

Taking it to Heart: What Choice Do We Have?

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We can assent to a proposition, build a theory around it, base our actions on it, and affirm its truth -- without ever taking it to heart. This frequently happens to recipients of bad news, for example, who figure out what is entailed by the news, make appropriate plans, and pass the news on to others -- all without really "taking it in". It happens to those who accept a scientific claim without abandoning their more private views of how things work, and it happens to members of a jury who confidently arrive at a verdict of 'guilty' yet remain, on some deeper level, unconvinced. Conversely, a person may dismiss their prejudices as mere prejudices while continuing to hold onto them, and a friend may acknowledge a remark to be innocuous yet be offended. Such phenomena are widespread, diverse, and philosophically intriguing. They are not simply cases of weak versus strong belief, or belief that something has a low probability versus a high probability (the receiver of bad news does not question the reliability of the source, and the jury member agrees that the defendant is guilty "beyond a reasonable doubt"); nor are they cases of accepting on authority what we only partially understand (the grieving parent is not unsure about what death is, and the convicting jury member is not ignorant of what guilt involves). Rather, in each case, there is certain lack of *depth* to one's beliefs.

In what follows, I consider what such depth consists in and to what extent it is under our control. Section I discusses recent attempts to distinguish acceptance from belief, and considers whether the examples cited above count as instances of

acceptance without belief.¹ I reject accounts that depend on a distinction between thought and feeling, or on a distinction between thinking that is truth-directed and thinking that is guided by more pragmatic aims; and I develop an alternative that relies instead on the distinction between reflective and unreflective thought.

Section II then turns to the question of choice. Can we ever choose our beliefs directly, and just what are the possibilities for indirect choice? I defend a version of Bernard Williams' argument against the possibility of choosing beliefs, then clarify the possibilities for control that remain. Section III draws together the conclusions of Section I and Section II to demonstrate that there are several ways in which we can and *should* control what we take to heart.

I

L. Jonathan Cohen uses many examples like those cited above -- jury members who endorse a verdict without feeling convinced, people who sincerely discount prejudices without losing them, scientists who recognize the superiority of a prevailing theory while inwardly favoring their own, etc. -- to illustrate the contrast between what he calls "acceptance" and "belief". His distinction can be summarized as follows: to accept a proposition p is to adopt a policy of treating p as a premise in one's reasoning (both theoretical and practical), whereas to believe p is to have have a disposition to feel that p is true.² Thus the jury member accepts

¹ I discuss L. Jonathan Cohen's *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance*, (Clarendon, 1992), Michael Bratman's "Practical Reasoning and Acceptance in a Context" (*Mind*, Vol 101, Issue 401, 1992, pp. 1-15), and Keith Lehrer's "Belief, Acceptance and Cognition" (in *On Believing*, ed. Herman Parret, de Gruyter, 1983) and "Metamental Ascent: Beyond Belief and Desire" (*APA Proceedings*, vol. 63, No.3, pp. 19-29). Other formulations of the distinction can be found in Bas van Frassen's "Belief and the Will" (*Journal of Philosophy*, 81, 1984, pp. 235-256), in Pascal Engel's "Believing, holding true, and accepting" (*Philosophical Explorations*, Nr. 2, May 1998, pp.140-151), and in Raimo Tuomela's "Belief Versus Acceptance" (*Philosophical Explorations*, No. 2, May 2000, pp. 122-137).

² More precisely, to accept p is "to have or adopt a policy of deeming, positing, or postulating that p -- i.e. of including that proposition or rule among one's premisses for deciding what to do or think in a particular context, whether or not one feels it to be true.", and to believe

a defendant's guilt without believing it, the racist accepts that people of different races are equal yet continues to believe that they are not, and the scientist accepts the prevailing theory but believes her own.

Although our beliefs can affect what we accept and what we accept can affect what we believe, Cohen insists that there is no necessary connection between the two. He claims that the belief that *p* -- a disposition to feel that *p* is true -- will usually be a reason (though not a conclusive reason) for accepting *p*; and he claims that accepting *p* -- adopting a policy of treating *p* as a premise in one's reasoning -- will usually tend (over time) to cause a belief that *p*. But even these tendencies are not strictly necessary according to Cohen (we could continue to believe and continue to accept even if there were no tendency for the two to converge). Indeed, some divergence between acceptance and belief is actually a good thing; it is fortunate, for example, that beliefs due to racial prejudice are not always accepted, and that members of a scientific community do not always believe what they accept.³

Cohen's account of belief as a disposition to feel may seem promising as an explanation of what it means to take something to heart; the heart, after all, is where we tend to 'locate' our feelings. But what, exactly, is the feeling of belief? His comparisons with jealousy, alarm, despondency, and joy are not very helpful. If asked to describe the phenomenology of jealousy or alarm, we can cite characteristic bodily sensations or urges or images, for example, but no such correlations seem possible in the case of feelings of belief. What bodily sensation

a proposition *p* is to have "a disposition, when one is attending to issues raised, or items referred to, by the proposition that *p*, normally to feel it true that *p* and false that not-*p*, whether or not one is willing to act, speak, or reason accordingly." (p. 4)

could be common to the many different states of belief I experience? And what is it like, in general, to have a belief-feeling as opposed to an imagining-feeling or a wishing-feeling, for example?⁴

