Pervasive epistemic dependence on others is part of the human condition. Much of what we know and/or (justifiably) believe is based wholly, or in part, on what other people believe, particularly those within our respective epistemic communities. A majority of our beliefs are based on testimony from those within our communities, which includes most of our historical and scientific beliefs. (Historical and scientific beliefs are paradigm examples of belief-dependency.) So the epistemic communities to which we belong largely determine the beliefs that come to populate our individual belief-sets. Moreover, one’s judgment about the credibility of a proposition is partly a function of what she already believes; thus, her web of belief acts a filter of sorts. What we find tenable or plausible is filtered through our webs of belief via the procedures and cognitive processes by which we form and maintain beliefs; and, we inherit these cognitive characteristics from previous generations. Thus, not only do others influence the beliefs we end up holding; they pass on belief-forming and belief-maintaining procedures, and the norms employed to assess the rational status of those beliefs. Furthermore, we also see ourselves as purveyors of reliable information, and even transmitters of knowledge. In other words, we also think of others as epistemically dependent on our cognitive doings – people who trust us in certain ways to get them to the truth of some matter. As Welbourne contends, these relations of trust cement epistemic communities.

What binds the members of a community is trust. This is partly a matter of the reliance…on assumptions about what our fellows know, and it is partly a matter of faith in the reliability of our fellows as purveyors of knowledge. But this trust is, I suggest, sustained and reinforced by a feeling of dependence on others. Much of the knowledge which each of us possesses has been obtained from others (Welbourne 1981, p. 303).

We not only obtain knowledge from others (that is, assuming knowledge is possible); many of the beliefs in our respective webs are justified/rational due to sociological factors, which includes relations of epistemic trust. Given our epistemic situations the justificatory status of our
beliefs partly supervenes on social factors, namely on the evidence we get via other people’s beliefs whom we conscientiously (or justifiably) trust to get us to the truth. The justificatory status or the degree of justification I possess for some belief is partly dependent on my beliefs about what others believe about the proposition. In fact, it seems that well-functioning epistemic agents subject their beliefs to conscientious self-criticism, especially when the situation calls for it. Part of reflecting on the rational status of one’s beliefs includes taking what other people believe and/or testify to as epistemically relevant information.

Though most epistemologists think that other people’s beliefs are relevant to what one ought to believe, very little attention has been paid to the various roles these beliefs can play in rational assessments of one’s own belief. The main goal of this paper is to do just that. In this paper I explicate various ways in which awareness of another person’s belief can function for your own belief. I do this in section 1. Then, in section 2, I explore the idea that one’s own belief is evidence for her when she conscientiously reflects about its rational status, particularly in cases where she questions whether or not to maintain (or give up the) belief. I argue that a conscientious person’s belief is a reason of some kind to maintain belief when reflecting upon its rational status. I end by giving some suggestions on how one’s own belief might function for her.

1. Beliefs of Others as Higher-Order Evidence

Does another person’s belief that p count as evidence in favor of the belief’s credibility? I think it does. This claim must be filled out more, though. For, it isn’t clear whether S’s merely believing that p gives me prima facie reason to believe it, or whether I must be justified in believing that S is a reliable source in the domain of p before her belief becomes epistemically relevant to what I am rational believing.

The debate between epistemic egoists and non-egoists basically boils down to this dilemma.¹ On one hand, the non-egoist claims the mere fact that another person believes p gives me prima facie reason to believe it. The egoist, on the other hand, maintains that I must have

evidence of another person’s reliability in the relevant domain before her opinions within the
domain count in favor of their reasonableness for me. So, really, the egoist and non-egoist
disagree about the conditions under which another person’s belief duly counts as evidence in
favor of her own. That is, they disagree on whether a person S must have evidence of another’s
track record before that person’s belief becomes epistemically relevant for S. But they do agree
that what another person believes can be epistemically relevant to what I’m justified in believing.
My beliefs do the same for other people when they become aware of them.

