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BELIEF IN CHARACTER STUDIES

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Abstract: *In* Go Set a Watchman, *Harper Lee reveals that American man of integrity Atticus Finch harbors deep-seated racist beliefs. Bob Ewell, Finch's nemesis in* To Kill a Mockingbird, *harbors the same beliefs. But the two men live out their shared racist beliefs in dramatically different fashions. This article argues that extant dispositionalist accounts of belief lack the tools to accommodate Finch and Ewell's divergent styles of believing. It then draws on literary and philosophical character studies to construct the required tools.*

Apocryphally, a journalist once asked Gilbert Ryle if he ever spared time to read novels. Ryle's response? "Oh yes. All six, every year."

Contrary to the journalist's suggestion, Ryle's time spent reading Jane Austen was not time spent away from doing philosophy; he found that Austen wrote character studies "partly from a deep interest in some perfectly general, even theoretical questions about human nature and human conduct." For example, she wrote *Pride and Prejudice* "from an interest in the quite general question what sorts and degrees of pride do, and what sorts and degrees of pride do not go with right thinking and right acting." Ryle argued that Austen's novels delivered properly Aristotelian answers to such questions, while eschewing the style of Aristotelian philosophy. Despite Aristotle's insistence on the unity of the virtues, his successors like Theophrastus took ethical questions one at a time, and in the abstract. What is it to believe that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife? Theophrastus would respond by reflecting on that belief alone, abstracted from the particular ways in which different believers hold the belief, so as to provide a candidate general analysis. "In contrast," Ryle wrote that "Jane Austen's technique is the method of the vintner. She pin-points the exact quality of character in which she is interested, and the exact degree of that quality, by matching it against the same quality in different degrees, against simulations of that quality, against deficiencies of it and against qualities which, though different, are brothers or cousins of that selected quality." Ryle went on to specify how the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are different inside the same genus: all proud, but possessed of diverse styles of pride.

> Thus in *Pride and Prejudice* almost every character exhibits too much or too little pride, pride of a bad or silly sort or pride of a good sort, sham pride or genuine pride and so forth. Elizabeth Bennet combines a dangerous cocksureness in her assessments of people with a proper sense of her own worth … Mr Bennet has genuine pride. He does despise the despicable. But it is inert, unexecutive pride. He voices his just contempt in witty words, but he does nothing to prevent or repair what he condemns. It is the pride of a mere don, though a good don … Darcy is, to start with, haughty and snobbish, a true nephew of Lady Catherine de Burgh. His early love for Elizabeth is vitiated with condescension. He reforms into a man with pride of the right sort. He is proud to be able to help Elizabeth and her socially embarrassing family. He now knows what is due from

> him as well as what is due to him. Mr Collins is the incarnation of vacuous complacency. He glories in what are mere reflections from the rank of his titled patroness and from his own status as a clergyman. He is a soap-bubble with nothing at all inside him and only bulging refractions from other things on his rotund surface.[1]

Pride and Prejudice imparts no general analysis of either pride or prejudice, but Ryle argued that it does, nevertheless, provide the reader with theoretical insight into the nature of these character traits. Austen demonstrates that there are many degrees and varieties of pride, and that these varieties interact in subtle—albeit extravagantly comedic and dramatic—ways. Merely to attribute pride is to explain very little about someone. However, to attribute genuine but inert, unexecutive pride to Mr. Bennett explains much about what sort of man Elizabeth Bennett has for a father.

Ryle went on to analyze all the major characters in Austen's novels, illuminating how "Austen dispenses with the sacred Siamese-cows, Reason-Passion, Virtue-Vice, Spirit-Flesh, Saint-Sinner, Salvation-Damnation, etc. People differ in all shades and hues of all colours."[2] Erstwhile, in *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle invoked this practice of Austen's to articulate what he thought the behaviorists got right about human psychology: "Novelists, dramatists and biographers had always been satisfied to exhibit people's motives, thoughts, perturbations and habits by describing their doings, sayings, and imaginings, their grimaces, gestures and tones of voice. In concentrating on what Jane Austen concentrated on, [behaviorist] psychologists began to find that these were, after all, the stuff and not the mere trappings of their subjects."[3] Like the behaviorists, Ryle resolutely refused to identify the mental—people's motives, thoughts, perturbations, and habits—with anything underlying the thick, personal level which fascinated his favorite novelist.

Ryle instead characterized mental phenomena such as beliefs as "multi-track dispositions"—patterns of tendencies to behave, think, and feel—"the exercises of which are indefinitely heterogeneous." He illustrated this heterogeneity by pointing out that "when Jane Austen wished to show the specific kind of pride which characterised the heroine of 'Pride and Prejudice', she had to represent her actions, words, thoughts and feelings in a thousand different situations. There is no one standard type of action or reaction such that Jane Austen could say 'My heroine's kind of pride was just the tendency to do this, whenever a situation of that sort arose'." In arguing that this goes for belief as much as pride, Ryle famously meant to refute 'intellectualism': the view that a belief consists solely in the "one-track intellectual process" of (being disposed to) assent to a proposition '*p*' (*CM*, p. 44). Especially when read in the light of his later writings on Austen, it seems that Ryle was simultaneously suggesting that different people can have the same belief in different ways. Just as most characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are prideful, but prideful in different ways, so too do most believers that *p* have different styles of believing that *p*.

A philosophical account of belief (and other objects of folk psychology) must have the tools to account for how folks conceive of people as "different inside the same genus"—as matching the same pattern in different respects. In this article, I construct those tools out of materials provided by character studies.

I.

Following Ryle, several philosophers defending roughly Rylean views of belief have remarked on the fact that different people can hold the same belief in different ways. As a rule, they have also followed Ryle in avoiding providing details about what people who believe that *p* in diverse manners all have in common. Thus, Daniel Dennett takes all believers that *p* to match the same real pattern despite immense diversity in how they match that pattern. But he gives no analysis of real patterns that sheds light on how this is possible, instead contenting himself with the fact that "ordinary folk psychologists have no difficulty imputing such useful but elusive commonalities to people."[4] Lynne Rudder Baker, meanwhile, admits the possibility that two believers that *p* have absolutely nothing in common other than the "irreducible fact" that they both believe that *p*.[5]

Eric Schwitzgebel is an exception to this rule. Like Ryle, Schwitzgebel explicitly analogizes beliefs to character traits. To be brave is to be disposed to act in ways that people stereotypically associate with bravery. Likewise, Schwitzgebel claims that "to believe that *p* … is nothing more than to match to an appropriate degree and in appropriate respects the dispositional stereotype for believing that *p*." The key notion here is that of a "dispositional stereotype." A stereotype is "a cluster of properties we are apt to associate with a thing, a class of things, or a property." Thus, a dispositional stereotype for believing that *p* is a cluster of behavioral, phenomenal, and cognitive tendencies that an interpreter would be apt to associate with the belief that *p*. Schwitzgebel argues that which respects and degrees of match to a dispositional stereotype are to count as "appropriate"—and thus as sufficient to ground belief—"will vary contextually and so be left to the ascriber's judgement."[6]

