

# *How Reasoning Aims at Truth*

David Horst

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Many hold that theoretical reasoning aims at truth. In this paper, I ask what it is for reasoning to be thus aim-directed. Standard answers to this question explain reasoning's aim-directedness in terms of intentions, dispositions, or rule-following. I argue that, while these views contain important insights, they are not satisfactory. As an alternative, I introduce and defend a novel account: reasoning aims at truth in virtue of being the exercise of a distinctive kind of cognitive power, one that, unlike ordinary dispositions, is capable of fully explaining its own exercises. I argue that this account is able to avoid the difficulties plaguing standard accounts of the relevant sort of mental teleology.

## 1. Introduction

The topic of this paper is *theoretical* reasoning: reasoning towards belief.<sup>1</sup> On the view of many, a defining feature of such reasoning is that it is *aim-directed*. Consider some representative examples from the recent literature:

“[I]t is in the nature of reasoning that it has a certain point or aim. [...] [I]t is plausible that the *point* of theoretical reasoning is to acquire [true] beliefs [...]; theoretical reasoning aims at truth”. (McHugh/Way 2018: 176 and 177)

“[R]easoning is something we *do*, not just something that happens to us. [...] And it is something that we do with an *aim*—that of figuring out what follows or is supported by other things one believes.” (Boghossian 2014: 5)

“To deliberate whether to believe that *p* is to engage in reasoning aimed at issuing or not issuing in a belief that *p* in accordance with norms for such a belief.” (Shah 2006: 489)

The general idea here seems to be something like this. Suppose you reason “P, so Q”. If so, your transition from the belief that P to the belief that Q is not just a random association of thoughts. Rather, in responding to your belief that P by forming the belief that Q, you *aim* at forming a belief

with a specific feature: a true belief or one that is supported by the available evidence. The question I want to address is: what is it for reasoning to be thus aim-directed?

I will begin by considering some answers suggested by standard accounts of reasoning and/or aim-directedness. According to these views, reasoning is aim-directed either (i) in virtue of the reasoner's *intention*, or (ii) in virtue of being the manifestation of a certain *disposition*, or (iii) in virtue of being an instance of *rule-following*. However, I will argue that none of these answers is satisfactory. This, then, motivates the introduction of my alternative proposal, according to which acts of reasoning are aim-directed in virtue of being exercises of a distinctive kind of cognitive power. Thus, I will suggest that the key to an adequate account of reasoning's aim-directedness is a proper understanding of the metaphysics of our mental powers. In particular, I shall argue that such an account requires that we clearly distinguish the power at work in reasoning from the sort of belief-forming dispositions that figure prominently in various contemporary accounts of reasoning.

I think that getting clear on reasoning's aim-directedness is important for a number of reasons. First, as already noted, it helps explain the difference between reasoning and the mere association of thoughts.<sup>2</sup> Second, it can help make sense of the common claim that beliefs aim at truth. Some have objected that this claim cannot literally be true, since beliefs do not literally aim at anything.<sup>3</sup> However, as many have pointed out, it is belief's connection with reasoning that can ground and explicate what's true about this claim: it is theoretical reasoning that aims at truth, and beliefs share this aim to the extent that they are regulated by such reasoning.<sup>4</sup> Third, the fact that reasoning is constitutively aim-directed promises an attractive account of the norms for good or correct reasoning. Thus, McHugh and Way (2018) have recently argued that, just like in the case of other teleologically defined kinds of activities, reasoning's aim fixes certain standards by which particular acts of reasoning can be assessed as good or bad, depending on whether or not they live up to this standard. Given the relevance of the issue and, as I shall argue, the shortcomings of existing accounts, I think that a proper understanding of reasoning's aim-directedness is a clear desideratum.

