

UNDERSTANDING EPISTEMIC NORMATIVITY

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## **ABSTRACT**

Kate Nolfi: Understanding Epistemic Normativity  
(Under the direction of Ram Neta)

Why ought we care about whether we conform to epistemic norms?

Many philosophers think that the nature of belief itself issues a mandate to conform with epistemic norms. But what is it about the nature of belief in virtue of which it issues this mandate? The most popular answer is: belief aims at truth. I argue, however, that if belief really did aim at truth, then the nature of belief could not explain why it is that we ought to believe in conformity with epistemic norms. Only an account of the nature of belief according to which belief aims at guiding action can explain why believers are bound by a mandate to conform with epistemic norms.

I show that this sort of account can explain how epistemic norms have authority over our beliefs. Then, I develop an account of doxastic control that succeeds where other accounts fail in explaining when and why epistemic norms are regulative. Finally, I put both my explanation of the authority of epistemic norms and my account of doxastic control to work in developing an explanation of why it is that we ought to care about conforming with epistemic norms.

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## CHAPTER 1: HOW TO BE A NORMATIVIST ABOUT THE NATURE OF BELIEF<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

According to the normativist about the nature of belief, it is built into what it is to be a *belief* (as opposed to some other sort of mental attitude) that beliefs are subject to certain norms.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the normativist maintains that the nature of belief is normative.<sup>3</sup> Normativism enjoys a great deal of popularity in epistemology because it promises to explain, in a relatively straightforward way, the authority of epistemic norms: on any version of normativism, beliefs will be appropriately evaluated with respect to epistemic norms simply by virtue of being the sorts of mental attitudes that they are.<sup>4</sup> There are, however, surprisingly few sustained defenses of normativism about the nature of belief—only a handful of philosophers have tried to provide independent motivation for the view.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This piece is forthcoming in *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*.

<sup>2</sup>The normativist might take this defining commitment either as a thesis about the metaphysical nature or essence of belief or as a thesis about the nature of the concept of belief. In what follows, I'll understand this commitment metaphysically, rather than conceptually. However, I believe that the arguments I offer here can be adapted to apply to normativism cashed out in conceptual terms.

<sup>3</sup>The normativist might maintain that the nature of belief is irreducibly normative or, put in other terms, that it is impossible to characterize the nature of belief completely without referring to irreducibly normative properties or relations. Alternatively, the normativist might accept that beliefs, simply in virtue of being the sorts of mental attitudes that they are, are subject to certain norms, but deny that normative facts about the nature of belief are irreducible (the normativist might deny, that is, that it is impossible to give a complete account of the nature of belief in non-normative terms. What I say below is neutral between these two kinds of normativism.

<sup>4</sup>Jonathan Adler, Allan Gibbard, Peter Graham, Peter Railton, Nishi Shah, Ernest Sosa, David Velleman, Ralph Wedgwood and a great many others either explicitly endorse or implicitly rely on normativist accounts of the nature of belief in their work. Any view maintaining that belief has a constitutive aim and so that some standard of success or correctness is built into the nature of belief itself is a version of normativism.

<sup>5</sup>Although many presuppose normativism in their efforts to answer questions about the nature of epistemic norms, to my knowledge only Wedgwood (2007a), (2007b), Zangwill (1998), (2005), Shah (2003), and Shah and Velleman (2005) actually defend normativism about the nature of belief.

One powerful defense of normativism—the defense from dispositionalism, which I develop in the first section of what follows—establishes that only a normativist account of the nature of belief can explain certain facts about what it takes for a creature to have the capacity for belief.<sup>6</sup> In the second and third sections, I show that the defense from dispositionalism undermines normativist accounts of the nature of belief according to which a truth norm plays a certain sort of fundamental or privileged explanatory role. This is because the defense from dispositionalism imposes an explanatory burden on any normativist account of the nature of belief that no truth privileging account can discharge. Thus, epistemologists who, as I argue they should, endorse the defense from dispositionalism should look for an alternative to a truth privileging account of the nature of belief. In the fourth section of this paper, I sketch just such an alternative account and I show that this alternative is well-positioned to achieve explanatory adequacy just where truth privileging accounts fall short. The normativist about the nature of belief, then, should adopt the defense from dispositionalism in order to defend normativism against descriptivism and then reject a truth privileging normativist account in favor of the alternative that I propose here.

### **From Dispositionalism to Normativism**

A dispositionalist account of the capacity for belief is an account according to which facts about the way in which a creature is disposed to form, revise, and employ her various mental attitudes determine which sorts of mental attitudes she is capable of having. On a dispositionalist account, facts about which dispositions to regulate and employ the various mental attitudes a

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<sup>6</sup>This line of defense is certainly inspired by and perhaps best understood as an adaptation of certain strands of reasoning that emerge in Wedgwood (2007a) pages 9-14 and (2007b), Chapter 7 and, somewhat less explicitly, in Zangwill (1998). Wedgwood, in particular, employs some of the same argumentative moves I deploy in developing the defense from dispositionalism in Section 1 below in his effort to show that the essences of (each of) our concepts and our attitude types are all irreducibly normative. The argument I develop in Section 1 loosely tracks Wedgwood's reasoning as applied to the case of belief, in particular, and insofar as his reasoning establishes the weaker conclusion that the nature of belief is normative (but perhaps not irreducibly so).

creature has determine whether or not the creature is capable of having mental attitudes that would be appropriately labeled beliefs. A believer's capacity for belief is (at least partially) constituted by certain of her dispositions to regulate and employ a particular class of her mental attitudes in specific ways. The defense from dispositionalism takes a dispositionalist account of the capacity for belief as its starting point.

There is good reason to think that some sort of dispositionalist account of the capacity for belief must be right.<sup>7</sup> After all, if a creature is not even disposed, at least under normal circumstances, to form a mental attitude of type T with the content P in response to a perceptual experience constituting evidence (in the straightforward sort of way) that P, nor is she at all disposed to act in ways that would satisfy her desires if P were true when she does have this type of mental attitude toward P, then it certainly seems that T is not belief, but rather some other sort of mental attitude (perhaps T is the attitude of imagining, supposing, entertaining, etc.). Intuitively, a creature that is not disposed to regulate or employ any of her mental attitudes in *any* of the ways that we are disposed to regulate and employ our beliefs is simply not a *believer*. Such a creature is not capable of having *beliefs* at all, although she might well be capable of having various other different types of mental attitudes. If this is right, then whether or not a creature has certain dispositions to regulate and employ her mental attitudes in particular ways makes a difference to whether or not she has the capacity for belief. So, a fully general account of the capacity for belief must spell out how facts about the ways in which a creature is disposed to regulate and employ her mental attitudes settle the question of whether or not the creature has the capacity for belief.

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<sup>7</sup>Wedgwood argues for a dispositionalist account of the capacity for belief (see Wedgwood (2007b), Chapter 7) and both Shah and Velleman are also committed to some sort of dispositionalist account (see, in particular, Shah (2005), note 45, and Velleman (2000)).



Now there are two ways of developing a dispositionalist account. According to a *complete set approach*, there is a particular set of dispositions to regulate or employ mental attitudes in particular ways such that having each one of the dispositions in this set is required for and essential to having the capacity for belief. On a complete set approach, then, a creature counts as having the capacity for belief if and only if she has all of the dispositions in this set. If a creature lacks any one of the dispositions in the set, then that creature is not capable of having beliefs (although she might well have the capacity for another sort of perhaps belief-like mental attitude). According to a *cluster approach*, however, there is a particular set of dispositions to regulate or employ mental attitudes in particular ways such that a creature must only have some subset of the dispositions in the essential set in order to count as having the capacity for belief. On a cluster approach, there need not be any single disposition that is required for or essential to the capacity for belief. Rather, a cluster approach allows that the capacity for belief might be constituted by different particular dispositions in different instances. A cluster approach also allows that different dispositions may carry different weights in constituting the capacity for belief and that there may be borderline cases where there is no clear fact of the matter regarding whether a creature that has only a few of the dispositions in the set of potentially capacity-constituting dispositions has the capacity for belief.

The defense from dispositionalism does not depend on which of a complete set approach or a cluster approach is correct. However, appreciating the philosophical space of possibilities here brings a point that is crucial to this defense of normativism against descriptivism into clear focus: a fully general account of the capacity for belief will have to describe those dispositions that constitute (on a complete set approach) or potentially constitute (on a cluster approach) that capacity. After all, not every conceivable disposition to regulate and employ certain of one's

mental attitudes in a particular way can help to constitute the capacity for belief. I'll call the set of dispositions that are essential to and constitutive of (on a complete account) or that are capable of constituting (on a cluster approach) the capacity for belief the *essential set*. A fully general account of the capacity for belief will identify and describe the particular capacity-constituting or potentially capacity-constituting dispositions in the essential set.

So, which dispositions are in the essential set? Well, it seems that a creature simply cannot have the capacity for belief if she lacks *every* disposition to regulate and employ her mental attitudes in ways that would either constitute or relatively closely approximate *rationaly permissible* belief regulation and employment (i.e. every *rational disposition*). It would be misleading at best to say that such a creature—one who is *only* disposed to regulate and employ her various mental attitudes in ways that would constitute rationally impermissible belief regulation and employment—is a defective believer. This creature departs so far from the relevant paradigm that it seems she is not a *believer* at all. A creature who lacks every rational disposition is not one who has the capacity for belief and is disposed to believe poorly, but rather one who lacks the capacity in the first place.<sup>8</sup> To see the intuitive appeal of this thought, consider the following process of transformation: take a creature that clearly has the capacity for belief. Strip this creature of all and only dispositions to regulate and employ her mental attitudes in ways that would either constitute or approximate rational belief formation and employment – leave everything else about the creature unaltered or install in the creature some dispositions the manifestation of which would not constitute rationally permissible belief regulation or employment. We would resist labeling the transformed creature a believer, and for good reason.

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<sup>8</sup>The driving thought here, one to which Wedgwood and Zangwill, for example, both appeal, is that the capacity for belief cannot be wholly grounded in or constituted by dispositions to regulate or employ beliefs in ways that are rationally impermissible—complete irrationality is, in this sense, simply impossible.

The structure of this creature's mental economy will be radically altered as a result of this transformation. And because the structure of her mental economy post-transformation will diverge so radically from the mental economy of paradigmatic believers, it makes so sense to say that this creature's mental attitudes are of the same kind as the mental attitudes of paradigmatic believers.

If a complete set approach is right, then a creature that lacks the capacity for belief necessarily lacks at least one of the dispositions in the essential set. Since a creature that lacks all the rational dispositions lacks the capacity for belief *regardless of what other dispositions she happens to have*, it must be that some particular rational dispositions are in the essential set. On a cluster approach, a creature must have some subset of the dispositions in the essential set in order to have the capacity for belief. So a creature that lacks the capacity for belief lacks some of the dispositions in the essential set. If this creature lacks the capacity for belief in virtue of lacking every rational disposition—and so independently of what other dispositions she happens to have—then it must be that some of the rational dispositions are in the essential set. Thus, whether a cluster approach or a complete set approach is correct, at least some of dispositions in the essential set must be rational dispositions.

Plausibly, each disposition to regulate or employ a mental attitude type in a particular way can be described by a function from input conditions to output conditions. So, for example, a creature might be disposed to form a belief that P—the output condition—whenever she has a perceptual experience as of P—the input condition. But this disposition cannot be a *rational* disposition. It would not be rationally permissible to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P and one knows that one is under the influence of a hallucinogenic drug, or that one is likely to be perceiving a hologram, or that one is in fake-P-county, etc. Any

description of a rational disposition will have to include a *ceteris paribus* clause that excludes these sorts of circumstances in specifying the relevant input conditions. And, any unified characterization of the circumstances that this *ceteris paribus* clause must exclude will reference a normative property. Most naturally perhaps, a complete specification of the input conditions for a rational disposition might include a clause that refers to the property of being a defeater. Plausibly, it is rationally permissible, *in circumstances when no defeaters are present*, to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P and so the disposition to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P *and no defeaters are present* is a rational disposition. One might, however, describe this same rational disposition somewhat less helpfully as the disposition to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P *and it would be rationally permissible to believe that P on the basis of this perceptual experience*.

Thus, any characterization of the set of circumstances that must be excluded from the potential input conditions of a rational disposition will refer (although perhaps only tacitly or obliquely) to a normative property.<sup>9</sup> And if every rational disposition can be characterized only by referencing a normative property, it follows that it is impossible to fully describe the dispositions in the essential set without referring to some normative property. So, any complete and fully general account of the capacity for belief will have to refer to some normative property in spelling out what constitutes or potentially constitutes this capacity.

We can schematize this bit of reasoning as follows:

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<sup>9</sup>If the relevant normative property or relation can be reduced to purely descriptive properties and relations, then it will be possible to supply a unified characterization of the input conditions of a rational disposition in non-normative terms. Still, this characterization will refer to the relevant normative property or relation, albeit obliquely, by referring to its reduction base.

*Premise 1:* An account of the capacity for belief will have to describe the set of capacity-constituting or potentially capacity-constituting dispositions (i.e. the essential set).

*Premise 2:* A creature lacking every rational disposition thereby lacks the capacity for belief, regardless of what other dispositions she might have.

*Conclusion 1:* So, the essential set must include some rational dispositions.

*Premise 3:* Any complete characterization of (any of) the rational dispositions must refer to some normative property.

*Conclusion 2:* So, an account of the capacity for belief must refer to some normative property.

Of course, this argument has not yet established that the nature of belief includes a normative component. The reasoning I've marshaled up to this point only shows that an account of what it takes to be the sort of creature that is capable of belief must reference normative properties. How ought the normativist bridge the gap from this conclusion about the capacity for belief to a conclusion about the nature of belief? Well, explanations of necessary truths generally appeal to the natures of the various entities involved. So, we should expect the features that are built into the nature or metaphysical essence of belief itself to play a central role in explaining why various other necessary truths involving belief obtain. In particular, we should expect facts about the nature of belief to supply an explanation of why it is that having the capacity for belief depends on having all or some subset of the particular dispositions in the essential set. And, since some of these dispositions are rational dispositions, it follows that facts about the nature of belief must explain why some of the dispositions in the essential set are rational dispositions.

Remember that the rational dispositions are just dispositions conformity with which constitutes rational belief regulation and employment. Given that the rational dispositions can only be characterized by reference to normative properties or relations like the property of being a defeater or being rationally permissible, non-normative features of the nature of belief could never explain why it is that the essential set includes some of these dispositions. In fact, there is good reason to suspect that the best (and perhaps the only) adequate explanation of why the essential set includes some rational dispositions will appeal to the fact that beliefs are governed by certain norms (and, in particular, norms of rational belief regulation or employment). And if, as seems plausible, the nature or essence of belief itself is to explain why the capacity for belief involves having all or some subset of dispositions in the essential set, then the fact that beliefs are governed by certain norms must be built into belief's very nature as the kind of mental state that it is. Thus, the fact that some of the capacity-constituting or potentially capacity-constituting dispositions are rational dispositions is good reason to think that an account of the nature of belief must include that beliefs are subject to certain norms. We can represent this abductive inference schematically as follows:

*Conclusion 2:* So, an account of the capacity for belief must refer to some normative property.

*Premise 4:* The best explanation of the fact that any account of the capacity for belief must refer to some normative property is that the nature of belief is (at least in part) normative.

*Conclusion 3:* So, the nature of belief must be (at least in part) normative.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The most prominent defenses of normativism on offer in the current literature—Wedgwood (2007a) and (2007b), Shah and Velleman (2005), Shah (2003), and Zangwill (1998)—all employ an abductive inference of roughly this sort: these defenses begin by identifying some apparently non-normative feature of believers or of the capacity for

Of course, as an argument for the conclusion that the right account of the nature of belief must be normativist rather than descriptivist, the defense from dispositionalism that I advance in this section does not explicitly favor any particular version of normativism over alternatives. That said, the defense from dispositionalism does place a constraint on normativist accounts of the nature of belief. In order for the abductive inference at the center of this defensive argument to be sound, a normativist account must be able to explain why it is that the particular rational dispositions in the essential set (whichever dispositions these turn out to be) are constitutive or potentially constitutive of the capacity for belief. If, as I have tried to show, the defense from dispositionalism is independently compelling, then we have good reason to reject any normativist account of the nature of belief that cannot discharge this explanatory burden.

### **Truth Privileging Normativism**

Recall that, according to the normativist, it is built into or partially constitutive of the nature of belief that beliefs are governed by a distinctive set of norms. This fact is, for the normativist, a crucial part of what differentiates beliefs from other sorts of mental attitudes.

*Truth privileging* accounts of the nature of belief are normativist accounts that embrace a popular pair of additional theses about the content and the explanatory priority of the constitutive norms governing belief. First, the truth privileging normativist maintains that there is a certain norm—the fundamental norm or the correctness norm—that plays a privileged explanatory role in an account of the nature of belief. Second, the truth privileging normativist maintains that this fundamental norm is a truth norm. So, on a truth privileging account, it is an essential and explanatorily fundamental fact about beliefs that beliefs are subject to a truth norm.

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belief and then suggest that only a normativist account of the nature of belief can adequately explain the relevant non-normative feature.

Truth privileging normativism about the nature of belief has *prima facie* appeal as a way of cashing out the widely accepted platitude that belief aims at the truth. It is, perhaps for just this reason, by far the most popular version of normativism in contemporary epistemology.<sup>11</sup>

Velleman, for example, means to be stating common ground when he writes that

...belief just is...an attitude for which there is such a thing as correctness or incorrectness, consisting in truth or falsity. For a propositional attitude to be a belief just is, in part, for it to be capable of going right or wrong by being true or false.<sup>12</sup>

In this section, I explore the two defining commitments of truth privileging normativism. In the following section, I argue that a truth privileging account lacks the resources to provide a satisfactory explanation of why certain dispositions in the essential set constitute or are capable of constituting the capacity for belief. If my arguments are successful, then the normativist who endorses, as I have suggested she should, the defense from dispositionalism must reject a truth privileging account of the nature of belief.

I turn first to the truth privileging normativist's thesis about explanatory priority. For a truth privileging normativist, there is a fundamental norm of correctness that constitutes a kind of explanatory bedrock in her account of the nature of belief. The fundamental norm is explanatorily basic in the sense that the fact that beliefs are governed by the fundamental norm explains other facts that are built into the nature of belief. Wedgwood's description of the way in which a truth privileging normativist understands the explanatory relationship between the

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<sup>11</sup>The philosophers whose work I reference in note 3 all either explicitly endorse or simply presuppose a truth privileging normativist account of the nature of belief in their work. Any account of the nature of belief according to which belief aims at the truth and where the relevant sort of aiming is cashed out in normative terms is a truth privileging normativist account.

<sup>12</sup>Velleman (2000). p. 16. For Velleman here, correctness is robustly normative and so not merely equivalent to truth.



fundamental norm and other constitutive norms is sufficiently illuminating to be worth reproducing here.

