How to Be a Normativist About the Nature of Belief

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Abstract

According to the normativist, it is built into the nature of belief itself that beliefs are subject to a certain set of norms. The descriptivist denies this claim. I argue here that we ought to favor a normativist account over its descriptivist competitors because only a normativist account of the nature of belief can explain certain non-normative facts about what it takes to have the capacity for belief. However, this way of defending normativism against descriptivism places an explanatory burden on any normativist account that a truth privileging account of the nature of belief—in which a truth norm is explanatorily fundamental or primitive—cannot discharge. I develop an alternative normativist account of the nature of belief—the proper function privileging account—that is well-positioned to achieve explanatory adequacy where a truth privileging account falls short.

Introduction

According to the normativist about the nature of belief, it is built into what it is to be a belief (as opposed to some other sort of mental attitude) that beliefs are subject to certain norms. 1 In this sense, the normativist maintains that the nature of belief is normative. 2 Normativism enjoys a great deal of popularity in epistemology because it promises to explain, in a relatively straightforward way, the authority of epistemic norms: on any version of normativism, beliefs will be appropriately evaluated with respect to epistemic norms simply by virtue of being the sorts of mental attitudes that they are.3

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1 The normativist might take this defining commitment either as a thesis about the metaphysical nature or essence of belief or as a thesis about the nature of the concept of belief. In what follows, I’ll understand this commitment metaphysically, rather than conceptually. However, I believe that the arguments I offer here can be adapted to apply to conceptual normativism.

2 The normativist might maintain that the nature of belief is irreducibly normative or, put in other terms, that it is impossible to characterize the nature of belief completely without referring to irreducibly normative properties or relations. Alternatively, the normativist might accept that beliefs, simply in virtue of being the sorts of mental attitudes that they are, are subject to certain norms, but deny that normative facts about the nature of belief are irreducible (the normativist might deny, that is, that it is impossible to give a complete account of the nature of belief in non-normative terms. What I say below is neutral between these two kinds of normativism.

3 Jonathan Adler, Allan Gibbard, Peter Graham, Peter Railton, Nishi Shah, Ernest Sosa, David Velleman, Ralph Wedgwood and a great many others either explicitly endorse or implicitly rely on normativist
There are, however, surprisingly few sustained defenses of normativism about the nature of belief—only a handful of philosophers have tried to provide independent motivation for the view.⁴

One powerful defense of normativism—the defense from dispositionalism, which I develop in the first section of what follows—establishes that only a normativist account of the nature of belief can explain certain facts about what it takes for a creature to have the capacity for belief.⁵ In the second and third sections, I show that the defense from dispositionalism undermines normativist accounts of the nature of belief according to which a truth norm plays a certain sort of fundamental or privileged explanatory role. This is because the defense from dispositionalism imposes an explanatory burden on any normativist account of the nature of belief that no truth privileging account can discharge. Thus, epistemologists who, as I argue they should, endorse the defense from dispositionalism should look for an alternative to a truth privileging account of the nature of belief. In the fourth section of this paper, I sketch just such an alternative account and I show that this alternative is well-positioned to achieve explanatory adequacy just where truth privileging accounts fall short. The normativist about the nature of belief, then, should adopt the defense from dispositionalism in order to defend normativism against descriptivism and then reject a truth privileging normativist account in favor of the alternative that I propose here.

1. Defending Normativism: From Dispositionalism About the Capacity for Belief to Normativism About the Nature of Belief

A dispositionalist account of the capacity for belief is an account according to which facts about the way in which a creature is disposed to form, revise, and employ her various mental attitudes determine which sorts of mental attitudes she is capable of having. On a dispositionalist account, facts about which dispositions to regulate and employ the various mental attitudes a creature has determine whether or not the creature is capable of having mental attitudes that would be appropriately labeled beliefs. A believer’s capacity for belief is (at least partially) constituted by certain of her dispositions accounts of the nature of belief in their work. Any view maintaining that belief has a constitutive aim and so that some standard of success or correctness is built into the nature of belief itself is a version of normativism.

⁴ Although many presuppose normativism in their efforts to answer questions about the nature of epistemic norms, to my knowledge only Wedgwood (2007a), (2007b), Zangwill (1998), (2005), Shah (2003), and Shah and Velleman (2005) actually defend normativism about the nature of belief.

⁵ This line of defense is certainly inspired by and perhaps best understood as an adaptation of certain strands of reasoning that emerge in Wedgwood (2007a) pages 9-14 and (2007b), Chapter 7 and, somewhat less explicitly, in Zangwill (1998). Wedgwood, in particular, employs some of the same argumentative moves I deploy in developing the defense from dispositionalism in Section 1 below in his effort to show that the essences of (each of) our concepts and our attitude types are all irreducibly normative. The argument I develop in Section 1 loosely tracks Wedgwood’s reasoning as applied to the case of belief, in particular, and insofar as his reasoning establishes the weaker conclusion that the nature of belief is normative (but perhaps not irreducibly so).
to regulate and employ a particular class of her mental attitudes in specific ways. The defense from dispositionalism takes a dispositionalist account of the capacity for belief as its starting point.

There is good reason to think that some sort of dispositionalist account of the capacity for belief must be right. After all, if a creature is not even disposed, at least under normal circumstances, to form a mental attitude of type T with the content P in response to a perceptual experience constituting evidence (in the straightforward sort of way) that P, nor is she at all disposed to act in ways that would satisfy her desires if P were true when she does have this type of mental attitude toward P, then it certainly seems that T is not belief, but rather some other sort of mental attitude (perhaps T is the attitude of imagining, supposing, entertaining, etc.). Intuitively, a creature that is not disposed to regulate or employ any of her mental attitudes in any of the ways that we are disposed to regulate and employ our beliefs is simply not a believer. Such a creature is not capable of having beliefs at all, although she might well be capable of having various other different types of mental attitudes. If this is right, then whether or not a creature has certain dispositions to regulate and employ her mental attitudes in particular ways makes a difference to whether or not she has the capacity for belief. So, a fully general account of the capacity for belief must spell out how facts about the ways in which a creature is disposed to regulate and employ her mental attitudes settle the question of whether or not the creature has the capacity for belief.

