

CRITICAL NOTICES

Bortolotti on Epistemic Innocence

ROBIN MCKENNA

According to the ‘heuristics and biases’ tradition in psychology, human beings are deeply irrational creatures (Kahneman 2011). We form beliefs and reason in ways that systematically violate epistemic norms (‘proportion your belief to the evidence’), the canons of decision and probability theory and even the laws of logic. We make extensive use of ‘heuristics’: rough-and-ready rules of thumb that work for the most part but go badly wrong in certain situations. This is because we need to balance our need to have true, well-grounded beliefs about the world against our limited time and cognitive resources. Thinking logically or in accordance with the axioms of probability theory is *hard* and the effort isn’t always worth it. The result is a tragic picture of human rationality: we are condemned to irrationality.

According to the rival ‘bounded rationality’ tradition, the mistake in this line of argument is in taking decision theory, logic or probability theory (not to mention epistemology!) as setting the standards of *human* rationality (Gigerenzer 2010). A textbook in logic or probability theory tells us how an ideally rational agent would go about their business, but it is simply a mistake to measure human agents up against this standard. A better approach is to start with human reasoning itself, the contexts in which we reason and what we are trying to do in those contexts. The result is a more optimistic picture of human rationality: we are, for the most part anyway, rational creatures.

In her *The Epistemic Innocence of Irrational Beliefs*,¹ Lisa Bortolotti steers a middle ground between these two traditions. Here is how she introduces her central claim:

I have long been struck by the fact that we do not simply survive but navigate this world quite successfully despite all the irrational beliefs we are inclined to adopt and hang on to. This book is an attempt to make sense of the idea that our undesirable and at times cringeworthy irrationality may support our way to succeed as imperfect agents (Bortolotti 2020: 1).²

On the one hand, Bortolotti thinks we often fall short of the standards of rationality. But this isn’t tragic because she also thinks our beliefs are often functional *because*, not despite of, their irrationality. Bortolotti isn’t the first to try and steer a middle ground between the tragic and the optimistic pictures (Samuels et al. 2002) and her book would be less interesting than it is if this were all she was trying to do. Her main aim is rather to show that, at least for certain purposes, we need to adopt a way of assessing beliefs and

1 Lisa Bortolotti, *The Epistemic Innocence of Irrational Beliefs*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, 176pp.

2 All references in what follows are to *The Epistemic Innocence of Irrational Beliefs* unless otherwise stated.

reasoning *other than* in terms of rationality. Adopting this alternative mode of epistemic assessment offers a way out of the ‘rationality wars’ in psychology (136). Beliefs don’t need to be rational in order to be functional. Instead, they can be ‘epistemically innocent’.

What does Bortolotti mean by ‘epistemic innocence’? Epistemic innocence is a property of beliefs. Put roughly, a belief is epistemically innocent iff it is (i) epistemically irrational, (ii) yet delivers some tangible epistemic benefits and (iii) the only means (in the present context) by which the believer (the person whose belief it is) can secure these benefits. Bortolotti argues that certain classes of epistemically irrational beliefs – distorted memory beliefs, confabulated explanations, delusions, positive illusions – may nonetheless merit a form of positive epistemic assessment because they are epistemically innocent. If a belief is epistemically innocent, you deserve no blame for having it, even though it is epistemically irrational. It may also be that there is no good reason for others to try and get you to abandon it.

The concept of epistemic innocence is important and worth considering in more detail. In this review, I raise a series of questions about epistemic innocence itself, its significance and the relationship between it and more familiar dimensions of epistemic evaluation, such as epistemic justification and rationality (§3–6). I raise these questions in the spirit of exploring the epistemological, psychological and practical significance of epistemic innocence. I do not claim that Bortolotti lacks the resources to adequately respond to them. But I do think that working through them helps better appreciate the overall shape of her project. Before getting to this, though, let me set out, in a little more detail, the central claims that Bortolotti makes about epistemic innocence (§1) and its significance (§2).

1. *Epistemic innocence*

It is a familiar thought that ‘epistemic success’ (having true/rational/knowledgeable beliefs) is a precondition for ‘practical success’. If your beliefs are ‘epistemically faulty’ (false, irrational), you are going to make a mess of your practical reasoning because you won’t take the right means to your ends. You want ice cream, but because you irrationally believe ice cream is kept in the fruit and vegetable section of the supermarket you can’t find it so you go home sad and empty-handed.

