiring Morse**, on the other hand, Morse is merely going through the motions — he performs the activities that a genuine inquirer usually performs, but he doesn't have the same goal as the inquirer: He doesn't try to know the answer to Q and so he doesn't count as genuinely inquiring.⁴

If genuine inquiry consists at least in part of the agent adopting an interrogative attitude with respect to Q, then it becomes clear why it would be odd for Morse to believe that he killed the doctor while at the same time genuinely inquiring into who killed him. This is because to be genuinely inquiring, Morse must take a genuine interrogative attitude with respect to the question of who killed the doctor — he must wonder or be curious about who killed him, for example. But it would seem strange for Morse to have any of these attitudes while believing that it was he himself who killed the doctor.

This observation motivates Friedman to posit the following normative principle about the connection between beliefs and inquiry:

⁴ Friedman expands on the role inquiry plays in epistemology in Friedman (2017) and (2020).

Don't believe and inquire (DBI): One ought not inquire into/have an interrogative attitude about Q at t and believe P at t [where P is a complete answer to Q]. (Friedman (2019), p.13)

While Friedman argues that cases like that of Morse show that it is *irrational* or *incoherent* for an agent to believe some proposition P while inquiring into some question Q (of which P is a complete answer), she does not think that it is *impossible* for an agent to do this. But on a stronger view, it wouldn't simply be irrational for Morse to believe that he killed the doctor while inquiring into it — it isn't possible for him to do both at the same time. On this view, if Morse were genuinely inquiring into who killed the doctor, he wouldn't count as believing that he killed him (though he might suspect or fear that it was him). Likewise, genuine belief would be compatible with going through the motions, as non-inquiring Morse does, but not with genuine inquiry of the sort that involves having interrogative attitudes, as inquiring Morse has. It's this stronger principle about the connection between belief and inquiry that is denoted by **BCI**.

It seems to me that the intuitions that motivate **DBI** in **Inspector Morse** really support the stronger view that believing involves having closed inquiry. It is for example difficult to imagine how a Morse who wonders about whether he killed the doctor could even count as genuinely believing that he does. Suppose Morse confides the following to another close friend: "I believe that I killed the doctor, but I still wonder whether I did." Our first thought wouldn't be that Morse is irrational in having these attitudes, but rather that Morse is misreporting his attitudes: Either he doesn't really believe that he killed the doctor (he only suspects it for example), or he isn't really wondering about it at all. If some attitude (or combination of attitudes) is merely irrational rather than impossible, it is usually not very difficult to imagine an agent having the irrational attitude (or combination of attitudes). It is not usually difficult, for example, to imagine an agent who holds a particular belief that is not supported by her evidence. The fact that it is so difficult to imagine Morse inquiring into who killed the doctor while believing that he killed him seems to suggest that it is impossible for him to do this, and thus

arguably supports the descriptive idea that believing involves having closed inquiry that is part of **BCI**.⁵

I take it, therefore, that these considerations about cases like Morse's motivate the view that belief involves having closed inquiry. In section 2 of this paper, however, I will give an additional argument for adopting this view. This new motivation (unlike the example of Morse) has the consequence that it clearly supports the descriptive idea that believing involves closing inquiry (as stated by **BCI**) rather than the normative idea that it is irrational to believe P while inquiring into whether P (as held by **DBI**). The fact that it can help us tell which of the two principles we should adopt is I think an additional advantage of this view. But let us first turn to the question of whether closing inquiry by concluding some proposition also involves belief.

(ii) Closing inquiry involves belief

It seems to me that the other direction of **BCI** is not as controversial as the idea that believing involves closing inquiry. Suppose an agent closes inquiry into some question Q by concluding P — in other words she settles Q in a positive way rather

⁵ While Friedman only argues for **DBI** in her paper, it seems to me that at times she herself leans towards accepting something like **BCI**. She notes “the thought that there’s an incoherence in both believing a complete answer to a question and inquiring into that question gives us some insight into a key role that belief plays at the end of inquiry” (Friedman (2019), p. 18) and “this gives us a way of understanding the idea that believing is a sort of settled opinion - it’s a settled opinion in virtue of its being a way of settling a question, in virtue of being an answering attitude” (Friedman (2019), p. 20). It also seems to me that accepting something like **BCI** fits nicely within Friedman’s overall project. This is because Friedman (2017) argues that inquiring is (descriptively) constitutive of suspension of judgement. On her view, we suspend judgement on some question Q iff we adopt an interrogative attitude with respect to Q and are inquiring into it. Adopting this view towards suspension of judgement in conjunction with accepting **DBI** rather than **BCI** leads to an awkward consequence. If it is possible (though irrational) for an agent to believe P while inquiring into whether P, yet to inquire into whether P just is to suspend judgment on whether P, then it follows that it is possible (though irrational) for an agent to believe P while at the same time suspending judgement about whether P. This strikes me as an odd result.

