REASONING ABOUT COMMITMENTS IN PERSONAL IDENTITY:
Talking About the Ontological Commitment as Degree of Normative Reason

William R. Delise

Abstract: Theories, broadly speaking, are composed of statements held to be true called data. Stronger theories are coherent and composed of well justified data, where some datum is justified if and only if its normative reasons for adoption are strong. Metaphysical theories of personal identity ordinarily aim at two criteria: (1) a good theory is one which reliably identifies the desideratum over time and (2) the identification narrowly describes objects which are rightly and fruitfully called persons and no other objects. In this paper, I advance a descriptive and a normative claim. The first is that theories of personal identity are characteristically laden by the ontological commitments of their theorists. Disagreements over persistence conditions are really disagreements over the attributes of the of posit called person. The second claim is that commitment laden theories ought to be lightened, because theories with fewer commitments are more communicable and are often more strongly justified. One way of doing this is talking about commitments as a particularly strong degree of normative reason.

I. Introduction

The present paper will be in three parts: the first part outlines a conceptual framework about theories and theory datum justification, the second part concerns some paradigm cases of ontological commitments in theories of personal identity, and the third concerns one way of lightening the burden of ontological commitments by talking about them as particularly strong normative reasons. Let me begin with a prefatory account of what I hope to accomplish.

Metaphysical theories of personal identity since John Locke have endeavored to mark persistence conditions for persons. Successful theories identify 'what' a person is and 'how ought' a person be identified over time. The second condition necessarily hinges on the first. The 'whatness' of the person is what I will call the theorist's ontology. Theories concerning intuitive and everyday concepts like

personhood are strongly informed by everyday usage and intuitiveness. Hence theorists of personal identity who begin with different semantic ranges for the term person will be at cross purposes for identifying their persistence conditions. The disjoint portion of the term's extension between two theorists will inform disagreements over applications in paradigm cases. Because the goal of a theory of personal identity is to be orindarily fruitful for the theorist, theorists have a particularly strong interest in resisting revision in ontologies which are ordinarily fruitful. I call these ontological posits which strongly resist revision ontological commitments.

In section three of this paper, I will identify what I view to be ontological commitments in some paradigm cases in the history of personal identity theory, namely, in the work of John Locke, Derek Parfit, Christine Korsgaard, Maria Schechtman, Galen Strawson, and Hilde Lindemann. Broadly these are the Lockean, the Parfitian, the Narrative, and the non-Narrative views of personal identity.

Theories which are drawn around one or more ontological commitments are typically fruitful for the theorist in particular, but may be composed of incommunicable data or justifications. The interest for a philosopher in developing metaphysical argumentation is ordinarily to expose the justification of a particular perspective. Theories which have clear and communicable normative reasons for adoption are stronger than those which do not. In cases where theorists do not expose their ontological commitments in terms of their rigidity, their theories may become characteristically hard to evaluate. In section four of this paper, I will argue that ontological commitments can be mapped to contingently very strong normative reasons, and that theories which discuss them as such benefit from the increased communicability of their justification.

II. Theories and Reasons

Careers of ink have and continue to be spilled on how theories are in fact structured and the manner in which they ought to be constructed. It is not my present aim to contribute to this project. For my purposes, I will employ what I hope to be an inoffensive standpoint and will mark out a working definition. The

thrust of my argument should retain its value failing agreement with the particulars of my definition of theories.

Theories are constructs composed of statements which are held to be true and which relate interdependently by logical connection.[1] Statements describe the way the world is and their truth is dependent in one manner or another on the relationship between the meaning of the statement and experiences about facts in the world. It is useful to talk about these sorts of statements as theory data. Then, a theory is strong if and only if its data are well justified, and a datum is well justified if and only if its reasons for adoption are strong.[2] Theories are coherent when those of their data which relate logically to other data do not create absurdities.[3] A good theory is then composed of well justified and coherent data.

