

There seems to be a special relationship between belief and truth that can be metaphorically expressed by saying that belief “aims” at truth or that belief’s “direction of fit” is “to fit the world.” There is an **Aristotelian thesis**, according to which the special relationship between desire and goodness is the same as the special relationship between belief and truth. Assuming that belief “aims” at truth, then, desire “aims” at goodness. This contrasts with a **Humean thesis**, on which, while belief “aims” at truth, desire has no analogous “aim.”<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I clarify the Aristotelian thesis by offering a less metaphorical account of the “aims” of belief and desire, in terms of constitutive standards of correctness (§1). This account enables the Aristotelian to avoid the standard objections to her view. I then present a novel argument for the Aristotelian thesis, so clarified, that appeals to the explanation of desire based on goodness-related considerations (§2).

## 1 The “aims” of belief and desire

In this section I articulate the Aristotelian thesis as a claim about the constitutive standards of correctness for belief and desire: truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, and goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire (§1.1). I shall then say something about correctness (§1.2), goodness (§1.3), and the nature of desire (§1.4).

### 1.1 “Aims” as correctness conditions

The Aristotelian thesis is a thesis of analogy or parity: the special relationship between desire and goodness is the same as the special relationship between belief and truth (cf. Tenenbaum 2007, pp. 6-17, pp. 30-2).<sup>2</sup> So defined, the thesis is silent on the nature of the special relationship. But it would be difficult to defend or criticize the Aristotelian thesis without a more precise articulation of the “special relationship” in question. This section aims to provide the needed precision. As will emerge, I side with those who maintain that we desire things only under the “guise of the good, but the key idea here is the analogy or parity affirmed by the Aristotelian thesis: we desire things only under the “guise of the good,” in the same way that we believe things only under the “guise of the true.”

Assume the Aristotelian thesis, and that belief “aims” at truth. Desire, then, “aims” at goodness. Just as a belief is true just in case its propositional object is true, a **desire is good**, in the relevant sense, just in case its propositional object is good. This will require us to speak of a proposition being good. A proposition is good when it’s being true is or

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that the Aristotelian thesis, as defended here, is compatible with the Humean theory of motivation (Smith 1994, Chapter 4), with the belief-desire model of intentional action (Davidson 1980, Essay 1), with Humean accounts of practical reason (e.g. Drier 2001), with skepticism about practical reason, which is plausibly Hume’s own view (Millgram 1995), and with the central tenets of Hume’s philosophy, and in particular with the idea that belief (along with desire) is a species of sensation, governed by instinct and not by reason. On the labels “Aristotelian” and “Humean” see below (§1.1) and *Treatise of Human Nature* II.iii.3.

<sup>2</sup> I speak here of “the” special connection, but there might be more than one. Getting more precise on the nature of the relevant connection (§1) will avoid any potential problems with this infelicity.

would be good.<sup>3</sup> Think of the following sentences: “It’s good that you made it home for Christmas”; “It’s good that Kobe’s injured, or else the Nuggets wouldn’t stand a chance”; “It’s good that you added thyme to the stew.” In this way we often speak of the goodness of propositions. More on this below (§1.3).

I focus here on **propositional desire**, i.e. desire that something be the case - e.g. my desire that the Celtics win their next game – and bracket **objectual desire**, i.e. desire for some object – e.g. my desire for a glass of whisky. (The relationship between these two sorts of desire is left open.)<sup>4</sup> I also bracket **practical desire**, i.e. desire to perform some action – e.g. my desire to drink a glass of whisky. (Again, the relationship between practical desire and propositional desire is left open.)<sup>5</sup> What I say here about propositional desire could be said, *mutatis mutandis*, about objectual desire and practical desire. And I’ll consider cases of objectual and practical desire below (§§1.2 – 1.4).

What does it mean to say that such-and-such propositional attitude (belief, desire) “aims” at such-and-such property (truth, goodness)? I shall adopt the following account:

A propositional attitude  $A(p)$  **aims** at property of propositions  $F(p)$  iff it is an essential property of  $A(p)$  that: a token instance of  $A(p)$  is correct iff  $F(p)$ , and incorrect otherwise.

Thus to say that belief “aims” at truth is to say that it is an essential property of belief that a token belief (that  $p$ ) is correct iff the proposition that  $p$  is true, and incorrect otherwise, and to say that desire “aims” at goodness is to say that it is an essential property of desire that a token desire (that  $p$ ) is correct iff the proposition that  $p$  is good. Truth and goodness are standards of correctness for belief and desire, respectively. But more: they are constitutive standards of correctness, which is captured by the idea that it is an essential property of belief that truth is its standard of correctness and an essential property of desire that goodness is its standard of correctness. That which is constitutive of  $x$  tells us what  $x$  is, in other words, it tells us about the essential properties of  $x$ .

Given this conception of “aims,” and again assuming that belief “aims” at truth, the Aristotelian is thus committed to the view that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief and goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire. In other words, she is committed to this:

**Aristotelian commitment:** (It is an essential property of belief that) a belief is correct if and only if its propositional content is true, and incorrect otherwise, and (it is an essential property of desire that) a desire is correct if and only if its propositional content is good, and incorrect otherwise.

---

<sup>3</sup> This is neutral between rival accounts of propositions (structured propositions, propositions as sets of worlds, etc.), although I assume that propositions are the contents of propositional attitudes (belief, desire). See also [footnote on attitudes towards impossible propositions].

<sup>4</sup> My desire for whisky is naturally understood as a *de se* desire that I drink some whisky. So perhaps objectual desire is a species of propositional desire.

<sup>5</sup> An account of practical desire in terms of propositional desire seems promising:  $S$  desires to  $\Phi$  iff  $S$  desires *de se* that  $S \Phi$ . Consider also: “I want the Celtics to win.” A promising account:  $S$  wants  $x$  to  $\Phi$  iff  $S$  desires that  $x \Phi$ .

More schematically, a belief (that p) is correct if and only if it is true that p, and a desire (that p) is correct if and only if it is good that p. And, moreover, these facts about belief and desire are essential properties of belief and desire.

We find something like this view in Aristotle, who writes that “of the intellect that is contemplative ... the good and bad state are truth and falsity (for this is the function of everything intellectual),” (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI.2 1139a29-9, trans. Ross) that “good action is an end, and desire aims at this,” (ibid. 1139b4) and that “desire ... may be either correct or incorrect,” where “the object of desire is either the good or the apparent good.” (*De Anima*, 433a27, trans. Irwin and Fine) For this reason, “each man loves not what is good for him but what seems good,” (*Ethics*, 1155b25, trans. Ross) and “no one wishes for what he does not think to be good.” (Ibid. 1136b7, cf. 1165b14) Plato seems to hold a similar view (*Gorgias*, 466e-468d, *Meno* 77c-78b),<sup>6</sup> and this kind of view has some contemporary defenders (Anscombe 1963, Stampe 1987, Tenenbaum 2007; cf. Davidson 1980, Raz 2002, Chapter 2, 2010).

## 1.2 What is correctness?

What then is correctness? In the intended senses of “correct” and “incorrect,” we might just as well speak of a propositional attitude being right, apt, fitting, incorrect, wrong, mistaken, or in error.<sup>7</sup> But we can say more about these notions, by appeal to the notion of representation.

To say that a propositional attitude has a constitutive standard of correctness is to say that it is a **representation** of a certain kind. To say that a property is the constitutive standard of correctness for a propositional attitude is to say that instances of that propositional attitude represent their objects as having that property. This explains why token instances of said attitude are correct if and only if their object has said property. Thus, on my view, belief represents its object as true and that desire represents its object as good.

All propositional attitudes, in a different sense, are representations, in the sense that they all have propositional content. Believing that p and desiring that p, along with other propositional attitudes, are representations (in this sense) of the proposition that p. And with respect of being representations (in this sense) of the proposition that p, they all represent the same thing and (in this sense) they all have the same content.<sup>8</sup> But there is another sense of representation, on which belief and desire do not represent the same thing and do not have the same content. Belief is a species of what we might call **factual or descriptive representation**: a representation of how things are. Desire is a species of what we might call **evaluative or prescriptive representation**: a representation of what is or would be good. Compare two paintings of the cat Paws, one that depicts her as sitting on the mat, and the other that depicts her as not sitting on the mat. In one

---

<sup>6</sup> On the claim that desire “aims” at goodness in Ancient philosophy, see Evans 2010, Clark 2010, Moss 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Tenenbaum 2007, pp. 5-6, Raz 2002, p. 25, Moss 2010, p. 70.

<sup>8</sup> Jessica Moss (2010) writes that “pleasurable perception” is “a genuine cognitive state,” (p. 67) and Sergio Tenenbaum writes that desiring that p requires “conceiving” the proposition that p as good, and explains this by appeal to the example of imagining: when I imagine that p, I conceive the proposition that p as true (p. 21). However is not incorrect to imagine that p, when the proposition that p is false. Conceiving does not seem to be the same as representing (in my sense).

sense, the two paintings depict the same thing (namely, Paws), but, in another sense, they depict different things (namely, her location). In the same way, although believing that p and desiring that p in one sense represent the same thing (namely, the proposition that p), in another sense they represent different things. The former represents the proposition that p as true, while the latter represents the proposition that p as good.

