

## ***Recent Work on the Normativity of Belief\****

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The definitive version of this article is to appear in *Analysis Reviews* (<http://analysis.oxfordjournals.org/>). Please cite the published version.

### *1. Introduction*

Belief, some say, is normative. To say this is to say, not only that beliefs are subject to normative standards or principles, but that it is part of the *essence* of belief to be subject to such norms. Call this view, *Normativism*.

Normativism, so characterised, should be distinguished from three related claims. First, that it is part of the *concept* of belief that it is subject to normative standards or principles. This is not entailed by Normativism, as characterised here. (Compare: it is part of the essence of water, but not part of the concept of water, that water is H<sup>2</sup>O.) Nonetheless, many Normativists accept this further claim.

Second, that it is part of what it is to be a belief that it *satisfy* (or go some way toward satisfying) certain norms. Some make this claim but it is stronger than what we are here calling Normativism, which speaks of subjection not satisfaction. Some opponents of Normativism point out that failure to satisfy candidate norms for belief is widespread (cf. Rey 2007). This might undermine the stronger claim but it does not undermine Normativism as such.

Third, Normativism as such is not committed to any specific claim about *which* norm(s) govern belief. The most common proposal is that belief is essentially subject to a norm of truth (Boghossian 2008; Littlejohn 2012; Millar 1994; Shah and Velleman 2005; Whiting 2010). There are various suggestions for how to formulate this norm but the idea, roughly, is that one ought to believe only what is true. Alternative proposals include that belief is governed by a knowledge norm (Engel 2004; Smithies 2012; Williamson 2000), an evidential norm (Adler 2006), or norms of rationality (Zangwill 2005), such as consistency requirements. Some adopt an inclusive position and suggest that a version of some or all of the proposed norms hold. Wedgwood (2002), for example, takes the *fundamental* norm to be one of truth, and takes norms of rationality and knowledge to hold as a consequence. In this survey, we will not seek to resolve this internal dispute among Normativists. For the most part, we will refer to norms of truth, indicating alternatives only when it makes a difference to the arguments.<sup>1</sup>

\* We are grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) for funding which supported the writing of this paper (AH/K008188/1).

<sup>1</sup> Another dispute concerns whether the norms should be formulated in *deontic* terms, e.g. in terms of what one ought to believe, *evaluative* terms, e.g. in terms of what it is good to believe, or other terms (see Fassio 2011; McHugh Forthcoming).

The recent debates surrounding Normativism have their roots in a number of more established debates. First, a prominent idea which emerges from the so-called rule-following considerations – inspired by Kripke’s Wittgenstein (Kripke 1982) – is that *semantic content* is in some sense normative. It is a short step from there to the idea that the acts or attitudes which bear such content are normative (see Boghossian 2008). Second, epistemology has taken a so-called ‘value turn’, which involves thinking of epistemology (like ethics) as a normative discipline, as concerned with uncovering or systematising the norms to which govern belief. This brings with it an interest in what belief must be like if it is to be subject to such norms (compare ethicists’ interest in action theory). Third, in ethics there is a growing concern with normativity in general, not just practical normativity, and there are efforts to consider how ethical theories might fare when applied to other domains. One prominent view in ethics is that being subject to certain practical norms is constitutive of action or agency (cf. Korsgaard 1996; Velleman 2000). A natural analogue of this is that being subject to epistemic norms is constitutive of belief or inquiry.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Arguments for Normativism

Recent proponents of Normativism include Adler (2006), Boghossian (2008), Brandom (1994), Engel (2004), Fassio (2011), Jackson (1999), Lynch (2009), McDowell (1994), Millar (1994), Nolfi (forthcoming), Shah and Velleman (2005), Tanney (1999), Wedgwood (2007), Whiting (2010), and Zangwill (2005). Given its present popularity, it is surprisingly rare to find arguments in support of Normativism.<sup>3</sup> The mere fact that belief is norm-governed does not support it. As Rosen puts it, ‘The indisputable fact that belief is governed by norms is consistent with the following picture: The doxastic facts are constituted entirely from non-normative materials. But once in place, they engage with an independent body of cognitive norms’ (2001: 617).

### 2.1 Entailment

One consideration sometimes given in support of Normativism is that attributions of belief *entail* normative claims. Consider:

- (1) S believes that it is raining.
- (2) It is raining.
- (3) So, S correctly believes that it is raining.