Cohen specifies that the belief that *p* is a disposition to feel that *p is true*. So a feeling of belief, it seems, must be equivalent to a feeling of truth. But what is that? Suppose it is a feeling of overall fit or coherence: "It all fits together. Yes!" Presumably, this feeling of fit is the result of following out the implications of a proposition far enough to see that it is consistent with, and even supportive of, other propositions that one believes. But then it is hard to see how the feeling of truth can diverge from a willingness to use something as a premise in one's reasoning. Why isn't the feeling of truth that constitutes belief also the feeling of inferential fit that constitutes acceptance? Or suppose, alternatively, that the feeling of truth is a feeling of some reality independent of oneself -- a sense that the object of one's belief has an objective existence 'out there'. This too seems to depend on various sorts of reasoning about that object -- reasoning about what would happen if I moved in one way rather than another, reasoning about what is cause and what effect, and so on. So here too the feeling of truth which is supposed to constitute belief seems to coincide with the willingness to use something as a premise in one's reasoning that constitutes acceptance.

³ These and other examples are cited on pp. 19-20 and pp. 86-100, *ibid*.

⁴ One can't help but wondering, for example, just what feeling goes with believing versus accepting that 97 is a prime number -- an example mentioned on p.15. Cohen suggests, negatively, that belief feelings are less noticeable than various other feelings only because they are more familiar. And, positively, he characterizes them as "some kind of orientation on the 'True or false?' issue in relation to their propositional object." (p. 11) But this offers little help to anyone trying to discern the feeling in question.

There are two other ways that Cohen might wish to distinguish acceptance from belief. One way relies on the fact that we can use something as a premise in our reasoning for reasons that have nothing to do with pursuing the truth. The other way emphasizes the difference between using something as a premise in one's reflective reasoning and using it as a premise in unreflective reasoning.⁵ The first possibility, which Cohen explicitly endorses, is pursued more fully by Michael Bratman. The second possibility gets indirect support from Cohen's comments on language, but is pursued more fully by Keith Lehrer. I turn, therefore, to Bratman's and Lehrer's accounts of the distinction between acceptance and belief.

On Bratman's account, acceptance is guided by considerations such as efficiency and collegiality while belief is guided only by considerations of truth. This makes acceptance context-relative while belief is context-invariant. It means that beliefs demand *more* than acceptance insofar as they ought to be consistent with all of one's other beliefs, in order to produce a single coherent view of the world; but beliefs also demand *less* than acceptance insofar as they answer only to the truth and do not need to accommodate a whole array of other aims that guide our practical reasoning. For the purpose of reaching a decision and conforming to the law, I may accept a verdict of 'guilty' even though, all things considered, I consider the defendant to be innocent; and I may accept the prevailing theory of gravity because that enables me to be a serious participant in scientific discussions even though, in my heart of hearts, I think the prevailing theory false.⁶

⁵ See p. 16, and Chapter II, *ibid*, on the role of non-epistemic aims in acceptance versus belief; p.12 and p.38, and Chapter III on the role of language in acceptance versus belief; and p. 4 and Chapter IV on the context-specificity of acceptance (though Cohen's insistence that acceptance, not belief, is bound by norms of deductive closure seems to favor a view of acceptance as context-invariant).

⁶ A variety of such examples are discussed his "Practical Reasoning and Acceptance in a Context" (*Mind*, Vol 101, Issue 401, 1992).

Once Bratman has detached the attitude of acceptance from the aim of truth, however, it is not clear why acceptance is anything other than useful, and circumscribed, supposition or pretence. Cohen resists equating acceptance with supposition on the grounds that suppositions govern our thoughts but not our actions, and he resists equating acceptance with pretence on the grounds that pretence governs our actions but not our thoughts, the assumptions that we accept govern both our thoughts and our actions.⁷ But this only invites the view that acceptance is a combination of supposition and pretence. Bratman's insistence that acceptance is not mere supposition or pretence seems to derive, instead, from the realization that acceptance as he describes it is central to all practical reasoning; for he balks at the notion that *all* decision-making is based on rather extensive forms of pretence.⁸ But we can agree on the reasonableness and pervasiveness of what Bratman calls acceptance without viewing it as anything more than supposition or pretence.

Whatever terms one prefers, though, Bratman's notion of acceptance doesn't really help us with our opening examples. I do not accept bad news for the sake of

⁷ Cohen also claims that, unlike mere supposing, acceptance implies answerability to an external authority and, unlike merely proceeding 'as if' (what I am calling pretence) acceptance involves an inner as well as an outer commitment -- a commitment in thought as well as in speech and action. (p. 12-14) His characterization of an external authority is elusive, however, it is certainly possible to think as well as act merely 'as if' one believes.

