

# Partiality and Prejudice in Trust and Belief<sup>1</sup>

You can trust your friends. You *should* trust your friends. Not all of your friends all of the time: you can reasonably trust different friends to different degrees, and in different domains. Still, we often trust our friends, and it is often reasonable to do so. Why is this? In this paper I explore how and whether friendship gives us reasons to trust our friends, reasons which may outstrip or conflict with our epistemic reasons. In the final section, I will sketch some related questions concerning trust based on the trustee's race, gender, or other social identity.

## 1. Trusting and Believing

Although there are rival accounts of what trust is, most agree that trusting someone to do something need not involve belief that she will do it, or even that it is likely she will do it. In some circumstances, trust seems to be a matter of decision: we can sometimes directly control whether we trust, even though we lack that kind of direct control of our beliefs (Holton 1994). Where trust does not involve belief, it might seem obvious that trust is therefore not governed by epistemic norms. This would then leave space for friendship – or prudence, or morality, or etiquette – to give us reasons to trust someone to do something even when we do not have epistemic reasons to believe she will fulfil our trust.

To assess this line of thought, we need to consider what the attitude of trust is, and how it differs from belief. Most philosophers writing on this topic distinguish rich interpersonal trust from mere reliance: you trust your friend to take care of your dog whilst you're on holiday, but you merely rely on your garden gate to keep the dog from the busy road. The difference in these attitudes is reflected in our different responses when things go wrong: if your friend neglects your dog, you are entitled to feel resentful and betrayed, whereas if the gate breaks, those responses would be inappropriate. We sometimes take an attitude of mere reliance to other people: relying on Kant's regular morning walk to set our watches (Baier 1986) or relying on the noisy children to distract onlookers. A central task for any philosophical account of trust is to explicate the difference between the richer attitude of trust, which is

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<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements to be added.

connected with betrayal, and the attitude of mere reliance. And there are a number of ways in which this difference may be explicated (McLeod 2006 provides a helpful overview).

I will account for trust and distrust in terms of commitment, as follows. A trusts B to do X iff (i) A believes that B has a commitment to do X; and (ii) A relies upon B to do X. Moreover, A distrusts B to do X iff (i) A believes that B has a commitment to do X; and (ii) A does not rely upon B to do X.

I do not have space to defend this account here, and most of what I say in this paper would survive rejection of this account in favour of one of the usual alternatives. However a few points of clarification are essential. First, B can have a commitment to do X, in the relevant sense of ‘commitment’, even if B has no intention of doing X. In this sense of ‘commitment’, if I insincerely promise to come to your birthday party then I acquire a commitment to do so, even though I have no intention of turning up.

Second, where there is no commitment, neither trust nor distrust is appropriate: I may predict that you will buy me flowers tomorrow, but unless you have acquired a commitment to do this, I should neither trust nor distrust you in this respect. This places an epistemic constraint on both trusting and distrusting: in both cases, there must be good epistemic reason to believe that the person trusted (or distrusted) has the relevant commitment. If I trust random strangers not to swim in the North Sea in December, then I am in error, even though it is true that they will not swim in the North Sea in December: my mistake is to think that they have a commitment not to swim, to think that this is a matter for trust or distrust, to think that I could reasonably feel betrayed if they do decide to swim. This epistemic constraint on trusting and distrusting applies even where those attitudes do not involve belief that the person concerned is trustworthy (or untrustworthy). For the most part, I will neglect this particular epistemic constraint, mentioning it only where specially relevant.

Third, the notion of ‘reliance’ is borrowed from Richard Holton (1994): relying upon B to do X amounts to working the supposition that B will do X into one’s plans. Holton’s notion of reliance, or something like it, is central to many different accounts of trust, and it makes space for trusting someone to do something without believing

that she will. Working the supposition that B will do X into one's plans need not involve believing that B will do X: as Holton argues, 'Those who see belief as a disposition must have some way of distinguishing belief from perfect pretence' (68). Importantly for my purposes, however, working on the supposition that  $p$  is incompatible with belief that not- $p$ . That is because if you believe that not- $p$ , you should work on the supposition that not- $p$ , which is incompatible with working on the supposition that  $p$ . You might act in public as if supposing that  $p$ , whilst believing that not- $p$  – this might be the best option politically – but Holton argues that belief that not- $p$  will manifest itself in contingency plans, anxieties, and other private behaviours.

So trusting B to do X is compatible with lack of belief that B will do X. But it is incompatible with belief that B will not do X. This means that evidence about whether B will do X has some bearing on whether to trust B to do X, even where this trust does not involve belief that B will do X. If you have good epistemic reasons to believe that B will not do X, then you have good epistemic reason not to trust B to do X. If in such circumstances friendship – or other considerations – nevertheless give you reason to trust, then we have a potential conflict between epistemic and other reasons, a conflict I will explore through this paper.