Now there are two ways of developing a dispositionalist account. According to a complete set approach, there is a particular set of dispositions to regulate or employ mental attitudes in particular ways such that having each one of the dispositions in this set is required for and essential to having the capacity for belief. On a complete set approach, then, a creature counts as having the capacity for belief if and only if she has all of the dispositions in this set. If a creature lacks any one of the dispositions in the set, then that creature is not capable of having beliefs (although she might well have the capacity for another sort of perhaps belief-like mental attitude). According to a cluster approach, however, there is a particular set of dispositions to regulate or employ mental attitudes in particular ways such that a creature must only have some subset of the dispositions in the essential set in order to count as having the capacity for belief. On a cluster approach, there need not be any single disposition that is required for or essential to the capacity for belief. Rather, a cluster approach allows that the capacity for belief might be constituted by different particular dispositions in different instances. A cluster approach also allows that different dispositions may carry different weights in constituting the capacity for belief and that there may be borderline cases where there is no clear fact of the matter regarding whether a creature that has only a few of the dispositions in the set of potentially capacity-constituting dispositions has the capacity for belief.

The defense from dispositionalism does not depend on which of a complete set approach or a cluster approach is correct. However, appreciating the philosophical space

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6 Wedgwood argues for a dispositionalist account of the capacity for belief (see Wedgwood (2007b), Chapter 7) and both Shah and Velleman are also committed to some sort of dispositionalist account (see, in particular, Shah (2005), note 45, and Velleman (2000)).
of possibilities here brings a point that is crucial to this defense of normativism against descriptivism into clear focus: a fully general account of the capacity for belief will have to describe those dispositions that constitute (on a complete set approach) or potentially constitute (on a cluster approach) that capacity. After all, not every conceivable disposition to regulate and employ certain of one’s mental attitudes in a particular way can help to constitute the capacity for belief. I’ll call the set of dispositions that are essential to and constitutive of (on a complete account) or that are capable of constituting (on a cluster approach) the capacity for belief the essential set. A fully general account of the capacity for belief will identify and describe the particular capacity-constituting or potentially capacity-constituting dispositions in the essential set.

So, which dispositions are in the essential set? Well, it seems that a creature simply cannot have the capacity for belief if she lacks every disposition to regulate and employ her mental attitudes in ways that would either constitute or relatively closely approximate rationally permissible belief regulation and employment (i.e., every rational disposition). It would be misleading at best to say that such a creature—one who is only disposed to regulate and employ her various mental attitudes in ways that would constitute rationally impermissible belief regulation and employment—is a defective believer. This creature departs so far from the relevant paradigm that it seems she is not a believer at all. A creature who lacks every rational disposition is not one who has the capacity for belief and is disposed to believe poorly, but rather one who lacks the capacity in the first place.\(^7\) To see the intuitive appeal of this thought, consider the following process of transformation: take a creature that clearly has the capacity for belief. Strip this creature of all and only dispositions to regulate and employ her mental attitudes in ways that would either constitute or approximate rational belief formation and employment—leave everything else about the creature unaltered or install in the creature some dispositions the manifestation of which would not constitute rationally permissible belief regulation or employment. We would resist labeling the transformed creature a believer, and for good reason. The structure of this creature’s mental economy will be radically altered as a result of this transformation. And because the structure of her mental economy post-transformation will diverge so radically from the mental economy of paradigmatic believers, it makes so sense to say that this creature’s mental attitudes are of the same kind as the mental attitudes of paradigmatic believers.

If a complete set approach is right, then a creature that lacks the capacity for belief necessarily lacks at least one of the dispositions in the essential set. Since a creature that lacks all the rational dispositions lacks the capacity for belief regardless of what other dispositions she happens to have, it must be that some particular rational dispositions are in the essential set. On a cluster approach, a creature must have some subset of the dispositions in the essential set in order to have the capacity for belief. So a creature that lacks the capacity for belief lacks some of the dispositions in the essential set. If this creature lacks the capacity for belief in virtue of lacking every rational disposition—and so

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\(^7\) The driving thought here, one to which Wedgwood and Zangwill, for example, both appeal, is that the capacity for belief cannot be wholly grounded in or constituted by dispositions to regulate or employ beliefs is ways that are rationally impermissible—complete irrationality is, in this sense, simply impossible.
independently of what other dispositions she happens to have—then it must be that some of the rational dispositions are in the essential set. Thus, whether a cluster approach or a complete set approach is correct, at least some of dispositions in the essential set must be rational dispositions.

Plausibly, each disposition to regulate or employ a mental attitude type in a particular way can be described by a function from input conditions to output conditions. So, for example, a creature might be disposed to form a belief that P—the output condition—whenever she has a perceptual experience as of P—the input condition. But this disposition cannot be a rational disposition. It would not be rationally permissible to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P and one knows that one is under the influence of a hallucinogenic drug, or that one is likely to be perceiving a hologram, or that one is in fake-P-county, etc. Any description of a rational disposition will have to include a ceteris paribus clause that excludes these sorts of circumstances in specifying the relevant input conditions. And, any unified characterization of the circumstances that this ceteris paribus clause must exclude will reference a normative property. Most naturally perhaps, a complete specification of the input conditions for a rational disposition might include a clause that refers to the property of being a defeater. Plausibly, it is rationally permissible, in circumstances when no defeaters are present, to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P and so the disposition to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P and no defeaters are present is a rational disposition. One might, however, describe this same rational disposition somewhat less helpfully as the disposition to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P and it would be rationally permissible to believe that P on the basis of this perceptual experience.

Thus, any characterization of the set of circumstances that must be excluded from the potential input conditions of a rational disposition will refer (although perhaps only tacitly or obliquely) to a normative property. And if every rational disposition can be characterized only by referencing a normative property, it follows that it is impossible to fully describe the dispositions in the essential set without referring to some normative property. So, any complete and fully general account of the capacity for belief will have to refer to some normative property in spelling out what constitutes or potentially constitutes this capacity.

We can schematize this bit of reasoning as follows:

Premise 1: An account of the capacity for belief will have to describe the set of capacity-constituting or potentially capacity-constituting dispositions (i.e. the essential set).

Premise 2: A creature lacking every rational disposition thereby lacks the capacity for belief, regardless of what other dispositions she might have.

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8 If the relevant normative property or relation can be reduced to purely descriptive properties and relations, then the it will be possible to supply a unified characterization of the input conditions of a rational disposition in non-normative terms. Still, this characterization will refer to the relevant normative property or relation, albeit obliquely, by referring to its reduction base.
**Conclusion 1:** So, the essential set must include some rational dispositions.

**Premise 3:** Any complete characterization of (any of) the rational dispositions must refer to some normative property.