Before moving on, let me add two clarificatory remarks. First, in what follows, I will simply assume that *what* reasoning aims at is truth (i.e., the formation or retention of true beliefs). This assumption is in line with most of the literature on the topic, but different views are certainly possible (e.g., that the aim is knowledge or justification).<sup>5</sup> My main concern is not with the specific content of reasoning's aim, but with what it is for reasoning to be aim-directed at all. Most of what I will have to say is compatible with diverging views on the content of reasoning's aim. Second, reasoning may fail to achieve its aim. Assuming that the aim is truth, roughly, this can happen in one of three ways: (i) by reasoning incorrectly (e.g., by affirming the consequent), (ii) by reasoning correctly, but from false premises, and (iii), in cases of non-deductive reasoning, by ending up with a false belief, even though you reasoned correctly from true premises. Yet, just like with any other aim-directed activity, I take it that failure to achieve the aim doesn't imply that you weren't aiming at all.

I proceed as follows. In §2, I will present a brief outline and critique of standard accounts of reasoning's aim-directedness, setting the stage for the introduction of my alternative proposal. I will develop this view in several stages throughout §3. After some clarifications of how I understand the notion of a power in general (§3.1), I propose a general requirement on what it is for something to be aim-directed (§3.2). Next, I develop my account of the sort of cognitive power at work in reasoning, distinguishing it from the notion of a disposition central to many contemporary accounts of reasoning (§§3.3 and 3.4). I conclude the main part of the paper by arguing that, being exercises of the relevant sort of cognitive power, acts of reasoning meet the general requirement on aim-directedness (§3.5). In §4, I clarify my account in several respects.

## **2. Standard Accounts of Reasoning's Aim-Directedness**

### *2.1 The Intentional View*

Suppose you reason from P to Q, such that in responding to your belief that P by forming the belief that Q you *aim* at truth (i.e., at forming a true belief). What is it for your transition from the one to the other belief to aim at truth? Our primary model of understanding aim-directedness is in

terms of intention. On this view, for some act A to aim at B just is for the act of A-ing to be guided by an intention to B. For example, in crossing the street, you count as aiming to go to the store just in case, in crossing the street, you are guided by your intention to go to the store. Applying this model to reasoning, we get something like the following view:

*Intentional View:* In responding to your belief that P by forming the belief that Q you *aim* at truth just in case your response is guided by your intention to believe the truth.

This view, however, threatens to give rise to familiar circularity and/or regress worries. This is because it's unclear how your intention can bear on your reasoning if not through another piece of truth-directed reasoning. To see this, consider that, in order to implement your intention to believe the truth, you would have to determine what compliance with this intention requires of you in the particular situation at hand: roughly, a situation in which you are trying to figure out whether or not to believe that Q. Thus, in order to determine how best to comply with your intention to believe the truth in the situation at hand, you would have to ascertain whether Q is true given your evidence. But ascertaining whether Q is true in light of your evidence *just is* engaging in a piece of reasoning aimed at truth. Hence, it looks like the implementation of your intention to believe the truth involves another piece of theoretical reasoning. But then, of course, the account would be circular: we would explain aim-directed reasoning by intentional guidance and intentional guidance by aim-directed reasoning.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.2 *The Dispositional View*

The currently prevailing account of reasoning is a *dispositional* account.<sup>7</sup> The basic idea behind this view is that reasoning from P to Q is simply a matter of manifesting a certain sort of disposition. Given the popularity of this approach, one may turn to the notion of a disposition in attempting to account for reasoning's aim-directedness. McHugh and Way (2018: 182) explicitly endorse such an account: "What we are suggesting, in effect, is a dispositional account of the aim-directedness

of reasoning.” They specify the relevant disposition as one to conform to various patterns of truth-preservation: roughly, a disposition that yields true beliefs given that the “input” beliefs are true as well. McHugh and Way claim that it is in virtue of manifesting such a disposition that reasoning aims at truth.<sup>8</sup> This yields roughly the following proposal:

*Dispositional View.* In responding to your belief that P by forming the belief that Q you *aim* at truth just in case your response is the manifestation of a disposition to form true beliefs when given true beliefs as inputs.

