**Belief as Emotion**

**Draft as of July 24, 2018. Comments welcome.**

**Abstract**

It is commonly held that (i) beliefs are evidence-sensitive and (ii) beliefs are connected to actions in reliable and predictable ways. Given such a view, many argue that if a mental state fails to respond to evidence or doesn’t result in the kind of behavior typical or expected of belief, it is not a belief after all, but a different state. Yet, one finds seeming counter examples of resilient beliefs that fail to respond to evidence, or that do not connect to action in the way we would expect them to. I offer a view of belief that does not force us to exclude states as *real* beliefs that we pre-reflectively think of as beliefs, and that does not require us to “outsource” the work belief seems to do to other mental states. Rather than assume that belief is a purely cognitive state, I propose that we view belief as a type of emotion where emotions are understood as including cognitive and non-cognitive elements. Thinking of beliefs as emotions can help us make sense of resilient or recalcitrant beliefs, of seeming breakdowns between belief and actions, and offer insight into the phenomena of persistent disagreement and self-deception.

1. **Introduction**

Beliefs figure prominently in our explanations and understanding of one another, are essential for navigating our way around the world, and at times help define our characters and motivations. It is not surprising, then, that beliefs also figure prominently in many philosophical discussions and debates. But it is not always clear what is being investigated in these discussions, or if the same phenomenon is being discussed in all the debates about belief. One way of trying to understand what kind of mental phenomenon is most closely captured by the designation of “belief” is to think about what distinguishes beliefs from other mental states. Two common metaphors are used to distinguish beliefs from other attitudes. The first is “direction of fit”; we want our beliefs to “fit” the world while, for example, we want the world to “fit” our desires. The second is to say that beliefs, unlike other states, in some sense “aim at truth.” But without further elaboration, it is not clear how the “truth-aim” distinguishes beliefs from other states that represent their content as true such as imaginings, suppositions, practical acceptances, and guesses.[[1]](#footnote-1)

While accounts vary about belief’s distinctive character, because a belief can be true or false, in a way that, for example, feeling angry or sad cannot be, beliefs are seen as paradigmatically *cognitive* states.[[2]](#footnote-2) What it means for a state or attitude to be cognitive, as opposed to conative or affective, is rarely made explicit, but a core idea is that such attitudes are what constitute *thinking* about the world in a way that can lead us to knowledge or to accurate representations. Indeed, some take it as constitutive of an attitude being cognitive that it has no phenomenal feel in the way that sensation, perception, or *feelings* in general do.[[3]](#footnote-3) Despite differences in the way this state is characterized, it is commonly held that (i) beliefs are evidence-sensitive, meaning that if one does not think one’s belief is supported by one’s evidence one will cease to have the belief and (ii) beliefs are connected to actions such that actions can be explained by what one believes, and inferences can be made about what one believes by how one acts. In what follows I sometimes will refer to the view which holds these two features as essential to belief as the “cognitivist” view of belief. Given such a view, many argue that if a mental state fails to respond to evidence or doesn’t result in the kind of behavior typical or expected of belief, it is not a belief after all, but a different state.[[4]](#footnote-4) Yet, one finds seeming counter examples of resilient beliefs that fail to respond to evidence, or that do not connect to action in the way we would expect them to. Two responses are common in the face of such examples, which are often tied together. The first is to deny that these states which we pre-reflectively call “beliefs” really are beliefs, that is to put restrictions on what counts as a belief so that these are no longer counter examples. The second is to introduce new mental states to account for what is going on in these cases where it appears that one has a belief, but the belief is not behaving according to what the restricted account allows.[[5]](#footnote-5)

I will offer a view of belief that does not force us to exclude states as *real* beliefs that we pre-reflectively think of as beliefs, and that does not require us to “outsource” the work belief seems to do to other mental states. Rather than assume that belief is a purely cognitive state, I propose that we view belief as a type of emotion where emotions are understood as including cognitive and non-cognitive elements. I see my view as building on Hume’s insight that *“belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*” (*Treatise* 1.4.1, 2000). While theorists of emotion disagree on how to characterize these components, most agree that emotional states contain a judgment-like component as well as a “feeling” component. Beliefs include feelings in a way that other states of “holding true,” like, for example, supposing or accepting for planning purposes, do not.[[6]](#footnote-6) Many puzzling features about belief cease to be as puzzling if we think of belief as an emotion.[[7]](#footnote-7) In particular, it can help us make sense of resilient or recalcitrant beliefs, of seeming breakdowns between belief and actions, and offer insight into the phenomena of persistent disagreement and self-deception.

I will begin (in section 1) by presenting some of the problematic cases that have put pressure on a common way of thinking of belief which has led to the idea that the concept of belief cannot do all the work it has typically been asked to do. I will then (in section 2) outline the central features of theories of emotion which can be classified as “neojudgmentalist,” and clarify what it would mean to think of beliefs as emotions. I will then (in section 3) show how thinking of beliefs as emotions can help us respond to puzzles, so that we need not exclude recalcitrant or resilient beliefs as being actual beliefs, and we do not need to introduce new mental states to handle such cases. I will conclude (in section 4) by considering and casting doubt on the position that, even if I am right that the category of belief should be extended to include these problematic cases, that there can be good reasons for epistemologists to be concerned with a specific *type* of belief that does exclude them.

**1. Recalcitrant (Resilient) Beliefs**

When beliefs fail to respond to evidence, or when behavior typical of belief behavior fails manifest, the cognitivist view of belief has a hard time making sense of what is going on, and there is an increasing tendency to declare that such states are not actually beliefs after all. These problematic states include delusions, beliefs based on reasons of trust or friendship, and religious or quasi-religious beliefs. Even though these are ordinarily taken as beliefs, because they fail to exhibit features that seem essential to belief, many argue that they are actually not beliefs, but some other kind of attitude. I will argue that the cost of excluding these from the category of belief is high; it is very difficult to find principled reasons to exclude them while not excluding all beliefs that are not paradigmatically rational. Thinking of beliefs as emotions can easily allow that the problematic “holdings true” are beliefs. I will begin by describing four problematic areas where one finds pressure to question whether what appears to be a belief is better understood as a different kind of mental state. I will then argue that this pressure stems from certain assumptions that can be jettisoned if we think of beliefs as emotions.

*1.1. Delusions*

While providing an account of delusions which distinguishes them from other false and irrational beliefs proves almost as difficult as providing an account of belief which distinguishes it from other mental states, we do not here need the degree of precision that may be needed if one were using the definition for clinical purposes.[[8]](#footnote-8) I will use “delusion” to refer to a state of “holding true” that is resistant to change despite “clear …contradictory evidence regarding its veracity.”[[9]](#footnote-9)We typically use the language of belief to describe what is going on in such cases: We say, for example, “He believes he is dead,” or “She believes her husband has been replaced by an impostor.” But it has seemed to many that this use of belief is misguided; that delusions do not exhibit some of the features required to be designated beliefs.[[10]](#footnote-10)

David Velleman’s discussion of why delusions are not beliefs represents a fairly widespread view, even for those who disagree with other aspects of his account of belief. What is distinctive about belief, according to Velleman, is that we regard a proposition as true with the aim of getting the truth-value right. In expanding on this definition, Velleman makes it clear that this aim need not be consciously recognized or pursued. Instead he is thinking of these cognitions being regulated for truth independently of how the agent within whom they reside thinks about them. He conceives of there being “cognitive systems” that regulate an agent’s beliefs “in ways designed to ensure that they are true, by forming, revising and extinguishing them in response to evidence and argument” (2000, 253).