**Conclusion 2:** So, an account of the capacity for belief must refer to some normative property.

Of course, this argument has not yet established that the nature of belief includes a normative component. The reasoning I’ve marshaled up to this point only shows that an account of what it takes to be the sort of creature that is capable of belief must reference normative properties. How ought the normativist bridge the gap from this conclusion about the capacity for belief to a conclusion about the nature of belief? Well, explanations of necessary truths generally appeal to the natures of the various entities involved. So, we should expect the features that are built into the nature or metaphysical essence of belief itself to play a central role in explaining why various other necessary truths involving belief obtain. In particular, we should expect facts about the nature of belief to supply an explanation of why it is that having the capacity for belief depends on having all or some subset of the particular dispositions in the essential set. And, since some of these dispositions are rational dispositions, it follows that facts about the nature of belief must explain why some of the dispositions in the essential set are rational dispositions.

Remember that the rational dispositions are just dispositions conformity with which constitutes rational belief regulation and employment. Given that the rational dispositions can only be characterized by reference to normative properties or relations like the property of being a defeater or being rationally permissible, non-normative features of the nature of belief could never explain why it is that the essential set includes some of these dispositions. In fact, there is good reason to suspect that the best (and perhaps the only) adequate explanation of why the essential set includes some rational dispositions will appeal to the fact that beliefs are governed by certain norms (and, in particular, norms of rational belief regulation or employment). And if, as seems plausible, the nature or essence of belief itself is to explain why the capacity for belief involves having all or some subset of dispositions in the essential set, then the fact that beliefs are governed by certain norms must be built into belief’s very nature as the kind of mental state that it is. Thus, the fact that some of the capacity-constituting or potentially capacity-constituting dispositions are rational dispositions is good reason to think that an account of the nature of belief must include that beliefs are subject to certain norms. We can represent this abductive inference schematically as follows:

**Conclusion 2:** So, an account of the capacity for belief must refer to some normative property.

**Premise 4:** The best explanation of the fact that any account of the capacity for belief must refer to some normative property is that the nature of belief is (at least in part) normative.
Conclusion 3: So, the nature of belief must be (at least in part) normative.\(^9\)

Of course, as an argument for the conclusion that the right account of the nature of belief must be normativist rather than descriptivist, the defense from dispositionalism that I advance in this section does not explicitly favor any particular version of normativism over alternatives. That said, the defense from dispositionalism does place a constraint on normativist accounts of the nature of belief. In order for the abductive inference at the center of this defensive argument to be sound, a normativist account must be able to explain why it is that the particular rational dispositions in the essential set (whichever dispositions these turn out to be) are constitutive or potentially constitutive of the capacity for belief. If, as I have tried to show, the defense from dispositionalism is independently compelling, then we have good reason to reject any normativist account of the nature of belief that cannot discharge this explanatory burden.

2. Truth Privileging Normativism

Recall that, according to the normativist, it is built into or partially constitutive of the nature of belief that beliefs are governed by a distinctive set of norms. This fact is, for the normativist, a crucial part of what differentiates beliefs from other sorts of mental attitudes.

*Truth privileging* accounts of the nature of belief are normativist accounts that embrace a popular pair of additional theses about the content and the explanatory priority of the constitutive norms governing belief. First, the truth privileging normativist maintains that there is a certain norm—the fundamental norm or the correctness norm—that plays a privileged explanatory role in an account of the nature of belief. Second, the truth privileging normativist maintains that this fundamental norm is a truth norm. So, on a truth privileging account, it is an essential and explanatorily fundamental fact about beliefs that beliefs are subject to a truth norm.

Truth privileging normativism about the nature of belief has *prima facie* appeal as a way of cashing out the widely accepted platitude that belief aims at the truth. It is, perhaps for just this reason, by far the most popular version of normativism in contemporary epistemology.\(^{10}\) Velleman, for example, means to be stating common ground when he writes that

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\text{...belief just is...an attitude for which there is such a thing as correctness or incorrectness, consisting in truth or falsity. For a propositional attitude}
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\(^9\) The most prominent defenses of normativism on offer in the current literature—Wedgwood (2007a) and (2007b), Shah and Velleman (2005), Shah (2003), and Zangwill (1998)—all employ an abductive inference of roughly this sort: these defenses begin by identifying some apparently non-normative feature of believers or of the capacity for belief and then suggest that only a normativist account of the nature of belief can adequately explain the relevant non-normative feature.

\(^{10}\) The philosophers whose work I reference in note 3 all either explicitly endorse or simply presuppose a truth privileging normativist account of the nature of belief in their work. Any account of the nature of belief according to which belief aims at the truth and where where the relevant sort of aiming is cashed out in normative terms is a truth privileging normativist account.
to be a belief just is, in part, for it to be capable of going right or wrong by being true or false.\textsuperscript{11}

In this section, I explore the two defining commitments of truth privileging normativism. In the following section, I argue that a truth privileging account lacks the resources to provide a satisfactory explanation of why certain dispositions in the essential set constitute or are capable of constituting the capacity for belief. If my arguments are successful, then the normativist who endorses, as I have suggested she should, the defense from dispositionalism must reject a truth privileging account of the nature of belief.

I turn first to the truth privileging normativist’s thesis about explanatory priority. For a truth privileging normativist, there is a fundamental norm of correctness that constitutes a kind of explanatory bedrock in her account of the nature of belief. The fundamental norm is explanatorily basic in the sense that the fact that beliefs are governed by the fundamental norm explains other facts that are built into the nature of belief. Wedgwood’s description of the way in which a truth privileging normativist understands the explanatory relationship between the fundamental norm and other constitutive norms is sufficiently illuminating to be worth reproducing here.

Suppose that there is a universal epistemic norm—that is, a norm that applies to all beliefs as such—that is particularly fundamental, in the following way. Not only is this a “primitive” epistemic norm that cannot be any further explained; but it also explains absolutely all other such universal epistemic norms. If there is such a norm, then, I propose, a belief is “correct” just in case it satisfies this fundamental epistemic norm.\textsuperscript{12}

And, elsewhere:

Among these [universal] norms that apply to belief, there may be some that form part of the very nature or essence of belief; if there are any such norms, they could be called the essential or constitutive norms of belief. Among these constitutive norms, there may be one that counts as the most fundamental constitutive norm. This norm would be the most fundamental in the sense that it plays a crucial role in the explanation of all the other constitutive norms of belief—while none of the other constitutive norms play such a crucial role in these explanations.\textsuperscript{13}

The question ‘why are beliefs subject to the fundamental correctness norm?’ has, for the truth privileging normativist, only a trivial answer: beliefs are subject to the fundamental norm because being subject to this norm is just what it is for a particular mental attitude to be a belief. There is nothing more to be said.

\textsuperscript{11} Velleman (2000). p. 16. For Velleman here, correctness is robustly normative and so not merely equivalent to truth.

