Chapter 3
In Defence of Believing Wishfully

What is so great about having true beliefs? Why should one care not to believe something false? *Should* one care not to believe something false? These are the questions we will attempt to answer in Part II of the book.

In this chapter, I will do my very best to argue that believing truly should not always be one's concern. Sometimes, I will argue, it pays to be indifferent to whether one's belief is true. One should, that is, in certain situations, be open to believing things wishfully. In Chapter 5 we will consider objections to the view I develop here.

1. True beliefs and successful endeavours

A first reason why one should care to believe truly and not to believe falsely is a straightforward reason of prudence. It is a reason having to do with the role beliefs play in actions. An action is something one does intentionally, attempting to attain some end. Actions stem from desires and beliefs. We desire something and we believe doing such-and-such will (likely) work to get us the thing we desire. Our desires motivate us or move us to action by giving us our ends, while our beliefs guide our actions in our pursuit of our ends. When we act, when we attempt to do something, we go about our attempt in the way that we do because of our beliefs. If we want some milk, we will go about getting milk in one way rather than another according to what we believe about, for instance, where milk is and how we can get it. If you want some milk and you believe that there's milk in the fridge, you will attempt to get milk by going to the fridge. If, though, you believe that there's no milk in the fridge, you will attempt to get milk by going to the store or borrowing it from a neighbour.

You guide yourself in your pursuit of your ends by your beliefs. When your beliefs are true, you stand a good chance of succeeding in your endeavour. True beliefs are accruate guides. If you believe that there's milk in the fridge and there is, then likely you will succeed in your quest for milk when, guided by your true belief, you go to the fridge to get milk. But when you act on a false belief (when, for instance, you go to the fridge believing you will find milk there though the fridge is empty), you will, almost certainly, fail in your endeavour. Since we don't want to fail in our endeavours, we want to have true beliefs.

So, we do well not to believe falsely but to believe truly. We do well not to believe falsely as actions guided by false beliefs rarely succeed in accomplishing their intended ends.

2. Belief and evidence

Since we have a reason to care generally that our beliefs are true, we have a reason to do whatever it is that would tend to cause us to believe truly rather than falsely. We have a reason, that is, to have high epistemic standards and to live up to them. We have a reason to be concerned that our beliefs are well justified epistemically.

To be well justified epistemically in believing some proposition is to have reasons or grounds that indicate that that proposition is true, reasons or grounds strong enough by one's epistemic standards for one to believe that proposition. One type of epistemic reason or ground for belief, perhaps the central type, is evidence. Consider the proposition that squirrels live in trees. One might believe that squirrels live in trees on evidence that they do, evidence strong enough, given one's epistemic standards, to warrant one in believing that they do. Evidence one might cite that squirrels live in trees includes that squirrels build nests in trees, that we never find baby squirrels anywhere but in trees, and that squirrels are well-adapted for life in trees. Someone who believes on evidence that squirrels live in trees first of all holds true the proposition "squirrels live in trees" (that's what it is to believe they do) and second has other beliefs that support the idea that squirrels live in trees (that's what it is to believe they do on evidence).

The more evidence a person has in favour of a proposition, and the stronger and more relevant that that evidence is, the more likely it is that that proposition is true. On the other hand, that a proposition is true becomes less likely with each small bit of evidence against it. Of course, a person can believe a proposition though she has little or no reason to believe it true, and a proposition one has plenty of good reason to believe is true can still be false. Nonetheless, typically, the more evidence one has in favour of a proposition the more likely it is that that proposition is true, while the more evidence one has against a proposition, the more likely it is that that proposition is false.

For the most part, we hold our beliefs on evidence. Rarely do we think that something is true when we have no reason to think it is true. For the most part, we apportion our beliefs to our evidence. That is to say, we are most confident in the truth of propositions for which we have lots of evidence and no contrary evidence, we are less confident in the truth of propositions for which we have both some positive and some contrary evidence, and we don't believe propositions for which we have no evidence. Usually, we disbelieve propositions for which we have evidence against and no evidence for.