In her paper, Friedman notes that inquiring while believing might be possible in cases where an agent cannot access P temporarily. However Archer (2018) points out that such cases might actually pose counterexamples to **DBI** as well because it seems rational for an agent who temporarily forgot P to inquire into it. Thus I think it is best to consider agents who can’t access some of their beliefs as mentally fragmented along the lines of Lewis (1982), such that one fragment of his mind believes P while the other fragment inquires. This might be the view that Friedman actually holds, but it also seems to me to be compatible with **BCI**. This is because the fragment that believes P has in fact closed inquiry into whether P. See also Lee (forthcoming) for a separate argument that the arguments Friedman gives for **DBI** really support the thesis that believing and inquiring isn’t possible.

than stopping inquiry temporarily or abandoning it altogether. One way for the agent to settle the question is to form the belief that P. Are there any others that do not involve belief? It seems to me that there are not. We might end inquiry with a supposition that P or a hypothesis that P. But if we don't believe that P is true then we haven't settled the question Q of which P was supposed to be the answer — we might have closed inquiry, but only in the sense that we have given up inquiring into Q (at least for the moment). Staffel (2019) has argued that we might end deliberation (and perhaps inquiry) with a credence rather than a belief. But while it might be true that inquiry sometimes ends with a credence, it seems that an agent who ends inquiry with a credence of 0.8 in P but no belief has not sufficiently settled the question to count as having closed inquiry— such an agent seems to have merely reached a dead end and so broken off inquiry. And even more clearly, ending inquiry with a credence of 0.8 in P (for example) isn't enough for the agent to count as having closed inquiry by *concluding* that P, which is what suffices for belief according to **BCI**.

Another reason to think that closing inquiry involves belief comes from considering the goal of inquiry. According to Friedman, an agent who inquires into some question Q has a desire to know the answer to Q — but knowing the answer to Q requires forming a belief that Q. So in so far as it is the goal of an inquiring agent to come to know the answer to Q, the agent can only (positively) close inquiry into Q by forming a belief.⁶

Since it follows from the nature of inquiry that closing inquiry in a positive way involves forming a belief, I will thus take the second part of **BCI** (that closing inquiry involves forming a belief) for granted. The controversial aspect of **BCI** is therefore the first half: whether beliefs really (always) involve closing inquiry - or in other words, whether beliefs really are settled attitudes. If we can successfully argue for this claim, then we have defended **BCI**. And while I think that cases like Morse's give strong intuitive support to **BCI**, there is nevertheless a problem with relying solely on such cases in order to argue for the inquiry-based view. The problem is that while it seems

⁶ See also Kelp (forthcoming) for an argument that knowledge is the goal of inquiry.

odd to imagine that Morse could both believe that he killed the doctor and genuinely inquire, there are other cases where inquiring while believing does not seem obviously irrational or impossible. Consider for example the following case:

Double-checking Morse: Morse is engaged in a routine investigation and he believes he found the murderer: The gardener did it. Nevertheless, there are two more witnesses to interview and so Morse continues to inquire further just to make sure.

Unlike in the previous example, it does not seem obviously strange to imagine that Morse believes the gardener did it and yet he engages in further inquiry to confirm his belief. It may seem that Morse can inquire further into who committed the murder even after he has formed a belief, as long as he is merely trying to double-check or confirm a belief that he already has. Cases like this thus seem to pose a counterexample to **BCI**— we can call this the double-checking objection.

The double-checking objection poses not just a problem for **BCI** but also seems to undermine any kind of strong connection between believing and closing inquiry — even the weaker principle **DBI** advocated by Friedman. In fact, several authors have recently appealed to cases like the one above precisely to put pressure on Friedman’s idea that beliefs and inquiry are closely connected (see Millson (2021), Falbo (forthcoming), and Woodard (ms.)). How might an advocate of a principle like **BCI** or **DBI** respond to such counterexamples? One intuitive response is to simply deny that a double-checking Morse really believes that the gardener did it (Millson and Friedman for example consider this response), or that a double-checking Morse really counts as inquiring. As it stands, however, such responses seem ad hoc. Naively, double-checking Morse seems to have a belief, and the authors who advocate these responses don’t give us a reason for thinking that this initial impression is mistaken — other than the fact that doing so allows us to hang on to **DBI** and **BCI**. If the case for

DBI and **BCI** thus merely rested on intuitions about cases in the first place, such a response is questionable at best.

In the next section I thus want to give a new motivation for the inquiry-based view, and in section 3 I want to show how this motivation can be used to give a principled response to the double-checking worry.

Section 2: A new argument for the inquiry-based view

In the previous section, I sketched a view of belief according to which we believe P iff we have closed inquiry into some question Q by concluding that P and I have given some preliminary reasons for accepting this view. In this section I want to highlight another reason for adopting this view. This reason derives from the role that beliefs play in the formation of our reactive attitudes. What I ultimately want to argue is that beliefs can only play this role if believing involves closing inquiry. We thus have the following argument for the (controversial) direction of **BCI**, namely that believing involves closing inquiry:

Premise 1: Beliefs are the mental state that licenses reactive attitudes

Premise 2: If beliefs did not involve closing inquiry, then beliefs would not be the mental state that licenses reactive attitudes.

Conclusion: Believing involves closing inquiry.

Let's discuss the two premises in turn:

Premise 1: Beliefs are the mental state that licenses reactive attitudes

Lara Buchak has argued that one of the functions of beliefs is to enable us to form reactive attitudes about others:

“Within our practices of holding each other morally responsible, having a reactive attitude — e.g., resentment, indignation, guilt, or gratitude — toward someone on account of her action is a prevalent, perhaps indispensable, way to hold her responsible for that action. Whether to blame or praise someone via the reactive attitudes is an all-or-nothing decision based, so it seems, on what I believe (or know) about the facts concerning her and her action, such as whether she actually performed the act and whether that act was permissible. While reactive attitudes do come in degrees, the degree of blame I assign to a particular agent is based on the severity of the act, not on my credence that she in fact did it.” (Buchak (2014), p. 299).