When discussing whether a theorist is justified in adopting a datum, we ground the answer in terms of reasons. One view of the theory of reasons has three sorts: explanatory, normative, and motivating reasons.[4] A normative reason is just any fact which *ex ante* counts in favor of adopting the datum. A motivating reason is just any fact which *ex post* had effected the adoption of that datum. Normative reasons are always explanatory reasons, because they explain how the agent conceived of factors in the deliberation. Motivating reasons are often normative reasons. When prescriptions are made in favor of adopting a datum, normative reasons are employed for the justificatory work. This is just

---

[1] In alternative language, theories are systems of beliefs which do not conflict. I am here purposefully invoking the language of logical empiricism because I think the view of pragmatism and analyticity that follows Quine's *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* sheds light on what I will call an ontological commitment. These commitments are, in behavior, rigid in the same way synthetic statements that appear to be analytic sometimes are. I mean this only by analogy; committed data are not analytic in any proper formal sense.

[2] In alternative language, a system of beliefs about the world is well justified if all the constitutive beliefs cohere and each belief is adopted and maintained for strong reasons.

[3] For example, it is absurd to hold the data that (1) the trees outside my window are birch trees, (2) a birch tree is a name for a snowy bird and never a tree, and (3) there are no birch trees. (1) and (2) are absurd by meanings and logical connection, while (1) and (3) are absurd by mutual exclusion in fact.

[4] For my conceptual summary of reasons, I rely on the work of Stephanie Leary, especially: Leary, S. (2016). In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief. Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 95(3), 529–542. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2016.1237532

because what matters in justifying adopting a datum is the presence of sufficient facts counting in favor of its adoption to warrant effecting its adoption. Call this adoption of a datum 'ϕing' the datum.

Notably, motivating reasons might not have to be normative reasons. For a theorist to conceive of some reason R as counting in favor of ϕing some datum P is sufficient to qualify R as a normative reason. But sometimes the theorist does not *ex ante* conceive of R as counting in favor of ϕing, but R still explained why *ex post* the theorist ϕed. If holding a datum in a theory constitutes believing that datum, then some philosophers, called alethists, argue that only credential reasons constitute normative reasons for ϕing. Some reason R is credential if and only if it disposes one to ϕ only because conceiving of R causes one to believe the datum is true. Because we can conceive of data which are rigidly held for normative reasons which are not credential, I will proceed by assuming that the pragmatists are right: non-credential (e.g., pragmatic) normative reasons can justify ϕing.[5]

What I mean by the term 'commitment' is just any datum which behaves as if it were indispensable, that is, any datum which the theorist holds come what may. Strictly defined, a commitment is just that datum which is present in all possible iterations of a theory.[6] In ordinary language: theorists have beliefs which they strongly dislike abandoning (e.g., a person is something accountable, or something constituted by a narrative, or strictly neither of these). Theorists might disprefer abandoning these beliefs because of very strong credential reasons, or for very strong pragmatic reasons.[7] Theories made by theorists with one or more beliefs rigid in this way behave as if these committed data are true, no matter which peripheral data must be dispensed with to cause the web of beliefs to cohere. Hence a commitment is such that its ϕing was impervious to the obtaining of any additional normative reason.

---

[5] e.g., (R1) if I believe in God I will be happy, (R2) I want to be happy, (ϕ) therefore I should believe in god. (see Leary pp. xx). R1 gives no credential justification for the existence of God, but combined with R2 it counts in favor of a belief in God. The alethist will object that this is a strictly descriptive case; it says nothing about how we *ought* to form our beliefs. For the descriptive work of this paper, I think the fact that we sometimes do use pragmatic reasons suffices.

[6] Or, a commitment is that datum which is present in significantly many iterations of a theory to appear as if it will necessarily appear in all possible iterations of a theory.

[7] I think there is a third class of commitments which are held because of non normative motivating reasons, but that thesis requires more support than the scope of this paper allows.

Theories of personal identity are ontologically founded. By this I mean that they involve positing objects and describing the criteria for their identification. Posits in this fashion are necessarily engineered concepts. We are informed in our use of terms by the history of their usage and our concepts are reciprocally revised by building up an account of a term's extension. So by ontological commitment I mean a posit which is connected as referent to a name, and the qualities of which concept are rigidly held come what may. In this way, concepts can be described just as I have described theories: they are composed of data called qualities which determine which objects of our experience fall under general terms. Persons are this kind of general term.

