

The Aim of Belief

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1

Introduction: Aiming at Truth

Timothy Chan

I. Overview of the main questions

It is not a contingent fact that I cannot bring it about, just like that, that I believe something... Why is this? One reason is connected with the characteristic of beliefs that they aim at the truth. (Williams 1973: 148)

So wrote Bernard Williams in 'Deciding to Believe', coining the dictum 'beliefs aim at truth'. Since then 'the aim of belief' has come to be the rubric for a family of philosophical issues concerning the nature of belief and its relationship to truth. This volume brings together ten new essays on these questions, questions that are not only central to philosophy of mind and epistemology, but also significant for philosophy of language, meta-ethics, and philosophy of action. In this introduction I first outline the major questions that are addressed by the authors, locating their contributions in the context of current debates. In the second section a synopsis of each of the chapters is provided.

What does it mean to say that beliefs aim at truth? Williams's explication in his article is brief, amounting to little more than two paragraphs (1973: 136–7). This is because belief aiming at truth is in Williams's paper an *explanans*, with the *explanandum* being the impossibility of believing at will. Before introducing aiming at truth as the first among several basic characteristics of belief, Williams warns 'it will be necessary to mention things which may seem problematic or completely platitudinous' (1973: 136). 'Beliefs aim at truth' proves to be both at the same time. Just about all authors can agree on its being a platitude, when understood in *some* sense or other, but that is as far as any universal agreement goes. There are important and fertile ongoing debates about how this idea is to be fleshed out, what explains it and what its implications are, including but going far beyond whether Williams is right to claim that it implies belief cannot be formed at will.¹ We shall look at the most central among these in a moment.

¹ For example, recent articles that are devoted entirely to addressing what 'beliefs aim at truth' means include Engel (2005, 2007), Owens (2003), Shah (2003), Shah and Velleman (2005), Steglich-Petersen (2006, 2009), Vahid (2006), Velleman (2000), Wedgwood (2002), Whiting (2012), Zalabardo (2010), not to mention the many more that do so in part.

Of course, these philosophical issues themselves long predate the label ‘the aim of belief’. Another crucial source of the literature on our current topics in the last half-century is Anscombe (1957), who introduced the idea (though not the actual phrase) of directions-of-fit. To paraphrase, generalizing from her example, if a belief and what it purports to represent do not agree, then the mistake is in the belief (1957: 56). By contrast, if what one desires is not realized, it does not follow that the desire is mistaken. After Searle (1979, 1983), the distinction is known as belief and desire having respectively ‘mind-to-world’ and ‘world-to-mind’ directions of fit, meaning that the mind is to fit the world for belief, and vice versa for desire.² To say that belief is to fit the world seems to express essentially the same idea as saying that belief aims at truth—for a belief to succeed in representing the world as it is, amounts to just the same thing as for the belief to be true. Having the mind-to-world direction of fit is what distinguishes belief from many other types of propositional attitudes. It is an essential characteristic of belief, just as aiming at truth is supposed to be.

Both ‘having a mind-to-world direction of fit’ and ‘aiming at truth’, while insightful and suggestive, require unpacking and more precise formulation. Anscombe spells out her original distinction in terms of the observation that a false belief is, whereas an unfulfilled desire is not, *ipso facto mistaken*. The other side of the coin is that true beliefs are correct. As Gibbard writes,

For belief, correctness is truth. Correct belief is true belief. My belief that snow is white is correct just in case the belief is true, just in case snow is white. (Gibbard 2005: 338)

The distinction between being correct and being mistaken in this context requires hardly less explication. This pair of terms, however, has (*prima facie*) a very significant characteristic, as Gibbard immediately continues to observe,

Correctness, now, seems *normative*. More precisely, as we should put it, the concept of correctness seems to be a *normative* concept. (Gibbard 2005: 338, my italics)

Starting with these two claims, pithily stated by Gibbard, that truth provides a fundamental standard of correctness for belief, and that correctness is normative, some philosophers argue that there is an irreducibly normative dimension in understanding the nature and contents of belief.³ Opponents of these normative accounts of the aim of belief question whether the putative norm can be spelt out in a plausible way, and argue

² For a comprehensive critical review of the literature on directions of fit, see Humberstone (1992). See also Zangwill (1998).