Velleman admits that it is possible that some psychological mechanisms tend to cause beliefs that happen to diverge from the truth. One of his examples is that we have adapted to have dispositions to be cautious in perceiving predators so we are apt to believe, for example, that the coiled rope is a snake. His second example is that we have adapted to overestimate our own popularity. But the less responsive a state is to “corrective influences,” namely the less evidence-sensitive it is, the less likely Velleman is to call it a belief; a biased belief can be corrected but, perhaps, a delusion cannot. For example, he says that someone who is not Napoleon but who professes that he is does not actually have the belief that he is Napoleon. We normally describe such a person as believing he is Napoleon but, according to Velleman, we are mistaken in this usage:

Aren’t there people who believe that they are Napoleon? (People other than Napoleon, I mean.) Don’t such people have a belief that isn’t regulated for truth? I think the answer is that it isn’t literally a belief. I suspect that we tend to apply the term ‘belief’ in a figurative sense to phantasies for which the subject doesn’t or cannot have countervailing beliefs…The phantasy of being Napoleon is thus what he has instead of a belief about his identity; and in this sense it is his belief on the topic, just as a cardboard box on the sidewalk may be his house by virtue of being what he has instead of a house. If you ask me, however, a cardboard box on the sidewalk isn’t really a house. And a phantasy of being Napoleon isn’t really a belief. (2000, 289)

What excludes this kind of “holding true” from being a belief, for Velleman, is that “the subject doesn’t or cannot have countervailing beliefs” that can dislodge it. That one *does not* actually possess beliefs counter to something else one believes cannot be a reason to rule it out; one will not have countervailing beliefs to the ones that are the most secure and rational. So it has to be because the subject “cannot” have countervailing beliefs or evidence that would alter the “phantasy” that excludes it from being a belief. But what kind of “cannot” is at issue here? In the case of delusions the “cannot” is psychological. And depending on the type of delusion, one may have some countervailing evidence based on testimony, or discovered in the course of treatment that can lead to revision. These countervailing beliefs may even help to explain why some of the typical behavior associated with beliefs are sometimes absent in the case of delusions.[[11]](#footnote-11)

And how resistant to evidence must a “holding true” be for it to fail to be a belief? Many prejudiced and biased beliefs are so deeply engrained that it seems that one “doesn’t or cannot have countervailing beliefs” capable of dislodging them. To distinguish these from delusions one would need to argue that one *could* revise them in a sense that those with delusions *cannot* but again, if the impossibility (or extremely high degree of difficulty) is psychological, it is hard to see how such a distinction can be made in a principled way. The risk of excluding delusions from the belief-family is that similar considerations will lead us to exclude other false, irrational beliefs. Yet it is important that those other beliefs remain so that they can be exposed, criticized and possibly even altered. If delusions are excluded as beliefs, we are at risk of only counting rational beliefs as *actual* beliefs. But part of what we may want is an explanation of why and to what degree a belief is rational, and further why rationality is a good thing. Velleman, and others, claim to be offering an account of belief, but what they end up providing are accounts of *good* beliefs.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Another important consideration in thinking about excluding delusions is how to make sense of the subject’s own reports of belief. What do those with delusions mean when they say they believe the content of the delusions? One possibility is that their assertions are insincere. But this is rather far-fetched. Often these delusions are disruptive and painful to the subject and those around her. Why would someone pretend to endorse such content? And again, the reluctance to attribute beliefs in such cases is not usually due to a suspicion that they are not genuinely endorsed, or taken as true. Rather it is the grounds for such endorsement (or lack of grounds) that lead to suspicion about its status as a belief.

*1.2 Other breakdowns between belief and action*

Beliefs are importantly linked to action. It is often thought that the way people act can tell us what they believe. For example, if I see you walking very gingerly across a rickety bridge, it is appropriate for me to attribute the belief to you that the bridge is not very stable. It has also been suggested that an important mark of what makes something a belief, as opposed say, to a mere suspicion or guess, is that one will be prepared to act on what one believes; that beliefs can serve as premises in practical reasoning, and so there should also be a connection between a *rational* belief and *rational* action. But, as we have seen, these explanations seem to break down at times and these breakdowns are difficult to accommodate or explain. While clinical delusions are rare, other kinds of disconnections between belief and action are more common. In a series of papers, Tamar Gendler has discussed a number of these problematic cases. Here is one:

SKYWALK: A tourist walks on to the steel-supported glass skywalk overlooking the Grand Canyon. She understands that the structure will keep her from falling and believes she is perfectly safe. As she walks, she is trembling, hanging on to her companion for support, barely able to make it to the center.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Why do people manifest fear-behavior when they walk on a glass skywalk overlooking the Grand Canyon if they believe they are perfectly safe? What I want to emphasize is that cases like these are puzzling given a particular conception of belief. If beliefs simply are states that represent the world according to the inputs given by evidence (perceptual, testimonial, *etc*.), it seems these breakdowns should not occur. If I really take the evidence to support the truth of the propsotion “this skywalk is safe,” the result should be that I walk as confidently on it as I do on the sidewalk in front of my house.

Gendler has argued that one should recognize that in cases like the SKYWALK one needs a new category to explain the state associated with the feeling of danger. She calls such states “aliefs” which are “*a*ssociative, *a*utomatic, and *a*rational.” An alief is not responsive to evidence and not held true, but is activated by features of the subject’s internal or ambient environment, something akin to an instinct. She says, “A notion of *alief* is crucial if we wish to hold on to a notion like belief that relates to action in anything like the way philosophers have traditionally assumed, if you want to save belief, then you need to make conceptual room for the notion of *alief.*”[[14]](#footnote-14) The subject’s hesitation to walk out over a skywalk can be explained by a “*belief-discordant alief”* – that is, an alief that produces effects which are discordant with the behaviors expected of a belief.

What are the traditional philosophical assumptions to which Gendler here refers? It seems she is identifying those two features that those who view beliefs as paradigmatically cognitive states see as essential that I identified above, namely that they are evidence-sensitive and are connected to actions such that actions can be explained by what one believes, and inferences can be made about what one believes by how one acts. In the skywalk case we can still say that the person believes what they take to be supported by the evidence, and the fact that she is walking on the skywalk is explained by her belief. Her fear behavior, however, according to Gendler, is explained by a different state and so the “traditional” philosophical view of belief is thus saved.

*1.3 Trust*

In discussions about the nature of trust, a distinction is usually made between mere reliance and trust. I can rely on something or someone if I accept for purposes of planning that the person or thing will behave as I expect. I can rely on my car not breaking down just as I can rely on my colleague to print out the handouts. But reliance can come without belief, especially when the situation doesn’t leave much room for options; and in those situations one can, quite directly, *choose* to rely. Even if I have doubts about my car’s capacity to make the trip, if I have a crucial meeting I need make, I can choose to rely on the car even while being a little anxious the whole way. If I have a lot of positive evidence that my car will *not* make it, however, it doesn’t seem that I could rely on it by accepting for the sake of planning; I would have to make contingency plans in case it did not make it, for example.

If my colleague always prints out the handouts I may *rely* on the fact that he will in a way that does not constitute trusting that he will. If I actually trust him to do it, this comes along with reactive attitudes that are not present in mere reliance. If I am merely relying on him to make the copies because this is the usual state of affairs, I would not be betrayed if he failed to do so. And if I find myself irritated for his not doing it, this is a flaw in me, not him. It is because failures in cases of trust *do* constitute grounds for attitudes like resentment and anger, that one can only trust people and not objects.