Suppose that there is a universal epistemic norm—that is, a norm that applies to all beliefs as such—that is particularly *fundamental*, in the following way. Not only is this a “primitive” epistemic norm that cannot be any further explained; but it also explains absolutely all other such universal epistemic norms. If there is such a norm, then, I propose, a belief is “correct” just in case it satisfies this fundamental epistemic norm.<sup>13</sup>

And, elsewhere:

Among these [universal] norms that apply to belief, there may be some that form part of the very nature or essence of belief; if there are any such norms, they could be called the *essential* or *constitutive* norms of belief. Among these constitutive norms, there may be one that counts as the *most fundamental* constitutive norm. This norm would be the most fundamental in the sense that it plays a crucial role in the *explanation* of all the other constitutive norms of belief—while none of the other constitutive norms play such a crucial role in these explanations.<sup>14</sup>

The question ‘why are beliefs subject to the fundamental correctness norm?’ has, for the truth privileging normativist, only a trivial answer: beliefs are subject to the fundamental norm because being subject to this norm is just what it is for a particular mental attitude to be a *belief*. There is nothing more to be said.

Nevertheless, the fact that beliefs are governed by the fundamental norm plays a crucial role in explaining all the other normative facts built into the nature of belief. In particular, for my purposes here, the fact that beliefs are governed by the fundamental norm explains why belief is, simply in virtue of being the kind of mental attitude that it is, governed by certain norms of rationality. Beliefs are subject to constitutive norms of rationality *because* they are subject to the fundamental norm. The norms of rationality, according to the truth privileging normativist, are just those norms that articulate the most effective, most reliable means of

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<sup>13</sup>Wedgwood, (2002). p. 6.

<sup>14</sup>Wedgwood, (forthcoming). p. 2.

achieving conformity with the fundamental norm.<sup>15</sup> Conformity with norms of rationality ensures that, in normal circumstances, our beliefs will likely end up being correct. So, the fact that beliefs are subject to a certain norm of correctness just entails that beliefs must also be subject to norms of rationality.

With a clear picture of this explanatory structure in hand, one can better appreciate how the truth privileging normativist might arrive at the conclusion that the fundamental norm of correctness is a truth norm. Certainly there is a long philosophical tradition of endorsing the claim that norms of rationality are norms conformity with which is (at least typically) a reliable means of arriving at a belief that P if and only if P is true. Plausibly, it is rational, in normal circumstances, to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P. And conformity with this norm of rationality is—again, quite plausibly—a reliable way of forming true beliefs. Put in other terms, forming true beliefs seems to be precisely the goal that conformity with this norm is meant to achieve. But, the proponent of a truth privileging account reasons, only a fundamental norm stating that a belief is correct if and only if it is true can explain why beliefs are subject to a norm of rationality stating that one should, under normal circumstances, form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P. More generally, the truth privileging normativist suggests, there is good reason to think that belief is subject to standards of rationality conformity with which *does* ensure that, in normal circumstances, the subject believes P if and only if P is true. So it must be that beliefs are subject to a fundamental norm of correctness stating that a belief is correct if and only if true because only a fundamental correctness norm with this content can explain why it is that beliefs are subject to the norms of rationality to which it seems that they are, in fact, subject. Specifying

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<sup>15</sup>I assume an instrumentalist picture of the entailment relationship between the fundamental norm and the norms of rationality for ease of exposition, but the arguments that follow do not turn on this assumption.

content of the fundamental correctness norm in this way best explains why the norms of rational belief formation have the particular content that they seem to have. Wedgwood gives voice to just this line of thought when he writes

... (i) it is essential to *beliefs* that they are...regulated by certain standards of rational or justified belief, and (ii) the ultimate purpose or point of conforming to these standards is not just to have rational or justified beliefs purely for their own sake, but to ensure that one believes the proposition in question if and only if that proposition is true.<sup>16</sup>

So, the truth privileging normativist maintains that it is built into the nature of belief that one's belief that P is correct if and only if P is true. And it follows, on a truth privileging account, that it is also built into the nature of belief that one's belief is rational if and only if it is the result of a process that is (or that one rationally believes to be) a reliable means to believing that P if and only if P is true.<sup>17</sup>

### **Reason to Reject Truth Privileging Normativism**

The defense from dispositionalism demands that the right normativist account must explain why certain rational dispositions are in the essential set. In this section, I argue that a truth privileging normativist account does not have the resources to discharge this explanatory burden. In an effort to streamline my argument, I will presuppose a complete set approach in what follows.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Wedgwood, (2007b). p. 154.

<sup>17</sup>It is controversial among proponents of truth privileging accounts whether the relationship between the norms of rationality and the truth norm should be understood as internalist or externalist in character. But I mention this controversy here only to put it aside.

<sup>18</sup>I believe an argument that is similar in spirit to the one that I develop here (an argument that appeals to the need for an account of the capacity for belief to explain the apparent parity with respect to this capacity of the two creatures that I ask the reader to imagine in what follows) shows that the proponent of a cluster view ought to accept that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set and so relevant for determining whether a creature has the capacity for belief. However, a proponent of the cluster view can deny that there are *any* dispositions the having of which are metaphysically necessary for having the capacity for belief. As a result, the cluster view introduces complications a full treatment of which would require more space than I can reasonably devote to it in this paper.

My argument comes in two steps. I make the case below that some of the dispositions in the essential set must be what I call output-side dispositions. Then, and this is the second step of my argument, I show that a truth privileging normativist account lacks the resources to explain why any output-side dispositions are in the essential set. If the argument I offer here is sound, then the normativist who endorses, as I have suggested she should, the defense from dispositionalism ought to abandon a truth privileging account of the nature of belief.

*Step 1:*

I'll begin by partitioning the set of rational dispositions into two classes. On the one hand, some rational dispositions map the ways in which it is rational to regulate our beliefs in response to various stimuli. Plausibly, for example, it is rational, in normal circumstances, to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P. I call these dispositions the input-side dispositions.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, some of the rational dispositions map ways in which our other mental attitudes should be responsive to our beliefs. These dispositions capture the ways in which a rational individual employs her beliefs in forming and revising other sorts of mental attitudes. For example, perhaps it is rational, in normal circumstances, to form the intention to  $\phi$  in cases where one desires that P, and one believes that  $\phi$ -ing is the best means of making P true available at present. If this is right, then the disposition to form the intention to  $\phi$  in standard cases where one desires that P and believes that  $\phi$ -ing is the best means of making P true available at present is a rational disposition. I call these rational dispositions the output-side dispositions.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Any disposition that identifies belief as its *output* counts as an *input-side disposition*. So, a disposition to form the belief that both P and Q when one believes that P and also believes that Q, for example, counts as an input-side disposition.

<sup>20</sup>Notice that the norms with which a subject conforms when she manifests one of these output-side dispositions are not norms of *epistemic* rationality. Failure to conform with such norms does not make a subject's *beliefs* irrational.

In what follows, I argue that some output-side dispositions help constitute the capacity for belief. To this end, I first show that the proponent of a complete set view must accept that a creature who lacks every output-side disposition cannot be a believer. Then, I argue that in order to explain why it is impossible for a creature to have the capacity for belief unless she has some of the output-side dispositions, the proponent of a complete set view must accept that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set.

To see why being a believer requires having some of the output-side dispositions, first imagine a creature with a kind of representational mental attitude—b-attitudes—such that the creature is disposed to generate and revise her b-attitudes in response to various sorts of stimuli in precisely the ways that constitute rational belief formation and revision. However, this creature—call her Bee—is not disposed to form and revise the rest of her mental attitudes in response to her b-attitudes in any of the rationally permissible ways in which one might form and revise one’s other mental attitudes in response to one’s beliefs. We can imagine, instead, that Bee’s b-attitudes have exactly the same sort of impact on her other mental attitudes that our imaginings have on our other mental attitudes. When I merely imagine that there is a bar of chocolate in the kitchen, then (in normal circumstances) even if I have a very strong desire to eat a piece of chocolate, I will not thereby be moved to form an intention to get up off the sofa and walk to the kitchen. Similarly, when Bee has a b-attitude with “there is a bar of chocolate in the kitchen” as its content, then, even if she also has a very strong desire for chocolate, she will not be disposed to form an intention to go retrieve the chocolate from the kitchen. In every other respect, Bee is just like a paradigmatic believer.

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Nevertheless, these norms are norms of rationality broadly construed: they govern the ways in which it is rationally permissible for one’s various other mental attitudes to shift in response to changes in one’s beliefs.

Now, imagine a second creature—call her Lief—with a kind of representational mental attitude—lief-attitudes—such that she is disposed to form and revise her other mental attitudes in response to these lief-attitudes in precisely the same ways that we are disposed to form and revise our other mental attitudes in response to our beliefs. However, Lief is not disposed to regulate her lief-attitudes in ways that would constitute rationally permissible belief regulation. We might imagine, for example, that Lief is always and only disposed to form lief-attitudes via a process that generates a lief-attitude with the content P when Lief’s evidence (e.g. perceptual experience, testimony from the other members of her social group, etc.) suggests that P is *not* the case. Or, perhaps Lief is a kind of perpetual wishful thinker who is always and only disposed to form a lief-attitude with the content P when she desires that P. In every other respect, Lief is identical to Bee.

Now, Bee’s b-attitudes and Lief’s lief-attitudes seem to have roughly equal claim to be labeled beliefs. Both have some of the distinctive and perhaps seemingly essential features of paradigmatic belief, but lack others. So, an account of the capacity for belief ought to give the same answer to the question of whether Bee has the capacity for belief in virtue of having b-attitudes that it gives to the question of whether Lief has the capacity for belief in virtue of having lief-attitudes. It would be objectionably *ad hoc*, for example, to simply stipulate that lief-attitudes are not beliefs, but that b-attitudes are. Bee and Lief seem on a par, so to speak. Intuitively at least, whatever we say about Bee regarding whether she has the capacity for belief, we should say the same about Lief.

However, it cannot be that both Bee and Lief have the capacity for belief. Since there are no rational dispositions that they share, it is impossible that both Bee and Lief have all of the

dispositions in the essential set. So, it must be that, although both b-attitudes and lief-attitudes are or seem to be belief-like in important respects, neither are beliefs.<sup>21</sup>

Now, if both input-side and output-side dispositions are in the essential set, then it is easy to explain why both Bee and Lief are not believers. Neither creature has all of the dispositions in the essential set.

But, if no output-side dispositions are in the essential set—if, that is, the only the capacity constituting dispositions are input-side dispositions—then the normativist can only explain why Bee is not a believer if she can show that Bee is metaphysically impossible. Here is why. If Bee is metaphysically possible, then, *ex hypothesi*, Bee has *all* of the input-side dispositions. The only rational dispositions Bee lacks are output-side dispositions. If no output-side dispositions are necessary for the capacity for belief, then Bee has all of the rational dispositions the having of which could possibly make a difference to whether she has this capacity. Moreover, her mental economy is, with the exception of her rational dispositions, structured in precisely the way that the mental economy of a paradigmatic believer is structured. Thus, the normativist who denies that having some output-side dispositions is necessary for having the capacity for belief does not have the resources to deny that Bee's b-attitudes are beliefs. If Bee is metaphysically possible and no output-side dispositions are in the essential set, Bee must be a believer.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Recall that I have assumed a complete set view here. Notice that the proponent of a cluster view has additional options regarding what to say about Bee and Lief. She might say that both b-attitudes and lief-attitudes are beliefs, albeit rather exceptional ones in that they depart from the paradigm rather substantially. Alternatively, she might say that although both are belief-like in important respects, neither sort of attitude qualifies as belief. Finally, she might say that there is no fact of the matter about whether b-attitudes and lief-attitudes are beliefs. Rather, all there is to say is that both sorts of attitudes are belief-like in certain crucial respects. Although I do not have the space to defend my assessment here, I believe the proponent of a cluster view will have to rely on there being certain output-side dispositions in the essential set in order to vindicate any of these three verdicts.

<sup>22</sup>If the normativist were to deny that having some output-side dispositions is necessary for having the capacity for belief and she were to accept that Bee is metaphysically possible, then she would have to say that Bee's b-attitudes are beliefs, but that Lief's lief-attitudes are not beliefs, but this violates our intuitions about the apparent parity of Bee and Lief with respect to the capacity for belief.

So, in order to secure the result that Bee is not a believer, and so to successfully treat Bee and Lief as being on a par with respect to the capacity for belief, one must accept that a creature who lacks every output-side disposition cannot be a believer. One must accept, that is, that having some output-side dispositions is at least necessary for having the capacity for belief.

So far, so good. But the result that any creature with the capacity for belief must, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, also have some output-side dispositions demands explanation. One especially straightforward explanation of this result is that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set. However there is another explanation available here, one that appears, at least at first, to be compatible with the claim that no output-side dispositions are in the essential set.<sup>23</sup> It is plausible that the output-side dispositions that are necessary for (but perhaps not constitutive of) the capacity for belief are precisely those output-side dispositions that characterize the rationally permissible ways in which beliefs can impact intentions. And it is also plausible that 1) having just these output-side dispositions is (at least partially) constitutive of having the capacity for intention and that 2) the capacity for belief and the capacity for intention (and perhaps the capacity for certain other mental attitudes, such as desire) come as a metaphysical package. That is, perhaps it is metaphysically impossible to have the capacity for one of these sorts of attitudes without also having the capacity for the other sort(s) of attitude(s). If this is right, then any metaphysically possible creature that has all the dispositions that are constitutive of the capacity for belief must also have whichever dispositions are constitutive of

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<sup>23</sup>In order to sustain the result that Bee is metaphysically impossible, the normativist might suggest that there are some output-side dispositions that every believer necessarily has, but that are not essential to or constitutive of the capacity for belief. If this is right, then Bee has all those dispositions that constitute the capacity for belief, but she lacks certain other dispositions that every believer necessarily has. This line of reasoning is not available to someone who endorses a standard modal characterization of essential properties according to which an essential property of an entity is just a necessary, non-accidental property of that the entity. However, it is compatible with other, more restrictive characterizations of essential properties such as the definitional characterization of essential properties made popular by Kit Fine (see Fine, 1994). I am grateful to Ralph Wedgwood for bringing this line of reasoning to my attention. However, my argument below reveals why this line is ultimately untenable.



the capacity for intention. Since these dispositions include the output-side dispositions in question here, any metaphysically possible creature that has the capacity for belief must also have these output-side dispositions. So, this metaphysical package view supplies a coherent metaphysical picture according to which it is a metaphysically necessary truth that all believers have certain output-side dispositions. This truth is explained by the fact that believers necessarily have the capacity for intention and the fact that the relevant output-side dispositions partially constitute the capacity for intention. Moreover, it seems, at least at first pass, that this metaphysical picture is perfectly compatible with the claim that no output-dispositions are in the essential set.

But appearances can be deceiving. Assume that the metaphysical package view is right. Still, the thesis that the capacity for belief and that capacity for intention come as a metaphysical package itself demands an explanation. The normativist who wishes to embrace the metaphysical package view must be able to explain why it is that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, a creature cannot have the capacity for either one of these two sorts of attitudes without having the capacity for the other. I argue below that a view according to which certain output-side dispositions partially constitute the capacity for belief supplies the best explanation of why the capacity for belief and the capacity for intention come as a metaphysical package. If my argument is successful, then the metaphysical package view is in tension with the thesis that the essential set contains no output-side dispositions. Anyone who is sympathetic to the metaphysical package view has compelling reason to accept that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set.

Now, in general, we expect facts about the metaphysical natures of the various entities referenced in the statement of a metaphysical necessity to explain why that necessity obtains.

So, we should expect that facts about the nature of the capacity for belief and facts about the nature of the capacity for intention explain why, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, any creature with the capacity for belief must also have the capacity for intention and vice versa. And the normativist who adopts the metaphysical package view can easily and straightforwardly explain why having the capacity for intention necessitates having the capacity for belief by appeal to just these resources. If certain output-side dispositions—namely, dispositions for a creature’s *beliefs* to shape her intentions in certain ways—are constitutive of the capacity for intention, then it follows that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, any creature with intentions must also have beliefs. Plausibly, it is built into what it takes for a creature to count as having the capacity for intention that the creature be disposed to regulate its intentions in distinctive ways in response to *beliefs*.<sup>24</sup> So because it is essential to the capacity for intention that a creature’s intentions hook up to beliefs (and not some other sort of mental attitude) in these distinctive ways, any creature that counts as having the capacity for intention must also have the capacity for belief.

However, to fully explain the metaphysical package view, the normativist must also explain why any creature with the capacity for belief must have the capacity for intention. In fact, it is really only this direction of the biconditional that is crucial to her explanation of the fact that output-side dispositions are necessary for the capacity for belief. And the most natural explanation here is one that parallels the explanation above for why any creature with the capacity for intention necessarily also has the capacity for belief. Crucially, this sort of parallel explanation relies on its being the case that being disposed to have one’s beliefs shape, in specific ways, one’s *intentions* (and not one’s mental attitudes of other sorts) is constitutive of

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<sup>24</sup>Of course, it might *also* be constitutive of the capacity for intention that a creature’s intentions hook up to certain of the creature’s other mental attitudes (e.g. desires) in particular ways.

one's having the capacity for belief. If the relevant output-side dispositions are constitutive (in part) of the capacity for belief, it follows that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, any creature with beliefs must also have intentions. So, the most natural explanation of why any creature with the capacity for belief must also have the capacity for intention requires assuming that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set. More generally, any adequate explanation of why the capacity for belief is necessarily accompanied by the capacity for intention will have to reference some essential feature of the capacity for belief in virtue of which that capacity is linked to the capacity for intention. Intuitively, at least, the connection between belief and intention is just that beliefs should inform intentions in a particular, distinctive way and this connection is precisely the connection that is captured by output-side dispositions. Thus, there is good reason to think that any essential feature of the capacity for belief that can forge a metaphysical link between the capacity for belief and the capacity for intention strong enough to explain the fact that the first of these capacities is necessarily accompanied by the second will guarantee (although perhaps only indirectly) that having certain output-side dispositions is essential to having the capacity for belief.<sup>25</sup> Anyone who endorses the metaphysical package view has independent reason to think that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set.

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<sup>25</sup>A normativist who hopes to resist step 1 of my argument here by rejecting my conclusion that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set, might try to explain the metaphysical package view in a different way, by pointing out that there are good reasons—reasons having to do with the sort of evolutionary pressures that led to the development of creatures with the capacities for belief, intention, etc.—to think that creatures that have developed the capacity for one sort of attitude here have also developed the capacity for the other(s). It seems to me that such considerations might well show that, as a matter of contingent, natural fact, the capacities for belief, intention, etc. come as a package. However, facts about the evolutionary pressures that led to or explain the development of creatures with the capacities for belief, intention, etc. are (at least metaphysically-speaking) merely contingent and so cannot lend support to the metaphysical thesis that such a normativist needs to defend here. Facts about the way in which various evolutionary pressures led to the development of creatures with a certain set of capacities that explain why the capacities in this set did not develop in isolation do not supply reason for thinking that creatures that have one of the capacities in this set and not others are *metaphysically* impossible. I am grateful to Ralph Wedgwood for helping me to see this point clearly.

The demand that any account of the capacity for belief respect the fact that Bee and Lief are on a par, so to speak, with respect to this capacity forces the proponent of a complete set account to accept that that it is metaphysically impossible for a creature to be a believer if she lacks every output-side disposition. And, I have argued, providing a satisfactory explanation of this result requires accepting that some output-side dispositions partially constitute the capacity for belief. More generally, there is no way for an account of the capacity for belief to fully sustain the parity of Bee and Lief with respect to the capacity for belief unless the account allows that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set.