We do not, though, consciously seek to apportion our beliefs to the evidence, or at least we do so only rarely. Usually it's entirely automatic that we hold a belief with just the degree of confidence the totality of the evidence of which we are aware warrants. Usually we just find ourselves passing from confident belief to less confident belief to doubt to disbelief as the contrary evidence we collect mounts.

You yourself do not, for the most part, believe just anything; you tend to believe only what you have epistemic reason to believe, and that you tend to believe only what you have epistemic reason to believe tends to lead you to believe what is true and not to believe what is false. Perhaps you've never really thought about how sensitive your beliefs are to evidence, but now that you are thinking about it, maybe it's not really surprising to you that they are. After all, as we said above, to believe a proposition is to believe that that proposition is true; thus, since evidence is evidence of truth, being sensitive to evidence might well just be part of what it is to have beliefs.

Yet, even though we might not be surprised that our beliefs are sensitive to evidence, we should be happy that they are. We should be happy that they are, for their sensitivity to evidence keeps us from believing falsely—or, at least, keeps us from believing falsely as often as we would were they not sensitive to evidence. Since false beliefs prevent us from

succeeding in our tasks and we want to succeed in our tasks, it is a good thing that our beliefs tend, without much effort on our part and without our conscious control, to respond to evidence and, thereby, tend to be true.

Let us pause to sum up the ideas in Sections 1 and 2 of this chapter. Our beliefs are, for the most part, sensitive to evidence, we said, and it's a good thing that they are, for their sensitivity to evidence enables us to believe truly and to avoid believing falsely. It is a good thing that we tend, at least when it comes to everyday matters, to believe truly and only rarely to believe falsely, for one will seldom succeed in getting what one wants when one acts on false beliefs. Since we want to succeed at what we do and not to fail, we should be happy that, for the most part, our beliefs are sensitive to evidence.

3. Believing wishfully

For the most part our beliefs are sensitive to evidence. Are they not *always* sensitive to evidence? No, clearly they are not always sensitive to evidence. Sometimes we continue to believe something even though we have plenty of evidence against that thing, and sometimes we fail to believe something though we have plenty of evidence in favour of it. Sometimes we continue confidently to believe something despite having bits and pieces of contrary evidence, the sort of contrary evidence that usually causes us to doubt what we believe and to lower our confidence that our belief is true. And sometimes we believe something though we have no evidence at all one way or the other.

Why would a belief be insensitive to evidence? What might cause us to believe a proposition when we have, by our own standards, insufficient evidence that it is true? A belief's sensitivity to evidence can diminish when we have some strong reason of desire or emotion to want to have that belief. Wanting to believe forces the counter-evidence out of our mind or causes us to ignore our usual epistemic standards. We have a name for the sort of believing we engage in when we believe without evidence or when the strength with which we believe fails to accord with our evidence. We call it "wishful believing."

For the most part our beliefs are sensitive to evidence, but sometimes we believe wishfully. In believing wishfully, we form or maintain beliefs despite not having good evidence for them, or despite not having any evidence for them, or sometimes even despite having good evidence against them. What causes us to depart from our usual standards of evidence in believing when we believe wishfully is our strong desire to have or to maintain our belief. We like to believe that people enjoy our company, say, or that we are doing well in our Contemporary Poetry course; we would be disturbed and unhappy to believe otherwise; and so we form and cling to our belief regardless of how likely true our evidence says that it is. We also sometimes engage in fearful believing, in believing that some idea must be false despite lacking evidence that it is; we think it must be false because we fear what it would mean for it to be true. It would be too terrible, some people think, to accept that humans evolved from an ancestor species merely by means of natural and sexual selection; and this fear causes them to think that the thesis that humans have so evolved is probably if not certainly false.