⁸ Recounting the ordinary sorts of decisions that fill his day, he remarks:
"[W]hat I accept/take for granted reasonably varies across different practical contexts. Perhaps I even move back and forth from planning my day to betting with you. In the former context I accept that the weather will be good; in the latter context I do not. It is not that I have a context-independent cognitive attitude that keeps changing; instead, I accept something relative to one context that I do not accept relative to another." (pp.5-6, *ibid*)

efficiency or sociability, and I do not agree that a remark was innocuous just to be agreeable. A jury member may think a defendant is almost certainly guilty, regardless of legal guidelines and peer pressure, and a scientist may recognize the clear superiority of the dominant theory over her favorite. One way to bring out the difference between the sorts of cases that fit Bratman's analysis and the sorts of cases that do not is to focus on the presence or absence of a sense of conflict. On Bratman's view of things, there should be no experience of conflict between what one accepts and what one believes; one is for the sake of convenience or show while the other is 'for real'. Coordinating the two may be awkward at times, but as long as one remains clear about which of the two attitudes is engaged, there should not be any sense of inner conflict. But surely a sense of inner conflict is one of the things that characterizes our initial examples: the recipient of bad news who can't take it in, the jury member who arrives at one verdict while inwardly convinced of another, the person who recognizes a misunderstanding and still feels insulted, and so on. Cohen's claim that belief is usually a reason for acceptance and acceptance usually leads to belief acknowledges some pressure to make the two converge, but if belief and acceptance are governed by different aims, even this pressure is lost. Thus, Bratman's distinction (and that strand in Cohen) can't account for the cases with which we began.

I turn, finally, to the suggestion that acceptance differs from belief by engaging our reasoning explicitly rather than implicitly, linguistically rather than pre-linguistically, or reflectively rather than unreflectively. Keith Lehrer maintains that belief is a "first-order doxastic state" resulting from the automatic processing

And it is not only practical reasoning that is context-relative; theoretical reasoning also requires some restrictions in the scope of one's considerations for there too we will need to do some simplifying, and some bracketing of background doubts, in order to proceed at all.

of received information, while acceptance is a second-order "metamental" state consisting in the positive epistemic evaluation of a first-order belief state.⁹

According to Lehrer, I may guess a friend's telephone number -- indicating my unreflective *belief* that it is his number -- without *accepting* it as his number because I am not in a position to evaluate my belief positively. And conversely, I may *accept* that a friend has died because I evaluate the source of the report as dependable, without yet *believing* it because it has not yet become one of my first order doxastic states. Both belief and acceptance rest on inferences that are based on available information, and both have an important role to play in guiding our behavior, but belief proceeds automatically while acceptance proceeds via metamental assent (which, according to Lehrer, may or may not be conscious or deliberate).

Lehrer presents his distinction between acceptance and belief as exactly analogous to the more familiar distinction between value and desire (as theorized by Harry Frankfurt and others): values are second-order desires -- desires about what to desire, or desires about what sort of person we want to be. And just as morality is said to depend on values rather than desires, knowledge, according to Lehrer, is said to depend on acceptance rather than belief.

Lehrer's distinction does help to explain our initial examples, I think. One receives news of a death, knows it to be reliable, yet is unable to incorporate it into one's automatic, habitual reasoning. The jury member arrives at a verdict on the basis of canons of reasoning that she deems conducive to arriving at the truth, but finds that her unreflective strategies for arriving at a belief pull her in another

⁹ Further implications of Lehrer's account of the acceptance/belief contrast, as put

direction. And I am sympathetic to Lehrer's suggestion that certain *sorts* of processing -- logical as opposed to heuristic, for example -- may depend on second-order assessments of various kinds.¹⁰ Reasoning that relies on counterfactuals may need to be carried out reflectively, while reasoning that relies on analogies may benefit from unreflective modes of information-processing. The former sort of reasoning may lead one to a guilty verdict while the latter leads one to suppose the defendant innocent.

Lehrer, however, is primarily interested in what it takes for a belief to count as knowledge while our interest is in what it takes for a belief to be taken to heart, and that may happen whether or not there has been any metamental assent. It is not how we *acquire* our beliefs so much as how we *use* them that determines whether or not we take them to heart. Deep beliefs, I want to suggest, are beliefs that operate unreflectively, automatically generating a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and behavior (much of which I may be quite unaware). My belief in a defendant's guilt, arrived at through explicit reflection on the evidence, becomes something I take to heart when that belief eventually guides the thoughts, feelings, and actions that I pursue automatically rather than deliberately. A deep belief in the guilt of a defendant leads automatically to thoughts about his character, feelings of fear or anger, behavior that is wary or punitive, and so on. On the other hand, some beliefs that we acquire automatically may fail to function automatically in relation to other beliefs, actions, and feelings -- in which case we fail to take

forward in the papers discussed here, are pursued in his book *Metamind* (Clarendon, 1990).

¹⁰ I argue for a related thesis in "Reasonable Irrationality" (*Mind*, vol. 96, no. 3, 1987, pp. 354-366). There is also a growing literature, within psychology, on the differences between implicit and explicit thought and reasoning. An informative overview and addition to this literature can be found in Zoltan Dienes and Josef Perner's "A theory of implicit and explicit knowledge", which is followed by much useful commentary (*Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 22, 1999, pp 735-808).

them to heart. I may quite automatically arrive at the belief that a crying child needs my help yet fail to take this to heart (perhaps because I am preoccupied with other things, perhaps because his need makes me uncomfortable) if I fail to make appropriate inferences automatically, fail to feel immediately concerned, fail to react with immediate sympathy, and so on.