On my account, then, trust always involves the belief that the trustee has a certain commitment; like other beliefs, this is subject to epistemic norms (and perhaps also to nonepistemic norms). Trust can also involve belief that the trustee will fulfil the trust, in which case epistemic norms clearly apply (alongside nonepistemic norms, perhaps). But trust without belief is also subject to epistemic norms: such trust is epistemically reasonable only where it is epistemically reasonable not to believe that the trustee will not fulfil the trust. Trust can be epistemically reasonable even where belief in trustworthiness is not, but nevertheless it is subject to epistemic norms.

One final preparatory point. I am concerned with different sorts of reasons to trust – roughly, epistemic and non-epistemic reasons (reasons of friendship in particular). But this distinction amongst reasons need not line up with the distinction between trusting someone as a speaker or source of knowledge, and trusting her as an actor, even though the former is sometimes called 'epistemic trust'. Indeed, the

commitment account allows us to bring both of these under a single heading: to trust someone as a speaker is to trust her to speak truthfully (this dovetails with the idea that assertion involves commitment to speak truthfully). Either trusting someone to speak truthfully, or trusting her to perform some other task, might in principle be done for epistemic and/or non-epistemic reasons.

## **2. Trust and Knowledge are Compatible**

I aim to explore situations in which epistemic reasons to trust or distrust may conflict with non-epistemic reasons to trust or distrust. But a certain misconception might threaten this project. The misconception is that trust and knowledge are somehow incompatible with one another, or at least in tension: if A *knows* that B will do X, then it is unnecessary, or inappropriate, or even impossible, for A to *trust* B to do X. For example, Paul Faulkner writes that there is ‘a tension between accepting what someone says because of trust, and doing so because one has evidence that what they say is generally true’ (2007b, 305). Moreover searching for evidence is often taken as an indication of mistrust: if I find that my boss keeps checking my work, or that my husband keeps checking my whereabouts, I will resent their lack of trust in me.

Trust does not require knowledge: sometimes we trust and are betrayed, sometimes our trust is vindicated though we did not know it would be, perhaps did not even believe it would be. But trust does not require ignorance either: you can trust someone to do something whilst knowing that she will, indeed your trust may be based, in part, on this knowledge. Only in part, because trust goes beyond mere reliance: you can know that someone will do something for fun, for its own sake, or out of self-interest, without its being appropriate for you to trust her to do this. Trust is appropriate only where you take someone to be fulfilling a commitment (different accounts of trust will differ here, but all will impose some condition which distinguishes trust from mere reliance).

Why think that trust requires ignorance? One possible source of confusion is that when we trust people, we rely upon them to act in certain ways as a matter of free choice. You do not trust me to metabolise the food in my digestive system, and nor do you distrust me in this respect, because you see that I have no choice in the matter. Likewise, if I am acting under coercion, at gunpoint, you should neither trust nor

distrust me, although you may attempt to predict what I will do. The presumption of freedom helps explain why we tend to resent those who betray our trust; this chimes nicely with the commitment account, since commitments are meaningful only where there is the possibility of free action.

It is perhaps tempting to think that when people act out of free choice, we simply cannot know what they will do; hence the traditional worry that God's foreknowledge limits our freedom. If this were so, it would be a precondition of appropriate trusting that we do not know what the trustee will do. But free choices can be entirely predictable: I know you will choose to do the right thing because you're such a good person, I know you won't choose steak because you're a vegetarian, and I know you will choose strawberry ice-cream because that's your favourite. Fatalists deny that any of us are free, the sceptic casts a shadow over all of our empirical knowledge, and human beings are complex systems whose behaviour can be hard to predict. But by ordinary standards we often do know what others will freely choose to do.

There may even be a lingering worry here that we cannot know what others will do in the future, because we cannot know *anything* about the future, perhaps because it is metaphysically 'open'. But a moment's reflection shows that we do in general take ourselves to have knowledge about various mundane aspects of the future, and that knowledge of others' future choices, whilst sometimes very difficult to come by, is not in general impossible. So considerations of freedom provide no reason to rule that trust requires ignorance.

What about checking? If I claim to trust you in some respect, there is something discordant about my looking for further evidence about your behaviour in that respect: you would be justified in concluding that I do not really trust you. Perhaps genuine trust renders knowledge unnecessary: if I seek to know whether you are reliable in this respect, that shows that I do not trust you.