Belief is a representation of truth; desire is a representation of goodness. Note the identification (cf. Tenenbaum 2007, p. 23, Moss 2010, p. 72): the idea is *not* that belief (that p) is necessarily connected with a distinct representation, one that represents the proposition that p as true, nor that desire (that p) is necessarily connected with a distinct representation, one that represents the proposition that p as good (cf. §1.4).<sup>9</sup> Belief *just is* a certain kind of representation, and desire *just is* another kind.

So: desire, like belief, is a representational propositional attitude. Just as a person's beliefs reveal how she takes the world to be, a person's desires reveal what she takes to be good.<sup>10</sup> In what way does desire represent its object as good? We can articulate this by appeal to Aristotle's idea that we desire what *seems* or *appears* good to us (cf. Stampe 1987, pp. 356-62, Tenenbaum 2007, pp. 38-42, Moss 2010, p. 67-8). When someone desires that p, the proposition that p seems good to her – i.e. it seems to her that it is good that p, or would be good were it the case that p. In the same way, when someone believes that p, the proposition that p seems true to her. However, seeming is not believing: there are seemings that are not believings. The Müller-Lyer lines seem unequal in length, but I do not believe that they are unequal in length, and even though I believe that they are equal in length, they do not seem equal in length. Is this consistent with the claim that when someone believes that p, the proposition that p seems true to her? It is, once we distinguish between ways in which something can seem to be the case, or in which something can seem good, i.e. between ways of representing something as the case, or of representing something as good. My visual experience of the Müller-Lyer lines represents them as unequal in length, while at the same time my belief about the length of the lines represents them as equal in length. We can thus contrast **visual representation** with **doxastic representation**.

I implied, above, that desire is a non-doxastic species of representation, by saying that desire is “another kind” of representation in addition to belief. This assumption won't play a role in my argument below (§2), which is compatible with the view that desire is a species of belief, e.g. that desiring that p is believing that p is good (cf. Pettit 1987, Lewis 1988, pp. 323-5, 1994, pp. 117- 25; see also Altham 1986, pp. 284-5). But I don't find that view plausible, so let us continue to assume that desire is non-doxastic.

Nevertheless, when someone desires that p, the proposition that p seems good to her. In the same way that my visual experience of the Müller-Lyer lines visually represents them as unequal in length, my desire that the Celtics win represents that proposition as good, independently of whether I believe that it would be good were they to win. This is **orexic representation**. When someone desires that p, the proposition that p seems good to her, but this doesn't necessarily mean that she believes that the proposition that

---

<sup>9</sup> Contrast Joseph Raz's (2010) view that “[i]ntentional actions are taken in, and because of, a *belief* that there is some good in them.” (p. 111, my emphasis; see also e.g. 2002, p. 25, Setiya 2007, p. 21, 2010, p. 88)

<sup>10</sup> For this reason it is false that “practical irrationalities ... can leave someone's evaluative outlook intact while removing their motivations altogether.” (Smith 1994, pp. 120-1) To have desires is to have an evaluative outlook, and to change someone's desires is to change her evaluative outlook.

p is good. Nor does it mean that someone who believes that the proposition that p is good necessarily desires p. Desire is an appearance of goodness, but as with visual appearances, there is no automatic connection to belief (cf. §1.4). Something might seem good to me without my believing that it is good (as when I yearn for a cigarette), and I might believe something is good without its seeming good (as with a foul-tasting medicine).

Does believing that p require possessing the concept of truth, and does desiring that p require possessing the concept of goodness? We can distinguish between strong and weak senses of “possessing a concept.” In the strong sense, concepts are representational mental states that are potentially the objects of introspective awareness or linguistic articulation. In this sense, belief does not require possessing the concept of truth and desire does not require possessing the concept of goodness. Compare fear, which represents its object as dangerous. Non-human animals are capable of fear, but they do not (in the strong sense) have the concept of danger. However, there is another sense of “possessing a concept”: in the weak sense, concepts are abilities to discriminate, and S possesses the concept of being F just in case she can discriminate between Fs and non-Fs.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, non-human animals do possess the concept of danger, in virtue of their ability to distinguish the dangerous from the non-dangerous, which ability is realized by their capacity for fear. In the weak sense, belief does require possessing the concept of truth and desire does require possessing the concept of goodness. And given this distinction, the representational account is compatible with the attribution of beliefs and desires to non-human animals and human children (cf. Velleman 1992, p. 7, Tenenbaum 2007, pp. 247-8, Moss 2010, pp. 68-73).

That desire represents its object as good is what G.E.M. Anscombe (1963) is getting at when she argues that it is impossible to “just want” something<sup>12</sup>:

[I]s not anything wantable, or at least any perhaps attainable thing? It will be instructive to anyone who thinks this to approach someone and say: ‘I want a saucer of mud’ ... He is likely to be asked what for; to which let him reply that he does not want it *for* anything, he just wants it. [...] Does it serve as a symbol? Is there something delightful about it? Does the man want to have something to call his own, and no more? Now if the reply is ‘Philosophers have taught that anything can be the object of desire; so there can be no need for me to characterize these objects as somehow desirable; it merely so happens that I want them’, then this is fair nonsense. (pp. 70-1; cf. Tenenbaum 2007, pp. 27-38)

The point Anscombe is making is actually not that it’s false that anything can be the object of desire. Of any given thing, it is possible for someone to desire it. Anscombe is not saying that some things – like saucers of mud – are just too awful for anyone to desire them. She is saying that anyone who desires a saucer of mud is, a fortiori, someone to whom a saucer of mud seems good in some way. It is required “for our concept of ‘wanting’ ... that a man should see what he wants under the description of some good.” (Ibid.) Again, as Aristotle puts it, “there is no natural object of wish, but only what seems good to each man.” (1113a22, trans. Ross) Someone cannot “just want” something, if what that means is that it does not seem good to her. Someone who

---

<sup>11</sup> N.b. that one can have an ability without successfully exercising it; the victim of a deceptive demon has the ability to discriminate between hawks and handsaws.

<sup>12</sup> I assume here and in what follows that desiring and wanting are the same.

claimed to desire a saucer of mud, but denied that it seemed good to her, would be less than fully intelligible. This is not to say that she might be telling (something close to) the truth: someone might desire that *p*, and yet not have a clear sense of how or in what way the proposition that *p* seems good to her. Such a person would be less than fully intelligible both to us and to herself. She might say: “I want it, but I don’t know why.” Such a person can be made intelligible to us once we come to understand how or in what way the proposition that *p* seems good to her. That desire represents its object as good explains why this is so. To see why, note that all this applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to belief. Each person believes not what is true but what seems true to her. And it is impossible to “just believe” something, in the sense that you cannot believe that *p* without representing the proposition that *p* as true. Someone who claimed to believe that *p* whilst denying that seemed true to her that *p* would be less than fully intelligible. That belief represents its object as true explains why this is so.

Note two appealing corollaries of the present view. First, the Aristotelian commitment is compatible with the possibility of not desiring something that you believe to be good, as when you are depressed or dejected (Stocker 1979, pp. 741-6). On the present view, desiring is a non-doxastic way of representing something as good, which does not imply that believing something to be good entails desiring that thing (cf. Stampe 1987, pp. 355-8).<sup>13</sup> Second, the Aristotelian commitment is compatible with the possibility of desiring something that you believe to be bad, as when you want to smoke a cigarette you know to be nasty (Stocker 1979, p. 747, Brink 2008, p. 31). The present view does not imply that that desiring something entails not believing that it is bad. Nor does it imply that desiring something entails believing that it is good (cf. Tenenbaum 2007, p. 40, p. 251). The present view maintains a necessary connection between desiring that *p* and representing the proposition that *p* as good, not a necessary connection between desiring that *p* and believing that the proposition that *p* is good.<sup>14</sup> And it indeed seems possible to desire something without believing that it is good. I might perversely have a thirsty

---

<sup>13</sup> Sergio Tenenbaum (2007) takes the possibility of desiring something you believe to be bad to be “a particularly difficult challenge to the scholastic view,” (p. 284) i.e. the view that desire represents its object as good. I don’t see the problem if the scholastic view says that “we desire (only) what we conceive to be good” (p. 22); the depressed or dejected person is not a counterexample to this, but rather to the view that we conceive to be good only what we desire.