Depending on the circumstances, we may take something to heart either gradually or suddenly, either partly or completely. (This, too, contrasts with Lehrer's more strict dichotomy between first-order and second-order assent.) The fact of a friend's death may 'sink in' only slowly while the force of an insult may suddenly 'hit home', or *vice versa*. I may take to heart the past implications of a defendant's guilt but not the future implications, while the implications of my pet view of the cosmos may be wholly in force in my implicit view of the world.

To describe some beliefs as 'deeper' than others is not merely a shorthand or metaphorical way of saying that some beliefs operate automatically or implicitly -- 'out of sight', as it were. It is, I suggest, a quite literal description of the *phenomenology* of belief insofar as the objects of belief seem more substantial or objective when they guide our inferences automatically, and insofar as things that seem more substantial or objective also seem to have more depth. It is only when the implications of a friend's death begin to unfold effortlessly and relentlessly that that death begins to seem like a substantial fact in space and time rather than a mere phrase on a page or in someone's mouth, the implications of which must be worked out deliberately and laboriously.¹¹ It is only when the implications of a

¹¹ The explanation of this phenomenology rests, ultimately, with Kant, who recognized the intimate relationship between our perception of things as extended in space and time and our conceptualization of things as following certain rules. I elaborate on my understanding of this

scientific theory begin to unfold automatically rather than deliberately that the objects postulated by that theory seem to be really 'out there', positioned in space and time.

II

Each of the writers canvassed above -- Cohen, Bratman, and Lehrer -- maintain that "acceptance" but not "belief" can be chosen. In the case of Cohen, this is due to the fact that acceptance amounts to adopting a certain policy while belief amounts to having a certain feeling. He insists that "if in your reasonings and deliberations you try to *accept* that p and fail, it is normally because you have not tried hard enough to maintain the policy of treating p as a premiss or inference-license."¹² On the other hand, he says, "we can try to induce or inhibit our dispositions to have feelings of belief, jealousy, alarm, etc. that p by acquainting ourselves with all the relevant evidence and evaluating it within a balanced perspective, by discussing the problem with our friends, or maybe by prayer, meditation, exercise, or deep breathing. But that does not make our feeling-dispositions, whatever they may turn out in the end to be, any less involuntary when they actually arise."¹³ And in the case of Bratman, we cannot choose what to believe because beliefs must aim at the truth (he defers to Williams' argument to this effect, discussed below); but we can choose what to accept insofar as we can choose to use premises in the service of aims other than the truth.¹⁴

part of Kant in my "'Seeing As' and the Double Bind of Consciousness" (*Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol.7, no. 8/9, 2000, pp. 99-111).

¹² p.22, *ibid.*

¹³ pp. 26-7, *ibid.* Cohen also claims that beliefs, like other feelings "come over you, arise in you, or grow on you. You cannot don, raise, or grow them yourself." (p.21)

¹⁴ It is worth noting, though, that on Bratman's account choice does not enter at the level of content -- determining *what* to believe or *what* to accept -- so much as at the level of context or overall aim -- determining whether to think broadly or more narrowly, how risk-averse to be, whether to think as a group or as an individual, and so on. I may choose to adhere to a conservative interpretation of the law, and I may choose to defer to my colleagues, but given these choices I have very little choice about what verdicts or what theories I accept. Thus,

In the case of Lehrer, however, it is not so clear why he thinks acceptance is any more under our control than belief. Unlike our decisions about what desires we want to value, our decisions about what beliefs to accept seem to be dictated by considerations outside our control, namely, considerations of truth. (Lehrer makes a small concession to the limits of choice with regard to acceptance, acknowledging that "perhaps we cannot help but evaluate *modus tollens* positively no matter what arguments might be raised against it"¹⁵; but I see no reason not to extend this concession to acknowledge a lack of choice in the face of any good argument -- even an argument against *modus tollens*). Indeed, on Lehrer's account, acceptance may seem more rather than less constrained than belief insofar as the heuristics that guide our automatic processing of information tend to be more easily contaminated by non-epistemic aims. Since our account of what it means to take something to heart follows Lehrer in assuming that both reflective and unreflective beliefs aim at the truth, we too must rethink the question of choice.

To sort this out, it is useful to look closely at a classic argument by Bernard Williams:

If I could acquire a belief at will, I could acquire it whether it was true or not; moreover, I would know that I could acquire it whether it was true or not. If in full consciousness I could will to 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. At the very least, there must be a restriction on what is the case after the event; since I could

Bratman's distinction between acceptance and belief distinction is not really a distinction between a cognitive attitude that can be chosen and one that cannot, for, once one's aims are determined, acceptance is no more controllable than belief.

not then, in full consciousness, regard this as a belief of mine, i.e. something I take to be true, and also know that I acquired it at will. With regard to no belief could I know -- or, if all this is to be done in full consciousness, even suspect -- that I had acquired it at will. But if I can acquire beliefs at will, I must know that I am able to do this; and could I know that I was capable of this feat, if with regard to every feat of this kind which I had performed I necessarily had to believe that it had not taken place?¹⁶

This passage raises many tricky issues (concerning the nature of consciousness and knowledge, for example, and concerning such qualifiers as "seriously" and "purportedly"). The crucial premises, however, are the following:

(1) If I believe that p, then I believe that p is true.