However, there is a pragmatic explanation for the fact that checking is evidence of lack of trust. Checking is typically burdensome – physically, psychologically, socially – so typically I avoid checks I take to be unnecessary. Checking whether  $p$  – seeking evidence with respect to whether  $p$  – is unnecessary when I already know

whether  $p$ . So my checking your behaviour is good evidence that I take myself not to know what you will do. If I know that you have a commitment to do X, and nevertheless I think I don't know that you will do X, then I doubt whether you are motivated by your commitments: I don't trust you, and you may rightly feel aggrieved.

But none of this shows that trust and knowledge are incompatible. Checking suggests (perceived) lack of knowledge, as well as lack of trust, and does not discriminate between these two. This is illustrated by the fact that unintentional acquisition of further evidence about someone's reliability need not undermine trust. Suppose I trust you to take my cash to the bank, and I happen to bump into you while you're doing it: this doesn't make me trust you any less. Suppose you prove yourself over and over again, demonstrating beyond a shadow of a doubt that you always fulfil your commitments. This will ought to deepen my trust in you, indeed it would be perverse for me to reduce my trust, or regard you as less trustworthy, once I obtain all this extra evidence about you. Trust may sometimes occur without knowledge, or even belief, but knowing that someone will do something is entirely compatible with, may even be part of the rationale for, trusting her.

### **3. Believing our Friends to be Trustworthy**

We stand in different relationships to different people, some chosen, and some not. And some of these relationships seem to underpin special obligations, or at least to make it permissible to treat certain people better than others, whether they are our friends, our parents, our colleagues, or our fellow-citizens. Although the nature and existence of these obligations and permissions is controversial, they are usually discussed in connection with behaviour rather than belief: for example, it seems I have obligations to care for my parents which go beyond any obligations I have towards your parents, and it seems permissible for me to buy modest gifts for my children, whilst buying nothing for yours.

Friendship can underpin partiality of this kind, and Sarah Stroud (2006) argues that we owe our friends a form of partiality in our beliefs as well as in our actions; Simon Keller (2004) argues independently for a similar view. According to Stroud 'Friendship places demands not just on our feelings or our motivations, but on our

beliefs and our methods of forming beliefs...this epistemic partiality is contrary to the standards of epistemic responsibility and justification held up by mainstream epistemological theories.' (2006, 499) According to Keller 'epistemic norms sometimes conflict with the requirements of good friendship' (2004, 329).

Suppose you are told that your friend was rude and obnoxious at a recent social event; how should you react to this news? According to Stroud, 'We need to ask whether...as a good friend, you ought to react differently to this information that you otherwise would, or than a detached observer would. I shall suggest an affirmative answer.' (2006, 504) Stroud argues that you should go to greater lengths to think of alternative explanations of the reported behaviour, demand higher levels of evidence that your friend did in fact behave as reported, question the motives of the person reporting this to you, and so on. You are not required to believe the very best of your friend come what may, to defy even the strongest of evidence. But you are required to be unusually hesitant to believe the worst. For Stroud, 'friendship requires epistemic irrationality' (2006, 518).

How do these claims apply to our beliefs and behaviour around trusting? I have already distinguished between trusting someone to do something and believing that she will perform the relevant task. These can come apart in both directions: you can trust B to do X without believing that she will do X, so long as you do not believe that she will not do X. And you can believe that B will do X without trusting her to do so, if you do not believe that B has a commitment to do X (perhaps you think she will do X just for fun). For the sake of simplicity I will focus on situations in which you believe that B has a commitment to do X, so that belief that B will do X amounts to belief that B is trustworthy in this respect, and belief that B will not do X amounts to belief that B is not trustworthy in this respect.

Trustworthiness is an admirable trait, thus, if Stroud and Keller are correct, it is one we should be quick to ascribe to our friends, and slow to withhold. On this picture, friendship can give us reasons to believe our friends trustworthy, reasons which go beyond the evidence, and which do not apply to beliefs about the trustworthiness of others. I will assess this view, before turning (in section 4) to discuss our reasons for trusting where this does not involve belief that the trustee is trustworthy.

### **3.1 Friendship as providing good reasons for belief**

Neither Stroud nor Keller maintains that favouring our friends in our beliefs is always the right thing to do. Given that we already think relatively well of our friends, there are many epistemically-disreputable reasons why we might resist bad news about their characters. As in any enquiry, we are prone to confirmation bias, the tendency to notice evidence which confirms our existing beliefs and ignore evidence which undermines these (Mercier and Sperber 2011). Moreover we may resist bad news about a friend if it retrospectively undermines our shared history of friendship: part of the pleasure and value of friendship is a sense of mutual understanding and respect, making it particularly painful to discover we have been wrong all along about a friend. And if we accept bad news about a friend's character, we then face difficult choices amongst unappealing options: should we quietly drop the friend, provoke a confrontation, or accept a continuing friendship contaminated with doubts?