Since this view doesn’t appeal to any intention, it avoids the sort of circularity and/or regress troubles of the previous proposal. Yet, on the face of it, it is rather mysterious how appeal to the notion of a disposition is supposed to do the trick in an account of aim-directedness. After all, it seems clear that manifesting a disposition isn’t sufficient for aim-directedness. Sugar is disposed to dissolve in water, such that, other things equal, if you place it into water, it will dissolve. But, in doing so, sugar doesn’t *aim* at dissolution (nor at anything else for that matter). If aiming at A was just a matter of being disposed to do A in response to certain conditions, we would have to ascribe aims to physical objects such as sugar. But this seems simply wrong: being reliably responsive to certain conditions doesn’t make for aim-directedness. Hence, the mere fact that, in responding to your belief that P by forming the belief that Q, you manifest a certain disposition doesn’t seem to be enough to show that you *aim* at truth (or anything else for that matter).

No doubt, proponents of the *Dispositional View* will want to respond that the sort of disposition you manifest in reasoning is somehow more complex or more sophisticated than ordinary dispositions (like solubility), and that this difference accounts for reasoning’s aim-directedness. For instance, one may think that an account like John Broome’s (2013) will be of help here. Roughly, according to Broome, in order to reason from P to Q, it is not enough that you manifest a disposition to form the belief that P upon believing that Q, you must also be prepared to “check” and “correct” your first-order belief-forming tendency for its ability to yield true beliefs.<sup>9</sup> So, in

short, the idea would be that while sugar doesn't "check" and "correct" its behavior, reasoners do, and that's why the latter, but not the former, count as aiming when manifesting their relevant dispositions. However, the problem with this proposal is that it's hard to see how the relevant notions of "checking" and "correcting" could be spelled out without relying on the very idea we are trying to understand. Surely, we must distinguish "checking" and "correcting" from changing your behavior in response to some brute impulse to do so. Yet, it's not clear that we can do this without (covert) appeal to the relevant notion of aim-directedness: intuitively, when you check and correct your belief-forming tendencies for their ability to yield true beliefs, you are in some way guided by the *aim* of truth.

Be that as it may, my aim here is not to consider every actual or possible attempt to improve on the *Dispositional View*. Ultimately, I think that this view contains an important insight: that reasoning's aim-directedness must be understood, not in terms of the reasoner's intention, but in terms of the sort of power exercised in reasoning. My complaint is just that proponents of this view have failed to identify the *right* sort of power: as I shall argue below, reasoning is the manifestation, not of a disposition, but of a distinctive kind of cognitive power. If that's right, then the way forward is not to supplement the dispositional account with further conditions—such as Broome's requirement for "checking" and "correcting"—but to correct the widespread focus on dispositions in modeling the power at work in reasoning. But before moving on to the positive proposal, we need to consider another widely popular view of reasoning.

### *2.3 The Rule-Following View*

Many hold that reasoning is a matter of following certain rules. And one might plausibly think that this view holds the key to a proper understanding of reasoning's aim-directedness. The underlying thought here would be that rule-following implies aim-directedness, so that an account of the former also yields an account of the latter. Thus, suppose that, in reasoning from P to Q, you follow the rule "If you believe that P, form the believe that Q!" Plausibly, if you follow this rule,

you count as aiming at forming the belief that Q. Suppose further that this rule codifies a pattern of truth preservation. If so, then, arguably, there is a sense in which, by following this rule, you aim at forming a true belief. This yields something like the following account:

*Rule-Following View:* In responding to your belief that P by forming the belief that Q you *aim* at truth just in case your response is an instance of following a truth-preserving rule.

I do not want dispute that reasoning involves rule-following, nor that rule-following implies aim-directedness. I suspect, however, that the problems surrounding the notion of rule-following are too closely connected to those confronting an account of aim-directedness for the former to provide an illuminating account of the latter. To bring this out, consider that by far the most popular account of rule-following is a dispositional account.<sup>10</sup> Roughly, according to such a view, in responding to your belief that P by forming the belief that Q, you follow some rule R just in case your response is the manifestation of a disposition to conform to R. Yet, as we have seen in the previous section, it is hard to see how the appeal to the notion of a disposition is to be of help in an account of reasoning's aim-directedness. Consequently, if following a rule were just a matter of manifesting some disposition to conform to the relevant rule, it would be rather unclear how rule-following could imply aim-directedness. Since the implication seems hard to deny, this, in fact, might be taken to count against the dispositional account of rule-following. But either way, the appeal to the notion of rule-following doesn't seem to help with the task at hand: either rule-following doesn't imply aim-directedness after all or, if it does, we are currently lacking an agreed upon account of rule-following able to accommodate this implication.