The diachronicity of personhood is what makes theories of personal identity qualitatively metaphysical: the identification of persistence conditions for an object over two or more discrete points in time is a complex, relational operation, which is different in kind than the positing and identification of a conceptual object synchronically.[8] On my definition, ontological posits are anterior to metaphysical relations, so theories in metaphysics ought to be considered in light of their ontologies.[9]

In the following section I will expose some genera of these commitments in the history of philosophy and contemporary discourse on the topic of personal identity. But generally I think these commitments arise from the intuitiveness and everyday importance of personhood. Broadly speaking, we posit objects in order to explain and communicate about phenomena. The term 'person' ordinarily describes human agents but is sometimes granted of other kinds of embodied agents without doing too much harm to intuition.[10] But other sorts of commitments in personhood can exist, such as to persons

---

[8] Notably, the ostension 'this is a person' differs in kind from the ostension 'this is the same person now as that person this morning was'. The first is the application of a general term while the second is the application of a particular term.

[9] By this I do not mean to say that the relationships between objects do not inform our revision of concepts. The opposite is the case. It is often by observing objects diachronically and fitting them to our persistence conditions that absurdities shake out of our definitions. But, each time we revise the conceptual framework of our ontological posits, we use those as the foundation to build up persistence conditions for our metaphysics.

[10] Today we are sometimes asked whether personhood is attributable to non animal agents, such as machines. Philosophers who find personhood to be the seat of moral standing and who wish to attribute moral standing to machine agents may wish to oppose the intuitiveness criteria I am suggesting. Or at least, I think we are not wrong to revise our intuitions from time to time—which is a thesis I think supports my argument in favor of identifying commitments as reasons.

which are nonhuman animals, or who lack embodied behaviors in the ordinary fashion, or who are discontinuous over time. Conceiving of a possible object *qua* its hypothetical qualities allows us to spontaneously stumble upon salient reasons and makes possible the promulgation of these reasons into commitments. Behaviorally speaking, if we think we should like to call *that* a person now, and later, to call *that* the same person and *this* a different one, or to call *these* no persons at all, and if we like our thinking, ostending, and naming, then we are not without justification for bringing about and maintaining these commitments.

Consequently, I will use the term *commitment laden* to describe any theory which is informed in its conclusion by commitments in its premises.[11] An individual theory is value free with respect to its commitment ladenness just because a theory when considered holistically entails an account of its own value. Where some committed datum entails that this selfsame commitment has a particular value, the commitment is not value free, but is in all other cases. However, deliberating over theory choice entails the evaluation of merit by values not contained within the considered theory.[12] In general cases then, a theory is better when it is more lightly commitment laden than when it is heavier. We ought to prefer lighter theories just because deliberations over theory choice are grounded in normative reasons, or just those facts which count in favor of adopting a theory, and commitments make deliberation over these facts characteristically hard.

III. Précis of Paradigm Cases

The descriptive claim that theories of personal identity are commitment laden exists, I think, as a feature of all ontologically dependent theories. It will be my project in this section to elucidate a few paradigm cases in personal identity theories, but this proof will not entail the generalization of this claim. Where

---

[11]Every conclusion with premises reliant on mutable facts in the world or mutable definitions is more or less rigid depending on the rigidity of those premises. But the sort of conclusions I intend here are those whose premises are so rigid as to appear to differ not only in degree, but in kind.

[12]So to speak, we are biased by our current outlook when we evaluate new outlooks.

philosophers are right to infer from a few paradigm cases, I think this claim generalizes, however the thrust of the subsequent normative argument will not rely on the universalization of the claim and shall be evident by application to these cases only.

The essay which first appeared in the second edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* by John Locke, entitled "Of Identity and Diversity" has been the origin of much work in personal identity theory, so it is a suitable place to begin. The basics of the theory are as follows: it is never the case that any object is at the same place at the same time as any object which it is not, nor can any one object be in two places at one time. Combined with a set of satisfactory definitions for terms, this description should constitute a persistence condition for inanimate objects, animate objects, animals, and human persons. Human persons in particular are thinking, intelligent beings, who have self-reflection, and are agents.[13]

It is just because persons are reasoning and self-reflecting agents that persons are rightly able to be held accountable for their actions. Were persons unable to think of themselves as persisting over time and to plan ahead, punishment *qua* deterrence loses its color. Consequently, some philosophers read Locke to have been motivated by accountability.[14] If one reads Locke to have made a commitment in his theory to holding human agents accountable, then the emergent ontology is strictly mapped onto the boundary conditions of that commitment. In other words, if the statement that 'persons are limited to agents which self-reflect' is just because the condition of personhood's satisfaction of accountability wins out against any other normative reason, then the condition of accountability was a commitment in Locke's theory. In yet another set of terms, Locke posits accountable agents and ostends to humans as their referent; in defining the persistence conditions for persons, he is reacting to this prior ontology.