¹⁵ p. 212, *ibid.*

¹⁶ "Deciding to Believe" in Bernard Williams' Problems of the Self (Cambridge University Press, 1973, p.148). Williams also presents a somewhat different argument that appeals to the need for beliefs to be responsive to the environment: "(A) very central idea with regard to empirical belief is that of coming to believe that p because it is so, that is, the relation between a man's perceptual environment, his perceptions, and the beliefs that result. Unless a concept satisfies the demands of that notion, namely that we can understand the idea that he comes to believe that p because it is so and because his perceptual organs are working, it will not be the concept of an empirical belief... But a state that could be produced at will would not satisfy these demands, because there would be no regular connexion between the environment, the perceptions and what the man came out with, which is a necessary condition of a belief..." (p. 149, *ibid*)

The problem with this argument, as Jonathan Bennett has pointed out (in "Why is belief involuntary", *Analysis*, vol 50. No.2, 1990, pp. 87-107), is that even if there is a (conceptual) requirement that most instances of the belief that p be responsive to environmental instances of p, this cannot be a requirement in every instance. There can be a regular connection between a belief and the environmental fact that makes it true without that connection being perfect. (Indeed, the possibility of mistaken belief relies on there being exceptions to the rule.) The need for a "regular connexion" between belief and world does not rule out the possibility of an occasional "irregular connexion" between belief and will.

- (2) I can't both believe that p is true and believe that my belief that p was acquired irrespective of the truth of p.
- (3) If I am capable of acquiring a belief at will, I am capable of acquiring a belief irrespective of its truth.
- (4) If I am capable of acquiring a belief at will, I know that I am capable of acquiring a belief at will.
- (5) If I know that I am capable of acquiring a belief at will, I know that I have in some particular instance acquired a belief at will.
- (6) But given (2), in no instance can I know that I have acquired a belief at will. Therefore, I am not capable of acquiring a belief at will.

Several parts of this argument need further clarification and defense. Premise (1) may appear to require either too much or too little -- too much to be plausible or, if plausible, too little to support the ensuing argument. Insofar as it suggests that a belief that p must be accompanied by the further belief that p is true, which must in turn be accompanied by the belief that p is true is true, and so on *ad infinitum*, it may seem implausible, requiring us to endlessly and recursively affirm the truth of our beliefs in order to have beliefs at all. On the other hand, if one thinks that (1) fails to identify anything distinctive of belief (after all, imagining p also implies imagining that p is true, doubting p implies doubting p is true, and so on¹⁷), then it seems unable to support premise (2), which is supposed to be distinctive of belief. (I *can* imagine p to be true and believe that my imagining arose irrespective of the truth of p.)

¹⁷ This point is made by David Velleman in his "How Belief Aims at the Truth" (manuscript), though he may not agree in extending the parallel to desire as well.

These worries can be put to rest, however, if we understand belief to be a dispositional state rather than an occurrent state -- a *disposition* to affirm or endorse p should the occasion arise, rather than an *actual* affirmation or endorsement of p at a given time. The requirement that in believing p we also believe p to be true thus becomes a requirement that we *would* also affirm or endorse the proposition 'p is true' should the occasion arise.¹⁸ So understood, premise (1) is not trivial -- since we would not likewise affirm the truth of what we merely imagine; and it no longer leads to an infinite regress -- since we need only affirm that p is true, and that p is true is true, etc., as the occasion requires.

Just what are we affirming, though, when we affirm that p is true? Williams indicates that we are affirming that p represents reality, and this, he claims in Premise (2), is not compatible with also believing that the *cause* of our believing p has nothing to do with the reality it represents. But why can't I believe that p is true *and* that my belief in p was caused by something other than its truth?¹⁹ Granted, if I believed that my belief that p was somehow caused by the *falsity* of p, then there would be an incompatibility, for then I would need to believe in both the truth and the falsity of p. But the claim that my belief was acquired through an act of will makes no commitments about whether or not that belief is in fact true. The problem must lie elsewhere -- presumably in the fact that if I think that my belief

¹⁸ This is a position defended by Donald Davidson, for example, in his "Thought and Talk" and his "Rational Animals" (Dialectica, 1982, pp.318-27). Difficult questions surround the notion of a *capacity* to affirm p's truth *should* the question arise; must one have already entertained the question of truth at least sometime in the past? Must one already be a user of language? Davidson answers these questions in the affirmative, but his is not the only alternative.

¹⁹ Although Williams focuses on certain assumptions about how my belief was "acquired", what matters is not the original cause of my belief so much as its present support. The original cause of my belief that whales are mammals may have had nothing to do with the reality of that fact, but as long as I assume that it is the fact that whales are mammals that now sustains my belief.

was acquired through an act of will, then I have no *reason* to think it true. Do I need a reason, though? Yes and no. Certainly I do not need explicitly to provide a reason for everything I believe, and I may not even be inclined to acknowledge the reasons I have (if I think they sound suspect, for example); but I must think there is some reason to believe in order to believe at all, and I must realize, however vaguely, that reasons are reasons precisely because they ensure the presence of some reliable (not perfect) connection between a given belief and what it is about. Put another way: in believing that p, my default assumption must be that my belief is in some way reliably connected to the fact that p; and that default assumption gives me a reason to believe that p.²⁰ If I abandon this default assumption -- as I must if I assume that my belief is held irrespective of the truth, I will abandon my belief as well.