Certainly, these brief considerations fall far short of showing that standard views of reasoning's aim-directedness are untenable. But I think they do enough to suggest that we are currently lacking an adequate account of the relevant sort of mental teleology. Moreover, I think the lesson we can learn from the previous discussion is that an adequate account of reasoning's aim-directedness

must steer clear of two corresponding threats. On the one hand, on pain of generating familiar regress and/or circularity problems, such an account must dispense with any appeal to the reasoner's intentions (or other mental states). On the other hand, on pain of collapsing the distinction between genuine aim-directedness and mere reliable responsiveness, such an account must resist construing our reasoning-ability on the model of ordinary dispositions. What I hope to accomplish in the remainder of this paper is to sketch an account that is able to avoid both of these pitfalls.

### **3. An Alternative Account of Reasoning's Aim-Directedness**

In my view, the key to understanding reasoning's aim-directedness is to conceive of acts of reasoning as exercises of a *distinctive kind* of power, one that is structurally different from the notion of a disposition that figures prominently in various contemporary accounts of reasoning. In other words, I am suggesting that a proper account of such aim-directedness turns on our ability to distinguish between different kinds of powers: ordinary dispositions, if you like, are only one species of a more abstract category, another distinct species of which is the power at work in reasoning. (I call the more abstract category "power", but terminology doesn't matter here, we may just as well speak of capacities, faculties, abilities, etc.) As noted, this proposal builds on what I take to be an important insight underlying the *Dispositional View*: that reasoning is the exercise of a certain sort of power. Where I disagree with proponents of this view is in the conception of the relevant sort of power: reasoning isn't properly understood, I shall suggest, as long as we rely on ordinary disposition (such as solubility and fragility) as our model for the power at work in reasoning. More specifically, I shall argue for two main claims:

- (1) What's special about the power at work in reasoning, setting it apart from ordinary dispositions, is that it is a *self-actualizing* power, in the sense that it is able to fully explain its own actualizations (i.e., acts of reasoning).



(2) It is because the power at work in reasoning is self-actualizing that particular acts of reasoning manifesting this power count as *aiming* at truth.

In brief, then, I hope to make a case for roughly the following account of reasoning's aim-directedness (some specifications will be added later):

*Self-Actualizing Power View:* In responding to your belief that P by forming the belief that Q you *aim* at truth just in case your response is the exercise of a certain kind of self-actualizing power.

I am aware that the notion of a self-actualizing power is not part of contemporary philosophy's common currency.<sup>11</sup> So it may look as if my appeal to this notion risks trying to explain the obscure by the still more obscure. But here I ask the reader for some patience and to keep an open mind. By the end of this paper, I hope to have shown that, while perhaps unfamiliar, the notion of a self-actualizing power captures an important phenomenon of our cognitive lives and does indeed provide an illuminating account of reasoning's aim-directedness.

In the next section, I will briefly say something about how I understand the notion of a power in general. Next, I shall propose a general requirement on what it is for something to be aim-directed. In subsequent sections, I argue that, because it is a self-actualizing power, acts manifesting the power at work in reasoning meet this requirement, whereas manifestations of ordinary dispositions do not.

### *3.1 Some Remarks on Powers in General*

In general, a power is specified by what it is a power *to do*: by reference to the kind of act in which it is perfectly or successfully exercised.<sup>12</sup> I call the defining act of a power its *characteristic exercise*. Roughly, for instance, the characteristic exercise of solubility is the process of dissolution; the characteristic exercise of fragility is the event of breaking. Importantly, a power's characteristic exercise is not, at least not straightforwardly, a *statistical* matter. As is well known, powers can be

“masked”. A piece of sugar may find itself immersed in water, yet fail to dissolve, as when it is wrapped in aluminum foil. A vase may be dropped, yet not break, as when it is wrapped in packing material. That is, a power may not exhibit its characteristic behavior in appropriate circumstance.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, we could imagine a scenario in which *most* sugar cubes are wrapped in aluminum foil, so that, even when put into water, they would not dissolve. Yet, even in such circumstances, it would still seem right to say that sugar, as such, is disposed to dissolve when put into water. It’s not that sugar has lost its characteristic disposition just because, for whatever reason, most pieces of sugar have been wrapped in aluminum foil. It would be more apt to say that, in the imagined scenario, most sugar cubes exist in conditions that *prevent, block, or interfere* with their characteristic exercise. Thus, I take it, a power’s characteristic exercise is, not a statistical, but rather a *conceptual* matter: it is the kind of act that defines or specifies the relevant power as the kind of power it is. It is the sort of thing a power does when nothing *prevents, blocks or interferes* with its full actualization.