I think Richard Foley (2001) and Linda Zagzebski (2008) have made a convincing case
for non-egoism. I’ll assume for the purposes of this paper that non-egoists are correct. As Foley
notes, epistemic self-trust in one’s basic epistemic faculties and cognitive capabilities is
inescapable. A major reason why we cannot escape self-trust in our individual basic epistemic
faculties and cognitive capabilities is in large part due to the fact there are no non-question-
begging reasons we can give for the reliability of our faculties. Therefore, epistemic rationality
not only permits self-trust; it requires self-trust if rational belief is possible at all. Without self-
trust in the reliability of our faculties and capabilities rational belief seems all but impossible.
Rational belief, thus, has its foundation in self-trust. In fact, for Foley, epistemic rationality is
grounded in self-trust. Without self-trust, pervasive skepticism awaits. If we are not skeptical
about our own intellectual abilities and procedures, then we are committed on pain of
irrationality to grant basic prima facie authority to the opinions of others. In Foley’s words:
“Insofar as I trust my own faculties and opinions, and insofar as this trust is reasonable, it not
being condition on rationality that I have non-question-begging assurances of my reliability, I am
pressed to grant intellectual authority [or trust] to others (2001, p. 175).” He offers two
reasons for this conclusion. First, we inherit many of our individual beliefs from others. Thus,
we face rational pressure to grant others the same basic authority: “For, insofar as the opinions of
others have shaped our opinions, we would not be reliable unless they were (Ibid., p. 102).”
Second, Foley says that most of us have similar cognitive equipment. “So, once again, if I trust
myself, I am pressured on the threat of inconsistency also to trust you (Ibid., p. 102).” If Foley is
right, what follows from these considerations is what I’ll call the principle of universal trust
(PUT).

PUT: The fact that another person believes p gives you prima facie reason to believe it.
As Foley notes, another person S’s belief that p is prima facie reason for you only if you justifiably believe that she does in fact believe p. For, you may either be unaware that S believes p or you might have counterbalanced evidence in support of the conclusion that she believes p. In either case you would probably not be justified in believing that S believes p. With that clarification in mind, the idea is still that what other people believe counts as evidence (or a reason) for you, that is, when you become aware of her belief.

In the remainder of this section I explore various ways in which other people’s beliefs factor into what is rational for one to believe – to fill out PUT in more detail. In other words, the purpose of this section is to explicate various functions another person’s belief can play for me. In spelling out various functions we can see, at least in part, why other people’s beliefs are epistemically relevant. The beliefs of others, I will claim, act as higher-order evidence, which is evidence (i) about the existence of evidence, or (ii) a body of evidence’s merit or character.\(^2\) Higher-order evidence is to be contrasted with first-order evidence, which is not about the existence of evidence or the merits of the evidence in one’s (or another’s) possession. Thus, when I get higher-order evidence E for p, E is either evidence that there is first-order evidence for p, or it is evidence that says something about the merit of the first-order evidence. Suppose I believe that p on first-order evidence E*. As I’ve defined ‘higher-order evidence’, E only indirectly supports p by offering evidence for the conclusion that my first-order evidence E* supports belief in p. If other’s beliefs are epistemically relevant instances of higher-order evidence, it follows, then, that rationality-assessments for many of our beliefs must appeal to what’s going on in the heads of other people.

A single person’s belief can function differently for various people. For example, you and I might knowingly agree that p is true, but on different evidence (for all we know). But, you might knowingly agree with another person S on the same evidence. So it seems to me that your belief functions differently for me than it would for S. There are many different types of higher-order evidence that one might come to possess by becoming aware of another person’s belief. But four examples stick out in my mind as most relevant for our purposes, each of which fulfills its own function.

\(^2\) Feldman (2009) characterizes higher-order evidence this way.
Let me quickly spell out the four functions before I explicate them in more detail. First, there is a kind of higher-order evidence person $S$ gets when she justifiably believes that another person $R$ believes that $p$, where $S$ and $R$ do not share the same evidence, and $S$ has yet to judge for herself whether $p$. This kind of evidence signals that there is (extra) evidence for $p$. Call this the ‘Evidence of Evidence Function’ (EEF) of higher-order evidence. Second, $S$ procures higher-order evidence when she both believes that $p$, and justifiably believes that $R$ agrees with her judgment (that is, $R$ believes that $p$), but on different and unspecified evidence. This kind of evidence signals that $R$ does not possess any relevant defeaters for $S$’s belief. Call this the ‘No Lurking Defeaters Function’ (NLDF). Third, there is a kind of higher-order evidence $S$ obtains when $S$ and $R$ share the same evidential set, $E$, and $S$ justifiably believes that $R$ believes $p$ on $E$, but has yet to make a judgment herself based on $E$. This kind of higher-order evidence signals that $E$ makes $p$ reasonable to believe. Call this the ‘Right Assessment Function’ (RAF) of higher-order evidence. Finally, there is a kind of higher-order evidence $S$ gets when she justifiably believes that $R$ agrees with her on the same evidence, $E$. This kind of evidence confirms that $S$’s weighing of $E$ was rationally permissible (or something like that). Call this the ‘Right Assessment Confirming Function’ (RACF). This list of functions is not exhaustive; but it is the most relevant for our purposes here. Let’s first consider EEF and NLDF.