In believing wishfully or fearfully we form or maintain beliefs not because we have evidence they are true, but because of our wishes, hopes, or fears. We believe as we do simply in order to be happy or to avoid unhappiness. That we believe that people enjoy our

company, if we believe wishfully that they do, is to be explained by the role that that belief plays in keeping us in a good state of mind. It is not a belief we can justify as likely true by pointing to adequate evidence in its favour. That we are believing wishfully rather than on evidence is not something we ourselves are aware of, of course, when we believe wishfully. (At least it is not usually something of which we are aware. The case of religious belief is sometimes different.)

Standardly, in cases of wishful believing, we take for granted that we are believing on evidence, but really we are not. We hide from ourselves the fact that we believe what we do simply because we want to believe it, rather than that we are epistemically well justified in believing it. That we hide this fact from ourself is also something we have some reason of desire or emotion to do.

There is much of interest to investigate in the phenomenon of wishful believing. We would like, for instance, to understand how it is possible to believe wishfully, that is, what psychological mechanisms are required to produce wishful thinking. We would like also to know whether wishful believing always involves an element of self-deception. In this chapter, though, we will address a single issue regarding believing without evidence. That is the issue of its pragmatic wisdom or, more precisely, the issue whether, from the point of view of prudence, it could be wise to be the sort of person open to believing things wishfully or fearfully. In the following sections I will lay out an argument purporting to show that sometimes, in certain well-defined circumstances, indeed it is wise to believe wishfully or fearfully, that indeed in those circumstances it is positively foolish to apportion one's beliefs strictly to the evidence one has.

We have already noted that from the point of view of prudence one does well to be strongly inclined to apportion belief to evidence. A person strongly inclined to apportion belief to evidence is more likely to believe truly than a person not strongly inclined, and a person who tends to believe truly is more likely to meet with success in her endeavours than a person who tends to believe falsely. Since you want very much to succeed in your endeavours, and having false beliefs will prevent you from succeeding in your endeavours, prudentially it is a good thing that you are strongly inclined to apportion your belief to your evidence. Your happiness is well served by your inclination to apportion your beliefs to your evidence. But if, generally speaking, happiness is what you are after, then you are wise to go against your inclination in those cases, should there be any, where your happiness is better served by wishful or fearful thinking. And so our concern here is with whether there are any such cases, cases in which a person's happiness is better served by wishful or fearful thinking than it is by thinking directed entirely by evidence.

4. The contention

The reason it is generally prudent for you to believe according to high standards of evidence is that believing according to high standards of evidence tends to make your life go well. Well, then, by parity of reasoning, it would have to be prudent to believe on insufficient evidence whenever believing on insufficient evidence would make your life go well. Can believing on insufficient evidence ever make your life go well? Can a person ever come out ahead for believing wishfully or fearfully rather than believing realistically?

Let us entertain the contention that sometimes it *is* prudent for a person to believe something though that person has little or no evidence that that thing is true (and maybe even some evidence that it isn't). Let us entertain the contention that sometimes it would be downright foolish for a person not to believe, despite her lack of evidence. By saying it is "prudent" for a person to believe something, we mean that believing that thing serves well one or another of her interests, that it provides a means by which to satisfy or fulfil one of her desires. We mean also that it serves well one of her interests without frustrating other, more important, interests she has. That is to say, wishful believing solves one or another problem she has without thereby creating a worse problem for her. This point is important, for it's never prudent to get out of trouble by getting into even more trouble. We can all agree that believing wishfully is often fun or reassuring or satisfying, at least for a moment, and that it thereby serves one or another interest we have. But the moment passes and the wishful believer finds he is no further ahead, at least if he's lucky. Usually he finds that his wishful belief has set him back a pace or two. We want, then, to entertain the contention that sometimes it is prudent *overall*, not just in the moment, to believe on insufficient evidence.