As Buchak notes, whether I can appropriately blame (or praise) someone for a particular action will depend on whether I have a belief that someone performed an objectionable (or praiseworthy) action. In particular Buchak proposes the following norm:

Blame Norm: Blame someone if and only if you believe (or know) that she transgressed, and blame her in proportion to the severity of the transgression. (Buchak (2014), p. 299).

The blame norm essentially states that it is beliefs that license reactive attitudes like blame and not some other mental state like high credences. This means that whether it’s appropriate for an agent to decide to blame someone, for example, will depend on whether they have a (rational) belief that the other person transgressed.

There are two complications that I am glossing over in what follows: First, I will remain agnostic about whether mere beliefs that someone committed a particular action is enough to license reactive attitudes or whether only rational beliefs can do so. The main point that I am interested in is that it is *beliefs* rather than some other mental state like the having of a high credence that licenses reactive attitudes.

Second, merely having a belief (even a rational belief) that an agent committed some action might not be enough on its own to make it appropriate for me to have a

particular reactive attitude towards that agent. It might be that further external conditions have to be met.⁷ If S committed a transgression against someone, I as a third party might lack standing to blame S even though I believe that they transgressed. Or if S had a good excuse for their transgression it might also not be appropriate for me to blame them even if believe that they transgressed. We might call these external conditions that have to be in place in order for blame to be the appropriate response in a particular situation the *external background conditions*. In what follows I will simply assume that such external conditions for the having of reactive attitudes (whatever they are) are met. We can then still ask: Given that the external background conditions are met, which mental state does the agent have to adopt towards the proposition “S committed a certain action” in order to license reactive attitudes.

We can see that this mental state seems to be belief rather than (high) credence if we consider the following example that Buchak presents where beliefs and high credences seem to come apart:

iPhone: You leave the seminar room to get a drink, and you come back to find that your iPhone has been stolen. There were only two people in the room, Jake and Barbara. You have no evidence about who stole the phone, and you don't know either party very well, but you know (let's say) that men are 10 times more likely to steal iPhones than women. I contend that this isn't enough to make you rationally believe that Jake stole the phone. (Buchak (2014), p. 292)

iPhone is a case where your credence that Jake stole the phone is very high (i.e. higher than 0.9). Now, suppose that you respond to the example by refraining from believing

⁷ See for example Smith (2007) and Cohen (2006) for relevant discussions.

that Jake stole the phone (as Buchak thinks you should). Would it be appropriate for you to blame Jake on your high credence alone?⁸

Buchak argues that the answer is no. Without a (rational) belief that Jake stole your phone, blaming him would be inappropriate. It's important to notice however that what renders it inappropriate for you to blame Jake in this case is simply the fact that you don't believe he's guilty and not that your credence in his guilt is too low to license blame. To see this, imagine your friend Peter saw Jake steal the phone and told you about it. Suppose in response to Peter's testimony you form a belief that Jake stole your phone — it would not seem similarly inappropriate for you to blame Jake in this case. And this might be despite the fact that (since you think reports like Peter's are only accurate in 90% of cases) you only have a credence of 0.9 in the claim that Jake stole your phone in this case as well. This suggests that it's beliefs and not merely high credences that license reactive attitudes.⁹ But this raises the question: in virtue of which feature is it that beliefs are able to license reactive attitudes? I want to argue that this feature is that beliefs involve closing inquiry.

Premise 2: If beliefs did not involve closing inquiry, then beliefs would not be the mental state that licenses reactive attitudes.

My argument for the claim that if beliefs did not involve closing inquiry, then beliefs would not be the mental state that licenses reactive attitudes is this:

⁸ To imagine the case in this way, we need not accept Buchak's claim that it would be irrational for you to believe that Jake stole the phone. All that we need is that an agent in **iPhone** can rationally have a high credence that Jake stole the phone without having the belief. This should be possible if we assume that the Lockean Thesis as introduced by Foley (2009) is false. This assumption is natural within the framework in which we are working because principles like **DBI** and **BCI** according to which believing P is incompatible with (rationally) inquiring seem only plausible if the Lockean Thesis is false — after all, no credence below 1 antecedently makes further inquiry irrational or impossible.

⁹ Notice that it also doesn't seem right to say that it's appropriate for me to blame Jake iff that would maximize expected utility. It might well be that blaming him will make me happy and (because by now Jake is far away and won't learn about it) it doesn't have any negative consequences on Jake's life. In this case, my blaming Jake might very well maximize expected utility - but I should still not do it.

- (1) If someone hasn't adequately closed inquiry into whether P, then it is not appropriate for them to blame an agent on the basis of P
- (2) If belief did not involve closing inquiry, then it would be possible for someone to believe some proposition P and inquire into whether P.
- (3) If it were possible for someone to believe some proposition P and inquire into whether P, then it would be possible that someone believed P but it is not appropriate for them to blame an agent on the basis of P.
- (4) If it's possible that someone believes P but it is not appropriate for them to blame an agent on the basis of P, then beliefs are not the mental state that licenses reactive attitudes such as blame.
- (5) Thus: If believing did not involve closing inquiry, then beliefs would not be the mental state that licenses reactive attitudes such as blame.¹⁰

I take steps 2-4 of the above argument to be uncontroversial. The key step is premise 1: that if someone is still inquiring into a particular proposition, then it is not appropriate to blame on the basis of that proposition.

