

# 6

## Belief, Truth, and Blindspots

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### 1. Introduction

Intentional states, such as beliefs, desires, and intentions, are often thought to have two components, an attitude and a propositional content. You can combine different attitudes with the proposition that there is tea in your cup: you can believe that there is tea in your cup, desire that there is tea in your cup, or intend that there is tea in your cup (you can also disbelieve it, assume it, imagine it, consider it, desire its negation, and so forth). One of the fundamental questions in the philosophical study of the propositional attitudes is this: what is it about the attitude you have when you believe that  $p$  that makes it the *belief* that  $p$  and not, for instance, a desire or supposition with the same content?

It is popular to answer this question by appeal to the slogan that belief ‘essentially aims at truth’ (Williams 1970: 151). But what, exactly, does this mean? It is, of course, a truism that to believe that  $p$  is to believe that  $p$  is true. However, this does not tell us anything distinctive about belief. Similarly, to desire that  $p$  is to desire that  $p$  is true, and to imagine that  $p$  is to imagine that  $p$  is true, and so forth. If our question concerns what makes a belief the sort of attitude it is rather than some other attitude with the same content, the slogan interpreted in this way does not help to answer it.

It has recently become popular to interpret this slogan in a specifically *normative* sense (Kripke 1982; Velleman 2000; Engel 2001, 2005; Noordhof 2001; Wedgwood, 2002, 2007a, 2007b; Gibbard 2003, 2005; Shah 2003; Boghossian 2003; Zangwill 2005). The version of ‘doxastic normativism’ (‘normativism’, for short) with which we are concerned holds that the following is a constitutive truth about belief (Blackburn 1984; Stalnaker 1987; Boghossian 1989, 2003; Velleman 2000; Engel 2001; Wedgwood 2002, 2007a, 2007b; Gibbard 2003, 2005; Shah 2003):<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is a range of views in the ballpark that we do not discuss. For instance, Brandom’s (1994) inferentialism is arguably committed to the normativity of belief. The norms that Brandom suggests are constitutive of content are inferential, i.e., norms licensing or forbidding certain inferences. For an argument against Brandom’s defence of the normativity of meaning and content, see Hattiangadi (2007).

*Doxastic Correctness*: Your belief that  $p$  is correct if and only if  $p$  is true.

Normativists maintain that *Doxastic Correctness* has normative import in the sense that it entails some normative claim about what you ought to believe (Boghossian 2003; Wedgwood 2002; Gibbard 2003, 2005). They also maintain that *Doxastic Correctness* is *constitutive* of belief (Velleman 2000; Wedgwood 2002, 2007b; Boghossian 2003; Gibbard 2003). On one version of the constitutive claim, *Doxastic Correctness* is meant to capture the metaphysical essence of belief (Wedgwood 2002); on another version, it is meant to capture a conceptual truth (Boghossian 2003; Gibbard 2003; Shah and Velleman 2005). Proponents of both versions of the constitutive claim are committed to giving an account of belief that distinguishes belief from all other propositional attitudes. Indeed, alternative, non-normative accounts of belief are rejected by normativists on the grounds that they fail to identify a distinguishing characteristic of belief (Velleman 2000; Owens 2003; Shah and Velleman 2005).

The interest of these issues extends well beyond the foundational metaphysical question of what constitutes belief. It is a widespread view in epistemology that truth is the fundamental epistemic aim or value (David 2001; Sosa 2001; Alston 2002; Wedgwood 2002; Boghossian 2003; Shah 2003; Zagzebski 2003; Shah and Velleman 2005). In this context, the question is whether a truth-norm, which supposedly follows from *Doxastic Correctness*, is explanatorily fundamental in the sense that it can explain evidential and inferential norms governing belief. For instance, it is sometimes suggested that a truth-norm explains why one ought to proportion one's belief to the evidence, or that one ought to avoid contradictory beliefs, or that one ought to believe the obvious logical consequences of one's beliefs (David 2001; Wedgwood 2002; Boghossian 2003; Shah 2003; Shah and Velleman 2005). Roughly speaking, the thought is that truth is the fundamental epistemic aim. But since the truth is not transparent to us, we need to follow evidential and inferential rules as a means of acquiring true beliefs and thereby satisfying the fundamental epistemic aim. It is because we aim at satisfying this norm that we ought to follow evidential and inferential rules, for following these secondary rules brings us closer to satisfying our fundamental cognitive norm.

The question of whether a normative reading of *Doxastic Correctness* is both metaphysically and explanatorily fundamental also has direct bearing on the debate about whether there can be normative, pragmatic reasons for belief. For example, Nishi Shah and David Velleman have defended evidentialism about belief on the basis of the claim that *Doxastic Correctness* is constitutive of belief. They argued that the view that belief is constitutively normative is uniquely able to explain a phenomenon they refer to as the 'transparency of belief' (Shah 2003; Shah and Velleman 2005). According to Shah and Velleman, if you deliberate whether to believe that  $p$ , your deliberation is transparent to the question whether  $p$  in the following sense: once you have settled the question whether  $p$ , you have thereby settled the question whether to believe that  $p$ . The view that belief is constituted by *Doxastic Correctness* is said to explain this phenomenon, as follows. It is part of the concept of belief that the belief that  $p$  is correct if and only

if  $p$  is true. In doxastic deliberation, you deploy the concept of belief, and in so doing you must recognize the normative force of *Doxastic Correctness*, which, they assume, means that you ought only to believe truths.<sup>2</sup> But if you want to comply with this norm, the only considerations you ought to be sensitive to in determining whether to believe that  $p$  are considerations relevant to determining whether  $p$  is true. Since it is part of the very concept of belief that only considerations relevant to determining whether  $p$  is true can settle the question whether to believe that  $p$ , there can be no pragmatic reasons for belief, which are not relevant to the question whether  $p$  is true.

In this chapter, we would like to go directly to the heart of these issues: is it true that *Doxastic Correctness* is both normative and constitutive of belief? We will argue first that ‘correct’ is not an essentially normative term. So, one cannot say that *Doxastic Correctness* is normative just on the grounds that it is stated in terms of ‘correct’. Moreover, on a very natural understanding, *Doxastic Correctness* is not even constitutive of belief, since it does not distinguish beliefs from other mental states; it does not answer the original question of what makes a belief a *belief* rather than some other kind of psychological attitude.

In the following sections, we consider and reject explicitly normative reformulations of *Doxastic Correctness*. The arguments we present here build on those made in an earlier paper, in which we argued that the following principle, *Doxastic Ought*, which might naturally be thought to capture the normative implications of *Doxastic Correctness*, faces serious problems:<sup>3</sup>

*Doxastic Ought*: You ought to (believe that  $p$ ) if and only if  $p$  is true.

The main problems with *Doxastic Ought* (and variants of it) concern ‘blindspots’—true propositions which nevertheless are logically impossible to believe truly. If you ought to believe a blindspot because it is true, then you ought to believe something that, necessarily, will be false if you believe it. In this chapter, we extend the argument to other normative reformulations of *Doxastic Correctness*, namely:

*Doxastic Permissibility*: You are permitted to believe that  $p$  if and only if  $p$  is true.

*Doxastic Value*: Your belief that  $p$  is good if and only if  $p$  is true.

In addition to considerations relating to blindspots, we also consider whether these norms are metaphysically or explanatorily fundamental.