---

[13]Locke, John. (2004). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, "Of Identity and Diversity". Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg. Retrieved December 20th, 2024, from https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10615/pg10615.html.
[14]Gordon-Roth, Jessica, "Locke on Personal Identity", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/locke-personal-identity/>.

It is useful to compare Locke's putatively committed persistence condition to Parfit's Identity Doesn't Matter (IDM) and Relation R, just because Parfit's theories appear to be comparatively unburdened by ontological commitments. Where I have argued that Locke is committed to an ontology of accountable persons which are identical to the sorts of human agents we ordinarily hold accountable, Parfit is concerned with exhausting the logical scene of reductionist and non-reductionist argumentation. IDM finds, through the exhaustion of these positions, that identity is not the seat of moral agency and that the psychological and physical constitution of the human is merely the locus of experience. Personal identity is not then a theory of accountability, but of connectedness of persons over time.[15] Each instant of a continuous person through time has a greater or lesser connectedness with every other instant of that continuous person, but the presence or strength of this so-called Relation R is not the same as declaring the identity of *x* and *y*. Viewing persons from a Parfitian outlook might change our behaviors, so it is meaningful to evaluate whether Parfit was motivated by his own commitments to behaviors, or if the theory ought to be resisted where other behaviors are preferred.

Korsgaard, in "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency", argues against Parfit to reestablish agency as an indispensable component of personal identity.[16] She makes an appeal to the Kantian view of respecting autonomy and persons as authorial agents. Persons, for Korsgaard, are objects with a unified agency that drives acts with the quality of consciousness and which constitutes a single embodied life defined by its relationships, goals, and projects. Parfit's IDM is untenable on Korsgaard's view, because IDM holds that the human is merely the locus of *incidental* experience, while the Kantian view of agency requires that experience is necessarily something we *do*. The human posit on this view is necessarily autonomous and the sorts of activities and qualities constitutive of this posit emerge from the quality of

---

[15]In fact, Parfit may be viewed to posit a new concept instead of revising personhood by speaking about 'series-persons'.
[16]Korsgaard, Christine. 1989. Personal identity and the unity of agency: A Kantian response to Parfit. Philosophy and Public Affairs 18, no. 2: 101-132.

autonomy. Thus the person possesses a unity of agency and she is characterized by consciousness which is, for Korsgaard, a quality inherent in experiential activities.

In order for the person to be considered *as ends* in moral deliberation, the person must have ends, and having ends entails the ability to not only engage in conscious activity, but to *choose* to engage in these activities. The person posits of Parfit are not sufficient for this view: they are not necessarily authorial. Whereas Korsgaard is committed to positing authorial persons. Korsgaard and Parfit are perfectly well in dialogue; the arguments in favor of agency are commensurable with the arguments against. But the sort of motivation which causes Korsgaard to prefer agency over Parfit's view is her commitment to Kantianism, and while the facts which count in favor of Kantianism are persuasive to Korsgaard, they are not to Parfit.

Similar in vein to Korsgaard's authorial person, Schechtman and others defend the position that a person not only experiences their self-perception to be structured as a narrative, but that persons are essentially narrative in structure.[17] Theories of narrative identity try to explain behaviors analogically by comparison to narratives. Human persons are those who define themselves and author their actions in context of the self's interaction with an external context. The particular ontological commitment differs between theorists but the common theme is that persons must in every case be self-reflecting and authorial agents. The justification for this is psychological and behavioral–it seems to be the case that humans interact and develop themselves in such and such a way, and personhood is this agency and self-development, therefore personhood is defined by this narrative analogy. Thus on the narrative theorist's view, human persons are necessarily structured in terms of a narrative and not have been otherwise.

---

[17]Schechtman, M., Oxford University Press. (2011). *The Self*, "The Narrative Self" ed. Gallagher, S. Clarendon Press. pp. 394-415.