What then are grounds, or reasons for trusting? Well, part of it is evidential, just as in the case of reliance. If I know someone well and come to see that he can be counted on, keep his word, *etc*., these are evidential reasons to trust him. But trust does not only come about from a careful weighing of the evidence; at least some of the reasons for trusting are non-evidential. I trust you because you are my friend or because our relationship requires that I do, or because I love you. There is a difference, for example, between someone assessing the odds and deciding that it is worth betting on whether my friend will keep her word, and *my* trusting my friend to keep her word.[[15]](#footnote-15) And it is not clear, in certain contexts, that the right grounds for trusting are the evidential grounds. As Sarah Stroud (2006) has argued, the demands of friendship may actually require that I do not base my beliefs only on the evidence.

Some maintain that trust, like reliance, can come without belief; I can trust that you will do something even if I do not believe that you will.[[16]](#footnote-16) Given the potential costs associated with trusting I find this implausible. Trust makes you vulnerable, you open yourself up to the possibility of betrayal, as Richard Holton says it requires a kind of “emotional seriousness.” If I tell you sincerely that I will keep my word and you say you trust me even though you don’t believe me, I would have a hard time understanding you. Not being believed is a terrible feeling and it is the same terrible feeling as not being trusted.[[17]](#footnote-17)

In some recent discussions of trust, a distinction is made between trusting when there is enough positive evidence to warrant believing the person is *not* trustworthy and when the evidence is absent or inconclusive. Something is wrong about trusting in the first case whereas trusting in the second case is less problematic.[[18]](#footnote-18) In those cases, trusting for non-evidential reasons seems permissible. When one has important non-evidential reasons to believe one’s friend is trustworthy and there is not overwhelming evidence against it, it is not clear that there is anything wrong with believing it. Guy Longworth discusses these cases in very similar terms:

Can it ever be reasonable to trust other people, or to rely upon them, without evidence of their trustworthiness or reliability? The answer we have come to at this point is conditional: yes, provided, first, that there is not too much evidence that they are untrustworthy or unreliable and, second, that there are genuine practical reasons for trusting them or relying upon them. However, it seems obvious that we are constantly presented with genuinely practical reasons for trusting others. (Longworth, 2017)

I think the motivation for maintaining that trust can come without belief has to do with the reasons for trusting. One can trust even when one’s evidence does not seem to dictate believing and, if it is never permissible to believe without sufficient evidence, and if trust entailed believing, then all non-evidentially based trusting would also be impermissible. One way to avoid the conclusion that it is always irrational to trust in such cases is to argue that the kind of “holding true” in cases of trust is not the same kind of “holding true” found in cases of belief. This is Longworth’s view, for example. He says, “insofar as one has a conception of belief as governed by evidence, one has a reason not to conflate holding things true for practical purposes with holding things true for theoretical purposes.” His worry about counting these kinds of “holding true” as beliefs is that, according to the cognitivist view, they would all be irrational or defective because they are held for non-evidential reasons and any *beliefs* so held (if such a thing is even possible) are defective or irrational. But to say it is always irrational to trust others is a worrisome conclusion. Moreover, as we have seen, we can distinguish cases of reasonable and unreasonable trusting. Two options are available: accept the view of belief which entails that we frequently do not actually believe those whom we trust are trustworthy, or see these as cases which reveal the limitations of that view of belief.[[19]](#footnote-19)

*1.4 Faith*

Another kind of problematic “holding true” which shares some similarities with trust are those related to matters of religion, or perhaps what may more broadly be called “meaning-making.”[[20]](#footnote-20) I am worried about using the term “religion” because I do not want to include only those views committed to the idea of a deity or to a particular creed or dogma. I want to include in this category the beliefs (if they are that) of the practitioner in deep mediation who holds true, for example, that all beings are connected, or that the notion of an individual self is an illusion.[[21]](#footnote-21)

To exclude matters of faith from the domain of belief, on the face of it, seems the most counterintuitive, at least according to the way people ordinarily talk. When I tell non-philosophers that I work on issues related to beliefs, they often assume I mean religious beliefs and I need to explain that I am also interested in more mundane, factual beliefs.[[22]](#footnote-22) What then is the motivation for excluding them? Again, like with trust, they have a problematic connection to the evidence that makes them difficult to evaluate in any standard way. While some religious believers claim that their beliefs are evidentially based, there are also those who talk about faith as something like believing despite having no evidence, that the talk of evidence is beside the point. If this is the case, they seem to share what is problematic about delusions, namely that they are highly resistant to countervailing beliefs or evidence.

Because the reasons for excluding them are similar to the reasons for excluding the other kinds of cases I have discussed, the same considerations for including them apply in this domain. Again, it is very important that not all “meaning-making-holdings-true” get lumped together as being in some other category which excludes them from evaluation. If we retain the idea that they *are* beliefs then we can distinguish between them and they need not all be equally irrational or defective. The same criteria appealed to in cases of trust can be used in matters of faith, and the content of the proposition “held true” will matter in distinguishing between them. If one holds something true despite overwhelming evidence against it, this is different than holding true when the evidence is absent, neutral or very inconclusive. As in the cases of trust, believing for non-evidential reasons in the latter cases may well be permissible. But in the “meaning-making” domain those cases will be even more rare than in matters of trust. It seems only propositions with vague or imprecise content will not have massive countervailing evidence against them, propositions like “there is something greater or beyond what can be measured materially.” But the more specific the content, the more likely it is that it can only be maintained by ignoring, suppressing or disregarding evidence, as would be the case with the belief that “there is such a person as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Jewish and Christian revelation: the God of the Bible.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

One may think that what I am calling meaning-making beliefs are more like hopes than beliefs, but they are importantly different. To see the difference consider this definition of belief given by McKay and Dennett (2009), which they say is general enough to cover most representationalist and dispositional accounts: “A belief is a functional state of an organism that implements or embodies that organism’s endorsement of a particular state of affairs as actual.” This definition, we shall see, is also general enough to include my alternative view, particularly because they have left the kind of endorsement that is needed ambiguous. To “embody” an endorsement and to implement it may be two different things. When I feel fear I embody a kind of endorsement that the environment is dangerous but, perhaps, implementation of such endorsement need not follow. I think it is clear that all the cases I have discussed in this section are examples some kind of endorsement of a particular state of affairs as actual. Hoping that something is true, on the other hand, does not require any kind of endorsement. The expression “holding true” is used as a genus which covers beliefs but, can also cover cases where there is no endorsement. I can “hold true” a hypothesis that I do not endorse at all just to see what follows, or to play devil’s advocate. To further understand different kinds of endorsement and what is needed for belief, I turn now to a discussion of a theory of emotion which, I argue, allows us to categorize belief as an emotion.

1. **Clarifying the Alternative View of Belief**

*2.1. Belief as a blended state*

While theories that fall under the category of “neojudgmentalist” vary in their details, what binds them together is that they all reject both purely “cognitive” theories which equate emotions with evaluative judgments, as well as “feeling-theories,” which equate emotions with non-cognitive (often automatic) reactions to the environment, much like passive sensations. Instead, these theories view emotions as essentially blended states, as involving both emotional feelings as well as evaluative judgments (or construals).[[24]](#footnote-24) This is not to say that emotions are a combination of a mental states; fear, for example, cannot be reduced to the belief that I am in danger, the desire to flee, and some flutters in my stomach and sweat on my brow. As Bennett Helm points out one can experience such a combination and not feel fear. The fear itself is a separate feeling, and according to Helm, and others, it is an evaluative feeling. I *feel* that I am in danger. Such a feeling will often include physical sensations, it will be motivational as the feeling is painful, and it will represent the world as being a certain way. He says of emotions that they “are unitary and not compound states of evaluative feeling, states involving elements of both cognition and conation simultaneously” (2001, 59). Helm realizes that describing emotions as feelings of this very particular kind runs afoul of the cognitive-conative divide, that is the view that all states must be either one or the other, and argues that the divide should be rejected because an adequate account of the phenomenology of emotions cannot be provided while it remains.