The problem is that epistemically faulty beliefs can also have practical benefits (McKay and Dennett 2009, Williams 2021). To use some of Bortolotti’s examples, having an overly optimistic view of the qualities of one’s romantic partner can result in a better – happier, more stable – relationship. Or it may be that someone with dementia who has distorted beliefs about their past is happier than they would otherwise be because they ‘remember’ having a pleasant childhood. Importantly, Bortolotti wants to go further and show that epistemically faulty (irrational) beliefs can also have *epistemic* benefits. They can enhance our ‘epistemic functionality’ – our ability to pursue and attain epistemic goals. Indeed, it is sometimes the case that *only* an epistemically irrational belief could have these benefits. When these conditions are met, a belief is *epistemically innocent*:

EPISTEMIC INNOCENCE: Agent A’s belief B is epistemically innocent iff:

- (i) EPISTEMIC IRRATIONALITY. B is epistemically irrational.
- (ii) EPISTEMIC BENEFIT. The adoption, maintenance, or reporting of B by A delivers some significant epistemic benefit to A.

- (iii) NO ALTERNATIVE. The adoption, maintenance, or reporting of a less epistemically irrational belief than B is either not possible for or available to A or would fail to deliver the same significant epistemic benefit to A as B (13).

Let me comment on each condition. First, Bortolotti tells us that:

[E]pistemically irrational beliefs are beliefs that are either *ill-grounded* at the time of their adoption (that is, badly supported by the evidence that is relevant to the truth of their content) or *impervious to counterevidence* after their adoption (that is, scarcely responsive to contrary evidence) (1).

More generally, epistemic rationality ‘concerns the relationship between our belief and the evidence available to us that speaks for or against the content of that belief’ (1–2). Bortolotti therefore adopts an *evidentialist* view of epistemic rationality, on which epistemically irrational beliefs may tend to be false, but their falsity isn’t what makes them epistemically irrational. (I suspect she could say most of what she says on other views of epistemic rationality, such as reliabilism, so this commitment is less controversial than it might appear.)

Second, Bortolotti is concerned with the connection between an agent’s beliefs and her epistemic functioning, where epistemic functionality is ‘the capacity the agent has to pursue and attain epistemic goals’ (3). We describe something as functional when it is well suited to doing what it is meant to do. So, for example, a knife is functional when it is well suited to doing what knives are meant to do viz. cut things. Similarly, Bortolotti holds that a belief is functional when it contributes to our capacity to pursue and attain epistemic goals. (This seems to commit her to the – slightly controversial – view that the function of beliefs is to help us pursue and attain our epistemic goals. Contrast [Simion et al. \(2016\)](#), for whom the function of belief – or, rather, our belief-producing systems – is to produce knowledgeable beliefs).

It is worth pausing to consider why Bortolotti talks about epistemic functionality rather than epistemic responsibility. One reason is that she wants to sidestep thorny questions about whether merely having the capacity to pursue epistemic goals (e.g. the capacity to form true beliefs) is sufficient for being a responsible epistemic agent (7). Many – though certainly not all – epistemologists hold that responsible epistemic agency requires, in addition, that one be answerable to norms governing the formation of beliefs (e.g. [Williams 2008](#)). But another, perhaps more interesting, reason is that she thinks focusing on epistemic agency/responsibility forces us to try and extricate agents from their environments – to remove them from the environmental and psychological constraints they operate under. On the other hand, talking about epistemic functionality allows us to focus on what is required for success within the environment in which we find ourselves (8). (It strikes me that Bortolotti’s idea of epistemic functioning is a better fit with how virtue reliabilists like [Sosa \(2015\)](#) understand epistemic agency. But supporting this contention would require some work.)

One of Bortolotti’s central claims is that epistemically irrational beliefs can contribute to the pursuit and attainment of epistemic goals. This is because epistemically irrational beliefs can play a role in ‘securing active engagement with our surrounding physical and social environment’ (3) and ‘help restore such an engagement after a critical disruption’ (3). Over five chapters, Bortolotti seeks to support this contention by showing how paradigmatically epistemically irrational beliefs – distorted memory

beliefs (Ch. 2), confabulated explanations (Ch. 3), delusional beliefs (Chs. 4 and 5) and optimistically biased beliefs (Ch. 6) – can have various epistemic benefits.