\textsuperscript{12} Wedgwood, (2002). p. 6.

\textsuperscript{13} Wedgwood, (forthcoming). p. 2.
Nevertheless, the fact that beliefs are governed by the fundamental norm plays a crucial role in explaining all the other normative facts built into the nature of belief. In particular, for my purposes here, the fact that beliefs are governed by the fundamental norm explains why belief is, simply in virtue of being the kind of mental attitude that it is, governed by certain norms of rationality. Beliefs are subject to constitutive norms of rationality because they are subject to the fundamental norm. The norms of rationality, according to the truth privileging normativist, are just those norms that articulate the most effective, most reliable means of achieving conformity with the fundamental norm. Conformity with norms of rationality ensures that, in normal circumstances, our beliefs will likely end up being correct. So, the fact that beliefs are subject to a certain norm of correctness just entails that beliefs must also be subject to norms of rationality.

With a clear picture of this explanatory structure in hand, one can better appreciate how the truth privileging normativist might arrive at the conclusion that the fundamental norm of correctness is a truth norm. Certainly there is a long philosophical tradition of endorsing the claim that norms of rationality are norms conformity with which is (at least typically) a reliable means of arriving at a belief that $P$ if and only if $P$ is true. Plausibly, it is rational, in normal circumstances, to form a belief that $P$ when one has a perceptual experience as of $P$. And conformity with this norm of rationality is—again, quite plausibly—a reliable way of forming true beliefs. Put in other terms, forming true beliefs seems to be precisely the goal that conformity with this norm is meant to achieve. But, the proponent of a truth privileging account reasons, only a fundamental norm stating that a belief is correct if and only if it is true can explain why beliefs are subject to a norm of rationality stating that one should, under normal circumstances, form a belief that $P$ when one has a perceptual experience as of $P$. More generally, the truth privileging normativist suggests, there is good reason to think that belief is subject to standards of rationality conformity with which does ensure that, in normal circumstances, the subject believes $P$ if and only if $P$ is true. So it must be that beliefs are subject to a fundamental norm of correctness stating that a belief is correct if and only if true because only a fundamental correctness norm with this content can explain why it is that beliefs are subject to the norms of rationality to which it seems that they are, in fact, subject. Specifying content of the fundamental correctness norm in this way best explains why the norms of rational belief formation have the particular content that they seem to have.

Wedgwood gives voice to just this line of thought when he writes

... (i) it is essential to beliefs that they are...regulated by certain standards of rational or justified belief, and (ii) the ultimate purpose or point of conforming to these standards is not just to have rational or justified beliefs purely for their own sake, but to ensure that one believes the proposition in question if and only if that proposition is true.\(^\text{15}\)

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\(^{14}\) I assume an instrumentalist picture of the entailment relationship between the fundamental norm and the norms of rationality for ease of exposition, but the arguments that follow do not turn on this assumption.

So, the truth privileging normativist maintains that it is built into the nature of belief that one’s belief that P is correct if and only if P is true. And it follows, on a truth privileging account, that it is also be built into the nature of belief that one’s belief is rational if and only if it is the result of a process that is (or that one rationally believes to be) a reliable means to believing that P if and only if P is true.\textsuperscript{16}

3. Reason to Reject Truth Privileging Normativism

The defense from dispositionalism demands that the right normativist account must explain why certain rational dispositions are in the essential set. In this section, I argue that a truth privileging normativist account does not have the resources to discharge this explanatory burden. In an effort to streamline my argument, I will presuppose a complete set approach in what follows.\textsuperscript{17}

My argument comes in two steps. I make the case below that some of the dispositions in the essential set must be what I call output-side dispositions. Then, and this is the second step of my argument, I show that a truth privileging normativist account lacks the resources to explain why any output-side dispositions are in the essential set. If the argument I offer here is sound, then the normativist who endorses, as I have suggested she should, the defense from dispositionalism ought to abandon a truth privileging account of the nature of belief.

\textit{Step 1:}

I’ll begin by partitioning the set of rational dispositions into two classes. On the one hand, some rational dispositions map the ways in which it is rational to regulate our beliefs in response to various stimuli. Plausibly, for example, it is rational, in normal circumstances, to form a belief that P when one has a perceptual experience as of P. I call these dispositions the input-side dispositions.\textsuperscript{18} On the other hand, some of the rational dispositions map ways in which our other mental attitudes should be responsive to our beliefs. These dispositions capture the ways in which a rational individual employs her beliefs in forming and revising other sorts of mental attitudes. For example, perhaps it is

\textsuperscript{16} It is controversial among proponents of truth privileging accounts whether the relationship between the norms of rationality and the truth norm should be understood as internalist or externalist in character. But I mention this controversy here only to put it aside.

\textsuperscript{17} I believe an argument that is similar in spirit to the one that I develop here (an argument that appeals to the need for an account of the capacity for belief to explain the apparent parity with respect to this capacity of the two creatures that I ask the reader to imagine in what follows) shows that the proponent of a cluster view ought to accept that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set and so relevant for determining whether a creature has the capacity for belief. However, a proponent of the cluster view can deny that there are any dispositions the having of which are metaphysically necessary for having the capacity for belief. As a result, the cluster view introduces complications a full treatment of which would require more space than I can reasonably devote to it in this paper.

\textsuperscript{18} Any disposition that identifies belief as its output counts as an input-side disposition. So, a disposition to form the belief that both P and Q when one believes that P and also believes that Q, for example, counts as an input-side disposition.
rational, in normal circumstances, to form the intention to φ in cases where one desires that P, and one believes that φ-ing is the best means of making P true available at present. If this is right, then the disposition to form the intention to φ in standard cases where one desires that P and believes that φ-ing is the best means of making P true available at present is a rational disposition. I call these rational dispositions the output-side dispositions.19

In what follows, I argue that some output-side dispositions help constitute the capacity for belief. To this end, I first show that the proponent of a complete set view must accept that a creature who lacks every output-side disposition cannot be a believer. Then, I argue that in order to explain why it is impossible for a creature to have the capacity for belief unless she has some of the output-side dispositions, the proponent of a complete set view must accept that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set.