We conclude that belief is not normatively constituted. Though there is a reading of *Doxastic Correctness* that makes it uncontroversially true, it is not normative. The normative principles that have been suggested in the place of *Doxastic Correctness* are either untenable, or fail to be either metaphysically or explanatorily fundamental.

<sup>2</sup> What we call ‘*Weak Doxastic Ought*’ in the following.

<sup>3</sup> Bykvist and Hattiangadi (2007).

## 2. Correctness and Normativity

Some normativists maintain that ‘correct’ is an *essentially* normative term, and hence, that *Doxastic Correctness* must be understood as a normative statement. If this is true, then there is no legitimate reading of *Doxastic Correctness* as a non-normative statement. The ‘correct’ in this statement must apply to the state or act of believing that  $p$ , and what it says must be that believing that  $p$  is correct if and only if  $p$  is true.

However, to view ‘correct’ as an *essentially* normative term does not square well with common usage. For example, it does not fit well with the fact that ‘correct’ is standardly used to mean either ‘in accordance with acknowledged or conventional standard’ or ‘in accordance with fact or truth’. (See, for instance, the *OED*’s definition of the English word ‘correct’).<sup>4</sup>

Of course, according to a *deflationary* notion of normativity, being in accordance with a norm or standard is sufficient for being normative. But it is clear that the normativists are not deploying such a deflationary notion of normativity, for no one would deny that true beliefs are normative in the sense that they accord with the standard of truth. For normativists, to say that *Doxastic Correctness* has normative implications is to say that it entails that a true belief is something we *ought* to have, are *permitted* to have, are *rationally committed* to have, or something that it would be *good* to have.

On this more inflationary notion of normativity, to judge that  $\varphi$ -ing is correct or incorrect in the sense of meeting or not meeting some standard is not to make a normative judgement. For example, to judge that the utterance ‘my mother is upstairs’ meets the standard of truth, is not to judge that the utterance ought to be made (for instance, if the proverbial axe murderer is at the door and hunting down your mother, you ought not to utter the sentence). To judge that driving as a woman in Saudi Arabia contravenes conventional standards is not to think a woman in Saudi Arabia ought not to drive. Judging that  $\varphi$ -ing is correct is compatible with judging that one ought not to  $\varphi$ . Judging that  $\varphi$ -ing is incorrect is compatible with judging that one ought to  $\varphi$ . When it is a fact that  $\varphi$ -ing meets a certain standard, there is always a further question whether the standard ought to be met. In some cases, the standard ought to be met, in others, not.

If ‘correct’ is not an essentially normative term, then what does it mean? On our view, ‘correct’ is a context sensitive predicate, roughly synonymous with ‘in accordance with standard  $x$ ’, where the value of  $x$  is the standard salient in the context. In some cases, this is an acknowledged, conventional standard, such as the convention that forbids women to drive in Saudi Arabia, or the convention that requires curtsying before the Queen. In other cases, the acknowledged standard, or the standard that is salient in the context, is just the truth. In such contexts, the statement, ‘the belief that

<sup>4</sup> The point that ‘correct’ is not an essentially normative term is raised in Glüer (1999); Hattiangadi (2007); Wikforss (2001); Glüer and Wikforss (2009).

$p$  is correct' expresses the proposition that the belief that  $p$  is in accordance with the facts, or truth; in other words, that the belief that  $p$  is true.

Since we cannot conclude that *Doxastic Correctness* is normative from the mere fact that it is stated in terms of 'correct', the normativist owes us an argument for the claim that, in the context of belief, 'correct' must be given a normative interpretation. One reason to be pessimistic about the cogency of such an argument is that, on the face of it, it seems natural to assume that in the context of belief 'correct' just means 'in accordance with truth' or, simply, 'true'.

Wedgwood (2007c: 157) has argued against this view. First, he claims that it is sentences and propositions that are said to be true or false, whereas it is speech acts, such as assertion, and attitudes, such as belief, that are said to be correct or incorrect. However, this observation does not take us very far. It is acceptable to say 'Sara's belief is true', 'John's assertion is false', but note that it is equally acceptable to say 'what Sara believes is correct', and 'what John said is incorrect'. So, it is neither a solecism to apply 'true' to a belief nor 'correct' to a proposition when it is picked out by a noun clause such as 'what John said/believed'.

Second, Wedgwood considers the suggestion that 'is correct' is a synonym for 'has a true proposition as its content'. If this is true, Wedgwood argues, we should be able to describe other mental states as correct whenever they have true contents; but this is not always true. By way of illustration, he says that it seems appropriate to say:

- (i) He imagined he was Julius Caesar on the edge of the Rubicon, but what he imagined was not true.

He claims that if 'incorrect' meant 'has a false content', then it would be fine to say:

- (ii) He imagined he was Julius Caesar on the edge of the Rubicon, but his imagining was incorrect.

But, Wedgwood concludes, it is not fine to say this.

This point is true as far as it goes, but, again, it does not take us very far. These examples do not show that there is no plausible non-normative reading of 'correct' in this context. First, note that a direct substitution of 'incorrect' into (i) sounds perfectly fine:

- (iii) He imagined he was Julius Caesar on the edge of the Rubicon, but what he imagined was incorrect.

Similarly, a direct substitution of 'not true' for 'incorrect' in (ii) sounds just as bad:

- (iv) He imagined he was Julius Caesar on the edge of the Rubicon, but his imagining was not true.

So, not only does it seem to be perfectly fine to apply 'correct' to the contents of mental states other than beliefs exactly when the contents are true, it seems that the appropriateness of applying 'correct' covaries with the appropriateness of applying 'true'. It is

appropriate to apply 'correct' to a content of a mental state just in case it is appropriate to apply 'true' to the content. Furthermore, it is appropriate to apply 'correct' to a mental state just in case it is appropriate to apply 'true' to the mental state.

Wedgwood could concede that 'correct' has a non-normative reading in these cases but maintain that a normative reading of 'correct' is mandatory when it is applied to those mental states *M* that are correct just in case they are true. Beliefs fall under this characterization, since a correct belief is a true belief. The problem with this reply is that it would force us to say that all of the following true statements are normative too:

- (v) A correct guess is a true guess.
- (vi) A correct perception is a true perception.
- (vii) A correct assumption is a true assumption.
- (viii) A correct supposition is a true supposition.

But these statements are not normative, because it is perfectly coherent to accept them and still deny that we ought (or are permitted) to make a guess/assumption/supposition or have a perception just in case the guess/assumption/supposition/perception is true.

Crucially, our view differs from the view targeted by Wedgwood. Our view is not that in every context 'is correct' means 'has a true content.' This view would be open to immediate refutation, since there are clear cases in which this is not what is meant by 'is correct'—when 'is correct' is applied to acts which do not have contents, for instance, such as the act of driving in Saudi Arabia. Rather, our view is that 'is correct' is context sensitive, and that in some contexts, it picks out the property of having a true content. Assuming that context, the proposition expressed by 'the belief that *p* is correct' is identical to the proposition expressed by 'the belief that *p* is true'.

Of course, our account is consistent with the view that there is a genuinely normative standard of truth governing belief. According to our account of the meaning of 'correct', to say that  $\phi$ -ing is correct is to say that it meets a contextually salient standard; in some cases, that standard is normative in the sense that it ought to be met. The point is that even if it is granted that the belief that *p* is correct if and only if *p*, there is a further question whether one ought to or may believe that *p*. The normativist owes us an argument for the claim that the standard of truth is normative beyond claims about correctness. The normativist cannot simply assume that 'correct' is a normative term in this context, on pain of begging the question.

