

# Sensitive Truths

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# Clifford and James

- W. K. Clifford, 'Ethics of Belief' (1879): it is 'wrong always, everywhere, and for every one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence'
- James: in *some* cases, it is (1) *not* wrong to believe without sufficient evidence, but quite the converse, (2) *we should* do so:
  - 'Our *passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds*'

# James's argument

(P1) Either we follow the rule '*We must know the truth*' or another, substantially different maxim, '*we must avoid error*'.

(P2) '[A] rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule'.

(P3) There are cases where following the second maxim would prevent us from attaining some truths.

(C) In some cases, then, a believing attitude (or following the first maxim) is called for.

# P3: Sensitive truths?

Some propositions (ideas, ‘truths’) must fulfill either of two conditions:

1.  $P$  is sensitive if believing that  $p$  is a necessary condition for the truth of  $p$ , or
2.  $P$  is sensitive if the believing that  $p$  is a necessary condition for obtaining evidence that shows the truth of  $p$ .

James’s examples:

- A. First-person capacities
- B. Cooperation with others
- C. Moral value