Premise (3) simply clarifies the sort of choice that is at issue -- choices that are guided by considerations other than the desire to adhere to the truth. Following Descartes, we may say "I choose to believe only what I know to be true", but this expresses a determination to adhere to strict standards, not an ability to take on whatever beliefs we choose.

Premise (4) is crucial. It states that I must know that my choices are efficacious (at least sometimes, not necessarily in each particular instance) if I am to make choices at all. Most causes do not need to be known in order to be

²⁰ It has been suggested that hearing one's own thoughts as the voices of others, or seeing the constructs of one's imagination as real, indicates the loss of an ability to monitor one's own contributions to experience. Unaware of their own contribution, people must rely on a default assumption to the effect that our experiences are caused by the things they represent. Gregory Currie has developed this idea in several papers, including "Imagination, Delusion and Hallucinations" (in *Pathologies of Belief*, eds. Max Coltheart and Martin Davies, Blackwell,

effective, of course. But doing something intentionally, or by choice, implies at least some expectation of success; otherwise, there would be no difference between choosing to do something and wishing to do something -- where we do not expect our wish to be causally efficacious. There are actually two parts to this requirement: a requirement that I believe in the efficacy of my choices, and a requirement that my choices actually be efficacious. Merely believing my wishes to be efficacious does not make them into choices; they must be efficacious in fact. Equally, the mere fact that my wishes are efficacious does not make them into choices if I am wholly unaware of their efficacy. (These requirements are probably not sufficient for choice -- since I may foresee certain likely consequences of my actions without intending them -- but they are necessary.)

Premise (4) requires me not only to know that my choices are, in general, efficacious but, more particularly, that my choices *to believe* are efficacious. How case-specific must this knowledge be? There is no precise answer to this question but it helps to consider a range of cases. I do not need to know that I am capable of turning a cartwheel in order for my action to count as an intentional cartwheel any more than I need to know that I am capable of killing in order for my action to count as murder; but I do need to know that efforts of that *sort*, on my part, have some likelihood of success. If I am paralyzed I can't choose to turn a cartwheel (at least not through the usual means). Likewise, I cannot choose to make the trees sing -- not just because I wouldn't or couldn't be successful (I may never be successful at turning a cartwheel either, and for all I know there is some way to make the trees sing), but rather because I have no idea *how* to make the right sort

2000); and John Campbell explores related ideas in "Schizophrenia, the space of reasons, and thinking as a motor process" (*Monist*, 82, 1999, pp. 609-25).

of effort. In order to choose to believe, then, I must at least have knowledge of the *sort* of thing I can do that is likely to bring about that belief.

Premise (5), finally, asserts that I cannot have knowledge of the efficacy of my efforts to choose a belief without having knowledge of the efficacy of some particular instance of my choosing to believe. Jonathan Bennett challenges this assumption by having us imagine a community (of "Credamites") whose members occasionally will themselves to believe something and, unbeknownst to themselves (but not to others) they occasionally succeed.²¹ In such a community, Bennett suggests, members might be justified in believing themselves capable of willing a belief despite each person's incapacity to know of any instance of success in his or her own case. This is because knowledge of others' success can give us knowledge of our own capacities -- on the assumption that those others are much like ourselves -- even if we can never be in a position to observe our own success. Bennett does not explain, however, just how I might observe the success of others' acts of will. Unlike a case where I might observe the success of your efforts at persuasion even though you remain unaware of your success (because, for example, those who are persuaded don't want to admit your effectiveness to you), there are no public actions to observe in a case of willing to believe. You could, of course, announce that you are trying to believe (this would have to be interpreted as you trying to do what you think others have done successfully) and you could then be observed to actually have the belief in question (though you yourself would not think your belief was due to your will). I, in turn, could try to imitate you. But it is unclear what my trying would consist in. Suppose I concentrate on how nice it would be to have some particular belief I do not now have, and then give the

mental 'push' you described yourself as giving (unsuccessfully, of course, from your point of view). Even if this was a plausible description of a mental act I could perform, could it count as a *choice* to believe given that I could never believe in its effectiveness in my own case? Observing others' apparent success but never my own, wouldn't I be bound to assume that I was not making the right sort of effort, that the recommended maneuver doesn't work in my particular case, or that its apparent success is illusory? And if others assured me that the recommended maneuver was the real cause of my belief -- a belief whose apparent cause is some appropriate evidence, would I believe them?²²

Williams's argument, then, seems to be a strong one. But is it, perhaps, too strong? Williams himself acknowledges the possibility of choosing what to believe through indirect means (he cites the possibility of choosing to be hypnotized in order to acquire a desired belief), but it is not clear just how his argument allows it?²³ Why can indirect methods succeed where direct efforts cannot? Answering this question should also clarify just what sorts of indirect methods work on just what sorts of beliefs.

There are two main possibilities. One possibility is that indirect means allow us to gather supporting evidence that we would not otherwise have, and thus to

²¹ Jonathan Bennett, "Why is belief involuntary? (*Analysis* Vol 50, no. 2, 1990, pp. 87-107).