<sup>14</sup> This point also undermines Setiya’s (2010) argument “against evaluative conceptions of desire” that appeals to the premise that “no further evaluative belief need be involved” in cases of desire (p. 91-2; cf. his 2007, pp. 33-8), and Brink’s (2008) argument that we have desires that are “not produced or sustained by the thought that the objects of desire are good.” (p. 31) Compare the idea that belief “aims” at truth: this doesn’t imply that cases of belief requires further belief (about the truth of the relevant propositions), or that beliefs are always (or ever) produced or sustained by the thought that the object of belief is true. Both beliefs and desires can arise spontaneously or as a result of “sub-rational processes” (*ibid.*), and unsophisticated creatures are capable of both belief and desire. Thus there is no threat to the present view from expressive actions (cf. Raz 2002, pp. 36-44, Tenenbaum 2007, p. 41). Grief-stricken, you want to (and do) roll around on a pile of your late partner’s clothes (Hursthouse 1991, p. 58). On the present view, you represent rolling around on the pile as good, i.e. rolling around on the pile seems good to you, which doesn’t entail that you believe that rolling around on the pile is good. In connection with this, note that desires need not be conscious, as in the case of Freud’s breaking his old inkstand (Setiya 2007, pp. 33-4).

urge to drink from a glass that I know contains turpentine. I don't believe that my drinking the turpentine would be pleasurable; I don't believe that it would quench my thirst, I don't believe that it would be good in any way. Still, I desire that I drink it. But what this desire consists in is an appearance of goodness: drinking the turpentine *seems* good, even though I do not believe that it would be good.<sup>15</sup>

Even though it is possible to desire something that you believe to be bad, you might wonder whether this state of mind is coherent. It can be, given that one and the same thing can be both good and bad (cf. §1.3). My smoking a cigarette is like this: it would be good, in virtue of being pleasant, but it would be bad, in virtue of being unhealthy. However, if you desire something that you believe to be *not* good, then there is an incoherence in how you represent things. Your desire constitutes a representation of the proposition that *p* as good, but your belief constitutes a representation of the proposition that *p* as not good. This is perfectly possible (cf. Moss 2010, pp. 72), and in general this kind of representational incoherence is possible, as in the case of the Müller-Lyer illusion (§1.2). However, there is not this kind of incoherence when I represent the proposition that *p* as good and represent the proposition that  $\sim p$  as good or represent the proposition that *p* as bad, given that one and the same thing can be both good and bad.

I have given an account of the metaphorical “aiming” of propositional attitudes in terms of correctness, and I have explained correctness in terms of representation. What has been gained by doing this? Although this is controversial, I assume that talk of propositional attitudes “representing” things is less metaphorical than talk of propositional attitudes having “aims.” And so I think we have made progress by giving the present account.

There are alternative accounts of the metaphorical “aiming” of propositional attitudes available. It seems to me that these are compatible with my account, but I don't assume that in what follows. Some say that it is an irreducible, a priori, conceptual truth about belief that a belief (that *p*) is correct iff it is true that *p* (Wedgwood 2002, Shah 2003, Owens 2003, Boghossian 2003, Shah and Velleman 2005). Others say that belief is “commitment-constituted” in the sense that “if I believe *p*, then I am committed to *p* as true, that is, I am answerable to questions and criticisms that would be answered by the considerations that bear on whether *p*.” (Hieronymi 2005, p. 450). Other says that a believer seeks, or desires, or intends to believe the truth (Steglich-Petersen 2006, 2009, Sosa 2007, 2009). Others say that the evolved function of belief is to be true (Millikan 1984, Papineau 1993; see also Velleman 2000, p. 253, Sosa 2009, p. 8); similar suggestions are made about desire and goodness (cf. Papineau 1993, Moss 2010). Finally, some argue, by appeal to the necessity of charity in interpretation, that it is impossible for there to be a believer whose beliefs are mostly untrue (Davidson 1984, 2001), and thus that “belief is in its nature veridical” (Davidson 2001, p. 146); likewise, charity ensures

---

<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, we might understand some would-be cases of desires for things believed to be bad as cases in which someone feels compelled to make it the case that *p*, but does not desire that *p* (Tenenbaum 2007, pp. 237-40). A certain kind of addict might best be described as not even *wanting* to smoke, but feeling compelled to smoke nonetheless: perhaps she is so alienated from her addiction that she “finds herself” reaching for a cigarette and experiences her smoking as the result of an “alien” or “external” force operating on her. This is, perhaps, the best interpretation of the case in which you have a “brute inclination” to turn on radios (Setiya 2007, p. 37). Although such descriptions are often rationalizations, in any event, they are no threat to the Aristotelian commitment.

that it is impossible for there to be a desirer whose desires are mostly not for the good (cf. Lewis 1974, p. 112, Davidson 1984, p. 137).

### 1.3 What is goodness?

What is it for a proposition to be good? You might worry that we cannot make sense of the idea that desire represents its object as good (§1.2) without an account of the nature of goodness – for without such an account, how shall we know what the representational content of desire actually is?

There is some truth to this worry, but we do not need an account of the nature of goodness to evaluate the idea that desire represents its object as good. Compare the idea that belief represents its object as true. We do not need an account of the nature of truth to recognize that belief represents its object as true. Compare the metaphorical claim that belief “aims” at truth; we can argue that belief “aims” at truth without taking a stand on the metaphysics of truth (or, for that matter, on the meaning of “true”). Likewise, we do not need an account of the nature of goodness to recognize that desire represents its object as good. We can remain neutral on questions about the nature of goodness (and on questions about the meaning of “good”).<sup>16</sup> Different philosophers will give different answers to these questions, just as different philosophers will give different answers to the analogous questions about truth (and “true”).

In defense of this methodological point, we do require a clarification. Take the idea that belief represents its object as true. There are two reasons why this idea is orthogonal to the question of the nature of truth. First, to say that belief represents its object as true is not the same as to say that if S believes that p, then S believes that the proposition that p is true. Tigers have beliefs, but they do not have beliefs to the effect that such-and-such propositions are true, because they do not have the concept of truth.<sup>17</sup> Second, representing x as F does not typically involve representing the nature of F. A seasoned prospector sees a nugget that looks, to him, like gold, i.e. the prospector visually represents the nugget as gold. But he does not visually represent the nugget as being composed of the element with atomic number 79 (even if he is aware of the nature of gold; and we can imagine he isn't). The nugget does not look, to him, like it is composed of the element with atomic number 79.<sup>18</sup> The prospector's visual representation of the nugget as gold is silent on the nature of gold. Likewise, our beliefs, which are representations of propositions as true, are silent on the nature of truth. The same, *mutatis mutandis*, when it comes to desire. Desiring that p does not require believing that p is good (§1.2), and our desires, which are representations of propositions as good, are silent on the nature of goodness.

---

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps not entirely neutral. The claim that desire “aims” at goodness would not be defensible (cf. §2) if we were to adopt an extreme form of subjectivism, on which the proposition that p is good iff S desires p (cf. Tenenbaum 2007, p. 26). For the same reason, the claim that belief “aims” at truth is not defensible if we were to adopt the view that p is true, for S, iff S believes p.

<sup>17</sup> The proposed principle would also create a (seemingly) vicious regress.

<sup>18</sup> At least in one sense of “looks.” There may be a sense in which the nugget looks, to him, like it is composed of the element with atomic number 79. It certainly looks, to him, the way that nuggets composed of that element look, to him. But there is clearly a *sense* in which it does not *look like* it is composed of that element.



For similar reasons, the view that desire represents its object as good does not commit us to anything actually being good. The anti-realist about evaluative or normative properties can agree with the Aristotelian commitment. Think here of the fact that our visual experiences represent physical objects as colored, which is orthogonal to the question of whether anything really is colored.<sup>19</sup>

However, there seems to be an important difference between truth and goodness, which we must bear in mind as we continue. There seem to many different goods, whereas there is only one truth. Each of these conjuncts is denied by some philosophers: there are monists in ethics who think that there is only one good, and there are relativists about truth who think that there are many truths. But many of us think that, while there is only one truth, there are many goods. One and the same proposition cannot be true and false, but one and the same proposition can be good and bad – global warming might be bad for polar bears, but great for those animals who like it hot. We think naturally in terms of what is good or bad in one particular way, i.e. with respect of one particular good, and we equally naturally think in terms of what is good or bad, all things considered. How then shall we understand the claim that desire represents its object as good? Not, I think, as saying that desire represents its object as good, all things considered. As Anscombe (1963) argues, “good is multiform,” and so “all that is required for our concept of ‘wanting’ is that a man should see what he wants under the aspect of some good.” (p. 75; cf. Raz 2001, p. 30) However, this still is ambiguous. Do we mean that desire represents its object as being good in some specific way, or that desire represents its object as being good in some way or other? I shall adopt the latter understanding. Desire (necessarily) represents its object as an instance of the genus of goodness, not (necessarily) as an instance of some particular species of goodness. Although it may be that whenever it is good that p, it is good in some particular way that p, when one desires that p, one does not (necessarily) represent the proposition that p as being good in some particular way. Compare the way that something can look like metal, without looking like any particular kind of metal. I can visually represent something as metal, without representing it as any particular species of metal, and likewise I can orexically represent something as good, without representing it as being good in any particular way.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Modulo, in both cases, the question of how such content is determined in the absence of the relevant properties.