In order to see that this is true, consider again the example of the stolen iPhone: Suppose I start an inquiry and aim to figure out who stole it. I have a suspicion that Jake stole the phone but I'm still gathering more evidence. It would surely be premature to blame Jake before I have fully closed inquiry into whether he really stole my phone - Jake deserves a full inquiry before we start to blame him. It would be premature of me to blame him while I'm still wondering whether he really took it or take any other interrogative attitude towards the question. It's only when I have settled the question of whether Jake really stole my phone that I can appropriately start to blame him.

¹⁰ I'm focusing on blame here but similar arguments could be run with other the reactive attitudes.

Since blame is not appropriate when one is inquiring it follows that the only way beliefs can license reactive attitude (as they seem to do) is because believing some proposition involves having settled the relevant question and closed inquiry.¹¹

Before I move on I briefly want to explain why I think that the argument I've given in this section supports **BCI** (i.e. the idea that believing and inquiring is impossible) rather than Friedman's normative principle **DBI**. Why can't **DBI** explain the fact that an agent who inquires cannot rationally blame others? At first glance one might think that **DBI** could in fact explain this. Suppose (for argument's sake) that it is only rational belief that licenses blame. Could we then not simply say that an agent who believes that Jake stole the phone while inquiring is irrational (due to **DBI**) and hence her belief does not license blame?

But this response is too quick. Suppose (contrary to **BCI**), that I can believe that Jake stole the phone and still wonder about whether he stole it. This might make me irrational. But notice that it wouldn't make *my belief* on its own irrational since **DBI** is a wide-scope norm. As such, **DBI** requires me either to drop my belief or drop my interrogative attitude. So I could comply with **DBI** by simply dropping my interrogative attitude and breaking off my inquiry into whether Jake stole the phone without having settled the question. Would this make it now rational for me to blame Jake? It seems to me the answer is still no. If I haven't closed my inquiry properly by settling the question then blame is still inappropriate. So it's not merely the stopping of inquiry that's required for blame — it's the answering for myself of the relevant question that is required. And so if belief is to be the mental state that licenses blame then belief has to involve *closing* inquiry in the sense specified by **BCI**.

¹¹ In this section I have only shown how the idea that beliefs license reactive attitudes supports the idea that believing involves closing inquiry, since I take this to be the controversial direction of **BCI**. But the role that beliefs play in the formation of our reactive attitudes also supports the other direction of **BCI**. In order to see this, just consider again the case of the stolen iPhone. If I have successfully closed inquiry into whether Jake was guilty by concluding that he is, this seems to be enough for me to blame him for taking my phone. So if closing inquiry didn't involve having a belief, then having a belief in Jake's guilt wouldn't be necessary for blame — I could blame Jake without believing he is guilty, as long as I have closed inquiry. However, if beliefs are necessary for blaming Jake, closing inquiry has to involve having a belief.

In the next section I will show how the insight that reactive attitudes aren't appropriate when an agent is inquiring can help us respond to what I call the double-checking objection against the inquiry-based view of belief.

Section 3: Responding to the double-checking objection

In this section I want to consider one of the most important objections to the idea that one believes P iff one has closed inquiry: the problem of double-checking.¹² Recall that the problem is posed by cases like the following:

Double-checking Morse: Morse is engaged in a routine investigation and he believes he found the murderer: The gardener did it. Nevertheless, there are two more witnesses to interview and so Morse continues to inquire further just to make sure.

In this case it seems perfectly plausible for Morse to double-check (or confirm) his belief that the gardener did it by interviewing two more witnesses without thereby giving up that belief. But if Morse's double-checking his belief is a form of inquiry (as it seems to be), then the idea that we believe P iff we have closed inquiry cannot be right in full generality. Double-checking Morse thus seems to constitute a counterexample to the inquiry-based view that we believe something iff we have closed inquiry. Despite the fact that the double-checking objection poses an important problem to the inquiry-based view of belief, it has not so far been adequately addressed in the literature.

How might we respond to cases like **Double-Checking Morse**? One option is to argue that double-checking Morse isn't genuinely inquiring. In order to see why we might doubt whether Morse is genuinely inquiring, recall again the distinction from section 1 between inquiring Morse, who adopts an interrogative attitude towards the

¹² For a discussion of a similar objection, see also Millson (2021), Falbo (forthcoming), and Woodard (ms.)

question at hand, and non-inquiring Morse, who is merely going through the motions. Perhaps double-checking Morse is like non-inquiring Morse in that he, too, is merely going through the motions. Double-checking Morse might even display *some* interest in Q, but as long as that interest falls short of Morse's adopting an interrogative attitude like wondering or being curious about Q, he would not count as genuinely inquiring in the way that I have been understanding it in this section. If Morse was not genuinely inquiring, then his case would not serve as a counterexample to the inquiry view.

However, while this way of responding to double-checking Morse might be the right diagnosis for some ways of spelling out the case, it seems to me that there are surely other ways of spelling out the details of the case according to which Morse really is genuinely inquiring. Consider for example this way of spelling out the details of Morse's case:

Curious Double-Checking Morse: Morse is engaged in a routine investigation and he believes he found the murderer: The gardener did it. Nevertheless, there are two more witnesses to interview and so Morse continues to inquire further. While interviewing the witnesses he is curious to hear what they have to say, all the while waiting to see if their testimony will confirm his belief that the gardener did it.