<sup>2</sup> For an influential critique of the ‘constitutivist’ view in ethics, see Enoch 2006. For a version of this critique applied to belief, see Papineau 2013.

<sup>3</sup> We focus here on recent arguments. A less recent but influential line of thought holds that it is constitutive of ‘interpretation’, that is, the attribution of propositional attitudes to subjects, that interpreters take the subject to by and large conform to rational norms (cf. Davidson 1980: ch. 11). Another important source for Normativism is Sellars 1963.

(3) appears to be a normative claim. According to a time-honoured principle, non-normative claims do not entail normative claims (no ‘ought’ from an ‘is’). Since (2) is a non-normative claim, (1) must be a normative claim.

Some respond to arguments of this sort by accepting the entailment while denying that correctness is a normative notion, hence that (3) is a genuinely normative claim (Dretske 2000: ch. 14; Glüer and Wikforss 2009; Rosen 2001). What does it take to be normative? A typical suggestion is that genuinely normative claims or principles are *prescriptive*.<sup>4</sup> So, the objection to Normativism is that the principle that beliefs are correct when true, while itself correct, does not serve to prescribe belief-formation; rather, it simply sorts or categorises belief according to a certain standard.<sup>5</sup>

A Normativist might support the claim that (3) and the like are genuinely normative by appeal to habits of criticism. For example, one might criticise a person who believes a proposition in the face of evidence which shows it to be false. If the person is criticisable, it might follow that she has violated or failed to respect a norm. Alternatively, a Normativist might respond to the objection by showing that a belief which is correct realises some value. Suppose, for example, that true belief is good.<sup>6</sup> It might follow that there are reasons to promote or secure this value. Since a correct belief is a true belief, it might follow in turn that there are reasons to hold, or take steps towards holding, correct beliefs.

Whatever one makes of such moves, the argument from entailment faces a more immediate difficulty (Horwich 1998: 93; Wedgwood 2009). Perhaps there is a normative principle according to which it is correct to believe a proposition when that proposition is true. If this principle holds, that explains why (1) and (2) entail (3). But, assuming the principle holds *necessarily*, it remains to be shown that the principle governs belief *essentially*. Compare the consequentialist claim that, if something is pleasurable, it ought to be promoted. If this is true, it is presumably necessarily true. But that does not show that pleasure is essentially normative.

## 2.2 Individuation

Some suggest that belief is *the* unique attitude to be governed by a norm of truth. Hopes, fears, and imaginings have content. But belief is the only attitude which is correct if and only if its content is *true*. It is correct to believe, but not to fear, that spiders are harmless when spiders are harmless. This might support the view that it is part of the essence of belief to be governed by a norm of truth – this distinguishes belief from all other attitudes (Lynch 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Although see n1 above.

<sup>5</sup> One must distinguish this objection from the objection that the relevant principles concerning belief have normative force only given a suitable desire (that is, that the norms in question are hypothetical, not categorical). Normativism is not, as such, committed to the view that the norms which govern belief are categorical. See §4 below.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion, see Whiting 2013a.

Arguably, however, there are attitudes other than belief which are subject to a norm of truth. To use Owens' example (2003), guesses are correct just in case they are true. In that case, belief is *not* individuated by being subject to a norm of truth.

Of course, one might develop a version of this argument by appeal to a norm for belief other than truth. Perhaps belief is the unique attitude to be governed by a norm of knowledge, or by certain rationality constraints. Be that as it may, like the argument from entailment, this argument is problematic. Even if, necessarily, pleasure is the only thing that ought to be promoted, it does not follow that pleasure is normative.

### 2.3 *Dispositionalism*

A common route to Normativism starts with *Dispositionalism*, the view that the essence of belief can be spelled out in terms of *dispositions*.<sup>7</sup> The starting point is the suggestion that, for a subject's attitude to be one of belief, she must have certain dispositions involving that attitude. For example, if a subject is disposed to form, revise, and maintain an attitude in (only) the ways we are disposed to form, revise, and maintain hopes, the attitude cannot be one of belief.