One of the main obstacles for pure judgmentalist (cognitivist) views is they seem unable to explain recalcitrant emotions in a satisfying way. If I judge that spiders are not dangerous, but still feel fear when I see a spider, the cognitivist would claim that the kind of irrationality here is simply one of incoherence, having two contradictory beliefs: spiders are dangerous and spiders are not dangerous, given that my fear is an expression of the evaluative judgment that the environment is dangerous. As Michael Brady points out such a view “imputes too much irrationality to the subject of emotional recalcitrance” (2009, 414). An emotion conflicting with a reflective judgment is common and intelligible. What these theories get right, however, is that emotions can be assessed as rational or appropriate, and that some normative principle is being violated in the cases of recalcitrant emotions. This is very difficult to account for if they are seen as passive sensations, akin to having a headache.

Brady, like Helm, offers a hybrid theory of emotions which he thinks can better account for recalcitrant emotions, as well as explain how emotions can be of epistemic value. For Brady emotions include inclinations to assent to evaluative construals, as well as emotional feelings which involve increased attention and sensitivity to the emotional object. Let’s take fear as an example: When I experience fear, the import of the situation is impressed upon me; this is the passive element of the emotion, and when I have such an experience I am “*inclined* to assent or endorse this view of the situation.” When I am afraid, both motivational and cognitive resources are mobilized which incline me both behave in a certain way and to assent or accept that things are a certain way. But though the emotion primes me for such assent, I need not give it. Recalcitrant emotions occur when one experiences priming, but does not give into the inclinations. Brady contends that this explanation can explain their irrationality without attributing straight-out incoherence. It is irrational, he contends, to be inclined to assent to something one has determined is false, or when one has determined one has no good reason to be inclined to assent to it. But such cases are understandable because usually the feeling itself constitutes a reason to be inclined to assent, and so such inclinations may be hard to eliminate.[[25]](#footnote-25)

How then would beliefs fit into this picture? When I believe (or experience belief to keep things parallel), it is impressed upon me that the world is a certain way, and this feeling puts a great deal of pressure on me to assent or endorse that the world is that way. Just as feeling fear includes a strong inclination to endorse the view that *p* is dangerous, belief includes a strong inclination to endorse the view that *p* is true. In both cases the feelings can sometimes be misleading or resisted. That I have the feelings associated with fear does not tell me that I have good reason to be afraid, but the feeling can motivate me to search for reasons which bear on the accuracy of the assessment that is embodied in the feeling, namely that the environment is dangerous. That I have the feelings associated with belief does not, by itself, tell me I have good reason to believe as I am inclined to, but having that belief-feeling can motivate me to search for reasons which bear on its accuracy, especially when it is questioned.

*2.2. Seeming differences between beliefs and emotions*

To view beliefs as emotions may seem immediately implausible because it is unclear what the feeling is that accompanies them, whereas we can easily recognize the feeling of other emotions, though they may be difficult to articulate. I know what anger feels like, and what fear feels like, but what does belief feel like? Ronald de Sousa describes the “feeling of rightness” we have when propositions strike as obviously true, like those which stem from the deliveries of the senses or recent vivid memories. De Sousa speculates that part of what might be going wrong for people suffering from OCD is that recent memory of performing certain actions “fails to trigger the right sort of feeling.” And what does that feeling of truth or rightness feel like? While my primary purpose is to suggest that there *is* something that beliefs feel like and not to explain *what* they feel like, I think it is fruitful to think of it as analogous to the feeling of attachment. Attachments come in degrees and intensity; some are easier to let go of than others; we do not always want to be attached in the ways that we find we are.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Most of the time, with factual propositions, we will not notice the feeling. But this is the case with many emotions I have; they do not always have a strong phenomenal feel. We experience emotions all the time of which we are not aware, and become aware of them when something draws our attention to them, or when they are needed to react appropriately to the environment. I may not be aware that I am angry at my father until some event happens that makes me aware. Or I may not be aware how attached I am to a person, until she is gone. One can find something analogous with beliefs. If one goes through life with a certain seemingly mundane, factual belief and discovers late in life that it is false, the feeling of attachment is made vivid. The radio program “This American Life” featured a number of stories like this. One described a college student in a discussion about endangered species and she asked “are unicorns endangered or extinct?” She didn’t just feel embarrassed about being wrong; letting go of a belief that one has held for a long time feels like a loss, even when its content is not normative.

How does one explain this feeling if beliefs are purely cognitive? One would need to appeal to other emotions that are related, but distinct, from the belief such as surprise or disappointment. And, though the content in this case is not normative, that it has to do with unicorns may explain the student’s feelings; it is not really a loss of belief that matters, one may think, but the loss of unicorns. Belief revision about more mundane matters perhaps does not feel like much of anything. What is central, however to the cases discussed is not their content but their longevity. One example was that the belief that the “crossing” sign which uses an “X” is pronounced “Zing.” When a belief hangs around long enough it becomes part of you, in a way mere suppositions or pure practical acceptances do not.

One may think that a difference between beliefs and emotions is exhibited in the way we can talk about them. Some think the assertion “I believe p though my evidence does not support p” is just like the classic Moore-paradoxical assertion “It is raining but I do not believe it is raining,” namely that both are incoherent. [[27]](#footnote-27) Whereas it does not seem incoherent to say “I fear p though my evidence does not support p being dangerous.” I have discussed the possibility of believing, in full consciousness, something you do not have evidential support for at length elsewhere. Asserting that this is so is not incoherent though, as in the case of emotions, it may display a kind of irrationality. Beliefs, like fears, if central and powerful, can persist even when one’s reflective evaluations indicate one should not believe as one does. Consider someone who has grown up in a fundamentalist tradition and believes that the Bible is literally true. This person may come to conclude that this belief is unsupported, and that he should give it up. Now we can imagine that it would be very difficult to break the habit of believing something inculcated at a very early age and reinforced throughout one’s life—just as it is very difficult to give up smoking after twenty years even when one decides one should.

How does this account explain cases where one knows that something is not the case, for example when you *know* that the oar is straight though it looks bent, or when you *know* the proper answer to the Monty Hall puzzle even though you initially thought your chances of winning do not improve if you switch your guess. [[28]](#footnote-28) It still *seems* like the oar is bent when looking at, and the proper answer still *feels* counterintuitive. How is this seeming different from the feeling that accompanies belief? One of the ingredients in the blended belief-state are feelings that are much like those of these seemings, and if one didn’t have the reflective capacities to see otherwise one would believe, for example, that the oar is straight. Just like in the case of fear, one would not be afraid if one did not have the associated feelings, but one can have those feelings, recognize that they are unsupported, and not be afraid. When the feelings are strong, however, to remain unafraid is difficult. If belief is an emotion, then it is a blended state. Part of this blend includes a reflective endorsement of the belief when actively considered.

A final worry may be that beliefs are states while emotions are more episodic. I think this depends on the complexity of the emotion, and there is nothing unusual about referring to an affective *state;* this is the way we tend to think of moods.One could have flashes of temper that come and go that can be viewed as episodes of anger, but one can also make sense of someone being angry which may be described primarily in terms of dispositions.

