

Why we should still worry about probability 1

The *credence-one view* is a view about the relationship between the binary notion of belief and the graded notion of confidence or credence. According to this view, beliefs require maximal confidence or credence 1. This view is typically deemed to be absurd on the grounds that we aren't maximally confident about anything. If the notion of belief is going to be of any interest at all, it must not involve maximal confidence. However, Clarke (2013, *Philosopher's Imprint* 13 (11)) and Greco (2015, *Philosophical Perspectives* 29 (1): 179–201) have recently argued that the credence-one view can be tenable if it is combined with doxastic sensitivism, according to which beliefs are sensitive to contextual factors such as practical factors and salience of error possibilities. Let's call Clarke and Greco's views credence-one sensitivism (henceforth C1S). Clarke and Greco argue that credence-one sensitivism has several advantages over the threshold view. According to the latter view, belief consists in having credence above some threshold below 1. They argue that credence-one sensitivism is able to resolve standard problems which affect the threshold view. The aim of this paper is to defend the threshold view against credence-one sensitivism. Against Greco and Clarke, I'll argue that threshold view better accounts for several important desiderata of belief.

C1S is a version of credence-one view. This view differs from the so-called certainty view, which is a combination of the credence-one view and the claim that beliefs are context-insensitive. According to Clarke and Greco, the space of live possibilities (or possibilities one takes seriously; the salient possibilities) determines the relevant set of doxastic possibilities over which the credence function distributes probabilities. This set also defines a context. C1S conceives belief as a three-place relation between a believer, a proposition and a context. In this picture, if one believes p in a particular context, p must be true throughout the whole set of doxastic possibilities related to that context. Hence one's credence in p automatically receives probability 1. One's credence function is variable depending on whether one comes to take more or fewer possibilities seriously and how one's probability distribution changes over the same set of space of doxastic possibilities.

I evaluate the threshold view and C1S against three sets of important facts about belief: i) the compatibility between having outright belief and assigning non-zero credence in certain error possibilities, ii) the fact that outright beliefs come with different strengths, and iii) attributions of outright beliefs to unconscious subjects. While C1Sists have difficulties in explaining those facts, the threshold view provides straightforward account.

(I) *Belief and non-ignored possibilities.* In many cases, it seems that one believes p in spite of assigning minimal positive credence to certain error possibilities one takes to entail not- p . In particular, there seems to be two types of error possibilities compatible with beliefs: one is far-fetched possibilities, the other is non-far-fetched possibilities. Far-fetched possibilities are those that from the subjective perspective are utterly unlikely to happen. Typical examples are sceptical scenarios, such as the brain-in-a-vat or the evil demon scenarios. Bizarre theoretical possibilities are also far-fetched possibilities.

According to credence-one sensitivism, if one believes p one's credence in p is one and one's credence in possibilities one takes to entail not- p is zero. In other words, if one assigns

positive credence to error possibilities one takes to entail not- p , then one does not believe p . However, there are cases in which far-fetched error possibilities are live in one's considerations and hence receive non-zero credence in one's probability distribution. Nonetheless, importantly, entertaining such possibilities doesn't seem to affect one's belief at all. Consider cases where one has been made aware of the possibility of a sceptical scenario. Presumably, upon learning the scenario, one registers the possibility that our cognition might be embedded in a virtual rather than a real world. But in many cases, we do not revise our ordinary beliefs by merely entertaining the possibility of a sceptical scenario. Apparently, C1S delivers the wrong prediction of this type of cases that the subject loses relevant beliefs by entertaining those far-fetched possibilities.

Some non-far-fetched error possibilities are also compatible with beliefs. One prominent type of example concerns the consideration of the fallibility of ways of acquiring beliefs, such as perception, testimony, inferences, etc. The fallibility of belief-forming methods constitutes salient non-far-fetched alternative possibilities relevant for beliefs because they are usually not as improbable (in the subjective probability sense) as sceptical scenarios or bizarre theoretical possibilities. In many cases, it seems that even if we recognize the fallibility of certain belief-forming method, in most cases we do refrain from forming outright beliefs for that reason. C1S, again, delivers the wrong prediction of this type of cases. In contrast, the threshold view can easily accommodate the considered data.

(II) *Beliefs with different strengths.* According to central platitudes about credence, credences are, in some sense, degrees of belief, or to raise one's credence that p is to increase the degree to which one believes that p . Degrees of belief can be divided into two types of cases: degrees of full beliefs and degrees of partial beliefs. We believe in many things, but we don't believe in them to the same strength. We are more confident in some of them than others. These constitute different degrees of full beliefs. Moreover, while there are many things we don't believe, we are more confident in some of them than others. These constitute various degrees of partial beliefs.

C1S can only accommodate the part of platitudes concerning degrees of partial belief. It cannot explain the existence of degrees of full beliefs. By contrast, the threshold view is able to account for both degrees of partial and full beliefs.

(III) *Ascribing beliefs to unconscious subjects.* The third set of facts concerns ascribing beliefs to unconscious subjects. We often attribute beliefs to unconscious subjects, in particular to those who are merely temporarily unconscious, for example those falling asleep. For instance, there seems to be nothing inappropriate in ascribing the belief that one plus one equals two to my sleeping partner. Since there are no possibilities entertained in the minds of unconscious and dreamless sleeping subjects, in such cases there is not the sort of context identified by C1Sists.

C1Sists could say that since an unconscious subject is currently not entertaining any possibility, the context is absent. Since the existence of a context is a necessary condition for having beliefs, the subject doesn't have any belief at the moment. Alternatively, since according to C1S, believing p is taking p to be true across the whole set of relevant doxastic possibilities, it follows that the subject believes whatever proposition, for, quite trivially, every proposition would be true in all possibilities included in an empty set. Both diagnoses seem to be highly problematic. In contrast, the threshold view has no problem in accommodating attributions of beliefs to unconscious subjects.