However, the argument continues, not all of a subject's dispositions are relevant to whether her attitude is one of belief. It seems that, if her attitude is to be one of belief, a subject must have some *rational* dispositions involving it – that is, dispositions to form, revise and maintain that attitude in ways which are rational, for example, in conformity with *modus ponens*. Moreover, it also seems that a fully rational being could have beliefs but no irrational dispositions. These points suggest that *some* rational dispositions, and *only* rational dispositions, involving an attitude are essential to its being one of belief. So, to specify the essential nature of belief, one must refer to a normative property, namely, rationality.<sup>8</sup>

One might ask whether it is possible to specify the rational dispositions in non-normative terms. Wedgwood replies as follows:

Rational dispositions are dispositions to engage in rational forms of reasoning. But whenever we specify a form of reasoning in wholly non-normative terms, it will turn out that the form of reasoning in question is *defeasible*, and so circumstances can arise in which it is not in fact rational to engage in that form of reasoning. [...] So the only way to specify a form of reasoning that will always count as rational is for one's specification to include a proviso that requires the absence of such defeating conditions. [...] But the very notion of a 'defeating condition' is a normative notion. (2007: 91-92)

<sup>7</sup> For variations on this theme, see Wedgwood 2007; Millar 1994; Nolfi Forthcoming; Zangwill 1998. The version we focus on is closest to Wedgwood's. Others focus on difficulties facing Dispositionalism and offer Normativism as a way of resolving those difficulties.

Needless to say, many think that there is an adequate non-normative dispositionalist account of belief, of which functionalism might be an example (e.g. Glüer and Wikforss 2013b; Papineau 2013).

<sup>8</sup> One response is to deny that rationality is a normative notion, or picks out a normative property (cf. Glüer and Wikforss 2013a).

One might wonder if it is possible to provide some specification of the defeating conditions in non-normative terms. If so, perhaps it is possible to characterise the dispositions essential to belief in non-normative terms.

It is beyond the scope of this survey to resolve this issue. But note that, if it is possible to specify the dispositions supposedly essential to belief in non-normative terms, that might not undermine this argument for Normativism. According to it, having a belief essentially involves having certain rational dispositions. If what it is to have a rational disposition can in turn be specified in non-normative terms, this might only show that the normativity of belief is *reducible*. Normativism, as such, is consistent with reductionism – both of the mental and of the normative. We will return to such matters in due course.<sup>9</sup>

#### 2.4 *Deliberation*

Shah (2003) provides an alternative argument for Normativism. It takes the form of an inference to the best explanation, the *explanans* being an apparent feature of doxastic deliberation that Shah labels ‘transparency’. Roughly, the idea is that, in deliberation about what to believe, only *evidence* can be treated as a reason for believing one thing or another; one cannot form beliefs because, e.g., they would make one happy. The question whether to believe *p* thus immediately ‘gives way to’ the question whether *p*.

Some argue that transparency is best explained by an *aim* constitutive of or essential to belief. In Williams’ well-known slogan, belief aims at truth. While suggestive, this slogan is hard to interpret. Beliefs are not agents, so how could they aim at anything? According to Velleman (2000), belief has an aim in the sense that the *regulation* of belief – the formation, maintenance, revision and rejection of beliefs – is literally directed at an aim, goal, or *telos*, and it is in virtue of this that the states so regulated count as beliefs. Most straightforwardly, this can happen through conscious, personal-level activity, such as the formation of a belief through an act of judgment.<sup>10</sup> However, much belief-regulation occurs more or less automatically, without the agent doing anything. Velleman deals with this by maintaining that the cognitive systems which do this job of regulation have truth as an aim or function, bestowed ‘by natural selection, or by education and training, or by a combination of the two’ (2000: 253). Call this the *teleological view* of belief (cf. Steglich-Petersen 2006, 2009, 2011; McHugh 2011, 2012a).

If belief aims in this sense at truth, one might think it follows that only evidential considerations figure in deliberation, since only evidence bears on the question of whether a belief is true.

<sup>9</sup> For challenges to the idea that an attitude is one of belief only if the subject has *rational* dispositions involving it, see Rey 2007; Zangwill 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Other defenders of the view that judging is an action include Sosa (2011), Toribio (2011). For criticism, see Boyle 2011.

