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Current Research

My research explores some of the disanalogies between theoretical reasoning (i.e., reasoning aimed at determining what one should believe, disbelieve or suspend) and practical reasoning (i.e., reasoning aimed at determining what one should intend). This exploration has had three major foci. First, I have attempted to arrive at a principled basis for distinguishing between theoretical attitudes (like believing) and practical attitudes (like intending). This has yielded a novel account of the notion of direction of fit that I call the “two-content interpretation”. According to the two-content interpretation, theoretical attitudes are ones whose content displays the same logical structure as an indicative speech-act while practical attitudes are ones whose content displays the same logical structure as an imperative speech-act. This is a proposal I develop and defend in my paper, “Reconceiving Direction of Fit”, published in *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy*.

My second research focus has been on the question of whether desiring to Φ can provide reasons to intend to Φ in a manner analogous to how perceiving that P may provide reasons to believe that P . There is some intuitive appeal to the idea that just as perceiving that P is an invitation to believe that P , desiring to Φ is an invitation to intend to Φ . The metaphor of an invitation is naturally interpreted in terms of the claim that perceiving that P and desiring to Φ typically disposes us to believe that P and intend to Φ , respectively. However, it may also be interpreted in terms of the claim that perceiving that P and desiring to Φ provide a prima facie reason to believe that P and intend to Φ , respectively. While I have no qualms with the first interpretation of the invitation metaphor, I have reservations about the second. In my paper, “Do Desires Provide Reasons? An Argument Against the Cognitivist Strategy”, published in *Philosophical Studies*, I argue that desire differs from perception in ways that preclude desiring to Φ from providing reasons to intend to Φ in a manner analogous to how perceiving that P provides reasons to believe that P .

My third research focus has been on what I take to be one of the key differences between theoretical and practical reasoning: namely, that there is no practical analogue to suspending. I hold that while belief displays a tri-attitudinal structure consisting of believing that P , disbelieving that P , and suspending that P , intention displays a bi-attitudinal structure consisting of intending to Φ and intending not to Φ . Moreover, while intending to Φ is the practical analogue of believing that P , and intending not to Φ is the practical analogue of disbelieving that P , I maintain that there is no practical analogue to suspending that P . This is a view I defend in my paper “Do or Do Not, There is No Suspending: Why the Nonexistence of Practical Agnosticism Matters”, which is currently under review. My ongoing examination of the attitude of suspension also includes an attempt to clarify its nature and significance, especially as relates to inquiry. This is the central focus of my paper, “Wondering About What You Know”, which appears in the journal *Analysis*.

Future Research

My future research will explore some of the ways in which close attention to the nature and significance of the doxastic attitude of suspension may enrich or alter our understanding of three ongoing areas of debate among philosophers of mind, normativity theorists, and epistemologists: (1) the transparency of doxastic deliberation, (2) the evidentialism versus pragmatism debate, and (3) the permissivism versus uniqueness debate. According to transparency, the deliberative question of whether or not to believe that **P** inevitably gives way to the factual question of whether **P**. However, in my manuscript, “Reconceiving Transparency”, I argue that one may suspend that **P** without answering the factual question of whether **P**. Indeed, suspending that **P** is typically the most natural response to being unable to determine whether **P**. Moreover, insofar as suspending that **P** is (alongside disbelieving that **P**) one of two ways in which doxastic deliberation may culminate in not believing that **P**, it is possible to answer the deliberative question of whether or not to believe that **P** (in favour of not believing that **P**) without determining whether **P**. I conclude that the transparency of doxastic deliberation, as standardly conceived, is false. This is significant since transparency often features as a premise in arguments in support of evidentialism, the thesis that only considerations that bear on the truth of **P** can be reasons to believe that **P**.