Given this way of spelling out the details of Morse's case it does not seem right to say that Morse is not genuinely inquiring. And here nevertheless it seems initially plausible that Morse believes that the gardener did it while he is interrogating the last witnesses — a belief that he is aiming to confirm. Since cases of double-checking only pose a problem to the inquiry-based view of belief if Morse is really inquiring, it is this version of Morse's case that I want to focus on through the rest of the paper.

What should we say about this version of Morse? If we hold fixed that Morse is genuinely inquiring into who committed the murder then perhaps the next natural thing to say is to merely deny that Morse really believes that the gardener did it. Perhaps we

might say that Morse is merely highly confident that the gardener did it (without having an outright belief), or perhaps he merely suspects it, or has a hypothesis. If Morse merely suspects or thinks it likely that the gardener did it, then again double-checking Morse doesn't provide a counterexample for the inquiry-based view of belief. This is in effect the response that Friedman (2019) and Millson (2021) consider on behalf of the inquiry-based view.

However, merely considering Morse's case as it stands, it's by no means clear that the verdict that Morse does not really have a belief is an intuitive one. And Friedman and Millson provide no further reason in support of their answer, despite considering the incompatibility of Morse's having a belief with the inquiry-based view. This makes their response seem ad hoc. And this is so especially so if our acceptance of the inquiry-based view itself rests merely on intuitions about cases like Morse's.

It is here that recalling the connection between beliefs and reactive attitudes from the previous section can help break the impasse. Once we realize that beliefs license reactive attitudes, we can provide a principled reason to suggest that our initial impression that Morse believes the gardener is the murderer must be mistaken (rather than just appealing to murky intuitions to support this judgement). In order to see this, we just have to realize that if Morse really displays an interrogative attitude towards the question of who committed the murder (e.g. he is curious to learn the answer, or curious to see if his hypothesis that it was the gardener is confirmed) — in other words, as long as Morse is genuinely inquiring — it would be inappropriate for him to (say) blame the gardener for committing the murder. Just like he should wait to put the gardener on trial until he is finished double-checking and interviewing all the witnesses, he should wait to form a reactive attitude about the gardener until he finishes his investigation. But if it would be wrong for Morse to form a reactive attitude in this situation, this suggests that Morse doesn't really believe that the gardener committed the crime (since a belief would license blame). At most, then, Morse has a high credence or a hypothesis that the gardener committed the crime.

The upshot therefore is this: Recognizing that it would be inappropriate for Morse to blame the gardener while he double-checks gives us a principled reason to claim that Morse doesn't actually believe that the gardener committed the crime. He might have a high credence or a hypothesis that the gardener did it, but he does not yet have an outright belief: for if he did, there wouldn't be a problem blaming the gardener. Thus, taking account of the connection between beliefs and reactive attitudes motivates the otherwise ad hoc claim that double-checking Morse does not count as believing that the gardener did it, and more generally, that an agent who is genuinely double-checking must lack the relevant belief. This is because agents who are genuinely double-checking are not licensed to form reactive attitudes in the way that agents who hold genuine outright beliefs are.¹³

Before I move on, I briefly want to consider an interesting argument that has recently been given in order to show that inquiring while believing can be possible after all. In a recent paper (Woodard (ms.)), Elise Woodard has argued that an agent can rationally continue to inquire into a particular question despite having a belief in the answer of that question, as long as the goal of her inquiry is not just to know the answer, but rather a higher epistemic state (such as certainty, for example). In essence Woodard's claim is this: some epistemic states are more demanding than others. Knowledge might be more demanding than belief, and certainty is more demanding than knowledge, and so on. Woodard argues that an inquiring agent might have either of these epistemic states as her goal. If an agent's goal is just to know the answer to Q then it might not be (rationally) possible for the agent to continue inquiring once she has formed a belief about the answer to Q. But if her goal is not merely to know the answer to Q but rather to have a *more demanding* epistemic state with respect to the

¹³ One might argue that the argument I've given here still fails to demonstrate that every time we double-check we fail to have a belief. This is because there might be some cases where I double-check whether P even though P isn't the kind of proposition on the basis of which one could form reactive attitudes about others. However it strikes me as ad hoc to say that we can believe P while double-checking as long as P is not a proposition on the basis of which we could form reactive attitudes, but not otherwise. It seems to me that when I double-check my attitude towards P, I am in the same mental state towards P whether I can form reactive attitudes on the basis of P or not, and so if that mental state doesn't amount to a belief in one case then it does not amount to a belief in the other case either.

answer to Q, then she might believe P while continuing to inquire. Additionally such an agent would still display enough openness and curiosity towards Q to count as genuinely inquiring.

Does Woodard's argument show that believing while inquiring can be possible? I think the answer is no. In order to show this, we can again appeal to the connection between beliefs and reactive attitudes. What we need to ask is the following: Suppose Morse has formed a belief about who committed the murder but continues to inquire further into the question *just to be certain*. Is this continued kind of inquiry compatible with reactive attitudes? Could Morse continue to blame the gardener *while he inquires to make sure that the gardener did it*? Here again, however, the answer seems to be no: It seems inappropriate for Morse to blame the gardener even while he is making sure that the gardener did it — he should first close his inquiry and only then form the reactive attitudes. But if this is so (and if it's beliefs that license reactive attitudes) this means that a Morse who inquires further just to make sure cannot, after all, hold on to his belief.¹⁴

Thus we can see that the connection between beliefs and reactive attitudes can not only be used to motivate the inquiry-based view of belief, but it can also help to defend it from an important objection.