Now that we have a better idea of what it means to think of a belief as an emotion, we can see how it contrasts with the cognitivist view. While part of the function or purpose of emotions is to provide accurate readings of the environment, this is not all they do. They also direct our attention, help us see what matters, and motivate us. In a discussion that argues that what they term “misbelief,” namely a belief “that to some degree parts from actuality,” are actually adaptive, meaning that they have been evolutionally favored because they contribute to the propagation of the species, Ryan McKay and Daniel Dennett (2009) describe the purpose of belief as going beyond the simple tracking of truth; “belief states have complex effects beyond simply informing our deliberations—they flavour our attitudes and feed our self-images—and complex causes that can create ancillary effects, such as triggering emotional adjustments and immune reactions.” Once the complexity of belief and its function is acknowledged, both how a belief is recognized and how it is assessed will differ from how it is recognized and assessed if one accepts the purely cognitivist view. While beliefs, like other emotions, are sensitive to evidence, just because an emotion fails to respond to evidence, it does not thereby cease to be an emotion. And while its failure to so respond may often display a defect of rationality, this need not always hold. I will now turn to showing how thinking about beliefs in this way can do a better job in explaining (or even solving) some of the puzzles about belief we considered above.

**3. Dealing with the Problem Cases**

Rather than see seemingly recalcitrant beliefs as examples of ‘holdings true” that are not beliefs, I think they are vivid examples of what goes on in all our beliefs, but that is often not evident. We have seen that a prominent way of thinking of emotions includes both a kind of embodied endorsement of a state of affairs as actual, as well a more reflective or cognitive endorsement of the feeling. All the problematic cases of belief we considered have strong feelings that come along with them. In the case of delusions these propositions often strike their subjects with such force that it is painful. Remember one of the reasons for denying them belief-status is it seems that behavior does not always conform to the way one would expect it to if they were, in fact, beliefs. Why would you continue living with someone if you believed he was an impostor?

One way to help make sense of such cases is to think about them as examples of when the cognitive and non-cognitive elements of believing come apart or are not aligned. In such cases, especially when one is attending to other beliefs, like the belief that one’s therapist, family, and friends tell the truth, the delusion’s felt force can be diminished. Or maybe one can concentrate on the evidence opposed to the delusion for some time which can destabilize it. But when attended to, the *feeling* of its truth is so strong that it leads one to find evidence in its favor. Given that such a feeling of truth usually occurs when one also has evidence for the belief, it makes sense that one would try to construct a way of providing it with evidential grounds, which is what those with delusions often do. But given that, in fact, this feeling stems from complex pathological sources, not from good (even if non-evidential) reasons, we have a way of distinguishing these recalcitrant beliefs from others.

As we have seen in matters of trust and faith, depending on the context, these beliefs can either be rational or not. In some matters, if one believes purely because of the strength of the feeling and the feeling overwhelms one so that one’s cognitive grasp is corrupted, then the beliefs are, epistemically, on par with delusions; Freud called religious beliefs delusions, in part, because he saw them as essentially unrevisable. And we might refer to a friend who seems incapable of attending to the clear evidence that her spouse is unfaithful as “deluded.” Of course, clinical delusions differ from these for many reasons, including the disruption and pain they cause. But the kind of irrationality displayed in the cases is similar. However, when it comes to some religious propositions and some matters of trust, it may be that the endorsement is primarily based on reasons to *feel* a certain way, but one can still ask: are these feelings taking me away from the truth? If there is no evidence that your belief is false, then it is at least possible that they are leading you towards it.

One may think that the kind of cases I have appealed to points to beliefs being closely associated with emotions, and even *caused* by them, but that the feelings are independent of the belief, and that we have no reason to think that there is an actual feeling component that is *part* of the belief.[[29]](#footnote-29) But explaining the connection while holding on to the cognitive view of belief is difficult. Consider the belief “abortion is murder.” On the cognitive view the belief itself is simply a response to the evidence as it appears to one, a cognitive endorsement that this is an accurate representation of reality. The negative emotions associated with it may be anger and disgust toward people one sees as murderers, perhaps also feelings of pride, or righteousness, maybe a desire to see abortion made illegal, perpetrators punished, or a more general desire to promote good and minimize evil. And the idea is all these feelings are related in certain ways to the belief, but are not part of the belief itself. This way of seeing things has given rise to one of the central difficulties that has been troubling meta-ethicists for years. It is often thought that moral beliefs are inherently motivating in that they provide one with some reason to act (or not act) in the way that the proposition supports. But if they are really *beliefs* and beliefs are purely cognitive, this is problematic.

This issue has been addressed in many ways, but I want to draw attention to the response that recognizes that these beliefs have a non-cognitive element at the same time that they purport to capture the truth. Michael Ridge (2014) has called these approaches “ecumenical” because they find some way of unifying the cognitivists and the non-cognitivists. As his discussion shows there are many different ways of doing this, all of which come with some advantages and disadvantages. I am not here concerned with the details but, rather, this shows that the notion of such a “hybrid state” is not entirely unfamiliar.

Now it may seem odd for me to refer to this example as supportive because when the ecumenical expressivist claims that moral judgments have cognitive elements, what they usually *mean* is that these states include a belief-like element. So to say there is a non-cognitive element in belief can sound like I am saying that there is a non-belief element in belief. But part of my point is to put into question this identification. Meta-ethicists are right to say that moral beliefs contain a cognitive element, as well as a non-cognitive element. Where they are mistaken, I contend, is in thinking there is anything peculiar about this; these elements are there in all beliefs. There is something to belief beyond intellectual processing, and it is not only when beliefs go wrong that there is more to them. To put another way, machines can have cognitions of some kind, but they cannot have beliefs.

Bernard Williams (1973) makes a similar point in his discussion of five features that he took to illuminate the nature of belief and to show “how far, if at all, believing something can be related to decision and will.” He discusses a machine that has “B states,” but because the machine cannot make insincere assertions, Williams says it cannot have beliefs. He argues, and I agree, that beliefs can be entirely internal, and never acted on. To make sense of a belief never acted on, we must think of them as being connected to purely internal feelings. And while there may be many particular ways one happens to be disposed to feel if one believes something, I contend that if one does not have the disposition to “feel” the truth of the proposition when considering it one does not believe.

Thought of in a certain way, the kind of hybridity endorsed by Ridge may seem very different from how I am suggesting we think about beliefs. Ridge thinks of these normative beliefs as a compound of two distinct states that are, in principle, separable. I am thinking of the hybridity as more like a blended state than a compound one. It could be, then, that the kind of hybridity suggested by theorists who posit what have come to be called “besires,” namely states that incorporate both representational and motivational elements (but are not divisible into a representational and a motivational conjuncts) is closer to what I have in mind. While I do see such accounts as helpful to my view insofar as they are endorsing the idea that the one state can have more than one direction of fit, and allow for “cognitive-passionate hybrid states” (Swartzer 2013), what I am urging is that we do not need to posit a new mental state; rather we need to see that beliefs themselves incorporate these elements.

Nor do we need to introduce a new mental state to explain what is going on in Gendler’s examples if beliefs are emotion. What such examples reveal is that the “traditional assumptions” about beliefs that Gendler refers to when she says we need to make room for aliefs if we want to save belief are misguided. What is going on in these cases is that the subject is experiencing two distinct emotions both which include the inclination to assent to the way the situation feels. It *feels* both like I am in danger and that that I am not in danger. I experience the feeling of fear on the one hand, and the feeling of truth on the other. And both are manifest in my behavior; that I am actually walking on the skywalk reveals that I feel that I am not in danger, that I walk gingerly reveals that I feel that I am. This is not to say that I have two conflicting beliefs. Rather, I am experiencing a complex mix of emotions akin to the way you can feel both happy and sad when you drop your child off at college. Such emotional mixes often lead to odd behavior.