These are genuine phenomena, which indicate how likely we are to be led astray epistemically with respect to our friends. But these phenomena do not show that we have reasons of friendship to resist bad news in this way, or that norms of friendship require us to do so. The considerations are all in some sense selfish – they play on our wish to be right, to have been right, to be a good judge of character, and to avoid difficult situations. None of these are really reasons of friendship, and none are directed towards our friend's interests as opposed to our own. Instead, they are like the many factors, from tiredness to stereotyping, which can disrupt epistemic rationality in any context, leading us to reason badly or misjudge evidence. We do not have 'reasons of tiredness' to be forgetful or sloppy in our thinking, even though tiredness can bring this about, and nor is there a 'norm of tiredness' that we should think poorly.

In contrast, for Keller 'A norm of friendship is a truth about what you should do, insofar as you are a particular person's good friend. If you and I share a close friendship, then there may be norms of friendship telling me to keep in touch, to come and pick you up when your car breaks down...These are all things that I might not do for just anyone, but they are things that a good, true friend would do for you.' (2004,

330) Keller argues that norms of friendship include truths about what you should believe in certain circumstances, insofar as you are a particular person's good friend.

Friendship can distort our thinking about our friends. But Stroud and Keller contend that friendship also gives us good, though epistemically dubious, reasons to resist bad news about our friends. Friendship is interestingly different from tiredness, confirmation bias, stereotyping, and so on, since it is a central, valuable part of human flourishing, not a weakness or flaw to be resisted. It is not just that friendship causes us to distort our reasoning; rather, friendship demands such 'distortion', and moreover the demands of friendship deserve to be taken seriously. Only a cartoon villain would seek to avoid all reasoning whilst under the influence of friendship.

### **3.2 Evidence of good character**

Stroud and Keller are surely right that we ought sometimes to respond differently to new evidence depending upon whether a friend is involved. But for this to provoke a conflict with epistemic rationality, this differential response needs to go beyond anything which can be explained by our differential epistemic situation with respect to our friends. Put simply, we already know a lot about our friends, and this can give us good epistemic reason for treating new information about our friends differently from new information about our non-friends. We already have lots of beliefs about our friends, and these beliefs count as evidence to be weighed in the balance with new stories about our friends, giving us some reason to reject those stories which do not fit our existing picture.

This breadth of evidence is not exclusive to friendship, for we can come to know work colleagues, carers, patients, or even our students better than we know our friends, in some respects at least. Stroud discusses a biographer who becomes expert on a particular historical figure without ever meeting her; we might also consider an obsessive fan who acquires more information about her idol than even the idol possesses. But where we do know a great deal about non-friends, we should be cautious about accepting new stories which conflict with the mass of existing evidence, just as we are with our friends: I have never known my colleague to lose his temper in a meeting, and this makes me sceptical about the claim that he did so yesterday, even though we are not friends. Moreover, our existing beliefs about our

friends are on the whole positive – why else would we be friends? – which helps explain the asymmetry in our reaction to negative stories about our friends (a tendency to reject), and our reaction to positive stories (a tendency to accept).

Keller's central case cannot be explained in this way. Eric's friend Rebecca invites him to attend her poetry reading, at a venue where he has heard lots of terrible poetry; Eric has no previous experience of Rebecca's poetry. Keller argues that, on purely evidential grounds, Eric should believe that Rebecca's poetry will be bad: he would believe this of any unfamiliar poet about to read in this venue. But, as a friend, Eric should not believe this of Rebecca. Moreover, during the reading, Eric should form beliefs about Rebecca's poetry more charitably than he would regarding a stranger's poetry. Keller argues that neither Rebecca's being Eric's friend, nor their shared history, give him evidence that she is a good poet. Eric does not choose his friends for their poetic talents, yet it seems his friendship with Rebecca requires him to think well of her in this respect.

Whatever we make of Keller's case, most of us do choose our friends in part for their trustworthiness, and we take ourselves to have positive evidence about the trustworthiness of our friends. Sometimes we differentiate, trusting one friend sober but not drunk, trusting another friend to keep a secret, but not to repay a loan. But this guides our reaction to negative stories about them: no surprise that Belinda behaved badly after drinking all evening, but it's hard to believe that she stole a purse at the gym. Trustworthiness is not the same virtue as honesty or sincerity, since people can be untrustworthy through ignorance or incompetence: someone who sincerely relates a bunch of falsehoods, or sincerely undertakes to complete a task she is incapable of performing, is untrustworthy though she is well-intentioned. Nevertheless, the self-knowledge required for trustworthiness in the fullest sense is something we value in our friends, and attempt to demonstrate to them. So we take ourselves to have good evidence that our friends are trustworthy in at least certain respects.