Once we accept the inquiry-based view of belief, we can then ask what norms should govern belief if belief is related to inquiry in the way spelled out by **BCI**. In the next section I want to address this question.

¹⁴ Note however that as well as arguing that inquiring is compatible with knowledge (and hence belief), Woodard also denies that inquiring requires suspension of judgement (see Woodard (ms.), p. 14). She might thus hold that in cases of double-checking, one can inquire into Q even though one doesn't have an interrogative attitude about Q. (See also Palmira (2020) and Falbo (forthcoming) who question the assumption that inquiry needs to involve interrogative attitudes.) I agree with Woodard that it would be possible to "inquire" (in a sense of inquiry that's different from the one I have been using) into Q while believing as long as one's inquiry-like mental state does not involve an interrogative attitude. But such a case would not pose a counterexample to the inquiry-based view. This is because the inquiry-based view depends on the incompatibility of the "settled" attitude belief with the open, interrogative attitude we have during inquiry.

Section 4: Believing rationally on the inquiry-based view

Suppose we accept the inquiry-based view of belief. One big upshot of accepting such a view is that it can tell us something interesting about the norms that govern what it is rational for us to believe. If one believes P iff one closes inquiry into some question Q by concluding that P, then it is rational to believe P iff it is rational to close inquiry into Q by concluding that P. So on the inquiry-based view of belief, the norms that govern rational belief are the norms that govern (closing) inquiry.

What are those norms? It is difficult to come up with a conclusive list of what kinds of norms could govern inquiry. However I want to propose two norms that I think nevertheless have some explanatory power. It seems to me that the following two conditions, for example, are necessary for justifiably closing inquiry into Q by concluding that P:

First, before we can rationally close our inquiry by concluding P, P should be at least more probable on our evidence than any of the other hypotheses we are considering as possible answers to Q. If we're considering both P and R as possible answers to Q and our evidence supports R over P, then it would be irrational to conclude that P rather than conclude that R. If we're arriving at any conclusion at all, we should conclude that R.

Second, it seems plausible that we can only rationally close inquiry into a particular question Q if we don't expect further relevant information about Q to be available relatively cheaply. Suppose I am fairly confident that P is the right answer to Q but it would be easy, quick and costless (or almost costless) for me to learn more about Q and so form a more accurate opinion about Q. It seems to me that in this case I should continue inquiring — this is because I want to find the right answer to Q and if cheap, relevant information is available, I should take it into account. Similarly, it seems plausible that how costly some piece of information can be in order to count as relatively cheap will depend on the potential benefits I can expect from learning that piece of information — if the potential benefits of learning some piece of information /

are high, then I should be willing to pay a bit more for learning / before I stop inquiring than if the potential benefits are very low.¹⁵

We can summarize these two necessary conditions as follows:

(1) Evidential Requirement: In order to rationally close inquiry into some question Q by concluding P, P has to be more likely than any other (salient) alternative hypotheses that the agent is considering as an answer to Q on her evidence.

(2) Pragmatic Requirement: In order to rationally close inquiry into some question Q by concluding P, one must not expect that more relevant information is relatively cheaply available (such that the cost of the further information is cheap compared to the potential benefits).¹⁶

Even though these necessary conditions on when it is rational for someone to close inquiry are somewhat weak, they nevertheless offer us the tools to explain a variety of phenomena related to belief that have emerged in the recent literature. I have already discussed how the inquiry-based view of belief is required to explain how beliefs are

¹⁵ For how we might calculate the value of some piece of information, see for example Good (1966).

¹⁶ Note that you would only be required to take further information into account if you think that there might at least be some benefit to doing so. This qualification is important to avoid the following counterexample to the **Pragmatic Principle**: Suppose I believe that climate change was caused by human behavior but then I run across a short article summarizing new research on the topic in the newspaper. I am intrigued and start reading the article. As I am about to read the article I am now in a situation where more information is cheaply available. Does this now mean that I can now no longer believe that climate change was caused by human behavior? This result seems counterintuitive. But notice that it seems counterintuitive to suppose that I lose my belief in this case because I don't even expect the forthcoming information to be able to change my mind about whether climate change was caused by human behavior. Even if the article strongly argues that climate change is not caused by humans, this alone wouldn't make me change my mind about the issue. At most it would make me slightly less confident that climate change was caused by humans — I thus expect there to be no benefit of taking the extra information into account and so I would not be required to inquire further. Notice, however, that if I really thought that there was a genuine possibility (even if that possibility is small) that the article could make me change my mind about whether climate change was caused by humans, then it might be true that I ought to take this new information into account before closing inquiry — but in this case it does not seem irrational to me that we should temporarily suspend judgement on whether climate change is caused by humans while reading the article.

required in order for an agent to have reactive attitudes about others. Once we consider the implications the inquiry-based view of belief has for how we ought to form our beliefs in a rational manner, we can explain two other popular phenomena that might otherwise be difficult to explain on the same theory.