Once these points are recognized, a number of arguments that have been given previously for the view that the standard of truth is normative can be seen to be *non sequiturs*. For instance, Allan Gibbard says the following:

For belief, correctness is truth. Correct belief is true belief. My belief that snow is white is correct just in case the belief is true, just in case snow is white. Correctness, now, seems normative.... The correct belief, if all this is right, seems to be the one [a subject] ought, in this sense, to have. (Gibbard 2005: 338–9)

Paul Boghossian echoes this thought with approval when he says:

... it seems right to say... ] that correctness is a normative matter, a matter of whether one ought to do what one is doing, and that the correctness conditions of one's thought are *constitutive*. (Boghossian 2003: 35)

Both Gibbard and Boghossian suggest that 'correct' is a normative term, and that the correctness conditions of a belief are constitutive of it. However, this intuitive defence of the thesis trades on contextual variation in the meaning of 'correct'.<sup>5</sup> In some contexts, the property picked out by the predicate 'correct' is the property of truth. Since 'correct' in some contexts picks out truth, 'correctness condition' can also be used co-extensively with 'truth condition'. Of course, it is virtually undeniable that the correctness conditions of one's thought are constitutive, if what is meant by this is that truth conditions are constitutive of the contents of the thoughts. In contrast, it is far from uncontroversial that the truth conditions of a proposition are also conditions under which it is correct in the (inflationary) normative sense to believe the proposition.

Furthermore, Gibbard's implicit argument for *Doxastic Correctness* being constitutive of belief generalizes to mental states other than belief. Gibbard suggests that it is because, for belief, correctness is truth, that one can infer that the belief that *p* is correct (in the normative sense) if and only if *p* is true. But if this is true, we should be able to conclude that attitudes other than belief are correct if and only if their contents are true. To see why, consider the following case. Suppose that you enter a competition to guess the number of sweets in a jar. There are 322 sweets, and you guess that there are 322. You have no evidence for this—you have simply picked the number out of thin air—but it would be natural to say that your guess is correct. Indeed, in this context, a correct guess is a true guess; any guess other than '322' would have been incorrect. If Gibbard's argument is valid, then we can infer from the fact that a correct guess is a true guess to the fact that the guess that *p* is correct if and only if *p* is true. The same goes for many other cases: a correct perception is a true perception, a correct assumption is a true assumption, a correct supposition is a true supposition, and so forth. It follows that belief is not unique in being a state for which correctness is truth, and hence that *Doxastic Correctness* is not metaphysically fundamental; it does not answer the question of what makes the belief that *p* a *belief* rather than some other mental state with the same content.

Finally, the foregoing points can be applied to Wedgwood's revised formulation of the intuitions about the correctness of belief (this volume: 131). His characterization of the fundamental normative principles governing belief can be restated for guesses, *salva veritate* in any context in which the salient standard for correctness is truth:<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For more arguments along these lines, see Hattiangadi (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Wedgwood says that a belief, when true is 'perfectly correct', when false 'maximally incorrect' and that suspending judgment in a proposition one has considered has an intermediate value between perfect correctness and maximal incorrectness (this volume: 126). He also claims that there are degrees of incorrectness (125). However, we have avoided these constructions because neither 'correct' nor 'incorrect' are gradable adjectives, like 'tall', 'rich', or 'expensive'; correctness and incorrectness do not come in degrees.

1. The guess that  $p$  when  $p$  is true is a correct guess.
2. The guess that  $p$  when  $p$  is false is an incorrect guess.
3. The state of wondering whether  $p$ , but not guessing that  $p$  nor guessing that not  $p$  is neither correct nor incorrect.

Clearly, the conjunction of these three principles are true of guesses, just as the corresponding principles for belief apply to beliefs. Moreover, 'guess' can be replaced with 'supposition', and 'assumption,' *salva veritate*. The conjunction of the corresponding claims about belief does not, therefore, serve to distinguish beliefs from other mental states. Postulating these principles does not help to answer the foundational question of what makes a belief a *belief* rather than some other kind of mental state.

Thus, given that 'correct' means (roughly) 'in accordance with a contextually salient standard  $x$ ', where in some contexts, the salient standard is truth, the conjunction of (1), (2), and (3) is trivial, as are the corresponding principles about belief. Because correctness is not an essentially normative concept, principles about belief formulated in terms of correctness are not necessarily normative. Furthermore, since the principles that have been formulated in terms of correctness do not distinguish belief from other mental states, *Doxastic Correctness* is not metaphysically essential to belief.

### 3. The blindspot problem

To say that the belief that  $p$  is correct is to say that it meets a standard; in some contexts, this is the standard of truth. It is a further question what normative consequences follow, if any. The normativist must, therefore, express the view that belief is constitutively normative in terms of the paradigmatic normative concepts, ought or permission. In our previous paper (Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2007), we considered simply reformulating *Doxastic Correctness* in terms of ought, as follows:

*Doxastic Ought*: You ought to (believe that  $p$ ) if and only if  $p$  is true.<sup>7</sup>

We argued that *Doxastic Ought* does not work as it stands. One problem is generated by the fact that *Doxastic Ought* implies that for any true proposition, you ought to believe it. However, there are not only infinitely many true propositions, but given that any conjunction of true propositions is itself a true proposition, there must be some true

<sup>7</sup> The parentheses are inserted just to make it clear that 'ought' has *narrow scope*. It governs only 'believe that  $p$ ' not the whole biconditional 'believe that  $p$  iff  $p$  is true'. The latter wide scope reading is also problematic, as we point out in our paper. However, since the main resistance to our arguments has been expressed by people who want to defend a narrow scope reading, we will ignore the wide scope reading in the following. We hope to come back to this issue at another time. Suffice it to say here that 'correct' in 'it is correct to believe that  $p$  iff  $p$  is true' clearly has narrow scope. If you have a true belief, what is correct is your belief, not the state of the world, nor the composite fact expressed by the biconditional 'you believe that  $p$  iff  $p$  is true'. Similarly, if you have a false belief, it is the belief state that is incorrect or defective, not the state of the world, nor the composite of your belief state and the state of the world. Thus any candidate normative principle that is put forward to capture *Doxastic Correctness* must have narrow scope.



propositions that are extremely complex—certainly far too complex for most humans to believe. Take a proposition that is too complex for you to believe. Since you cannot believe this proposition, and since ‘ought’ implies ‘can’, it follows that it must be false that you ought to believe the proposition, even if the proposition happens to be true. Since *Doxastic Ought* is meant to hold for any subject and any proposition, but surely does not hold for propositions too complex to be believed, it must be false.

Of course, the principle that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’ is not uncontroversial, as there are some well-known putative counterexamples. For instance, suppose that Smith cannot stop laughing at her boss’s haircut, though her boss is clearly taking offence. Though Smith cannot stop laughing at her boss’s haircut, it seems to be true nonetheless that Smith ought to stop. In this case, however, it is merely psychologically impossible for Smith to stop laughing, and ‘ought’ arguably does not entail psychological possibility (at least not in all contexts). In contrast, it is not *humanly* possible to believe an arbitrarily complex proposition—and this is arguably a form of metaphysical, as opposed to a mere psychological impossibility. Limits on how much information a human brain can store, and limits on the length of human lives place limits on the complexity of the propositions we can believe (Kripke 1982).

It is for this reason that Boghossian (2003) suggests rejecting the right to left direction of the biconditional in *Doxastic Ought*, and replaces it with *Weak Doxastic Ought*:

*Weak Doxastic Ought*: You ought to (believe that  $p$ ) only if  $p$  is true.