1.1 EEF and NLDF

Take EEF. Suppose that you discover John believes some proposition $p$, but you have yet to make a judgment for yourself whether $p$. Further, suppose you justifiably believe that your evidential sets differ. If John’s belief is epistemically significant for you, then it must play some specific role. Following what I said above, John’s belief counts as prima facie higher-order evidence. More specifically, it’s evidence that there is further evidence for $p$ to which you are not privy, albeit very weak evidence. Thus, you get indirect evidence in favor of $p$. That is, when you become aware of John’s belief you do not obtain his evidence, but you get evidence that he has evidence. Now one might object and say that it’s not the case that we get evidence that there is evidence just by becoming aware of John’s belief. After all, he may have based his belief on wishful thinking. First of all, I think most normal adults base most of their beliefs on at

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3 In this kind of case it’s not that $S$ has suspended judgment on $p$; $S$ just hasn’t formed an attitude on the evidence.
least some evidence. Therefore, I think basing beliefs on wishful thinking is not the norm.

Second, we could modify the case somewhat so that John’s belief is that he has evidence for some claim. So even if you don’t buy that another person’s belief can act as evidence of evidence when you are unaware of his conscientiousness, it would seemingly do so when the content of the belief was that your interlocutor has evidence. For example, you might become aware that John believes he has evidence for $p$. The basic idea is as follows:

Evidence of Evidence (EOE): If you have reason to believe that another person has evidence for $p$, then you obtain evidence for $p$; that is, you have reason to believe there is evidence for $p$.

In the case above, John’s belief counts as evidence that there is evidence for $p$, but weak evidence if you are unaware of his level of conscientiousness. His belief counts for more, though, when you possess evidence of his conscientiousness in the relevant domain. It seems right to say that if you are justified in believing that John is conscientious, the evidence you obtain via your awareness of his belief is epistemically stronger than it would have been if you knew nothing about his epistemic credentials.

Suppose that you are justified in believing that John is conscientious in domain $D$, and you justifiably believe that John believes $p$, but his evidential set is not identical to yours. Further, suppose you have yet to make a judgment on $p$. As EOE would indicate, that you become aware that John believes $p$ gives you evidence that there is evidence for $p$. More specifically, you get evidence that there is additional evidence for $p$ that you’ve not come across. Moreover, we have assumed that John is a conscientious believer, and you are justified in believing that he not only gathers evidence before forming beliefs, but he respects the evidence in his possession, so that John would not believe $p$ if he possessed evidence that instead justified suspension, or even disbelief. So the evidence you get via John’s belief seems to support the conclusion that the evidence he possesses supports his doxastic attitude. The basic idea can be encapsulated by the following principle:

Justifying Evidence of Evidence: If $S$ is justified in believing that $R$ is conscientious domain $D$, then when $S$ learns that $R$ believes $p$ on a body of evidence $E$ (whether or not $S$ possesses the evidence), $S$ has reason to believe that $E$ justifies belief in $p$.

When you are aware that John believes some proposition, you not only get evidence that there is evidence; you also procure evidence that there is evidence, which justifies belief in that
proposition. To put it differently, when it comes to forming beliefs in D, you can trust that
John’s beliefs are the product of conscientious judgment; thus, when he makes a judgment, and
you are aware of it, you obtain not only evidence that there is evidence for his doxastic
attitude; you get evidence that there is evidence that sufficiently supports his doxastic attitude.