Stroud argues that these existing beliefs about the positive characteristics of our friends do not really have the evidential status we attribute to them. After all, they themselves will have been formed under the pressure of friendship, which pushes us

to put a positive spin on the words and behaviour of our friends. ‘But think how much of that “knowledge” of your friend’s character may already have been corrupted and slanted by the interpretive heuristics of the good friend. It is simply not clear that your beliefs about your friend’s character constitute evidence in a sense that supplies epistemic justification.’ (2006, 516)

Stroud claims that friendship-driven beliefs are ‘corrupted and slanted’, so cannot in turn justify further beliefs. Her opponent denies the premise, seeing the earlier beliefs as epistemically justified by earlier experience of the friend’s character. Both sides agree that friendship does not license us to believe whatever we like about our friends. And both should acknowledge that we sometimes find it difficult to think clearly about our friends, just as we find it difficult to think clearly when tired, distracted, or drunk. Whilst this may reduce the evidentiary value of our existing beliefs about our friends, it also emphasises the difficulty of showing, as Stroud must, that friendship really provides good reasons for belief.

### **3.3 Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Stroud and Keller point out that we often ought to respond differently to our friends than to our non-friends, especially where our friends’ characters are in question, and I have been arguing that at least some of this difference can be accounted for by the fact that our epistemic situation vis-à-vis our friends differs from our epistemic situation vis-à-vis others. Thus far I have treated belief that our friends are trustworthy as just another belief about our friends’ characters, considering whether Stroud and Keller are right that we have non-epistemic reasons of friendship to believe our friends trustworthy, as well as generous, brave, or kind. But there are further considerations which apply more specifically to trust; I will argue that we often have especially good epistemic reasons to believe our friends will prove trustworthy to us.

Many people are more motivated by the trust of their friends, and by the commitments they make to their friends, than they are with respect to strangers. This difference may be generated by noble considerations of friendship, or by more pragmatic concerns: there can be more to lose from letting down a friend. This differential behaviour is not entirely admirable – promises should be kept, and lies should not be told, no matter who the audience is – though in situations where we cannot keep all of

our conflicting promises, it may be acceptable to prioritise our friends, other things being equal. Nevertheless, it is often more reasonable to believe your friends will prove trustworthy to you than to believe this of strangers, since your friends are objectively more likely to fulfil *your* trust, however they behave to others. (In Stroud's main case, where you hear a story about your friend's behaviour towards some third party, this consideration does not apply: perhaps *you* can trust your friend, but others should not.)

There are, as ever, exceptions. There are circumstances in which your friend might let you down instead of disappointing someone else, because your friend hopes that you will understand and forgive her. She may also find it more tempting to lie about some matters to you than she would do to a therapist, doctor, or even a stranger on a train, because she is concerned to maintain your good opinion of her, or because she doesn't want to worry you. But if she takes these liberties too often, you will feel you have been taken for granted, and come to resent your friend. Friendship requires mutual respect and openness as well as forgiveness.

So it will often be more reasonable – epistemically more reasonable – for you to believe that your friends will be trustworthy to you than to believe this of strangers. And we can have a good sense of where the exceptions to this rule may lie, in part through knowing our friends well: we know their weaknesses as well as their strengths.

I have argued that we often have good reason to expect our friends to prove trustworthy. But this point should be distinguished from the superficially similar claim, that trust can encourage trustworthy behaviour, at least where the trust is made manifest to the trustee (Paul Faulkner explores related issues in his (2007a)). This is not the universal situation, but again it may be more common with respect to friends: our friends may be more likely to recognise and respond to our belief in them. Similar considerations count against distrusting our friends: friends are more likely to be insulted by distrust, or even suspension of judgement, and step back from trustworthy behaviour, whilst a stranger might not give this a second thought.

Do such phenomena create additional epistemic reasons to believe our friends will fulfil our trust – and to make this belief manifest? In this respect, believing someone trustworthy can be a self-fulfilling prophecy: if you believe, that will help make it true. Given that we want our friends to be trustworthy, this clearly creates a prudential reason to believe them trustworthy. But it is less clear that it creates an epistemic reason to believe. After all, these reasons count equally well in favour of distrust: if you believe your friend to be untrustworthy, your believing this will help make it true. There is a prudential asymmetry here – we have good reason to encourage trustworthiness rather than untrustworthiness – but no epistemic asymmetry.