However, as we argued previously, the resulting principle is non-prescriptive. From the fact that  $p$  is false, it follows that it is not the case that one ought to believe that  $p$ , not that one ought not to. This is compatible with it being permissible to believe a falsehood; this very weak principle does not even forbid having false beliefs. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that such a weak principle has no hope of being explanatorily fundamental—it cannot explain why evidence would ever give one a positive reason for belief, nor could it explain why we should believe obvious logical consequences of our beliefs, as Boghossian (2003) suggests. If all that can be said about the fundamental nature of the belief is that it is not the case that one ought to believe falsehoods, we cannot on this basis show that evidential reasons are superior to pragmatic reasons.

Another way to resolve some of these problems is to restrict the true propositions one ought to believe to those propositions that one considers, and add an explicit clause saying that one ought not to believe falsehoods, as follows:<sup>8</sup>

*Doxastic Ought 1*: If you consider  $p$ , then: if  $p$  is true, you ought to (believe that  $p$ ) and if  $p$  is false, you ought not to (believe that  $p$ ).

This seems to solve the problem. For it seems plausible to suppose that any proposition you consider, you can believe. Arbitrarily complex true propositions are ruled out simply because you cannot consider such complex propositions, and we are no longer

<sup>8</sup> The suggestion is due to Wedgwood, personal communication.

required to believe an infinite number of true propositions since it is only if you consider a true proposition that you ought to believe it.

Nevertheless, *Doxastic Ought 1* runs into difficulties when it is applied to blindspot propositions. These propositions are such that it is logically impossible for you to believe them truly: necessarily, if they are true, then you do not believe them, and, necessarily, if you believe them, then they are false. These ‘blindspots’ (Sorensen 1988) are not truly believable.<sup>9</sup> The example we used in our previous paper was the proposition that *it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining*. If you believe the proposition that *it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining*, then you believe that *it is raining*, and it follows that the proposition that *it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining* is false. Furthermore, if the proposition that *it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining* is true, then it follows that you do not believe it.

The blindspot problem for the doxastic normativist is generated in the following way. Suppose that you consider a true blindspot proposition *p*. *Doxastic Ought 1* entails that you ought to believe *p*. However, if you were to believe *p*, then *p* would be false, and *Doxastic Ought 1* would say that it is not the case that you ought to believe *p*. The problem here is not that the proposition cannot be believed, but that the obligation to believe *p cannot be satisfied*. So this is not a violation of the principle that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’. Rather, it is a violation of the principle that ‘ought’ implies ‘can satisfy’, which says that if you ought to believe that *p*, then it is logically possible for you to *discharge or satisfy* this ought. Or, more generally:

*‘Ought’ implies ‘can satisfy’*

If you ought to *A*, then it is logically possible for you to *A* while its being true that you ought to *A*.

Now, the principle that ‘ought’ implies ‘can satisfy’ seems as plausible as the principle that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’. Just as one cannot have an obligation to do what is impossible to do, one cannot have an obligation that it is impossible to satisfy. Moreover, it is clearly not merely a psychological impossibility to satisfy the obligation to believe a true blindspot, but a *logical* impossibility. Since ‘ought’ implies ‘can satisfy’, *Doxastic Ought 1* must be false.

<sup>9</sup> We assume that blindspots can be understood, and that they can be believed. According to Engel, blindspots cannot be understood (Engel 2007: 193; see also this volume: footnote 17). Unfortunately, he does not explain why he thinks that these sentences cannot be understood. On the face of it, this is a very odd thing to say, since if we did not understand these sentences, we could hardly classify them as expressing blindspots in the first place. In general, if you do not understand a (descriptive) sentence, you do not understand which proposition it expresses. So, how can we, including Engel, see that they express blindspots? Furthermore, it seems very doubtful that it is impossible for a person to believe a true blindspot. Suppose that you are a radical sceptic and you are considering the true proposition that *you have never and will never have any beliefs*. The mere fact that it is true does not prevent it from being falsifiable by you any more than the mere fact that it is true that you have never and will never smoke prevents you from ever having a smoke. By believing the proposition that you have never and will never have any beliefs, you would falsify it and thus give up your radical scepticism. Of course, this is not to say that your believing that you have no beliefs would be rational, but that is another issue.

Perhaps these peculiar blindspots can be accommodated by making the following obvious change to the principle:

*Doxastic Ought 2*: If you consider  $p$ , and  $p$  is truly believable, then: if  $p$  is true, you ought to (believe that  $p$ ) and if  $p$  is false, you ought not to (believe that  $p$ ).<sup>10</sup>

*Doxastic Ought 2* does not imply that you ought to believe a blindspot, even when that proposition is true. However, *Doxastic Ought 2* is nevertheless too weak, for it tells you absolutely nothing about what you ought to do when faced with these peculiar propositions. *Doxastic Ought 2* does not tell you that you ought *not* to believe the blindspot. Yet, intuitively, this is precisely the right response to such a proposition: you should not believe it even if it is true. More exactly:

*Doxastic Ought Not*: If you consider  $p$ , and  $p$  is not truly believable, then you ought not to (believe that  $p$ ).

But *Doxastic Ought Not* cannot be added without coming into conflict with *Doxastic Ought 2*. The conflict arises because some considered and true propositions that are not truly believable consist of conjuncts each of which is considered and truly believable. For instance, the proposition *that it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining* is a clear example of such a proposition. Suppose that you consider this proposition and suppose that it is true. Given that the proposition is not truly believable, it follows from *Doxastic Ought Not* that you ought not to believe *that it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining*. However, if you consider a conjunction, you must in so doing consider each of the conjuncts. By hypothesis, the conjunction is true, which implies that each of the conjuncts is true—and although the conjunction may not be truly believable, each conjunct is. Given that you have considered each conjunct and given that each conjunct is both true and truly believable, it follows from *Doxastic Ought 2* that you ought to believe *that it is*

<sup>10</sup> Jonas Olson (in personal conversation) has suggested a version of this principle that avoids the blindspot problem. Space limitations prevent us from getting into the nitty-gritty of this view, but, very roughly, the idea is to qualify the truth-norm so that it only applies to situations in which the considered propositions are truly believable both separately and *in conjunction*. Since *it is raining* and *no one believes that it is raining* are not truly believable in conjunction, this principle cannot be applied to the blindspot case and the problem is solved, or rather avoided. However, this principle has problems with ‘commissive’ Moorean proposition, e.g., *that it is raining and you believe that it is not raining*. This proposition, unlike its ‘omissive’ cousin, is truly believable and thus not a blindspot, assuming that it is possible to have contradictory beliefs. When you are considering the proposition *that it is raining and you believe that it is not raining*, you are also considering the proposition *that it is raining* and the proposition *that you believe that it is not raining*. Now, each proposition is true and truly believable on its own, and, by hypothesis, true and truly believable in conjunction. Hence, Olson’s principle will tell you that you ought to believe *that it is raining and you believe that it is not raining*. However, if you were to *satisfy* this obligation (believe the proposition while it is still true and thus something you ought to believe), you would, unavoidably, have *contradictory* beliefs: you would both believe that it is raining and believe that it is *not* raining. It is odd that satisfying a truth-norm should sometimes require us to have contradictory beliefs, beliefs that *cannot* be true together. Ragnar Francen Olinder (2012) has formulated a truth-norm that seems to be able to deal with commissive Moorean propositions, but he admits that he would have to deny that correct beliefs are always beliefs one ought to have (or be permitted to have). It is therefore unclear how ‘correct’ can still be seen as normative notion on this account.

raining and that you ought to believe *that nobody believes that it is raining*.<sup>11</sup> But by *Doxastic Ought Not*, you ought not to believe *that it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining*.<sup>12</sup> This is a violation of this principle (assuming that ought-not implies not-ought):

*Agglomeration*

If you ought to (believe that  $p$ ) and you ought to (believe that  $q$ ), then you ought to (believe that  $p$  and  $q$ ).