One interesting phenomenon that has emerged in the recent literature is the idea that belief is weak. This is the idea that we can (and often do) believe something without a lot of evidence (or that the conditions in which we believe that P is true are just the conditions where we *think* that P is true). Consider the following example that might motivate this view:

Horse Race: Suppose there is a horse race between three horses: A, B, C. You think the chances of A's winning are roughly 45%, the chances of B and C winning are 28% or 27% respectively. (Hawthorne, Rothschild and Spectre (2016), p. 7).

Hawthorne et al. argue that in **Horse Race**, it might very well be rational for us to believe that horse A will win, even though we don't have very good evidence for that claim. They take this to suggest that belief is weak.¹⁷

A second phenomenon that has become quite popular in the recent literature is the idea that pragmatic factors can sometimes influence what it is rational for an agent to believe, and that the epistemic standards (i.e. how confident you have to be in P before you can rationally believe it) increase with the pragmatic stakes and so can be often quite high. The traditional example of such a phenomenon is a pair of cases discussed by Fantl and McGrath:

¹⁷ For other defenders of something like this idea, see also Dorst and Mandelkern (forthcoming) and Holguin (forthcoming). One might object to this view as follows: In the previous section I have pointed out that an agent who (rationally) believes P would also be able to appropriately blame others on the basis of their belief. One might now think that the same point can be used to undermine the example of weak belief: It seems strange, for example, to say that one can appropriately praise horse A for winning (let's say). I explore this tension more elsewhere.

Low Stakes Train Case: You're at the Boston train station preparing to see friends in Providence. You are having a conversation with the person next to you and ask "Does this train make all those little stops, in Foxboro, Attleboro, etc?" It doesn't matter much to you whether the train is the "Express" or not, though you'd mildly prefer it was. He answers, "Yeah, this one makes all those little stops." Nothing about him seems particularly untrustworthy. You believe what he says.

High Stakes Train Case: You're at the Boston train station waiting for a train to Foxboro. You absolutely need to be in Foxboro, the sooner the better - your career depends on it. You've got tickets for a southbound train that leaves in two hours and gets into Foxboro in the nick of time. You overhear a conversation like the one in the low stakes train case. You think "That guy's information might be wrong. I don't want to be wrong about this. I'd better go check it out myself." (The two cases are adapted from the cases in Fantl and McGrath (2002), p.67).

The commonly-related intuition about these cases is that while it's rational for the agent in the **Low Stakes Train Case** to believe that her train will stop in Foxboro, it's not rational for the agent in **High Stakes Train Case** to believe this, given that her career depends on whether it stops there or not.

While both of these phenomena (weak belief and pragmatic encroachment) seem intuitive in their own right, the problem is that the explanations that have been offered in the literature for each of the phenomena don't validate both phenomena at the same time. In order to see this, consider first the most popular explanation of pragmatic encroachment found in the literature. In order to explain why one is rational to believe that the train will leave in Foxboro in **Low Stakes Train Case** but not in **High Stakes Train Case**, Fantl and McGrath appeal to the idea that in order to rationally

believe P one has to be able to rationally act as if P.¹⁸ The agent is rational to act as if her train will stop in Foxboro in **Low Stakes Train Case** (which might perhaps involve telling other people that the train will stop in Foxboro), but in **High Stakes Train Case** she is not (in this case she should gather more information before getting on the train). This explains why the agent is rational to believe P in the low stakes case and not in the high stakes case. However, while this view can explain what is going on in the pragmatic encroachment cases, it can't explain why it's rational to believe that horse A will win in **Horse Race**. Since it's not rational to act as if horse A will win, this view would in fact entail that it is *irrational* to believe that horse A will win in this case. Conditional on A's winning, for example, it might be rational for you to bet some large sum of money on the proposition that horse A will win. It would not, however, be rational for you to do this in fact, and so you are not rational to act as if P. Conditional on A winning it might be rational to tell everyone that horse A will win, for example, but it would also not be rational for you to do this in fact. Thus in **Horse Race** you wouldn't be rational to act as if P and so the view that would explain pragmatic encroachment wouldn't be able to explain why it's rational for you to believe that horse A will win.

On the flip-side, consider a plausible explanation of why one might be rational in having a particular belief in **Horse Race**. Hawthorne et al. point out that we might explain why one can rationally believe that horse A will win by accepting a principle like this: "it is sufficient for thinking something probable (and hence having warrant to believe it) that it be more likely than its salient alternatives" (Hawthorne et al. (2016), p. 7).¹⁹ But while such a view can explain why it's rational to believe that horse A will win in **Horse Race** (where you are more confident of horse A winning than the others), it wouldn't explain why I can't rationally believe that the train will stop in Foxboro in **High**

¹⁸ For something like this idea, see for example Fantl and McGrath (2002), Ganson (2008), Weatherson (2005), and Ross and Schroeder (2014).

¹⁹ For this idea, see also Rothschild (2020).