Speaking most generally, we can frame the contention as follows: One has a prudential obligation to believe that p ("p" is a placeholder for any proposition) against one's usual epistemic standards for believing when, but only when:

1) Believing that p brings with it important benefits, or at least increases the chance that one will reap important benefits;

2) By remaining without the belief that p, one forfeits the benefits mentioned in 1), or at least one decreases the chances of reaping them.

The contention is that under these two conditions, one is required, from the point of view of prudence, to engage in wishful believing. Both conditions must be present for one to be required by prudence to engage in wishful believing—but as soon as both *are* present, it would be foolish *not* to believe wishfully.

The first condition, that believing that p brings with it important benefits, requires that somehow your interests overall are served by your believing that p. We said above that the point of apportioning one's belief to one's evidence is to promote one's interests. So, then, if in some case one can serve this same point otherwise than by apportioning one's belief to one's evidence, then maybe one should violate one's rule. In basketball, the point of passing to the open man rather than taking the shot oneself is to increase the chance of one's team scoring; thus, maybe one should take the shot oneself rather than pass to the open man should it happen that taking the shot oneself will lead to one's team scoring.

The second condition takes care of the tempation one might feel to violate the rule to apportion belief to evidence when it is not necessary to violate the rule. Maybe one should violate one's rule when one thinks doing so will bring one some benefit, but maybe one can reap that benefit without violating one's rule. The second condition, that by remaining without the belief that p, one forfeits the benefits mentioned in the first condition, requires that believing that p be the only way to reap the benefits at stake. If the rule is a good rule, then one should follow it even when one can safely break it, so long as following it doesn't prevent one from reaping a benefit. Each time one breaks a rule, we might suspect, one becomes a little less committed to that rule. Prudence, though, instructs us to maintain strong commitments to good rules. The smart basketball player passes to the open man rather than

takes the shot even when she judges that each alternative is as good as the other as far as scoring a basket is concerned. The smart basketball player passes, for she is concerned not to acquire any bad habits.

Together these two conditions are meant to ensure that the agent—you, for instance—is doing as well as he possibly can from the point of view of his many interests. You want—as all agents do—to succeed at your various tasks, and you want that your present success doesn't prevent you from succeeding at important tasks in the future. Apportioning your beliefs to your evidence serves you very well in this, but you would be foolish—as any agent would be—to follow even a generally good rule in the rare case in which you—or he—would do better not to follow it. Nonetheless, you would be foolish to violate a good rule even though you would gain by violating it, if violating it will weaken your commitment to it and thereby cause you, overall, to lose by violating it when it is foolish to violate it. And so how can you—how can any agent?—maintain your—his—commitment to the good rule of apportioning belief to evidence while being ready to reap what rewards might come from violating it in some particular case? The answer: By respecting the two conditions given above. You are not to go against your rule except when going against it is the only way to reap some reward. And you are to go against it when going against it is the only way to reap that reward—you'd be foolish not to!

You should right now, before moving on to the next section, take ten or fifteen minutes to reconstruct in your own words the reasoning presented in the above paragraphs of this section, Section 4. The contention we have developed is this: It is wise, because prudent, to believe that p though one has insufficient evidence that p when, but only when, believing that p brings one benefits, and the benefits that believing that p brings one cannot be had any other way. It is wise to believe that p when but only when these two conditions hold, and foolish not to believe that p when they hold. Given what you have read in this chapter to this point, what, to your mind, is the best argument in favour of the contention? What objections to the contention or to the best argument for it can you formulate?

5. Do any beliefs actually meet the two conditions?

We are considering the contention that one has a prudential obligation to believe that p ("p" is a placeholder for any proposition) against one's best epistemic standards of belief when, but only when:

1) Believing that p brings with it important benefits overall, or at least increases the chance that one will reap important benefits overall;

2) By remaining without the belief that p, one forfeits the benefits mentioned in 1), or at least one decreases the chances of reaping them.