*Step 2:*

If step 1 of my argument is successful, then the truth privileging normativist will have to concede that some dispositions in the essential set are output-side dispositions. I argue here, however, that a truth privileging normativist account of the nature of belief is ill-equipped to explain why this is the case. Establishing this conclusion constitutes the second step of my argument that truth privileging accounts are not in a position to discharge the explanatory burden that the defense from dispositionalism places on any normativist account of the nature of belief.

If the defense from dispositionalism is sound, then facts about what is constitutive or potentially constitutive of having the capacity for belief that involve normative properties should be explained by the fact that beliefs are subject to certain constitutive norms. After all, if it were possible to explain why certain rational dispositions are in the essential set without referencing the constitutive norms to which beliefs are subject, then we would have good reason to doubt the abductive inference at the center of this defense. So, on a truth privileging normativist account, the fact that certain rational dispositions are in the essential set must ultimately be explained by the fact that beliefs are subject to the fundamental truth norm.

It may seem that the fact that beliefs are subject to a fundamental truth norm can easily explain why some input-side dispositions are constitutive of the capacity for belief. Recall that the fact that beliefs are subject to the truth norm plausibly entails that beliefs are constitutively subject to certain input-side norms—namely, input-side norms conformity with which increases the likelihood that believers actually form true beliefs. If such norms are just the norms that characterize epistemically rational belief regulation, then that beliefs are subject to a truth norm entails that beliefs are subject to norms of epistemically rational belief regulation. Furthermore, being at least disposed to conform with norms of epistemically rational belief regulation (even if only in certain sorts of idealized circumstances) is plausibly part of what makes it the case that one counts as being capable of forming and revising *beliefs*—i.e. mental attitudes of a distinctive kind that are constitutively subject to these particular norms. Put differently, that the fact that beliefs are constitutively subject to certain input-side norms plausibly entails that being disposed to form and revise certain of one’s mental attitudes in ways that accord with these input-side norms is part of what makes it the case that the mental attitudes in question count as *beliefs* instead of some other sort of mental attitude. Thus, the fact that beliefs are subject to a constitutive truth-norm and so to certain constitutive norms of epistemically rational belief regulation plausibly explains why certain input-side dispositions do or can constitute the capacity for belief.

Yet, it is doubtful that the truth norm can underwrite an explanation of the fact that output-side dispositions are in the essential set. It is plausible that if beliefs weren’t the sorts of attitudes that were governed by a truth norm, then beliefs wouldn’t be subject to the output-side norms to which beliefs are, as a matter of fact, subject. However, it is not plausible that the fact that beliefs are correct if and only if true is *sufficient* to entail that beliefs be subject to any

output-side norms. And it is precisely this sort of sufficiency claim that the truth privileging normativist would have to establish in order to show that her account is capable of explaining why some constitutive norms of belief are output-side norms and, in turn, why some output-side dispositions are constitutive of the capacity for belief. The related necessity claim, although it is plausible, cannot do the job.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, it is reasonable to expect that the truth privileging normativist's explanation of why some of the dispositions in the essential set are input-side dispositions should parallel her explanation of why some of the dispositions in the essential set are output-side dispositions. But no analogue of the reasoning employed to establish that being subject to the truth norm entails that beliefs must also be subject to input-side norms of rationality will establish that being subject to the truth norm is sufficient for being subject to output-side norms.

For the truth privileging normativist, the fact that beliefs are subject to the truth norm entails that beliefs must be subject to input-side norms of rationality because the norms of rationality for belief *just are* whichever norms articulate the best means of ensuring that our beliefs conform with the truth norm. So, if the truth privileging normativist is right that beliefs should be true, then it follows that believers should regulate their beliefs in ways that conform with input-side norms of rationally permissible belief formation and revision. But how we employ our beliefs in forming intentions, for example, simply does not have an impact on whether or not our beliefs conform with the truth norm. More generally, whether or not the way

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<sup>26</sup>Of course, sometimes a set of necessary conditions for  $\Psi$ 's being the case, none of which is individually sufficient, are, taken together, jointly sufficient for  $\Psi$ 's being the case and so jointly explain  $\Psi$ 's being the case. It is somewhat plausible that the fact that beliefs are constitutively subject to a truth norm, taken in conjunction with certain other facts (perhaps facts about the constitutive norms for desire and intention, for example), might be part of a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a believer who also has desires and intentions being subject to certain output-side norms of rationality. But adopting this explanatory strategy in an effort to resist step 2 requires rejecting step 1 of my argument by denying that output-side norms of rationality are constitutive of belief itself. And I have tried to show above that the prospects for any attempt to reject step 1 are dim.

in which a believer's other mental attitudes change in response to her beliefs conforms with output-side norms has no impact on whether the her beliefs conform with the truth norm. Thus, the explanatory strategy that the truth privileging normativist adopts in order to demonstrate that the truth norm entails certain input-side norms cannot be pressed into service to show that the truth norm entails certain output-side norms. And for the truth privileging normativist, the truth norm is explanatorily basic or fundamental. So, if the fact that beliefs are subject to a constitutive truth norm does not explain why beliefs are also subject to certain constitutive output-side norms of rationality, then a truth privileging normativist account lacks the resources to explain why certain output-side dispositions are essential to the capacity for belief.

The defense from dispositionalism presupposes that the nature of belief, whatever its character, will explain why certain particular dispositions are in the essential set and so constitute or are capable of constituting the capacity for belief. I have argued that some of the dispositions in this essential set are output-side dispositions. Additionally, I have tried to show that the truth privileging normativist's claim that beliefs are subject to a constitutive truth norm cannot explain why beliefs are subject to output-side norms of rationality and so why some output-side dispositions are in the essential set. If I am right on both counts, then a truth privileging normativist account of the nature of belief cannot discharge the explanatory burden that the defense from dispositionalism places on any normativist account. One who is sympathetic to this independently compelling defense of normativism against descriptivism must reject a truth privileging account of the nature of belief as explanatorily inadequate.

### **An Alternative: The Proper Function Privileging Account of the Nature of Belief**

I have argued that a truth privileging account cannot explain why certain dispositions in the essential set do or can constitute the capacity for belief. The way in which a truth privileging

account falls short, however, illuminates a new path for the normativist to pursue in developing her account of the nature of belief. A truth privileging account fails to achieve explanatory adequacy because the truth privileging normativist's reasoning fails to appreciate the role that output-side dispositions and norms play in making belief the distinctive kind of mental attitude that it is. This suggests that any account that is capable of explaining why the essential set includes some output-side dispositions will have to recognize the crucial role that output-side norms play in differentiating beliefs from other sorts of mental attitudes.<sup>27</sup>

In particular, I propose here that an account according to which the explanatory core of the nature of belief is identified with the job that beliefs paradigmatically do—i.e. with the role that beliefs paradigmatically play—in believers' mental economies is especially well-positioned to explain why both output-side dispositions and input-side dispositions are essential to the capacity for belief. On such an account, it is the fact that beliefs are meant to fulfill a distinctive proper function in believers' mental economies that makes belief the distinctive kind of mental attitude that it is. Thus, understanding the nature or essence of belief involves, first and foremost, understanding beliefs' proper function. I call this account of the nature of belief the proper function privileging account.<sup>28</sup>

It is natural to formulate the proper function privileging account in a way that renders the account is structurally isomorphic to a truth privileging account. Both accounts accept that that there is a particular constitutive norm—a certain norm to which all beliefs are subject simply in

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<sup>27</sup>One strategy that the normativist might adopt here is to try to add to the truth privileging normativist's account of the correctness condition for belief by suggesting that a belief is correct if and only if it is true and also meets some other, independent condition that will do the work in explaining why beliefs figure in output-side norms of rationality. This is not the strategy I propose on the normativist's behalf here. I am skeptical that this strategy can be successful, but I will not defend my skepticism in what follows.

<sup>28</sup>Of course, there is no consensus regarding which of the range of different accounts on offer is the correct account of the biological notion of proper function. I mean for what I say here to be compatible with any of the candidates.



virtue of being the sorts of mental attitudes that they are—that plays a fundamental explanatory role in an account of belief’s nature. The proper function privileging account, however, maintains that this fundamental constitutive norm is not a truth norm, but rather a norm whose content is given by beliefs’ proper function—i.e. by the distinctive job that beliefs are meant to do in believers’ mental economies.

An appropriately nuanced articulation of the proper function of belief is far beyond the scope of this paper. However, a rough approximation will do for my purposes in what follows.<sup>29</sup> Assume (plausibly enough) that the proper function of belief is to inform our decisions to act so that we achieve those ends our actions aim to achieve by serving as a kind of map.<sup>30</sup> On the account that I am proposing here, the explanatory core of the nature of belief consists in belief being a mental attitude with this particular, distinctive proper function. Belief just is the kind of mental attitude that achieves a kind of success when it is well-suited to fulfill this proper function and that falls short when it is not. Put another way, the fundamental constitutive norm governing belief states that beliefs are correct if and only if they are disposed to fulfill this distinctive proper function. So, a belief is correct if and only if it is disposed to inform our actions by serving as a kind of map so that our actions successfully achieve the ends that our actions are meant to achieve.

Now, the proper function privileging account can provide a relatively straightforward explanation of why both input-side and output-side dispositions do (on a complete set approach) or can (on a cluster approach) help to constitute the capacity for belief. The proponent of this

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<sup>29</sup>I take the rough characterization of beliefs’ proper function that I employ here to operate at a higher level of abstraction than the more refined articulation of beliefs’ proper function that I offer in Nolfi (ms.).

<sup>30</sup>I aim to be giving voice to a popular idea that is perhaps most famously expressed by F. P. Ramsey’s thought that “beliefs are the maps by which we steer.” Although I do think that this idea is roughly correct, I believe that the question of how to characterize the proper function of belief is, at least in part, an empirical one.

account can easily adopt the truth privileging normativist's general formulation of the way in which the norm of correctness governing a particular attitude-type and the norms of rationality governing that attitude-type are related. So, according to the proper function privileging account, the norms of rational belief regulation and employment are just those norms conformity with which is, for creatures endowed with our particular sort of cognitive equipment operating in normal circumstances, likely to yield beliefs that are well-suited to fulfill their proper function. But norms so described are just norms that capture proper cognitive functioning with respect to belief. Thus, the norms of rational belief regulation and employment are, for the proper function privileging normativist, just the norms of proper cognitive functioning.

Furthermore, there is independent reason for thinking that being disposed to regulate and employ beliefs in ways that constitute proper cognitive functioning is essential to the capacity for belief. In general, we resist attributing a proper function  $f$  to some part of a complex system when the system simply lacks every disposition the manifestation of which would, under normal circumstances, reliably cause that thing to achieve  $f$ . That is, we resist characterizing an item under a functional description as having a proper function  $f$  when it is not even disposed to function properly with respect to  $f$ . If the red fluid in a glass tube that is marked from bottom to top with increasing numbers ranging from -20 to 120 is not even disposed to rise and fall in a way that is responsive to the temperature (imagine that the fluid turns out to be dyed water) we would resist labeling the fluid-filled tube as a thermometer.<sup>31</sup> And an object that is not even disposed, when appropriately situated, to circulate blood throughout a body is simply not a heart. Of course, a heart might be damaged so that it is, in fact, not capable of circulating blood. Nevertheless, the damaged heart will still be disposed to circulate blood *under normal*

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<sup>31</sup>Perhaps the object so described is a toy or fake thermometer.

*circumstances* (i.e. when the heart is not damaged in certain, specifiable ways) and so the broken heart still counts as a heart.

By parallel reasoning, a creature that lacks every disposition the manifestation of which would constitute proper cognitive functioning with respect to belief regulation and employment also lacks the capacity for belief. Whatever sorts of mental attitudes the creature has, none of them could possibly have the particular proper function that beliefs have and so none of them could possibly be beliefs. Thus, some dispositions to regulate and employ certain of one's mental attitudes in ways that, under normal circumstances, result in these mental attitudes being disposed to inform our actions toward success by serving as a kind of map must be in the essential set.

The way in which our beliefs are disposed to prompt changes in our other mental attitudes (e.g. in our intentions) obviously and straightforwardly impacts whether or not our beliefs will be disposed to inform our actions by serving as maps such that our actions are successful. Thus, the fact that beliefs are correct if and only if they are disposed to achieve this proper function entails that beliefs are subject to a variety of constitutive norms capturing how beliefs should be employed in a subject's mental economy and, in particular, to norms that capture how beliefs should impact intentions. The norms of rationality entailed by the fundamental norm (i.e. the norms of proper cognitive functioning relating to belief) must include output-side norms. And, as a result, we should expect certain output-side dispositions to be in the essential set.

Furthermore, a belief's being true (or at least true-enough) is, quite plausibly, a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for the belief's being disposed to inform our actions by serving as a kind of map so that we successfully achieve our ends. Even if my beliefs serve as a

map in guiding my actions in precisely the ways that they should, I am extremely unlikely to successfully achieve the ends that my actions are meant to achieve if my beliefs about the way the world is diverge too radically from the way the world is. If my belief that there is chocolate in the kitchen is false, then it is extremely unlikely that I will satisfy my chocolate craving by walking into the kitchen. So, perhaps it is a prerequisite for a belief to be disposed to inform action so that the believer acts successfully by serving as a kind of map that the belief be true. If this is right, then the proponent of the proper function privileging account should accept that beliefs are subject to a truth norm, albeit a truth norm that is derivative and so does not play a fundamental sort of explanatory role in an account of the nature of belief. And so the proponent of the proper function privileging account can accept that the norms of rationality involving belief include input-side norms in roughly the way that the proponent of a truth privileging account suggests. We should not be at all surprised, then, that certain input-side dispositions do or can constitute the capacity for belief. Thus, the proposed proper function privileging account can explain both why certain input-side dispositions and why certain output-side dispositions are in the essential set.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that some output-side dispositions do or can help constitute the capacity for belief. I have also tried to show that if this thesis is right, then a truth privileging normativist account of the nature of belief lacks the resources to discharge an explanatory burden that the defense from dispositionalism imposes on any such account. Without an argument for the seemingly implausible claim that the truth norm entails some output-side norms, a truth privileging account cannot explain why it is that certain output-side dispositions are in the essential set. Of course, a truth privileging normativist might simply deny that any output-side

dispositions are essential to the capacity for belief. But in light of my argument to the contrary, this move would be objectionably *ad hoc* and theory-driven. So, the normativist should reject a truth privileging account as explanatorily inadequate. I have sketched an alternative that takes the proper function of belief to supply the explanatory core of the nature of belief and I have argued that this account can explain why both output-side and input-side dispositions are in the essential set.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> I am especially grateful to Matthew Kotzen, William Lycan, Lisa Miracchi, Ram Neta, Blake Roeber, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, Susanna Siegel, Ernest Sosa, Kurt Sylvan, Ralph Wedgwood, Vida Yao, and an anonymous reviewer at *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* for their feedback on earlier drafts of this piece.

## CHAPETR 2: WHY IS EPISTEMIC EVALUATION PRESCRIPTIVE?<sup>33</sup>

### Introduction

If I say that a particular thermostat ought to turn on the heater when the ambient temperature drops below 65 degrees, I am describing a standard of proper functioning that governs the thermostat's operation. But I am not instructing the thermostat to operate in this way, nor am I providing the thermostat with guidance or advice. My statement that the thermostat ought to turn on the heater when the temperature drops below 65 degrees does not tell the thermostat how to respond to the ambient temperature.

The epistemic 'ought,' however, is often used to express guidance or advice regarding how to form, revise, or sustain one's beliefs. Evaluation with respect to epistemic standards—and, in particular, with respect to standards of epistemic rationality or justification—is often naturally interpreted as instructing or directing its target to reason in certain ways and not others. Thus, the epistemic 'ought' is often *prescriptive*, rather than merely *evaluative*.<sup>34,35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>A version of this piece was published in January of 2014 in *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 57:1, 97-121.

<sup>34</sup>Certainly epistemic evaluation that takes the form of praise or criticism with respect to standards of epistemic rationality or justification marks the fact that a believer has either met or fallen short of these standards in believing as she does. My point here is that this sort of epistemic evaluation is often more than a mere tool for marking whether or not a believer manages to live up to these epistemic standards. Rather, this evaluation is just evaluation that has directive or instructive import. The prescriptive 'ought' supplies advice or guidance. And normative claims that employ the prescriptive 'ought' tell someone or something how to be, how to act, or how to perform. This is what differentiates prescriptive evaluation from evaluation that merely reports whether or not its target conforms to a particular normative standard that governs it.

<sup>35</sup>The prescriptive/merely evaluative distinction that I draw here cuts across the ought-to-be/ought-to-do distinction to which Chrisman appeals in his (2008). Nothing in what follows turns on whether the kind of genuinely prescriptive epistemic evaluation on which I've focused my attention here—evaluation with respect to standards of rationality or justification—is understood as evaluation with respect to ought-to-bes (rules of criticism) or ought-to-

Why is the epistemic ‘ought’ different in this regard from the ‘ought’ of proper functioning that applies to the operation of a thermostat?<sup>36</sup> Plausibly, one reason is that it makes no sense to give instructions to someone or something that is thoroughly incapable of adjusting its performance in response to those instructions. And a thermostat’s operation can never be responsive to or guided by the instructions, directions, or advice that might be embedded in a claim about how it ought to operate. Advice, guidance, or direction presupposes that its target is (at least in normal circumstances) capable of following or being guided by its recommendations.<sup>37</sup> This suggests that the fact that a believer is capable of changing the way she regulates her beliefs in response to and in a way that is guided by epistemic praise or criticism explains (at least in part) why she is an appropriate target of prescriptive evaluation for believing as she does.<sup>38</sup> Put in other terms, it is the fact that a believer can exercise some yet-to-be-specified kind of control over either the content of her beliefs or over the processes that regulate them that explains (at least in part) why she is appropriately subject to epistemic evaluation that is prescriptive, rather than merely evaluative, in character.<sup>39</sup> Call the relevant

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dos (rules of action). Additionally, I remain agnostic regarding how this distinction is properly captured by a theoretical semantics of ‘ought’ (for a helpful discussion of the debate on this point, see Chrisman (2012)).

<sup>36</sup>This question is especially pressing if, as some epistemologists suggest, epistemic standards or norms have roughly the same kind of normative structure as the standards of proper functioning that govern e.g. thermostat operation, heartbeats, human perception, or animal cognition (see, for example, Sosa (2009) or Kornblith (2002)).

<sup>37</sup>This is why epistemic evaluation that is genuinely prescriptive in character seems confused, misguided, or misplaced when its target is a believer who, perhaps because of some deficiency or defect in her cognitive capacities, is systematically incapable of regulating her beliefs differently from the way in which she does. Of course, such a believer might well be appropriately subject to non-prescriptive epistemic evaluation.

<sup>38</sup>One other part of a complete explanation of when and why believers are appropriately subject to prescriptive epistemic evaluation in virtue of the way in which they believe must be an explanation of why believers fall under the scope of epistemic standards—i.e. of why epistemic norms have authority over the way in which believers believe—in the first place. For the purposes of this paper, I will simply assume that, somehow, epistemic standards do have the requisite sort of authority over the way in which we believe.