While there are some epistemic benefits that are particular to certain classes of irrational beliefs, in each chapter, Bortolotti typically argues for two claims. The first is that some kinds of epistemically irrational belief (distorted memory beliefs, confabulated explanations, delusional beliefs, optimistically biased beliefs) can have psychological benefits, including contributing to emotion regulation and promoting wellbeing and motivation. But these psychological benefits have, in turn, epistemic benefits. Someone who is emotionally well regulated and motivated to achieve their goals will likely be motivated to achieve their epistemic goals. For example, someone who is motivated to achieve their goals is likely to be motivated to acquire information about topics of interest to them.

The second claim is that these kinds of epistemically irrational belief can promote behaving in ‘agentic ways’ (110). The thought is that believing of oneself that one is competent, coherent, rational or good can make one more likely to act as a competent, coherent, rational or good agent would act. Crucially, it is more likely to do this irrespective of whether these beliefs are epistemically rational or not.

Third, for a belief to be epistemically innocent, it is not enough that it has certain epistemic benefits. It must also be that no alternative, less epistemically irrational belief with the same (or similar) epistemic benefits was available. Bortolotti distinguishes between three ways in which this condition might be satisfied. The first is that alternative, less irrational beliefs may be literally unavailable (‘strict unavailability’). For example, someone with dementia has distorted and largely inaccurate beliefs about their past because their memory system is malfunctioning. As a result, they are literally unable to even entertain more accurate beliefs about their past. The second is that, while less irrational beliefs are literally available to someone, they are psychologically incapable of accepting or even entertaining them (‘motivational unavailability’). Consider someone with an overly optimistic belief about their future health prospects that is born out of a deep psychological need to preserve their image of themselves as healthy. They may not be literally incapable of entertaining a more realistic estimation of their health. But, given their psychological need to think well of themselves, they are psychologically incapable of forming a more realistic estimation. Bortolotti calls this ‘motivational unavailability’ (16). Finally, this psychological need may lead them to collect evidence in ways designed to bolster their positive self-image. As a result, the possibility that their health prospects might not be as good as they think isn’t plausible given the evidence they actually have at their disposal. If this happens, then this alternative is not ‘explanatorily available’ to them.

2. *The significance of epistemic innocence*

Why is epistemic innocence important? Bortolotti tells us that her ‘epistemic innocence project’ has ‘wide-ranging implications for core issues in epistemology and psychology ... with practical consequences for how we conceive of mental health and manage our mutual interactions’ (4). Let me take each claim in turn.

First, what are the implications of the epistemic innocence project for epistemology? The ethics of belief deals with our duties concerning our beliefs (our ‘epistemic duties’). Plausible duties include a duty to believe what the evidence supports and a duty to seek

more evidence when we haven't got sufficient evidence. Bortolotti is proposing adding another dimension to the ethics of belief. We should evaluate beliefs in terms of how they contribute to epistemic functionality as well as in terms of epistemic rationality (or justification). Because a belief can contribute positively towards epistemic functionality despite being epistemically irrational, we need the concept of epistemic innocence for this purpose.

Because epistemic innocence precludes epistemic rationality, we now have two dimensions of epistemic evaluation that conflict with each other. This prompts a question: should we be aiming at epistemically rational or epistemically innocent beliefs? Bortolotti's answer is that it depends:

Epistemic innocence brings to the fore the necessity to distinguish between epistemically irrational beliefs that seem to be exclusively or predominantly costly, and that we should leave behind without regret; and epistemically irrational beliefs that have significant benefits as well as costs. In some cases, we may do well to dismiss beliefs in the latter category—those beliefs that are both good and bad for us—either because their contribution to our epistemic functionality is not central, or because we can replace them with more epistemically rational beliefs without major losses. In other cases, we may do well to hang onto those beliefs until our epistemic functionality is no longer hostage to them (136).

Thus, if Bortolotti is right, we are often faced with 'epistemic dilemmas' – dilemmas concerning what to believe in the face of compelling considerations that point in opposite directions. The epistemic irrationality of a belief often speaks against it, but its epistemic innocence may speak for it. So what is one to believe?

Second, what are the implications of the epistemic innocence project for psychology? In several chapters, Bortolotti criticizes what she calls the 'trade off view'. On this view, epistemically irrational beliefs may sometimes have psychological benefits. For example, it may be that having positive but largely false belief about your past (e.g. one's childhood) makes you feel happy. But having epistemically irrational beliefs always has epistemic costs because they put you 'out of touch' with reality. So there is always a trade-off between the psychological benefits and the epistemic costs of having an epistemically irrational belief. Bortolotti rejects the trade-off view because she thinks that epistemically irrational beliefs can also have epistemic benefits.