If this contention is true, then it is prudent to believe against one's epistemic standards whenever these conditions hold and foolish not to believe.

It isn't especially surprising to find that the contention is true. The contention says, in essence, that it is imprudent to believe on insufficient evidence except in those cases in which it is prudent. It's not likely that that claim is false! What is really in question, then, is not the contention itself, but whether in fact any candidate for belief ever meets the two conditions. We can agree that *if* a proposition meets the two conditions, then it would be foolish not to believe it, even if one has no evidence in favour of it; but now we want to know whether we

can expect any proposition ever to meet the two conditions. Could there be a proposition for which one lacks evidence but yet is such that by believing that proposition one can reap important benefits overall that one cannot reap except by believing that proposition? That is the question we must answer if we are to know whether in fact it is ever wise to believe something wishfully.

Now surely we can't expect that we would sometimes be wise to believe in violation of our epistemic standards a proposition regarding the everyday objects and events around us. It's hard to imagine that the two conditions would ever both be fulfilled in connection with our beliefs about how many tables are in the room, say, or about their colour, or about what is in the fridge. A person who believes heedless of evidence that there's milk in the fridge is simply courting disappointment, however pleasant it is for her to believe that there is milk in the fridge. Remember, also, that believing wishfully can well pose a threat to one's commitment to proper standards of belief. Even though believing what one would like to believe about, say, the distance of the earth from the sun might be pleasing in the moment and not ever itself get one into trouble, still believing wishfully in this case could bring one to believe wishfully in other cases, cases in which one's wishful belief does get one into trouble.

If there are any propositions that meet both conditions, most likely they will fall into some special and relatively uncommon types. They won't be propositions about the size, shape, or colour of things. About common things we do well to guard against believing wishfully.

The following list might not be exhaustive, but it seems that propositions that on occasion might meet the two conditions will fall into at least four sorts or classes. One is the class of propositions belief in which helps to make them true; another is the class of propositions belief in which helps to sustain one in one's endeavours; a third is propositions belief in which helps one to sustain one's preferred self image; a fourth is propositions belief in which is comforting (or which lack of belief in is painful). Let us look at each class individually, and see whether a case can be made that a proposition within that class can meet the two conditions such that it would be wise to believe it even wishfully.

1) Propositions belief in which helps to make them true. The proposition that one can jump the chasm or pass the test, or that people enjoy one's company, or that one's marriage is sound, or that one is essentially a good person, might well, for some people in some circumstances, meet the two conditions under which it is prudent to believe despite insufficient evidence and foolish not to. These are propositions that, in certain circumstances, can come to be true only by being believed. One who holds them can realize the benefit of holding a true belief, but as believing them comes before there is evidence that they are true, they are first of all held only wishfully.

Imagine that you are high in the mountains, standing on the edge of a wide chasm. On the other side is a sure path to safety. Night is falling and you will certainly perish should you go left or right or back the way you came. The only option available to you is to jump the chasm. Of course, if your jump is unsuccessful, you will plummet to your death. But you will die anyway unless you jump. And so you resolve to jump the chasm.

Maybe you have evidence that you can jump the chasm. You have jumped such distances before, perhaps even in similar weather conditions and states of mind. But suppose this evidence is inconclusive, for you have not always or even regularly succeeded in your

attempts to jump such distances. Or perhaps the distance to the other side is greater than any you have ever jumped before. Either way, you do not have sufficient evidence that you can jump the chasm. Still, you lack conclusive evidence that you *cannot* jump the chasm. For all you know, you might indeed be able to jump it.

Now suppose that one ingredient in successful jumping is confidence in one's ability to jump. It is not unreasonable to suppose that people confident that they can jump long distances tend to jump farther than people who lack confidence. A source of confidence in one's abilities is the belief that one in fact is able to perform well. Now in your situation, the only source of confidence you can have in your ability to jump the chasm would be the belief that you can jump it.