²² Analogous points might be made against Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson's famous claims about our lack of introspective knowledge of the causes of our beliefs and preferences ("Telling More Than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes", *Psychological Review*, 84, May 1977, pp. 231-59). Subjects may be convinced that their reasons are not grounded in the facts, but can they be convinced that their reasons were not causally efficacious?

²³ He says it wouldn't be rational (p. 150), but it may be rational if rationality is viewed as that which is conducive to happiness and, in any case, the possibility of choosing belief even indirectly seems to be ruled out by his argument.

believe, on the basis of the evidence, that our belief that p does depend on the fact that p. The convert in the convent, for example, is likely to believe that her belief in God is caused by God's existence, which has become evident to her since joining the convent. These are cases of choosing to be in situations that we expect will provide evidence sufficient to support a particular, favored belief; and where we hope and expect eventually to believe on the basis of that evidence. So described, we can recognize this as something that all theorists do, intentionally or not (though some also seek out evidence against a favored belief); and while it may constitute an effort to bias one's evidence, as long as the belief ultimately depends on the evidence in its favor, it does not count as an effort to believe irrespective of the truth.

The other possibility is that choosing a belief through indirect means helps me to ignore the conflict between my believing p and my believing that my belief that p is caused by something other than the fact that p. As long as there are sufficiently many steps, or sufficiently much time has elapsed, between my decision to get myself to believe p and my actually believing p, it is relatively easy to attend to my belief without attending to its cause. I can focus on my belief in God, for example, more or less forgetting that it is dependent on my decision to remain cut off from evidence that previously made me a non-believer. Of course, in order to make the choice in the first place, I must contemplate cause and effect together, and I must have some reason to suppose that there is a likely chain of causes leading from my will to the intended belief. I cannot continue to hold the intended belief if I am aware of its causal dependence on my will, but that does not prevent me from recognizing the effectiveness of similar causal chains in the past - the results of which remained in place for as long as I failed to recognize their

reliance on my will; and that is all that is needed in order to plan for similar results in the future.

Choosing a belief through indirect means, then, amounts to a choice to set a string of causes in motion -- intentionally opening the possibility that by the time the intended belief is acquired, either of two things will have happened: (a) one will have forgotten the original choice that set things in motion (as, allegedly, is true in the case where someone chooses to have a belief instilled through hypnosis, or files false reports in anticipation that he will treat it as a reliable record in the future²⁴), or (b) one will have acquired enough evidence in favor of the intended belief to make that belief dependent on the facts after all (as, allegedly, is the case where someone chooses to enter a convent in order to acquire a belief in God, or where one chooses to rely on someone in hopes of generating the evidence that will allow one to believe that she is trustworthy).

For beliefs that are relatively complex or relatively removed from perceptual experience, it is quite easy to meet these conditions. Normally, it is impossible to remember all the causes of such beliefs and it is easy not even to try. There is almost always some evidence in favor of a given belief, and it is notoriously difficult to check the counterfactuals that would tell one whether that evidence is sufficient to sustain one's belief. (Checking counterfactuals is always difficult, of course, and there are special difficulties in the case of counterfactuals concerning

²⁴ An extreme example of this possibility is offered in Christopher Nolan's film "Memento" (2000), where a man who has lost his ability to store memories chooses to set a chain of events in motion (beginning with his writing a false report to himself) that he knows will be efficacious precisely because he knows he will forget.

our mental states.²⁵) So, although it proves impossible to believe something while believing that that belief is dependent on one's choice rather than the evidence in its favor, it is rather easy to plan to bring about a state of belief in which the causes of belief are forgotten, or in which the evidence at one's disposal suffices to sustain the belief in question.

III

We can now draw together the conclusions of Sections I and II. Section I began on a negative note by rejecting certain versions of an acceptance/belief distinction as inapplicable to our opening examples, but it concluded by offering a positive account of what it means to take something to heart -- one that focusses on a distinction between reflective and unreflective reasoning. Section II likewise began on a negative note by rejecting the possibility of directly choosing our beliefs, but it concluded by articulating some ways in which we can indirectly control what we believe. We are now in a position to see how these indirect means for controlling belief are particularly well-suited to controlling what we take to heart. The result, somewhat paradoxically, is that we are often both more in control of, and more responsible for, what we take to heart than what we do not.

Recall the two conditions under which it is possible to choose a belief indirectly: a condition in which the causal role of one's choice is forgotten, and a condition in which one chooses to believe by choosing to accumulate evidence

²⁵ There are, for example, special difficulties regarding the *ceteris paribus* clauses attached to mental 'laws' (See Stephen Schiffer, "Ceteris Paribus Laws" and Jerry Fodor's reply, in *Mind*, vol 100, 397 (Jan 1991) pp. 1-34); and there are special difficulties regarding the self-constituting character of our beliefs about ourselves. (See Charles Taylor's various papers in *his Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers Vol 1* (Cambridge, 1985); and Richard Moran, "Making Up Your Mind: Self-interpretation and Self-Constitution", in *Ratio* (Dec. 1988) pp. 135-151.)

sufficient to support the belief in question. These conditions are usually easier to meet if the belief has become incorporated into one's automatic or unreflective reasoning -- i.e. has been taken to heart -- because automatic reasoning is not self-conscious reasoning and because automatic reasoning is promiscuous reasoning, forging far more connections between beliefs than it is possible to pursue reflectively. The fact that it is not self-conscious reasoning enables me to remain oblivious to my own role in making an assumption while the fact that it is promiscuous allows me to accumulate far more support for a belief than might be accumulated deliberately.