Schwitzgebel tells the story of Juliet, an implicitly racist academic who "coherently, sincerely, and vehemently" argues against the notion of racial differences in intelligence, yet "is systematically racist in most of her spontaneous reactions, her unguarded behavior, and her judgments about particular cases."[7] Does Juliet believe black people are intellectually inferior to white people? Philosophers have variously answered 'yes, but…',[8] 'no, but…',[9] and 'sometimes'.[10] Schwitzgebel, in contrast, points out that belief is a continuous phenomenon, not an all-or-nothing affair. It seems wrong to ascribe to Juliet either the same racist belief as a white supremacist or the same anti-racist belief as her fellow activists, whose behavior more consistently matches their avowed beliefs in intellectual equality. Instead, Schwitzgebel diagnoses Juliet as being in a state of "in-between believing". What does Juliet really believe? Here is the messy fact of the matter: Juliet matches the dispositional stereotype for believing that black people are intellectually inferior to white people to some degree and in some respects, and she matches the dispositional stereotype for believing that all races are intellectually equal to some degree and in other respects. Juliet lives in-between racism and anti-racism. In some contexts of ascription, it is appropriate to ascribe to Juliet the belief that black people are intellectually inferior. For example, it might be appropriate to ascribe this belief to her when conducting a review of her teaching and grading practices. In other contexts—while she is pontificating about the literature on racial differences and intelligence, for instance—it might not be appropriate to ascribe that belief to her. Finally, considered in general, abstracted from any particular context of ascription, the only determinate answer to the question 'does Juliet believe that black people are intellectually inferior to white people?' is 'sort of'.

II.

In order to deal with cases of dissonance between professed beliefs and behavior, Schwitzgebel treats beliefs like character traits. Just as the atheist in the foxhole can be sort of brave—that is, can match a model for bravery to certain incomplete degrees and in certain incomplete respects—she can sort of believe in God. But as Ryle and Austen knew, character traits have another, related feature. There are degrees of pride. But there are also different *styles* of pride. In order to complete the analogy with character traits, Schwitzgebel's conceptual machinery must be improved to account not only for in-between beliefs, but also for the wide array of styles in which different people—who all fully believe that *p*—think, feel, and behave as if *p*. Consider a case from literature.

Atticus Finch, American man of integrity, has been impeached. He is a racist.[11] In *Go Set a Watchman*, Harper Lee's first pass at the setting, characters, and themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus makes his racist beliefs explicit.[12] Defending his leadership role in White Citizens' Councils opposing the activism of the NAACP, Atticus asks Scout, "do you want Negroes by the carload in our schools and churches and theaters? Do you want them in our world? … Do you want your children going to a school that's been dragged down to accommodate Negro children?" Atticus does not desire these things, because he believes that "white is white and black's black." "So far," he says, "I've not yet heard an argument that has convinced me otherwise." He chastises Scout for not sharing this belief. "Honey, you do not seem to understand that the Negroes down here are still in their childhood as a people. You should know it, you've seen it all your life."[13]

Atticus—indisputably, if *Watchman* is canonical—believes that black people are intellectually inferior to white people. But he does not believe it in the same brute style as Bob Ewell, the villain of *Mockingbird*. Whereas Ewell's racism is crass, dehumanizing, and hateful, Atticus's racism is studied, condescending, and paternalistic. While both men sincerely and explicitly believe in the intellectual inferiority of black people, they live out this belief in dramatically different styles.

Juliet also believes that black people are intellectually inferior to white people, insofar as she does believe it, in a dramatically different fashion than Bob Ewell. Unlike Juliet, however, Atticus Finch would be poorly described as merely in-between believing that black people are intellectually inferior to white people. Atticus's bias is not an implicit bias. He severally explicitly avows the belief that black people are intellectually inferior to white people, and his actions with the Maycomb Citizens' Councils speak even louder than his words.

Nevertheless, Atticus and Ewell are disposed to behave, think, and feel very differently from each other, even in accordance with their shared belief. Ewell is disposed to mutter (and sometimes scream) racial slurs whenever a black person does something he thinks is stupid. Atticus does not swear in public, and never uses nasty slurs. He even, famously, has some of the dispositions stereotypically associated with being anti-racist: he cherishes and trusts his housekeeper Calpurnia, he works hard to defend his client Tom Robinson, he raises his children to treat people of all races with respect. Nevertheless, he is disposed to engage in political battles against integration in Alabama schools. And, again, if somebody just sits down and asks him, he will sincerely tell them he thinks black people are intellectually inferior to white people.

Some of the difference in style of belief between Atticus and Ewell can be chalked up to

the fact that they believe for different reasons. Atticus believes that black people are intellectually inferior to white people at least in part because he thinks that they are culturally inferior. Ewell, on the other hand, thinks that black people are naturally inferior to white people. These differences in reasons yield further differences in dispositions. For example, Atticus might be disposed to allow that black culture in the United States could mature to the point where it would be reasonable to integrate American schools. Ewell, on the other hand, is disposed to vehemently deny this possibility, and to assert that God made black people, like nonhuman animals, naturally inferior to white people.

The question is: how is it that people who explicitly believe the very same proposition can be disposed to think, feel, act, and react, in accordance with their shared belief, but in such strikingly different manners?

Although this puzzle appears in starkest relief with respect to multifarious and vexed beliefs (such as racist attitudes), it can also appear with respect to simple and mundane beliefs of the variety that usually feature in philosophers' toy cases. Consider this: I put a bottle of Soylent in my refrigerator before writing this paragraph (on August 13th, 2020). I have presumably led everyone reading this passage to form the same belief, and even to form that belief in the same way. Every reader now believes, on the basis of my testimony, that there was a bottle of Soylent in my fridge at the time of this writing. But readers likely also have a wide range of experience with, knowledge of, and interest in Soylent.

Imagine that a trusting reader named Marie had never heard of Soylent before. Because she trusts me, Marie does now believe, of Soylent, that there is some in my fridge. She has inferred some things about Soylent from the facts that is refrigerateable, comes in a bottle, and is called 'Soylent'—she hazily recalls something about a Harry Harrison novel, and something about Charlton Heston (or is it Clint Eastwood?), but cannot remember the exact connection between the novel and the actor. That is all she has to work with.