<sup>20</sup> David Velleman (1992) argues that “one can desire things conceived as worthless, or even bad, and desire them perfectly under those descriptions.” (p. 17; cf. 1996, p. 716) The Aristotelian rejects this possibility. Consider the case of someone who “likes bad movies.” This is no threat to the present view, because this person either (i) likes movies because they are *considered* bad by others, or (ii) likes movies that are bad in some ways and good in other ways. (The same possibilities apply in the case of those who love evil; cf. Anscombe 1963, p. 75, Raz 2002, p. 32, Tenenbaum 2007, pp. 251-6). When you desire something that you know to be bad or worthless, your desiring involves an appearance of goodness. That’s what’s uncomfortable about such a situation: something that you know isn’t good perversely continues to look good. What we seek is a case in which you desire something known to be bad or worthless, but in which there is nothing uncomfortable about the situation, because there is no appearance of goodness. Velleman (1992) offers two examples that are meant to be cases of this kind. The first is the case of someone in a silly or playful mood; constitutive of such a mood is “a disposition to form desires for things conceived of as having no particular value.”

## 1.4 What is desire?

The Aristotelian commitment (§1.1) says that belief is correct if and only if its propositional content is true and that desire is correct if and only if its propositional content is or would be good, and that these facts about belief and desire are essential properties of belief and desire. But the Aristotelian is not committed to the view that these facts about belief and desire are the only essential properties of belief and desire. She is not committed to saying that the constitutive standards of correctness for belief and desire exhaust their essences. The Aristotelian commitment claims that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire, but this claim is not offered as an exhaustive account of desire (i.e. one that purports to enumerate all of desire's essential properties).

However, the Aristotelian commitment is consistent with accounts of belief and desire on which their constitutive standards of correctness exhaust their essences. It is consistent with the view that belief *just is* the propositional attitude whose constitutive standard of correctness is truth (cf. Velleman 2000), and with the view that desire *just is* the propositional attitude whose constitutive standard of correctness is goodness. The former view is problematized by the existence of propositional attitudes that seem both to be distinct from belief and to have truth as their constitutive standard of correctness, such as guessing (cf. Owens 2003). In any event, these views are logically independent of the Aristotelian commitment.

The Aristotelian commitment says that desire is essentially representational; desires are representations of goodness (§1.2). Given what I've just argued, this is consistent with the view that desire is essentially practical. This seems to be at least one of the things that is captured by the metaphor of "direction of fit." Here is Mark Platts' (1997) influential articulation of the idea:

The distinction is in terms of the *direction of fit* of mental states with the world. Beliefs aim at the true, and their being true is their fitting the world; ... beliefs should be changed to fit the world, not vice versa. Desires aim at realisation, and their realisation is the world fitting with them; ... the world, crudely, should be changed to fit with our desires, and not *vice versa*. (pp. 256-7)

The metaphor of "direction of fit" – this "picturesque idiom" (ibid.) – needs to be cashed out in non-metaphorical, or less metaphorical, terms. (Should the world be changed to fit with my desires? Why mine? And what if my desires are for something awful?) Michael Smith (1994, pp. 113-6) offers such an account, which understands "directions of fit" in terms of **functional roles**:

---

(pp. 17-8) However, this is a bad description of being in a silly or playful mood. When you are in such a mood, things that you might otherwise think were worthless now appear good: racing to the end of the block, or pretending to be a fish (Raz 2010, p. 123; cf. p. 115), seems like it would be fun. (Bear in mind that on the present view desire does not represent its object as good in any particular way.) Velleman's second example is the case of someone who wants to harm herself. But here, as well, it is hard to imagine the right kind of case. We are not supposed to be thinking of a masochist (for whom self-harm is pleasant) or a certain kind of nihilist (who thinks that she deserves to be harmed), but rather of someone who wants to harm herself for no reason at all. But this is hard to imagine.

[A] belief that p tends to go out of existence in the presence of a perception with the content that not p, whereas a desire that p tends to endure, disposing the subject in that state to bring it about that p. (p. 115)

But this claim about the functional role of desire is compatible with the Aristotelian commitment. Indeed, it seems to me that the truth of the Aristotelian commitment explains why this claim is true, to the extent that it is (more on which below). That desire represents its object as good (§1.2) explains why desiring that p disposes one to bring it about that p (cf. Stampe 1987): if the proposition that p seems good to you, then bringing it about that p will make things pro tanto better, by your lights. To the extent that desire is essentially practical, its being essentially representational explains why this is so. Moreover, the Aristotelian can appeal to the representational nature of desire to explain the normative authority of desire (Stampe 1987) and to make sense of practical reason (Tenenbaum 2007). That desire represents its object as good explains why we are sometimes justified in acting on our desires, in treating them as reasons for action.

However, the Aristotelian commitment suggests an alternative way of understanding the “direction of fit” metaphor. In one sense, belief and desire have the same “direction of fit,” since they both have representational content, but in another sense they have different “directions of fit,” since beliefs represent the way the world is, and desire represents the way it would be good for the world to be. Both belief and desire “must fit” something external to them: belief must fit the way the world is; desire must fit the way it would be good for the world to be. In that sense, they have the same “direction of fit” (cf. Tenenbaum 2007, p. 6). But what they “must fit” is fundamentally different: belief describes the world as it is, while desire prescribes the world as it would be good for it to be. In that sense, they have different “directions of fit.”

Is desire essentially practical? Smith’s account (above) suggests this, as does David Velleman’s idea that “desire aims, not at the good, but rather at the attainable.” (1992, p. 17; cf. Charles 1982/3, p. 207) Velleman supports this idea by appeal to the premise that “[o]ne cannot desire something if it seems impossible or if it seems already to have come about.” (p. 17)<sup>21</sup> Supposing that the Celtics won last night, and I am happy about this, it would be unnatural to describe my state of mind by saying that I *desire* that they won last night; the natural thing to say is that I am *glad* that they won last night. Similarly, supposing that they lost, and I am unhappy about this, it would be unnatural to describe my state of mind by saying that I *desire* that they won last night; the natural thing to say is that I *wish* that they had won last night. Finally, and again along the same lines, supposing that I think it is impossible to have both liberty and security, and I am unhappy about lacking both, it would be unnatural to describe my state of mind by saying that I *desire* to have both liberty and security; the natural thing to say is that I *wish* I could have both liberty and security.<sup>22</sup> It is more natural to use the words “glad”

---

<sup>21</sup> I take Velleman to be an opponent here, but he may not really disagree with the Aristotelian commitment: “I am not opposed to describing desire as the attitude of regarding something as good, so long as this description is taken merely to express the attitude’s direction of fit.” (1992, p. 12)

<sup>22</sup> What is involved in desiring the impossible? What is the propositional object of one’s desire? The same question has been raised about believing the impossible. Suppose it is impossible that r. On one kind of account, when someone believes that r, she believes that the sentence “r” is true (cf. Stalnaker 1984, pp. 73–5, Lewis 1986, p. 36). Applied to desire, this is unappealing: I desire to have both liberty and security, not that the

and “wish” in connection with our attitudes towards states of affairs that (so it seem to us) we cannot possibly affect with our actions. This is why it even sounds a bit strange to say, in advance of tonight’s game, that I *desire* that the Celtics win; it would be more natural to say that I *hope* that they will win, or that I *want* them to win.

What should we say about all this? There are two plausible routes for the defender of the Aristotelian commitment. The first is to posit a plurality of propositional attitudes, each of which has goodness as its constitutive standard of correctness. (Compare the idea, mentioned above, that there are a plurality of propositional attitudes, each of which has truth as its constitutive standard of correctness.) These are the “pro-attitudes” (Davidson 1980, pp. 3-4, Smith 1994, p. 117), which we might distinguish in terms of the attainability of their contents: we desire things that we think we can bring about, we wish for things that we think are possible but that we think we cannot bring about, we are glad for things that we think have already occurred. But this sketch needs refinement: we speak naturally of desires for things that we think we cannot bring about (“My deepest desire has always been to win the lottery”) and of wanting things that we cannot bring about (“I want the Celtics to win”). Desiring and wanting, which are often taken to be the same, may or may not need to be distinguished. The second plausible route for the defender of the Aristotelian commitment is to argue that the propositional attitudes that we pick out, in ordinary English, when we speak of desiring, wanting, wishing, being glad, hoping, and so on, are all species of desire, in the strict and proper sense. Ordinary language draws distinctions between cases of desire; philosophical reflection reveals what is common between these cases – namely, that goodness is their constitutive standard of correctness – and unites them under the heading of “desire.”<sup>23</sup>

---

sentence “I have both liberty and security” be true. However, there are other (more) plausible accounts of propositional attitudes towards the impossible. These accounts are independently plausible, since it certainly seems possible to believe or desire the impossible. (For a spirited defense of the possibility of believing the impossible, see Sorensen 2001, Chapter 8.) First, believing and desiring the impossible are unproblematic if we understand propositions as structured (Soames 1985, 1987, Salmon 1986, 1989, King 1995, 2007), rather than as sets of possible worlds. Second, at least some cases of believing and desiring the impossible can be understood using a “divide and conquer strategy” (Sorensen 2001, p. 136), on which the believer or desirer is understood as having “compartmentalized” beliefs or desires (Stalnaker 1984, p. 83, Lewis 1986, pp. 34-5), which is consistent with understanding propositions as sets of possible worlds. Finally, believing and desiring the impossible are unproblematic if we continue to treat propositions as sets of worlds (or situations) and allow impossible worlds (or situations) (Barwise and Perry 1981, Yagisawa 1988, Barwise 1997, Nolan 1997, Berto 2010). This itself is (classically) unproblematic on the assumption that worlds (or situations) are not concrete, e.g. if they are understood as set-theoretic constructions.