The evidentialism versus pragmatism debate is typically framed in terms of what kinds of considerations may constitute reasons to believe. While evidentialists hold that only considerations that bear on the truth of **P** can constitute a reason to believe that **P**, pragmatists deny this claim. What both sides of the debate have typically failed to consider is the question of what kinds of considerations may constitute reasons *not* to believe. Given that suspending that **P** is one of the ways in which doxastic deliberation may culminate in not believing that **P**, and given that factors that do not bear on the truth of **P**—such as the high cost of falsely believing that **P** or the fact that one lacks any evidence for or against **P**—may constitute a rational basis for suspending that **P**, it follows that considerations that do not bear on the truth of **P** may constitute reasons to suspend that **P**. Hence, even if it is true that only considerations bearing on the truth of **P** can be reasons to believe that **P**, it may still be true that considerations that do not bear on the truth of **P** may be reasons not to believe (i.e., suspend) that **P**.

The permissivism versus uniqueness debate has to do with what doxastic attitude one is allowed to adopt given a certain body of evidence. According to permissivism, it is possible for two agents with exactly the same body of evidence with regards to **P** to arrive at different doxastic attitudes towards **P** without either agent being irrational. By contrast, defenders of uniqueness maintain that at least one of the two agents is being irrational. I submit that when one of the two attitudes is suspension, it is possible for two agents to arrive at different doxastic attitudes given the same body of evidence. This is because non-evidential considerations—like the high cost of getting things wrong—may constitute reasons to suspend. Hence, if two agents have exactly the same evidence, but there is a high cost of getting things wrong for one of the agents but not the other, it may be rationally permissible for the former to suspend and for the latter to believe (or disbelieve). This is a proposal I explore in my manuscript, “Suspension Pragmatism”, which is currently under review.

What unites all three strands of my future research is the exploration of how the doxastic attitude of suspension factors into an ongoing debate. This is a theme I hope to build on in a book-length project, which I will begin working on during the research leave I have scheduled for the 2019 Spring semester. My book project will seek to develop an alternative to standard

cognitivist accounts of intention. According to standard cognitivism, intending to Φ entails believing that one will Φ . According to my alternative to standard cognitivism, which I call “acceptance cognitivism”, intending to Φ entails accepting that one will Φ . One thing that distinguishes the attitude of acceptance from the attitude of belief is that the former only aims at truth in a negative sense, while the latter aims at truth in both a positive and negative sense.

An attitude towards P aims at truth in a *negative sense* just in case acquiring evidence that $\neg P$ exerts rational pressure on one to give up that attitude. Believing that P may be said to aim at truth in a negative sense since acquiring evidence that $\neg P$ exerts rational pressure on one to give up one’s belief that P . An attitude towards P aims at truth in a *positive sense* just in case it would be rationally impermissible to adopt that attitude sans a surplus of evidence in its favour. For example, to say that belief aims at truth in a positive sense means that if my evidence equally supports P and $\neg P$, it would be rationally impermissible for me to believe that P . I must have a surplus of evidence in favour of P for believing that P to be rationally permissible. The same is not true, for example, of the legal presumption of innocence in a criminal trial. One may legally presume a defendant to be innocent in cases in which one lacks evidence both for and against their innocence. Hence, presuming someone to be innocent does not require a surplus of evidence in favour of their innocence, and therefore cannot be said to aim at truth in a positive sense. However, evidence that a defendant is guilty does exert pressure on one to give up the legal presumption of innocence. Hence, the legal presumption of innocence may be said to aim at truth in a negative sense.

I conceive of acceptance as having an analogous rational profile to that of the legal presumption of innocence. Accepting that P does not require a surplus of evidence in its favour to be rationally permissible, but evidence that $\neg P$ does exert rational pressure on one to give up one’s acceptance of P . Hence, saying that intending to Φ entails accepting that one will Φ means that intention does not require one to have a surplus of evidence that one will Φ in order to be rationally permissible. However, evidence that one will not Φ does exert rational pressure on one to give up one’s intention to Φ . For example, the fact that the train conductor announces that the trains are no longer running (which constitutes evidence that one will not be taking the train to work) exerts rational pressure on one to give up one’s intention to take the train to work. This is a proposal I explore in my paper, “Reconceiving Cognitivism”, which is currently under peer review. The primary attraction of acceptance cognitivism is that it explains why intention is governed by consistency and means-end coherence norms while avoiding the main objections to standard cognitivism.