<sup>39</sup>The notion of control is closely linked to the notions of freedom, agency, and responsibility. Although I focus exclusively on the notion of control in this paper, I do think that the applicability of the prescriptive ‘ought’ (both in the epistemic domain and elsewhere) is tied to the applicability of a certain form of responsibility, and presupposes

kind of control, whatever it turns out to involve, *doxastic control*. So, doxastic control is that which ensures that a believer is capable of responding to, following, or taking up and putting into practice instructions, directions, or advice regarding how she ought to regulate her beliefs. If a believer lacks the capacity to exercise doxastic control, then she is not appropriately subject to evaluation with respect to standards of epistemic rationality or justification that is genuinely prescriptive in character. And the fact that we typically exercise doxastic control explains why we are typically appropriate targets of prescriptive epistemic evaluation.

Thus, the real work of explaining when and why the epistemic ‘ought’ is genuinely prescriptive lies in giving an account of doxastic control. The aim of this paper is to develop and defend such an account.

### **The Simple Account: Control as Immediate Causal Impact**

Perhaps the most intuitive and certainly the most widely endorsed account of doxastic control is what I call here the immediate causal impact account. Put roughly, the immediate causal impact account of doxastic control maintains that we exercise doxastic control if and only if our judgments about how we ought to believe in a particular set of circumstances cause us to actually believe in the ways that we judge we ought to believe in those circumstances.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, proponents of the immediate causal impact account accept that we do not always, or even typically, make judgments about how we ought to believe in the course of actually forming, revising, or maintaining our beliefs. Much of our belief regulation occurs

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both a certain kind of freedom and the capacity to exercise a certain sort of agency on the part of the evaluative subject. In future work, I hope to employ the particular account of doxastic control that I defend in what follows to explicate both the nature of our doxastic freedom, and the sense in which, as Boyle suggests in his (2011), we exercise a kind of agency in believing.

<sup>40</sup>Although I will not mark this explicitly in the text, the normative judgments to which I refer here and below when discussing doxastic control express a believer’s own conception of ideal belief-regulation and so these normative judgments always employ the *epistemic* ‘ought.’



automatically and unreflectively. Still, we are capable of making normative judgments about how we ought to believe in the circumstances with which we are faced. The immediate causal impact account maintains that a believer who exercises doxastic control is just a believer who is such that, when she does make such judgments, her judgments causally determine how she actually believes. As a first gloss, that a believer exercises doxastic control in now believing that P requires that, if she were to judge that she ought not now believe that P, then her judgment would cause her not to now believe that P. More carefully, that a believer exercises doxastic control in believing as she now does requires that, were the believer to make a certain sort of judgment about how she ought to now believe, her judgment would, itself, causally determine the way in which she would actually now believe. And, if the immediate causal impact account is right, then a believer is appropriately subject to prescriptive epistemic evaluation in virtue of how she believes in a particular case only when either the way in which she believes actually is causally determined by her judgment(s) about how she ought to believe in the case in question or the way in which she believes would have been so determined, had she made the relevant sort of judgment.

There are a variety of different ways in which one might understand the mechanism via which certain of a believer's normative judgments about how she ought to now believe causally determine how she actually now believes to which the immediate causal impact account of doxastic control appeals. Some proponents of the immediate causal impact account suggest that a believer exercises doxastic control because her judgments about how she ought to believe in a particular set of circumstances causally determine the content of her belief in those circumstances. On this sort of proposal, a believer's normative judgment about whether it would be rational or justified to now believe a particular proposition P on the basis of her current

perceptual experience, the other beliefs she now has, etc. causes her to have a belief with P as its content.<sup>41</sup>

What unifies different models of this mechanism is that, on each, the subject's judgments about whether she ought to now believe that P exerts causal power directly on her current belief. So, when a believer exercises doxastic control over her beliefs, the fact that she forms a judgment about what content she ought to believe in a particular case is sufficient to cause her to believe that content in that case.

Other proponents of the immediate causal impact account maintain, however, that it is the causal upshot of a believer's normative judgments about how she ought now to regulate her beliefs (and not her judgments about what particular contents her beliefs ought now to have) that determine whether or not a believer exercises doxastic control in believing.<sup>42</sup> On this proposal, a believer exercises doxastic control when her judgment that she ought now to believe truly or in a way that conforms with some other, perhaps more narrowly specified, epistemic norms modulates the cognitive processes (i.e. the, perhaps subconscious, reasoning) that now generate and/or sustain her belief. Suppose, for example, a believer judges that she ought not believe that P in the circumstances with which she is currently faced unless her total evidence makes it probable that P is true. Assuming this believer exercises doxastic control in the case at hand, her judgment must be causally efficacious in shaping the character of the processing which actually

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<sup>41</sup>Scanlon (1998) and McDowell (1994) both appear to endorse versions of this account—call it the reflective control account—of the relevant causal mechanism. David Owens also reads Korsgaard as endorsing a version of account, but I think that, in fact, what Korsgaard says in her (1996) does not clearly distinguish between the reflective control account and what I call the constitution account below. In later work Korsgaard more clearly rejects the reflective control account in favor of the constitution account. More recently, Shah (ms.) seems to suggest that he favors the reflective control account, where a second-order reflective state directly causes first-order belief, over the account of this mechanism that I consider next.

<sup>42</sup>In their (2005), Shah and Velleman seem to presuppose that we exercise something like this kind of control over our beliefs. Sosa (forthcoming) also seems to endorse a version of this sort of mechanism as the mechanism of doxastic control.

gives rise to and/or sustains a belief about whether P in the circumstances at hand such that that she only ends up believing that P (rather than suspending or disbelieving that P) if she takes her total evidence to make P probable. Her judgment must cause it to be the case that only considerations this believer takes to make P probable will actually give rise to or sustain (by serving as the basis for) her belief that P in the circumstances at hand. Crucially here, the relevant sort of judgment exerts its causal power directly on the cognitive processing that gives rise to and/or sustains belief in the circumstances at hand and so only indirectly on the content of the resulting belief.

Regardless of which of these mechanisms the proponent of the immediate causal impact account endorses, however, the psychology of a believer who exercises doxastic control in believing that P in a particular set of circumstances must be such that, were she to have made the relevant sort of normative judgment, this normative judgment would have causally determined how she actually believes in the circumstances at hand. So, on the immediate causal impact account whether a believer exercises doxastic control is fundamentally a matter of whether she is wired up, so to speak, in the right sort of way. We exercise doxastic control in now believing as we do when we are psychologically constituted such that any judgments about how we ought *now* to believe that we happen to make will be causally efficacious either in shaping the processes that *now* give rise to and sustain belief or in determining the content of what we *now* believe. And so, if the immediate causal impact account is right, then we are appropriately subject to prescriptive epistemic evaluation for believing as we do in the particular set of circumstances with which we are now faced because we are capable of immediately causally determining how we believe in the circumstances with which we are now faced by making a judgment about how we ought to believe in those circumstances.

## Why the Immediate Causal Impact Account Fails

Despite its intuitive appeal, the immediate causal impact account of doxastic control is untenable. And this is because the immediate causal impact account implausibly restricts the scope of prescriptive epistemic evaluation.

In cases where we believe rationally, our judgments regarding how we ought to believe cannot exert their causal power over how we actually believe in the way that the immediate causal impact account of doxastic control describes.<sup>43</sup> Thus, endorsing the immediate causal impact account commits one to denying that we exercise doxastic control when we believe rationally, and so denying that we are appropriately subject to genuinely prescriptive epistemic evaluation for believing in a great many of the cases in which it seems that we are. But it seems that we are appropriately subject to prescriptive epistemic evaluation for believing as we do in cases where we believe rationally.

It will be easier to bring out precisely why an immediate causal impact account of doxastic control entails that we do not exercise doxastic control when we believe rationally by considering a concrete case. To this end, imagine that I look out of my office window and see that the pavement is wet, that the sky is gray, and that the trees are dripping. I find myself believing, on the basis of my visual experience, that it has rained.<sup>44</sup> Since I have no reason to think that my visual experience is misleading with respect to the recent weather, my belief is both rational and justified. And I am epistemically praiseworthy for believing as I do. I form my

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<sup>43</sup>The arguments in defense of this conclusion that I offer below are inspired by and loosely track reasoning that David Owens puts forward in Chapter 2 of Owens (2000). A somewhat similar sort of argumentative line (marshaled in support of the claim that following an epistemic rule cannot be understood in terms of the believer having an intentional state representing the relevant rule that explains—causally—and rationalizes the believer's believing in the way that she does) runs through Boghossian (2008).

<sup>44</sup>Nothing in what follows turns on the fact that this case involves perceptual belief. The same points might be made by appeal to a case involving, for example, a simple deductive inference.

belief about whether it has rained in this case in precisely the way that I (epistemically) ought to form such beliefs on the basis of my visual experiences. Moreover, the kind of praise to which I seem appropriately subject in this case is not merely evaluative. The claim that I ought now to believe in the way that I do does not merely report that I now believe in a way that conforms to epistemic standards, nor does it function exclusively as a kind of sticker of approval. Rather, it would be natural to interpret this positive evaluation as instructing me to continue to sustain my belief in the way that I currently do, as advising me to go on believing that it has rained on the basis of my visual experience just as I do now, and perhaps even as directing me to form beliefs in similar ways in future situations. And, as such, this evaluation is (or, at the very least, it can be) genuinely prescriptive in character.<sup>45</sup>

Since being subject to prescriptive epistemic evaluation entails that one exercises doxastic control, it must be that I exercise doxastic control in believing that it has rained in the case at hand. And if the immediate causal impact account is right, then exercising doxastic control in now believing that it has rained requires that, were I to make a certain sort of judgment about how I ought to believe in the circumstances with which I am faced, my judgment would cause how I actually believe in the circumstances at hand to conform to the way in which I judge that I ought to now believe. However, there is good reason to think that my judgments about how I ought to believe in the circumstances with which I am now faced cannot be causally

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<sup>45</sup>If I believed that it had not, in fact, rained, but rather that the view through my office window had been carefully manipulated to make it appear as if it had rained—perhaps I believe that the window has been given a gray tint and that the area outside has been sprayed with a fire hose by mischievous students who hope to mislead me regarding today’s weather—then, given how unlikely I know this all is, I would be appropriately subject to epistemic criticism. Epistemic norms dictate that, in light of what else I know, I ought not to have taken seriously the possibility that my visual experience as of wet pavement, gray sky, etc. was the result of an elaborate hoax in this way when forming my belief. Moreover, there is no reason to think that the criticism to which I am appropriately subject here should not be genuinely prescriptive in character. My colleagues would be warranted in chiding me for failing to draw a reasonable, rational, or justifiable conclusion about the weather in response to my visual experience, and it is natural to think that their criticism here constitutes advice or guidance to the effect that I should have believed differently in the case at hand.

efficacious in this way. There is good reason to think, that is, that my judgments about how I ought to believe in the circumstances with which I am now faced cannot causally determine either the character of my current reasoning or the content of my current belief. And this is because a closer look at what believing rationally requires reveals that judgments about how one ought to believe in the circumstances with which I am faced cannot play either of these causal roles in generating or sustaining a rational belief. It will be helpful to treat the two different mechanisms of immediate causal impact that I discuss above in turn.

On the first proposal, I exercise doxastic control in believing, on the basis of my visual experience as of gray sky, wet pavement, and dripping trees, just in case, were I to judge that I ought to believe that P in the circumstances with which I am now faced, my judgment would cause me to believe that P. Imagine that, as I have a visual experience as of a gray sky, wet pavement, and dripping trees outside my office window, I judge that I ought now, on the basis of my experience, to believe that it has rained. Can it be that my judgment is that which causes me to believe that it has rained in the circumstances at hand? Well, it would, of course, be possible for me to believe rationally in the circumstances with which I am now faced, even if I had not made this judgment. Thus, it must be that my visual experience (perhaps along with certain of my background beliefs) is sufficient to serve as the rational basis and so as the causal ground for my belief that it has rained in this case. Whether or not I make the relevant sort of judgment, my visual experience and my background beliefs can do all the causal work that there is to be done in generating and sustaining my belief that it has rained in the circumstances at hand.

Now, certainly there would be something wrong with me, at least epistemically speaking, were I to judge that I ought now to believe that it has rained and yet now fail to so believe. But the best explanation for this is not that, if I am to believe rationally in a case where I make the

relevant judgment, then my belief that it has rained must be a causal product of my judgment that I ought to now so believe. Rather, it seems that, at least when all goes well, my belief and my judgment share a common causal ground. If my judgment is well-founded, then it seems my normative judgment must itself be grounded on and so be a causal product of the same visual experience (and background beliefs) that ground my belief that it has rained. After all, the reasons that I believe that it has rained in the case at hand must include that my perceptual experience is as of the sky being gray, the pavement being wet, etc. And it is for precisely these same reasons that I would be right to judge that I ought now to believe that it has rained. So, if I believe rationally, then whatever it is on the basis of which I judge that I ought now to believe that it has rained must also be that which explains why I now believe as I do. And if this is right, then there is no reason to think that my judgment figures at all in a causal explanation of why I now believe that it has rained. More generally, in cases where the content of what I now believe conforms to my judgment about what I ought now to believe, whatever it is that *grounds* my judgment (and not my judgment itself) will do all the causal work that needs to be done in generating or sustaining my belief. We have good reason to expect, then, that a complete causal explanation of the fact that I come to believe as I do in the circumstances at hand need not ever mention my judgment that I ought to so believe. Thus, it would be unparsimonious at best and over-intellectualizing at worst to suppose that my judgment that I ought to believe it has rained is, itself, causally efficacious in the relevant way in bringing it about that I believe that it has rained. Instead, we ought to conclude that my judgment is epiphenomenal—a kind of fifth wheel—with respect to the causal explanation of how it is that I come to believe as I do in the circumstances at hand. And since my judgment cannot be that which causes my belief to have

the content that it has, I cannot, on the proposal under consideration here, exercise doxastic control in believing that it has rained in the circumstances at hand.

Let us turn, now, to the second proposal regarding the mechanism of immediate causal impact that underwrites doxastic control introduced above. On this proposal, that I exercise doxastic control in the case at hand requires that, were I to judge that I ought to believe that it has rained only if believing that it has rained constitutes conformity with, e.g., a truth norm or with norms of epistemic rationality in the case at hand, my judgment would causally determine the character of the cognitive processing (i.e. the, perhaps subconscious, reasoning) that gives rise to and sustains my belief that it has rained. So, imagine that, as I look out my office window at the gray sky, wet pavement, and dripping trees, I judge that I ought only believe that it has rained on the basis of my visual experience if my visual experience makes it probable that it has rained. If I exercise doxastic control in the case at hand, it must be that my judgment causes me to regulate my belief in such a way that I only end up believing that it has rained on the basis of my visual experience in the case at hand because my visual experience makes it probable that it has rained. Assume that my judgment is correct: were it not the case that my visual experience made it probable that it has rained, my belief that it has rained in the circumstances at hand would be epistemically irrational. Thus, if I now believe rationally that it has rained on the basis of my visual experience, then it must be that I regulate my belief in such a way that I only end up believing that it has rained on the basis of my visual experience in the case at hand because my visual experience makes it probable that it has rained. And since it would have been possible for me to believe rationally here without having ever made the relevant judgment, there is good reason to think that my judgment is *not* what causes me to regulate my belief in this way. There must be some causal explanation for why it is that I regulate my belief that it has rained in ways



that are rational in similar cases where I make no judgments about how I ought to regulate my beliefs in the circumstances with which I am faced. And whatever causal explanation there is will apply equally well to the case at hand where I do make a judgment of the relevant sort. This suggests that my judgment that I ought not now believe that it has rained on the basis of my visual experience unless my visual experience makes it probable that it has rained is not that which causally determines the way in which I regulate my belief in the case at hand. To suppose otherwise would be unparsimonious at best and over-intellectualizing at worst. It seems that my judgment must be a kind of epiphenomenon—a fifth wheel—in any causal account of the character of the cognitive processing (i.e. the reasoning) that gives rise to and sustains my belief that it has rained. And since my judgment cannot be that which causes me to regulate my beliefs in the way that I do, I cannot, on the proposal under consideration here, exercise doxastic control in believing that it has rained in the circumstances at hand.

Regardless of how we describe the particular mechanism of immediate causal impact, the immediate causal impact account of doxastic control sets the bar for exercising doxastic control too high. In cases like the one I have described here, a believer seems to be appropriately subject to genuinely prescriptive evaluation in virtue of how she believes even though the believer's judgments about how she ought now to believe cannot causally determine the character of the belief-regulating processes that give rise to or sustain her belief, nor can these judgments causally determine the content of her belief. And, as a result, the immediate causal impact account gets the scope of the prescriptive epistemic 'ought' wrong by implausibly restricting the set of beliefs over which we can exercise doxastic control. As such, the immediate

causal impact account lacks the resources to vindicate the prescriptive character of significant portions of our evaluative practice in the epistemic domain.<sup>46</sup>

### **Laying the Foundation for an Account of Doxastic Control**

Nevertheless, there is something right, I think, about the way that proponents of the immediate causal impact account have understood what the task of supplying an account of doxastic control involves. The immediate causal impact account is a natural way of developing an intuitively appealing and fundamentally correct line of thought regarding what an account of doxastic control will have to look like if it is to do the work that it is supposed to do in explaining why epistemic evaluation is appropriately prescriptive.

It is easy enough to imagine the proponent of the immediate causal impact account motivating her view in the following way. Notice that we think a believer is appropriately subject to prescriptive epistemic evaluation only if she can follow, respond to, or be guided by epistemic evaluations that she regards as having merit or as being apt.<sup>47</sup> And this result raises the following question: how is it possible for the way in which a believer actually believes to be responsive to or guided by epistemic evaluation?

Here is the skeleton of an answer. Imagine that a believer accepts an epistemic evaluation as apt, perhaps by endorsing a normative judgment with the same content as the evaluation.<sup>48</sup> If this judgment about how the believer ought to believe can shape the way in

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<sup>46</sup>One could, of course, endorse the immediate causal impact account of doxastic control and simply accept that the scope of prescriptive epistemic evaluation is much more limited than our evaluative practice suggests. But I take it that, if possible, we ought to avoid this kind of error theoretic account of our evaluative practice. And the remainder of this paper aims to show that avoiding an error theory here is possible.

<sup>47</sup>Although I will not pursue the thought here, I believe what follows is a natural way of cashing out the idea that the prescriptive ‘ought’ (in the domain of epistemology and elsewhere) implies some sort of ‘can.’

<sup>48</sup>Certain theorists—e.g. Sosa (forthcoming) and Shah (2003)—suggest that the relevant second-order state here is not a normative judgment regarding how one ought to believe, but rather an intention to regulate one’s beliefs in a certain way (e.g. an intention to believe that P only if P is true). I ignore this wrinkle in my discussion because the

which she actually believes, then the evaluation can get a grip on the way in which the believer actually believes via her normative judgment. As a result, the believer can come to conform to the epistemic standards to which the evaluation gives voice.

The suggestion here is that if a believer takes an epistemic evaluation on board, perhaps by making the right sort of normative judgment, then, when all goes well, her having taken the evaluation on board will shape the way in which she actually believes going forward such that she ends up believing in the way in which the evaluation suggests she ought to believe.<sup>49,50</sup> And, plausibly, this is just what it takes for it to be the case that a believer can respond to and be guided by epistemic evaluation in the way that makes such evaluation appropriately prescriptive in character.