Stakes Train Case — after all, this hypothesis is more likely, given my evidence, than the salient alternatives.²⁰

The inquiry-based view of belief can explain both phenomena nicely if we accept the **Evidential Requirement** and the **Pragmatic Requirement**: In **Horse Race**, you are more confident that horse A will win than the others and so the **Evidential Requirement** is satisfied. Likewise, assuming that there is no more information easily forthcoming, the **Pragmatic Requirement** is satisfied. If the **Pragmatic Requirement** and the **Evidential Requirement** are merely necessary conditions for rational belief and not sufficient, then the fact that both conditions are satisfied does not by itself guarantee that one's belief is rational. However the **Evidential Requirement** and the **Pragmatic Requirement** seem to be the two most obvious restrictions on rational belief and the fact that an agent can satisfy both of these in **Horse Race** goes some way towards showing how one's belief that horse A will win might be rational.²¹

Let's turn next to the train case. Here, the **Evidential Requirement** is satisfied in both **High Stakes Train Case** and **Low Stakes Train Case**, and it's the **Pragmatic Requirement** that explains the difference in the epistemic status of one's belief in the two cases. Notice that the **Pragmatic Requirement** states that it's irrational to close

²⁰ Hawthorne et al. actually point out that something like this simple view can't be right. They suggest that perhaps the right view is something like this: "to believe something might require (a) it be significantly more likely than the salient alternatives, and (b) it be above some contextually determined threshold of likeliness" (Hawthorne et al (2016), p. 8) These two conditions sound very similar to the pragmatic and the evidential condition in the end. Note however that Hawthorne et al. don't give an account of how we might determine the threshold of likeliness in a particular context. A natural way to do this might be to use Fantl and McGrath's idea that one can believe P in a situation S iff one is confident enough in P to act as if P in that situation. But as I have pointed out, this way of determining the threshold would also not make it rational for one to believe that horse A will win in **Horse Race**.

²¹ Notice that the inquiry-based view has the interesting consequence that one's belief in **Horse Race** is only rational as long as one is (a) in a low-stakes case and (b) no more (cheap) information is forthcoming. Both of these consequences seem to be true however: It doesn't seem rational to believe that horse A will win if you are about to bet 1000 dollars on one of the horses. It likewise doesn't seem rational for you to believe that horse A will win the race in a case where your friend is an expert and has relevant information about the horses that you haven't considered. Considering the phenomenon of weak belief in light of the **Evidential Requirement** and **Pragmatic Requirement** thus offers a more subtle version of the view that belief is weak.

inquiry if further information is relatively cheaply available, in the sense that the cost of gathering such information is low compared with the potential benefit of doing so. But it seems plausible that the higher the stakes, the greater the potential benefits of gathering further information. For example, in the **High Stakes Train Case**, gathering further information could save you from getting on the wrong train and thus save your career. Thus, the cost of gathering information (namely the time and effort required to go and ask at the ticket counter about whether your train stops in Foxboro) is relatively low, compared with the potential benefit. By contrast, in the low-stakes case, it doesn't matter much to you whether the train stops in Foxboro, and so there are no real benefits to gathering further information. Thus, in this case, the cost of gathering further information is not low compared with the benefits of doing so. Therefore, in the low stakes case, the pragmatic requirement is satisfied and you can rationally close inquiry, but in the high stakes case it's not satisfied and you ought to inquire more (and thus can't rationally believe).

Thus, on the inquiry-based view of belief, the two phenomena - viz. that belief is weak and that pragmatic factors encroach on rational belief - turn out to both be explicable jointly.²²

Considering cases like **Horse Race** and **Pragmatic Encroachment Cases** thus show that our intuitions about what it is rational to believe in different situations suddenly make sense if we reframe them in the light of the question of whether it is rational to close inquiry in a given case. This further supports the inquiry-based view of belief.

It thus seems that something like the inquiry-based view underlies much of the recently discussed phenomena about belief, from the fact that beliefs are required for us to form reactive attitudes about others, to the idea that belief is weak and that

²² Note that the inquiry-based view also seems to nicely explain why it's irrational to believe something when there is more information cheaply available (as discussed by Schroeder (2012)). This might be another reason in favor of the inquiry-based view.

pragmatic factors encroach on the epistemic. The fact that the inquiry-based view can explain such a broad set of phenomena is a good reason to think that it is true.

Conclusion: An account of belief?

In this paper I have argued that we believe P iff we have closed inquiry into some question by concluding that P. But is this a full-blown account of belief that could replace the simple view according to which believing some proposition P just *is* being highly confident in it? After all, the inquiry-based view only tells us that there is a biconditional connection between believing something and closing inquiry — but this by itself does not entail that believing *is* closing inquiry: that is, that the very essence of what it is to believe something is to have closed inquiry. For example, it might turn out that believing some proposition P really consists in something else — for example in making a commitment to the truth of P, and that making that commitment just is appropriate in exactly the cases where we have closed inquiry.²³ If such a view were right, believing P wouldn't be closing inquiry into some question (even though they might be related).

However, even though I have not argued for the stronger claim that believing P just is closing inquiry, I think that this view is quite natural once we accept that we believe P iff we close inquiry into some question. It also seems to be motivated by looking in more detail at any case where we close inquiry. Suppose for example that you are investigating who committed the crime and you reach a conclusion that the butler did it. It seems to me that one does not perform two distinct mental acts of (i) closing inquiry and (ii) forming the belief. It seems to me that arriving at the conclusion and closing inquiry just is forming the belief. But even if we don't accept this stronger view that believing just is closing inquiry, the inquiry-based view of belief I've outlined in this paper is still interesting: It shows us that beliefs are very closely related to the inquiry process and that the norms that govern inquiry also, ultimately, govern belief. This seems like progress in trying to understand the nature of belief.

²³ For such a commitment view of belief, see Barranco Lopez (ms) and Neta (2018).

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