To see why being a believer requires having some of the output-side dispositions, first imagine a creature with a kind of representational mental attitude—b-attitudes—such that the creature is disposed to generate and revise her b-attitudes in response to various sorts of stimuli in precisely the ways that constitute rational belief formation and revision. However, this creature—call her Bee—is not disposed to form and revise the rest of her mental attitudes in response to her b-attitudes in any of the rationally permissible ways in which one might form and revise one’s other mental attitudes in response to one’s beliefs. We can imagine, instead, that Bee’s b-attitudes have exactly the same sort of impact on her other mental attitudes that our imaginings have on our other mental attitudes. When I merely imagine that there is a bar of chocolate in the kitchen, then (in normal circumstances) even if I have a very strong desire to eat a piece of chocolate, I will not thereby be moved to form an intention to get up off the sofa and walk to the kitchen. Similarly, when Bee has a b-attitude with “there is a bar of chocolate in the kitchen” as its content, then, even if she also has a very strong desire for chocolate, she will not be disposed to form an intention to go retrieve the chocolate from the kitchen. In every other respect, Bee is just like a paradigmatic believer.

Now, imagine a second creature—call her Lief—with a kind of representational mental attitude—lief-attitudes—such that she is disposed to form and revise her other mental attitudes in response to these lief-attitudes in precisely the same ways that we are disposed to form and revise our other mental attitudes in response to our beliefs. However, Lief is not disposed to regulate her lief-attitudes in ways that would constitute rationally permissible belief regulation. We might imagine, for example, that Lief is always and only disposed to form lief-attitudes via a process that generates a lief-attitude with the content P when Lief’s evidence (e.g. perceptual experience, testimony from the other members of her social group, etc.) suggests that P is not the case. Or, perhaps Lief is

19 Notice that the norms with which a subject conforms when she manifests one of these output-side dispositions are not norms of epistemic rationality. Failure to conform with such norms does not make a subject’s beliefs irrational. Nevertheless, these norms are norms of rationality broadly construed: they govern the ways in which it is rationally permissible for one’s various other mental attitudes to shift in response to changes in one’s beliefs.
a kind of perpetual wishful thinker who is always and only disposed to form a lief-attitude with the content \( P \) when she desires that \( P \). In every other respect, Lief is identical to Bee.

Now, Bee’s b-attitudes and Lief’s lief-attitudes seem to have roughly equal claim to be labeled beliefs. Both have some of the distinctive and perhaps seemingly essential features of paradigmatic belief, but lack others. So, an account of the capacity for belief ought to give the same answer to the question of whether Bee has the capacity for belief in virtue of having b-attitudes that it gives to the question of whether Lief has the capacity for belief in virtue of having lief-attitudes. It would be objectionably \textit{ad hoc}, for example, to simply stipulate that lief-attitudes are not beliefs, but that b-attitudes are. Bee and Lief seem on a par, so to speak. Intuitively at least, whatever we say about Bee regarding whether she has the capacity for belief, we should say the same about Lief.

However, it cannot be that both Bee and Lief have the capacity for belief. Since there are no rational dispositions that they share, it is impossible that both Bee and Lief have all of the dispositions in the essential set. So, it must be that, although both b-attitudes and lief-attitudes are or seem to be belief-like in important respects, neither are beliefs.\(^{20}\)

Now, if both input-side and output-side dispositions are in the essential set, then it is easy to explain why both Bee and Lief are not believers. Neither creature has all of the dispositions in the essential set.

But, if no output-side dispositions are in the essential set—if, that is, the only the capacity constituting dispositions are input-side dispositions—then the normativist can only explain why Bee is not a believer if she can show that Bee is metaphysically impossible. Here is why. If Bee is metaphysically possible, then, \textit{ex hypothesi}, Bee has all of the input-side dispositions. The only rational dispositional Bee lacks are output-side dispositions. If no output-side dispositions are necessary for the capacity for belief, then Bee has all of the rational dispositions the having of which could possibly make a difference to whether she has this capacity. Moreover mental economy is, with the exception of her rational dispositions, structured in precisely the way that the mental economy of a paradigmatic believer is structured. Thus, the normativist who denies that having some output-side dispositions is necessary for having the capacity for belief does not have the resources to deny that Bee’s b-attitudes are beliefs. If Bee is metaphysically possible and no output-side dispositions are in the essential set, Bee must be a believer.\(^{21}\)

\(^{20}\) Recall that I have assumed a complete set view here. Notice that the proponent of a cluster view has additional options regarding what to say about Bee and Lief. She might say that both b-attitudes and lief-attitudes are beliefs, albeit rather exceptional ones in that they depart from paradigm rather substantially. Alternatively, she might say that although both are belief-like in important respects, neither sort of attitudes qualifies as belief. Finally, she might say that there is no fact of the matter about whether b-attitudes and lief-attitudes are beliefs. Rather, all there is to say is that both sorts of attitudes are belief-like in certain crucial respects. Although I do not have the space to defend my assessment here, I believe the proponent of a cluster view will have to rely on there being certain output-side dispositions in the essential set in order to vindicate any of these three verdicts.

\(^{21}\) If the normativist were to deny that having some output-side dispositions is necessary for having the capacity for belief and she were to accept that Bee is metaphysically possible, then she would have to say that Bee’s b-attitudes are beliefs, but that Lief’s lief-attitudes are not beliefs, but this violates our intuitions about the apparent parity of Bee and Lief with respect to the capacity for belief.
So, in order to secure the result that Bee is not a believer, and so to successfully treat Bee and Lief as being on a par with respect to the capacity for belief, one must accept that a creature who lacks every output-side disposition cannot be a believer. One must accept, that is, that having some output-side dispositions is at least necessary for having the capacity for belief.

So far, so good. But the result that any creature with the capacity for belief must, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, also have some output-side dispositions demands explanation. One especially straightforward explanation of this result is that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set. However there is another explanation available here, one that appears, at least at first, to be compatible with the claim that no output-side dispositions are in the essential set. It is plausible that the output-side dispositions that are necessary for (but perhaps not constitutive of) the capacity for belief are precisely those output-side dispositions that characterize the rationally permissible ways in which beliefs can impact intentions. And it is also plausible that 1) having just these output-side dispositions is (at least partially) constitutive of having the capacity for intention and that 2) the capacity for belief and the capacity for intention (and perhaps the capacity for certain other mental attitudes, such as desire) come as a metaphysical package. That is, perhaps it is metaphysically impossible to have the capacity for one of these sorts of attitudes without also having the capacity for the other sort(s) of attitude(s). If this is right, then any metaphysically possible creature that has all the dispositions that are constitutive of the capacity for belief must also have whichever dispositions are constitutive of the capacity for intention. Since these dispositions include the output-side dispositions in question here, any metaphysically possible creature that has the capacity for belief must also have these output-side dispositions. So, this metaphysical package view supplies a coherent metaphysical picture according to which it is a metaphysically necessary truth that all believers have certain output-side dispositions. This truth is explained by the fact that believers necessarily have the capacity for intention and the fact that the relevant output-side dispositions partially constitute the capacity for intention. Moreover, it seems, at least at first pass, that this metaphysical picture is perfectly compatible with the claim that no output-dispositions are in the essential set.