The significance of this is best appreciated by looking at what Bortolotti says are the practical consequences of the epistemic innocence project. Consider the situation that someone who cares for a dementia patient is in when confronted with the patient's frequent untrue and inaccurate claims and stories about their past life. Perhaps they 'remember' being a prima ballerina in their younger years when in fact they were merely quite good. Or they 'remember' an idyllic childhood when things were not quite so simple. Should a caregiver (gently) challenge these claims? Or should they accept them? Bortolotti doesn't claim to have the answer to these questions, but she does claim that they should be framed in terms of epistemic innocence. The problem is not one of balancing psychological benefits against epistemic costs. The problem is rather one of weighing up various costs and benefits, some of which are epistemic and some of which are psychological.

This completes my overview of Bortolotti's main claims and her 'epistemic innocence project'. I will now discuss some concerns I have about the idea of epistemic innocence.

3. Does epistemic innocence come in degrees?

While epistemically innocent beliefs must have *some* (significant) epistemic benefits, it need not be that the epistemic benefits outweigh the epistemic costs, or indeed that the benefits overall outweigh the costs (12, 90, 136). In particular, in the two chapters on delusional beliefs (Chs. 4 and 5), Bortolotti is at pains to emphasize the epistemic and psychological *costs* of having delusional beliefs. But Bortolotti doesn't say much about the difference between epistemically innocent beliefs, which are, on the whole, beneficial to those who have them and epistemically innocent beliefs, which, on the whole, aren't beneficial. This is a little surprising, given that it seems to me that the natural thing to say would be that, much like epistemic rationality, epistemic innocence comes in degrees. One might think that, just as a belief can be more or less epistemically rational, a belief can be more or less epistemically innocent.

One reason why Bortolotti might not want to say this has to do with an analogy she draws between epistemic innocence and innocence in a criminal trial. Put roughly, the thought is that having an epistemically innocent belief can be understood as analogous to being found 'not guilty' in a criminal trial. Furthermore, the ways in which a belief might be shown to be epistemically innocent can be understood as analogous to the ways in which a seemingly unjustified act (like killing someone) might be shown to be justified (if performed in self-defence) or excused (if the defendant was not in a rational frame of mind) in a criminal trial. While there can be something like 'degrees of innocence' in a criminal trial ('this person is clearly innocent' vs. 'this person is probably innocent') there is just one verdict that secures the defendant's innocence: not guilty. Similarly, it may be that, on Bortolotti's view, it may be that there are 'degrees of epistemic innocence' ('this belief is clearly innocent' vs. 'this belief is probably innocent'), but there is just one verdict that secures a belief's innocence: not epistemically guilty.

That said, it isn't entirely clear how this analogy is meant to work. Wouldn't an epistemically irrational belief with some epistemic benefits but more epistemic costs be analogous to a defence in a criminal trial that cited some grounds to justify or excuse the defendant's actions, but not grounds sufficient to establish their innocence? Imagine a defence lawyer who argues that the defendant's actions were justified because they believed that their life is in danger. But the prosecution responds that this belief wasn't reasonable – no reasonable person could think their life was in danger in this situation. A successful defence doesn't just cite *a* justification; it must cite a *good* justification. The worry is that, while the fact that an epistemically irrational belief has some epistemic benefits is *a* justification for having it, it is only a *good* justification if those benefits outweigh any costs.

4. Everyday self-deception

It may be that all this shows is that the analogy with innocence in a criminal trial isn't particularly helpful in understanding epistemic innocence. Another way of understanding epistemic innocence would be by comparing epistemically innocent beliefs with other epistemically irrational beliefs, which are *not* epistemically innocent. If there are such beliefs, they may merit the label 'epistemically guilty'. But what would an example of an epistemically guilty belief be?

Bortolotti's discussion in Ch. 5 is helpful here. She distinguishes between 'motivated delusions' and 'everyday self-deception'. Motivated delusions are, put roughly, narrowly circumscribed delusions that people adopt in extreme circumstances to cope with a very difficult situation. Bortolotti considers a case of 'reverse Othello syndrome' where a subject who had recently become paralysed persisted in believing that he was still in a happy relationship with his ex-partner even though they were no longer even in contact. On Bortolotti's reading of the case study, the patient adopted this delusion out of a need to protect themselves from further blows to their self-esteem. In contrast, by 'everyday self-deception' Bortolotti means the small lies and half-truths we tell ourselves (and often manage to convince ourselves of) to 'keep our spirits up'. She tells us that the difference between motivated delusions and everyday self-deception comes down to this:

[W]hen we engage in everyday self-deception we may have better access to alternative hypotheses than when we adopt a motivated delusion, supposing that in the everyday context we are not subject to perceptual abnormalities or reasoning impairments to the same extent as in clinical contexts. Thus, it may be harder to argue for the epistemic innocence of non-clinical self-deception due to its failure to meet the No Alternative condition (106–7).