We must keep in mind though that there is an important difference between having
evidence of evidence and possessing the evidence for oneself: the former is direct evidence for p
while the latter is only evidence of evidence, that is say, evidence that there is evidence for p,
which is only indirect evidence for p. That you justifiably believe that John believes p does not
directly support p, but it does support the higher-level proposition that there is evidence in its
favor. Further, this will likely effect what you are justified in believing, especially when the
higher-order evidence is not defeated by other evidence in your possession. On the other hand, if,
for example, you justifiably believe that R is (generally) unconscientious when forming beliefs in
domain D, then the prima facie reason you get for p is defeated by other evidence in your
possession pertaining to R’s being untrustworthy in D. And, that’s consistent with PUT.

Now consider the No Lurking Defeaters Function (NLFD). Higher-order evidence in the
form of another person’s belief functions this way only when you’ve made a judgment yourself
on the proposition believed. Suppose you become aware of some person – call her ‘Jane’ –
whom you trust believes that Jack Russell’s are in general a hyper breed of dog. You, being a
Jack Russell owner, agree with her, but formed your belief independent of Jane’s judgment. Her
belief did not factor into your process of evaluating the evidence for the proposition that Jack
Russell’s are in general hyper. It’s likely that Jane’s belief functions as evidence of evidence. But
it does more than that. When you become aware of the fact that Jane agrees you procure
evidence that there are no defeaters for your belief. More accurately, you obtain higher-order
evidence that supports the conclusion that a conscientious person does not possess any
undefeated defeater. The reason for this is that if Jane possessed a defeater for the belief that
Jack Russells are hyper (in general), she would not have formed the belief, given she is
conscientious. Thus, you get new evidence, which confirms that there are no defeaters for your
belief; the same goes for her, especially when you are conscientious. And, evidence that there
are no defeaters for p indirectly supports the lower level proposition p. The higher-order
evidence you receive epistemically counts for more when you are justified in believing that the
other person is conscientious, which is the situation in the example above. Thus, the evidential impact of your awareness of Jane’s agreement is greater than it would be if you knew nothing about her level of conscientiousness. The fact that Jane agrees with you says nothing about your evidence or your functioning properly, given you do not share the same evidence for the agreed upon proposition. In other words, the agreement between you and Jane does not confirm or disconfirm that either one of you reasoned correctly on your evidence. Rather, as I’ve said, it confirms that a conscientious person, who has been exposed to different evidence than you, does not possess any defeaters for your belief. Now consider RAF and RACF

1.2 RAF and RACF

There are instances of higher-order evidence that say something about one’s evidence – more precisely, the connection between a proposition and one’s evidence for and against it. First, consider the RAF. Higher-order evidence plays this role when you and an interlocutor R share some evidential set E, and you justifiably believe that R believes that p on E, but you have not yet judged for yourself whether p. In this case, R’s belief signals that E supports belief in p. Moreover, when you are aware of R’s degree of confidence in p you get evidence that E offers a particular level of support for p. But when you lack evidence of R’s track record in the relevant domain the reasons on offer are rather weak. In other words, the strength of the evidence you get via R’s belief is stronger when you justifiably believe that he is conscientious in the domain of belief. When you are justified in believing that R is just as likely as you to get to the truth of p, then R’s belief is just as strong of evidence for the connection between E and p as it would be if you had believed p on E. Furthermore, if you are justified in believing that R is an expert in the domain of p, then his belief may count for even more than it would if you just simply knew R was conscientious. But when you have evidence that your interlocutor is unconscientious (or unreliable) in the domain of belief, then the prima facie reason you obtain is defeated, not because you have evidence that defeats his belief (since you agree), but because you have evidence that he is unconscientious. When you don’t have evidence that your interlocutor is unconscientious it may be reasonable for you to increase confidence in your belief. The same applies even more when you are aware that your friend is conscientious, and/or an expert in the domain. When you are aware of your interlocutor’s conscientiousness her belief strongly signals
that it would be rationally permissible for you to believe as she does on the evidence you both share.