Consider, once again, the plight of a jury member considering the guilt or innocence of a defendant. She explicitly considers the evidence, considers its sources, works through its implications, recognizes contradictions and, more often than not, rejects it as untrustworthy. Meanwhile (as any good lawyer knows), there may be quite a bit of implicit reasoning going on (below the threshold of awareness, in her daydreams, or in her imagining of various possibilities, for example) -- reasoning in which the sources of information are not reflected upon, and reasoning that tends to reinforce its own conclusions precisely by pursuing its implications so promiscuously. "*If the defendant is guilty, then he was at the scene of the crime, he was probably angry, and his anger made him want to harm her...*" By pursuing the implications of an suggested possibility far enough, we are bound to introduce images and assumptions to 'fill it out' -- images and assumptions that lose their status as hypotheses insofar as they are entertained unreflectively. Whereas the fact that an assumption is adopted deliberately causes us to treat it as a mere supposition within our reflectively reasoning, its suppositional character tends to disappear when reasoning unreflectively. What was explicitly considered merely 'as if' it were true comes to operate implicitly as indeed true, and what was

entertained explicitly as a consequence of a mere hypothesis is treated implicitly as an established fact.

The imagination is particularly powerful in this regard insofar as it serves to synthesize information in ways that are designed to bypass reflective deliberation. Images affect us automatically, setting off inferences and associations that reflective thought misses -- and perhaps rejects. Emphasizing the importance of metaphors -- the product of imaginative syntheses -- in our thinking (especially our implicit thinking) is perhaps a commonplace, but the role of choice in determining which metaphors guide us tends to be overlooked. I have very little choice about whether or not to believe that a friend has died, but considerable choice about how I imagine that friend, imagine his death, or imagine my future without him; and it is these choices that determine, more deeply, just what I take to heart. Likewise, the juror has very little control over what evidence is brought to her attention, she cannot simply choose to forget the sources of that evidence, and she cannot help but find certain lines of reasoning compelling -- when considered reflectively. But she can control what she takes to heart by choosing to pursue some lines of reasoning more vigorously than others, or by dwelling on some images rather than others.

If this is right -- if we actually have quite a bit of control over what we take to heart, then we also have quite a bit of responsibility for what we take to heart. We make choices about whether to take a death to heart, and how to take it to heart, shaping our implicit view of our own deaths in the process. As a jury member, we can choose to imagine some scenarios rather than others, with the result that our implicit beliefs develop in some directions rather than others, and this may affect our automatic dealings with others for years to come. And whereas

we might assure a member of the jury that she has no choice but to find the defendant guilty, we might also urge her not to take the murder to heart, not to view the defendant as a monster, and not to let herself see the world as an evil place. Clearly, in so urging, we assume that she has some control over these things.

Given the possibility of control, it is natural next to ask: when *ought* we to take things to heart? There seems to be no general reason to suppose that deeper, more automatically operative beliefs are more likely to be true than those we adhere to more deliberately. We are often in a position, for example, to realize that someone else's view of things is more likely to be true than our own deeply-held view of things. But neither is there any reason, in general, to suppose that the beliefs that guide our explicit deliberations are more likely to be true than those that guide us automatically. Deep beliefs are often the repositories of information that is not explicitly available to us, and responses guided by such beliefs often show a wisdom that is absent in our reflective deliberations. When we believe deeply, we draw more inferences more automatically, and this has certain epistemic advantages: it means we can figure out more things with less effort. On the other hand, the fact that such inferences are drawn automatically means they are less subject to scrutiny, by either ourselves or others, so the dangers of mistaken beliefs are multiplied. So, taking something to heart may or may not be conducive to true belief. There are no general reasons to trust the reliability of one form of belief over the other.

There are, however, various non-epistemic reasons for choosing to believe something deeply, or not. The less we take our beliefs to heart, the more easily they can be abandoned without disruption to our very selves. This has both

advantages and disadvantages. Moliere maintained that a lack of depth in the beliefs of the bourgeoisie makes them particularly susceptible to the fluctuations of fashion and, for this very reason, they are able to prosper in the marketplace.²⁶ Do we want to change along with the society around us or do we want to stay steady in the face of the changes around us? Clearly, the difference is a difference of degree only, but such differences are central to what sort of person one is and they are differences about which one has some choice. Deeper beliefs make for deeper selves; but then the desire for a deeper self may also seem suspect in a postmodern world.²⁷

²⁶ Adam Gopnik remarks on this trade-off in his review of Virginia Scott's *Moliere: A Theatrical Life* (The New Yorker, June 11, 2001, p. 82-89).

²⁷ I am grateful for conversations on this topic with Paul Boghossian, Manuel Garcia-Carpintero, and Bryan Van Norden. David Velleman's work has been an inspiration, and Ward Jones, Dylan Futter, and Veli Mitova made useful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft.