

BIG QUESTIONS

THREE TESTS FOR BELIEF FORMATION

OVERVIEW:

During part 4, we talked about the importance of balancing **intellectual autonomy** with **reasonable trust**. Here, we'll illustrate how you can apply each of these tests to claims that you encounter.

Test #1: Intelligibility

Does the claim make sense to me?
Is it intelligible?

If the answer is no, then you obviously shouldn't - and perhaps can't - form the belief. If the answer is yes, however, we proceed to the second test.

Test #2: Reliability

Does the source in question
have relevant authority?

Here, we're looking for reasons to think that the source of the information in question is reliable at getting at the truth on claims like the one in question. These reasons could be things like:

- I know that this person (or institution) has a good track record; they've often been right about these questions in the past.
- This person is certified by an institution or group which is reliable and credible.

Test #3: Adoptability

Does this claim conflict with
anything I already believe?

If the answer is "Yes," you have one further question to ask yourself: Are you more confident in your pre-existing, conflicting beliefs, or are you more confident in the reliability of the person (or institution) that is presenting you with new information? Below, you'll find the questions collected in a chart that you can apply on your own.