There are some objectors to the narrativity thesis, especially Strawson.[18] Strawson's objection has two horns, (1) that persons are not ordinarily and without exception structured as narratives and that (2) it is not the case that a person ought to structure her life as a narrative.[19] These are respectively a descriptive and a normative claim. The descriptive objection is a disagreement in ontologies. For Strawson, it is not the case that the sort of object that 'human person' ostends to is just that agent which self reflectively defines itself as one continuous narrative. Strawson in particular does not experience reality in the form of a narrative, so in being committed to identifying himself as a human person, the kind of posit which person is must be at least more broad in conception than the narrativity thesis allows. In this way the descriptive claim is, in particular, an objection about the ontological commitments in Schechtman's theory. The normative claim is the metaphysical horn: having established that the narrative ontology does not narrowly describe reality, the ethical claim should no longer follow.

One last salient case. The modification of narrative theory in Lindemann's "What Child Is This?" is motivated by the question "how can we make sense of the notion of conferring personal identity on someone who can contribute nothing to her own personhood?"[20] The theories of personhood already discussed have relied on psychological and physical aspects of continuity to establish persistence conditions and to characterize persons synchronically. Psychological states such as narratives, or authorially driven actions informed by memories, require the exhibition of behaviors in order for external parties to construct personhood for other bodies. Lindemann's younger sister, Carla, was born with hydrocephaly which impeded motion of the body, speech, and prehension. She was mechanically incapable of exhibiting the sorts of behaviors ordinarily used to construct personhood. But it is intuitive to say that Carla is Lindemann's family and that she must be a person in some important way. Thus the

---

[18]Schechtman 2011, pp. 407
[19]Strawson, Galen (2004). Against Narrativity. Ratio 17 (4):428-452.
[20]Hilde Lindemann Nelson. (2002). What child is this? The Hastings Center Report, 32(6), 29-.
    https://doi.org/10.2307/3528131

qualities of Carla must be compatible with the kind of posit which is a 'human person'. The social construction of personhood by the family unit in lieu of one's ability to self-express emerged as consequent to this commitment.

Metaphysics of personal identity describe the persistence conditions for persons. Because a good theory of personal identity is one which rightly describes the sorts of objects we call persons over time, the good theory is informed by the extension of objects we call persons. Debating over ontologies is possible, but from time to time, theorists have normative reasons which win out in each possible theory they draw. I think that the descriptions of posits which I have attributed to these theorists are commitments and that they would hold them come what may for the reasons I have described, namely, the theorists experience reality in different ways and require theories of personal identity for different ends.

IV. Lightening the Load

I have made the descriptive claim that commitment ladenness is a feature of personal identity theories just because changes in the metaphysics of personal identity necessarily respond to changes in the ontology of personhood. In cases where the theorist is committed to one or more qualities in the concept 'person', they become willing to dispense with other data in upholding this commitment. I will now briefly defend the claim that theorists ought to express their commitments in terms of normative reasons as if they were any other fact counting in favor of a particular datum or belief. Then, I will close by addressing two objections.

Qualities of concepts are really just facts about the concept, and any fact about a concept can count in favor or against positing that concept. If a particular theorist, Locke, is committed to, for instance, 'persons at least have behaviors which demonstrate they are self-reflecting agents', then this is just to say that self-reflection is a particularly strong reason for adopting a Lockean view of personal identity. In the same case, if Locke holds self-reflection to be a particularly strong reason to believe that

an agent who behaves with self-reflection is a person, then this reason is lacking when viewing, e.g., Carla. Conversely, Lindemann's recognition of the need for Carla to be a person renders out into facts like 'I want Carla to be a person', 'Sisters are usually persons', 'Carla was born the same way I was', so on and so forth, and each fact counts against adopting a Lockean perspective on personal identity.

Ontological commitments viewed as normative reasons resist other normative reasons in two cases. The first case is by generating incompatibilities in meaning. If a theorist is committed to, for instance, the datum that persons are at least autonomous agents, then the other qualities of personhood must be compatible in meaning with this fact. Persons cannot be such that they are slavish by nature, or that they do not have the sorts of authorially conscious activities ordinarily constituent of autonomy.[21] The second case is by generating facts which by nature resist the obtaining of other facts. For instance, if Korsgaard has identified over the course of her career a number of extremely strong facts which count in favor of the belief that Kantianism is the best moral philosophy, then if certain new facts which somewhat count against this belief become salient, their relative strength will be insufficient to effect a change in her belief. Cases can also be conceived of where an individual's view of justification biases certain facts radically. Some theorist, L, believes that the best metaphysical grounding principle is actually intuition. If a fact is intuitively true to L, the degree of intuition counts correspondingly in favor of adopting that fact as a datum. Then, if L intuits with extreme strength, e.g., that persons are only those humans who brush their teeth with their left hand and have red hair, and if it is a biological fact that L won't have any stronger intuitions, then L will hold this datum come what may, no matter what other facts obtain.