³ Apart from these ideas based on the notion of correctness, another important source of the current debate about whether ‘belief aims at truth’ should be understood in normative terms is Kripke (1982), who influentially and controversially argued that linguistic meaning is normative. (See Boghossian 1989.) As Glüer and Wikforss observe (2009a, 2009b, Chapter 5), over the decades, the locus of the debate about Kripke’s (Wittgenstein’s) thesis of the normativity of meaning has shifted to questions about the normativity of *thoughts*, both about the contents of thought, and modes or types of thought (i.e. what distinguishes different types of propositional attitudes such as belief and desire).

that the nature of belief can be understood in purely descriptive terms, without invoking any irreducible norms. The division between these two approaches constitutes the primary (though by no means the only) fault line in the debates about the aim of belief. The contours of the debate between them are reviewed and reflected across a majority of chapters of this volume, by some of their leading exponents. It is thus appropriate that we begin with the question at issue between them.

1. *Is truth the constitutive norm of belief?*

Just as almost everyone can agree that belief aims at truth, in some sense of ‘aim’, it is uncontroversial that in *some* way true beliefs in general have *some* positive normative significance compared to false beliefs. As Lynch observes, alongside aiming at truth, another prominent ‘platitude’ about belief is

Norm of Belief: It is prima facie correct to believe that *p* if and only if the proposition that *p* is true. (Lynch 2009: 10)

A number of disagreements arise, however, over how to understand the meaning and significance of the thesis. Perhaps the most important among these is the question whether the thesis identifies a *constitutive* property of belief, due to its very nature, or merely an *extrinsic* one, due at least in part to factors external to the nature of belief. For someone who accepts the former, it is natural to understand ‘a belief is correct iff it is true’ as what explains ‘belief aims at truth’, or indeed to treat the two as making the same claim in different terms. For example, Wedgwood defends

a *normative* interpretation of [the claim that belief aims at truth]. According to this interpretation, the claim expresses a normative principle about belief: in effect, it is the claim that belief is subject to a *truth-norm*. (this volume, Chapter 7: 123; see also Wedgwood 2002)

Let us use ‘normativism’ to stand for the view that belief, by its very nature or essence, possesses the normative property of having truth as its correctness condition.⁴ Correspondingly we can also call Wedgwood’s ‘normative interpretation’ of the thesis that belief aims at truth a normativist account of the aim of belief. Apart from Wedgwood, recent exponents of normativism (of various species) include Boghossian (2003), Brandom (1994), Engel (2005, 2007), Humberstone (1992), Millar (2004),

⁴ It is worth noting that normativism, as characterized here, ascribes to belief the *essential* normative property of having truth as its correctness condition, and that is saying something stronger than the claim that belief *necessarily* has this correctness condition. For not all necessary properties are essential properties. Gibbard (2005), from which we have earlier quoted, is a case in point. Gibbard holds that it ‘analytically’ (and thus necessarily) follows from a proposition being true that it ought to be believed, a fact which he finds profoundly puzzling as an apparent counterexample to the is–ought divide. He rejects explanations (attributed to Boghossian and Shah) according to which this is due to the concept of belief itself being normative, and develops an account which draws upon factors other than the nature of belief. In doing so, he eschews commitment to (what we are calling) normativism, even though he accepts that beliefs are necessarily correct-if-true.

Shah (2003), Shah and Velleman (2005), and Zangwill (1998, 2005), among others. In this volume, normativism is defended by Engel, Wedgwood, and Adler and Hicks in Chapters 3, 7, and 8,⁵ and challenged by Horwich, Papineau, Glüer and Wikforss, and Bykvist and Hattiangadi in Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 6.

The debate between the normativists and their opponents turns on a range of further questions about how the normativist thesis is to be articulated. Central among these questions are the following.

1A. WHAT'S THE LOGICAL FORM OF THE TRUTH-NORM?

The idea that truth constitutes the correctness condition of a belief can be naturally and schematically expressed as the following conjunction:

- (1a) It is correct to believe that p if it is true that p ; and
- (1b) It is correct to believe that p only if it is true that p