### **3.4 Epistemic Permissiveness**

The situations described by Keller and Stroud are familiar to us; we often favour our friends in our beliefs, including beliefs about their trustworthiness, and this is often the right thing to do, not a failing or weakness to be overcome. However it is especially difficult to identify cases in which friendship gives us good reason to believe someone will fulfil our trust, when we ought not to believe the same thing of a non-friend even given the same evidence. This is because it is especially difficult to construct a case in which we would have just the same evidence of a non-friend's trustworthiness to us as we have of a friend's trustworthiness to us. So the picture is messy, and the case for non-epistemic reasons for belief is as yet unproven.

But it would be rash to conclude that we are never justified in believing better of a friend than we do a non-friend except where evidence demands this. Instead of insisting on this conclusion, I will explore the idea that even if there are such differences, this does not show that friendship norms sometimes conflict with epistemic norms, or that friendship can require epistemic irrationality.

How can we judge what epistemic norms, or epistemic rationality, demand of a subject in a given situation? Both Keller and Stroud operate a kind of counterfactual test of epistemic reasonableness. They consider what we would (or should) conclude about a non-friend, given the evidence available, then compare this to what we do (or should) conclude about a friend, given the same evidence. For example Keller writes that Eric 'will believe that Rebecca's poetry was pretty good...even though he would

not have those beliefs about the work of a stranger who read exactly the same poem in exactly the same way' (333), and that Eric behaves as a good friend in believing thus. Stroud asks 'whether, as a good friend, you ought to react differently to this information [which casts your friend in a bad light] than you otherwise would, or than a detached observer would' (504), and she answers that you should indeed react differently.

The thought is that friendship *per se* is an epistemically-irrelevant factor, and so if this factor makes us adopt a doxastic attitude we would not adopt in its absence, then it tips us into epistemic irrationality. In itself, the counterfactual difference between what we would believe of a stranger and what we do believe of a friend looks symmetrical. So we judge our friends differently from our non-friends: why suppose that it is our treatment of our friends which is epistemically irrational? Perhaps we're being too mean to our non-friends. To avoid this concern, the counterfactual test sometimes turns on direct comparison between what we *ought* rationally to believe of a stranger, and what we *ought* to believe of a friend, rather than what we do and would believe.

Let's concede that if we must choose a single epistemic standard, then it is plausible that the standard we apply to non-friends is the epistemically rational one. So if friendship requires us to deviate from the standards we ought to apply to non-friends, then the norms of friendship conflict with epistemic norms. But why think that we must choose a single standard for all cases? This is to assume that there is always a single epistemically permissible or reasonable attitude to take to a given proposition, on the basis of a given array of evidence. But this assumption is dubious. Sometimes the evidence clearly tells us to believe that *p* (or that not-*p*); sometimes it is clear that we do not have enough evidence to arrive at a reasonable belief either way. But in many circumstances, a number of different options are permitted.

Different people – and the same person in different moods – can reasonably differ in their doxastic policies. Some people are somewhat quicker to belief than others are, some put more weight on the evidence of their own senses than others do, some are more sceptical about testimony than others are. There are many reasonable attitudes to epistemic risk, many acceptable ways to strike the balance between pursuing true

belief and avoiding false belief. We are all familiar with situations in which more than one conclusion could reasonably be drawn, even against the same background assumptions. For example, disagreements between colleagues about what grade a student paper deserves are not always reducible to disagreements about what qualities a student paper ought to exhibit. One can be an atheist, and regard oneself as epistemically reasonable in this respect, without regarding theists as epistemically unreasonable. Scientists can reasonably disagree about the merits of a given theory, even though all have access to the relevant evidence.

If, in a given situation, more than one set of standards is epistemically reasonable, then the fact that we employ different standards with respect to our friends than we do with non-friends does not entail that we are doing something epistemically unreasonable in either case. This picture explains why friendship does not give us reason to believe that our friends are absolutely marvellous, only to see them in what Keller describes as ‘the best possible light’ (330). ‘Possible’ here may be governed by epistemic permissibility, not psychological capability; friendship requires us to give our friends the benefit of the doubt, but no more than this.

I am suggesting a form of epistemic permissiveness, a denial of the doctrine which Roger White (2005) calls ‘Uniqueness’: given one’s total evidence, there is a unique rational doxastic attitude that one can take to any proposition (see also Feldman 2007). The permissive, anti-Uniqueness thought is that, under certain circumstances, more than one doxastic attitude is epistemically permissible, so that a difference between how we treat our friends and how we treat our non-friends, even given the same evidence, need not amount to epistemic irrationality in either case. White raises a number of important concerns about the denial of Uniqueness, which I cannot address here. Nevertheless, we should note that epistemic permissiveness, if it proves to be coherent, places yet another obstacle in the way of those who argue that non-epistemic reasons, such as reasons of friendship, can conflict with epistemic reasons, especially where trust is concerned.