Shah (2003) argues, however, that this explanation fails. While beliefs apparently cannot respond *through deliberation* to non-evidential considerations, they *can* be influenced by such considerations *outside* deliberation. For example, in wishful thinking you are influenced by what would make you happy to believe, but you cannot treat this as a reason for belief within your deliberation. The teleological view seems unable to explain this asymmetry, since it simply claims that belief-regulation is truth-directed; it posits no difference between belief-regulation through deliberation and belief regulation outside it.<sup>11</sup>

Instead, Shah (2003) claims, the best explanation of transparency is that the *concept* of belief is normative (which, one might think, entails that belief is normative). More specifically: in asking oneself what to believe, one necessarily conceives of the attitude one is to form as subject to a norm of truth, with the result that one is concerned with the truth or otherwise of the proposition in question, to the exclusion of other considerations. This explanation allows for the causal influence of non-evidential factors outside deliberation, since such influence is not mediated by deployment of the concept of belief.

An objection to Shah's argument is that his Normativist explanation of transparency fails, because it must assume an implausibly strong form of motivational internalism. In general, we are capable of knowingly violating norms we accept. Suppose that one accepts, as a constitutive norm of assertion, that one ought only to assert what is true. Surely one could nonetheless be moved to assert a falsehood on the grounds, say, that it would make someone happy to do so. So, why would our acceptance of a norm of truth governing belief ensure that we were concerned with satisfying this norm, to the exclusion of all other considerations, in doxastic deliberation (Steglich-Petersen 2006; McHugh 2013)?<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Arguments against Normativism

Having surveyed some of the main arguments for Normativism in the recent literature, we turn to some of the principal arguments against the view.<sup>13</sup>

#### 3.1 The Formulation Problem

<sup>11</sup> For a related argument against teleology, see Owens 2003. For discussion, see McHugh 2012a; Noordhof and Sullivan-Bissett 2013; Steglich-Petersen 2009; Toribio 2013.

<sup>12</sup> See Shah (2013) for a response. Alternative responses to Shah's argument are to deny that transparency is a genuine phenomenon (cf. McHugh 2012a), or to argue that appealing to the aim of belief can explain transparency (see Steglich-Petersen 2006; Whiting 2014).

<sup>13</sup> There is a worry, due to Alston (1988), with the idea that there are norms which govern belief which we will not discuss in detail. Consider:

- (i) If belief is subject to norms, it is subject to the will.
- (ii) Belief is not subject to the will.
- (iii) So, belief is not subject to norms.

If this argument is sound, it undermines, not just Normativism, but the very idea that belief is norm-governed. Fortunately for Normativism, (i) is false (see Chuard and Southwood 2009; McHugh 2012b).

A lot of discussion has focused on the issue of how to formulate the norms governing belief. Consider (with ‘ought’ taking narrow scope):

(T) One ought to believe a proposition if and only if it is true.

According to (T), if a proposition is true, one ought to believe it. This clashes with the principle that *ought implies can* – there are some propositions it is impossible to believe (Boghossian 2008). (T) also fails to capture a plausible constraint on belief (Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2007). If it is true that  $p$ , nothing follows. And if it is false that  $p$ , all that follows is that it is not the case that one ought to believe that  $p$ . This is consistent with the claim that one may believe that  $p$ , or that one ought to believe no propositions whatsoever.

Bykvist and Hattiangadi (2007) consider several alternative formulations of the truth norm but find none to be satisfactory.

It is not clear that the real issue here is Normativism. As noted above, one might think that belief is governed by a truth norm without thinking that its being so is essential to belief. Moreover, one might be a Normativist but deny that the norm to which belief is subject is one of truth.

Be that as it may, efforts to arrive at an improved formulation of the truth norm are ongoing.<sup>14</sup> Whiting (2010; 2013b), for example, proposes:

(T\*) One may believe a proposition if and only if it is true.

This does not violate *ought implies can* – if a true proposition is unbelievable, (T\*) does not imply that one ought to believe it. And it captures a plausible constraint on belief – if a proposition is false, it follows from (T\*) that one may not believe it.

Of course, this proposal might not prove successful. But note that, from the fact that philosophers have yet to arrive at an adequate formulation of a norm, it does not follow that there is no such norm. Compare: if philosophers have yet to articulate the ethical principles governing action, it does not follow that there are no such principles.