Statement (1a) states that truth is a sufficient condition for a belief's being correct; (1b) that it is a necessary condition. *Prima facie* (1a) may seem too strong. Out of the uncountably many true propositions, a vast number concern subject matters that are of no interest, either practical or theoretical, to anyone. (For instance, is the sum of the numbers on the number plates of all vehicles in London at this moment divisible by six?) It is not at all obvious that believing the truth on these matters, as opposed to not forming any opinion, is the correct thing to do. For one thing, life is short, and our cognitive resources are scarce (Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2007; Heal 1988). There are several ways the normativist may respond to this difficulty, some of which we discuss further below. One strategy is to do without (1a) altogether, and articulate the normativist thesis as simply making the claim (1b), which is to say that all false beliefs are incorrect. Proposals of this type, taking a conditional as opposed to biconditional form, are to be found in, for example, Boghossian (2003), Humberstone (1992) and Williamson (1996, 2000: 241f).⁶ Opponents of these proposals argue that (1b) alone is too weak to capture the normativist thesis. Bykvist and Hattiangadi (2007: 280), for example, contend that (1b) places no requirement on a believer at all. This debate, concerning whether (1a) is something the normativist is (or should be) committed to, is the first question about the logical form of the truth norm for belief as understood by the normativists.

A second question of logical form concerns the issue of scope. (1a) can be read in two ways, as either

- (1a_n) (It is correct to believe that p) if (it is true that p); or
- (1a_w) It is correct (to believe that p if it is true that p)

⁵ Henceforth, essays in this volume will be referred to simply by their chapter numbers.

⁶ Williamson's account is on the constitutive norm of assertion in the first instance. He suggests, however, that an account of a similar form should hold for belief (2000: 11, 238).

Similarly, (1b) can be read as either (1b_n) and (1b_w), obtained by substituting ‘only if’ for ‘if’ in (1a_n) and (1a_w). The first is called the narrow scope reading since ‘correct’ has narrow scope relative to the conditional, and the second is called ‘wide scope’ since ‘correct’ has wide scope relative to the conditional. The two readings are not equivalent (Broome 1999). Notably, the consequent ‘It is correct to believe that *p*’ in (1a_n) is *detachable*, in the sense that it can be validly inferred from (1a_n) together with ‘It is true that *p*’. By contrast, from (1a_w) and ‘It is true that *p*’, it is not valid to infer (or ‘detach’) ‘It is correct to believe that *p*’. Some of the issues just outlined with respect to conditional vs. biconditional forms also bear on the question of narrow vs. wide scopes. In a partial parallel to the former battle line, on relative scope we have Humberstone and Williamson (though not Boghossian) being in favour of the non-detachable form of (1b), and Bykvist and Hattiangadi (2007: 284) again arguing that a truth norm of this form is too weak. These two questions about logical form, moreover, interact to generate more possibilities to be considered. These issues are pursued further in Chapters 2, 3, and 6 of this volume.

1B. WHAT IS THE NORMATIVE FORCE OF THE TRUTH-NORM?

Statements (1a) and (1b) are formulated with ‘it is correct’ as a place-holder for the appropriate normative operator. What that operator should be is another dimension along which both normativists and their critics differ. The most popular approach is to understand ‘it is correct to believe that *p*’ as making a *deontic* claim, to be spelt out as ‘One *ought* to believe that *p*’ (Boghossian 2003; Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2007, Chapter 6; Glüer and Wikforss 2009a, Chapter 5). On this view correctness implies obligation. Whiting (2010) by contrast proposes that correctness should instead be understood as the weaker notion of permissibility. Reading (1a) as ‘One *may* believe that *p*’, Whiting argues, avoids many of the objections without rendering it trivial, a verdict shared by Papineau in his contribution (Chapter 4, §3), even though Papineau does not think the thesis is ultimately defensible. This proposal is criticized by Bykvist and Hattiangadi (Chapter 6, §4) and Engel (Chapter 3, §3). A third possibility, defended by Wedgwood (2002, Chapter 7), is to understand correctness as a basic normative concept in its own right, distinct from and irreducible to either deontic or axiological ones. Wedgwood grants that there is a correctness-related sense of ‘ought’, which he explicates in Chapter 7 here, but emphasizes that it is derivative from correctness, not the other way round. Axiological interpretations themselves, which understand correctness as an evaluative claim, and (1a) and (1b) as attaching *value* to true beliefs, constitute a fourth possibility which is assessed by Engel (Chapter 3, §§1, 4) and Bykvist and Hattiangadi (Chapter 6, §5). Finally, in Chapter 2 (§§1–2) Horwich puts forward the novel proposal that the set of correct beliefs is to be understood as the set that we ought to want our beliefs to be in. True beliefs are correct, according to Horwich, because we ought to want our beliefs to be true.

1C. WHAT IS A CONSTITUTIVE NORM?