The crucial difference between motivated delusions and everyday self-deception is meant to be that, in the former, there is no real alternative whereas, in the latter, there is. If this is right, then it does seem reasonable to describe everyday self-deception as involving epistemically guilty beliefs because there is a clear sense in which you could abandon them.

But is it right? Recall that there are a few different ways in which a belief may be unavailable to someone in a particular situation. Where motivated delusions are concerned, the most likely possibility is that any less irrational alternative belief is motivationally unavailable. In the case of the recently paralysed patient, they were motivationally unable to recognize that their ex had left them because it would be too much to cope with this as well as with their recent paralysis. It isn't entirely obvious that something similar won't work in many cases of everyday self-deception. Imagine you give a lecture and there are some signs it didn't go great. The students were unresponsive, most of them looked bored and nobody seemed to be following. But, because of a psychological need to think of yourself as a good lecturer, you reassure yourself that it went fine. As they day goes on, you become convinced that it was a good lecture. In this case, is the more rational alternative belief that it was not in fact a good lecture motivationally available to you? Given your psychological need to think of yourself as a good lecturer, it isn't clear that this alternative is *motivationally* available. (I am assuming this is an example of everyday self-deception. If it is rather an example of what in Ch. 3 Bortolotti calls 'everyday confabulation' or what in Ch. 6 she calls 'optimistically biased beliefs' then she can avoid this objection, but this raises the question of what the difference is between everyday self-deception and everyday confabulation/optimistically biased beliefs).

Contra Bortolotti, then, it seems to be there is a case for the *epistemic innocence* of everyday self-deception. This prompts a more general worry: which (epistemically irrational) beliefs are *not* epistemically innocent? Which are epistemically guilty?

5. *What are epistemic benefits?*

Bortolotti claims that a belief is epistemically innocent if it has certain epistemic benefits despite its epistemic irrationality. But what is an 'epistemic benefit'? Bortolotti distinguishes between two ways in which a belief might have epistemic benefits by contributing to our epistemic functionality:

Contributions can be divided into two types: a general contribution to agentic behaviour that strengthens the pursuit and attainment of epistemic goals among that of other goals; and a more specific contribution to the pursuit and fulfilment of epistemic goals (132).

Take, for example, optimistically biased beliefs, such as my belief that I will avoid the long-term health conditions associated with my chronic medical condition (I am no more likely to avoid them than anyone else). As Bortolotti argues in Ch. 6, having optimistically biased beliefs can mean being generally more motivated to achieve one's goals. Because some of our goals are epistemic (e.g. the goal of obtaining new information about how to handle my chronic health condition), someone who has optimistically biased beliefs is likely to acquire more information than they otherwise would because they will be more motivated to go out and get it.

As she also highlights, certain kinds of optimistically biased beliefs can become 'self-fulfilling prophecies'. Take, again, my belief that I will avoid these long-term complications. It may be that my having this belief leads me to behave in ways that actually make it more likely that I will avoid these complications (exercising regularly, eating the right sorts of foods etc.). Unlike in the usual case, where I achieve an epistemic goal (having a true belief) by forming beliefs that 'fit' with the facts, in this case I achieve that same epistemic goal by making the facts fit with my belief.

One thing that is immediately striking about what Bortolotti says about the epistemic benefits of epistemically irrational beliefs which might make them epistemically innocent is that the benefits always accrue to the individual with the epistemically irrational beliefs. She considers various ways in which certain kinds of epistemically irrational beliefs might still provide some significant epistemic benefits to the *believer*. But it is worth considering whether these beliefs might provide significant epistemic benefits to *others*. It is also worth considering whether, although they might be beneficial for the believer, they are epistemically costly for others.

Let me mention two possibilities here, which in my view warrant further exploration. First, if Bortolotti is right that, in certain circumstances, having an epistemically irrational beliefs can promote behaving in 'agentic ways', then it seems that this will have benefits for others as well as for the agent who is better able to behave as a full-fledged agent as a result of having an epistemically irrational belief. Some of these benefits will likely be epistemic. An epistemic agent is someone who we can rely on for information and to whom we can assign epistemic duties and responsibilities (e.g. we can make them responsible for gathering a kind of evidence). So, if, for example, having overly optimistic beliefs about your abilities and capacities can promote behaving in agentic ways, then my having such beliefs can be an epistemic benefit to others because they can now rely on me for information and assign me certain epistemic duties and responsibilities.