If something like this is correct, then any power brings with it a certain *standard of success or perfection*, where this just means that the notion of a power implies a distinction between acts that manifest the power in *full or perfectly* and those that do not. To take another example, heliotropic flowers have the power to track the sun. Accordingly, with respect to what a particular heliotropic flower does, we can distinguish between acts that *fully, successfully or perfectly* manifest its power and those that do not. For instance, on a given day, the winds may be so strong that the flower tracks the sun only very *poorly*. Here, we assess the behavior of the flower by comparing it to its power: to what it characteristically does. In this sense, a power fixes a standard, allowing us to assess its bearer’s behavior depending on the extent to which such behavior realizes the power’s potential. To be sure, I don’t mean to suggest that there is anything genuinely normative about such assessments. All I mean to say is that with the notion of a power comes the possibility of sorting behavior into perfect and imperfect realizations of the relevant power.

Now, let’s turn to the power you exercise in reasoning and ask what its characteristic exercise consists in. Consider what this power enables you to do when it is exercised successfully or

perfectly. Plausibly, when you exercise this power, and all goes well, you acquire or retain a true belief, and you do so in response to other things you believe. Thus, generalizing things somewhat, it seems plausible to say that the characteristic exercise of the power at work in reasoning is the attainment of truth.<sup>14</sup> Again, as with any power, failure is possible. Thus, in exercising this power, you may fail to attain the truth: if, for example, you start from false premises or commit the mistake of affirming the consequent. However, just like with powers in general, the possibility of failure shouldn't tempt us into construing that power's characteristic exercise as something *less* than the attainment of truth. More plausibly, cases where you fall short of, e.g., generating a true belief are cases where something prevents or interferes with the fully successful exercise of that power (e.g., the fact that your premises are false or that you confuse necessity and sufficiency). Accordingly, we can say that the standard contained in the relevant cognitive power is truth—or, more specifically, the generation and preservation of true beliefs. A perfect or successful exercise of that power is one that generates or preserves a true belief, an imperfect or unsuccessful exercise is one that falls short of that standard. Hence, on this view, acts of reasoning can be assessed with respect to the standard of truth simply because they are exercises of a power whose standard of success is the attainment of truth.

### *3.2 Conditions on Aim-Directedness*

Now we can put our central question as follows: why does generating true beliefs count as something you *aim* at in exercising the relevant cognitive power? To answer this question, let me first clarify what it is for something to count as *aiming* in general. I take the following characterization to be rather uncontroversial:

*Aim.* In A-ing, you *aim* at B just in case: (i) B sets a *standard of success*, such that, roughly, your A-ing is assessable depending on the extent to which it helps bring about B, and (ii) B *explains* why you undertake A-ing.

To illustrate: if you aim to climb Mt. Everest, then your actions are *assessable* and *explainable* by reference to climbing Mt. Everest. That is, if climbing Mt. Everest is your aim, then your actions can be assessed depending, roughly, on whether or not they get you closer to the top. But that's not enough: climbing Mt. Everest must also somehow explain why you undertake these actions. If climbing Mt. Everest isn't *why* you travel to Nepal, then, clearly, you don't travel to Nepal with the aim of climbing Mt. Everest. Now, plausibly, in this case, your actions meet both of these conditions in virtue of the fact that you *intend* to climb Mt. Everest: your actions are assessable and explainable by reference to climbing Mt. Everest *because* that's what you intend to do. Your intention provides the standard for the assessment of your actions and, at the same time, explains their occurrence. As we noted above, this is our primary model for understanding aim-directedness. Yet, as I shall argue in what follows, it is not the *only* way in which the general structure of aim-directedness—captured by *Aim*—can be realized. Another way, I want to suggest, is the kind of power that is at work in reasoning. This power doesn't only fix a *standard* by which we can assess its particular exercises (depending, roughly, on whether or not they result in true beliefs), rather, as we shall see, it also provides a full *explanation* of its own exercises (i.e., the particular acts of reasoning).<sup>15</sup> In other words, then, my claim is that it is in virtue of being exercises of this power that particular acts of reasoning meet both of the conditions on aim-directedness: being exercises of the relevant power, acts of reasoning are explained by that which, at the same time, provides the standard for their assessment. On this view, particular acts of reasoning count as *aiming at truth*, not because of the reasoner's intention to believe the truth, but simply because they are fully explained by a power whose standard of success is the attainment of truth.