Now imagine that another reader, Patrick, is wild about Soylent. He prefers its pancake batterlike taste to that of any other drink. He feels ten years younger since he replaced his diet with it wholesale. When somebody mentions that there might be even more Soylent to be acquired, his ears perk up. He has memorized the ingredient list of Soylent 2.0—the kind that comes in a bottle—and can explain exactly how it differs in make-up from Soylent Powder, Soylent Coffiest, and the Soylent Bar. He even has fond memories of making friends with the UPS delivery person, Greg, who makes sure his Soylent subscription arrives safe and sound every two weeks.

Patrick and Marie both believe that there is a bottle of Soylent in the fridge. We can veridically attribute that belief to both of them. But Patrick's belief is more interesting—associated with a much richer range of dispositions—than Marie's. Marie recently became disposed to answer 'yep' when asked if there was Soylent in my fridge, to be able to name the lone bottled beverage in a photo of the contents of my fridge dated August 13th, and so, boringly, on. Perhaps she also became disposed to think of the color green. Patrick gained a much richer set of dispositions, though he obtained the same belief as Marie for the same reason (they both accepted my testimony). Patrick became disposed to salivate when he thinks of my fridge, pay more attention to my arguments, answer '2.5' when asked how many grams of polyunsaturated fat I put in the fridge on August 13th, and vividly imagine sharing yet another cold, freshly refrigerated

bottle with Greg. Like Atticus and Ewell, Patrick and Marie have dramatically different styles of believing the very same thing.

III.

Psychofunctionalists—philosophers who identify beliefs with causally productive cogs in cognitive systems—have a straightforward way of solving the puzzle of styles of belief. They tend to specify the functional roles that individuate beliefs in terms of a disjunction of counterfactuals, varying with respect to the other possible mental states of believers. Thus, psychofunctionalists can take different believers' respective beliefs that *p* to be individuated in exactly the same (disjunctive, counterfactual) way—that is, to play the same (disjunctive, counterfactual) functional role in the believers' respective cognitive systems—and account for the differences between the two men in terms of their other attitudes. On this view, Atticus and Ewell do share the same belief in the intellectual inferiority of black people; this belief simply interacts with their other beliefs, desires, values, and memories in order to produce divergent behaviors. Similarly, the psychofunctionalist would diagnose Marie and Patrick as sharing the belief that there is a bottle of Soylent in the fridge, but differing in their other attitudes; Patrick alone strongly desires the pancake batterlike taste of Soylent. According to psychofunctionalism, then, believers do not believe that *p* differently; they think, feel, and behave as if *p* differently on account of how their shared belief interacts with other components of their cognitive systems.

Schwitzgebel does not have recourse to this kind of explanation of these cases, since, following Ryle, he rejects the assumption that beliefs are causally productive cogs in cognitive systems.[14] But Schwitzgebel could take a lesson from functionalism by building other mental attitudes into the activation conditions for the dispositions that divide believers. Indeed, some attitudes must be so built in. For example, many beliefs that *p* are partly constituted by the disposition to sincerely assert that p, and the activation conditions for that disposition include, among other things, the desire (or at least willingness) to let it be known that *p*.

Nevertheless, this pseudo-functionalist approach could only take a dispositionalist like Schwitzgebel so far, for two reasons.

First, there is no plausible sense in which Atticus is disposed to use racial slurs. He seems neither to possess—nor to be prone to come into possession of—any of the values and desires which would serve to activate such a hypothetical disposition. To say that Atticus is so disposed, but never triggers the activation conditions, would be to invite a slippery slope. Every human on earth could be said to be disposed to do everything within their capacities—if not everything humanly possible—were the activation conditions construed broadly enough.

Second, Schwitzgebel also gives a dispositional analysis of desires to let it be known that *p*. As it turns out, desires to let it be known that *p* are usually determined with respect to a dispositional stereotype that includes dispositions that also partly constitute beliefs that *p*. Schwitzgebel rightly explains that "one remarkable feature of stereotypes is that they overlap. The same dispositions can belong to more than one stereotype. Consequently, by virtue of satisfying one stereotype, a person can, for free, nearly match the dispositional stereotype for a closely related attitude."[15] For example, Atticus's belief that black people are intellectually inferior to white people is partly constituted by many of the dispositions that also constitute his desire for segregated schools. This overlapping of dispositional stereotypes means that the differences

between believers cannot be spelled out entirely in terms of differences in their other attitudes. On any Rylean understanding of the attitudes—which must be holistic if it is to avoid collapse—differences in believers' other attitudes are very often *ipso facto* differences in the dispositions that make up their beliefs themselves.

Both of these obstacles preventing Schwitzgebel from explaining styles of belief solely in terms of other attitudes derive their force from within a Rylean understanding of beliefs (and the dispositions that they comprise). In particular, both reasons hinge on the insight that the character of believers is molar, rather than molecular.[16] Character would be molecular if its components—habits, traits, attitudes, skills, memories, intelligence, imagination, and so on—could be understood independently of each other. However, as Ryle stressed, there is no clean way of carving up character. Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy are both prideful, but this does not mean they share the identical, detachable, molecular character trait of pride. On the contrary, their respective ways of being proud are thoroughly entrenched in their respective characters. Character is molar insofar as any given component of character can be fully understood only in light of the whole. Darcy's pride is properly labeled as 'belonging to Mr. Darcy' not just because the proprietor of Pemberley happens to be proud, but also because his style of pride inheres in his unique character. As Ryle wrote,

> Jane Austen's people [like real people] are, nearly always, alive all over, all through and all round, displaying admirably or amusingly or deplorably proportioned mixtures of all the colours that there are, save pure White and pure Black. If a Calvinist critic were to ask us whether Mr Collins was Hell-bound or Heaven-bent, we could not answer. The question does not apply. Mr Collins belongs to neither pole; he belongs to a very particular parish in the English Midlands. He is a stupid, complacent and inflated ass, but a Sinner? No. A Saint? No. He is just a ridiculous figure, that is, a figure for which the Calvinist ethical psychology does not cater ("JAM," p. 285).

Ryle's pertinent point is that Collins's particular attributes—his stupidity, complacency, and so on—cannot be fully understood except in light of his entire (ridiculous) character. The same goes for beliefs. Atticus's belief that black people are intellectually inferior to white people—his style of believing that proposition—is fully explicable only qua Atticus's belief, with all of Atticus's idiosyncrasy of character entailed. Correspondingly, beliefs are rarely the ultimate objects of folk psychological inquiry. People usually attribute beliefs to themselves and one another in order to better understand (or manipulate, praise, or sanction) whole believers. Readers of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman* are interested in the details of Atticus's racist belief, for instance, because it helps us understand Atticus himself.

