

# VICE EXPLANATIONS FOR EXTREME BELIEFS

*Contemporary Issues Across Ethics and Epistemology*

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## 1. Introduction

- Extreme beliefs in fundamentalism, fanaticism, extremism, terrorism, and conspiricism
- Explanations and epistemic vices
- Common sense
- Situationism
- Twofold relevance: viability of explanations and responsibility
- Structure

## 2. Preliminaries

- Two conceptions of epistemic vice
- Responsibilism vs reliabilism
- Moral and epistemic vice
- What is it to provide a vice explanation?
- Are vice explanations pejorative?

## 3. Vice Explanations for Extreme Beliefs

- First person explanations and vice explanations
- Prejudice
- Moral blindness
- Black and white thinking
- Lack of moderation
- Stigmatization
- Dogmatism
- Gullibility
- Sometimes explicit, often implicit

## 4. The Situationist Challenge: Vices as Fictions

- The basic idea

- Gilbert Harman, John Doris, Stephen Stich, Mark Alfano, and Lee Ross and Richard Nisbett
- H. Hartshorne and M.S. May on cheating at exams
- Alice Isen and Paula Levin on willingness to help
- John Darley and Daniel Batson's Good Samaritan experiment
- K.E. Matthews and L.K. Cannon on noises and smells
- Mark Alfano: also *epistemic* virtues
- Epistemic vice explanations for extreme beliefs as an instance of a more general point
- Situationist explanations of extreme beliefs in the literature

### **5. Assessing Situationism**

- The difference between virtues and vices  
Worry: combination of virtues and vices
- Common sense beliefs about virtues and vices and ambiguity
- Robust virtues and vices may just be rarer
- Virtues and vices come in degrees

### **6. Fine-tuning Vice Explanations for Extreme Beliefs**

- Domain-specificity
- Low- or high-fidelity vice and consistency
- Sensitivity towards relevant situational factors

### **7. Objections and Replies**

- Vice explanations cannot be quantified or measured  
Twofold reply: not necessary, they can (C & F scales)
- Vice explanations cannot predict  
Reply: partial explanations, possibly also risk
- A vicious regress?  
Reply: a complicated picture
- Are vice explanations deeper?  
Reply: distinguishing explananda

### **8. Conclusions**

- Main conclusion: situationism calls for fine-tuning of vice explanations for extreme beliefs in four regards
- Limitations: vice rather than virtue, belief rather than behavior