If this answer to the “how is it possible...” question with which we began is at least roughly correct, then a believer can follow, respond to, or be guided by epistemic evaluations because the way in which she actually believes can be somehow regulated by or responsive to

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success of the arguments both in defense of and against the different accounts of doxastic control that I canvas here do not turn on whether we understand the second-order state in question as being a normative judgment or an intention or some other sort of state.

<sup>49</sup>This way of putting things might make it seem as if the right place to look for an explanation of the prescriptive character of epistemic evaluation is in the literature on rule-following in the epistemic domain. However I think, for reasons that are particularly clearly expressed in Boghossian (2008), that attempts to explicate our capacity to exercise doxastic control in terms of conventional accounts of our ability to follow epistemic rules will not yield fruit.

<sup>50</sup>I take it that the fact that the ways in which we actually believe are somehow coupled to how we think we ought to believe partially constitutes, or at the very least helps underwrite, our capacity to believe for, in response to, and on the basis of (what we take to be) *reasons*. And so, I agree, in the main, with those who have suggested that the capacity to exercise doxastic control is bound up with or best understood in terms of the capacity to believe for, in response to, or on the basis of what one takes to be reasons (e.g. McHugh (2012), (forthcoming) or Boyle (2011), (forthcoming)), or what I take to be the related capacity to settle for oneself the question of whether P in a way that makes one answerable (Hieronymi (2006), (2008), (2009)). However, I do not regard these views as competitors to the accounts of doxastic control that I canvas here. Rather, I take the accounts of doxastic control that I canvas here to provide different ways of spelling out part of what it takes to have the capacity to believe for, in response to, or on the basis of (what one takes to be) reasons, and/or part of that in virtue of which it makes sense to say that believing that P involves settling for oneself the question of whether P. I hope to explore the connection between the capacity for doxastic control and the capacity to respond to reasons in believing in more detail in later work.

her understanding of how she ought to believe. So, if the fact that a believer exercises doxastic control is to explain why a believer is appropriately subject to prescriptive epistemic evaluation, it follows that exercising doxastic control must involve being such that the way in which one actually forms, revises, or sustains one's beliefs is somehow the product of or regulated by one's own conception of ideal belief formation, maintenance, and revision.<sup>51</sup> Put differently, a believer exercises doxastic control in believing when her understanding of how she ought to believe is coupled to the ways in which she actually believes such that she can come to believe in the ways that she thinks she ought to believe (at least in part) because she thinks that she ought to believe in those ways. A believer exercises doxastic control when, should she judge that she ought to believe in a certain way, her judgment is sufficient on its own to bring the way in which she believes closer in line with her conception of the relevant epistemic ideal. Exercising doxastic control involves having capacity to actually believe in the image of how one accepts that one ought to believe.

Of course, this first pass at describing what is involved in exercising doxastic control, however intuitively appealing, is too underdeveloped and uninformative to underwrite a satisfying explanation of when and why believers are appropriately subject to prescriptive epistemic evaluation for believing as they do. An explanatorily powerful account of doxastic control will have to describe the particular mechanism via which how a believer actually believes is responsive to or shaped by her conception of the relevant epistemic ideals.<sup>52</sup> That is, an

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<sup>51</sup>I assume here that a believer's conception of ideal belief regulation is, at least in paradigmatic cases, constituted by her normative judgments about how she ought to believe, and can be given voice by her intentions to regulate her beliefs in certain specific ways.

<sup>52</sup>Imagine a believer who believes that  $\sim P$  and that  $P \vee Q$ , wonders whether  $Q$ , and elects to undergo a procedure of targeted electromagnetic stimulation that will cause her to form a belief that  $Q$  on the basis of her beliefs that  $\sim P$  and that  $P \vee Q$  because she judges that she ought to reason in this way in the circumstances at hand. This believer's normative judgment about how she ought to reason in the case at hand is causally efficacious with respect to the operation of the belief-regulating processes that actually generate and sustain her belief that  $Q$ . And perhaps this is

account of doxastic control will have to spell out the way in which a believer's judgments about how she ought to believe are *coupled to* the way in which she actually believes. And this is precisely what the immediate causal impact account purports to do.

There are, however, alternative strategies one might pursue in unpacking this coupling metaphor. An account of doxastic control that spells out the way in which a believer's normative judgments about how she ought to believe are coupled to how she actually believes in terms of causal efficacy might well endorse a story of the particular causal relationship between how one actually believes, on the one hand, and one's judgment about how one ought to believe, on the other, that differs substantially from the one that the immediate causal impact account puts forward. Or, one might spell out the link between a believer's normative judgments and her actual belief regulation by appeal to a metaphysical relation (e.g. constitution) instead of causal efficacy.

In what follows, I articulate a new kind of causal impact account, according to which our normative judgments can shape how we actually believe by influencing which belief-regulating dispositions we manifest when we believe, that succeeds where the immediate causal impact account fails in capturing the scope of the prescriptive epistemic 'ought'. Finally, I explain why

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enough to ensure that the believer is appropriately subject to some kind of prescriptive epistemic evaluation for believing as she does. In cases like this one, a believer exercises a kind of control that Hieronymi has helpfully identified as manipulative or managerial control in her (2006) or (2008) over how she believes. I do not mean to deny that we can and sometimes do exercise manipulative or managerial control over how we believe. I do think, however, that our evaluative practice presupposes that this is not the only, or even the primary, kind of control that we exercise in believing. And this is because when we employ the prescriptive epistemic 'ought' in criticizing one another, we often presuppose that we are capable of correcting our belief-regulating practices directly, so to speak, without having to manipulate our environment and as soon as we are made aware of the way in which we have fallen short of epistemic standards. In this sense, our evaluative practice presupposes that we are equipped with the capacity to exercise doxastic control in virtue of being wired up in the way that we are, not in virtue of the contingent features of the environment in which we operate. Thus, we should expect that an account of doxastic control will not be simply an account of our capacity to exercise manipulative control over how we believe. Rather, the mechanism via which our conception of ideal belief regulations is coupled to the way in which we actually regulate our beliefs will be tighter and more direct than this.

we ought to favor this account—the disposition regulation account—over a metaphysical account of doxastic control.

### **Coupling as Deferred Causal Impact: The Disposition Regulation Account**

Let us assume, for the moment, that some sort of causal impact account is right and so that it is some kind of causal link between a believer's judgments about how she ought to regulate her beliefs and how she actually regulates her beliefs that constitutes the mechanism of doxastic control. The immediate causal impact account was untenable because there is good reason to think that, at least in certain otherwise-ordinary cases—our judgments about how we ought to believe in the particular set of circumstances with which we are currently faced cannot immediately and directly exert causal power on the ways in which we actually believe in those circumstances. Thus, I propose instead that our judgments about how we ought to believe can get a causal grip on how we actually believe by immediately and directly exerting their causal power in shaping the ways in which we are disposed to regulate our beliefs. In slogan form, I propose that our judgments regarding how we ought to believe shape what we might call our cognitive characters. And so, when the way in which we actually believe manifests our cognitive characters, our normative judgments shape how we actually believe.<sup>53</sup>

Typically, at least, the way in which one believes in any particular set of circumstances manifests one's belief-regulating dispositions. And, as I'll argue below, there is reason to think that, again, at least typically, a believer's judgments about how she ought to believe can be

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<sup>53</sup>The disposition regulation account does not entail a virtue theoretic account of the structure of epistemic standards, and one certainly need not be a virtue epistemologist in order to endorse the disposition regulation account of doxastic control. In fact, none of the accounts of doxastic control that I canvas here take a stand on the structure or the content of epistemic standards or norms. However, the disposition regulation account does fit quite naturally with the virtue theoretic approach since it maintains that, in the first instance, we exercise doxastic control over our belief-regulating dispositions and so over our cognitive characters. As such, it offers a way of spelling out the mechanism that underwrites the kind of explicitly virtue-based account of epistemic responsibility that one finds, for example, in Owens (2000).

causally efficacious all on their own in shaping the way in which she is *disposed* to form, revise, and sustain her beliefs.<sup>54</sup> Thus, I propose that a believer exercises doxastic control when her judgments about how she ought to believe in circumstances similar to those with which she is currently faced are causally efficacious in shaping the belief-regulating disposition(s) that she manifests in believing as she now does. So, a believer exercises doxastic control in believing that P if and only if she is wired up, so to speak, such that her judgments about how she ought to believe in circumstances like the ones with which she is now faced have this kind of direct causal impact on the strength of the various belief-regulating dispositions that she manifests in now believing that P. According to this account—the disposition regulation account—a believer is appropriately subject to prescriptive epistemic evaluation when, were she to make the relevant sort of normative judgment, her judgment would exert a kind of causal influence over the dispositions that she manifests in believing as she does *via* strengthening her disposition to regulate her beliefs in the way that she judges she ought to regulate her beliefs. If the disposition regulation account is roughly correct, then we exercise doxastic control in believing because (i) the ways in which we actually believe manifest our belief-regulating dispositions and (ii) a complete causal explanation of why it is that we are disposed to regulate our beliefs in certain ways and not others cites our understanding of the ways in which we ought to regulate our beliefs.

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<sup>54</sup>Of course, there are a slew of background conditions that must obtain if the normative judgment is to exert causal power in the way described. Perhaps the normative judgment will not be causally efficacious in shaping how the believer is disposed to form, revise, and sustain her beliefs if, just as the believer makes the normative judgment, she has a seizure, or sustains a serious brain injury, or if a mad scientist uses a small electrode to stimulate the believer's brain in a certain particular way, etc. Certainly the 'all on its own' language that I employ here and below is not meant to suggest otherwise. This language is only meant to mark that, unlike when Pascal's judgment that he ought to believe that God exists causes him to so believe (by first causing him take actions that he knows will result in his acquiring the belief in question), there is nothing that a believer must do, no further action that the believer must take, for her normative judgment to be causally efficacious in the way described.

If the disposition regulation account is right, then one can follow instructions or advice regarding how to regulate one's beliefs because one's judgments about how one ought to believe can be (in part) causally responsible for what one actually believes. As such, the kind of causal link to which the disposition regulation account appeals supplies us with a natural way of understanding what it takes for a believer to be responsive to or guided by her conception of ideal belief regulation in actually regulating her beliefs.<sup>55</sup> On the disposition regulation account, however, one's judgments about how one ought to believe can be partially causally responsible for how one actually believes only by being partially causally responsible for the disposition to form, revise, and sustain one's beliefs in certain ways that one manifests in believing. Thus, in contrast to the immediate causal impact account, the disposition regulation account is a deferred causal impact account. If the disposition regulation account is right, then the believer's normative judgment has no immediate causal impact on how she now believes.<sup>56</sup> As a result, the disposition regulation account escapes the kind of criticism that I have argued undermines the immediate causal impact account.

Furthermore, the disposition account posits that the causal impact that a believer's normative judgments have on the strength of belief-regulating dispositions is entirely automatic and unreflective. This strengthening or weakening effect is not, for example, modulated by the believer's intentional efforts to bring her dispositions in line with her normative judgments.

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<sup>55</sup>I suggested above that I think an account of the way in which a believer's conception of ideal belief regulation is coupled to her actual belief regulation ought to help illuminate what it takes to believe for, in response to, or on the basis of reasons. And, although I do not have space to develop the idea here, I think the disposition regulation account can also help us understand what is involved in believing in response to, for, or on the basis of reasons. Very roughly, perhaps believing for, in response to, or on the basis of *reasons* involves its being the case that the way in which one believes manifests a belief-regulating disposition the strength of which itself manifest the causal influence of the believer's understanding of how she ought to believe.

<sup>56</sup>And, although I cannot pursue the idea here, it is for this reason that I believe the disposition regulation account is well positioned to underwrite an account of epistemic agency that is not vulnerable to the kinds of objections that Boyle (2011) raises against "process theories" of epistemic agency.



Thus, the disposition regulation account does not objectionably over-complicate the cognitive processes that generate, sustain, and revise belief, nor does it over-intellectualize the way in which we come to have the belief-regulating dispositions or cognitive habits that we have.

Finally, there is some empirical reason to think that we are actually wired up, so to speak, in the way that the disposition regulation account suggests. Early results in psychology on the effectiveness of if-then planning (i.e. planning via implementation intention) in shaping future behavioral, affective, and cognitive responses to stimuli constitutes some reason to expect that certain sorts of normative judgments can have precisely the kind of impact on our belief-regulating dispositions that the disposition regulation account proposes.<sup>57</sup> These results suggest that if-then plans (e.g. if I find cookies in the mail room when I go to get a cup of coffee, then I will not eat them) are especially effective in shaping future behavioral, affective, and cognitive responses to stimuli because if-then plans forge an associative link between specific stimuli and a target response. Furthermore, researchers suggest that the effect of this link (or perhaps part of what constitutes the associative link itself) is the automatic strengthening of a subject's disposition to respond to the set of stimuli catalogued in the antecedent of the plan in the way specified by the consequent. The more easily identifiable or recognizable and the less abstractly specified the relevant inputs and output are, the stronger the strengthening effect will be.

Crucially, judgments regarding how one ought to believe in response to various sorts of cognitive inputs are like implementation intentions in the following respect: normative judgments regarding how one ought to believe pair a set of inputs to cognitive processing with a target output. One might judge that, for example, if one's perceptual experience represents one's immediate surroundings as being thus-and-so and circumstances are otherwise normal (inputs),

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<sup>57</sup>For a quite comprehensive review of the relevant psychological literature, see Webb, T. L., Schweiger Gallo, I., Miles, E., Gollwitzer, P. M., & Sheeran, P. (2012) or Gollwitzer, P. M., & Sheeran, P. (2006).

one ought to believe that one's immediate surroundings are thus-and-so (target output). Thus, the effectiveness of if-then planning in shaping a subject's dispositions to respond to stimuli in specific ways constitutes preliminary psychological evidence that a believer's normative judgments about how she ought to regulate her beliefs can directly and automatically shape her belief-regulating dispositions.<sup>58</sup>

### **Coupling as Causal Impact vs. Coupling as Metaphysical Constitution**

The disposition regulation account and the immediate causal impact account both maintain that the right way to cash out the idea that our normative judgments about how we ought to believe are coupled to the way in which we actually believe is to describe a mechanism of causal influence that links our normative judgments to how we actually believe. One might think, however, that the sense in which our beliefs are coupled to our normative judgments regarding how we ought to believe is metaphysical rather than causal. Perhaps the way in which our normative judgments about how to believe are coupled to—and so, in some sense, can guide or shape—how we actually believe, is not best understood in terms of our normative judgments somehow exerting causal influence over either our belief-regulating processes or over the contents of our beliefs, but rather in terms of there being some sort of special metaphysical relationship that links our beliefs to our normative judgments about how to believe.

The constitution account of doxastic control is grounded in precisely this line of thought. According to the constitution account, judging that I ought now believe that P constitutively involves actually believing that P. Believing that P is just part of what is involved in making a

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<sup>58</sup>Furthermore, this research suggests that the normative judgments that will have the most pronounced effects on a believer's belief-regulating dispositions will be normative judgments which link easily recognizable inputs with a specific target output (e.g. if sky is gray, the pavement is wet, and the trees are dripping and one's circumstances are otherwise normal, then one ought to believe that it has rained).

normative judgment that one ought to now believe that P.<sup>59</sup> As a result, on the constitution account, it is metaphysically impossible for a believer to judge that she ought to believe that P in the circumstances at hand and yet fail to now believe that P, because the latter mental attitude partially constitutes the former.<sup>60</sup> Insofar as one judges that one ought now believe that P, it is metaphysically guaranteed that one also now believes that P. And it is this fact, according to the constitution account, that underwrites one's capacity to follow or be guided by instructions or advice regarding how to reason that one accepts as apt. So, the fact that our beliefs are coupled to our normative judgments via constitution explains why we are appropriately subject to genuinely prescriptive epistemic evaluation.

So, why favor a causal impact account—and, in particular, the disposition regulation account—over the constitution account? Let me be clear: I offer no argument here against the claim that a believer's belief that P partially constitutes her normative judgment that she ought

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<sup>59</sup>If one thinks, as I do, that there could be believers who lack the capacity to make normative judgments about their own mental attitudes, then one must deny the converse constitution claim (i.e. the claim that a belief that P is partially constituted by a normative judgment that one ought now to believe that P). However, one might think that *our* capacity for belief (understood as an essentially rational capacity, and, at least in this regard, as being fundamentally different from any capacity that non-rational animals might have) and our capacity to make normative judgments about our own mental attitudes are metaphysically bound together. Put differently, one might think that our capacity to make normative judgments about how we ought to believe fundamentally alters the nature of our capacity to believe. And if something along these lines is right, then it is plausible that, at least for believers like us, both the original constitution claim and its converse hold: a normative judgment that one ought now to believe that P partially constitutes one's belief that P and *vice versa*. On this sort of view, believing that P on some particular basis and judging that one ought to believe that P on that very basis constitute a kind of metaphysical package: the belief partially constitutes the normative judgment and the normative judgment partially constitutes the belief. I think it is most charitable to read Boyle (forthcoming), (2011) and Korsgaard (2006) as endorsing just this kind of view.

<sup>60</sup>An account of the metaphysical link that connects first-order beliefs and normative judgments about how we ought to believe according to which a normative judgment that one ought now to believe that P partially constitutes one's belief that P, but one's belief that P *does not* partially constitute one's normative judgment that one ought to now believe that P will not be able to explain why it is that we are capable of following the instructions, directions, or advice embedded in prescriptive epistemic evaluation. This is because we accept, internalize, or take up instructions or advice by making a normative judgment. And so a metaphysical connection between normative judgment and belief can only explain why we are capable of following or being guided by instructions or advice that we regard as apt if making a normative judgment metaphysically guarantees that we believe in accordance with the judgment that we make. The thesis that one's belief that P partially constitutes one's normative judgment that one ought now to believe that P can underwrite this metaphysical guarantee. The thesis that a normative judgment that one ought now to believe that P partially constitutes one's belief that P, however, cannot.

now to believe that P. For all I say below, it may well be that our normative judgments about how we ought now to believe are partially constituted by our first-order beliefs in just the way that a proponent of the constitution account suggests.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, I think we have good reason to reject the constitution account of doxastic control.

Here is why. Notice that we are appropriately subject to genuinely prescriptive praise or criticism in virtue not only of how we believe, but also how we intend, hope, fear, anger, etc. We think that one is reasonable, rational, or justified in intending, hoping, fearing, feeling pride, or feeling anger as a result of and in response to certain sorts of mental inputs, but not others. We think, for example, that one ought to intend to  $\phi$  as a result of and in response to having certain combinations of beliefs and values or ends, but not as a result of and in response to having other combinations of beliefs and values or ends. And when we praise or criticize one another for intending, hoping, or fearing in certain ways, our praise or criticism is often instructive or directive in character. Evaluations with respect to the various different standards of rationality, reasonableness, or justification that govern the ways in which we regulate the various different sorts of mental attitudes that we have can be and often are genuinely prescriptive.