This principle has some intuitive pull, even though it is not entirely uncontroversial (for instance, in the face of lottery and preface paradoxes). However, many of those who defend the normativity of belief have reason to accept this principle, since they also defend the normativity of content (e.g. Boghossian 1989, 2003; Wedgwood 2002, 2007a, 2007b; Gibbard 2003, 2005). If content is constituted by norms, it is plausible that *Agglomeration* will be constitutive of the ordinary concept of *conjunction*, since *Agglomeration* seems to be a good candidate for a normativized version of the introduction rule for conjunction.

Furthermore, no matter whether or not *Agglomeration* is accepted, the normativist is forced to accept the existence of doxastic dilemmas of a certain kind. Suppose again that it is raining and that you are considering the proposition that it is raining, a proposition no one believes. Given the truth of this proposition and *Doxastic Ought 2*, you ought to believe that it is raining. Similarly, given *Doxastic Ought 2* and the fact that no one believes that it is raining, you ought to believe that no one believes it is raining. However, if you satisfy the first obligation—to believe that it is raining—then, given *Doxastic Ought 2* and the fact that you now believe that it is raining, it is not true that

<sup>11</sup> Ralph Wedgwood and Benjamin Curtis have (independently) suggested the following: if you consider, at  $t$ , the true proposition  $p$ , then, from a plausible temporally explicit version of *Doxastic Ought 2*, it will follow that you ought, at  $t$ , to believe  $p$ . If you consider a little later at  $t+1$  the true proposition *that you do not believe that  $p$* , from this version of *Doxastic Ought 2* it will follow that you ought, at  $t+1$ , to believe *that you don't believe that  $p$* . But then there is no synchronic conflict because the oughts are now indexed to different times. That is, *Doxastic Ought 2* does not imply that, at the very same time, you ought to believe that  $p$  and you ought to believe *that you don't believe that  $p$* . This argument assumes that once you are considering the second conjunct *that you don't believe that  $p$*  you have stopped considering the first conjunct  $p$ . This is not true in general, especially if the conjunction is short and simple. Indeed, if you are considering both conjuncts in the context of considering the conjunction, and you do not form a doxastic attitude towards either conjunct prior to forming a doxastic attitude towards the conjunction, then the time intervals during which you consider each conjunct overlap, and we are back to the original problem.

<sup>12</sup> Some people have objected that the blindspot problem is generated by ignoring crucial temporal indices (we've heard versions of this objection from Ofra Magidor, John Hawthorne, and Antony Eagle). Consider the blindspot proposition ' $p$  and nobody believes that  $p$  at  $t$ ', where we have now made explicit the moment at which the belief is absent. There is no problem in truly believing *now* that ( $p$  and nobody believes that  $p$  at  $t$ ), if the present moment is different from  $t$ . Of course, the proposition is not truly believable, if  $t$  = the present moment. But then it is simply not believable. However, there are propositions that are believable and yet not truly believable at the time they are considered. For example, take any true proposition of the form ' $p$  and, during the period  $t - t^*$ , nobody believes that  $p$ ' which are considered at a time strictly within the period  $t - t^*$ . At the time you are considering this proposition nothing prevents you from believing it. In order to avoid clutter, we will drop the time indices, and assume that the blindspots are considered at times at which they are also believable.

you ought to believe that no one believes that it is raining, for in the situation in which you satisfy the first obligation, the proposition that no one believes that it is raining is false. That is, even though each obligation is satisfiable separately, and therefore conforms to the principle that ‘ought’ implies ‘can satisfy’, they are not *jointly* satisfiable. Crucially, in this case, necessarily, if you believe all the things you ought to believe, you end up in a situation in which you believe something (viz. that no one believes that it is raining) that it is not true that you ought to believe in that situation.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. Permission instead of ought

We have often encountered the suggestion that the normativist should retreat to the notion of permissibility (e.g. Whiting 2010). Instead of saying that correct implies ought, they claim that correct implies may. If you judge that it is correct to believe that *p* if and only if *p* is true, it follows that you judge that you are *permitted* to believe that *p* if and only if *p* is true. That is,

*Doxastic Permission 1:* If you consider *p*, then you are permitted to (believe that *p*) if and only if *p* is true.

By weakening the principle in this way, it avoids the implication that you ought to believe true blindspots, since *Doxastic Permission 1* only tells you that you are permitted to believe true blindspots, and this is compatible with your being permitted to disbelieve them. However, *Doxastic Permission 1* still has counterintuitive consequences in the blindspot case. Suppose that the proposition that *it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining* is true. Then *Doxastic Permission 1* tells you that you are permitted to believe this proposition. But if it were false, *Doxastic Permission 1* would tell you that you are forbidden to believe it. Thus, if you were to believe that *it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining*, which *Doxastic Permission 1* implies that you are permitted to

<sup>13</sup> Podlaskowski (2010) has recently argued that the blindspot problem can be avoided by qualifying *Agglomeration* so that it only applies to situations in which all considered propositions are truly believable both taken separately as well as in conjunction. We cannot then move from ‘I ought to believe that it is raining’ and ‘I ought to believe that no one believes that it is raining’ to ‘I ought to believe that it is raining and no one believes that it is raining’, since ‘it is raining’ and ‘no one believes that it is raining’ are not truly believable in conjunction. We think that this reply shows that Podlaskowski has misunderstood our argument. As we explicitly say, unrestricted agglomeration is somewhat controversial, and that is why we provide a different argument in our paper that does not rely on this principle. As pointed out above, we argue that the problem is that if I ought to believe that it is raining and I ought to believe that no one believes that it is raining, then these obligations are not jointly satisfiable. For if we believe all the things we ought to do, we end up believing impermissibly. Podlaskowski does mention this alternative argument briefly in a footnote, but goes on to say that this is perhaps something we can live with, since it is the same predicament anyone who accepts Kyburg’s solution to the lottery paradox will find herself in. We don’t think this is the same predicament. In Kyburg’s case, it is perfectly possible to satisfy all doxastic obligations without having an impermissible belief, namely by believing of each lottery ticket that it will not win. Of course, the beliefs will then be jointly inconsistent, but Kyburg thought it was permissible to have jointly inconsistent beliefs. Furthermore, the *Preface paradox* provides further reason to think that it might be permissible to have jointly inconsistent beliefs.

do, you would believe a falsehood, which *Doxastic Permission 1* implies you are forbidden to do. So what we have here is a permission which, if acted upon, would unavoidably change into a prohibition. And this seems fishy. Here's a vivid illustration of the fishiness: imagine you went to a (fish!) restaurant that offers an all-you-can-eat buffet. You pay, and tuck in, but as you do, the waiters come running and explain that you are permitted to eat as much as you want only if you do not eat as much as you want, whereas if you do eat as much as you want, you are forbidden to do so.

A further refinement of *Doxastic Permission 1* has been suggested by Wedgwood<sup>14</sup> and others, which avoids this problem:

*Doxastic Permission 2*: If you consider  $p$  and  $p$  is truly believable, you are permitted to (believe that  $p$ ) if and only if  $p$  is true.

*Doxastic Permission 2* does not tell you that you are permitted to believe *that it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining*, because the principle only applies to truly believable cases. It tells you that you are permitted to believe *that it is raining*, and permitted to believe *that nobody believes that it is raining*. But this seems fine, because it is uncontroversial to claim that, in general, if you are permitted to believe that  $p$  and permitted to believe that  $q$ , you are permitted to believe that  $p$  and  $q$ .

However, the normativist who accepts *Doxastic Permission 2* cannot also say that it is impermissible to refrain from believing  $p$  when  $p$  is true. If he did, he would have to say that believing what is true is not just permissible but something that ought to be done. So, either the normativist has an incomplete theory, which says nothing about whether you ought to believe truths, or it says that it is permissible to refrain from believing truths. But if the normativist chooses the latter, he will have given up the idea that belief aims at truth. Rather the idea is now that belief aims at the *avoidance of falsity*. Indeed, one can comply with this version of the truth-norm by simply never having any beliefs. Hence, this does not capture Wedgwood's and other normativists' suggestion that there is a unique doxastic attitude which you *ought* to have to any given proposition that you consider.

Whiting acknowledges that, strictly speaking, the 'belief aims at truth' slogan has been dumped, but he tries to sweeten the pill by pointing out that the idea that belief aims to avoid falsity is a 'closely related intuition', for 'to say that beliefs aim only at the truth... is another way of saying that it aims to avoid falsity (Whiting 2010: 217). Whiting suggests that the change of slogans is not so drastic after all. It is just a change from 'belief aims at truth' to 'belief aims *only* at truth'.

However, this small change comes at a significant cost: the explanatory fundamentality of the norm of truth. *Doxastic Permission 2* does not explain other evidential and inferential norms, such as that you ought to proportion your belief to the evidence, or that you ought to believe the obvious logical consequences of your beliefs. For instance, consider the norm that tells you to proportion your belief to the evidence.

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication.

*Doxastic Permission 2* does not explain this norm, because proportioning your belief to the evidence is not the best way to satisfy *Doxastic Permission 2*. A policy of forming no beliefs at all would be much better as a means of satisfying this norm. This is because, if you proportion your beliefs to the evidence, you run the risk of forming some false beliefs, which is not permitted, according to *Doxastic Permission 2*, whereas if you were to adopt the policy of forming no beliefs at all, you would guarantee that you satisfy this principle. *Doxastic Permission 2* could not explain why you ever have positive reason to form a belief.<sup>15</sup>

It might be argued in response that though *Doxastic Permission 2* does not explain evidential norms, there are other norms that apply to belief, which do explain the evidential norms. For instance, if belief is necessary for action, and action is necessary for the satisfaction of desires, then you have a reason to form some beliefs as opposed to forming no beliefs at all. But this is a pragmatic reason for belief—it is not explained by *Doxastic Permission 2*, nor any other truth-related consideration, but by your desires. If this further pragmatic reason is required to explain why you should proportion your beliefs to the evidence, then *Doxastic Permission 2* is not explanatorily fundamental.

Nor, for that matter, can this view rule out normative, pragmatic reasons for belief. Pragmatic reasons for belief are on a par with evidential reasons, since neither stem from the fundamental truth-norm, but from the need to form beliefs for the sake of action. For example, imagine that you are offered \$1 million to suspend belief in an obvious tautology, such as *either it is raining or it is not*. Since it is permissible to suspend belief in *either it is raining or it is not*, according to *Doxastic Permission 2*, this principle would not explain why you should not suspend belief in this tautology, despite the chance of receiving a reward. For similar reasons, this principle does not explain why you should believe the obvious logical consequences of your beliefs. Since it is permissible to suspend belief in an obvious logical consequence of your beliefs according to *Doxastic Permission 2*, it cannot explain why you have positive reason to draw obvious conclusions.

It is worth noting that *Doxastic Permission 2* will similarly fail to explain the phenomenon of ‘transparency’, which Shah and Velleman claim is a signal virtue of the normative account of belief. Recall that according to Shah and Velleman, doxastic deliberation is transparent in the following sense: if you deliberate whether to believe that *p*, your deliberation is transparent to the question whether *p* is true. Once you have settled the question whether *p* is true, you have thereby settled the question whether to believe that *p*. They claim that the explanation of this phenomenon is that *Doxastic Correctness* is a conceptual truth about belief—it is part of the very concept of belief that the belief that *p* is correct if and only if *p* is true. If you deliberate whether to believe that *p*, you deploy the concept of belief, and hence can only recognize truth-related considerations as reasons for belief.

<sup>15</sup> Both Whiting (2010) and Raleigh (2013) seem to be happy with this result. We find this surprising. If the relevant truth-norm cannot even give us reason to form beliefs rather than to withhold beliefs, it is hard to see what all the fuss about the fundamentality of the truth-norm is about.

This line of explanation has no chance if the normative consequences of *Doxastic Correctness* are taken to be captured by *Doxastic Permission 2*. Even if we suppose that *Doxastic Permission 2* is a conceptual truth about belief, how could a commitment to the avoidance of false belief explain transparency? Since *Doxastic Permission 2* cannot explain why you ever have a positive reason to form a belief, it cannot explain why, if you settle the question whether  $p$  is true, you thereby settle the question whether to believe that  $p$ . To settle the question whether to believe that  $p$ , you need a further reason, over and above the fact that believing that  $p$  would be compatible with *Doxastic Permission 2*, that tips the balance in favour of believing that  $p$  over suspending judgement. This is because, even if you have settled whether  $p$  is true, suspending judgement that  $p$  is also compatible with *Doxastic Permission 2*.

## 5. Truth-norm based on doxastic values

The problems generated by the principles we have discussed so far have led some people to consider a very different understanding of the norm that is constitutive of belief. On this approach, the norm is defined in terms of doxastic values. Here is a sketch.<sup>16</sup> Start by assigning values to beliefs: true beliefs are good, false ones bad, and suspension of belief has some intermediate value.<sup>17</sup> Then focus on the propositions a subject considers. Think of all the possible doxastic attitudes the subject can take towards these propositions. Rank these doxastic possibilities according to the overall value of the included attitudes: a true belief rates the possibility a plus, a false one, a minus, and a suspension something in between. For simplicity, assume that a true belief is assigned +1, a false one -1, and a suspension something in between. Finally, define the norms in terms of the ranking of doxastic possibilities:

### *Doxastic Value Maximization:*

You ought to have doxastic attitude  $D$  towards  $p$  iff you consider  $p$  and you  $Dp$  in *all* of the highest-ranked doxastic possibilities (relative to your considered propositions).

You are permitted to have doxastic attitude  $D$  towards  $p$  iff you consider  $p$  and you  $Dp$  in *some* of the highest-ranked doxastic possibilities (relative to your considered propositions).

With this simple machinery at hand, we have a solution to the blindspot problem. Take the non-conjunctive blindspots first. Suppose you consider such a proposition  $p$  (e.g. the proposition that you have no beliefs), and that it is true (because you are a total

<sup>16</sup> This is a version of a view we suggested some time ago to Wedgwood, which is similar to the view he discusses in this volume.

<sup>17</sup> The main difference between our formulation and Wedgwood's is that whereas we say that true beliefs are good and false beliefs are bad, Wedgwood says that true beliefs are perfectly correct and that false beliefs are maximally incorrect. Our reservations about Wedgwood's formulation have to do with treating 'correct' as a gradable adjective, which we find objectionable (see footnote 5). Unlike 'correct' and 'incorrect', 'good' and 'bad' are gradable adjectives, since we can say things like 'x is good, but y is better', 'x is very good' and so forth.



sceptic). The possible attitudes you can take towards this proposition are these, assuming that you can affect  $p$ 's truth-value:

believe  $p$  ( $Bp$ ), suspend belief about  $p$  ( $Sp$ ), believe  $\sim p$ , ( $B\sim p$ )

The value-ranking of these doxastic possibilities will then be:

$$\begin{aligned} & B\sim p, \sim p (+1) \\ & Sp, p \text{ (something between } +1 \text{ and } -1) \\ & Bp, \sim p (-1) \end{aligned}$$

Hence, *Doxastic Value Maximization* says that you ought to *disbelieve* the blindspot  $p$ . So, the problem is solved for a non-conjunctive blindspot whose truth-value is in your control.

But we can drop this assumption of control and the theory will still provide a solution. If you cannot affect the truth-value of  $p$ , both  $B\sim p$  and  $Bp$  would be impossible for you, in which case  $Sp$  would be your only remaining option, and we have the result that you ought not to believe that  $p$ ; more specifically, you ought to suspend belief about  $p$ .

Now move on to the case of conjunctive blindspots in which each conjunct is a truly believable proposition. Take the proposition that  $p$  and you do not believe  $p$  ( $p$  and  $\sim Bp$ ). Suppose that you cannot affect the truth-value of  $p$  (perhaps it is about the past, or a logical truth) but that you can affect the truth-value of  $\sim Bp$ . If you consider this proposition, then you consider each conjunct. So the set of considered propositions are

$$p \text{ and } \sim Bp, p, \sim Bp.$$

The best doxastic possibility involving these propositions will then include:

$$B\sim(p \text{ and } \sim Bp), Bp, p, B\sim\sim Bp \text{ (i.e., } BBp).$$

Since this is the only possibility that will contain only true beliefs (assuming that the truth-value of  $p$  is fixed), changing any of these beliefs to a suspension or a disbelief would only lower the total value. So, we have the result that you ought  $B\sim(p \text{ and } \sim Bp)$ , you ought ( $Bp$ ), and you ought ( $BBp$ ). So, again, the blindspot is something you ought to disbelieve, and this ought judgement is perfectly consistent with the fact that you ought ( $Bp$ ) and you ought ( $BBp$ ).

In fact, we can drop the assumption that the truth-value of  $p$  is fixed, and we still have a solution. If  $p$ 's truth-value can be changed, then you would have *two* possibilities at the top of your ranking:

$$B\sim(p \text{ and } \sim Bp), Bp, p, BBp$$

and

$$B\sim(p \text{ and } \sim Bp), B\sim p, \sim p, B\sim Bp$$

The result would then be that you still ought to disbelieve the blindspot, but  $Bp$ , and  $BBp$  are only permissible for you, not beliefs you ought to have.

If both the truth-value of the blindspot proposition  $p$  and  $\sim Bp$  are fixed, the only remaining possibility for you would be:

$$S(p \text{ and } \sim Bp), Sp, p, B\sim Bp$$

Since this possibility is trivially the best one, the result is that you ought to suspend belief about  $p$  and you ought to believe  $\sim Bp$ .

Hence, no matter whether we let the truth-value of the considered propositions be within your control, the result is that you ought not to believe blindspots (either you ought to disbelieve them or you ought to suspend belief about them). So, in either case the blindspot problem seems to be solved.

Everything is not rosy, however. The reason why *Doxastic Value Maximization* avoids the blindspot problem is because, according to it, the fact that a proposition is true at the actual world, @, does not entail that one ought to, or even may believe it. Indeed, in the case of a blindspot that is true at @, it is impermissible to believe it, according to this theory. However, conversely, the theory implies that, in some cases, you ought to believe a proposition that is false at @, and this implication is counterintuitive. Suppose that you consider a true blindspot of the form  $p$  and  $\sim Bp$ , and that you can only affect its truth-value by changing the truth-value of  $\sim Bp$ . Then in the best doxastic possibility it holds that  $B\sim(p \text{ and } \sim Bp)$ ,  $Bp$  and  $BBp$ , and thus you ought to believe  $Bp$ . But the proposition that  $Bp$  is false at @. So, you ought to believe something that is false. For example, take the blindspot that *it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining*, where you can only affect its truth-value by changing your doxastic attitudes. In the best possibility you will disbelieve that *it is raining and nobody believes that it is raining*, believe that *it is raining*, and believe that *you believe that it is raining*. Though this is the best doxastic possibility, by hypothesis, the proposition that *you believe that it is raining* is false at @. Hence, this view tells you that you ought to believe that *you believe that it is raining*, even though that proposition is actually false.

What is worse, *Doxastic Value Maximization* implies that in some cases you not only ought to believe a proposition that is false, but that you ought to believe a falsehood even if it would remain false were you to believe it. Suppose, for instance, that if you were to believe that *you believe that it is raining*, you would still not believe that *it is raining*. Since it is true that in the best doxastic possibility you believe that *you believe that it is raining*, the theory says that you ought to believe that *you believe that it is raining*. Hence, in this case the theory will not just say that you ought to believe what is false; it will also say that you ought to believe something that would be false, if believed. Moreover, the best doxastic possibility is accessible to you, insofar as it is possible for you to bring it about. So, this implication cannot be ruled out simply by adjusting the accessibility relation on worlds, as Wedgwood suggests in this volume.

*Doxastic Value Maximization* therefore conflicts with the original idea that 'incorrect' means 'impermissible', since the theory entails that in some situations, you ought to have a belief that is not only false, but that would be false if you were to believe it. If false beliefs are incorrect, then the theory entails that I ought to have an incorrect belief. If 'incorrect' entailed 'impermissible', we would have the absurdity that it can both be obligatory and impermissible to believe that  $p$  at  $t$ . To make this theory coherent it would have to radically break away from the idea that 'correct belief' is a

normative expression because that (roughly) ‘a belief I ought to have’ or ‘a belief I am permitted to have’.

Even if it is modified in this way, it is not clear that *Doxastic Value Maximization* could be explanatorily fundamental. Since it implies that you ought, in some cases, to have beliefs with contents that are actually false, the standard explanation for evidential norms will no longer apply. Consider the norm that you ought to proportion your belief to the evidence. This norm is not explained by the present theory. This is because evidence that supports the truth of a proposition, *p*, is evidence that speaks in favour of the actual truth of *p*, and evidence against *p* is evidence that speaks in favour of the actual falsity of *p*. This means that if you acquire some evidence that *p* is actually false, this does not give you reason, according to the present theory, to disbelieve that *p*, for *p*’s actual falsehood is compatible with your being obligated to believe that *p*. Similarly, if you acquire evidence that *p* is actually true, this does not give you reason to believe that *p*, since *p*’s actual truth is compatible with your being forbidden to believe that *p*.

Thus, although *Doxastic Value Maximization* can solve the blindspot problem, it has counterintuitive consequences, and cannot be explanatorily fundamental.

## 6. Correctness as goodness

To avoid the incoherence threat, *Doxastic Value Maximization* could be revised so that instead of saying that ‘incorrect belief’ is normative because it means ‘belief one should not have’, it could say that ‘incorrect belief’ is *evaluative* because it means ‘belief that is bad’. More exactly, to say that a belief is incorrect is to say that it is bad, to say that it is correct is to say that is good.<sup>18</sup>

Can ‘correct belief’ be understood as ‘good belief’? Well, correctness can hardly be seen as a kind of goodness for the simple reason that whereas goodness can come in degrees, correctness cannot. Nothing can be more or less correct than something else. Nor can anything be more or less incorrect than something else: ‘correct’ is not a gradable adjective, whereas ‘good’ clearly is. There are a number of tests for gradability of adjectives, involving the appropriateness of adding comparative morphemes (*more, less, as*), sufficiency morphemes (*too, enough, so*), or intensifiers (*very, quite, rather*). The evidence from these tests for treating ‘incorrect’ as gradable is poor. The following sentences sound odd:

- (a)  $\phi$ -ing is incorrect, but  $\psi$ -ing is *more* incorrect
- (b)  $\phi$ -ing is incorrect *enough*
- (c)  $\phi$ -ing is *very* incorrect

Compare with a standard gradable adjective, such as ‘expensive’:<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> This view is defended in Karlander (2008).

<sup>19</sup> For more on gradable adjectives, see Kennedy (1999).

- (d)  $x$  is *more* expensive than  $y$
- (e)  $x$  is expensive *enough*
- (f)  $x$  is *very* expensive

Whereas (a) to (c) are solecisms, (d) to (f) sound fine. The same tests suggest that ‘good’ is a gradable adjective:

- (g)  $x$  is *better* than  $y$
- (h)  $x$  is good *enough*
- (i)  $x$  is *very* good

This linguistic point reveals that our concepts of correctness and incorrectness are not graded either—we do not think that either correctness or incorrectness comes in degrees. Of course, we can talk about something being *closer* to being correct, such as an incorrect answer that was not too far off the mark. But it is a mistake to think that this shows that incorrectness itself comes in degrees.

Of course, that true beliefs are good could be seen as a *substantive* value judgement rather than as a judgement that is true because of the very nature of belief. In the same way we ascribe intrinsic or final value to pleasure, knowledge, and friendship, we could ascribe intrinsic or final value to correct beliefs. But this is far from what the doxastic normativist is claiming. The idea is not that beliefs are normative or evaluative in the way that pleasure is normative or evaluative. The idea is rather that a proper understanding of the nature of beliefs requires the knowledge of specifically doxastic norms or values. Furthermore, to say that true belief is good in the same way as pleasure is good would be to put forward a very controversial axiology to say the least. Why should we think that a true belief is good in itself, no matter whether it is a belief about the number of hairs on my head or about the fundamental laws of nature? Why should we think that a true belief is good in itself even if it is evidentially baseless?

It is also worth noting that replacing the claim that beliefs are normative with the claim that beliefs are evaluative does not necessarily avoid all variance problems. Suppose that the ‘correctness is goodness’ idea is spelled out as follows:

*Doxastic Value:* Your believing that  $p$  is good iff  $p$  is true.  
Your believing that  $p$  is bad iff  $p$  is false.

Suppose further that what is assigned value here is the abstract state of affairs consisting of a person believing a proposition. This generates problems of *evaluative* variance. For suppose that  $p$  is a blindspot and I do not believe that  $p$ . Then *Doxastic Value* entails that the state of affairs that I believe that  $p$  is good (because  $p$  is true). However, if this state of affairs were to obtain, then *Doxastic Value* would deem it no longer to be good, since it would then be false and thus bad. So, the state of affairs of believing a blindspot is good only if it does not obtain. This is an especially troublesome case of evaluative variance, since here it is *logically impossible* to realize the good state of

affairs without thereby making sure that it is bad. These good states of affairs are not just necessarily evasive; they are necessarily bad if they obtain. But this would make them poor candidates for being good states of affairs, since they can no longer play the essential role of a good state of affairs, which is to rate the world a plus—to make it better in one respect—by obtaining in the world. Indeed, these good states of affairs would instead play the role of a bad state of affairs, since they would make the world *worse* by obtaining.

The same point can be made if we focus on *belief-type* evaluations rather than state of affairs evaluations.

*Doxastic Value 1:* It is good for you to *believe* that  $p$  iff  $p$  is true. It is bad for you to *believe* that  $p$  iff  $p$  is false.

If  $p$  is a blindspot, the state or act of believing  $p$  is good only if it is not performed. Were it performed, then it would unavoidably be bad. Again, we have an unacceptable form of evaluative variance. For the essential role of a good act-type is to rate an act-token a plus—to make the act-token better in one respect—by being a type to which the token belongs.

So, we need to change the evaluative principles. A natural way out of this problem would be to say that what we have are not beliefs but *beliefs' being true*. More exactly,

*Doxastic Value 2:* Your belief that  $p$  being true is good (equivalently, the state of affairs that  $S$  believes  $p$  and  $p$  is good). Your belief that  $p$  being false is bad (equivalently, the state of affairs that  $S$  believes  $p$  and  $\sim p$  is bad).

What is assigned value here is no longer a belief-type or the state of affairs that someone believes something but the state of affairs that a certain belief is true (or false). Evaluative variance is avoided by including the value relevant property of being true (or false) in the value bearer.

The trouble with this theory is that it is not metaphysically fundamental, because these value assignments do not distinguish belief from other propositional attitudes. Belief is not the only mental state such that it is good that  $S$  has this mental state towards  $p$  and  $p$  is true. Consider other popular candidates:

*Desire:* It is good that you desire  $p$ , and  $p$  is true.

*Pleasure:* It is good that you take pleasure in  $p$ , and  $p$  is true.

*Promise:* It is good that you promise  $p$ , and  $p$  is true.

They all have the form 'It is good that you  $A$  that  $p$ , and  $p$  is true'. So we cannot say that belief is the only mental state that would be a true substitution for  $A$  in this schema.

One reply is to say that even if other mental states satisfy this general schema only belief does so in virtue of the nature of being a belief. For example, even if *Desire* is true, it is doubtful that it is true in virtue of the nature of desire. Rather *Desire* is a substantive evaluative claim. This reply is not sufficient. Arguably, if any of *Desire*, *Pleasure*, or *Promise* is true, then it would be a necessary truth. Suppose *Desire* is such a truth.

One could then just as reasonably maintain that a full understanding of the nature or essence of desire requires the knowledge of its necessary evaluative properties as well as its necessary non-evaluative ones. If so, *Desire* is part of what is needed to fully understand the nature or essence of desires.

A more important point is that by changing the scope of goodness from the belief that  $p$  to the conjunction of the belief that  $p$  and the proposition that  $p$ , we seem to give up on the idea that 'correct' means 'good'. The initial thought that normativists needed to make precise was that true beliefs are correct and false beliefs are incorrect. On this view, it is the belief that  $p$  that is correct, not the conjunction of the belief that  $p$  and the proposition that  $p$ .

## 7. Concluding remarks

We started with the slogan that belief aims at truth, and the thought that, for belief correctness is truth, and incorrectness, falsity. The principle formulated in terms of correctness, we argued, is not in itself normative. When we considered normative statements about truth, we found that all of the plausible contenders faced difficulties. More exactly, we have seen that the main normative or evaluative readings of the slogans will all have implausible normative or evaluative consequences, or will fail to be either metaphysically or explanatorily fundamental. The prospects of finding a reading of the slogans that are normative and metaphysically as well as explanatorily fundamental look bleak.

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