This molar conception of character provides a clear heuristic (although no precise metric) for distinguishing the lack of a disposition from the existence of a disposition with chronically unfulfilled activation conditions. Believers have dispositions with chronically unfulfilled activation conditions insofar as they are the type of people who might fulfill—that is, insofar as they possess characters conducive to the fulfillment of—those activation conditions. Believers lack dispositions insofar as they are not that type of person: insofar as fulfilling the activation conditions would involve an attendant change in (or at least lapse of) character. Again, the

preceding is not a precise metric by which to decide whether somebody has a perpetually latent disposition or lacks that disposition. However, it is an intuitive heuristic by which one can veridically judge clear cases. Atticus lacks the disposition to use nasty slurs because he is not that kind of man. To fulfill the activation conditions for slurring would be to become a different kind of man. On the other hand, even though Atticus Finch has never reprimanded his daughter for dating a black man, *Watchman* provides solid evidence that he would do so if the activation conditions arose. Such an action would be (unfortunately but undeniably) in character. Thus, Atticus has the disposition to so act. Likewise, Patrick has the disposition, which Marie lacks, to imagine sharing a cold Soylent 2.0 with Greg, because he has the associated knowledge and memories. If Marie were to gain that knowledge and those memories, then her personality profile would be relevantly altered, and she would gain that disposition too.

Divergent dispositions are the stuff, and not the mere trappings, of our protagonists' respective beliefs. As Ryle wrote, "styles and procedures of people's activities *are* the way their minds work and are not merely imperfect reflections of the postulated secret processes which were supposed to be the workings of their minds … Overt intelligent performances are not clues to the workings of minds; they are those workings. Boswell described Johnson's mind when he described how he wrote, talked, ate, fidgeted and fumed" (*CM*, p. 58). It is not just the consequences of belief that must be analyzed relative to entire characters; it is the constitution of believing itself. From this perspective, it does no good to construe the tendency to use nasty racial slurs (given the appropriate activation conditions) as a perpetually unactivated component of Atticus's belief. His belief is a modification of his character, and his character is diametrically opposed to fulfilling the activation conditions for using nasty racial slurs. His character is nevertheless perfectly consonant with the (as yet unfulfilled) activation conditions for scolding his daughter for her romantic interest in a black man. The latter disposition is the stuff of his belief that black people are inferior to white people; the former is alien to him.

Thus, while Atticus differs from Ewell in some of his other attitudes, he also—by the very same token—differs from Ewell in his style of belief. Schwitzgebel has detailed one way in which believers can differ in their style of belief: they can differ in the degree to which they believe (not just in degree of confidence—credence, as the Bayesians would have it—but also in degree of fit to a dispositional stereotype). However, unlike Juliet, Atticus does not believe that black people are inferior to white people to any lesser degree than Ewell. Elizabeth Bennett is no less proud than Darcy, though she does possess a profoundly different style of pride. If pride, considered in general, is the trait of living as if one deserves respect, then Ms. Bennett and Mr. Darcy vary in the styles in which they are disposed to think, feel, and behave as if they deserve respect. Analogously, Atticus and Ewell vary in the styles in which they are disposed to think, feel, and behave as if black people are inferior to white people. Part of this difference in style of belief amounts to a difference in the other attitudes the two men possess. Nevertheless, for Ryleans who embrace the molar conception of believers as whole persons, this difference in other attitudes must also amount, equally, to a difference in the constitution of belief.

IV.

Schwitzgebel's conceptual machinery does not provide a satisfactory answer to the question of how to account for diversity in style of belief. Schwitzgebel posits a single general-

purpose stereotype for each belief, against which every potential believer is measured.[17] This stereotype does not comprise an exhaustive list of all the ways in which believers might act (or react) as if *p*. Instead, it comprises only those dispositions that a normal interpreter would be apt to associate with the belief that *p*. Every believer fits this stereotype more or less well. Thus, Schwitzgebel has a good answer to the question of how Atticus and Ewell can be said to share a racist belief: they both fit the relevant general-purpose stereotype well enough. But Schwitzgebel does not have a good answer to the question of how it is that they live out their respective beliefs in such dramatically different fashions.

It might be thought that Schwitzgebel covers this base by pointing out that believers diverge from dispositional stereotypes in certain respects, as well as to certain degrees. But respects of divergence do not do the trick. For starters, several of the dispositions that make up Atticus's particular style of believing—some of his well-meaning paternalistic tendencies, for instance—are not dispositions that a normal interpreter would be apt to associate with racism (unless they had somebody like Atticus in mind as an archetypical racist). Similarly, Patrick's disposition to imagine hanging out with his UPS delivery person is part and parcel of his belief that there is Soylent in the fridge: if somebody knows Patrick well, then they know that whenever he thinks about Soylent, he starts daydreaming about his buddy Greg. However, this idiosyncratic disposition of Patrick's will (rightfully) be nowhere to be found in Schwitzgebelian general-purpose stereotypes of the belief that there is Soylent in the fridge.

More abstractly, Schwitzgebel's general-purpose dispositional stereotypes lack the proper metaphorical shape to shed light on the particular styles in which different people believe that *p*.

<insert Figure 1 about here>

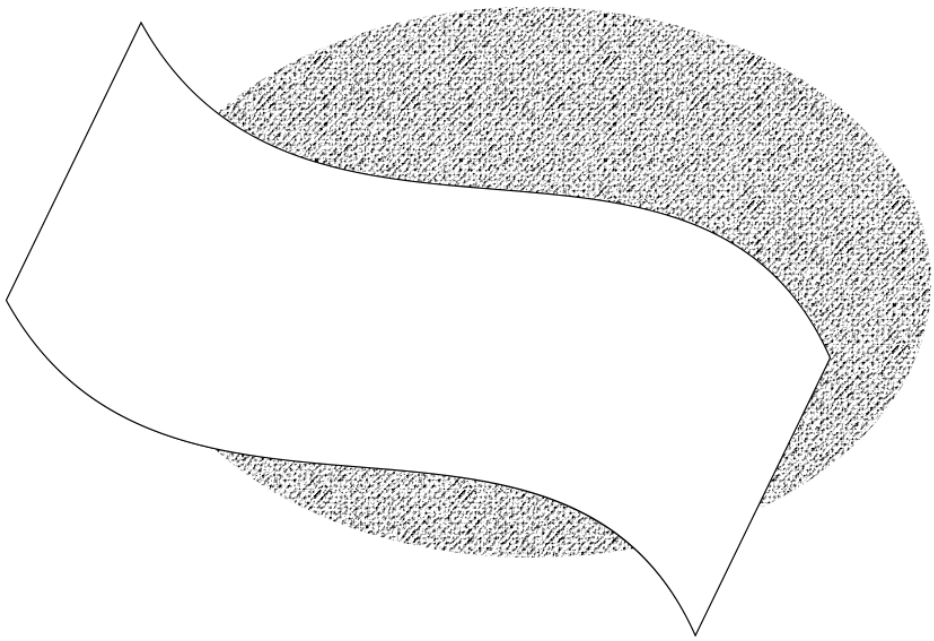

Figure 1. The shaded ovaloid represents a general-purpose stereotype for a belief. The blank ribbon represents a style of belief.