<sup>23</sup> There is an instructive (if rough) analogy with belief here. In ordinary English <S believes that p> implies a lack of knowledge (especially in first-person belief attribution), and the implication is such that some people find <S knows that p and S believes that p> contradictory. Many people have a strong intuition that what you believe and what you know don’t overlap. But epistemologists, for reasons not related to ordinary language, treat knowledge as a species of belief; they adopt a broader conception of belief than that suggested by ordinary language. The present proposal says something similar

So, again, is desire essentially practical? On a broad conception of desire that includes wanting, it seems not: I want the Celtics to win, but I am not disposed to bring it about that they win. We could avoid this conclusion by amending our account of the relevant practical disposition: rather than defining desire (that p) as a disposition to bring it about that p, we might define desire (that p) as a disposition to “make certain sorts of bets when faced with lotteries where the outcome is *inter alia* that p.” (Smith 1994, p. 208) Desire is thus understood as essentially practical – essentially a disposition to act, where “the action is all betting behavior.” (Ibid.) (This conception of desire, however, would still exclude cases of wishing for what seems impossible.) It seems to me, however, that desire is not essentially practical, given a broad conception of desire that includes wanting. To the extent that we think of desires in terms of their functional roles, it seems to me much more natural to think of my wanting the Celtics to win in terms of my affective dispositions, rather than my dispositions to bet on the outcomes of lotteries. Someone who wants the Celtics to win will feel anxious as the game begins, upset when the Celtics fall behind, excited when they mount their comeback, and happy when they have won. The functional role of desire is not exhausted by the practical dispositions of the desirer. We should include in our account of desire’s functional role the affective dispositions of the desirer. This allows us to understand why even wishes for the impossible are desires: we can think of my wishing I could have both liberty and security in terms of my disposition to feel sad about my lacking both.

Again, it seems to me that the truth of the Aristotelian commitment explains the functional role of desire. In the case of my desire that the Celtics win, my emotional responses to the events of the game are explained throughout by the fact that their winning seems good to me. My happiness after the game makes sense in light of my desire that they win (along with my knowledge that they won): in response to the question, “Why are you happy?,” the perspicuous answer is, “Because I wanted them to win, and they won.” The reason it makes sense to cite a desire here, the reason the existence of desire is a good explanation for my happiness, is that desire represents its object as good. Given the Aristotelian commitment, I could have said: “Because their winning seemed good to me, and they won.” An explanation that appealed only to the functional role of desire would be curiously unsatisfying; it would be like saying, in the same context, “Because I was in a state that disposes its bearer to happiness under certain conditions, and those conditions were met.” In any event, the Aristotelian can give satisfying explanations of (at least some of) our emotional responses (namely, those that are desire-based). Moreover, she is well-positioned to account for why (those same) emotional responses can be rational or justified: happiness about the forthcoming ceasefire agreement is rational or justified because it is correct to desire that a ceasefire be agreed, and it is correct to desire that a ceasefire be agreed because it would be good were a ceasefire agreed. So rather than thinking that there is an essential connection between desire and practical reason, we might conclude that there is an essential connection between desire and rationality in general.

The Aristotelian commitment is a claim about desire in particular, and not a claim about intention or intentional action. The question of the nature of desire is distinct from, although related to, questions about the nature of intention and intentional action. And

---

about “desire”: we have reasons, not related to ordinary language, to treat wishing (for example) as a species of desire, and to adopt a broader conception of desire than that suggested by ordinary language.

intention seems essentially practical, in precisely the way that (I have argued) desire isn't. It seems impossible to intend something that you seem unable to affect with your actions: you can desire that the Celtics win, but you can't intend that they win, unless you're in a position to have some effect on whether they win. The Aristotelian commitment is thus compatible with the view that "if I intend to  $\Phi$ , then I am committed to  $\Phi$ ing," (Hieronymi 2005, p. 45) the view that "[j]ust as we say that belief aims at truth ... intention aims at to-be-doneness," (Shah 2008, p. 8) the view that "the constitutive aim of action" is "autonomy," (Velleman 1996, p. 719) the view that "a constitutive aim of intention" is "coordinated, effective control of action," (Bratman 2009a, p. 25, 2009b, pp. 49-55) as well as with the view that intentional action is performed under the "guise of the good." (Davidson 1980, Raz 2002, Chapter 2, 2010)<sup>24</sup>

## 2 In defense of the Aristotelian commitment

I have articulated the Aristotelian thesis as a claim about the constitutive standards of correctness for belief and desire, which I called the Aristotelian commitment: truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, and goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire (§1.1). I take this to mean that belief represents its object as true, and that desire represents its object as good (§1.2). In this section I'll argue that the Aristotelian commitment is true. I'll present an argument for the conclusion that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief (§2.1), show how an equally sound argument can be articulated for the conclusion that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire (§2.2), and amend both arguments in response to an objection (§2.3).

### 2.1 The argument from doxastic-alethic exclusivity

Bernard Williams (1973) writes that:

If in full consciousness I could acquire a 'belief' irrespective of its truth, it is unclear that before the event I could seriously think of it as a belief, i.e. as something purporting to represent reality. (p. 148; cf. Williams 2002, pp. 79-83)

Although there is a lot going on in this passage, let's focus on Williams' implied conclusion: you cannot acquire a belief irrespective of its truth. If this is true, it represents an important connection between belief and truth – one that is explained, Williams argues (1973, p. 148), by the fact that belief "aims" at truth. We can articulate Williams' idea as follows:

**Doxastic-alethic exclusivity:** It is impossible to consciously treat some consideration as your basis for belief (that p) if you take that consideration to be unrelated to the truth of the proposition that p.

---

<sup>24</sup> Kieran Setiya (2010) argues that "the guise of the good is best understood as a claim about reasons, and only derivatively a claim about desire," (p. 85) suggesting that the question of the "aim" of desire cannot be cleaved from these questions about intention and intentional action. His argument for this assumes, however, that "we should think of desires as presenting the specific appeal of their objects, what it is about them that seems to make them good." (Ibid.) I rejected this, above (§1.3).

Note that the present formulation is not restricted to cases in which belief is *acquired* on the basis of certain considerations (as with Williams' formulation), and also covers cases in which belief is *sustained* on the basis of certain considerations. The phenomenon of doxastic-alethic exclusivity, and related phenomena<sup>25</sup>, has received a lot of attention recently (see Jones 2002, 2009, Owens 2003, Shah 2003, 2006, Hieronymi 2005, 2006, Steglich-Petersen 2009, McHugh 2012), and many argue (op. cit.) that the phenomenon has *something* to do with the fact that belief "aims" at truth (cf. §2.3).

Although considerations you take to be unrelated to the truth of the relevant proposition cannot form the conscious basis for belief, they can unconsciously or indirectly affect belief-formation. Ward Jones (2009) writes that:

Some doxastic goods [e.g. truth] are such that my consciously realizing that coming to believe *p* will (or already does) allow me to attain them can, itself, determine my belief that *p*. Other doxastic goods [e.g. a cash prize for belief], however, cannot. The latter can only work *surreptitiously* in bringing about belief; they cannot bring about belief in a way that is 'open' to the believer. (p. 142)<sup>26</sup>

For example, your love of Australian cricket might cause you to falsely remember reading that Australia won the 1979 Cricket World Cup, or you might try to get yourself to believe that Australia won by creating misleading evidence to that effect and then somehow forgetting your scheme (as in the movie *Memento*). The need for such a scheme is evidence for doxastic-alethic exclusivity: evidence that Australia won is relevant to the truth of the proposition that they won, and this is the sort of thing that can form the basis for belief. If I am to consciously treat some considerations as my basis for believing that *p*, then they must be considerations that I take to be related to the truth of the proposition that *p*.