In what follows, I attempt to flesh this out by contrasting the power at work in reasoning with ordinary dispositions (such as solubility or fragility). Unlike the former, dispositions do not fully explain their own actualizations (i.e., the occurrence of the acts manifesting the disposition). This, I claim, is why their manifestations do not count as being aim-directed. If this is right, then the key

to understanding the specific way in which reasoning counts as aiming at truth is to appreciate how the power at work in reasoning differs structurally from dispositions.

### *3.3 Dispositions and Aim-Directedness*

As noted above, intuitively, it seems quite clear that dispositions do *not* set an aim. But what underlies this intuition? My suggestion is this: a disposition is a kind of power whose actualization requires a condition—usually called a “stimulus” or “trigger”—for whose obtaining the disposition does not itself provide.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for a sugar cube to dissolve, it must be placed into water. But being placed into water is a condition whose obtaining is not in any way accounted for by sugar’s disposition. After all, sugar doesn’t place itself into water. Likewise with fragility: other things equal, a fragile vase will break if dropped. But being dropped is not something a vase itself brings about. To fully explain why a sugar cube is dissolving or why a vase is breaking, we need to look *beyond* their dispositions, we need to invoke a condition whose presence is not itself explainable by reference to their respective dispositions (e.g., the fact that someone placed the sugar into water or that someone knocked the vase to the ground). In general, then, what’s characteristic of dispositions is that, at least in the fundamental case, their actualization depends on conditions whose obtaining is simply independent of these dispositions. This, I submit, is why dispositions do not set an aim: they set a standard, in the sense that they can be actualized more or less perfectly, but, since the actualization of a disposition requires an independent condition, this standard doesn’t account for its own realization. In other words, then, a disposition is a sort of power that doesn’t fully explain the occurrence of the acts manifesting it, and this is why dispositions do not meet the conditions on aim-directedness captured by *Aim*. If correct, this gives us a principled explanation for what we knew all along: that a dissolving piece of sugar doesn’t aim at dissolution.<sup>17</sup>

Some claim that there are dispositions that manifest without any stimulation: uranium’s disposition to decay is the standard example here (see Molnar 2003: 85). But, even if such dispositions exist, they do not undermine the present point. Radioactive decay is just a *random* process, in that,

apparently, it is impossible to predict when a particular atom will decay. If so, radioactive decay isn't fully explained by uranium's disposition, since—given its randomness—it isn't fully explained at all. Hence, radioactive decay doesn't meet the explanatory condition on aim-directedness.<sup>18</sup>

Next, I shall argue that this is crucially different when we move from ordinary dispositions (like solubility or fragility) to the sort of power that is exercised in reasoning. This power differs from dispositions in that its actualizations (i.e., particular acts of reasoning) do not depend on independently given conditions—conditions in whose obtaining this power isn't itself involved. This is why the power engaged in reasoning can be seen to fully explain its own exercises and, therefore, meet the conditions on aim-directedness set out above.