### 3.2 The Guidance Problem

Glüer and Wikforss (2009; 2013a) argue that belief cannot be subject to norms because norms are supposed to be *guiding* – we are supposed to be able to follow norms and adjust what we do in light of them – and belief *cannot* be guided by norms. To see this, consider (T\*).<sup>15</sup> To follow this rule (as opposed to merely conforming to it) one must first determine whether the conditions under which one may believe (e.g.) that it is raining obtain. That is, one must first determine whether it is raining. But this involves forming a belief as to whether it is raining. So, to follow (T\*) in this or any given case, one must in advance and

<sup>14</sup> For discussion, see Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2013; Fassio 2011; McHugh 2012c; Raleigh 2013; Wedgwood 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Other formulations of the norms of belief face a similar challenge.

independently arrive at a belief with respect to the relevant matter. (T\*) arrives too late to provide any guidance.

Note, again, that this is an objection, not only to Normativism, but to any view according to which belief is subject to a norm of truth.

One response is to accept that (T\*) does not *directly* guide belief but insist that it *indirectly* guides belief via some other principle, for example, that one may believe only what the evidence supports (Boghossian 2008; Wedgwood 2002).<sup>16</sup> A less concessive response is to challenge the operative conception of what it takes for a norm to be guiding. According to it, a subject takes a general principle and determines how to apply it in a particular case, before acting in light of the verdict it delivers. It is beyond the scope of this survey to develop an alternative but one might think that a norm counts as guiding belief-formation when its acceptance or internalisation causally explains (non-deviantly) why you form beliefs in ways which accord with that norm, even if that norm does not figure in your reasoning (cf. Engel 2013; Steglich-Petersen 2013).

### 3.3 Mental Causation

It is often thought to be a platitude that beliefs are causally efficacious. For example, Sharon's belief that it is raining might be causally responsible for her belief that the streets are wet, her concern that she'll step in a deep puddle, her decision to take an umbrella, and, in turn, her taking an umbrella. However, if belief is essentially normative, it might seem hard to understand how belief can be causally efficacious. Why? Because, as is often suggested, the normative is *not* causally efficacious.<sup>17</sup>

This worry is particularly acute if the normative is not reducible to the non-normative. If normative properties are reducible to some natural properties, they might be causally efficacious. Normativism, as such, is compatible with reductionism.

Even if the normative is not reducible to the natural, a Normativist might argue that the normative *is* causally efficacious (see Wedgwood 2007; Zangwill 2005). It would take more space than there is available to spell out what such an argument would look like in full, let alone to evaluate it. But, in short, the idea is that, first, like normative properties in general, the normative properties which beliefs possess are *supervenient* – they depend on (but are not reducible to) non-normative properties.<sup>18</sup> Second, the normative properties are causally efficacious in virtue of supervening upon properties which are themselves causally efficacious. Of course, there are problems in making sense of the idea that supervenient properties are causally efficacious (don't the subvenient properties do all the work?) but these are not problems for Normativism alone.

<sup>16</sup> Glüer and Wikforss anticipate and criticise this move (see 2009: 44-45).

<sup>17</sup> This worry is often raised by Normativists (for versions of it, see Millar 1994; Zangwill 2005).

<sup>18</sup> For an interesting argument against Normativism, which appeals to the supervenience of the normative on the non-normative, see Steglich-Petersen 2008.



#### 4. Teleology

Having reviewed some of the arguments for and against Normativism, we turn now to the question: if belief is essentially subject to certain norms, is this a brute fact about belief (or about the concept of belief), or is it susceptible to a deeper explanation?<sup>19</sup> This question brings us back to the teleological view.

Importantly, while the teleological view is frequently presented as a foil to Normativism (e.g. Shah 2003; Steglich-Petersen 2006), it is not incompatible with it. In fact, the claim that belief has an aim can be and often is drawn on to *explain* the truth of some version of Normativism: it is *because* belief has this aim that belief is essentially governed by the norms by which it is governed. As Velleman says:

To say that belief aims at the truth is not simply to re-express the norm stipulating that a belief must be true in order to be correct; rather, it is to point out a fact about belief that generates this norm for its correctness. (2000: 16-17)

The disagreement over the ‘aim of belief’ is thus not a disagreement between defenders and opponents of Normativism, but a disagreement over the further claims that belief has an aim in the teleological sense, and that this explains the norms governing it.