Second, it is a little surprising that Bortolotti doesn't consider the epistemic costs of certain kinds of confabulated explanations or optimistically biased beliefs. If I believe

that my assessments of the respective merits of job candidates are based on my impartial assessment of their experience and skills, when in actual fact my assessments are heavily influenced by various identity prejudices and stereotypes, then I am likely not just to take some candidates less seriously than others but also to be unaware of the fact that I am doing so. While Bortolotti is alive to the obvious social and political problems this poses, she doesn't comment on the epistemic dimensions of the problem. Constructing confabulated explanations is one way in which we avoid the hard work of, as Medina (2012) puts it, interrogating our testimonial and hermeneutical sensibilities (our quick and automatic judgements about who and who not to take seriously, our sense of which ideas and possibilities are worth taking seriously). They are therefore complicit in both the perpetuation and – perhaps more importantly – the hiding of epistemic injustice.

6. *Epistemic innocence and epistemology*

Bortolotti highlights the contribution that epistemic innocence can make to the ethics of belief. But it is worth considering which other contributions it might make to epistemology. Let me finish by highlighting one possibility. As I mentioned above, Bortolotti thinks that epistemically irrational beliefs can contribute to our agency. Take this passage:

Distorted memory beliefs and delusional beliefs can provide enough engagement with the surrounding environment to avoid a paralysis of agency. Confabulated explanations and optimistically biased beliefs can contribute to a view of ourselves as competent, largely coherent, and efficacious agents, thereby sustaining our motivation to pursue our goals in the face of challenges and setbacks. This suggests that some epistemically irrational beliefs may be quietly boosting agency. If this is so, then the challenge is to find creative ways to reduce epistemic irrationality without giving up that boost (140–41).

While Bortolotti runs the 'agentive benefits' of distorted memory beliefs and delusional beliefs together with those of confabulated explanations and optimistically biased beliefs, it strikes me that she is making two quite different points here. The first is that, in someone who is otherwise a reasonably functional epistemic agent, certain kinds of epistemically irrational beliefs (confabulated explanations, optimistically biased beliefs) can 'boost' agency still further by enhancing motivations. The second is that, in someone who is *not* functioning well (or at all) as an epistemic agent, other kinds of epistemically irrational beliefs (distorted memory beliefs, delusional beliefs) can avoid a 'paralysis of agency'. The thought then is that *some* (but not all) epistemically innocent beliefs may, in certain situations, be *necessary* for the exercise of epistemic agency. As Bortolotti puts it elsewhere in the book:

As I have argued, motivated delusions serve a useful epistemic function at a critical stage, allowing us to overcome negative feelings or low self-esteem that would prevent us from exercising our epistemic agency (108).

This suggestion is interesting in part because it is both similar to and strikingly different from the Wittgensteinian idea that certain commitments ('hinges') are essential for rational enquiry. This idea is often defended as a response to the problem of

scepticism about the external world. If certain commitments, like a commitment to there being an external material world, are essential for rational enquiry, then scepticism is incompatible with rational enquiry and perhaps with rationality itself. In Coliva's (2015) influential version of this idea, commitment to an external material world is constitutive of epistemic rationality and so necessary for being an epistemic agent. In a somewhat similar vein, Bortolotti is suggesting that certain kinds of beliefs (distorted memory beliefs, motivated delusions) can, in extreme circumstances, also be necessary for being an epistemic agent.

But, while some (and perhaps Wittgenstein himself) disagree with Coliva's contention that these commitments can be called 'rational', this is because they, as it were, stand outside the scope of rationality, not because they are *irrational*. In contrast, Bortolotti's thought is that certain epistemically irrational beliefs can be necessary for the exercise of epistemic agency. While this might not spell immediate trouble for this Wittgensteinian take on the sceptical problem, it does suggest that there might be a problem with trying to ground epistemic rationality and epistemic agency itself in commitments that are necessary for the exercise of epistemic agency. If Bortolotti is right, beliefs that are, by anyone's lights, epistemically *irrational* can be necessary for the exercise of epistemic agency. So there need not be any tight connection between what is epistemically rational and what we need to assume in order to be epistemic agents.

University of Liverpool
Liverpool, UK
r.j.mckenna@liverpool.ac.uk

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