Next, I think there are instances of higher-order evidence that confirm the proposition that you’ve reasoned correctly on your evidence. In these kinds of cases, the higher-order evidence one gets via another person’s belief plays the RACF. This type of evidence is evidence about the evidence currently in your possession. It’s evidence that the evidence in you and your friend’s possession epistemically permits the conclusion you both agree upon. So the fact that a conscientious person agrees with you, if it is in fact epistemically relevant, doesn’t signal that there is more evidence for the agreed upon claim, or that there are no defeaters for your beliefs; rather, it’s evidence that there is a justificatory connection between your belief and your evidence. When you get this kind of higher-order evidence the proposition that you reliably responded to the evidence is, in some sense, confirmed.

Consider a situation where you discuss the case for $p$ with another reasonable person. She is conscientious when it comes to questions regarding $p$, and moreover, you both share the same evidence after full disclosure – call it E. Suppose that you both independently form the belief that $p$ and disclose your beliefs with one another. I would argue that each of your beliefs confirms that it was reasonable to form the belief that $p$ on E. In other words, your interlocutor’s belief confirms the proposition that E makes reasonable your belief; your belief functions the same way for her belief. Notice this case points toward a different kind of higher-order evidence than that described in the paragraph above where you and a friend have different bodies of evidence for some claim. In the case considered here, the fact that a conscientious person agrees with you that $p$ on evidence E confirms the proposition that $p$ is reasonable to believe on E. However, it also confirms that you reliably formed a judgment on the evidence. So your conscientious friend’s belief functions in a slightly different way than it would if you had yet to make a judgment on E. In that case, as described above, the fact that your interlocutor believes $p$ on E says something about the epistemic permissibility of coming to believe $p$ on the evidence; in this case it confirms that you’ve reasoned correctly (i.e., you functioned properly) on this

\[\text{\footnote{I’m not assuming here any stance on the relation between epistemic permission and epistemic obligation (if there is such a thing).}}\]
occasion. Again, if you are not justified in believing that your interlocutor is not conscientious,\(^5\) then you may have reason to increase confidence in your belief, but even more so when you are justified in believing that she is conscientious. Of course, the facts about justified confidence adjustment will depend on the case.

To conclude, I offered various ways in which another person’s belief can factor into what one is rational in believing. There are interesting parallels to be made between NLDF and RACF (as described above), on the one hand, and cases where interlocutors disagree, on the other. I am attracted to the idea that disagreement functions in one of three ways (if not more) – (i) as evidence of evidence, (ii) as evidence that there are defeaters lurking out there that one is unaware of, and (iii) as evidence that one’s evidence does not support her conclusion (disagreement is disconfirming evidence). In fact, this seems to be a consequence of Foley’s PUT, if we elaborate more on how another person’s belief functions as prima facie evidence, as I briefly did above.

Following PUT, when a person whom you are justified in believing is conscientious, forms a belief that is contrary to your own, you obtain prima facie reason to believe your opinion is mistaken. PUT does not imply, though, that because another person disagrees with you on the truth of \(p\) that you should reduce confidence (or suspend judgment) or that your belief’s level of justification has somehow been diminished. That another person believes \(p\) is prima facie reason to believe \(p\). Thus, if you believe \(\neg p\), her belief is reason to think you’ve made some kind of mistake. However, it’s a defeasible reason, which may be defeated by other evidence in you possession. But it’s evidence nonetheless. Whether you should reduce confidence will certainly depend on the details of the case being filled out a bit more.

The non-egoist’s commitment to PUT does not entail a particular position in the epistemology of disagreement. After all, one might hold, as Foley (2001) does, that the prima facie evidence you get when another person believes some proposition is defeated when her belief is contrary to your own. Thus, something like Foley’s *Priority Thesis* might be right.

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\(^5\) To say that you are not justified in believing that another person is unconscientious or conscientious is different than saying that you are justified in believing that she is not conscientious. In the first case you lack sufficient evidence to judge whether your interlocutor is conscientious. In the latter case you have evidence that justifies the belief that she cannot be trusted.
Priority Thesis (PT): If my opinion about \( p \) conflicts with yours, then the prima facie reason that your opinion gives me is defeated.\(^6\)

Even if PT is true, that doesn’t mean you can simply ignore the fact that a conscientious person disagrees with you. You’ve got to do some adjusting to get rid of the cognitive dissonance created by the fact that another conscientious person disagrees with you. If Foley is right, then a conscientious person will take seriously what others believe. Otherwise, it looks as though she disrespects epistemically relevant higher-order evidence. One may not always know what her evidence is, or whether certain epistemically relevant pieces of information are in fact part of her evidence. The latter scenario seems to be true for many of our beliefs. But when you become aware that another conscientious person believes \( p \) you obtain higher-order evidence, which functions in one of the ways listed above (if not in some other way).