If the shaded ovaloid in Figure 1 represents the general-purpose stereotype for racism, and the blank ribbon represents Atticus's dispositions to think, feel, act, and react as if black people are intellectually inferior to white people, then it does not seem best to describe Atticus's belief just by saying how he conforms to and deviates from the general-purpose stereotype. In line with my point in the previous paragraph, the blank ribbon exceeds the boundaries of the shaded ovaloid in crucial respects. The blank ribbon also hangs together in its own unique way. Atticus's belief is not best defined by its relationship to the shaded ovaloid; it has its own structural integrity. There are many things to say about how Atticus harbors his racism that are not well captured by Schwitzgebel's language of fit to the general-purpose stereotype. This point holds even if the general-purpose stereotype in question is construed extremely broadly, as in Figure 2.

<insert Figure 2 about here>

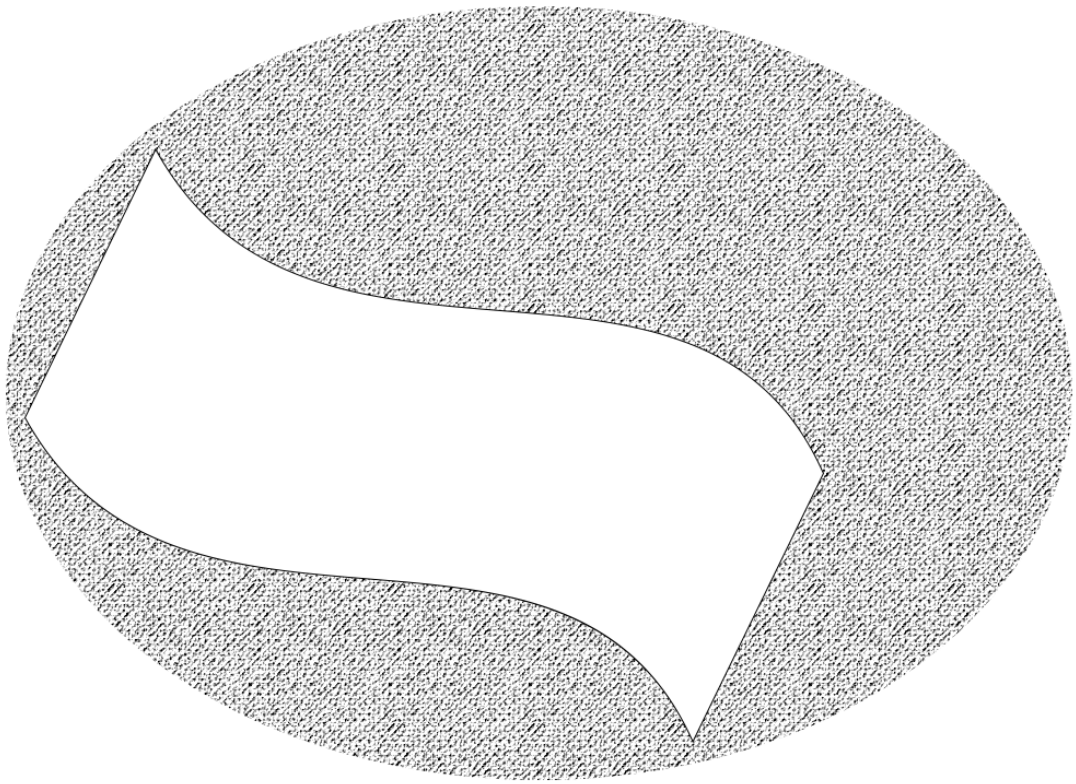

Figure 2. The shaded ovaloid represents an extremely broad general-purpose stereotype for a belief. The blank ribbon represents a style of belief.

Even if, against my expectations, the normal observer is apt to associate all sorts of weird (but possibly relevant) dispositions with racism, a measure of how much and in which respects Atticus deviates from their stereotype is not the best—or typical—way for attributors to come to understand Atticus's unique style of believing. Why, as lay belief attributors, would we ever construct such a fully general model of belief? And even if we did, why would we use it in order to pin down a style of believing?

Atticus's belief that black people are intellectually inferior to white people can be analyzed with regard to conformity and deviation from the general-purpose dispositional stereotype for

that belief; however, such an analysis is not the most informative way to come to understand the idiosyncrasies of his belief. Different dispositions are more central, and different dispositions more peripheral, to Atticus's belief than to the stereotypical racist belief. Moreover, unlike Juliet, Atticus does not somehow fall short of full belief insofar as he deviates from the general-purpose stereotype. The fact that he is in no way prone to uttering nasty racial slurs, for instance, does not reliably indicate that he is any closer to believing in the intellectual equality of the races than if he were prone to using such slurs.

General-purpose stereotypes are most effectively employed as initial tools for sizing up and categorizing believers. To achieve a serious practical understanding of any particular person as a believer, belief attributors must move beyond general-purpose stereotypes and, to paraphrase Ryle on Austen, pin-point the exact quality of the belief, and the exact degree of that quality, by matching it against the same quality in different degrees, against simulations of that quality, against deficiencies of it and against qualities which, though different, are brothers or cousins of that selected quality. Per the constraints of Schwitzgebel's machinery, the most informative answer to 'does Atticus believe that black people are inferior to white people?' is 'sort of', or perhaps 'yes, though he deviates from the stereotype to this degree and in these respects'. I disagree with Schwitzgebel that these are the most informative answers. 'Sort of' is just a stop-gap answer: an answer we give while still working with the blunt tool that is a general-purpose stereotype.

Schwitzgebel acknowledges that when we really want to understand somebody, we move beyond dispositional stereotypes and develop a description of the person's own idiosyncratic pattern of dispositions. However, Schwitzgebel claims that in such scenarios "belief language starts to break down; the simplifications and assumptions inherent in it aren't entirely met" ("AC," p. 535). When belief attribution via a general-purpose stereotype falls short of providing us with a fully satisfactory understanding of the believer, we must move past the attribution of belief—which, on Schwitzgebel's view, is just "shorthand" ("PDAB," p. 271) for the direct attribution of dispositions anyway—and try to get a direct grip on the messy dispositional details. Schwitzgebel writes that "once all the relevant dispositions have been made clear, the case is closed. There are no further facts to report" ("PDAB," 262).

