

## Control of Belief and Intention

There are striking parallels between our control of belief and intention respectively. You can't form a belief just because it would be desirable to have that belief; you must take there to be some evidence for the truth of the proposition believed. You can't form an intention just because it would be desirable to have that intention; you must take there to be some consideration that favours acting as intended.

According to 'the symmetry view', these facts about control reflect important symmetries between the *natures* of belief and intention. A natural suggestion is that belief has some essential connection to truth, and intention has a corresponding essential connection to the 'to-be-doneness' of actions. These essential connections, it might be said, explain why beliefs cannot be formed in disregard of truth, nor intentions in disregard of 'to-be-doneness'.

But what exactly might these essential connections amount to?

One prominent answer, due to Pamela Hieronymi (2008, 2009), is that the belief that  $p$  (or that  $\sim p$ ) embodies one's answer to the question whether  $p$ , and the intention to  $\Phi$  (or not to  $\Phi$ ) embodies one's answer to the question whether to  $\Phi$ . Call this 'the metaphysical version' of the symmetry view.

A second answer, due to Nishi Shah (2003, 2008), is that there is an internal *normative* relation between belief and truth and a corresponding internal normative relation between intention and to-be-doneness. These internal norms make the deliberative question what to believe *transparent* to the question what is true, and the deliberative question what to intend *transparent* to the question what to do. Call this 'the normative version' of the symmetry view.

A third answer is that the relation between belief and truth, and that between intention and to-be-doneness, is *teleological*. Forming a belief about whether  $p$  involves *aiming* to acquire a true belief about whether  $p$ ; forming the intention to  $\Phi$  involves aiming to acquire an intention to do what is in fact to be done. Call this 'the teleological version' of the symmetry view.

I argue that we should prefer the teleological version of the symmetry view over the others. That is because there is a *prima facie* problem for the symmetry view, which the teleological version is best placed to avoid.

The problem derives from the following observation.

In practical deliberation, if your reasons only marginally favour  $\Phi$ ing over some alternative course of action, or if they are tied, you can form the intention to  $\Phi$  partly on the ground that you have reasons to make your mind up—reasons to form *some* intention (e.g. because you have to act now, or to facilitate planning). By contrast, in doxastic deliberation, if your

evidence only marginally favours  $p$  over  $\sim p$ , or if it favours neither  $p$  nor  $\sim p$ , you cannot go ahead and form the belief that  $p$  partly on the ground that you have reasons to make your mind up—reasons to form *some* belief as to whether  $p$  (e.g. because you will be tortured if you don't). You can assume that  $p$  for practical purposes; or you can form a belief as to how probable it is that  $p$ ; but you can't form the outright belief that  $p$ .

Thus, it seems that there is after all an important difference between the role of truth in the control of belief, and the role of to-be-doneness in the control of intention. This is *prima facie* problem for the symmetry view, in so far as the symmetry view claims that, and tries to explain why, these roles are strictly parallel.

The way out for the symmetry view, I think, is to say that what is essential to belief is a connection to (not truth but) *knowledge*. Thus, in order to form the outright belief that  $p$  you would need not only some evidence favouring  $p$ , but evidence that is (by your lights) good enough for knowledge. This latter claim is independently plausible (Owens 2000; McHugh 2011).

But this move cannot plausibly be applied to the metaphysical version of the symmetry view. For the view would then be that the belief that  $p$  embodies one's answer to the question whether one knows  $p$  (or would know  $p$  if one believed it). And that's surely wrong; even if belief is essentially connected to knowledge, believing that  $p$  does not involve answering a question about one's own knowledge-state with respect to  $p$ .

The move also makes trouble for the normative version of the symmetry view. If the internal norm of belief makes for transparency, as Shah claims, and if the norm is knowledge rather than truth, then this would have to be transparency of the question whether to believe  $p$  to (not the question whether  $p$  but) the question whether one knows (or would know)  $p$ . But that is not plausible. It's not the case that one can answer the question whether to believe  $p$  only by answering the question whether one knows (or would know)  $p$ . One can answer the question whether to believe  $p$  by considering whether  $p$  and without giving any explicit consideration to one's own state of knowledge.

Of course, one might deny that an internal norm of belief must give rise to transparency. But this would be to sever the connection between the nature of belief and control of belief, which was supposed to motivate (the normative version) of the symmetry view.

The teleological version of the symmetry view can comfortably accommodate the shift from truth to knowledge. The view would simply be that, as intention aims at to-be-doneness, so belief aims at knowledge. This does not entail that, in deliberation about whether to believe  $p$ , one's primary focus must be on one's own knowledge-state. Rather, it entails that, while one's primary focus may be on the evidence for  $p$ , one will be satisfied that one has *enough* evidence only when it strikes one as good enough for knowledge.

I conclude that the symmetry view is most defensible in its teleological version.