A question prior to whether truth is the constitutive norm of belief is, of course: What *is* a constitutive norm? In the literature, chess and other competitive games are the primary examples with which the notion of constitutive norm is introduced. They are activities with explicitly defined rules, which set a normative standard both for judging moves within the game, and for defining what a move is in the first place (Dummett 1959; Searle 1969; Williamson 1996, 2000). The model is then usually applied to speech acts, in particular assertion, on the hypothesis that it has a constitutive rule or constitutive norm. Two issues are relevant for our purposes. First, there are doubts about whether (putative) constitutive rules or norms can play the roles that the authors cited want them to play (Glüer and Pagin 1999; Chapter 3, §2). Second, even if they can, questions remain about whether the model could be extended to belief, as opposed to assertion (Chapters 5, 10).

1D. HOW CAN THE TRUTH-NORM GUIDE BELIEF?

If there is a constitutive norm of belief, can it make any difference to how our beliefs are actually formed and maintained? Engel (Chapter 3) emphasizes that this question is one of psychology, which is logically distinct from the metaphysical question whether the norm exists. While not denying that there is a distinction between these questions, most authors nevertheless accept that the postulation of a constitutive norm is justified only if it can be psychologically efficacious in *guiding* the formation of our belief. Glüer and Wikforss (2009a, Chapter 5) argue that this constraint could not be satisfied on any intuitively acceptable notion of rule-guidance. Addressing the same issues, Shah and Velleman (2005) argue that the way we carry out our doxastic deliberation manifests guidance by the constitutive norm of truth. In this volume, Engel (Chapter 3, §5) attempts to answer Glüer and Wikforss by drawing on aspects of Shah and Velleman's account, while Horwich (Chapter 2, §8) suggests that our commitment to the truth-norm is manifested in our practice of evidence-gathering.

2. *What is the source of the norms that govern belief?*

What explains normative facts about beliefs, such as the conditions under which it is correct or incorrect to hold a belief? In particular, why is it generally correct to hold a belief if it is true and generally incorrect to hold a belief if it is false? Further, why are true beliefs generally correct and false beliefs generally incorrect? The normativist has a straightforward answer: these normative properties of belief are constitutive of belief, and are thus explained by the very nature of belief. The anti-normativist, on the other hand, holds that normative properties are extrinsic properties of belief. They are thus committed to there being some other, independent source(s) of these properties, including the crucial role played by truth. What can these be? Papineau (Chapter 4) undertakes to provide the answer, arguing that when true beliefs are valuable (which they usually but not always are), that is always due to their personal, moral,

and (possibly) aesthetic values. Horwich (Chapter 2, §6) also reflects on the complex relationship between the moral and instrumental values of true beliefs.

3. *Is being the aim of belief a substantive property of truth?*

So far the questions we discussed concern the nature of belief. On the other side of the equation, we may also ask whether being the aim of belief tells us anything about the nature of truth. If the normativist understanding of the aim of belief is incorrect, then a distinct question will be whether being a (or the) fundamental norm of belief tells us anything about the nature of truth. Lynch (2009), for example, suggests that being the norm of belief and being the end of inquiry are central among the ‘truisms’ that define our concept of truth. An adequate theory of truth must explain (or explain away) these truisms. He then argues that the deflationist theory of truth, according to which truth has no underlying nature, fails in this task. Similarly, Wright (1992) argues that deflationist accounts of truth fail to account for its distinctive normative force. In his contribution (Chapter 2, §7), Horwich explains why the deflationist should reject both the claim that being the norm of belief is constitutive of the concept of truth, and that explaining this fact requires a substantive theory of truth. Bykvist and Hattiangadi (Chapter 6, §2) go even further and offer a deflationatist view of what the normativist takes to be the truth-norm for belief. On their view, insofar as it is true to say that ‘a belief is correct if and only if it is true’, the notion of correctness which is in play should be understood *in terms of* the concept of truth.

4. *Does aiming at truth imply that belief cannot be formed at will?*

Williams, as we have seen, first asserted that belief aims at truth as part of the explanation for the impossibility of believing at will. Not surprisingly, the assumption that belief aims at truth forms the backdrop of much of the subsequent debate between doxastic voluntarists (those who hold that we can sometimes believe at will) and doxastic involuntarists (those who agree with Williams in holding that we cannot).⁷ In his contribution (Chapter 9) Reisner argues that, contrary to Williams and most doxastic involuntarists, belief’s aiming at truth does *not* entail the impossibility of forming a belief voluntarily. Indeed, he argues for the stronger claim that in some special circumstances the ability to form belief at will would facilitate the fulfilment of the aim of arriving at true beliefs. Adler and Hicks respond to some of Reisner’s arguments in Chapter 8.