In the case as we have described it, you would be wise to believe that you can jump the chasm and foolish not to believe you can, despite your lack of evidence that you can. First of all, jumping the chasm successfully is terribly important to you; indeed, your life depends on it. Thus, prudence says, whatever you can do to improve your chances of jumping the chasm is something you should do. Second, by believing you can jump the chasm you will have the confidence needed to jump the chasm successfully. Third, you will not gain this needed confidence any other way. There are, then, benefits that might come with belief, benefits that are not available any other way. Only a fool would fail to believe wishfully when facing the chasm, and you are no fool.

A similar case can be made for each of the other examples given a few paragraphs above. For each example, a case can be made that believing the proposition in question is a necessary condition of the proposition coming true, and that while the proposition's being true is a necessary condition of the agent receiving some reward there is no other condition that is sufficient for receiving that reward. For each example, it is possible that a person might attain some benefit by believing the proposition. A person who wants to pass the test or wants people to enjoy his company, or who wants that his marriage is sound or that he is a good person, might well get what he wants (or at least improve the chance that he will get what he wants) by believing true what he wants to be true. Thus, for each example it is possible that it satisfies the first condition, that believing that p brings with it important benefits, or at least increases the chance that one will reap important benefits. And for each example, it is possible that having the belief in question is the only way to attain that benefit (or at least the only way to increase the chance that one will attain it).

2) Propositions belief in which helps to sustain one in one's endeavours. The belief that whatever happens, one is safe in God's hands, or that God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, or that it matters that I treat people fairly, whether I benefit by doing so or not, or that each setback is actually an opportunity, might well, for some people in some circumstances, meet both conditions under which it is wise to believe on insufficient evidence and foolish not to. They might meet both conditions by enabling one to continue on in face of hardship where nothing else can do so.

Unlike beliefs that help make themselves true, these beliefs might well be beliefs a person cannot have but wishfully. To believe one of the propositions listed above might inevitably be to believe on evidence much slighter than one would accept in believing just about anything else. Perhaps there is no observation one could have, no experiment one could perform, that could speak strongly in favour of any one of the propositions in question, if

speak in favour of it at all. If this is so, then always a person is believing on insufficient evidence when he holds one of them true. (Of course, as we see in the chapters on philosophy of religion, some philosophers are prepared to offer arguments that religious beliefs can indeed rest on good reasons or evidence. They would deny that religious beliefs can be held only wishfully.) And yet, as religious believers are often quick to point out in connection with their religious beliefs, there would seem also to be nothing that would decisively show any such proposition to be false. If in the nature of things a proposition of religion cannot be shown to be false by evidence or reasoning from acceptable premises, then in the nature of things whether a proposition of religion is true cannot be determined on intellectual grounds alone; and, so, to believe a proposition of religion is always to believe wishfully. Interestingly, while usually we hide from ourselves the fact that we are believing wishfully, often enough religious believers are not deceived about their lack of evidence, nor are they embarrassed by it. They have faith, which might mean they believe sincerely and confidently (though perhaps not without some doubt) on what they are entirely aware is, given their own epistemic standards, less than sufficient evidence.

People who believe such propositions as listed above are often inspired and energized by their beliefs. Without them, they would be unable to soldier on when times are hard. People who believe these propositions very often, then, derive much benefit from their beliefs.

We can all agree that it's not easy to live rightly, honouring and promoting those values, whatever they are, that one takes to be central to ethical living. It's not easy to live rightly, for there is much that distracts one from ethics, or that tempts one into unethical behaviour. One's self-interest, for instance, can get in the way of one's doing what one believes is right. So can one's concern for the people and things that one loves, as such concern can make us partial when ethics demands that we be impartial. And, further, because we often take our motivation from the effects of our behaviour on others, our concern to do the right thing can waiver when others are indifferent to our good behaviour. Nonetheless, one might want very much to live rightly. By believing that, say, the world has a value structure, one might be able to rise to meet whatever challenges to one's ethical attitudes the world throws one's way. Such beliefs can give one the strength to continue to care to do right despite the pull of self-interest, the lure of partiality, or the drag of indifference. Perhaps one feels that the only thing that prevents one from turning callous and cruel is the belief that it is wrong to be callous and cruel, no matter how draining of one's spirit compassion and kindness can be and how easy life would be were one callous and cruel. If it is important to one that one stays on the track of kindness, decency, and justice, and having certain metaethical beliefs can help one to stay on that track, then one has good prudential reason to have such beliefs, even if one lacks evidence for them.