This shows, I think, that there is a broader genus of prescriptive evaluation—I'll call it rational evaluation—of which prescriptive epistemic evaluation is a species. One is appropriately subject to prescriptive rational evaluation in virtue of having a particular mental attitude whenever that attitude is of a sort for which one can be appropriately asked to provide justifying or rationalizing reasons. And so, doxastic control (whatever it involves) must be a

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<sup>61</sup>One might worry that the constitution account is obviously false since I can judge that I ought to believe that P because I am being offered a reward and yet fail to so believe. But this is too quick. The normative judgments to which the constitution account is meant to apply involve the epistemic 'ought,' and it is far less clear that one can judge that one epistemically ought to believe that P and yet fail to believe that P.

species of a more general type of control—I'll call it rational control—that explains when and why individuals are appropriately subject to prescriptive evaluation with respect to the norms of rationality or justification that govern how we form, revise, and maintain the various different sorts of mental attitudes that we have. We ought to be able to generalize an account of doxastic control—an account of the link between a believer's normative judgments regarding how she ought to believe and how she actually believes—to generate an account of rational control that can explain when and why all sorts of rational evaluation are prescriptive. I argue below that we ought to favor the disposition regulation account of doxastic control over the constitution account of doxastic control because the former can be naturally extended to provide a unified account of rational control and the latter cannot.<sup>62</sup>

The reason that the constitution account of doxastic control cannot supply a unified account of rational control is that, even assuming it is plausible that one's normative judgment that one ought now to believe that P is constitutively linked to one's belief that P, it is not at all plausible that one's normative judgment that one ought now to have a certain mental state (e.g. an intention to  $\phi$ , a wish or hope that P, a fear of X) is constitutively linked to the first-order mental state that one's normative judgment is about. Focus on the case of intention for a moment. If I judge that, given how desperately I want to stick to my diet, I ought to intend to refrain from eating the scoop ice cream that has been put in front of me, I may, nevertheless, find

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<sup>62</sup>Either a reflective control account or a reflective guidance account of the mechanism of rational control might seem promising, at least at first pass, as applied to the cases of intention, hope, fear, etc. David Owens, for example, endorses a reflective control account of the kind of control we exercise in intending, although he denies that we have the capacity for reflective control over our beliefs. Perhaps he is right that our intentions are responsive to our normative judgments in just the way that a reflective control model suggests. Nevertheless, since neither reflective control nor reflective guidance provides a suitable model of doxastic control, to adopt either sort of account *as an account of rational control* amounts to rejecting that there is a *unified* account of rational control and so a unified explanation of when and why subjects are prescriptively evaluable in believing and in intending, hoping, fearing, etc. In light of the apparent unity in the phenomena to be explained, giving up on supplying a unified account here should be viewed as a kind of last resort, one that this section shows there is no need to pursue.

myself quite intentionally digging in. And I might well intend to have another serving of ice cream when I am through, while judging that I ought not so intend. Cases like these suggest that it is possible to make a normative judgment that one ought, in the circumstances at hand, intend to  $\phi$ , and yet fail to now intend to  $\phi$ , and that it is possible to intend to  $\phi$  without judging that one ought now intend to  $\phi$ .<sup>63,64</sup> But if the normative judgment that one ought now to intend to  $\phi$  is not necessarily accompanied by the intention to  $\phi$ , then it cannot be that an intention to  $\phi$  partially constitutes this judgment. And if one's intention to  $\phi$  is not necessarily accompanied by the normative judgment that one ought now so intend, then this judgment cannot partially constitute the intention to  $\phi$ .

We cannot explain why agents are often appropriately subject to prescriptive rational evaluation in virtue of how they intend by understanding the link between an agent's normative judgments and her intentions in terms of constitution, because it is implausible that an agent's normative judgments and her intentions are actually metaphysically linked in this way.<sup>65</sup> If we accept the constitution account of doxastic control, then we must also accept that there is no

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<sup>63</sup>It is perhaps natural to think that something like what I describe here is precisely what is going on in cases of practical akrasia, but I mean to remain agnostic regarding whether or not this is the right way of understanding that phenomenon. Regardless, what I describe here seems to be possible, and that is enough for the present argument.

<sup>64</sup>Perhaps the proponent of a constitution account might respond as follows in an effort to rescue her view: in the first of these cases, I intend both to eat the ice cream and to refrain from eating the ice cream; in the second, I judge both that I ought and that I ought not to have another scoop. However, this way of interpreting what is going on in these cases is in conflict with the phenomenology of the agent. If asked in the second case whether I think that I ought to intend to have a second scoop of ice cream, I might respond by saying, "of course not! I know that I'll feel sick if I have another scoop! I'm standing in line for another scoop because I intend to have one even though I know that I ought not. I wish that I could give up my intention to have another scoop, but alas, I am overcome by temptation." At the very least, considerations of simplicity and parsimony tell against interpreting the cases in the way suggested here, and so, without independent motivation, this move is ad hoc at best.

<sup>65</sup>It is even less plausible, I think, that one's normative judgments regarding what one ought to fear are constitutively linked to one's fears, or that one's normative judgments regarding in virtue of what one ought to feel pride are constitutively linked to feeling proud.

unified explanation of when and why we are subject to prescriptive rational evaluation for regulating the various different sorts of mental attitudes that we have in the ways that we do.

However, the disposition regulation account of doxastic control can be naturally extended to supply a unified account of rational control, and so to underwrite a unified explanation of the (sometimes) prescriptive character of rational evaluation of various different mental attitude types. Let us focus again on intention. Imagine I judge that I ought to intend to perform M when I adopt a particular end E, and believe that performing a particular action M constitutes a necessary means to achieving E. If I exercise rational control in intending, then according to the disposition regulation account of rational control, my normative judgment will be sufficient on its own to strengthen my disposition to intend to perform actions that I believe to be the necessary means to my various ends. Put in other terms, my normative judgment that I ought to form intentions in response to my beliefs and my ends in a way that corresponds to the pattern of reasoning described here itself strengthens my disposition to form intentions in precisely this way. And if I judge often enough that I ought to regulate my intentions in a way that corresponds to this pattern of regulation, I will develop a strong standing disposition to regulate my intentions in just this way.

The psychological results that I discuss above lend support to the thesis that we are wired up, so to speak, just as the disposition regulation account suggests, just as much in the case of intention as in the case of belief. So it is plausible that my normative judgments are causally efficacious with respect to my intention-regulating dispositions in precisely this way. And, just as in the case of belief, the fact that they are is enough to ensure that I can, in the relevant sense, follow instructions or directives regarding how to form, revise, and sustain my intention. If I judge that I ought to intend to perform M when I adopt a particular end E, and believe that

performing a particular action M constitutes a necessary means to achieving E, then (assuming I have the capacity for rational control) just by making this judgment, I am on my way toward developing a standing disposition to form intentions in a way that conforms with my judgment about how I ought to intend. If an agent who exercises rational control over how she intends takes up the instructions embedded in a bit of rational praise or criticism by judging that she ought to regulate her intentions in the way that these instructions describe, the way in which she actually intends going forward will have been guided by these instructions. Thus, if the disposition regulation account is right, then the fact that an agent can exercise rational control in intending is enough to explain why she is appropriately subject to genuinely prescriptive evaluation for intending as she does.

As such, a disposition regulation account of rational control is well suited to explain when and why we appropriately take each other to be targets of genuinely prescriptive evaluation with respect to standards of rationality or justification in intending. And there is no reason to doubt that an analogous explanation of when and why we appropriately take each other to be targets of genuinely prescriptive rational evaluation in virtue of how we regulate various other sorts of mental attitudes that we have is in the offing.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the disposition regulation account is especially well positioned to underwrite a unified account of when and why we are appropriate targets of prescriptive evaluation in virtue of how we form, revise, and sustain the range of different types of mental attitudes that we are capable of having.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Although I do not have space here for a detailed discussion of this point, I think it is quite plausible that we enjoy different degrees of rational control over our different types of mental attitudes. Perhaps, for example, we are more capable of exercising rational control in believing and intending than in fearing, wishing, or angering. If this is right, then we have yet another reason to favor a disposition regulation account over a constitution account of rational control: the kind of strengthening effect to which a disposition regulation account appeals might well take on different magnitudes in cases involving different mental attitude types, but constitution cannot come in degrees.

<sup>67</sup>Although a full treatment of the issue is beyond the scope of this paper, I believe that a disposition regulation account of rational control can also supply a satisfying explanation of when and why individuals, as well as group



## Conclusion

Here is an intuitively appealing thought about what is required for a believer to have the capacity to be guided by instructions regarding how to believe: a believer is capable of responding to instructions or directions regarding how she ought to believe because the way in which she actually forms, revises, and maintains her beliefs is somehow coupled to and can be regulated by her own conception of how she ought to form, revise, and maintain her beliefs. Plausibly, then, it is this link between a believer's conception of ideal belief regulation and her actual belief regulation that constitutes her capacity to exercise doxastic control. The mechanism of doxastic control is just the mechanism via which a believer's conception of ideal belief regulation is coupled to the ways in which she actually regulates her beliefs.

The immediate causal impact account, the disposition regulation account, and the constitution account are all inspired by and best understood as attempts to flesh out this foundational thought. I argue, however, that the disposition regulation account is better positioned than its competitors to supply a satisfying explanation of when and why it is that believers are appropriately subject to prescriptive epistemic evaluation for believing as they do. The immediate causal impact account rightly cashes out the link between a believer's normative judgments regarding how she ought to believe and the way in which she actually believes in terms of a kind of causal impact that the former have on the latter. But the immediate causal impact account is committed to an implausibly immediate model of this causal connection. Thus, the disposition regulation account, according to which a believer's normative judgments regarding how she ought to believe have a kind of deferred causal impact on how she actually

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agents (a board of directors, a government agency, etc.), are subject to genuinely prescriptive evaluation with respect to standards of rationality or justification in virtue of how they act. Notice that this is precisely what we should expect if, as I suggest above in notes 17 and 23, an account of this sort of control helps to explain what it takes to be reasons-responsive, since both individuals and group agents are typically responsive to reasons in acting.

believes, succeeds where the immediate causal impact account fails in explaining the scope of prescriptive epistemic evaluation. Furthermore, the disposition regulation account can underwrite a plausible and unified explanation of when and why evaluation with respect to the different standards of rationality, justification, or reasonableness that govern our various different types of mental attitudes is prescriptive, while the constitution account cannot.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>I am especially grateful to Matthew Kotzen, William Lycan, Lisa Miracchi, Ram Neta, Blake Roeber, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, Nishiten Shah, Susanna Siegel, Ernest Sosa, Kurt Sylvan, and Vida Yao for their feedback on earlier drafts of this piece.

## **CHAPTER 3: WHY THE EPISTEMIC STATUS OF OUR BELIEFS OUGHT TO WEIGH WITH US**

### **Introduction**

Our evaluative practice in the epistemic domain suggests that we always have reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with norms of epistemic rationality or justification. Thus, facts about the epistemic status of our actual or potential beliefs are not without normative import or consequence. Rather, these kinds of facts ought to weigh with us: that a particular one of a subject's beliefs has positive epistemic status (i.e. constitutes an instance of believing in conformity with epistemic norms) guarantees that the subject has genuine normative reason(s) counting in favor of holding that belief.

This paper develops and defends an explanation of why this is so. Sections 2 and 3 motivate a certain explanatory strategy—the constitutivist strategy—and then defuse an intuitively gripping line of objection to this strategy. In the course of so doing, I show that any account adopting the constitutivist strategy faces a certain explanatory burden. Section 4 articulates one sort of constitutivist account that can discharge this explanatory burden, but shows this sort of account to be untenable for other reasons. And section 5 articulates and defends a new constitutivist account of why it is that the epistemic status of our beliefs ought to weigh with us succeeds where other extant accounts fall short.

### **Understanding the Explanandum**

Imagine that Pat is diagnosed with a severe illness. Pat knows medical studies confirm that 98% of patients with her diagnosis die within three months. And yet, Pat remains somewhat optimistic regarding her own chances of survival: she believes that she is somewhat likely to

recover; that she has a fighting chance. Pat's belief is epistemically irrational and unjustified. After all, her evidence suggests that it is overwhelmingly likely that she will die within three months.<sup>69</sup> Still, suppose that Pat's epistemically unwarranted optimism will increase the quantity and quality of the life she has left. In this case, it is hard to say why Pat should be moved at all by her knowledge of the research on patient outcomes to temper her optimism. Put differently, it is mysterious why Pat should regard the irrationality of her unrealistically optimistic belief as relevant in any way to the question of whether she believes as she ought to believe, given her circumstances.<sup>70,71</sup>

Reflection on this and similar cases naturally precipitates two flavors of response. The first is concessive: it suggests that the epistemic status of Pat's unrealistically optimistic belief ought not matter to Pat at all in the case at hand. The idea here is that Pat would be thoroughly uncriticizable were she to be entirely indifferent to whether her belief about how likely she is to recover is epistemically rational. Given her circumstances, the epistemic status of Pat's unrealistically optimistic belief does not bear on the question of what she ought to believe about her own chances of recovery. The second flavor of response is dogmatic: it suggests that

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<sup>69</sup>We may stipulate that Pat's medical case is in no way exceptional and so that she has no evidence to the effect that the medical studies on patient outcomes are anything but entirely indicative of the likely progression of her illness.

<sup>70</sup>Here and below, the 'ought' in question is the 'all-things-considered ought.' However, appeals to this sort of 'all-things-considered ought' are not uncontroversial. Feldman (2000), for example, suggests that the question with which I am concerned here—"why (not epistemically speaking, but all things considered) ought we care about the epistemic status of our beliefs?"—is, at least as it stands, defective or incoherent. I do not share Feldman's skepticism on this front, but cannot do justice to his concerns in this piece.

<sup>71</sup>One might be tempted to think that framing this issue in deontological terms—i.e. in terms of what sorts of considerations bear on what Pat *ought* to believe in the circumstances with which she is faced; in terms of whether Pat has genuine normative reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms and avoid believing in ways that violate epistemic norms—presuppose an objectionable form of doxastic voluntarism, according to which Pat can form a belief about her own chances of recovery at will, so to speak (for a series of argument that might draw on toward this conclusion, see Alston (1988)). But I believe this is a mistake. I agree with Alston (1988) that framing the issue with which I am concerned in this piece in deontological terms does presuppose that believers are capable of exercising some kind of control over their own belief formation, revision, and maintenance. However, I defend an account of doxastic control in Nolfi (2014) that I believe can sustain the deontological register I adopt here and yet falls short of doxastic voluntarism.

although perhaps Pat ought to be excused or forgiven for believing as she does in the case at hand, she is nevertheless required to conform with the norms of epistemic rationality here as much as elsewhere.<sup>72</sup> Thus, Pat has gone wrong; she has decisive reason to not believe in the unrealistically optimistic way that she does. Although Pat's mistake here is perhaps understandable, excusable, or forgivable, it is a genuine mistake, nonetheless.

But both flavors of response are unsatisfactory. And this is because neither one is equipped to vindicate the complicated way in which our evaluative practice actually handles cases like Pat's.

It is telling that our evaluative practice treats as genuinely permissible—not merely as excusable or understandable—that Pat believes irrationally here. We do not think that Pat does something genuinely wrong in believing that she has a fighting chance. Rather, we think Pat has precisely the sort of belief about this matter that she ought, all things considered, to have, given her circumstances. Evidence of this fact is that we think that Pat's doctors and loved ones would be entirely immune from criticism were they to help Pat cultivate and sustain her unwarranted optimism here. Of course, we might admit that Pat's optimism is criticizable from an epistemic perspective. But from an all-things-considered point of view, it seems that Pat's unrealistic optimism ought to be praised and encouraged, not condemned or rebuked.<sup>73</sup> And this shows that our evaluative practice does not treat the fact that one's belief is epistemically irrational or unjustified as sufficient to establish that one does not believe as one ought, all things considered, to believe in the circumstances with which one is faced. That one believes irrationally does not, it seems, guarantee that one has decisive normative reason(s) against believing as one does.

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<sup>72</sup>Many—perhaps most famously, W. K. Clifford—have expressed sympathy with this kind of dogmatic response.

<sup>73</sup>Again, for the purposes of what follows I simply assume that the question of what or how, given one's particular circumstances, one, all things considered, ought to believe is coherent, legitimate, and, at least sometimes, pressing.

Nevertheless, we think that Pat ought to recognize the results of medical studies on patient outcomes as bearing directly on the question of what she ought to believe about her own chances of recovery. And, since Pat's knowledge of these results is what determines (in part) the epistemic status of Pat's belief, this shows that we think the negative epistemic status of Pat's unrealistically optimistic belief ought to weigh with her. Pat may not dismiss or brush aside (either internally in reflection or in a conversational exchange) concerns about the epistemic status of her unrealistically optimistic belief as thoroughly irrelevant to the issue of whether she, in fact, believes as she ought to believe. And should Pat recognize her optimistic belief as epistemically unwarranted, we expect Pat to accept that she has some reason to temper her optimism.

All this suggests that our evaluative practice is premised upon the assumption that, although the epistemic status of our beliefs is not necessarily decisive in determining what we ought, all things considered, to believe, the epistemic status of our beliefs ought, nevertheless, to weigh with us. Put differently, our evaluative practice presupposes that there is an intimate connection between the epistemic status of our (actual or potential) beliefs and the normative reasons that we have for believing in certain ways and not others. In particular, our evaluative practice presumes that the epistemic status of each of our (actual or potential) beliefs is *reason-guaranteeing*.<sup>74</sup> That is (i) if S's belief that P is irrational or unjustified, then S has (*pro tanto*) reason(s) that counts against her believing that P and (ii) if S's belief that P is rational or justified, then S has (*pro tanto*) reason(s) that counts in favor of her believing that P.<sup>75</sup> And this

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<sup>74</sup>Although perhaps not *reason-giving* (see note 75).

<sup>75</sup>Notice that this way of formulating the explanandum does not entail that the rationality/irrationality of one's belief that P is, itself, a reason for/against believing that P in the circumstances with which one is faced. It is compatible with the above formulation that, supposing, e.g., that the evidential considerations of which one is currently aware that bear on whether P wholly determine whether one's belief that P is rational, the reasons one has for or against believing that P are *just* the evidential considerations of which one is currently aware that bear on whether P.

presumption, a presumption that I've argued is manifest in the way in which our evaluative handles cases like Pat's, is one that neither the concessive nor the dogmatic line of response to Pat's case can vindicate.

I propose that we take our evaluative practice here at face value and so accept that (i) and (ii) capture the sense in which the epistemic status of each of our beliefs gets a normative grip on us, so to speak.<sup>76</sup> In so doing, we arrive at

*Guaranteed Reason (GR)*: we always have *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe ways that conform with epistemic norms and *pro tanto* reason(s) to avoid believing in ways that fail to conform with epistemic norms.

In the remainder of this paper, my aim is to explain why it is that, regardless of one's particular circumstances, the epistemic status of each of one's beliefs is reason-guaranteeing by developing and defending a vindicating explanation of *GR*.

### **The Constitutivist Strategy**

The scope of our evaluative practice in the epistemic domain suggests that *GR* applies to all believers like us, regardless of what sorts of idiosyncratic circumstances we face on any particular occasion.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it is plausible that *GR* holds in virtue of the fact that we are believers of a particular sort and so that *GR* captures a certain necessary feature of *believers like us* (i.e. a necessary feature of a certain sort of entity, paradigmatically situated in a certain sort of environment).<sup>78</sup> In this respect, at least, it seems that *GR* might be very much like, e.g., the fact

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<sup>76</sup>I assume here that, *ceteris paribus*, we ought to prefer a vindicating explanation of (aspects of) our evaluative practice over an error-theoretic explanation. Since I believe that we can give a vindicating explanation of the fact that the epistemic status of each of our beliefs is reason guaranteeing—namely, the explanation that I offer below—I see no reason to opt for an error-theoretic explanation.