---

<sup>25</sup> Some argue (e.g. Williams 1973) that doxastic-alethic exclusivity has something to do with the fact that we lack direct voluntary control over what we believe. (Note that this is compatible with the possibility of indirect voluntary control over what we believe and with long-range control over what we believe; cf. Alston 1988, p. 260, Bennett 1990, p. 89, Feldman 2000, p. 670, Hieronymi 2006, p. 48.) You have **direct voluntary control** over whether you  $\Phi$  when  $\Phi$ ing is something that you can "just do," where your  $\Phi$ ing is something that you can bring about "just like that," simply by intending to  $\Phi$ , i.e. where you can  $\Phi$ , and there is no distinct  $\Psi$  such that you  $\Phi$  by  $\Psi$ ing. Did Australia win the 1979 Cricket World Cup? Suppose I offered you £1,000 on the condition that you believe that they will win. You have no evidence that they will. You would not be able to believe that Australia won on the basis of my offer (Alston 1988, p. 263, Bennett 1990, p. 88, Ryan 2003, p. 50). Only considerations relevant to the *truth* of the proposition that Australia won could form the basis for belief. As Nishi Shah (2006) writes, of Pascal's wager, it is "impossible [for someone] to come to believe that God exists directly on the basis of appreciating the practical argument expressed by the wager." (p. 494)

<sup>26</sup> In this connection, Pamela Hieronymi (2005) writes that considerations unrelated to the truth of the proposition that *p*, that speak in favor of believing that *p*, "are not the kind of reasons which, simply by finding convincing, one would believe *p*," (p. 448) and Williams (2002) maintains that "when beliefs are the products of wishful thinking, or in other ways become hostage to desires and wishes, they do so only as the result of hidden and indirect processes." (p. 83; see also 1973, pp. 148-51)

Along similar lines, Shah (2003) argues that doxastic deliberation (i.e. deliberation about whether to believe that *p*) is “transparent” to truth (cf. Adler 2002). He writes:

[O]ne cannot settle on an answer to the question *whether to believe that p* without taking oneself to have answered the question *whether p is true*. (Ibid. p. 447)

The phenomenology of deliberation ... is that evidence is the only kind of consideration that can provide a reason for belief, because only evidence is relevant to answering the question “Is *p* true?” that one finds oneself directly faced with in deliberation about *whether to believe that p*. (Ibid. p. 464)

[D]eliberation that is framed by the particular question of *whether to believe p* is answered solely by considerations relevant to answering the question *whether p is true*. (Ibid. p. 467)

Deliberation about whether to believe that *p* “collapses” into (p. 447) or “gives way” to (p. 449) deliberation about whether it is true that *p*. The way that we “settle” the question of whether to believe that *p* is by deliberating about whether it is true that *p* (2003, p. 447, p. 464, 2008, p. 3). We can ask after the benefits of believing, but “deliberation that aims at a belief whether *p* starts directly with the question *whether p*.” (2008, p. 3) Only by asking the question of whether it is true that *p* is one genuinely deliberating about whether to believe that *p*; otherwise one is “idly wondering, without aiming to make up one’s mind.” (Ibid.) Only by making up my mind about whether it is true that *p* can I make up my mind about whether to believe that *p* (cf. Moran 1988). Shah assumes that doxastic deliberation is possible, but does not assume that in doxastic deliberation you desire or intend to form a belief, nor that such deliberation requires explicitly asking yourself the question of whether to believe that *p*. You settle the question of whether to believe that *p*, in doxastic deliberation, by answering the question of whether it is true that *p*; as Shah (2008) argues “[t]his does not show that one does not settle the question *what to believe* in doxastic deliberation; it just shows that one needn’t explicitly ask that question in order to settle it.” (p. 3) Moreover, you need not explicitly deploy the concept of truth in doxastic deliberation: doxastic deliberation can begin and end with the question of whether *p*, as opposed to proceeding awkwardly through a series of questions: e.g. whether to believe that *p*, whether it is true that *p*, and finally whether *p*.

Doxastic-alethic exclusivity forms the basis for an argument that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief (Adler 2002, Shah 2003, 2006, 2008; cf. Hieronymi 2005, 2006, Jones 2009). This **argument from doxastic-alethic exclusivity** takes the form of an **inference to the best explanation**: that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief is the best explanation of the truth of doxastic-alethic exclusivity. Shah (2003) argues that:

by framing his deliberation as answering to the question whether to believe that *p*, a disposition to be moved by considerations that he regards as relevant to the truth of *p* and a disposition blocking considerations that he regards as irrelevant to the truth of *p* are activated. (p. 467)

This is the case because:



An agent's grasp of this constitutive truth about belief [that truth is the standard of correctness for belief] shows up phenomenologically in the way that the truth of *p* appears to him as solely relevant to settling whether to believe that *p*. (p. 468)

We can put this in terms of basing and exclusivity: to consciously treat some consideration as your basis for belief (as opposed to some other propositional attitude), you must be aware (if only tacitly, implicitly, or unconsciously) that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, and this ensures that considerations so treated must be considerations you take to be relevant to the truth of the (content of the) belief in question. Given doxastic-alethic exclusivity, we can conclude that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, by inference to the best explanation.

## 2.2 The argument from orexic-axial exclusivity

I maintain the following thesis:

**Orexic-axial exclusivity:** It is impossible to consciously treat some consideration as your basis for desire (that *p*) if you take that consideration to be unrelated to the goodness of the proposition that *p*.<sup>27</sup>

The truth of orexic-axial exclusivity can be appreciated by considering a case of desire on the basis of certain considerations (which will also serve to clarify the notion of desiring something on the basis of considerations). Parliament is debating whether to introduce a carbon tax. As an immigrant, I don't have much influence on whether a carbon tax is introduced, but I start to wonder what I think about the issue. I ask a series of questions about carbon taxation: whether it would have good or bad consequences for the environment, whether it would be good for the local economy, whether it would be good for the global economy, whether it would affect me personally, whether it would be consistent with existing laws, and so on. Eventually, I decide that carbon taxation would be better than the alternatives (the environmental benefits outweigh the economic costs, say), and I conclude that Parliament ought to introduce a carbon tax. I still can't do much about it, but now I want Parliament to introduce a carbon tax. My reflection on the aforementioned considerations has led me to desire that a carbon tax be introduced, and my desire is based on those considerations. It's perfectly natural here to speak of the basis of my desire that Parliament introduce a carbon tax, and we might equally naturally say that such-and-such considerations are my reasons for wanting Parliament to introduce the tax.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Note (cf. §2.1) that we have no direct voluntary control over what we desire. (Although this is compatible with the possibility of indirect voluntary control over what we desire and with long-range control over what we desire.) Desiring is not something that I can "just do"; I cannot bring it about that I desire something "just like that." Again we can appeal to the inefficacy of cash prizes: Just as I could not bring myself to believe, for money, that Australia won the 1979 Cricket World Cup, I could not bring myself to desire, for money, that Australia won the 1979 Cricket World Cup.

<sup>28</sup> Orexic-axial exclusivity is not restricted to cases in which desire is *acquired* on the basis of certain considerations, and also covers cases in which desire is *sustained* on the basis of certain considerations (cf. §2.1). The latter kind of case may be more common than the former. We are at least quite familiar with critical reflection on our desires, i.e. with the question of whether to continue desiring what we already desire.

Orexical exclusivity can be motivated by considering a variant on the toxin puzzle (Kavka 1983, cf. Shah 2008): an eccentric millionaire offers you an extremely appealing cash prize if at midnight tonight you desire that you drink a toxin tomorrow, which toxin will cause you considerable discomfort for several hours (but which is otherwise harmless). Your receiving the prize is not contingent on your drinking the toxin; the payout will come before the time comes to drink. It may well be clear that desiring that you drink the toxin is in your best interest, or that it would be best, all things considered, were you to desire that you drink the toxin. But you could not bring yourself to desire that you drink the toxin on the basis of the fact that so desiring is in your best interest. You can only treat considerations that you take to be relevant to the *goodness* of the proposition that you drink the toxin as the basis for your desire. But since its effects are nasty, and drinking it will win you nothing, the proposition that you drink the toxin does not strike you as in any way good. What you might desire, on the basis of the millionaire's offer, is that you desire that you drink the toxin. But the fact that desiring that you drink the toxin is in your best interest is unrelated to the goodness of the proposition that you drink the toxin: the fact that desiring that you drink the toxin is in your best interest doesn't change the fact that the effects of the toxin are nasty, nor the fact that drinking it will win you nothing.

Orexical exclusivity is consistent with the fact that considerations unrelated to the goodness of the proposition that *p* can unconsciously or indirectly influence desire-formation. In the toxin case, you might attempt a program of conditioning designed to make the toxin seem more pleasant: imagine that you prepare dishes of your favorite food and season them with something that tastes just like the toxin, so that you come to love the taste of the toxin. The need for such a scheme is evidence for doxastic-alethic exclusivity: that the toxin tastes good is relevant to the goodness of the proposition that you drink it, and this is the sort of thing that can form the basis for desire. If I am to consciously treat some considerations as my basis for desiring that *p*, then they must be considerations that I take to be related to the goodness of the proposition that *p*.