The belief that each setback is actually an opportunity can function to make a person optimistic about his prospects. Being optimistic, he has the will to pursue his dreams through adversity.

Interestingly, it doesn't actually matter whether what these people believe is true for them to derive the benefits of peace of mind and inspiration that they do derive from their beliefs; the benefit is the same whether the belief is true or false. (This contrasts with the first case, the case of beliefs that serve to make possible their own truth. In the case of those beliefs, the believer realizes the relevant good—getting to the other side of the chasm, for

instance—only if the belief turns out to be true.) But though the truth of the proposition is irrelevant to certain benefits that believing it brings, it might not be irrelevant to all of them. If a certain proposition of religion is true, for instance, then, in believing it, a person might have satisfied a necessary condition for salvation. Or at least this is so according to central branches of the major monotheistic religions.

Those who are sustained in their endeavours by believing certain propositions despite lacking evidence for them might well be unable to derive greater or comparable benefit any other way. Nothing but the belief that whatever happens, I am safe in God's hands could inspire me to undertake the difficult tasks I want to undertake. If this is true for some person, then both conditions are satisfied and, thus, it would be foolish for that person not to believe himself safe in God's hands, though he entirely lacks evidence that he is.

3) Propositions belief in which helps one to sustain one's preferred self image. "I possess free will and am responsible for my actions." "Despite my flaws, I'm really a good person." "I've earned my high station in life." "I've done nothing to deserve having such a low station in life."

Part of our happiness consists in thinking that we are the sort of people we want to be. We are made unhappy by the thought that we are not living up to our image of what we should be. Believing one or another of the propositions listed in the previous paragraph can help us to think that we are living up to our image of what we should be, even when we have some evidence that we are not. Believing that my successes are the results of my efforts and that my failures are not my fault can go a long way toward assuring a person that, despite the evidence, she is living up to her preferred self image.

4) Propositions belief in which is comforting (or that would be painful not to believe). "God understands me and loves me." "He'll get his one of these days." "Those grapes are sour." "They're working on my rescue even at this moment."

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We set out in this section to show that in fact there are some propositions a person might be prudent to believe though she lacks good evidence that they are true. We seem to have succeeded in doing what we set out to do. We have argued that it is possible for a person in some situation to be foolish not to hold potentially self-fulfilling beliefs, or some or other religious beliefs, or certain metaethical beliefs, though that person has less evidence in favour of those beliefs than she usually requires before she will believe something. We have not, of course, shown of any specific person, of Sally, say, or of Martin or of Andrea, that that person is wise to believe something on insufficient evidence. Whether a specific person is wise to believe something on what, according to her own standards, is poor evidence is a matter involving that person's specific desires and other beliefs, as well as the situation that that person inhabits. Sally would not be foolish to fail to believe that she can jump the chasm when what would excite her and propel her to do her best is merely to wonder whether she can jump the chasm. Martin would not be foolish to refrain from believing that he is safe in God's hands when he would derive no satisfaction from that belief. We have succeeded, if we have, in establishing the general contention that it can in fact be wise to believe on insufficient evidence; whether this or that person is wise in believing this or that proposition though they lack evidence for it will turn on the many details of the specific case. But *have*

we indeed succeeded in vindicating as not inevitably wrong-headed wishful believing? That is the question for the next two chapters.