<sup>77</sup>Believers like us are not, I take it, located in demon worlds, in worlds where there are epistemic angels, etc.

<sup>78</sup>Constitutivists often do not appeal explicitly to any sort of privileged environment in which believers like us operate in developing their account and some might reject the inclusion of an environmental condition of this sort in

that water is a gas at 500 degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>79</sup> And, if this is right, then, just as we look to facts about what is involved in, constitutive of, or essential to being a collection of water molecules to explain why water is a gas at 500 degrees Fahrenheit, it makes sense to look to facts about what is involved in being believers of the sort that we are to explain why it is that we ought to care about the epistemic status of our beliefs.

It is worth making explicit that pursuing this kind of explanatory strategy—call it the constitutivist strategy—in an effort to explain *GR* involves two related tasks.<sup>80</sup> First, the constitutivist must provide an account of what is involved, for us, in having the capacity for belief (i.e. an account of what is constitutive of having the kind of capacity for belief that we have, of being believers of the sort that we are). Of course, this account must be independently plausible, or else the constitutivist's explanation of *GR* will be *ad hoc*. Second, the constitutivist must show how it is either built into or falls out of this account that the epistemic status of each of our beliefs is reason-guaranteeing. In other words, the constitutivist must explain how facts about what is involved, for us, in having the kind of capacity for belief that we have entail that the epistemic status of each of our beliefs is reason-guaranteeing.

It can seem that there is good reason for optimism that the constitutivist strategy will yield explanatory fruit. After all, it can seem, at least at first pass, that the constitutivist can garner sufficient resources to complete both these tasks by appealing, in one way or another, to

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an account of what it takes to be a believer of the sort that we are. I think this is a mistake. One, but not the only reason, is that it is not at all obvious what to say about whether, e.g., believers in demon worlds, for example, have reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms – our evaluative practice is indeterminate or inconclusive at best in the way that it handles such cases. Thus, it is not at all obvious that we should *want* an explanation of *GR* according to which believers in demon worlds have such reason(s).

<sup>79</sup>After all, if water is under extremely high pressure, then it will be liquid at 500 degrees Fahrenheit.

<sup>80</sup>Prominent theorists who express sympathy for and/or pursue the constitutivist strategy, as I've characterized it here, include Bratman, Korsgaard, Shah and Velleman, Street, and Wedgwood.



the independently attractive idea that believing is a constitutively norm governed activity or performance (or, put in slightly different terms, that belief is a constitutively norm governed state). But the constitutivist strategy, at least when developed in this way, faces an initially gripping and seemingly devastating objection, which I'll call the *schmelief objection*.<sup>81</sup>

In order to feel the bite of the *schmelief* objection, consider Chester, who is playing chess although she has no reason to do so—there is absolutely nothing to be said in favor of her playing the game in the circumstances at hand.<sup>82</sup> If you like, imagine Chester is playing chess on her computer and suddenly realizes that she has completely lost interest in the game. It is easy enough to imagine that Chester continues on for a few more turns, deliberately moving the pieces in ways that conform with rules of the game, after realizing that she has no reason to now play chess and before she actually gets up from her computer. Crucially, it is simply not plausible that, during this time, Chester actually has *pro tanto* reason to move the chess pieces around the board in ways that are chess-legal or that she has *pro tanto* reason against moving the pieces in illegal ways. Since Chester has no reason to remain engaged in chess-playing, whether or not the various ways in which she might move the chess pieces around board conform with the rules of the game simply has no bearing on how she has most reason (or, how she ought) to move the chess pieces.<sup>83</sup> The fact that Chester happens to be playing chess does not guarantee that she has

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<sup>81</sup>For a particularly clear presentation of this kind of objection, see Enoch (2006) and (2011).

<sup>82</sup>Assume here that chess is a constitutively norm governed activity (i.e. the rules of chess are part of what make chess the particular game that it is) and that playing chess constitutively involves treating facts about whether one moves the chess pieces around the board in ways that conform with the rules of the game as reason-guaranteeing.

<sup>83</sup>Of course, when Chester gives up treating the legal status of her moves as reason-guaranteeing, she thereby gives up playing chess. But, and this is the crucial point, she has no reason counting against precisely this course of action in the circumstances with which she is faced. And this shows that Chester cannot possibly have *pro tanto* reason to move the pieces around the board in ways that conform with the rules of chess since, if she did have such reason, it would not be permissible for her to escape or disregard the force of this reason by failing to treat the legal-status of her moves as reason-guaranteeing.

any reason to play chess. And, as a result, the fact the Chester happens to be playing chess is not enough to ensure that she has reason to move the pieces around the board in ways that conform with the rules of the game. Thus, in general, the legal status of a subject's chess move is *not* reason-guaranteeing: that a particular way of moving the pieces is illegal does not ensure that such a subject who is playing chess has a *pro tanto* reason counting against moving the pieces in that way. Unless the subject has some prior reason to play chess in the circumstances with which she is faced, facts about what is involved in playing chess (e.g. that playing chess involves it being the case the one's moves are criticizable *qua* chess move should they violate the rule of the game) tell us nothing about what reasons the subject has for and against moving the pieces around the board in various ways.

If this way of thinking extends to the epistemic domain—and it is far from obvious, one might think, why it does not—then facts about what is involved in being a believer of the sort that we are cannot (at least not on their own) explain *GR*. Assume that believing involves having a kind of mental attitude that is appropriately evaluated with respect to epistemic norms. And assume, for the moment at least, that exercising our capacity for belief involves *treating* the epistemic status of our beliefs as reason-guaranteeing. Even so, it seems that if we have no reason to go in for *belief* or to be *believers*, in the first place—i.e. no reason to form, revise, maintain, and employ *beliefs*, conceived of as being constitutively governed by epistemic norms—then facts about what is involved in being believers of the sort that we are cannot possibly explain why it is the epistemic status of our beliefs *actually is* reason-guaranteeing. To put the point in slightly different terms, were we to lack reason to be believers of the sort that we are, then, in the same way that it is normatively (even if not metaphysically or psychologically) open to the chess-player who lacks reason to play chess to engage in some other kind of activity

(one that might involve moving the chess pieces around the chessboard, but is governed by different constitutive norms or by no norms at all) it must be normatively (even if not metaphysically or psychologically) open to us to give up believing and, instead to go in for another sort of (perhaps belief-like) mental attitude—call it *schmelief*—that is not constitutively governed by epistemic norms. The *schmelief* objection, then, is that, taken on its own, the fact that we are *believers* of a certain sort (rather than *schmelievers*) is cannot but be normatively impotent. Just like the fact that one happens to be playing chess, the fact that we happen to exercise a capacity for *belief* (rather than, e.g., exercising a capacity for *schmelief*) cannot possibly have normative import. And if this is right, then no account of what is involved in having and exercising the kind of capacity for belief that we have can possibly ground an explanation of *GR*.<sup>84</sup> Thus, if the analogical reasoning that underwrites the *schmelief* objection is sound, then the constitutivist strategy is hopeless: no account of what is involved in having the kind of capacity for belief that we have could ever ground the fact that, in any of the circumstances we might expect to face, we have *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms and *pro tanto* reason(s) to avoid or abstain from believing in ways that fail to conform with these norms.

The constitutivist, however, both can and should reject the *schmelief* objection as question-begging. But appreciating why this is illuminates a particular challenge facing the constitutivist, one that the constitutivist account I develop below is especially well-equipped to meet.

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<sup>84</sup>The analogical reasoning that underwrites the *schmelief* objection here purports to establish that facts about what is involved in being believers of the sort that we are could only help to explain *GR* if we had some kind of independent reason to be believers in the first place. But accepting that an explanation of why the epistemic status of our beliefs is reason-guaranteeing must appeal to some prior reason that we have to be believers of a certain sort amounts to abandoning the constitutivist strategy. On this sort of picture, it is the reason that we have to be believers of a certain sort, and not the fact that we actually are believers of this sort, that does all the heavy-lifting in explaining why we ought to care about conforming with epistemic norms.

The constitutivist and her objector agree that a vindicating explanation of *GR* will have to cite some kind of explanatory ground, at least from the perspective of normative explanation, in virtue of which *GR* obtains.<sup>85</sup> The question, then, that divides the constitutivist and her objector is just the question of where to locate this ground. The constitutivist's promissory claim is that the normative facts that ground *GR* can be located in an account of what is involved in having the kind of capacity for belief that we have. The proponent of the schmelief objection, however, is best interpreted as suggesting that the relevant sort of ground cannot possibly be located there. And for this reason, the objector's claim that the facts that ground *GR* cannot possibly be found in an account of what is involved in being believers of the sort that we are is question-begging.<sup>86</sup>

The reasoning that underwrites the schmelief objection relies on an analogy between belief, on the one hand, and constitutively norm governed activities or performances like playing chess, on the other. And, at least as it stands, this analogical reasoning does not constitute a principled reason to deny the constitutivist's promissory claim. The constitutivist is well within her rights to simply reject the analogy on which her objector relies as inapt. After all, our evaluative practice in the epistemic domain differs markedly from our evaluative practice in the domains of other constitutively norm governed activities or performances like playing chess: the epistemic status of our beliefs appears to be reason-guaranteeing, but the chess-legal status of a subject's moves does not. Thus, anyone attracted to the constitutivist strategy has good reason to accept that facts about what is involved in having the kind of capacity for belief that we have

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<sup>85</sup>And this point holds regardless of whether the normative is ultimately reducible to the non-normative.

<sup>86</sup>Adopting a strategy that is very different from the one that I outline here, Ferrero (2009), Korsgaard (2008), Rosati (2003), and Velleman (2005) appeal, in one way or another, to the inevitability of belief and so to the inescapability of our commitment to conforming with epistemic norms in an effort to discharge this explanatory burden. After all, we are stuck believing in a way that a chess player is not stuck playing chess—and this difference constitutes an obvious point at which any sort of analogy between believing and chess-playing breaks down. But, for reasons that are close to those that Enoch (2011) cites, I believe this line of response is wrongheaded.

must possess a kind of normative import for us that facts about what is involved in playing chess, for example, simply do not.

Of course, if the constitutivist is to make use of this line of response, she must supply an account of what is involved in having the kind of capacity for belief we have that sustains this disanalogy. Any tenable account of what is involved in playing chess will not include facts that could plausibly serve as ground for a normative requirement of any kind. But if the constitutivist strategy is to bear fruit, then facts about what is involved in having the kind of capacity for belief that we have must be different: these facts must include some facts that can plausibly serve as a kind of normative bedrock and, as such, can underwrite a satisfying explanation of *GR*. Thus, the reasoning that motivates the schmelief objection reveals that the constitutivist faces a challenge. She must identify constitutive features of believers of the sort that we are that can plausibly underwrite a genuinely normative fact about believers of this sort. However, the analogical reasoning that underwrites the schmelief objection alone simply does not constitute a principled basis for thinking that this challenge cannot be met.<sup>87</sup>

### **GR is Normatively Derivative**

Perhaps the most obvious way for the constitutivist to meet this challenge is by proposing that it is a brute, explanatorily primitive normative fact, built into what is involved in being a believer of the sort that we are at the bottom level, so to speak, that any such believer always has *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe ways that conform with epistemic norms and *pro tanto* reason(s) to

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<sup>87</sup>One way to supply this sort of principled basis might be to show first that an account of what is involved in having the kind of capacity for belief that we have must be stated in purely descriptive terms and then to appeal to something akin to the principle that one cannot derive a normative conclusion from purely descriptive premises. Although I cannot discuss it further here, I am skeptical that this kind of argument could be successful.

avoid believing in ways that fail to conform with epistemic norms. On this sort of proposal—call it *straightforward constitutivism*—*GR* itself constitutes a kind of normative bedrock.<sup>88</sup>

For the straightforward constitutivist, the fact that believers like us have *pro tanto* reason to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms is, from an explanatory perspective, like the fact that water molecules are composed of hydrogen atoms and oxygen atoms. Having the kind of capacity for belief that we have involves being such that the epistemic status of one's beliefs carries normative weight, so to speak. And, just as there is no substantive explanation for why it is that being composed of hydrogen and oxygen is partially constitutive of being water, the straightforward constitutivist maintains that there is no substantive explanation for why it is that being such that the epistemic status of each of one's beliefs is reason-guaranteeing is partially constitutive of being a believer of the sort that we are. For the straightforward constitutivist, creatures who have the kind of capacity for belief that we have *just are* (in part) creatures who always have *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe ways that conform with epistemic norms and *pro tanto* reason(s) to avoid believing in ways that fail to conform with epistemic norms. And there is nothing more that can or needs to be said *vis-à-vis* why this is the case.

The straightforward constitutivist's account of what is involved in being a believer of the sort that we are appears to vindicate *GR* with ease. But, *GR* is not plausibly explanatorily

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<sup>88</sup>Shah and Velleman (2005) and Wedgwood (forthcoming), (2002) seem to endorse a kind of view that is closely related to straightforward constitutivism and, I think, initially appealing to a great many epistemologists. These theorists suggest that a normative requirement compelling us to conform with a truth norm plays a fundamental, explanatorily primitive role in an account of what is involved in being a believer of the sort that we are. Moreover, the fact, built into what it is for us to have the kind of capacity for belief that we have, that we inevitably are and/or recognize ourselves as being normatively required to conform with this truth norm entails that we also have reason to conform with norms of epistemic rationality or justification. Although I do not have space to treat these kind of view separately here, I believe that the same kind of argument that I offer below against straightforward constitutivism undermines any sort of truth norm privileging constitutivist account by showing that the fact that believers like us ought or have reason to conform with a truth norm is not plausibly explanatorily primitive in the way such accounts suggest. And this is because it strikes me that the question of whether one ought, all things considered, to believe truly (as well as the question of whether one has any reason at all to believe truly) can be a live, and even pressing question for believers like us in certain sorts of cases.

primitive in way in which the fact that water molecules are composed of hydrogen and oxygen atoms is. It is implausible that having the kind of capacity for belief that we have constitutively involves always having *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe ways that conform with epistemic norms and *pro tanto* reason(s) to avoid believing in ways that fail to conform with epistemic norms at the bottom level, so to speak, in the way that the straightforward constitutivist suggests.<sup>89</sup> And, for just this reason, the proponent of the constitutivist strategy ought to reject straightforward constitutivism.

The straightforward constitutivist's account is implausible because the question of whether one has *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms (and *pro tanto* reason(s) to avoid believing in ways that fail to conform with epistemic norms) can be a live and even pressing question for believers like us, one that, at least in certain sorts of cases, seems to require a substantive answer. And this fact constitutes good evidence that the fact that we are guaranteed to have such reasons is derivative: *GR* must be grounded on and so explained by some other more fundamental or basic normative fact.

To see why, think back to Pat's case with which we began.<sup>90</sup> Pat knows that, given her circumstances, irrationally believing certain particular propositions (e.g. the somewhat unrealistically optimistic 'I have a real shot at beating the odds here' or 'I very well might win

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<sup>89</sup>Put in different terms, there is good reason to think that the kind of capacity for belief that *we* have is not the kind of capacity for belief that the straightforward constitutivist describes.

<sup>90</sup>As before, it is the structural features of Pat's case that will be relevant here. And it is worth pointing out that there are a variety of ways in which we might fill in the details of a case with the relevant structural features. Most simply, we can imagine a subject threatened by a powerful epistemic thug, who will harm the subject's loved ones and frustrate the subject's most central life projects unless, with respect to a particular proposition, she believes in a way that violates an epistemic norm. Alternatively, we can imagine a subject's psychology is such that having epistemically irrational beliefs about P-like propositions will allow her to pursue certain means to her ends that she would otherwise be unable to pursue successfully. And, it is worth noting that certain results in psychology—see Dennett and McKay (2009) or Hazlett (2013), chapter 2 for helpful reviews of the relevant literature—suggest that this way of filling in the case might well characterize a kind of situation in which we often find ourselves. Hazlett (2013), chapter 3 provides additional arguments for thinking that certain sorts of (at least seemingly) irrational beliefs may play a crucial role in promoting and sustaining one's wellbeing.

my fight with this illness') is guaranteed to better equip her to accomplish her various reasonably adopted goals, than would adopting rational cognitive attitudes (i.e. suspension or disbelief) toward these propositions. Label one of these propositions P. We can easily imagine Pat wondering whether, given her circumstances, the negative epistemic status of her potential belief that P counts *at all* against her believing that P in the circumstances at hand. Both from Pat's own perspective, as well as from our perspective as third party to her case, the question of whether the epistemic status of her potential belief that P is even relevant to determining what Pat ought to believe in the circumstances with which she is now faced strikes us as live, perfectly legitimate, and even pressing. It is a question one whose answer is, at the very least, nonobvious.

Suppose Pat accepts that beliefs are constitutively governed by epistemic norms. So Pat accepts that irrationally believing that P amounts to falling short *qua believer* and so to being criticizable from an epistemic perspective. Still, it is easy enough to imagine Pat wondering, and reasonably so, whether believing in a way that is uncriticizable from an epistemic perspective matters at all in the circumstances at hand. It is far from clear why, or even whether, apt epistemic criticism should move her at all given her present situation. Crucially, such doubts about whether the epistemic status of Pat's belief carries any normative weight at all in the circumstances with which she is faced strikes us as both perfectly coherent and legitimate (even if ultimately answerable).<sup>91</sup> And, for this reason, an account of why it is that the epistemic status of our beliefs is reason-guaranteeing ought to supply a satisfying account of why such doubts are ill-founded.

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<sup>91</sup>Of course, Pat might well be incapable of forming the irrational belief that P so long as she remains convinced that believing that P in her present circumstances would be irrational. But we can imagine Pat regarding this particular limitation of hers as an unfortunate and regrettable feature of her psychology, one that, if at all possible, she ought to try to overcome or circumvent.



In an effort to expose why such doubts are misplaced, the straightforward constitutivist can only cite the fact that being a believer of the sort that we are constitutively involves being such that one has *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms (and *pro tanto* reason(s) to avoid believing in ways that violate epistemic norms). But the relevant concern here is precisely that Pat might be the sort of creature who, in her present circumstances, *lacks* any such reason(s)! If we accept, as the straightforward constitutivist would have it, that believing at all involves being such that one has reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms, then we might put this concern in different terms: why ought we think that what Pat does in adopting a cognitive attitude toward P must count as *believing* (so conceived) instead of, e.g., *schmelieving*. And, because the straightforward constitutivist maintains that the normative fact that believers like us have reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms is explanatorily primitive, she has nothing left to say in response. Thus, the straightforward constitutivist cannot explain why the question ‘does Pat, in fact, have reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms in the circumstances with which she is faced?’ has an affirmative answer in a way that is satisfying in light of the fact that this question can reasonably strike us as live.