How exactly can the teleological view explain, e.g., the epistemic norms to which belief is subject? Most obviously, in instrumental terms. For example, basing a belief on sufficient evidence is instrumental to satisfying the aim of believing truly, since beliefs based on sufficient evidence have a greater tendency to be true than those not so based. This, it might be claimed, is why beliefs based on sufficient evidence have a positive normative status.<sup>20</sup>

There is no doubt that, if the teleological view could satisfactorily explain the norms governing belief, this would be an attractive feature of the view. But can it really do so? There are at least two worries here. First, the mere fact that you have a certain aim does not by itself seem to give you reason or justification for taking the means to satisfying it. The aim might be abhorrent. So, the mere fact that believing what you have good evidence for would be instrumental to something you aim at does not confer any positive normative status on doing so.

It is tempting to respond to this worry by arguing that, unlike many other aims, the aim of true belief is worth having, given the obvious ways in which true beliefs benefit us. So, taking means to having true beliefs is worth doing. But it is not obvious that *all* true beliefs are worth having. And, even if they are, this move seems to make the fact that one aims at truth drop out of the explanation of epistemic norms: it is not the fact that one has this aim,

<sup>19</sup> One answer to this question, which we do not have the space here to explore, is that belief is constitutively subject to certain norms because of the role it plays in practical reasoning and action guidance (cf. Nolfi Forthcoming; Whiting 2014).

<sup>20</sup> A sophisticated version of this kind of approach is defended by Sosa (2007, 2009, 2011), who offers a virtue-theoretic, teleological account of epistemic norms, and applies it to a range of classical problems of epistemology.

but rather the fact that it is *worth* having – that is, that we *should* aim for truth – that generates the derivative epistemic norms.

A more promising response might be to draw on the notion of attributive goodness. If belief has as its aim or function to be true, then a true belief counts as a *good* belief – good *qua* belief. Thus, the aim of truth, being constitutive of belief, already has a normative standing built into it, unlike the various aims that one might just happen to adopt.<sup>21</sup> This does not fully resolve the worry, since there are also such things as, for example, good nuclear bombs, and yet we do not seem to have reasons to take means to acquiring them (even if we want to). In any case, there remains a second worry about the teleological explanation of the norms of belief.

If epistemic norms derive from a certain aim, they are in force, it seems, only when we have this aim. According to the teleological view as usually understood, the relevant aim is a specific aim constitutive of each particular belief. But epistemic norms apply to us with respect to beliefs we do *not* have (Whiting 2012). For example, you might have no beliefs about what the weather will be like tomorrow and not be intending to form any, but nonetheless have reasons or justification for certain such beliefs and not others. The relevant norms here seem not hypothetical, but categorical: the forecast can give you reasons not to believe that it will be a nice day regardless of whether you aim to have a true belief about the matter (Kelly 2003). If you don't have this aim, how could the reasons derive from it?<sup>22</sup>

One might deny that epistemic norms are categorical. Sosa (2007) appears to do this when he denies that epistemic value is 'domain-transcendent', comparing it to the values constitutive of other 'critical domains' associated with human activities, such as hunting. Something can be assessed according to the values and norms of hunting, even if neither assessor nor assessee endorse these values and norms, or share the aims constitutive of this domain.

Steglich-Petersen (2011) proposes an interesting and somewhat different version of this response, arguing that evidence for a proposition gives a categorical reason to believe that proposition only conditionally on one's having reason to form a belief about that proposition (i.e. take up the aim involved in believing or disbelieving it) in the first place. While many philosophers are likely find the denial of the categoricity of epistemic norms an unattractive option, this issue merits further attention.

It goes without saying that the teleological view only explains the norms governing belief if it is itself true. We now note an objection directed at the teleological view, due to Zalabardo (2010).

<sup>21</sup> This sort of view is suggested by McHugh 2012c. For a more developed, broadly neo-Aristotelian view, see Graham 2011, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> On the categoricity of epistemic norms see also Cuneo 2007. Shah (2013) presents a related worry about reasons for giving up beliefs.

It appears to be a contingent and *a posteriori* matter whether the automatic, extra-deliberative regulation of the attitudes we call beliefs is in fact directed at truth. If the teleological view is true, then the possible situation in which these attitudes are *not* regulated for truth is one in which these attitudes are not beliefs at all. But, Zalabardo claims, this is counterintuitive. Were these attitudes not automatically regulated for truth, it would not be the case that we lacked beliefs, but rather that our beliefs were not automatically regulated for truth. Similarly, had this possible situation turned out to be actual, we would not have reclassified these attitudes as something other than beliefs – we would have taken ourselves to have learned something about our beliefs.

