**Some good rules of thumb for finding counterexamples:**

1. *Don’t forget that you have two conditionals!*
2. Focus on the conditional most open to counterexample:
   1. This is typically the more controversial conditional
   2. Or the most expansive conditional (whose antecedent applies to more situations – this is the one with “or” in it)
3. Consider examples right near the borderline between the conditionals.
   1. These are cases that just barely fit the antecedent of the conditional the counterexample is relevant to.
      1. When the antecedent says “If (a) *or* (b) *or* (c), then…” look at cases where only one of these conditions is met, and the others are not.
   2. Don’t be afraid to add a lot of details that make your view look bad, even if they are very unlikely to occur. You only need to show that there is a *single* counterexample, even if it is a very rare type of case.
      1. If the antecedent has a lot of “or” conditions, make just one of them met, and just barely, while the others are maximally *un*met.

*Thesis:* If believing *x* is, as far as A can tell, the best way to increase the number of true things A believes, then A is epistemically justified in believing *x*.

*Part 2*

Jane is an atheist who lives in a community of atheists and has never met anyone who has had a religious experience nor anyone who believes in God. All of the evidence she has – evidence from her experience, her observations, her emotions, and from testimony – supports the belief that God does not exist. Jane is doing academic work, and wants to get a grant to continue her research. The only grant-giving body that funds research like hers is a religious group (the group is in a distant country, and Jane has no idea why they have religious beliefs). In order to get funding from them, one must truly believe in God – they have very effective tests to determine if one’s belief is sincere or not. Jane has gone through all the initial stages of the grant process, and is guaranteed a grant if she just believes in God. Jane’s colleague has developed a pill which can make a person believe in God. Jane knows that, if she takes the pill and gets the grant, she will continue her research and learn many more true things, more than she would learn if she does not get the grant. So, as far as Jane can tell, believing in God is the best way to increase the number of true beliefs she has.

Even so, Jane would not be justified in believing in God. This is because she has no evidence that God exists, and she has evidence that God does not exist. A person cannot be justified in believing something when that belief goes against all of her evidence, no matter how beneficial the belief would be. It is practically rational for Jane to believe in God – the belief would be beneficial to her and her research – but the belief is not epistemically justified.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Part 3* *(version A)*

I agree that Jane is not epistemically justified in believing in God, but this is not really a counterexample to my thesis. The example only seems to fit my antecedent because we are focusing just beliefs that are due to Jane’s research grant. However, there are additional consequences of this belief that we should not overlook. First, Jane’s choice to believe in God involves a form of self-deception. If a person is willing to engage in this kind of self deception, they are likely to continue to engage in it in situations where it is not epistemically beneficial. For example, people who are capable of this sort of self deception will tend to believe things just because those beliefs make them happy. This will, in the long run, lead Jane to form a lot of false beliefs. Second, if Jane believes that God exists, she will also believe the conjunction of the proposition that God exists and every other propositions that she believes. In other words, for any proposition *p* that Jane believes is true, she will also believe “God exists and *p* is true;” for example, she will believe “God exists and 2+2=4. Before Jane takes the pill, she justifiably believes that God does not exist. So, before Jane takes the pill, she justifiably believes that it is false that “God exists and 2+2=4” (this proposition is only true if both of the conjunctions are true). That means that, before she takes the pill, she should justifiably believe that taking the pill will lead her to believe an enormous number of false things. Putting this all together, Jane should expect to form more false beliefs by coming to believe in God than she will form true beliefs. So this is not a counterexample to my thesis.[[2]](#footnote-2)

*Are there ways that the example in Part 2 could have been changed that would make the Version A response not work?*

*Part 3 (version B)*

While it is counterintuitive, Jane really is justified in believing in God in this situation. To say Jane’s belief is justified is to say that it is reasonable *for Jane* to have that belief. When we say that believing something is reasonable, it is reasonable relative to some end or goal. What is the end or goal that belief aims towards? It is truth. To see why I say that, consider the following … [arguments would be needed here] Further, if Jane has the goal of her beliefs being true, this is the goal of as many of her beliefs as possible being true, not that just the goal of one particular belief being true … [arguments would be needed her][[3]](#footnote-3)

Consider now two different standards for evaluating when beliefs are good or appropriate relative to this goal. One is that standard set out in my thesis: beliefs are good when they are the best way to getting more true beliefs. The other standard is the standard appealed to in Part 2, which says that a person cannot be justified when it goes against one’s evidence. If the example in Part 2 is relevant to my thesis, then it must be that sometimes believing what our evidence tells us is *not* the best way of increasing the number of true beliefs we have. But then it cannot be reasonable for a believer to always employ this standard, since it is not really aimed at the believer’s goal. So my standard is the better standard, and my thesis correctly identifies which beliefs are justified.

1. This example is adapted from one given by Richard Fumerton in 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Some of these ideas come from William Clifford and some from Jonathan Adler [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is, by the way, a super controversial claim in contemporary philosophy. If you were to say this in your paper, you’d have to back it up. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)