2. Epistemic Conservatism

In this section I give reasons to think that one’s own belief that \( p \) can count as a reason to continue believing, not only for others, but also for her. I’ll call this view ‘Epistemic Conservatism’.\(^7\) Then, I briefly explain how one’s belief might function in the rationality of her belief.

2.1 Reasons to Think Epistemic Conservatism is True

Most epistemologists wouldn’t deny that the manner in which I form a belief is epistemically relevant to an assessment of its justificatory status. But most philosophers stop short of claiming that one’s belief is an epistemically relevant piece of evidence for her. If what I’ve said in section 1 is correct, then the justificatory status of our beliefs partly supervenes on what other people believe. If Foley and Zagzebski are right, self-trust rationally commits us to trust in others. This implies that when one becomes aware that another person believes \( p \) she is given reason (or higher-order evidence) to believe \( p \). Therefore, what we are rational believing is partly a function of what other people believe. I think, though, that one’s own conscientiously held belief


\(^7\) Epistemic Conservatism is mostly thought of as the view that if it seems to me that \( p \) (or if I believe \( p \)), then my belief is prima facie justified (see Harman 1986 and Huemer 2001). My contention is simply that one’s belief counts as evidence for her.
counts as evidence for her. So a full assessment of the rationality of a conscientious person’s belief must include the fact that she believes as she does.

If I’m correct, it follows that when I am considering a body of evidence for and against \( p \), my consciously believing \( p \) is epistemically relevant to the rational status of my belief. So I think that something like the following epistemically conservative principle, CRP, is true.

*Conservative Reasons Principle (CRP):* If \( S \) conscientiously believes \( p \), her belief is an epistemically relevant consideration when she reflects on its rational status and/or considers whether to maintain belief.

The basic idea behind CRP is that conscientious persons should be mindful of the fact that they hold particular beliefs when they are re-evaluating the beliefs’ reasonableness. The main reason for this is that a conscientious person would not have come to the conclusion she did unless she found it reasonable. Therefore, when some conscientious person \( R \) believes \( p \) she has reason to think her belief is reasonable. That is to say, her belief is higher-order evidence that the conclusion she drew was reasonable. Though I maintain this reasoning is correct, let me step back and explain in more detail why I think this is right.

Assuming skepticism is false, conscientious self-criticism – a process by which one reflects on the rational status of her beliefs – would seem like a reliable way to acquire truth. If nothing else, beliefs that withstand conscientious self-criticism will more likely be reasonable than those that don’t. In fact, it seems that if one’s beliefs do not survive conscientious self-criticism (when subjected to it) they are, therefore, not rationally held. With this in mind, suppose I believe that \( p \) and decide to subject it to conscientious self-criticism. Further, suppose I justifiably believe that it was the product of conscientious reflection. With all that in mind I think something like the following principle is highly plausible.

*Reliable Process Reasons Principle (RRRP):* When you have reason to believe some process \( P \) is reliable you have reason to think the outputs of \( P \) (i.e., the beliefs that are the products of \( P \)) are true and/or reasonable.

If RRP is true, it seems to follow that when you have reason to trust that some process is reliable, and you have reason to believe that your belief was the product of such a process, you therefore have an additional reason to think your belief is true. More accurately, your belief that \( p \), plus an awareness of the fact that the process by which you derived the belief is reliable, gives
you reason to believe \( p \). Suppose I have evidence that my conscientious reflection is a reliable means to acquiring truth. So when I know my belief that \( p \) is the product of conscientious reflection I have reason to believe my belief is reliably held; therefore, I have a reason to believe \( p \). In other words, that I believe \( p \) as a product of a reliable process (i.e., conscientious reflection) is some additional reason I have for holding it. I have reason to trust that my conscientious reflection is reliable, in part, because of what others believe. Moreover, I possess evidence that I tend to form reasonable beliefs on the evidence I have at a given time. Thus, I have higher-order evidence that my beliefs are reasonably held when the product of conscientious self-reflection. Therefore, when I conscientiously believe \( p \), I have reason (higher-order evidence) to maintain belief when reflecting on its rational standing.