But appearances can be deceiving. Assume that the metaphysical package view is right. Still, the thesis that the capacity for belief and that capacity for intention come as a metaphysical package itself demands an explanation. The normativist who wishes to embrace the metaphysical package view must be able to explain why it is that, as a matter

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22 In order to sustain the result that Bee is metaphysically impossible, the normativist might suggest that there are some output-side dispositions that every believer necessarily has, but that are not essential to or constitutive of the capacity for belief. If this is right, then Bee has all those dispositions that constitute the capacity for belief, but she lacks certain other dispositions that every believer necessarily has. This line of reasoning is not available to someone who endorses a standard modal characterization of essential properties according to which an essential property of an entity is just a necessary, non-accidental property of that the entity. However, it is compatible with other, more restrictive characterizations of essential properties such as the definitional characterization of essential properties made popular by Kit Fine (see Fine, 1994). I am grateful to --- for bringing this line of reasoning to my attention. However, my argument below reveals why this line is ultimately untenable.
of metaphysical necessity, a creature cannot have the capacity for either one of these two sort of attitudes without having the capacity for the other. I argue below that a view according to which certain output-side dispositions partially constitute the capacity for belief supplies the best explanation of why the capacity for belief and the capacity for intention come as a metaphysical package. If my argument is successful, then the metaphysical package view is in tension with the thesis that the essential set contains no output-side dispositions. Anyone who is sympathetic to the metaphysical package view has compelling reason to accept that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set.

Now, in general, we expect facts about the metaphysical natures of the various entities referenced in the statement of a metaphysical necessity to explain why that necessity obtains. So, we should expect that facts about the nature of the capacity for belief and facts about the nature of the capacity for intention explain why, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, any creature with the capacity for belief must also have the capacity for intention and vise versa. And the normativist who adopts the metaphysical package view can easily and straightforwardly explain why having the capacity for intention necessitates having the capacity for belief by appeal to just these resources. If certain output-side dispositions—namely, dispositions for a creature’s beliefs (whatever, metaphysically speaking, these attitudes turn out to be) to shape her intentions in certain ways—are constitutive of the capacity for intention, then it follows that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, any creature with intentions must also have beliefs. Plausibly, it is built into what it takes for a creature to count as having the capacity for intention that the creature be disposed to regulate its intentions in distinctive ways in response to beliefs. So because it is essential to the capacity for intention that a creature’s intentions hook up to beliefs (and not some other sort of mental attitude) in these distinctive ways, any creature that counts as having the capacity for intention must also have the capacity for belief.

However, to fully explain the metaphysical package view, the normativist must also explain why any creature with the capacity for belief must have the capacity for intention. In fact, it is really only this direction of the biconditional that is crucial to her explanation of the fact that output-side dispositions are necessary for the capacity for belief. And the most natural explanation here is one that parallels the explanation above for why any creature with the capacity for intention necessarily also has the capacity for belief. Crucially, this sort of parallel explanation relies on its being the case that being disposed to have one’s beliefs shape, in specific ways, one’s intentions (and not one’s mental attitudes of other sorts) is constitutive of one’s having the capacity for belief. If the relevant output-side dispositions are constitutive (in part) of the capacity for belief, it follows that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, any creature with beliefs must also have intentions. So, the most natural explanation of why any creature with the capacity for belief must also have the capacity for intention requires assuming that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set. More generally, any adequate explanation of why the capacity for belief is necessarily accompanied by the capacity for intention will

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Of course, it might also be constitutive of the capacity for intention that a creature’s intentions hook up to certain of the creature’s other mental attitudes (e.g. desires) in particular ways.
have to reference some essential feature of the capacity for belief in virtue of which that capacity is linked to the capacity for intention. Intuitively, at least, the connection between belief and intention is just that beliefs should inform intentions in a particular, distinctive way and this connection is precisely the connection that is captured by output-side dispositions. Thus, there is good reason so think that any essential feature of the capacity for belief that can forge a metaphysical link between the capacity for belief and the capacity for intention strong enough to explain the fact that the first of these capacities is necessarily accompanied by the second will guarantee (although perhaps only indirectly) that having certain output-side dispositions is essential to having the capacity for belief.

Anyone who endorses the metaphysical package view has independent reason to think that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set.

The demand that any account of the capacity for belief respect the fact that Bee and Lief are on a par, so to speak, with respect to this capacity forces the proponent of a complete set account to accept that that it is metaphysically impossible for a creature to be a believer if she lacks every output-side disposition. And, I have argued, providing a satisfactory explanation of this result requires accepting that some output-side dispositions partially constitute the capacity for belief. More generally, there is no way for an account of the capacity for belief to fully sustain the parity of Bee and Lief with respect to the capacity for belief unless the account allows that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set.

**Step 2:**

If step 1 of my argument is successful, then the truth privileging normativist will have to concede that some dispositions in the essential set are output-side dispositions. I argue here, however, that a truth privileging normativist account of the nature of belief is ill-equipped to explain why this is the case. Establishing this conclusion constitutes the second step of my argument that truth privileging accounts are not in a position to discharge the explanatory burden that the defense from dispositionalism places on any normativist account of the nature of belief.

If the defense from dispositionalism is sound, then facts about what is constitutive or potentially constitutive of having the capacity for belief that involve normative properties should be explained by the fact that beliefs are subject to certain constitutive

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24 A normativist who hopes to resist step 1 of my argument here by rejecting my conclusion that some output-side dispositions are in the essential set, might try to explain the metaphysical package view in a different way, by pointing out that there are good reasons—reasons having to do with the sort of evolutionary pressures that led to the development of creatures with the capacities for belief, intention, etc.—to think that creatures that have developed the capacity for one sort of attitude here have also developed the capacity for the other(s). It seems to me that such considerations might well show that, as a matter of contingent, natural fact, the capacities for belief, intention, etc. come as a package. However, facts about the evolutionary pressures that led to or explain the development of creatures with the capacities for belief, intention, etc. are (at least metaphysically-speaking) merely contingent and so cannot lend support to the metaphysical thesis that such a normativist needs to defend here. Facts about the way in which various evolutionary pressures led to the development of creatures with a certain set of capacities that explain why the capacities in this set did not develop in isolation do not supply reason for thinking that creatures that have one of the capacities in this set and not others are metaphysically impossible.
norms. After all, if it were possible to explain why certain rational dispositions are in the essential set without referencing the constitutive norms to which beliefs are subject, then we would have good reason to doubt the abductive inference at the center of this defense. So, on a truth privileging normativist account, the fact that certain rational dispositions are in the essential set must ultimately be explained by the fact that beliefs are subject to the fundamental truth norm.