What I am saying is not that Korsgaard or L are unjustified in holding their committed data come what may; on the contrary, there are contingent facts which are rightly acting as normative reasons

---

[21]See Korsgaard 1989, pp. 109-119

for adopting and holding these data. What I argue is that theorists ought to exhaustively describe the facts which count in favor of a theory and ought to pay special attention to their commitments in doing so.

In summary, there are *prima facie* two ways to lighten the commitment ladenness of a theory. The first is to remove the rigidity of the commitments altogether in order to make the theory more communicable. This, I think, is intractable. The only way to approach this would be to cause theorists to *agree* over ontologies, but this seems implausible.[22] The second way is by expressing the commitment as a bi-conditional with its hinge fact. For instance, 'if and only if it serves the deliberator to have a theory of personal identity which permits use for holding persons accountable, then this fact counts in favor of adopting that theory'. I think this is the correct way out.

We should, I argue, analyze the commitments out of the theory into the plain language of justification, in order to permit commensurable evaluation over theories of personal identity. This is just because in choosing a theory we are required to form a complete and transitive preference structure over a set of evaluable theories. The choice is determined in terms of degree of justification, so the formation of this structure requires piecewise evaluation in terms of normative reasons and their strength. Hence the better theory of personal identity is the one which lays bare all the facts which count in favor of its adoption, especially the contingent facts.

One might object that in talking about commitments as normative reasons, the theorist has not actually reduced the committedness of her theory. This objector has the right view. It seems implausible that theorists should, at length, come to agreement over the precise semantic range of an everyday term. It is sometimes fruitful to change the ordinary use of a term, or it is sometimes fruitful to elucidate the boundary conditions of a term. But if theorists wish to come to agreement over semantic ranges, they

---

[22]Compare, for instance, with the excellent discussion in: Quine, W. V. (1948). On What There Is. The Review of Metaphysics, 2(5), 21–38. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20123117

ought to either come up with new terms, or to qualify their definitions with jargon specific contexts. For instance, if 'person' is a so-called diagnosing term, this suggests a usage which differs from the everyday tokening. Ditto Parfit, who introduces 'series-person' instead of revising the particular definition of personhood. Translations of these type have the advantage of clarity accompanied by a loss in the economy of language– talking about α-persons and β-persons and so on might be thought to overcomplicate language except in cases where absolute precision is required.[23] What I argue is just that theorists ought to lighten the *burden* of these commitments on their theories, a prescription which amounts to discussing them openly in terms of normative reasons.

Others might complain that theorists are already in the practice of making the move I prescribe. I agree in part. The claim that theorists ought to clearly explain the justification for their theory is by no means original. Really, it is the job and the goal of the theorist to do so. The difference in my point can be seen through comparison between the term commitment and the term bias. One definition of a bias is just some datum which sways the acquisition or dispensation of other data. Epistemologists and philosophers of science frequently talk about bias in theory choice.[24] But a bias is ordinarily something with a negative value judgement attached. To be biased is to be less justified in one's conclusion. This is a value judgement that *can* be made of some commitment laden theories, but I do not think it is a necessary aspect of a conclusion informed by commitments which behave in the way I describe. In framing the motivations for their arguments, theorists ordinarily put forth a narrative out of which the reader may surmise what facts are informing the argument. But the need for inference is, I think, the problem needing remediation. Biases might just be those commitments which are not elucidated and which hide from both the theorist and the evaluator. In this way (and only in this way) commitments can become harmful. In every case the

---

[23]See pp. 26-27 for a discussion: W. V. Quine. (1951). Main Trends in Recent Philosophy: Two Dogmas of Empiricism. The Philosophical Review, 60(1), 20–43. https://doi.org/10.2307/2181906

[24]For example but among others, the Duhem-Quine thesis, or in feminist epistemology, e.g., Okruhlik, K. (1994). Gender and the Biological Sciences. Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary Volume, 20, 21–42. doi:10.1080/00455091.1994.10717393

more communicable and commensurable theory will be the one which describes its commitments in terms of normative reasons, and hence, will be the better theory.