### *3.4 Reasoning and Belief*

To prepare the ground for this view, it will be helpful to first consider how things would look if we conceived of the power engaged in reasoning on the model of dispositions. Typically, proponents of the *Dispositional View* proceed by introducing the relevant notion of a disposition by means of example—fragility and solubility being the favorite ones—and then apply the model of stimulus-response characteristic of such dispositions to reasoning.<sup>19</sup> Consider, for instance, Markus Schlosser who takes a window's disposition to shatter when hit by a baseball as his model and then goes on to claim that the same sort of structure is found in reasoning:

“The application to the case of reasoning is straightforward. [...] The agent forms the new belief [that P] in response to considering the antecedent beliefs [that P and that if P then Q] and is thereby manifesting a disposition to form beliefs in accordance with *modus ponens*. [...] [I]t seems clear that the cause (the agent's considering the antecedent beliefs) just is the disposition's stimulus condition and that the effect (the new belief) just is its manifestation.” (Schlosser 2011: 347)<sup>20</sup>

Now, if indeed the power engaged in reasoning can be understood on the model of ordinary dispositions, we should expect that there is no fundamental difference in the underlying structure of stimulus and response in both cases. That is, we should expect that “considering certain

beliefs”—the alleged stimulus in the reasoning case—stands to our cognitive power as “being hit by a baseball” stands to the window’s disposition to shatter when struck. But this, I think, is highly doubtful. In the case of our power to engage in reasoning, the alleged stimulus condition—the agent’s considering certain beliefs—is arguably *itself* an exercise of that very power. When you form a new belief in response to having considered certain beliefs of yours, you do not seem to respond to a condition that obtains simply independently of the relevant cognitive power. More plausibly, this power is already engaged when you consider the relevant antecedent beliefs—considering these beliefs is simply part of making up your mind by way of reasoning. Alternatively, one might think that what initially prompts your cognitive power into action is the act of considering a certain question (i.e., the question whether Q).<sup>21</sup> But again, in the relevant sense, considering the question whether Q is best seen as itself part of the operation of the cognitive power: it is itself an act that you undertake with the aim of figuring out the truth. This suggests an important *structural* difference between dispositions and the power at work in reasoning: unlike in the case of dispositions, the alleged stimulus of the relevant cognitive power—considering certain beliefs or the question whether Q—is a condition whose obtaining is itself explainable by reference to that power.<sup>22</sup>

One might want to object that this suggestion hinges on a problematic claim about what constitutes the stimulus condition for our power to engage in reasoning. Thus, one might argue that what actually moves you to draw the relevant conclusion and form the belief that Q is not any act of considering—either the belief that P or the question whether Q—but rather the antecedent belief itself: your believing that P. On this view, acts of considering certain beliefs or questions are just part of the *enabling* or *background* conditions that must be in place for the relevant antecedent beliefs to be efficacious and move you to draw the relevant conclusion.<sup>23</sup> (Support for this comes from the fact that, when we explain why you form the belief that Q, we point directly to your belief that P, not to your act of considering this belief or the question whether Q.) I think this is a plausible view. But it doesn’t undermine the structural point I am trying to bring out. For, as I shall argue now, your believing P itself can plausibly be seen to be a condition whose obtaining is a matter of

exercising the relevant cognitive power, the one that is also at work in your reasoning about P. I should stress, however, that my overall argument doesn't depend on settling for beliefs—as opposed to acts of considering beliefs or questions—as the proper stimuli for our cognitive power; what matters is just that each one of these potential stimuli can be seen to involve an engagement of that very same power.

So, let's consider the claim that believing P and reasoning about P are simply different ways to exercise the same cognitive power. I think there are a number of ways to argue for this, but a good place to start is the following remark by Barry Stroud:

“[A] picture of the mind as containing a list of propositions believed, even if the list carries the title ‘Things Believed’, will appear ridiculous in giving no account of a person's understanding of what he believes. Believing something involves understanding it, and that in turn appears to involve seeing some of its connections with other things one understands, or at least having the capacity to see and accept those connections in appropriate circumstances.” (Stroud 2000: 107)

On this view, if you believe P, you understand what you believe: you understand P. What is involved in understanding the propositional contents of one's beliefs is of course a large question. But, following Stroud, we can say at least this much: understanding P requires that you are (at least) able to recognize some of the connections (of implication, exclusion, or evidential support) between P and other propositions, and to adjust what you believe in light of these connections. For instance, we would expect that someone who believes “Tomatoes are red” to be able to recognize that this implies “Tomatoes are colored”. If she wasn't able to draw this inference in appropriate circumstances, it would become immediately doubtful whether she is indeed correctly credited with a belief of this content. If this is correct, then there is indeed an intimate connection between belief and our power to engage in reasoning; a connection that we may capture in the following claim:

*Connection:*                    If someone is capable of believing P, then she is also capable of reasoning from and to P.