We have established that we often have better evidence that our friends will fulfil our trust than we do for the same belief about non-friends. Thus the belief that our friends will fulfil our trust is often better justified than the analogous belief about non-friends.

Even where we do not have this clear evidential difference, given epistemic permissiveness, it may be epistemically permissible to believe as Stroud and Keller say that friendship requires us to do, to believe that our friends will fulfil our trust on evidence which would not compel us to believe that non-friends will do so. Each of these points make it incrementally harder to establish a conflict between epistemic norms and friendship norms, although I have not demonstrated that such conflicts cannot possibly arise.

#### **4. Trust Without Belief**

Throughout section 3, I have discussed our reasons to believe that someone will fulfil our trust, and I have examined Stroud and Keller's arguments to the effect that friendship can give us reasons for belief which outstrip the epistemic reasons available to us. As we saw earlier, however, trusting someone to do X does not always involve belief that she will do X, though it is incompatible with belief that she will not do X. When we find ourselves in that middle zone, where we believe that someone has a commitment to do X, yet the evidence neither requires us to believe that she will do X, nor requires us to believe that she will not do X, it seems open to us to choose whether to trust or to distrust.

By hypothesis, in such situations epistemic reasons do not govern our choice, though they help determine whether we are in such a situation in the first place. How, then, might reasons of friendship help determine our choice? Recall Keller's claim that if you and I are friends, this gives me reason to come and pick you up when your car breaks down, for example. If I do this, you benefit. Likewise, if I trust you, you are likely to benefit: being trusted brings freedoms and opportunities not otherwise available. Moreover, coming to pick you up when your car breaks down is somewhat onerous for me, and I don't seem to be obliged to do this for strangers (supposing they're merely inconvenienced by the breakdown, not endangered). Likewise, trusting you can be somewhat onerous for me, especially where the evidence isn't strong enough to require belief that you are in fact trustworthy. Trust often involves risk, and I don't seem to be obliged to take these risks for strangers.

So there are reasons of friendship to trust our friends when this is epistemically permissible, even where we do not believe our friends will fulfil our trust. And in

such situations we also have self-interested reasons to trust our friends – trusting your friend will help deepen the friendship, and encourage her to trust you in return, bringing future rewards for both of you.

These points bring into focus a final concern about Stroud's and Keller's arguments that friendship can give us reasons to believe which go beyond what epistemic rationality permits. Stroud and Keller describe situations which prompt us to agree that friendship gives us reason to believe something we would not believe otherwise. A more deflationary description of these situations would concede that friendship gives us reason to act as if we believe the proposition in question, but that this falls short of having a reason to actually believe it. Thus we should protest out loud when someone tells us a negative story about a friend, but we should privately judge on the evidence. And Eric's friendship with Rebecca obliges him to behave in supportive ways towards her, helping her find further opportunities to read her poetry but perhaps it does not oblige him actually to believe that her poetry is good.

Keller responds that what Rebecca wants is for Eric to believe that her poetry is pretty good, not just to act as if he does. 'I doubt, however, that this kind of pretend approval is what we really want in a good friend. It is not likely to be what Rebecca wants when she looks for a supportive person in the audience.' (335) But what our friends want of us is not a straightforward guide to what friendship gives us reason to do. There may be a conflict between acting as your friend wishes, and acting in her best interests, though concerns about paternalism should prevent us invariably opting for the latter. Moreover, what Rebecca wants is for it to be the case that her poetry is good. So at least one reason why she wants Sam to believe that her poetry is good is that this will provide evidence that the poetry is indeed good; she might care less about what Sam believes if she takes him to be a poor judge of poetry. But if Sam's belief is guided by non-epistemic factors, it is not evidence of its own truth, and thus lacks the instrumental value Rebecca hopes it will have.

Likewise, Stroud argues that 'A good friend does not defend her friend outwardly...while inwardly believing the worst of her friend' (505). But again there are a number of possible explanations available. First, we can concede that a good friend should not believe the *worst* of her friend, i.e. should not lean towards the least

charitable extreme of what is epistemically permissible; this is compatible with the claim that a good friend need not believe what is epistemically impermissible. Second, the person described here is behaving insincerely, saying one thing whilst believing another, and this provides at least some reason to condemn her behaviour.

These difficulties are heightened when we consider trust. I argued above that friendship gives us reason to trust our friends, where this is epistemically permissible at least, because of the benefits our friends will reap from our trusting them. But many of these benefits are available so long as we trust, and do not depend upon us also believing that our trust will be fulfilled. Moreover the risks we take when we trust without believing are not always less onerous than the risks we take when we believe that our trust will be fulfilled. Friendship gives us reason to take these risks in order to offer our friends these benefits, but this falls short of giving us reason to believe our friends trustworthy where this belief is not supported by the evidence.

