Some remarks on Extended Rationality

1. The Extended Rationality (ER) view

*Epistemic rationality*$_{ER}$: it is epistemically rational to believe evidentially warranted propositions and to accept those unwarrantable assumptions that make the acquisition of perceptual warrants possible in the first place and are therefore constitutive of ordinary evidential warrants.

(1) Epistemic rationality depends on the basic epistemic practice of producing, assessing and withdrawing from ordinary empirical beliefs.

(2) In order to take part in this practice, one ought to assume general propositions (e.g., there is an external world).

(3) Therefore, epistemic rationality depends on assumptions of general propositions.

Analogy with games: appropriate assumptions are like *rules* in a game and epistemic warrants are like *moves* in the game. As both rules and moves are parts of a game, both assumptions and warrants are parts of epistemic rationality.

2. In what sense are assumptions of general propositions rational?

In one sense, it is trivial that something that constitutes Rationality is ‘rational’ (e.g., laws are ‘legal’).

In another sense, assumptions of general propositions cannot be assessed as rational or irrational, since they are what make something rational or irrational (at least in part).

A suggestion: assumptions are not constitutive rules of rationality, but they are mandated by some constitutive rule of epistemic rationality. Example: the rule that requires accepting that there is an external world.

3. A counterexample to the ER view

Suppose that a radical skeptic suspends her acceptance and belief of general propositions and suspends all other beliefs about specific material objects in the world. This may be because she couldn’t eliminate relevant counter-possibilities in every case (e.g. she is a BIV, or this might a painted mule). Thereby, suppose she only forms beliefs about internal experiences (appearances). Such a skeptic seems still to be able to engage in genuine epistemic practices (e.g., producing beliefs about internal experience) and she doesn’t seem to be epistemically irrational, or a-rational in taking part in that practice.
Example: the inference from the belief that it appears to me that the sky is blue to the belief that I perceive that the sky is colored seems to be equally rational both made by a non-skeptic and a skeptic who suspends all her judgments about the external world.

4. Some thoughts on the notion of ‘basic epistemic practice’

4.1 Is epistemic rationality dependent on the performance of an activity?

Consider the following argument:

1) Epistemic rationality depends on basic epistemic practices (of producing, assessing and withdrawing from ordinary empirical beliefs).
2) An epistemic practice is a practice.
3) A practice involves the performance of an activity.

Conclusion: Epistemic rationality (and epistemic warrant) depends on the performance of an activity (more in general, it depends on some practical factor).

This conclusion may be in tension with the possibility that, at least in some circumstances, epistemic rationality and epistemic warrant don’t depend on practical factors (practices, activities).

Example: warranted belief involuntarily formed, involuntary → independent of action.

This seems to suggest that epistemic practices are not constitutive of epistemic rationality and warrant.

A possible solution: substitute ‘epistemic practices’ with something like ‘processes of belief-formation’?

4.2 Why should we endorse a practice-first approach?

According to the argument for ER, the most fundamental bearers of rationality are epistemic practices (epistemic rationality depends on the basic epistemic practice and its constitutive rules). Ordinary evidential warrants are made possible by unwarrantable assumptions, which are constitutive of basic epistemic practices.

Why not the other way around?
According to an alternative approach, an epistemic practice is rational because it produces warranted beliefs. And whether a belief is warranted depends on constitutive rules/norms of belief (or warrant). (Many philosophers have argued for the claim that belief is normative, e.g. Wedgwood 2002, The Aim of Belief. Philosophical Perspectives, 36(s16), 267–97). Why should we favor a practice-first approach rather than a warrant-first or a belief-first one?