The fact that beliefs are subject to a fundamental truth norm can easily explain why some input-side dispositions are constitutive of the capacity for belief. Recall that the fact that beliefs are subject to the truth norm is sufficient on its own to entail that beliefs are constitutively subject to input-side norms conformity with which increases the likelihood that believers actually form true beliefs (i.e. norms of rational belief regulation). Furthermore, the fact that beliefs are constitutively subject to these input-side norms plausibly requires that believers at least be disposed to form and revise their beliefs in ways that accord with input-side norms of rationality since, the truth privileging normativist might point out, being so disposed is part of what it takes to count as forming and revising a kind of mental attitude that is subject to the particular constitutive norms in question and so counts as belief. Thus, the fact that beliefs are subject to a constitutive truth-norm and so to certain constitutive norms of rationality explains why certain input-side dispositions are essential to the capacity for belief.

Yet, it is doubtful that the truth norm can underwrite an explanation of the fact that output-side dispositions are in the essential set. It is plausible that if beliefs weren’t the sorts of attitudes that were governed by a truth norm, then beliefs wouldn’t be subject to the output-side norms to which beliefs are, as a matter of fact, subject. However, it is not plausible that the fact that beliefs are correct if and only if true is sufficient to entail that beliefs be subject to any output-side norms. And it is precisely this sort of sufficiency claim that the truth privileging normativist would have to establish in order to show that her account is capable of explaining why some constitutive norms of belief are output-side norms and, in turn, why some output-side dispositions are constitutive of the capacity for belief. The related necessity claim, although it is plausible, cannot do the job. Moreover, it is reasonable to expect that the truth privileging normativist’s explanation of why some of the dispositions in the essential set are input-side dispositions should parallel her explanation of why some of the dispositions in the essential set are output-side dispositions. But no analogue of the reasoning employed to establish that being subject to the truth norm entails that beliefs must also be subject to input-side norms of rationality

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25 Of course, sometimes a set of necessary conditions for Ψ’s being the case, none of which is individually sufficient, are, taken together, jointly sufficient for Ψ’s being the case and so jointly explain Ψ’s being the case. It is somewhat plausible that the fact that beliefs are constitutively subject to a truth norm, taken in conjunction with certain other facts (perhaps facts about the constitutive norms for desire and intention, for example), might be part of a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a believer who also has desires and intentions being subject to certain output-side norms of rationality. But adopting this explanatory strategy in an effort to resist step 2 requires rejecting step 1 of my argument by denying that output-side norms of rationality are constitutive of belief itself. And I have tried to show above that the prospects for any attempt to reject step 1 are dim.
will establish that being subject to the truth norm is sufficient for being subject to output-side norms.

For the truth privileging normativist, the fact that beliefs are subject to the truth norm entails that beliefs must be subject to input-side norms of rationality because the norms of rationality for belief just are whichever norms articulate the best means of ensuring that our beliefs conform with the truth norm. So, if the truth privileging normativist is right that beliefs should be true, then it follows that believers should regulate their beliefs in ways that conform with input-side norms of rationally permissible belief formation and revision. But how we employ our beliefs in forming intentions, for example, simply does not have an impact on whether or not our beliefs conform with the truth norm. More generally, whether or not the way in which a believer’s other mental attitudes change in response to her beliefs conforms with output-side norms has no impact on whether the her beliefs conform with the truth norm. Thus, the explanatory strategy that the truth privileging normativist adopts in order to demonstrate that the truth norm entails certain input-side norms cannot be pressed into service to show that the truth norm entails certain output-side norms. And for the truth privileging normativist, the truth norm is explanatorily basic or fundamental. So, if the fact that beliefs are subject to a constitutive truth norm does not explain why beliefs are also subject to certain constitutive output-side norms of rationality, then a truth privileging normativist account lacks the resources to explain why certain output-side dispositions are essential to the capacity for belief.

The defense from dispositionalism presupposes that the nature of belief, whatever its character, will explain why certain particular dispositions are in the essential set and so constitute or are capable of constituting the capacity for belief. I have argued that some of the dispositions in this essential set are output-side dispositions. Additionally, I have tried to show that the truth privileging normativist’s claim that beliefs are subject to a constitutive truth norm cannot explain why beliefs are subject to output-side norms of rationality and so why some output-side dispositions are in the essential set. If I am right on both counts, then a truth privileging normativist account of the nature of belief cannot discharge the explanatory burden that the defense from dispositionalism places on any normativist account. One who is sympathetic to this independently compelling defense of normativism against descriptivism must reject a truth privileging account of the nature of belief as explanatorily inadequate.

4. An Alternative: The Proper Function Privileging Account of the Nature of Belief

I have argued that a truth privileging account cannot explain why certain dispositions in the essential set do or can constitute the capacity for belief. The way in which a truth privileging account falls short, however, illuminates a new path for the normativist to pursue in developing her account of the nature of belief. A truth privileging account fails to achieve explanatory adequacy because the truth privileging normativist’s reasoning fails to appreciate the role that output-side dispositions and norms play in making belief the distinctive kind of mental attitude that it is. This suggests that
any account that is capable of explaining why the essential set includes some output-side dispositions will have to recognize the crucial role that output-side norms play in differentiating beliefs from other sorts of mental attitudes.\textsuperscript{26}

In particular, I propose here that an account according to which the explanatory core of the nature of belief is identified with the job that beliefs are supposed to do in our mental economies is well-positioned to explain why both output-side dispositions and input-side dispositions are essential to the capacity for belief. On such an account, beliefs are just the sort of attitude that is meant do a certain distinctive job in believers’ mental economies. Put in other terms, what makes belief the kind of mental attitude that it is just that beliefs are supposed to fulfill a distinctive proper function. I call this account of the nature of belief the proper function privileging account.

The proper function privileging account is structurally isomorphic to a truth privileging account. Both endorse the thesis that there is a particular constitutive norm governing belief that plays a fundamental explanatory role in an account of belief’s nature. The proper function privileging account, however, maintains that this fundamental constitutive norm is not a truth norm, but rather a norm whose content is given by the particular job that beliefs are meant to do in a believer’s mental economy.