Furthermore, the fact that one’s belief is evidence for her seems to fall out of some rational requirement to respect the evidence in her possession. The idea is that if my evidence \( E \) strongly supports \( p \), then to suspend judgment or believe \( \neg p \) would be a kind of rational failure (whether or not it’s the evidence that justifies belief).\(^8\) One ought to go where the evidence leads. This idea of respecting evidence leads to another reason for thinking that one’s belief gives her a reason to maintain belief (or to believe her belief is rational on the evidence she has). The main idea is this: if you do not count your belief as evidence in situations where you are considering its reasonableness, or whether to give it up, you somehow disrespect epistemically relevant evidence, namely higher-order evidence that you are conscientious. From what I said above, following PUT, the fact that another person \( S \) believes that \( p \) is epistemically relevant; and, the epistemic role her belief plays for me will depend on the circumstances (e.g., what I believe, whether we share the same evidence, etc.). Thus, in some sense, other people’s beliefs sometimes act as conscientious indicators for our own beliefs; that is, what other people believe can serve as signals of one’s own conscientiousness/unconscientiousness in a particular domain by functioning in one of the ways I described in section 1.\(^9\)

\(^8\) So one need not be worried about respecting-the-evidence talk. For, any card-carrying reliabilist worth her salt will hold that disrespecting evidence is no way to arrive at rational belief; it’s not truth-conducive.

\(^9\) One could also say that other people’s beliefs act as reliability indicators. I think, though, that the concept CONSCIENTIOUSNESS captures what I’m am after just as well. For, conscientious persons will form beliefs in reliable ways.
As suggested, conscientious people do not disrespect evidence – first-order or higher-order. But it seems that not taking your belief as epistemically relevant evidence for you is, in some important sense, ignoring higher-order evidence that you are conscientious. Thus, given you would be ignoring higher-order evidence of your conscientiousness if you did not count your belief that $p$ as a reason to maintain the belief – and you shouldn’t do that – your belief is an epistemically relevant piece of evidence pointing to the reasonableness of believing $p$. Really, then, as I suggested above, I’m claiming the fact that you are conscientious, coupled with the fact that you believe $p$, serves as part of your evidence – not simply that you believe $p$. So the reason you get via your conscientiously believing $p$ is a conjunctive reason. How strongly you should weigh your belief is largely a function of your beliefs about what others believe. But the point still stands. Conscientiously holding some belief confers positive epistemic status on it by providing the believer with additional evidence. When one is aware that her belief survived conscientious reflection she has reason to think the belief is true and/or reasonable. If I’m going to be conscientious in contexts where I consider whether to maintain the belief, I must respect the evidence pointing toward my being conscientious. Moreover, I must take into account the fact that a conscientious person – i.e., me – responded to the evidence in a certain way. And, to do that I must count my belief as evidence in favor of belief-maintenance.

As Foley argues, epistemic rationality has as its foundation trust in our basic faculties, opinions and procedures. But eventually we gather enough evidence about our conscientiousness in particular domains to justify certain levels of self-trust in our abilities to form reasonable beliefs in those domains. We never escape a sort of primitive trust in our basic faculties and procedures. For, we must trust them to even make judgments about what other people believe to arrive at conclusions about how conscientious we are. But I think we can eventually obtain derivative trust in our abilities in certain domains, evidence that our judgments within those domains are conscientiously held.\textsuperscript{10} And, as I’ve argued above, if your evidence

\textsuperscript{10} Foley (1994) uses the terms ‘primitive authority’ and ‘derivative authority’. But he has in mind a different distinction.
justifies (or makes reasonable) self-trust in some domain D, then by not taking your belief as
evidence would in some way amount to disrespecting evidence of your conscientiousness in D.¹¹

Foley provides support for PUT by arguing that primitive trust in others is rationally
required in advance of any evidence of their reliability. That is, reasons to trust another person
translate into reasons to trust the output of their deliberations. And, when you have reason to
trust the output of another’s deliberations, those outputs give you reasons (or higher-order
evidence) to believe what they do. Therefore, when you are aware that another person R believes
p you obtain higher-order evidence for p. The same thought applies in the case of one’s own
belief. When you have evidence of your conscientiousness and/or reliability in D you have
reason to trust the outputs of your belief-forming processes in D – to wit, conscientious self-
reflection. And, assuming with Foley that when you have reason to trust R, her believing p gives
you a reason to believe it, it would seem, to be consistent, that the same reasoning applies to your
belief counting as reason for you.