In the years since Schwitzgebel first published his account of belief, several theorists have articulated a compelling new model-theoretic take on the dynamics of folk psychology.[18] Model-theoretic accounts of folk psychology vindicate Schwitzgebel's claim that belief attribution employs stereotypes—or models—to organize, and recognize patterns lurking among, swaths of believers' dispositions. But they also indicate that belief attribution is more powerful—and lay attributors' models of belief less rigid—than Schwitzgebel's conceptual machinery allows. By discussing only general-purpose stereotypes, on the one hand, and unorganized morasses of dispositions on the other, Schwitzgebel fails both to draw attention to the impressive flexibility inherent in human belief attribution practices and to capitalize on the fact that patterns of dispositions have interesting emergent properties over and above the properties of unstructured lists of dispositions. Contra Schwitzgebel, even if all of somebody's relevant behavioral, cognitive, and phenomenal dispositions have been made clear, the case is far from closed; the further facts to report are the beliefs themselves: the emergent and irreducible patterns of dispositions that are believers' idiosyncratic styles of living as if *p*.

According to model-theoretic accounts of folk psychology, there is a great deal of flexibility in the models of belief employed by people engaged in the folk psychological practice of belief attribution. Attributors' models of belief do serve to capture swaths of individual dispositions at once, but their core purpose is to detect real patterns that figure in molar characterizations of whole believers. In order to achieve this aim, belief attributors must construct and refine two broad varieties of model of belief: in addition to general-purpose stereotypes—which, as Peter Godfrey-Smith notes, provide attributors with "an understanding of a general structure or schematic pattern that can have many specific instantiations"—attributors construct models of how particular believers (in particular contexts) believe. These specialized models—some of which "are extremely fragmented and minimal, while others are rich and detailed"—allow attributors to understand individual believers on a more nuanced level.[19]

Both varieties of model detect real patterns. General-purpose stereotypes detect comparatively generic patterns that are lived out in diverse manners by many believers; specialized models detect comparatively stylized patterns that are lived out in more specific manners by fewer believers. The former serve mainly to reveal commonalities between believers that *p*; the latter serve mainly to highlight styles of belief. With regard to phylogeny, there are empirical grounds for speculating that the capacity to construct and wield general-purpose stereotypes, being closely linked to the more basic capacity that Cecilia Heyes terms "submentalizing", arose prior to—and was necessary for the development of—the capacity to construct and wield specialized models.[20] (Specialized models are almost certainly what Heyes calls "cognitive gadgets": products of cultural rather than genetic evolution.) Regardless of the murky evolutionary history, modern human belief attributors routinely apply both types of model to attribute beliefs to their friends and acquaintances.

In contexts in which the questioner really wants to understand Atticus as a person, a better answer than 'sort of' to the question 'does Atticus believe that black people are inferior to white people?' is 'yes; he believes that black people are inferior to white people in this particular style', followed by a qualitative description of the pattern in which Atticus Finch lives by that belief. This answer requires the interpreter to go beyond simply measuring Atticus up against a standard, one-size-fits-all general-purpose stereotype for believing that black people are inferior to white people. However, it does not require the interpreter to cast aside the notion of belief altogether, and delve all the way down to the dispositional details. Instead, it requires the construction and consultation of a brand new, believer-specific dispositional stereotype: a model of believing that black people are intellectually inferior to white people in the style of Atticus Finch.

This new believer-specific model will differ from the general-purpose stereotype in (at least) three respects. First, it will include dispositions that the general-purpose stereotype does not; for example, Atticus's paternalistic style of believing partially comprises the disposition to be extremely polite towards black people. Second, it will omit dispositions that the general-purpose stereotype includes; Atticus is not prone to using nasty racial slurs. Third, it will mark different dispositions as central to the belief; the tendency to worry about the political and legal system being corrupted by the influence of black voters may be peripherally associated with the general-purpose stereotype, but it is absolutely central to any veridical believer-specific model of Atticus's style of belief.

V.

We frequently attribute belief in this fine-grained manner by constructing and consulting believer-specific models. LeBron James believes he is the greatest basketball player to ever live, but he does not believe it like Michael Jordan. Nobody believes in themselves quite like Mike. Indeed, both Jordan's success on the world stage and his failure at more intimate human endeavors are often chalked up to his singular, monomaniacal and vainglorious style of believing in his own greatness. William Faulkner, Margaret Cavendish, and Dale Carnegie all believe–and do not merely kind of believe–that the function of literature is to reveal truths about the human condition, but belief attributors easily recognize that their respective beliefs comprise dramatically different patterns of dispositions. If we really want to understand what these individuals are like, via attributions of belief, then we have to get much more specific. Returning, then, to our central case: to understand that Bob Ewell holds racist beliefs in a crass, dehumanizing, and hateful manner, whereas Atticus Finch believes in a studied, condescending, and paternalistic manner, is to begin to understand the two characters for who they really are.

Proliferating models of belief allows belief attributors to account smoothly for how Atticus's racism is both the same as—and radically different from—Ewell's. The real patterns in which the two men express their attitudes towards race both overlap substantially and come apart in significant respects. Whether belief attributors should focus on the overlap or the divergence—and thus work with general-purpose or believer-specific models—depends largely on the context in which attributors are concerned to figure out what they believe.

It might be objected that I have been oscillating between the articulation of two apparently contradictory views: first, that Atticus and Ewell share a single belief, manifested in different ways; second, that Atticus and Ewell possess distinct, though related, beliefs.[21] I have, in a sense, been so oscillating, but that is because the two views are not in conflict. The two men, at once, share one belief (which emerges in relation to a general-purpose model of racist belief that they both fit) and possess distinct beliefs (which emerge in relation to specialized believer-specific models). As noted above, both general-purpose models and specialized models detect real patterns. Atticus and Ewell have distinct beliefs in relation to my—the belief attributor's—believer-specific models of what it takes to believe-like-Atticus and believe-like-Ewell, respectively. Only Atticus fits the former model, and only Ewell fits the latter model. Nevertheless, at the same time, the two men share a belief in relation to my general-purpose model of believing that black people are inferior to white people.[22]

Merely to attribute a belief that *p* to somebody is to explain very little about them. General-purpose stereotypes are far from without their uses: sometimes people do not need to know very much about somebody in order to predict, explain, judge, or regulate their behavior, and sometimes human beings are simply obsessed with distinguishing the believers from the non-believers. Indeed, people frequently rely on general-purpose stereotypes even though believer-specific models are ready to hand. Averroes, Astell, and Spinoza all believe in God. That is not to say much about their respective religious views, but it is the right attribution when the attributor's sole purpose is to divide the atheists from the believers.