Given that it is unlikely that any view of belief will capture all the diverse phenomena associated with the way we think and talk about belief, the best we can do is offer hypotheses and compare them in terms of how well they can explain the phenomena. I have argued that my view does a better job of accounting for recalcitrant or resilient beliefs. I also think this view holds promise for dealing with issues related to disagreement and belief alteration, as well as helping to illuminate the phenomenon of self-deception. I will end this section by briefly considering how this may be the case.

If I discover true expert disagreement on a controversial topic, the proper epistemic attitude, it seems, should be that I suspend judgment on the topic. This has sometimes been called “controversial view agnosticism.” [[30]](#footnote-30) But such deep disagreement is often found in areas that are the most important to one’s social identity such as philosophy, religion, morality and politics, and it seems that there would be something spineless about giving up such beliefs. Can it really be wrong to hold beliefs in these domains? The problem of disagreement should not be a problem at all if beliefs behaved simply as the cognitivist account holds. The answer to what to believe in cases where the evidence is truly evenly balanced as it would be in cases of actual expert disagreement would be obvious, and if you continue to hold beliefs on these topics then you are doing so on the pain of irrationality.

Again, recognizing that beliefs are emotions can explain what is going on in cases of deep disagreement and why it can be hard to change one’s belief even when there is evidence against it. To put it simply, evidence does not immediately affect feelings. If you are angry or very sad and you are told not to be and given a number of good reasons why you shouldn’t be, these reasons will not immediately lead to an alteration of your emotional state. In the areas where one finds deep disagreement, the beliefs held are ones where one’s feeling of their truth is very intense, and so it is not surprising that it would be difficult to alter such beliefs. Recent empirical work shows how, if one’s belief is seen as centrally connected to one’s identity, even if there is overwhelming evidence *against* the belief, it remains resilient. These studies suggest that the way to get people to be open to changing their beliefs is to begin by finding ways to make them more secure and less defended so that the presentation of facts does not feel like an assault on who they are.[[31]](#footnote-31)

While the account of belief I am defending can explain why recognizing deep expert disagreement does not dislodge beliefs, can it offer a recommendation or assessment of the position one *should* take in these cases? Again, it makes assessment more complicated, but I think similar kinds of considerations hold as when discussing matters of trust and faith. It could be that, in this domain, what one finds is a question of when to trust yourself. If there is overwhelming evidence that your belief is false, this is a reason to question whether the feeling of truth you have is well-based. If you continue to hang on to the belief, ignoring the evidence against you, you are believing badly. But again, if the evidence is neutral, as we are supposing it is in matters of deep disagreement, then the fact that the belief is one central to your social identity may well provide you with good enough reason to believe it.

Building on our discussion of recalcitrant beliefs, we can see how thinking of belief as emotion may also help dispel some of the puzzles related to self-deception. Thinking back to matters of trust, even if not all the reasons to trust are evidential, when the evidence that your spouse has been unfaithful, or that your child is a drug dealer, mounts high enough, we may call someone who continues to believe against the evidence “self-deceived.” The notion of self-deception has led to many philosophical puzzles. If self-deception is anything like other-deception then I must both hold the warranted belief, for example that my child is a drug dealer, and the unwarranted one that he is not. As in the case of delusions, as well as Gendler’s “alief” examples, what often leads us to say that someone is self-deceived is that their behavior is at odds with the belief they avow. For example, I believe my spouse is faithful and yet find myself tempted to look at his emails. I may even have a story that I believe about why I have such a temptation which has nothing to do with fidelity, but, someone looking at my behavior, would conclude that I do not actually believe as I say I do.

A common response to this puzzle is to deny that one of the attitudes -- either the welcome, unwarranted one or the unwelcome, warranted one--is actually a belief. As is the case with the recalcitrant beliefs discussed above, there are different candidate suggestions for what these belief-like states *really* are. Again, one can see the pressure to do so if one holds on to the traditional assumptions that beliefs are particularly sensitive to evidence, and guide behavior in a predictable way. While I do not have the space here for a full treatment of the problem of self-deception, thinking about what it is like to have other conflicting emotions can help in understanding the phenomenon if beliefs are indeed emotions. I can both love and hate my father. Or, if we want to think about an example that can be expressed about the same proposition: I can feel sad that my 90-year old mother who has lived a full, rich life but has been suffering is about to die and happy that she is about to die. Tension will accompany these conflicting emotions just as it accompanies the self-deceived agent. And it may well be the case that I will disavow one of the emotions much of the time, though my behavior will reveal that both are there.

**4. Do epistemologists have good reasons to have a more restricted view of belief?**

If beliefs are emotions then all the “non-standard” cases of “holding true” are cases of belief, but they are not all equally rational. If we accept that beliefs are not purely cognitive, assessing them becomes more complex. Emotions are not beyond assessment; we can say, for example, that one’s anger is not rational or is inappropriate, but the criteria of assessment are complicated. Once we think of beliefs as emotions, we will also need to recognize that the criteria of assessment for beliefs goes beyond the narrow view of justification usually appealed to in philosophical contexts. But one may object that the kind of state of interest to epistemologists is indeed a more narrow one, and so even if these cases of “holding true” are beliefs, they are not the kinds of beliefs relevant to the epistemologist.

A number of theorists have recognized that “belief” refers to mental states beyond the one picked out by the purely cognitivist account. Here are two representative quotations of such a view:

“The term “belief” is ambiguous to an extraordinary extent…To me, this is reason to abandon the search for a unified account…We should give up the search for a comprehensive theory of belief and embrace pluralism more willingly, indulge in it more promiscuously. (Klausen 2012)

I thus claim to have distinguished six kinds of belief, or - for those who prefer to put it this way, six different kinds of belief-like mental states to replace the messy folk concept of belief from which we started. Am I thus eliminating folk psychology, or proposing an improvement with it? Some may say that belief is not a genus with six species, but a disparate bundle tied loosely together by family resemblances. (Stevenson, 2002)

Such considerations have led some to think the term and concept “belief” as used in ordinary practice is so messy and confused that it would be better for philosophers to shift focus away from it. This suggestion comes in a number of forms. I think some of the motivation for “knowledge first” epistemology stems from this idea. A dominant view in epistemology has been that to understand the nature of knowledge we should think about what ingredients must be added to belief such that the conditions of knowledge are met. This view may be misguided if the initial ingredient is itself so elusive. Instead, perhaps we should begin with a state that is less ambiguous, namely knowledge, a state that is “factive” and then we could understand belief in terms of “botched knowledge” if it fails to attain this factive state. I also think the idea that we should shift from a belief-focused epistemology to one that is credence-based stems partly from a desire for more precision that can be offered when dealing with the vagaries of belief.[[32]](#footnote-32)

But rather than give up on belief completely, the more usual reaction to the recognition that there are many states beyond the one traditionally picked out by epistemologists that should be called belief, is to conclude that only a specific *kind* of belief is of central philosophical, and especially epistemological, interest. This approach allows one to explain away problem cases by saying that these are referring to another kind of belief, one that is not of *our* concern. One motivation for such a restriction could be the idea that epistemologists are concerned with the kinds of beliefs that can be knowledge, and that some of the problematic cases I have discussed, concern states that could never meet the epistemic standards needed for knowledge. Ernest Sosa, for example, distinguishes between beliefs that are *epistemic* and those that are not. Sosa allows that one can be motivated to believe for practical reasons and that, all things considered, it can be rational to do so. Still he thinks it makes sense to say that “a belief can be *epistemically irrational* though rational all things considered” (2010, 34), and perhaps this is what he would say about some of the cases of non-evidentially based believing I have discussed. The idea then could be that epistemology is interested in *epistemic* rationality and so that explains why the focus is kept on a particular subset of beliefs. Sosa says that he is interested in a particular kind of belief: “When we say that knowledge is apt belief, therefore, we must understand this as belief of a certain sort.  Only beliefs in the endeavor to attain truth will qualify.” (2010, 17)