2.2 How One’s Belief Might Function For Her

As is the case with other people’s beliefs, your own belief can play different functions for
you in terms of what you ought to believe. Take for example a case where you believe p, but
you no longer possess the evidence that lead you to that belief. Suppose you have higher-order
evidence of your conscientiousness. If you possess evidence of your conscientiousness, it looks
like you have evidence that you once had first-order evidence – evidence that justified your
belief in p. You’ve got evidence that your belief was the product of a conscientious/reliable
process because you possess evidence that you are conscientious. So even though you do not
have the first-order evidence for p, you do have evidence that you are conscientious; thus, you
have evidence to believe your evidence was good; therefore, you have reason to believe p,
namely your belief itself. In other words, the fact that you believe p signals that you once
possessed justifying evidence for your belief. After all, given you are conscientious, you would

¹¹ An expert in theoretical physics, for example, has evidence that she is conscientious and/or reliable in that
domain, enough to justify the belief that she is such. She is justified in trusting the outputs of her epistemic
deliberation in theoretical physics. This kind of trust is derivative in the sense that she does not start out with
justified self-trust in this domain. Eventually, though, with enough evidence (e.g., higher-order evidence in the form
of other people’s beliefs – maybe other scientists’ beliefs) she becomes justified in believing that if she forms a
belief in this domain, it will more than likely survive conscientious reflection.
not have formed the belief unless you had such evidence. Therefore, in this kind of case, your belief plays the *justifying evidence of evidence* function as described in section 1. One might argue that this kind of case accurately describes the epistemic situation for many (if not most) of our beliefs. Much of what we believe is based on forgotten evidence. So when we reflect on the rational standing of such beliefs all we have to go on is the fact that a conscientious person believes as she does. If one’s belief does not count as evidence, at least in these types of cases, then it looks like many of our beliefs are unjustified. But, intuitively, that conclusion is incorrect. Thus, in describing the way one’s belief might function for her in cases of forgotten evidence, it looks like we have even further reason to hold that one’s conscientiously held beliefs are evidence for her.

But what role does your belief play in a case where you still possess your evidence E for p? In this kind of case your believing p would not be evidence of evidence. Rather, it’s evidence about the justificatory force of the evidence in your possession. Suppose you are justified in believing that you are conscientious. Then, if you conclude that p on evidence E, it seems like you’ve got evidence that E makes p reasonable. Put differently, your belief is higher-order evidence that p is rationally permissible to believe given E. So your conscientiously held belief fulfills a role similar to that which your conscientious friend’s belief would. It signals that there is a justificatory connection between your belief and the evidence.

In sum, I think we have reason to believe that CRP is true. By taking our conscientiously held beliefs as evidence we respect the evidence pointing toward our conscientiousness, namely the higher-order evidence we get via what other people believe. Furthermore, following RPRP, when you have reason to believe that some process P is reliable, you have reason to believe the outputs of P are true and/or reasonable. Assuming you have reason to think conscientious self-criticism is such a process, you have reason to trust the outputs of conscientious self-criticism. And, when you have reason to trust the outputs, namely your beliefs, your beliefs count as reason to maintain belief when they are rationally challenged. I know more work must be done to establish that CRP, and thus, Epistemic Conservatism is true. My purpose in this section was to simply provide reasons in favor of Epistemic Conservatism.

3. Conclusion
If Richard Foley (2001) and Linda Zagzebski (2008) are right, then the fact that another person believes \( p \) gives me reason to believe it. In this paper I explicated various functions another person’s belief can play in rationality assessments of your belief. I have also given reasons to think that your belief counts as a reason for you to maintain it in circumstances of rational self-criticism. The fact that a conscientious person believes \( p \) adds something to the belief’s justificatory standing even when the believer is you. Though this conclusion is counterintuitive, I think it is right. *Conscientiously* believing \( p \) confers some positive epistemic status on the belief.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