Attributors also construct and consult specialized models at various levels of generality between general-purpose stereotypes and believer-specific models. Just as perceivers can group one subset of shades of red as crimson, and another subset as scarlet, belief attributors can (and

probably should) note that Ewell and Atticus both believe that black people are inferior to white people in the style of white 20th century US southeasterners. Moreover, attributors sometimes make generalized use of believer-specific models. Faulkner, Cavendish, and Carnegie all believe that literature functions to reveal truth, but they believe it in different styles. (I wield believer-specific stereotypes for each of their particular beliefs.) Karl Ove Knausgaard, meanwhile, believes that literature reveals truth somewhat like Faulkner, and a bit like Cavendish, but not so much like Carnegie. That is to say: he fits stereotypes for Faulkner and Cavendish better than he fits Carnegie's, though of course there is a believing-that-literature-reveals-truth-like-Knausgaard stereotype to be constructed that fits him best of all.

I submit that there are (at least) as many potential veridical models of the belief that *p* as there are believers—and classes of believer—that *p*. What everybody who believes that *p* has in common is that they all cross the threshold for believing that *p*, according to a general-purpose stereotype for that belief. But describing somebody merely as believing that *p* is not to describe their belief(s) that *p* in full detail. To describe any given believer's belief(s) in full detail would be to say a great deal about that believer that they do not (necessarily) have in common with any other believer that *p*. However, contra Schwitzgebel, such a description would still pick out an emergent pattern, rather than a mere tabulation of individual dispositions.

Emergent folk psychological phenomena other than beliefs (and personality traits like pride) are similarly stylized. Consider intelligence.[23] Percival Everett's protagonists are usually indisputably intelligent, but Everett uses stories to explore their divergent styles of intelligence. In *Glyph*, the preternaturally precocious baby Ralph is book smart, but not street smart (and Ralph himself reserves the label "genius" for "someone who could drive a car or at least hold his shit")[24]; in *God's Country*, the Wild West tracker Bubba is street smart but not book smart; in *Wounded*, the horse rancher John Hunt's street smarts belie his book smarts. Sometimes it is prudent to focus on what these protagonists have in common, and simply note that all three are smart. More often, it is prudent to highlight how they are different inside the same genus.

To recap: by building on Schwitzgebel's notion of a dispositional stereotype, I have equipped Ryleans with the tools to explain how it is that believers that *p* can vary dramatically in their styles of believing that *p*—and, in general, how people can belong to the same folk psychological categories despite variance in their relevant dispositions. Schwitzgebel argues that the biggest feather in Ryleanism's cap is that it usefully legitimizes in-between beliefs as objects of philosophical and psychological investigation. I would add that it legitimizes general-purpose stereotypes, believer- and situation-specific models, and a whole range of more or less specialized models in between. Which models of belief are properly applied in any given context is determined not by a third-person functional analysis of the believer's cognitive system, but by particular belief attributors' second- or first-person purposes in attributing belief.[25] Sometimes these purposes call for the application of general-purpose models that divide all of the believers from all of the nonbelievers. Othertimes, they call for a specialized model that more closely emphasizes an idiosyncratic style of belief. If any reader still doubts that people exhibit many and various styles of believing, I have six good books to recommend them.

VI.

To conclude, I want to admit that people—and our folk psychological methods of understanding them—are more complicated still. People resemble and differ from each other in myriad subtle ways. Moreover, people are internally fickle. Proponents of the situationist challenge to virtue ethics have notoriously drawn on psychological studies to make this point,[26] but they might as well have drawn on fiction.

As Zadie Smith remarked in the wake of the election of Donald Trump, "if novelists know anything it's that individual citizens are internally plural: they have within them the full range of behavioral possibilities. They are like complex musical scores from which certain melodies can be teased out and others ignored or suppressed, depending, at least in part, on who is doing the conducting."[27] Situationists would nod approvingly at Smith's diagnosis. (It is in their intellectual character.) For, as Smith reminds us, how people are disposed to behave is overwhelmingly determined by the situations in which they find themselves, including their social relationships. Smith knows that, to be realistic, her characters must be internally plural. But that does not stop her from believing in character studies. The situation-dependence of behavior does not entail that people have incoherent or fragmented characters, much less that people lack character altogether. Nor does it entail that we ought to explicate any given personality in terms of the full range of behavioral possibilities, considered independently of the situations in which those personalities happen to be embedded.

On the contrary, the situation-dependence of character means that individual personalities—including individual styles of belief—are usefully explicable only in terms of dispositions to act, react, think, and feel in relevant situations.[28] This situation-dependence is why Smith's stories—like Austen's , Lee's, Faulkner's, and Everett's—turn on placing big personalities in new contexts and watching how they respond. Thus, in Smith's *On Beauty*, Levi's aspiration to be authentic is definitive of his character while he shuttles back and forth between his suburban family and city-dwelling counterculture friends**.** Atticus's style of belief is likewise fully understandable only in the context of a life embedded in Jim Crow Alabama. His belief does not include dispositions that might have been manifested by a different believer, living in a different place at a different time. It includes only those dispositions that constitute Atticus's tendency to live, in his place, during his time, as if black people were intellectually inferior to white people. To admit this situation-dependence is not to give up on the objective reality of belief. It is to embrace the extraordinary plurality that novelists recognize as latent in human personalities.

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Notes

[1] Gilbert Ryle, "Jane Austen and the Moralists," *The Oxford Review* 1 (1966), reprinted in *Collected Papers: Volume 1* (London: Hutchinson, 1971): 286–301, pp. 286–290; hereafter abbreviated "JAM."

[2] Gilbert Ryle, "Review of 'Jane Austen: The Six Novels' by W. A. Craik," *The Review of English Studies* 17:6 (1966): 336–338, p. 337.

[3] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949), p. 328; hereafter abbreviated *CM*.

[4] Daniel C. Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), p. 55. Of course, in another move anticipated by Ryle's discussion of the multi-track nature of belief, Dennett also allows for intersubjective indeterminacy about what people believe. See Daniel Dennett, "Real Patterns", *Journal of Philosophy* 88: 1 (1991): 27–51; hereafter abbreviated "RP." See also endnote 22, below.

[5] Lynne Rudder Baker, *Explaining Attitudes* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 156–157.

[6] Eric Schwitzgebel, "A Phenomenal, Dispositional Account of Belief", *Nous* 36 (2002): 249–275, pp. 250–253; hereafter abbreviated "PDAB."