There is nothing wrong with focusing inquiry on a particular category of belief and asking some very specific questions about that category. One may, for example, focus inquiry on testimony-based belief, or moral beliefs, or perceptual beliefs. But what Sosa is suggesting is different, and it is less clear what species of belief he has in mind when he refers to some beliefs as *epistemic* and some as not. Why would a belief that was based partly on practical or moral reasons cease to be epistemic?[[33]](#footnote-33) If one came to view such a belief as false one would cease to believe it and, if it were false and one thought it true, it would still be a faulty belief. Further, we should be aware of what the potential implications are of removing a class of beliefs from the domain of epistemic assessment. If epistemology focuses on some special sub-set, at the exclusion of delusions, biased beliefs, religious faith -- if these are not proper subjects of epistemic evaluation -- then many other intuitively irrational and unjustified beliefs, such as those based on wishful thinking will also be excluded. But something has gone wrong if epistemology is no longer concerned with investigating and evaluating such beliefs.

Even if a coherent species of belief could be distinguished here, one thing to notice is that very few discussions about questions related to which beliefs are rational or justified are clear that these terms are being circumscribed or that the concern is only about a particular sub-set of beliefs. And more importantly, most theorists view epistemology as normative. A lot of recent work in epistemology has focused on questions related to epistemic agency, responsibility and normativity. But the more narrow the focus, the less clear becomes the sense in which it is normative. Normative ethics focuses on questions of how we ought to act, and the scope of actions with which it is concerned is very broad. Analogously, if epistemology is normative it should focus on questions of how we ought to believe, where the scope of beliefs with which it is concerned is also very broad.

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1. In thinking about how to characterize belief, David Velleman makes this point. Other attitudes, he says, regard their propositions as true (or *accept* them in his terms) and so the difference must be explained in terms of the different purposes of the acceptances. Believing, he says, is acceptance “with the aim of so regarding it only if it really is. Thus, to believe a proposition is to accept it with the aim of thereby accepting a truth” (2000, 251). In what follows, I will use Velleman’s account as one example of an overly restrictive view of belief. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. David Hunter (ms.) has recently argued that if beliefs are states, we should resist saying they are true or false as they have no semantic properties. While I think Hunter is right to push for clarification here, when philosophers, and most of us most of time, talk about beliefs being true, they usually mean the content of what is believed. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Those who are sometimes called conservatives about “cognitive phenomenology” hold this view. See Bayne and Montague (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Eric Schwitzgebel’s entry in The Stanford Encyclopedia on “belief” begins by saying “Contemporary analytic philosophers of mind generally use the term ‘belief’ to refer to the attitude we have, roughly, whenever we take something to be the case or regard it as true.” But as mentioned such a definition is too broad. As the entry elaborates on the question of what it means to believe something, and different theories are canvassed, one finds the core ideas of what I have here termed the “cognitivist view” repeatedly surfacing. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For an illuminating discussion of these problematic states see: Bayne, T. and Hattiangadi, A. (2013). They refer to the category of “quasi-beliefs” as those which “are belief-like in some respect but not all respects” and that “fail to fully conform to the functional role characteristic of belief” (125); these are seen as “bedfellows” of belief, and the challenge is to explain what is going on in these cases. This is what they call “the bedfellow challenge.” They canvass and criticize a number of strategies for accounting for such states and conclude that even if some of these accounts can help make sense of how these states play causal roles in behavior, they rightfully point out: “Talk of belief is not only in the business of providing causal explanations of behaviour, it is also – and perhaps even more fundamentally – in the business of making ourselves intelligible to each other as rational creatures. And from this perspective the bedfellow challenge emerges as deeply problematic, for we don’t know how to think of rationality when it comes to the borderlands of belief” (140-141). Schwitzgebel (2010) also critiques a number of ways of addressing some of these problematic cases, and argues that they should be understood as examples of vague or “in-between” beliefs “where careful description of the subject’s mental state requires refraining from either ascribing or denying belief” (533). Bayne and Hattiangadi point out that it is unclear “how the fuzzy conception of belief might accommodate the rational dimensions of belief-talk.” (140) Part of Schwitzgebel’s point, I take it, is that in such cases we cannot easily and decisively say whether one’s belief or behavior is irrational but need to acknowledge the complexity and, at times, messiness of our mental lives. I will argue that if we think of beliefs as emotions then we capture these elements of complexity, but it also offers us a model to think about belief’s rationality; we should assess beliefs’ rationality as we do emotions. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Describing the nature of this component is difficult, but I will attempt to say more about it below. Jonathan Cohen has argued that what distinguishes belief from acceptance is that when one believes something one “feels” it true in a way that one does not if one only accepts it. I want to take seriously the idea that beliefs involve such “credal feelings.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Some suggest that we think of desires as having a “belief-like component.” Alex Gregory (2017) has recently argued that “to desire to is to believe that you have normative reason to ” According to Gregory, we should think of desires (at least desires to act) as having both a representational aspect that is evidence-sensitive, as well as a motivational aspect, and we use the words “desire” or “belief” depending on which aspect of the state we are focusing on. Other discussions which focus on desire as representations of goodness, as well as appropriate conditions for desire, are found in Hazlett (ms) and Oddie (2005). I take it one of the main lessons of these discussions, and I see the account I am presenting here being put forth in a similar spirit, is that the strict divisions and categories of “cognitive,” “conative” and “affective” can often do more to obfuscate rather than clarify. Schwitzgebel (2013) makes a similar point when discussing how best to think of attitudes. He argues that “we can treat the stereotypes associated with these somewhat different attitudes as largely overlapping, though with different centers and peripheries. Believing and desiring and valuing would seem on the surface to be very different attitude types, and are often treated as such – beliefs are ‘cognitive’, desires ‘conative’, they have different ‘directions of fit’, etc.” but, Schwitzgebel considers cases where “the particular belief, desire, and valuation seem only subtly different”(90). The account I propose shares some features in common with Schwitzgebel’s view, perhaps most significantly the idea that an account of belief should not deviate too far from our actual belief-ascribing practices. My concern about his account is that it is entirely dispositional. While he thinks the dispositional profile of belief goes beyond a disposition to *act*, and so it not vulnerable to the same criticisms as purely behaviorist accounts, I still think it is difficult on his view to make sense of there being “something that it is like” to be in a state of believing and I would prefer to not entirely eschew there being a phenomenology of attitudes, or the idea that they could be viewed as mental representations. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For a helpful discussion of the difficulty of defining delusions and the differences between different kinds of delusions, see Lisa Bortolotti’s (2010) introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This is how DSM-5 defines delusions. It also refers to them as “beliefs,” but many philosophers dispute this categorization. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. What has come to be called “non-doxasticism” about delusions is widespread though there is disagreement concerning how to categorize the non-belief state that characterizes delusions. Greg Currie (2000), for example, argues that many delusions are better understood as imaginings that one mistakes as beliefs, he says they would “sometimes be better described as a delusional metabelief based on a cognitive hallucination”; one misrepresents imaginings as beliefs. His main reason for thinking they are not beliefs is because they fail to play the role that beliefs play in action and they are not evidence-sensitive. Andy Egan (2009) argues that to make sense of delusions we need to introduce a new mental state called “bimagination” which should be understood as “something *in between* paradigmatic belief and paradigmatic imagination – that delusional subjects are in states that play a role in their cognitive economies that is in some respects like that of a standard–issue, stereotypical belief that P and in other respects like that of a standard-issue, stereotypical imagining that P.” Part of what I will be urging is that what is often thought of as paradigmatic believing is actually a restrictive subset of the stereotype. Richard Dub (2015) has argued that delusions should be classified as acceptances based on a certain kind of affective state. Again, one of the main features Dub identifies that reveals delusions are not beliefs is that they are unresponsive to evidence. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In a discussion defending her view that most delusions should be seen as beliefs, Bortolotti (2011) points out that both their unrevisable nature, as well as their discontinuity with behavior, is often exaggerated by those who deny them belief status. She says, “Delusions are typically resistant to counterevidence, more so than ordinary beliefs, but it is probably an exaggeration to say that ‘normal reality testing is powerless against delusions.’ Three sources of information recommend caution: the consideration of clinical case studies; the evidence on the effectiveness of cognitive probing (often in the context of cognitive behavioural therapy) in the treatment of delusions; and the reports of people who successfully manage their delusions.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I argue elsewhere that one finds a similar conflation in the accounts of Jonathan Adler, Nishi Shah, and Ralph Wedgewood. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This example is from Tamar Gendler, “Alief and Belief,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, 634-663. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Gendler, 647. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For an extended discussion about how, at times, the beliefs formed by a disinterested bookie can, and should, deviate from someone more partial, see Marušić (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See, for example Katherine Hawley (2014), especially 2030-31. She largely bases her discussion on Holton (1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Paul Faulkner (2011) argues that it is often the case that we believe what people say (and are warranted in so doing) *because* we trust them and that this kind of trust is often not based on the evidence which would allow us to predict that one would tell the truth. Faulkner distinguishes this kind of “predictive” trust (which seems to map on to what I have called mere reliance) from “affective” trust which is based on what we normatively expect of one another and allows for the appropriateness of reactive attitudes such as resentment and disappointment. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Hawley, as well as Guy Longworth (2016) which I discuss below. Allan Hazlett (2017) makes a similar distinction in discussing the possibility of beliefs that manifest loyalty, and whether such intellectual loyalty can be a virtue. If one’s beliefs are such that one refuses to consider evidence to the contrary then they would not manifest any virtue, but Hazlett suggests one can believe for reasons of loyalty while still maintaining open-mindedness. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Berislav Marušić (2015, chapter 7) argues that we should see trust as a kind of belief, but that “trusting belief” is different from evidential belief because the reasons for trusting are different in the case of trust. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. We sometimes even talk about having “faith” in someone to mean we trust him. Longworth’s discussion of trust alluded to above builds on Kant’s account of “moral faith.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. It is possible that belief in some philosophical theories would count as “religious” in this wide sense. David Kiloren (2015) has argued that robust moral realism should be viewed as religion, but he thinks this is not a reason to reject it, and that it more defensible than most other religions. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. While some, most notably, the “Reformed epistemologists” (Plantinga, Wolterstorff, 1983) have defended the rationality of religious beliefs despite their failing to be based on evidence, others have suggested that faith be thought of as quite different from belief and so should not be evaluated in the same way; having faith that something is the case, it is argued, can be rational even if belief is not. This is, for example, Robert Audi’s position. Audi (1991, 2008) argues that there is a kind of propositional faith that does not entail belief which he calls “fiducial faith.” His two main reasons for distinguishing between these states are first, that faith includes a positive attitudinal element that belief need not, and second, that faith is compatible with a higher degree of doubt than is belief. This attitude is not simply a cognitive or intellectual state which is what a belief is, according to Audi who accepts the cognitive conception. For similar reasons, William Alston (1996) thinks many attitudes of religious faith should be classified as “acceptances” rather than “beliefs.” Neil Van Leeuwen (2014) has argued for a similar conclusion, that we should view the attitudes of factual belief and religious credence as different cognitive attitudes and, again this is because “religious cognitive attitudes lack the defining characteristics of factual beliefs (2).” One such defining characteristic is that they are evidentially vulnerable.