In the same way that doxastic deliberation is "transparent" to truth (§2.1), orexical deliberation (i.e. deliberation about whether to desire that *p*) is "transparent" to goodness. Deliberation about whether to desire that *p* "collapses" into, or "gives way" to, or is "settled" exclusively by, deliberation about whether it is good that *p*. Questions about what to desire are, in the relevant sense, questions about what is good, and so when we deliberate about whether to desire that *p*, we address ourselves to the goodness of the proposition that *p*. Only by asking the question of whether it is good that *p* is one genuinely deliberating about whether to desire that *p*. This is illustrated in the case of my reflections on carbon taxation. My reflections constitute deliberation about whether to desire that Parliament introduce a carbon tax, and this question "collapses" into questions about the goodness of carbon taxation: I think about whether it would be good were that proposition true; I focus my attention on carbon taxation, and ask whether it would be a good idea. To make up my mind about whether to desire a carbon tax, I must make up my mind about the goodness of carbon taxation. As above (§2.1), I assume that orexical deliberation is possible, but do not assume that in orexical deliberation you desire or intend to form a desire, nor that such deliberation requires that you explicitly asking yourself the question of whether to desire that *p*. (The carbon taxation case wasn't like that.) By forming a desire that *p* on the basis of answering the question of whether it is good that *p*, you have ipso facto deliberated about whether to believe that *p*. Moreover, you need not explicitly deploy the concept of goodness in orexical deliberation (cf. §1.2).

You might object that it is possible to desire that  $p$  on the basis of considerations unrelated to the goodness of the proposition that  $p$ . For example, so the objection goes, someone could think pleasure was neither good nor bad, or even think that pleasure was bad, and yet take the fact that she would feel pleasure if it were the case that  $p$  as a consideration in favor of desiring that  $p$ . However, once we get clear on the kind of case we are being asked to imagine, we'll see that this objection can be met. First, I do not think that we can coherently imagine someone who reasons as follows: "Smoking is absolutely abhorrent to me in every way, and I see nothing whatsoever good about it, but nevertheless I consider the fact that smoking is pleasurable a good reason to desire that I smoke a cigarette." Second, that someone treats the fact that smoking is pleasurable as a consideration in favor of desiring that she smoke seems to reveal her positive evaluative attitude towards pleasure: she sees pleasure as good, and given the connection between smoking and pleasure, sees the fact that smoking is pleasurable as a consideration in favor of desiring that she smoke. So the case either looks incoherent or like a case of desire based on considerations relevant to goodness. Recall that one need not explicitly deploy the concept of goodness in orexic deliberation. This is helpful when considering cases in which I treat some property of the proposition that  $p$  as a consideration in favor of desiring that  $p$ , but don't conceptualize that feature as good-making. Just as the cat Paws is responsive to the truth-conduciveness of evidence when she bases her beliefs on evidence, without conceptualizing evidence as truth-conducive, someone might be responsive to the goodness of pleasure (for example), by basing her desires on hedonistic considerations, without conceptualizing pleasure as good-making.

Given orexic-alethic exclusivity, we can articulate an argument for the conclusion that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire, analogous to the argument from doxastic-alethic exclusivity (§2.1). This is the **argument from orexic-axial exclusivity**: that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire is the best explanation of the truth of doxastic-alethic exclusivity. To consciously treat some consideration as your basis for desire, as opposed to treating it as your basis for some other propositional attitude, you must be aware (if only tacitly, implicitly, or unconsciously) that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire, which ensures that considerations so treated must be considerations you take to be relevant to the goodness of the (content of the) desire in question. Given orexic-axial exclusivity, we can conclude that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire, by inference to the best explanation.

### 2.3 An objection and an amendment to the argument

There is a problem with both the argument from doxastic-alethic exclusivity (§2.1) and the argument from orexic-axial exclusivity (§2.2) (cf. Steglich-Petersen 2006, pp. 506-7, McHugh 2011, pp. 372-4). Suppose that being  $F$  is the constitutive standard of correctness for  $\Phi$ ing. It does not follow from this that it is impossible to consciously treat some consideration as your basis for  $\Phi$ ing if you take that consideration to be unrelated to whether your  $\Phi$ ing is or will be  $F$ . The correctness of your  $\Phi$ ing may be one of many considerations that you consider relevant to the question of whether to  $\Phi$ , and you may not even consider correctness to be relevant. Your awareness of a constitutive standard of correctness for  $\Phi$ ing does not, in general, ensure that the considerations that you treat as your basis for  $\Phi$ ing be relevant to that standard. Considerations of correctness do not, in general, "exclude" other considerations. The correctness of representations is not the only consideration we take to be relevant to whether to make them. A certain kind of realist painter might treat accuracy as the only

basis for her decisions about what to paint and how to paint it, but in other cases painters, who are nonetheless making representational paintings, treat considerations unrelated to accuracy as the basis for their decisions. Consider a related example. Certain actions have a constitutive standard of success: in basketball, a shot is successful if and only if it scores (goes through the hoop). But you can treat considerations, which you know to be unrelated to scoring, as your basis for taking a shot, as when you intentionally miss for the sake of a promised bribe. Therefore, that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief does not explain the truth of doxastic-alethic exclusivity, and that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire does not explain the truth of orexic-alethic exclusivity.

However, that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief is *part* of the explanation of the truth of doxastic-alethic exclusivity, for it allows us to make sense of what is going on when someone believes on the basis of truth-related considerations. And being *part* of the best explanation of some truth speaks in favor of an *explanans*, no less than being the entire explanation of said truth. So inference to the best explanation does support the conclusion that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief. Why think, then, that the fact that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief is *part* of the explanation of the truth of doxastic-alethic exclusivity?

Believing on the basis of truth-related considerations seems to involve a kind of evaluation: to believe on such a basis is to treat true belief as a value, goal, or aim. To believe on such a basis is to engage in a kind of evaluation vis-à-vis truth. We can make sense of this evaluation once we recognize that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief. When we believe on the basis of truth-related considerations we treat true belief as a value, goal, or aim, and our doing this makes sense, given that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief. When I say that evaluation vis-à-vis truth “makes sense” given that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, I mean that this allows us understand evaluation vis-à-vis truth. Imagine someone who preferred to form beliefs on Tuesdays, who took the fact that it was Tuesday as a mark in favor of believing, or who otherwise treated belief formed on a Tuesday as a value, or goal, or aim. We would struggle to understand such a person, in a way that we do not struggle to understand someone who treats true belief as a value, goal, or aim. That truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief explains why this is so: once we recognize that true belief is correct belief, we can understand why people treat true belief as a value, goal, or aim: because they treat correctness as a value, goal, or aim. Evaluation (of belief) vis-à-vis truth is evaluation vis-à-vis correctness. This provides a *partial* explanation of what is going on when someone believes on the basis of truth-related considerations, but not a full explanation. A fuller explanation would explore why we treat correctness as a value, goal, or aim, and situate our relationship with correctness within the broader context of what we think and care about.<sup>29</sup>

It will be instructive here to consider a case of non-constitutive correctness. Imagine that Samir is an Elvis impersonator who tries to make his weight match that of Elvis in 1964, i.e. 165 pounds: when his weight goes above this standard, he fasts; when his weight drops below this standard, he eats two double-cheese pizzas. Equaling 165 pounds is the standard of correctness for his weight: his weight is correct if and only if it equals 165 pounds, and incorrect otherwise. “Correctness” is the right word here, for

---

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Steglich-Petersen 2006, Hazlett 2013, §8.5.4. This fuller explanation might, or might not, follow Shah’s account (§2.1) in appealing to conceptual truths about belief.

Samir's weight is a *representation* of Elvis' weight in 1964 (cf. §1.2), given the way that Samir intends his performance. Our recognition that equaling 165 is the standard of correctness for his weight allows us to make sense of his behavior. Of course, this is a partial explanation of Samir's behavior; a fuller explanation would explain why Samir wants his weight to match Elvis' weight, and situate this desire within the broader context of what he thinks and cares about. Our explanation of his eating the two pizzas (for example) will appeal to the fact that Samir wants his weight to be correct (given the standard articulated above), but also to the fact that (say) he likes the taste of cheese and has no moral objection to eating it. (We should bear in mind that an explanation in terms of correctness is not the only kind of explanation that could be offered for this kind of behavior, but in Samir's case, an explanation in terms of correctness is apt, and allows us to understand his behavior.)

Williams (1973) writes that "truth and falsehood are a dimension of an assessment of beliefs as opposed to many other psychological states and dispositions." (p. 137) On my view, the truth in this claim is that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, but not for many other propositional attitudes.<sup>30</sup> But the connection to assessment – what I have called "evaluation" – is instructive. Believing on the basis of truth-related considerations is not the only species of evaluation vis-à-vis truth. The criticism of other people's beliefs in terms of epistemic rationality, for example, seems also to involve the same kind of evaluation vis-à-vis truth. That truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief allows us make sense of this kind of evaluation.

So truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief. This is uncontroversial. But if all this is right, then so is the following: that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire is *part* of the explanation of the truth of orexic-axial exclusivity, for it allows us to make sense of what is going on when someone desires on the basis of goodness-related considerations. Desiring on such a basis seems to involve a kind of evaluation: to desire on such a basis is to treat good desire (i.e. desire that p where it is or would be good that p; cf. §1.1) as a value, goal, or aim. To desire on such a basis is to engage in a kind of evaluation vis-à-vis goodness. We can make sense of this evaluation once we recognize that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire. When we desire on the basis of goodness-related considerations we treat good desire as a value, goal, or aim, and our doing this makes sense, given that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire. Thus evaluation (of desire) vis-à-vis goodness is evaluation vis-à-vis correctness. This provides a *partial* explanation of what is going on when someone desires on the basis of goodness-related considerations. And thus inference to the best explanation supports the conclusion that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire.