Moreover, the way in which the straightforward constitutivist’s response to our concerns here strikes us as unsatisfying suggests that explaining why that the epistemic status of Pat’s belief about P ought to weigh with her requires showing first that Pat has a reason for *something else* (e.g. to have a true belief about whether P or to have a belief about whether P that is well-suited to guide her future actions), and then that this reason, in turn, generates reason(s) for Pat to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms. And so, contra the straightforward constitutivist, it seems that the *pro tanto* reasons Pat has to believe in ways that conform with

epistemic norms must be normatively *derivative*. The fact that the question ‘does Pat, in fact, have reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms in the circumstances with which she is faced?’ can reasonably strike us as live constitutes evidence that the constitutivist’s thesis that being a believer of a particular sort involves being the kind of creature for whom GR obtains is one that demands a substantive normative explanation. The fact that the epistemic status of our beliefs is reason-guaranteeing is not explanatorily primitive. Rather, *GR* is the sort of normative fact that requires some other normative fact to serve as its ground. There must be some distinct, and more fundamental normative fact(s) that ground an explanation of why it is that believers like us have *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms and avoid believing in ways that violate epistemic norms.<sup>92</sup> And if the constitutivist strategy is to bear fruit, these facts—this explanatory ground—must, itself, be built into what is involved in having the kind of capacity for belief that we have.

### **Developing an Explanation by Taking the Connection Between Belief and Action Seriously**

In this section, I show that conceiving of our capacity for belief as constitutively tied to our capacity to come to act in certain, distinctive way supplies the constitutivist with the resources that she needs in order to explain *GR*. It is by appreciating what is involved in being the sort of creature that can, at least sometimes, come to act in this distinctive way that the constitutivist uncovers normative bedrock that can underwrite the fact that believers like us have

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<sup>92</sup>Another way to press the point that *GR* cannot be explanatorily primitive or fundamental as the straightforward constitutivist maintains, one that I cannot develop in detail here, is by considering a believer in a demon world. Very briefly, straightforward constitutivism entails that the believer in the demon world has *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms simply because being a believer of the sort that she is constitutively involves having such reason(s) (just as being water constitutively involves being composed of hydrogen and oxygen). However, it is not at all obvious that a believer in a demon world actually has such *pro tanto* reason(s) (although, of course, this believer might *think* that she does). Thus, were it to turn out that the believer in the demon world has *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms after all, we should expect there to be some kind of substantive explanation for this fact.

*pro tanto* reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms and *pro tanto* reason(s) to avoid believing in ways that violate epistemic norms.

So, what is actually involved in having the kind of capacity for belief that we have? Well, it is uncontroversial that, at least when all goes well, beliefs play a distinctive role in our mental economies. They have a certain job to do; they fulfill a particular function. Moreover, it is plausible that having and so being disposed to perform this role, job, or function is just part of what it is to be a belief. This is a metaphysical point: that our beliefs have and so are disposed to perform their proper function is just what makes our beliefs the particular kind of mental attitude that they are. I'll call the distinctive role or job that beliefs paradigmatically perform in our mental economies the *proper function* of belief. Thus, the proposal here is that the nature or essence of belief is partially constituted by belief's having a certain proper function.<sup>93</sup>

Notice that understanding of the nature of belief in this way naturally gives rise to an account of the content of epistemic norms. On a proper function privileging account, beliefs are appropriately evaluated as correct or successful *qua belief* when they are well-suited to fulfill their proper function. And just as any heart that is not well-suited to pump blood is thereby faulty or defective *qua heart*, any belief that falls short of this standard—i.e. any belief that is not well-suited to fulfill belief's proper function—is faulty or defective *qua belief*. And, thus, it makes sense to identify epistemic norms as just those norms that specify patterns of belief regulation (i.e. patterns of transition from inputs to cognition—perceptual experiences, other beliefs, etc.—to cognitive output—namely, belief) instantiations of which best or most reliably equip believers like us with beliefs that are well-suited to fulfill their proper function. Put differently, epistemic norms are just norms of ideal cognitive functioning with respect to belief regulation for believers

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<sup>93</sup>For a defense of this kind of proper function privileging account of the nature of belief, see Nolfi (forthcoming).

equipped with our cognitive equipment and our cognitive limitations, operating in an environment like our own.<sup>94</sup>

The project of supplying an account of the proper function of belief is empirical, at least in part. That said, I think we have good reason to hypothesize that the proper function of belief is to enable or contribute to successful action in a particular way.<sup>95</sup> If this hypothesis is right, then a complete account of what is involved in having the kind of capacity for belief that we have must specify, first, what it takes for our actions to be successful and, second, the distinctive enabling role that beliefs paradigmatically play in generating action that is successful in this sense.

The driving thought here is that the nature of our capacity for belief must be understood in terms of belief's paradigmatic contribution to successful action. Just as the heart's capacity to beat at different rates in different situations, blood vessels' capacity to dilate in certain circumstances, etc. are best understood in light of the contributions that these capacities make to the circulatory system's capacity to effectively distribute oxygen, etc. throughout the body, our capacity for belief is best understood in light of the contribution that it makes to our capacity to act successfully in the distinctive way that we paradigmatically do.<sup>96</sup>

It is plausible, I think, that our capacity to act in the way that we paradigmatically do is, fundamentally, a capacity to act in response to and on the basis of certain distinctive kinds of

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<sup>94</sup>For a defense of this kind of account of the content and structure of epistemic norms, see Lycan (1988) or Nolfi (forthcoming).

<sup>95</sup>This idea is certainly not new. It is perhaps most famously given voice by F. P. Ramsey's thought that "beliefs are the maps by which we steer."

<sup>96</sup>Hilary Kornblith (2002) and Mark Schroeder (2007) have each suggested that we to look to the role belief plays in guiding action to explain the force of epistemic norms and, as I hope is now clear, I agree. That said, my way of developing this basic thought in what follows diverges significantly from Schroeder's and Kornblith's. Unfortunately, there is not space here to catalogue differences or defend the view articulated below against Schroeder's and Kornblith's likeminded competitors.

mental attitudes: beliefs and what I'll call *values*. When we exercise this capacity to act, our beliefs and values serve as the causal grounds for our action. Crucially, valuing, as I conceive of it here, involves representing some person, object, or state of affairs as meriting a certain kind of treatment, and, as a result, being committed to treat the person, object, or state of affairs in question in the way that she or it merits.<sup>97</sup> It is the kind of mental attitude that one has towards another person when, on recognizing that person as deserving of respect, one is thereby moved to act in ways that show her the respect that one sees her as meriting.

Understood in this way, the kind of capacity to act in light of one's values that we have imposes an internal standard for success on one's actions: for a creature who acts (at least paradigmatically) on the basis of her values, an action is successful to the extent that it treats that which merits a certain kind of treatment in the way that it merits.<sup>98</sup> And, in believers whose capacity for belief subserves this kind of capacity for action, it is this standard to which an account of the proper function of belief ought to appeal. Thus, our beliefs are well-suited to fulfill their proper function when they are well-suited to play the role that our beliefs paradigmatically play in enabling us to act in ways that treat that which is merits a certain kind of treatment in the way that it merits being treated. Moreover, and plausibly enough, the distinctive enabling role that our beliefs play, when all goes well, in generating action that is successful in

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<sup>97</sup>As such, valuing involves both a representational component and a motivational component, where the motivational component is dependent on the representational component. Watson (1975) and Bratman (2000) appeal to a kind of mental attitude that is quite similar to the kind of mental attitude that I have in mind here. I will not take up the project of articulating and defending an account of the particular contribution that acting in response to and on the basis of values makes to our biological fitness in this piece. Bratman takes some steps toward supplying such an account in his (2000).

<sup>98</sup>Successful action is, at one level of description, just action that contributes to our biological fitness. But just as understanding that one's circulatory system is supposed to contribute to one's biological fitness by distributing oxygen, etc. throughout one's body (and not, e.g., by breaking down complex carbohydrates, or by delivering information, coded in electrical signals, to one's motor cortex) allows us to specify more narrowly focused standards of success in the domain of circulation, understanding the way in which our particular capacity to act in the way we do is supposed to contribute to our biological fitness will allow us to specify more narrowly focused standards of success in the domain of action.

this sense is that they serve as predictive tools—maps of the way the way things are and of the way the world works—that enable us to discover and then pursue plans of action are likely to treat appropriately the various things that we value across a wide variety of circumstances.<sup>99,100</sup>

Exercising the capacity to value involves recognizing and responding to the fact that X merits a particular sort of treatment as an appropriate basis for one's own commitment to treating X in the way that it merits. Put differently, exercising the capacity to value involves regarding commitment to treating a person, object, or state of affairs in the way that it merits as the *appropriate* response to its meriting treatment of a particular sort and so involves recognizing one's actions as *better* to the extent that as they treat persons, objects, or states of affairs in ways that they merit being treated. Thus, not only does our capacity to act in response to our beliefs and our values impose an (evaluative) standard of success on our actions, our capacity to act in response to our beliefs and our values guarantees that we regard this standard of success as one to which our actions ought (normatively speaking) to conform. Our capacity to act in response to our beliefs and our values guarantees that we see ourselves as normatively compelled to regard an (actual or potential) action as worth doing to the extent that it is successful (i.e. to the extent that it treats that which merits a certain sort of treatment in the way that it merits). So, that we have the capacity to act in the way that we do guarantees that we are normatively committed to acting successfully. But, more than this, that we have the capacity to act in the way that we do guarantees that we cannot wonder whether this commitment is one that we ought to have. The

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<sup>99</sup>A similar way of thinking about the nature of belief runs through, e.g., Bennett's *Linguistic Behavior*.

<sup>100</sup>The idea here is, roughly put, that the capacity to act on the basis of beliefs and conative attitudes (e.g. desires, goals, aims, ends, or, as I've suggested here, values) affords a creature with a kind of flexibility in responding to the environment that enables successful action across a variety of different circumstances. So, it is compatible with the kind of proper function privileging account I've adopted here that our capacity for belief is one species of capacity for belief. Put in other terms, the particular kind of belief that we are capable of having might well be one species of a broader genus. Thus, the proponent of a proper function privileging account need not deny the possibility that creatures lacking the capacity to value might, nevertheless, have a kind of capacity for belief.

question “ought one (even if only to the extent that one can) act in ways that treat that which merits a certain kind of treatment as it merits?” simply cannot be live for creatures us. Rather, this question has an immediate and obvious affirmative answer! It is not that the question is, for creatures who act in the way that we do, incoherent or unintelligible, but rather that creatures of this sort automatically and inevitably recognize this question as *closed*.<sup>101</sup>

Why is it that having the capacity to act in the way that we do involves regarding oneself as normatively compelled to act in certain ways, rather than others? Perhaps the fact that one has the capacities to value and to act in response to one’s values entails not only that one takes oneself to be, but also that one is, in fact, normatively required to act successfully (i.e. in ways that treats that which merits treatment of a certain sort appropriately).<sup>102</sup> The proposal here is this: that the question “ought I act in ways that treat appropriately whatever it is that turns out to merit treatment of a particular sort?” is *closed* for us constitutes good evidence that a binding normative requirement to act successfully partially constitutes our capacity to act in response to our beliefs and our value in the way that we paradigmatically do. The normative fact that creatures like us ought, all things considered, to act in ways that appropriately treat that which merits treatment of a certain sort is built into what is involved in having the kind of capacity to act on the basis of values that we have at the bottom level, so to speak. And it is our recognition that we are bound by this explanatorily primitive (at least normatively speaking) requirement that

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<sup>101</sup>A subject who takes the question of whether to act in ways that appropriately preserve, protect, promote, or respect that which merits preservation, protection, promotion, or respect to be genuinely open, live, and pressing is necessarily deficient or defective (at least as compared to ourselves). Such a subject does not recognize the facts that certain entities merits treatment of a certain sort as generating normative reason(s) for her to act in certain ways and not others. And, as a result, such a subject, it seems, simply lacks the kinds of capacities to value and to act on the basis of her values that we recognize in ourselves.

<sup>102</sup>Although, again, perhaps if only to the extent that and insofar as one can.

explains why we regard ourselves as normatively compelled to act in ways that treats that which merits treatment of a certain sort appropriately.

If our capacity for belief is constitutively tied to our capacity to act in response to our beliefs and values in the way that I've proposed, then it follows that being believers of the sort that we are involves being such that we are normatively (rather than merely psychologically or metaphysically) required to act in ways that treat whatever it is that merits a certain sort of treatment in the way that it merits. Put differently, the normative fact that we ought, all things considered, to act so as to treat that which merits a certain sort of treatment in the way that it merits is built into what it takes to have the kind of capacity for belief that we have as a kind of explanatory bedrock (at least from the perspective of normative explanation). Being bound by a normative requirement compelling us to act successfully is partially constitutive of having the kind of capacity for belief that we have simply in virtue of the fact that having this kind of capacity for belief involves being the kind of creature who is capable of acting in the way that we paradigmatically do. And, as I'll show in what follows, this result supplies explanatory ground, embedded into the account of what it takes to be a believer of the sort that we are that I've put forward above, that can underwrite a successful constitutivist explanation of *GR*.

Recall that our beliefs are well-suited to fulfill their proper function when they are well-suited to enable us to predict which of our potential actions will effectively preserve, protect, promote, and respect that which calls out for such treatment across a wide variety of circumstances. Moreover, at least typically, it is in virtue of having beliefs that are well-suited to perform just this job that we are able to act in ways that treat that which merits treatment of a certain sort in the way that it merits. So, for believers like us (i.e. believers operating in the kind of environment in which we operate) acting successfully typically requires having beliefs that are



well-suited to fulfill their proper function. Since believers like us ought to act successfully, then, believers like us have a strong reason to maintain a belief corpus composed at least largely, if not exclusively, of beliefs that are well-suited to fulfill their proper function. Being constituted so as to have this kind of reason is just part of what is involved in being a believer of the sort that we are.

Epistemic norms are just, according to a proper function privileging account, those norms conformity with which best equips believers like us with a belief corpus composed of beliefs are well-suited to fulfill their proper function. Moreover, the way in which we actually regulate our beliefs typically, if not inevitably, manifests our belief-regulating dispositions. And so it is plausible that the most efficient way, by far, for believers like us to wind up with such a belief corpus is to have belief-regulating dispositions that conform with epistemic norms. If all this is right, the fact that we have strong reason to have a belief corpus composed of beliefs that are well-suited to fulfill their proper function makes it plausible that we ought to do the best that we can to cultivate belief-regulating dispositions that conform with epistemic norms. Complying with a normative requirement that compels one to act successfully plausibly requires, at least for creatures equipped with the kind of cognitive systems that we have, operating in the kind of environment in which we operate, that one have belief-regulating dispositions that conform with epistemic norms. And so, the fact that we are bound by a normative requirement compelling us to act successfully, in conjunction with facts about what it takes for creature equipped with mental economies like ours, operating in environments like our own, entails that we have reason(s) to cultivate belief-regulating dispositions that conform with epistemic norms.

However, the kind of control that we have over whether we are disposed to regulate our beliefs in ways that conform with epistemic norms is, I suggest, similar to the kind of control that

a smoker plausibly has over whether she is disposed to smoke on future occasions. If the smoker's individual choices about whether to smoke were completely isolated from one another, then she might decide to have a cigarette on one occasion without thereby compromising her chances of quitting. But, plausibly, the smoker's choices are not so isolated. She is wired up, so to speak, such that smoking now will make it more difficult for her to abstain from smoking later. As a result, the smoker who has a weighty reason to quit her habit thereby has a (*pro tanto*) reason to abstain from smoking on every occasion in which she might light up.<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, I suggest that believers like us are wired up, so to speak, such that the way in which they regulate a certain one of their beliefs on a particular occasion inevitably has an effect (if only a very small one) on how they will be disposed to regulate their beliefs in similar situations going forward. And so, if believers like us have weighty reason(s) to cultivate belief-regulating dispositions that conform with epistemic norms, believers like us thereby have (*pro tanto*) reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms in every instance in which they form, revise, or sustain belief. *GR* obtains because, by virtue of the particular way in which we are wired up, so to speak, having reason(s) to cultivate belief-regulating dispositions involves, at least for believers like us, always (i.e. in every instance) having reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms.

In summary, the proper function privileging account of the nature of belief, at least when conjoined with a plausible empirical assumption about of beliefs' distinctive proper function, gives rise to the result that being bound by a normative requirement compelling one to act successfully (i.e. in ways that treat that which merits a certain sort of treatment, whatever it turns out to be, in the way that it merits) is partially constitutive of having the kind of capacity for

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<sup>103</sup>Notice that this point holds even if the smoker decides that, all things considered, it is worth it to have a smoke on a particular occasion.

belief that we have. Moreover, for believers like us, acting successfully requires having a belief corpus composed of beliefs that are well-suited to fulfill their proper function. Acting successfully involves, at least as a general rule, believing successfully. And so, believers like us have strong reason to maintain a belief corpus composed of beliefs that are successful in the sense of being well-suited to fulfill their proper function.

For believers like us, however, maintaining a belief corpus with this property requires being disposed to form, revise, and maintain beliefs in ways that conform with epistemic norms. So, believers like us have reason to cultivate belief-regulating dispositions that conform with epistemic norms. We are creatures of cognitive habit: the way in which we actually regulate our beliefs on a particular occasion typically (if not inevitably) manifests our dispositions to regulate our beliefs in specific ways. And as a result, the fact that we are normatively required to act in ways that treat that which merits a certain kind of treatment as it merits entails that we have reason to cultivate belief-regulating dispositions that conform with epistemic norms. And that we have reason to cultivate belief-regulating dispositions that conform with epistemic norms entails *GR*. This is because, for creatures who enjoy only the kind of limited influence in shaping their belief-regulating dispositions over time that we seem to enjoy, having reason(s) to cultivate belief-regulating dispositions that conform with epistemic norms involves always (for any proposition P) having reasons that count in favor of believing that P just in case epistemic norms sanction or require believing that P in the circumstances with which one is faced and that count against believing that P just in case epistemic norms forbid believing that P in the circumstances with which one is faced.

That the epistemic status of each of our beliefs is reason-guaranteeing is explained facts about what it takes for believers like us to successfully comply with the normative requirement

that we act in ways that treat that which merits treatment of a certain sort in the way that it merits. And being bound by this normative requirement is just part of what is involved in (or, put differently, partially constitutive of) being the sort of creature who come to act in the way that believers like us paradigmatically do. Thus, *GR* is a normative consequence of an explanatorily primitive normative requirement compelling successful action that I have argued being bound by which is partially constitutive of being a believer of the sort that we are.

### Conclusion

It is because we have the kind of capacity for belief that we have that we always have *pro tanto* reason(s) to believe in ways that conform with epistemic norms and *pro tanto* reason(s) to avoid believing in ways that fail to conform with epistemic norms. If my proper function privileging account of what is involved in being a believer of the sort that we are is right, then believing differs from playing chess in precisely the following respect: at least for creatures like us, believing constitutively involves having an explanatorily primitive reason of a certain sort—namely, a reason to act in way that treat that which merits treatment of a certain sort in the way that it merits—that grounds *GR*. Playing chess, however, does not constitutively involve having any such explanatorily primitive reasons. Thus, contra the proponent of the schmelief objection, there is no need to cite a prior reason that we have to be believers of the sort that we are in order to explain why it is that we ought to care about the epistemic status of our beliefs. Rather, the *pro tanto* reason(s) that we have to believe in ways that are rational or justified as normatively grounded in a further normative fact, which is, itself, built into what is involved in having the kind of capacity for belief that we have.<sup>104</sup>

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