The debate about doxastic voluntarism is also relevant to the questions we are addressing in this volume in a different way, which goes in the opposite direction. Rather than taking belief aiming at truth as a datum which constrains our ability (or inability) to believe at will, the current point takes doxastic involuntarism itself as a datum, which constrains the account one can give of belief’s aiming at truth. In

⁷ See, for example, Hieronymi (2006), Setiya (2008), and Winters (1979).

particular, Alston (1988) influentially argues that the deontological conception of justification (which understands epistemic justification in terms of an epistemic species of *ought*) is untenable because, first, *ought* implies *can*; and, second, we *cannot* form or discard beliefs in the way required by the deontologist. The deontological conception of justification is a distinct thesis from normativism about the aim of belief, but, as we have seen, normativism is commonly construed in terms of an epistemic *ought* as well. Thus, making the plausible assumption that *ought* implies *can*, the same considerations which support doxastic involuntarism can be deployed to make the case against normativism. This is indeed an important part of the strategy of Bykvist and Hattiangadi (2007, Chapter 6). They argue that normativism violates the ought-implies-can and closely related principles such as ought-implies-can-do-otherwise.

5. *In what ways do partial beliefs aim at truth?*

The literature on the aims and norms of belief largely focuses on full or outright belief, whereby one either believes a proposition or does not believe it. How, if at all, can the account one gives of the relationship between full belief and truth be extended to apply to partial (or degrees of) belief? There are two broad types of answers, which we may dub ‘unifying’ and ‘dividing’ approaches, and both of them feature in this volume. The unifying approach, represented here by Horwich (Chapter 2) and Wedgwood (Chapter 7), seeks to generalize whatever account one gives of full belief in order to cover partial belief. For example, Horwich, who understands the truth-norm governing belief in terms of the desirability of having true beliefs, proposes extending the norm in terms of the comparative desirability of having a comparatively high degree of belief in p when p is true. Moreover, he argues that our commitment to the truth-norm for belief is manifested in the first instance as a commitment to the latter, degree-based norm, through our practice of evidence gathering, rather than the categorical norm for full belief.⁸ According to the dividing approach, followed by Adler and Hicks (Chapter 8), full belief is a distinct type of propositional attitude in its own right, not to be conflated as the limiting case on a continuous spectrum of degrees of belief. In their defence of evidentialism, Adler and Hicks draw on characteristics of outright or full belief that, as they highlight, are not shared by partial belief. On this view, it should not be expected that the account one gives of the relation between truth and full belief can be straightforwardly generalized to cover partial belief.⁹

6. *Are all reasons to believe based on truth?*

If belief essentially aims at truth, does it follow that all (normative) reasons for belief are evidence for its truth? Evidentialism answers this question in the affirmative. As Adler and Hicks write, ‘Evidentialism, following Clifford (1999), is the thesis that the only considerations relevant to whether one ought or ought not to believe are epistemic’

⁸ See also Gibbard (2007).

⁹ See further Adler (2002).

(Chapter 8: 140). They defend *conceptual* evidentialism, which differs from Clifford in holding that ‘this constraint of belief’s ethics to its epistemics is derived from the concept of belief’ (Chapter 8: 140). Their position is challenged by Papineau (Chapter 4) and Reisner (Chapter 9) in this volume. Papineau maintains that the ethics of belief cannot be derived from the concept of belief, and is based on personal, moral, and possibly aesthetic reasons, which sometimes override epistemic ones. Reisner (2007, 2009) also holds that evidentialism is not a conceptual truth, and indeed not a truth at all. In his contribution here, however, he aims at an internal criticism of evidentialism, arguing that even granting the assumption that belief aims at truth and knowledge, evidentialism does not follow. An important element of his argument seeks to establish that there are non-evidential reasons that are nevertheless epistemic, in the sense of aiming at truth or knowledge. If true, this thesis would open up an interesting new possibility in the conceptual space of reasons for belief.