    As in the cases of trust discussed above (and for Audi these attitudes are very similar) one of the main motivations for carving out a category of non-doxastic propositional faith is to have a way of maintaining its rationality. Holding a belief when one’s evidence is inconclusive is deemed by many to be irrational or impermissible and so to make room for faith or trust being rational or permissible, it is suggested that these attitudes are not beliefs. The other option, which I am urging, is that we see these examples as exposing that belief is not purely intellectual or cognitive. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The latter proposition is the one specified by Alvin Plantinga when defending the rationality of religious belief. Elsewhere, I critique his arguments and discuss further how one can distinguish between the permissibility of different religious beliefs. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For an overview of the literature and for some ways in which these components are described see; de Sousa, Ronald, "Emotion", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/emotion/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Brady may overstate what is required for irrationality. That one is inclined (in some sense) to assent to the appearance that the stick is bent in the water when one knows it is straight, is not irrational. Still, even such inclinations create a kind of tension, and take some work to resist. That such inclinations can at times be so strong that they are given in to, even when one sees they are not based on good reasons, is all that matters for my account of belief. I elaborate some on this kind of case further below. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. It may seem that proponents of cognitive phenomenology would be helpful to me. But this is not clearly the case. What is at stake and where disagreement lies concerning this issue is complex and varied. One central question is whether there is a distinctive kind of phenomenology that is *cognitive* rather than sensory, perceptual or affective. That is not my concern here as I am not claiming that the phenomenal element in belief is different in kind than that found in emotions. There are those who argue that there is a distinct “what it’s like-ness” to believing that differs from what it’s like to remember, or doubt and that we can discover its distinct character if we “pay attention.” I agree with this. Many, however, deny that it feels like anything even when attentively introspecting to what beliefs feel like. I think this is right as well; introspection is not always a sufficient tool to access our feelings. Hume draws our attention to “calm passions” which “are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation” among which he includes “love of life.” If I introspect right now, can I discover what it feels like to want to remain alive? Perhaps, but it won’t happen easily or immediately. However, if my life is under threat, the feeling will intensify. And the same is true, I contend, when my belief is under threat. For an overview of the central debates of concern surrounding cognitive phenomenology, see Bayne and Montague (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Jonathan Adler (2002)’s discussion, especially pp. 26-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monty\_Hall\_problem [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The widely discussed phenomenon of “motivated belief” or “motivationally biased belief” points out how emotions can lead one to believe in certain ways, for example, by leading one to attend to certain evidence and not others. This is the prevalent way of understanding self-deception. See, for example Mele (2000). On such a view belief can be infected by emotions in certain ways that will lead away from rationality. On my view a belief-state is an emotion and so to evaluate the appropriateness of belief we have to think, not only about whether the evidence supports the truth of the proposition believed, but also about the more complex question of whether the affective endorsement allows the belief to serve the more complex role that beliefs seem to fulfill over and above representing truth, the role of navigation, coherence and agential flourishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. J. Adam Carter (forthcoming) offers an illuminating discussion of this view as well as a (qualified) defense of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. For an overview of some of these studies, see <http://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/i-dont-want-to-be-right> [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Weisberg (forthcoming) discusses a number of ways one may want to reduce belief states to credence states and cites the following of examples of reductionists: Christensen (2004), Foley (1993) or Sturgeon (2008) and Stalnaker (1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Michael Pace (2011) offers a convincing argument for why moral considerations concerning what to believe should sometimes be thought of as epistemic. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)