### **5. Rational Trust, Epistemic Injustice, and Forbidden Base Rates**

Finally, I want to outline some connections between these issues about trusting on the basis of friendship, and issues about trusting – or distrusting – on the basis of race, gender, class, or other social identities. I do not have space to explore these important matters in the depth they deserve, so will limit myself to raising some questions.

Miranda Fricker in her *Epistemic Injustice* (2007), explores the notion of ‘testimonial injustice’. The central case of testimonial injustice is identity-prejudicial credibility deficit; to a first approximation, this occurs when a speaker is not taken seriously as an informant because of the audience’s prejudices about her race or gender, for example. Fricker has all sorts of interesting things to say about testimonial injustice, and the distinctively epistemic harms to which it gives rise. But I will focus on the fact that credibility deficit is defined both in counterfactual terms, and by reference to what is epistemically required of the audience. Counterfactual: ‘the prejudice...results in [the speaker] receiving less credibility than she otherwise would have – a credibility deficit’ (2007, 17). Epistemic requirements: ‘...there is no puzzle about the fair distribution of credibility...the hearer’s obligation is obvious: she must match the level of credibility she attributes to her interlocutor to the evidence that he is offering the truth’ (19).

Like Stroud and Keller, Fricker uses counterfactual considerations as a guide to what epistemic rationality requires. In situations where (e.g.) a speaker's being female is *per se* an epistemically irrelevant factor, then if this factor makes us adopt a doxastic attitude we would not adopt in its absence, i.e. if the speaker were not female, then it tips us into epistemic irrationality. As with Stroud and Keller, the possibility of epistemic permissiveness derails this argument: if more than one doxastic attitude is epistemically permissible, then a difference in our responses between two evidentially-equivalent situations need not show that we are epistemically irrational in either case.

But this pushes us to make explicitly moral evaluations of these counterfactual differences in judgement. Setting aside larger issues about the compatibility of morality and partiality (Baron 1991), considerations of friendship seem a morally acceptable reason to give someone the benefit of the doubt, at least where this is epistemically permissible. But it does not seem morally acceptable to use considerations of race, gender or class in this way. Even if it is epistemically permissible to be somewhat mean-minded, and epistemically permissible to be quite charitable, it is not morally permissible to switch between these doxastic policies on grounds of race, gender, or class. Thus epistemic permissiveness – if it proves viable – opens up new questions about epistemic injustice, showing that this can arise even without epistemic irrationality.

Tamar Gendler takes these matters a step further. Like Fricker, she raises many more interesting issues than I can mention here, and I will focus on the notion of 'forbidden base rates' (Gendler 2011, section 5, where she discusses Tetlock et al (2000)). We do not live in perfectly egalitarian societies, and race, gender, class and other identities can significantly affect how our lives work out. For example, in the US in 2004, only 10.2% of engineers were female (source: Society of Women Engineers). You may not have known this exact statistic, but the ballpark figure probably doesn't surprise you.

Now suppose you're at a reception for engineers and their spouses, and you're introduced to a male-female couple about whom you know next to nothing. Odds are,

he's the engineer. But if you have anti-sexist aspirations, you may feel pulled towards keeping an entirely open mind about which of these two strangers is the engineer, rather than allowing your statistical knowledge to incline you towards the man. If you do 'slip' into assuming the man to be the engineer, and this turns out to be a mistake, you're likely to be more embarrassed than you would be had you wrongly assumed the couple to live in the local area, on the grounds that most guests at the reception live locally. And a female engineer from out of town is likely to get more annoyed by people assuming she's 'the spouse' than by people assuming she lives locally, even though both assumptions have roughly the same statistical support.

The 'forbidden' base rate here is the statistical information about the relative numbers of male and female engineers. Discussing a different, race-oriented case, Tetlock and his co-workers argue that 'the primary obstacle to using the putatively relevant base rate is not cognitive but moral' (2000, 854). There are many issues to unpack before we can draw any determinate conclusions (Egan 2011 has useful discussion, and also makes the connection to Keller and Stroud). However this at least opens up the possibility that moral reasons – indeed, reasons connected quite directly with issues of fairness and impartiality – can direct us towards doxastic states which are not epistemically permissible.

Neither Gendler nor Tetlock *et al* are specifically concerned with trust, and Fricker's main concern is with trusting speakers, rather than trusting people to act. Nevertheless, these intriguing arguments have clear connections to debate about trust more generally. But exploring those connections must remain a task for another occasion.

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