7. *Are there two different kinds of reasons governing belief and its formation?*

The answer to Question (6) obviously depends in part on what reasons *are*. In the recent literature on the rationality of propositional attitudes, a popular analytic strategy is to distinguish between two fundamentally distinct kinds of reason pertaining to the same attitude. Putting the point in highly general terms so as not to prejudge questions about how the various distinctions on offer are mutually related, we can say that one kind of reason relates directly to the propositional content of the attitude, whereas a second kind relates directly to either the psychological state or processes that bring about or sustain it. Thus, for example, Parfit (2001) draws a distinction between object-given and state-given reasons, while Piller (2001) distinguishes between content-related and attitude-related reasons, and Hieronymi (2005) argues for a dichotomy between constitutive and extrinsic reasons. In this literature, belief is the most common attitude using which the distinctions are introduced or illustrated, with alethic (that is, truth-based) reasons for belief often taken to be the clearest instance of the first kind of reason in each distinction respectively. A normativist who maintains that all reasons to believe are alethic can naturally appeal to a distinction between different kinds of reasons pertaining to belief in order to defuse objections to his thesis. In this volume, Adler and Hicks (Chapter 8) distinguish between reasons *to believe* and reasons *for believing*, and argue that many putative instances of non-evidential reasons to believe are in fact no such thing, but are rather reasons for believing.

8. *Is truth the aim of epistemic justification?*

The relationship between epistemic reasons and truth is also examined by several of the contributors. Just as it is platitudinous that truth is a fundamental standard by which we evaluate beliefs, it seems no less platitudinous that epistemic justification also provides one such standard. As Steglich-Petersen writes, ‘the mere fact that truth

isn't the only relevant consideration when evaluating beliefs raises the question of how to understand the relationship between the two kinds of evaluation' (Chapter 11: 205). These do not seem to be two completely distinct standards, and a natural and very popular account of the apparently essential connection between the two is to understand epistemic justification as a matter of means–end instrumental evaluation of belief with truth as the ultimate end. A crucial problem arises for this view concerning the case of justified false beliefs, which, it has been forcefully argued (Fumerton 2001; Maitzen 1995), could not exist if the instrumentalist conception of epistemic justification were correct. The usual inference from this conditional is that, since there obviously are justified false beliefs, the instrumentalist account of justification cannot be correct. Steglich-Petersen, on the other hand, defends the instrumentalist conception by making the case for the impossibility of justified false beliefs. In other words, the proposal is that justification is factive.

9. *Does belief aim at knowledge rather than truth?*

A question which we have not directly addressed so far is whether the aim of belief is knowledge or truth. Most authors on the aim of belief, including most contributors to this volume, have either followed Williams in taking truth to be the aim or constitutive norm (if they exist) of belief, or proceeded on an assumption of neutrality between truth and knowledge. This is understandable, since most of the questions about the existence and nature of the aim of belief or the constitutive norm of belief can be discussed independently of whether they take the form of truth or knowledge. Given that knowledge entails truth, if belief aims at knowledge, it also aims at truth. And any considerations that count against truth being the constitutive norm of belief that are based on showing that it is too strong—and most that have been put forward are of this form—*a fortiori* also count against knowledge.

Nevertheless, the question 'truth or knowledge?' is clearly an important one in its own right, not least because the answers have very different implications for the nature of belief and, as we have just discussed, epistemic justification. In recent years, parallel to and as a consequence of the debate, originating in Williamson (1996), about whether knowledge is the constitutive norm of assertion, the idea that belief aims at knowledge rather than truth has been argued for in the literature.¹⁰ In this volume the issue is taken up by Engel (Chapter 3, §6), Horwich (Chapter 2, §5), and Whiting (Chapter 10). Whiting's chapter offers a critical assessment of existing arguments in favour of knowledge as the fundamental aim of belief, and presents new ones in favour of truth. It is one of the first full article-length systematic examinations of the merits of the truth-aim and knowledge-aim theses against each other.

¹⁰ See Whiting (Chapter 10) for a detailed review of works arguing for and against the knowledge norm.

II. Synopsis of chapters

1. *Belief-Truth Norms (Paul Horwich)*

The contributions by Horwich and Engel each provides a survey of the terrains we are traversing from two strikingly different perspectives. Horwich begins by asking how we are to understand the commonplace that true beliefs are correct and false beliefs incorrect. He argues that the fundamental norm connecting belief and truth is one which says that we ought to want our beliefs to be true. The correctness of true beliefs follows as a result. He addresses the question why this norm holds, and argues that its normative force is that of a moral norm. Horwich then investigates questions about the explanatory priority between the truth norm and the knowledge norm on the one hand, and the instrumental value of truth on the other. He argues against the idea that our commitment to the truth norm is constitutive of either our concept of truth or our concept of belief. Finally, Horwich argues that our commitment to a truth norm for belief is manifested in our practice of evidence gathering.