[7] Eric Schwitzgebel, "Acting Contrary to our Professed Beliefs, or the Gulf Between Occurrent Judgment and Dispositional Belief," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 91 (2010): 531–553, p. 532; hereafter abbreviated "AC."

[8] 'Yes, but…": perhaps she has contradictory beliefs, and both believes and disbelieves that black people are intellectually inferior, as suggested by Eric Mandelbaum, "Against Alief," *Philosophical Studies* 165:1 (2013): pp. 197–211. Or perhaps Juliet believes black people are intellectually inferior to white people, but has a higher-order judgement that she ought not believe it, as suggested by David Hunter, "Alienated Belief," *Dialectica* 65: 2 (2011): 221–240.

[9] 'No, but…": perhaps she disbelieves it, but has another doxastic mental state that causes her racist behaviors, as suggested by Tamar Gendler, "Alief and Belief," *Journal of Philosophy* 105:10 (2008): 634–663.

[10] 'Sometimes…" perhaps she shifts back and forth between states of belief and disbelief, as suggested by Darrell Rowbottom, "How Might Degrees of Belief Shift? On Actions Conflicting with Professed Beliefs," *Philosophical Psychology* 29:5 (2016): 732–742.

[11] On the most plausible reading he always was racist. In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1960), Atticus reassures his daughter, Scout, that he is "about as radical as Cotton Tom Heflin" (p. 336), the white supremacist senator from Alabama. See also Monroe H. Freedman, "Atticus Finch—Right and Wrong," *Alabama Law Review* 473 (1994): 473–482.

[12] In treating Atticus's (and Ewell's and Juliet's) racism as a matter of belief, I am following Tommie Shelbie, *Dark Ghettoes: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016). Shelby writes that "racism is an ideology: a widely held set of associated beliefs," and that "someone who explicitly subscribes to a racist belief system is obviously a racist, but so is someone who is disposed to act on racist assumptions (even when the person does not fully know that such assumptions shape his or her conduct and attitudes). A racist action is one undertaken because of the agent's racist attitudes or an action the agent rationalizes in terms of racist beliefs" (pp. 22–24).

[13] Harper Lee, *Go Set a Watchman* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), pp. 245–246.

[14] For my own Rylean critique of the notion that beliefs are productive causes (as opposed to being mere

dependence causes) of behavior, see Devin Sanchez Curry, "Beliefs as Inner Causes: The (Lack of) Evidence," *Philosophical Psychology* 31: 6 (2018), 850–877; hereafter abbreviated "BIC."

[15] Eric Schwitzgebel, "A Dispositional Approach to the Attitudes: Thinking Outside the Belief Box," in *New Essays on Belief*, ed. Nikolaj Nottelmann (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 75–99.

[16] I have lifted and adapted this terminology from mid-20th century psychology. Gestalt psychologists described experience as molar; see Kurt Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935); Wolfgang Köhler, *Gestalt Psychology* (New York: Liveright, 1947). Purposive behaviorists described behavior as molar; see E.C. Tolman, *Purposive Behavior in Animals and Men* (New York: Random House, 1932).

[17] Strictly speaking, Schwitzgebel posits a single stereotype for each belief relative to each belief attributor ("PDAB," p. 251), though he waffles on his commitment to this relativism (p. 271). Elsewhere, I offer a full-throated defense of relativism about belief, as well as an examination of the differences between the Rylean views of Davidson, Dennett, Schwitzgebel, Bruno Mölder, and myself,, in Devin Sanchez Curry, "Interpretivism and Norms," *Philosophical Studies* 177:4 (2020): 905–930; hereafter abbreviated "IN."

[18] See Peter Godfrey-Smith, "On Folk Psychology and Mental Representation" in *Representation in Mind: New Approaches to Mental Representation*, ed. H. Caplin, P. Staines, & P. Slezak (Cambridge: Elsevier, 2004); Godfrey-Smith, "Folk Psychology as a Model," *Philosophers' Imprint* 5:6 (2005): 1–16; hereafter abbreviated FPM; Heidi Maibom, "The Mindreader and the Scientist," *Mind & Language* 18:3, 296–315; Maibom, "In Defense of (Model) Theory Theory," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16 (2009), 360–378; hereafter abbreviated DMTT; Shannon Spaulding, *How We Understand Others: Philosophy and Social Cognition* (New York: Routledge, 2018), hereafter abbreviated *UO*; Curry, "IN"; Devin Sanchez Curry, "Interpretivism without Judgement-Dependence," *Philosophia* (forthcoming); hereafter abbreviated "J-D."

[19] Godfrey-Smith, "FPM" pp. 4–6; see also Maibom, "DMTT."

[20] Cecilia Heyes, *Cognitive Gadgets: The Cultural Evolution of Thinking* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), Chapter 7; see also Tad Zawidzki, *Mindshaping* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

[21] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this reading.

[22] On this view, which, following remarks of Ryle's, marries Schwitzgebel's dispositionalism with a twist on Dennett and Davidson's interpretivisms (see my "J-D" for an account of this marriage), the possibility of practically significant intersubjective indeterminacy also arises. In other words, it is possible that it makes a real practical difference that a single person has a particular belief in relation to one belief attributor (wielding a particular model), but lacks that belief in relation to another belief attributor (who lacks that model). For in-depth studies of this indeterminacy, and its ramifications for Rylean views, see my "IN", as well as Donald Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Dennett, "RP".

[23] I offer a Rylean account of intelligence in Devin Sanchez Curry, "Street Smarts," *Synthese* (forthcoming).

[24] Percival Everett, *Glyph* (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press 1999), p. 32

[25] For elaborations on and defenses of the claim that belief attributors' various purposes dictate how they attribute belief, see Kristin Andrews, *Do Apes Read Minds? Towards a Pluralistic Folk Psychology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012); Vivian Bohl, "We Read Minds to Shape Relationships," *Philosophical Psychology* 28:5 (2015), 674–694; Spaulding, *UO*; Curry, "BIC;" Curry, "IN;" Victoria McGeer, "Enculturating Folk Psychologists," *Synthese* (forthcoming); Anika Fiebich, "In Defense of Pluralist Theory," *Synthese* (forthcoming).

[26] See Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Gilbert Harman, "The Nonexistence of Character Traits," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (2000): 223–226; John Doris, *Lack of Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002); Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013).

[27] Zadie Smith, "On Optimism and Despair," *The New York Review of Books* (Dec. 22, 2016), p. 38.

[28] Which situations are relevant depends in large part on who is asking, as well as why they are asking; see Spaulding, *UO*; Curry, "IN;" Jane Suilin Lavelle, "The Impact of Culture on Mindreading," *Synthese* (forthcoming).

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