An appropriately nuanced articulation of the proper function of belief is far beyond the scope of this paper.\textsuperscript{27} However, an approximation will do for my purposes. Assume (plausibly enough) that the proper function of belief is to inform our decisions to act so that we achieve those ends our actions aim to achieve by serving as a kind of map.\textsuperscript{28} On the account that I am proposing here, the explanatory core of the nature of belief consists in belief being a mental attitude with this particular, distinctive proper function. Belief just is the kind of mental attitude that achieves a kind of success when it is well-suited to fulfill this proper function and that falls short when it is not. Put another way, the fundamental constitutive norm governing belief states that beliefs are correct if and only if they are disposed to fulfill this distinctive proper function. So, a belief is correct if and only if it is disposed to inform our actions by serving as a kind of map so that our actions successfully achieve the ends that our actions are meant to achieve.

Now, the proper function privileging account can provide a relatively straightforward explanation of why both input-side and output-side dispositions do (on a complete set approach) or can (on a cluster approach) help to constitute the capacity for belief. The proponent of this account can easily adopt the truth privileging normativist’s

\textsuperscript{26} One strategy that the normativist might adopt here is to try to add to the truth privileging normativist’s account of the correctness condition for belief by suggesting that a belief is correct if any only if it is true and also meets some other, independent condition that will do the work in explaining why beliefs figure in output-side norms of rationality. This is not the strategy I propose on the normativist’s behalf here. I am skeptical that this strategy can be successful, but I will not defend my skepticism in what follows.

\textsuperscript{27} Of course, there is no consensus regarding which of the range of different accounts on offer is the correct account of the biological notion of proper function. I mean for what I say here to be compatible with any of the candidates.

\textsuperscript{28} I aim to be giving voice to a popular idea that is perhaps most famously expressed by F. P. Ramsey’s thought that “beliefs are the maps by which we steer.” Although I do think that this idea is roughly correct, I believe that the question of how to characterize the Proper Function of belief is an empirical one.
general formulation of the way in which the norm of correctness governing a particular attitude-type and the norms of rationality governing that attitude-type are related. So, according to the proper function privileging account, the norms of rational belief regulation and employment are just those norms conformity with which is, for creatures endowed with our particular sort of cognitive equipment operating in normal circumstances, likely to yield beliefs that are well-suited to fulfill their proper function. But norms so described are just norms that capture proper cognitive functioning with respect to belief. Thus, the norms of rational belief regulation and employment are, for the proper function privileging normativist, just the norms of proper cognitive functioning.

Furthermore, there is independent reason for thinking that being disposed to regulate and employ beliefs in ways that constitute proper cognitive functioning is essential to the capacity for belief. In general, we resist attributing a proper function \( f \) to some part of a complex system when the system simply lacks every disposition the manifestation of which would, under normal circumstances, reliably cause that thing to achieve \( f \). That is, we resist characterizing an item under a functional description as having a proper function \( f \) when it is not even disposed to function properly with respect to \( f \). If the red fluid in a glass tube that is marked from bottom to top with increasing numbers ranging from -20 to 120 is not even disposed to rise and fall in a way that is responsive to the temperature (imagine that the fluid turns out to be dyed water) we would resist calling the fluid-filled tube a thermometer (although we might call it a toy thermometer or a fake thermometer). And an object that is not even disposed, when appropriately situated, to circulate blood throughout a body is simply not a heart. Of course, a heart might be damaged so that it is, in fact, not capable of circulating blood. Nevertheless, the damaged heart will still be disposed to circulate blood under normal circumstances (i.e. when the heart is not damaged in certain, specifiable ways) and so the broken heart still counts as a heart.

By parallel reasoning, a creature that lacks every disposition the manifestation of which would constitute proper cognitive functioning with respect to belief regulation and employment also lacks the capacity for belief. Whatever sorts of mental attitudes the creature has, none of them could possibly have the particular proper function that beliefs have and so none of them could possibly be beliefs. Thus, some dispositions to regulate and employ certain of one’s mental attitudes in ways that, under normal circumstances, result in these mental attitudes being disposed to inform our actions toward success by serving as a kind of map must be in the essential set.

The way in which our beliefs are disposed to prompt changes in our other mental attitudes (e.g. in our intentions) obviously and straightforwardly impacts whether or not our beliefs will be disposed to inform our actions by serving as maps such that our actions are successful. Thus, the fact that beliefs are correct if and only if they are disposed to achieve this proper function entails that beliefs are subject to a variety of constitutive norms capturing how beliefs should be employed in a subject’s mental economy and, in particular, to norms that capture how beliefs should impact intentions. The norms of rationality entailed by the fundamental norm (i.e. the norms of proper cognitive
functioning relating to belief) must include output-side norms. And, as a result, we should expect certain output-side dispositions to be in the essential set.

Furthermore, a belief’s being true (or at least true-enough) is, quite plausibly, a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for the belief’s being disposed to inform our actions by serving as a kind of map so that we successfully achieve our ends. Even if my beliefs serve as a map in guiding my actions in precisely the ways that they should, I am extremely unlikely to successfully achieve the ends that my actions are meant to achieve if my beliefs about the way the world is diverge too radically from the way the world is. If my belief that there is chocolate in the kitchen is false, then it is extremely unlikely that I will satisfy my chocolate craving by walking into the kitchen. So, perhaps it is a prerequisite for a belief to be disposed to inform action so that the believer acts successfully by serving as a kind of map that the belief be true. If this is right, then the proponent of the proper function privileging account should accept that beliefs are subject to a truth norm, albeit a truth norm that is derivative and so does not play a fundamental sort of explanatory role in an account of the nature of belief. And so the proponent of the proper function privileging account can accept that the norms of rationality involving belief include input-side norms in roughly the way that the proponent of a truth privileging account suggests. We should not be at all surprised, then, that certain input-side dispositions do or can constitute the capacity for belief. Thus, the proposed proper function privileging account can explain both why certain input-side dispositions and why certain output-side dispositions are in the essential set.

Conclusion

I have argued that some output-side dispositions do or can help constitute the capacity for belief. I have also tried to show that if this thesis is right, then a truth privileging normativist account of the nature of belief lacks the resources to discharge an explanatory burden that the defense from dispositionalism imposes on any such account. Without an argument for the seemingly implausible claim that the truth norm entails some output-side norms, a truth privileging account cannot explain why it is that certain output-side dispositions are in the essential set. Of course, a truth privileging normativist might simply deny that any output-side dispositions are essential to the capacity for belief. But in light of my argument to the contrary, this move would be objectionably ad hoc and theory-driven. So, the normativist should reject a truth privileging account as explanatorily inadequate. I have sketched an alternative that takes the proper function of belief to supply the explanatory core of the nature of belief and I have argued that this account can explain why both output-side and input-side dispositions are in the essential set.29

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