2. *In Defense of Normativism about the Aim of Belief (Pascal Engel)*

In his contribution Engel reviews and sets out to answer the main objections which have been addressed to the normativist account of the aim for belief. These objections are that the norm fails to motivate, or motivates too much, that it is trivial and that it is unfathomable and does not provide any regulation or actual guidance for our belief. His main strategy is to distinguish between the tasks of specifying what the correctness conditions of a mental state are, and giving an account of how a norm regulates a mental state. If we respect this distinction, Engel argues, it becomes possible to envisage a separate account of the regulation of belief by a norm of truth, through the psychological feature of the transparency of belief.

3. *There Are No Norms of Belief (David Papineau)*

Papineau argues that there is no distinctive species of normativity attaching to the adoption of belief. He accepts that true beliefs are often (though not always) valuable, and false beliefs often (though not always) wrong. But he argues that such normativity arises due purely to moral, personal, or aesthetic reasons, rather than any *sui generis* doxastic reason. Papineau then addresses objections to his view based on the idea that believing is governed by a *constitutive* norm, which distinguishes it from other propositional attitudes such as desires. He suggests that the underlying idea here, that belief aims at truth, is best spelt out in terms of the biological function of belief, which is a purely descriptive notion. Moreover, even granting (for the sake of argument) that we humans have a practice of always valuing the truth, or even that we cannot help but respect the norm of matching our beliefs to our current evidence, no universal pre-scriptive conclusion concerning the formation of true belief follows. For these facts at

most show that as a matter of descriptive fact true beliefs are valued by us, but not that they are *valuable*, normatively speaking.

4. *Against Belief Normativity (Kathrin Glüer and Åsa Wikforss)*

Like Papineau, Glüer and Wikforss argue against the thesis that belief, as a type of propositional attitude, is essentially normative. They critically examine two lines of argument for the thesis, relying on the connections between belief with respectively truth and rationality. The common source of their failures, Glüer and Wikforss argue, is that the rules or norms of the type proposed by the normativist are incapable of guiding belief formation, on any intuitively acceptable notion of rule-guidance. It is central to any such notion of rule-guidance that being guided by a rule is not the same as merely acting or being in accord with it. Glüer and Wikforss argue that putative essential norms of belief are incapable of guiding belief formation in a way consistent with this observation. The reasons are that, first, in order for belief formation to be guided by the relevant norm one already had to form a belief on the subject matter in question. Second, these norms are never able to provide me with a reason to believe anything other than what I have come to believe anyway. In the paper they spell out their arguments for these conclusions, apply them to normativist views in the literature, and answer possible replies the normativist can make.

5. *Belief, Truth, and Blindspots (Krister Bykvist and Anandi Hattiangadi)*

Bykvist and Hattiangadi take as their key question how we are to understand the statement, 'Your belief that *p* is correct if and only if it is true'. According to the normativist, the statement is true, has substantive normative import and plays a fundamental role in explaining essential characteristics of belief. Bykvist and Hattiangadi argue that these three claims cannot be true at the same time. The statement is true only if it is read in a deflationary way, where it either does not have any normative import, or fails to mark out belief from other kinds of propositional attitudes. If it is read as telling us something significant about what we ought to believe, then it is subject to the counterexamples of blindspot propositions. These are propositions that are possibly true, but could not be truly believable (i.e. necessarily, if they are believed, then they are false), for example 'There are no believers' and the Moore-paradoxical 'It is raining and I don't believe that it is raining'. Supposing the generally accepted principle that *ought implies can*, Bykvist and Hattiangadi have argued (2007) that the existence of blindspot propositions show that, contrary to the normativist, it could not be that all truths ought to be believed. In their current paper, they respond to normativists' attempts to defuse this objection. In the course of doing so, they carefully consider and reject three ways of spelling out the normativist's claim using normative concepts other than *ought*. These are permission (you *may* believe that *p* if and only if *p* is true), doxastic value (true beliefs are ranked higher than false ones evaluatively) and goodness (true beliefs are better than false ones). All three proposals fail to salvage the normativist's

case, according to Bykvist and Hattiangadi, because they all fail to vindicate one or other of the three key claims made by the normativist.

6. *What is The Right Thing to Believe? (Ralph Wedgwood)*

In his chapter Wedgwood defends and further develops his normative interpretation of the idea that truth is the aim of belief. The idea should, he proposes, be spelt out as the thesis that truth is the most fundamental norm of belief, one which not only figures in an account of the very nature of belief, but plays an important role in explaining all other such norms. This gives rise to the normative principle that a belief is correct if and only if the proposition believed is true. Wedgwood takes *correct* rather than *ought* to be the fundamental normative concept here, and argues (among other things) that this provides the resources for answering Bykvist and Hattiangadi's blindspot objection to normativism. More specifically, he distinguishes between *ex ante* and *ex post* normative judgements about belief which an agent may hold, where the latter but not the former entails that the agent actually holds the belief. Wedgwood then shows that the notion of *ought* most naturally defined in terms of these more fundamental notions of correctness allows the normativist to meet the challenge posed by Bykvist and Hattiangadi's blindspot argument.

7. *Non-Evidential Reasons to Believe (Jonathan Adler and Michael Hicks)*

Adler and Hicks offer a wide-ranging defence of conceptual evidentialism against a large number of recent criticisms. Conceptual evidentialism states that one ought only to believe what one's evidence establishes, and that this demand follows from the very nature of belief. Two main anti-evidentialist strategies are to argue that sometimes pragmatic considerations justify a risky doxastic strategy which allows one to form beliefs beyond what one's evidence justifies, and to argue that evidential considerations underdetermine belief. Adler and Hicks show how the conceptual evidentialist can handle the supposed counterexamples and defuse the objections. Important among the strategies they adopt in doing so are: (i) to emphasize the need for beliefs to be detachable from their evidential base; (ii) to distinguish between reasons to believe and reason for believing; and (iii) to distinguish between all-out beliefs from commitments, which are voluntary undertakings, as well as partial beliefs.

8. *Leaps of Knowledge (Andrew Reisner)*

Reisner is prominent among the critics of evidentialism whom Adler and Hicks respond to in their paper. In his contribution, Reisner assesses whether considerations based on the aim of belief lend any support to either evidentialism or doxastic involuntarism, the widely accepted view that agents can never choose what they believe. He argues for a negative answer in both cases—that is to say, one can consistently accept that the aim of belief is either truth or knowledge (and that this aim plays a central role in setting the norms of belief), and yet reject both evidentialism and

doxastic involuntarism. Based on a detailed analysis of several number games with single or multiple fixed points, Reisner argues that there can be *epistemic* reasons for belief, based on the aim of truth or knowledge, that are non-*evidential*. Evidentialism therefore does not follow from the aim of belief being truth or knowledge. In some circumstances where non-evidential epistemic reasons play a decisive role, moreover, a restricted form of doxastic voluntarism (which enables the agent to make a ‘leap of knowledge’) would be conducive to the fulfilment of the aim of truth or knowledge.

9. *Nothing but the Truth: On the Norms and Aims of Belief* (Daniel Whiting)

Most discussions of the standard of correctness and the aim of belief have been premised on the assumption that truth is the best candidate. In recent years, however, an increasing number of prominent philosophers have suggested that it is *knowledge* which provides the fundamental standard of correctness and the constitutive aim for believing. In his contribution, Whiting reviews and examines in detail the considerations which have been put forward in support of this view, based on lottery beliefs, Moorean beliefs, our practice of criticism and defence of belief, and the value of knowledge. He argues that those considerations do not give us reason to give up the truth view in favour of the knowledge view. Moreover, Whiting contends that reflection on those considerations actually gives us some reason to *reject* the knowledge view. Thus, he concludes, we can continue to take the apparent platitude that belief aims at truth at face value.

10. *Truth as the Aim of Epistemic Justification* (Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen)

Steglich-Petersen defends the thesis that truth is the aim of epistemic justification against an influential and *prima facie* persuasive line of attack. The objection starts with the premise that a belief can be justified, that is, successful vis-à-vis the aim of justification, but false, that is, unsuccessful vis-à-vis the aim of truth. So, the objection concludes, the aim or criterion of success for epistemic justification cannot be truth. Steglich-Petersen seeks to defuse this objection by attacking the premise. He argues that it is *not* possible for a belief to be at once justified and false, on the notion of justification relevant to the debate. The relevant notion of justification requires that it must be possible for a justifying fact or consideration to act as an adequate epistemic reason for which someone believes a proposition. Based on this constraint on justification, Steglich-Petersen argues that a number of common intuitive considerations cited to support the possibility of justified false beliefs in fact fail to do so. He concludes by sketching and defending a positive account of justification, according to which the norm of justification never recommends anything that is not recommended by a truth norm.¹¹

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