### 3 Conclusion

I have defended an Aristotelian thesis, on which the special relationship between belief and truth is the same as the special relationship between desire and goodness. I articulated a version of this (§1), on which a belief is correct if and only if its propositional content is true, and incorrect otherwise, and a desire is correct if and only if its propositional content is good, and incorrect otherwise. I then defended this view

---

<sup>30</sup> Williams discussion of habits here (ibid.) is a red herring: of course truth and falsehood are not a dimension of assessment of habits, because habits don't have true or false propositional content. A relevant contrast are desires (which can have true or false propositional content), of which truth and falsehood is not a dimension of assessment.

(§2) by appeal to inference to the best explanation: that goodness is the constitutive standard of correctness for desire allows us to make sense of desire based on goodness-related considerations.

### **Bibliography:**

Adler, J. (2002), *Belief's Own Ethics* (MIT Press).

Alston, W. (1988), "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2, pp. 257-99.

Anscombe, G.E.M. (1963), *Intention*, second edition (Harvard University Press).

Altham, J.E.J. (1986), "The Legacy of Emotivism," in G. Macdonald and C. Wright (eds.), *Fact, Science, and Morality: Essays on A.J. Ayer's Language, Truth, and Logic* (Blackwell), pp. 275-88.

Barney, R. (2010), "Plato on the Desire for the Good," in Tenenbaum 2010, pp. 34-64.

Barwise, J. (1997), "Information and Impossibilities," *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 38(4), pp. 488-515.

Barwise, J., and Perry, J. (1981), "Situations and Attitudes," *Journal of Philosophy* 78(11), pp. 668-91.

Bennett, J. (1990), "Why is Belief Involuntary?," *Analysis* 50:2, pp. 87-107.

Berto, F. (2010), "Impossible Worlds and Propositions: Against the Parity Thesis," *Philosophical Quarterly* 60(240), pp. 471-86.

Bratman, M. (2009a), "Intention, Belief, and Instrumental Rationality," in D. Sobel and S. Wall (eds.), *Reasons for Action* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 13-36.

----- (2009b), "Intention, Belief, Practical, Theoretical," in S. Robertson (ed.), *Spheres of Reason: New Essays in the Philosophy of Normativity* (Oxford University Press), pp. 31-60.

Brink, D.O. (2008), "The Significance of Desire," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 3, pp. 5-45.

Boghossian, P. (2003), "The Normativity of Content," *Philosophical Issues* 13, pp. 31-45.

Charles, D. (1982/3), "Rationality and Irrationality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 83, pp. 191-212.

Davidson, D. (1980), *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford University Press).

----- (1984), *Essays on Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford University Press).

----- (2001), *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford University Press).

Drier, J. (2001), "Humean Doubts about Categorical Imperatives," in E. Millgram (ed.), *Varieties of Practical Reason* (MIT Press), pp. 27-48.

- Evans, M. (2010, "A Partisan's Guide to Socratic Intellectualism," in Tenenbaum 2010, pp. 6-33.
- Feldman, R. (2000), "The Ethics of Belief," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60:3, pp. 667-95.
- Geach, P. (1956), "Good and Evil," *Analysis* 17, pp. 32-42
- Hazlett, A. (2013), *A Luxury of the Understanding: On the Value of True Belief* (Oxford University Press).
- Hieronymi, P. (2005), "The Wrong Kind of Reason," *Journal of Philosophy* 102:9, pp. 437-57.
- (2006), "Controlling Attitudes," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 87, pp. 45-74.
- Hursthouse, R. (1991), "Arational Action," *Journal of Philosophy* 88(2), pp. 57-68.
- Jones, W. (2002), "Explaining Our Own Beliefs: Non-Epistemic Believing and Doxastic Instability," *Philosophical Studies* 111, pp. 217-49.
- (2009), "The Goods and the Motivation of Believing," in A. Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard (eds.), *Epistemic Value* (Oxford University Press), pp. 139-62.
- Kavka, G. (1983), "The Toxin Puzzle," *Analysis* 43, pp. 33-6.
- King, J. (1995), "Structured Propositions and Complex Predicates," *Noûs* 29(4), pp. 516-35.
- (2007), *The Nature and Structure of Content* (Oxford University Press).
- Lewis, D. (1974), "Radical Interpretation," *Synthese* 23, pp. 331-44, reprinted in D. Lewis, *Philosophical Papers I* (Oxford University Press), pp. 108-18.
- (1986), *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Blackwell).
- (1988), "Desire as Belief," *Mind* 97(387), pp. 323-32.
- Millgram, E. (1995), "Was Hume a Humean?," *Hume Studies* 21(1), pp. 75-94. Millikan, R. (1984), *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories* (MIT Press). McHugh, C. (2012), "Belief and Aims," *Philosophical Studies* 160, pp. 425-39.
- Moran, R. (1988), "Making Up Your Mind: Self-Interpretation and Self-Constitution," *Ratio* NS 1, pp. 135-51.
- Moss, J. (2010), "Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good," in Tenenbaum 2010, pp. 65-81.
- Nolan, D. (1997), "Impossible Worlds: A Modest Approach," *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 38, pp. 535-72.
- Owens, D. (2003), "Does Belief Have an Aim?," *Philosophical Studies* 115, pp. 283-305.

- Parfit, D. (2006), "Normativity," in R. Schafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, volume 1, pp. 325-80.
- Papineau, D. (1993), *Philosophical Naturalism* (Blackwell).
- Pettit, P. (1987), "Humeans, Anti-Humeans, and Motivation," *Mind* 96(384), pp. 530-3.
- Platts, M. (1979), *Ways of Meaning: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Language*, second edition (MIT Press).
- Raz, J. (2002), *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action* (Oxford University Press).
- (2010), "On the Guise of the Good," in Tenenbaum 2010, pp. 111-135.
- Ryan, S. (2003), "Doxastic Compatibilism and the Ethics of Belief," *Philosophical Studies* 114:1/2, pp. 47-79.
- Salmon, N. (1986), *Frege's Puzzle* (MIT Press)
- (1989), "Illogical Belief," *Philosophical Perspectives* 3, pp. 243-85.
- Shah, N. (2003), "How Truth Governs Belief," *Philosophical Review* 112:4, pp. 447-82.
- (2006), "A New Argument for Evidentialism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 56, pp. 481-98.
- (2008), "How Action Governs Intention," *Philosophers Imprint* 8:5.
- Shah, N., and Velleman, D. (2005), "Doxastic Deliberation," *Philosophical Review* 114, pp. 497- 534.
- Smith, M. (1994), *The Moral Problem* (Blackwell).
- Soames, S. (1985), "Lost Innocence," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 8(1), pp. 59-71.
- (1987), "Direct Reference, Propositional Attitudes, and Semantic Content," *Philosophical Topics* 15, pp. 47-87.
- Sorensen, R. (2001), *Vagueness and Contradiction* (Oxford University Press).
- Sosa, E. (2009), "Knowing Full Well: The Normativity of Beliefs as Performances," *Philosophical Studies* 142:1, pp. 5-15. Stalnaker, R. (1984), *Inquiry* (MIT Press).
- Stampe, D. (1987), "The Authority of Desire," *Philosophical Review* 96:3, pp. 225-81.
- Steglich-Petersen, A. (2006), "No Norm Needed: On the Aim of Belief," *Philosophical Quarterly* 56, pp. 499-516.
- (2009), "Weighing the Aim of Belief," *Philosophical Studies* 145:3, pp. 395-405.
- Stich, S. (1990), *The Fragmentation of Reason: Preface to a Pragmatic Theory of Cognitive Evaluation* (MIT Press).
- Stocker, M. (1979), "Desiring the Bad: An Essay in Moral Psychology," *Journal of Philosophy* 76:12, pp. 738-53.



Tenenbaum, S. (2007), *Appearances of the Good: An Essay on the Nature of Practical Reason* (Cambridge University Press).

----- (ed.) (2010), *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good* (Oxford University Press).

Velleman, D. (1992), "The Guise of the Good," *Noûs* 26:1, pp. 3-26.

----- (1996), "The Possibility of Practical Reason," *Ethics* 106, pp. 694-726.

----- (2000), "On the Aim of Belief," in his *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford University Press), pp. 244-81.

Wedgwood, R. (2002), "The Aim of Belief," *Philosophical Perspectives* 16, pp. 267-97.

Williams, B. (1973), "Deciding to Believe," in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 136-51.

----- (2002), *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton University Press).

Yagisawa, T. (1988), "Beyond Possible Worlds," *Philosophical Studies* 53, pp. 175-204.