A flat-footed response for the defender of the teleological view would be to deny the intuition on which it depends, and to insist that an attitude regulated in ways utterly unconcerned with the truth would not count as a belief. Note that what we are being asked to imagine here is not merely the influence of non-truth-directed processes on these attitudes, but the *lack* of influence of truth-directed ones. At the same time we are to imagine these attitudes guiding behaviour in the way characteristic of beliefs. This seems a rather exotic scenario (cf. Velleman 2000: 278-279).

### 5. *Metaphysics and Metaethics*

Having outlined arguments for and against Normativism, and its relation to teleological views of belief, we now consider the consequences of the view.

If Normativism is true, one might expect it to have implications for the metaphysics of mind. And, indeed, some Normativists have explored those implications.<sup>23</sup> It is commonly suggested that Normativism poses a problem for *naturalistic* accounts of belief, that is, accounts which seek to specify the nature of belief in the (non-normative) terms available to natural science. Whether that is indeed the case depends on whether the normative can be naturalised, and that is an issue in meta-ethics, to which we now turn.

One of the recent and most interesting developments in the debates surrounding Normativism is the suggestion that Normativism might support or undermine certain views in meta-ethics about the nature of normative discourse and its subject-matter. Normativists have argued against reductive naturalism (Wedgwood 2007), non-cognitivism (Lynch 2009; Jackson 1999; Zangwill 2009), and the error theory (Cuneo 2007; Shah 2011). By way of illustration, we focus here on the latter.

According to the error theory,<sup>24</sup> there is a practice of making normative judgements. These judgements express beliefs. However, those beliefs are false, because there are no normative properties or facts in reality to make them true.

<sup>23</sup> Zangwill (2009) argues by appeal to Normativism that eliminativism about belief and other intentional states is self-refuting.

<sup>24</sup> Moral error theory was introduced by Mackie (1977).

Given Normativism, if there are beliefs, there are normative properties. So, according to the error theory, there are no beliefs. But the error theory just is the theory that normative beliefs are false. So, the error theory is self-defeating.

On behalf of the error theory, Streumer (2013) grants Normativism (for the sake of argument) and suggests reformulating the error theory to accommodate it. To do so, he introduces the notion of a *quasi-belief*, an attitude the nature of which is non-normative but which is belief-like insofar as we take there to be reasons for having that attitude when (and only when) we take there to be evidence for it. He then presents the error theory as the view that normative judgements express quasi-beliefs which are false.

While this strategy might save the error theory from being self-defeating, it remains an unpalatable consequence of the view that there are no beliefs – to be told that there are nonetheless quasi-beliefs might seem little consolation. Moreover, while the notion of a quasi-belief is a coherent one, it is not sufficient just to introduce the notion – the error theorist needs to show that subjects who participate in normative thought and discourse really do possess the attitude that notion picks out.

Olson (2011) replies to the objection from Normativism in a rather different way. The error theorist does not deny that there are norms which a subject has reason to conform to given her desires, goals or roles; she denies only that there are norms which a subject has reason to conform to irrespective of her desires, goals or roles. That is, the error theorist denies that there are *categorical* reasons, not *hypothetical* reasons, since it is only categorical reasons which are metaphysically and epistemologically problematic. Returning to the issue at hand, the error theorist can accept that there are norms which govern belief essentially, while insisting that a subject has reason to conform to those norms only given a suitable desire, goal or role. So, Olson concludes, an error theorist can accept Normativism.

This places an onus on the opponent of the error theory to show that the norms to which belief is essentially subject provide a subject with categorical, rather than hypothetical reasons. This returns us to issues broached above (see §4).

## 6. Future Work

Efforts to argue for or against Normativism will no doubt continue. As noted above, there have been some attempts to explore the consequences of the thesis for debates in metaethics but the surface has only been scratched (might it support or undermine fictionalism about normative discourse, for example, or non-naturalism?). Another promising avenue for exploration is whether one might extend Normativism to other psychological attitudes, including conative attitudes such as desire or affective attitudes such as hate. Much of the discussion so far has focused on belief but it would certainly be surprising if belief were the *only* attitude to be essentially normative.

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