To be sure, there is much room to argue about the details of this claim. But I think the general idea is familiar enough and, I believe, very plausible. What's important for our purpose is that, if *Connection* is indeed true, then we should be able to say something about why it is true. For it is surely not just a happy *coincidence* that people capable of belief are also capable of reasoning. But then, if we don't want to rest content with simply positing the non-contingent connection as a brute fact, we should be able to explain why it holds.

I think there is a popular view with a venerable tradition in philosophy that offers a simple and elegant explanation of *Connection*.<sup>24</sup> For our purposes, the relevant claim of this tradition can be put as follows:

*Single Power.*                    Believing P and reasoning from and to P are different manifestations of a *single* underlying power (capacity, faculty, ability).

Roughly put, the basic thought behind this claim is that believing and reasoning do not stand to one another as, say, swimming and riding a bicycle. The latter pair draws on completely distinct skill sets, which is why it is perfectly possible to be able to do the one (swim, say), while completely lacking the ability to do the other (ride a bicycle). You might be a world class swimmer without ever having so much as looked at a bicycle. By contrast, on the view in question, believing and reasoning trace back to a common general capacity—a single skill set, if you like—which is why, here, it is *not* possible to be able to do the one (believe, say), while completely lacking the ability to do the other (reason). It's not as if, when you start reflecting on the contents of your beliefs, you switch to a completely different competence, one that you might as well lack while continuing to be a full-fledged believer. Rather, on the present view, when you reason from P to Q, you exercise a kind of power that, in a distinct way, is also engaged in simply believing that P. To be sure, this doesn't mean that belief and reasoning are not different sorts of things (arguably, belief is a state, reasoning a process).<sup>25</sup> Nor does it mean that all beliefs are formed by way of reasoning (which is clearly not the case, since, e.g., some beliefs are formed on the basis of perception, others by wishful

thinking). It just means that, in believing P and in reasoning about P, you exercise the same general cognitive power, albeit in different ways.<sup>26</sup> This view offers a straightforward explanation of why *Connection* holds: if believing P and reasoning from and to P are simply different aspects of a single capacity, then surely it's *no accident* that someone who is capable of the former is also capable of the latter.

Versions of *Single Power*, I think, can be found in various quarters of philosophy. Consider, for instance, what Kant termed “understanding in general” or “the higher faculty of cognition”. Significantly, Kant conceived of this faculty as a kind of power whose possession enables its subject, both, to deploy concepts in judgments—and, as we may add, beliefs—and to engage in reasoning about the conceptual contents judged or believed to be true.<sup>27</sup> Arguably, the chief idea, here, is that propositional thought—like believing that P—involves the engagement of a conceptual power, which in turn is specified as a kind of power that, *inter alia*, enables its subject to engage in reasoning about P. Hence, a conceptual power, in the relevant sense, is a power that can be exercised in distinct ways: in believing P, judging P, and in reasoning about P. Various contemporary philosophers have drawn on and developed this line of thought.<sup>28</sup> However, I don't think *Single Power* is unique to Kantians, nor do I think that it commits one to any of the more specific or controversial tenets of this tradition. Clearly, the basic idea underlying this view is extremely general and allows for various different ways of fleshing out. Thus, putting it somewhat differently, what *Single Power* invites us to do is simply to conceive of reasoning as the exercise of a more general cognitive power, one that we may specify as a power for *attaining truth*. Engaging in explicit reasoning about P is, then, just one way of (potentially) getting hold of the truth; another way is judging P or simply believing P on certain grounds (or, perhaps, on no specific grounds at all). Once again, the upshot is that, on this view, reasoning has its proper home within the wider context of a general cognitive capacity, one that can also be exercised in other cognitive endeavors.<sup>29</sup>

However, even though I think many philosophers would accept at least some version of this view, some would certainly reject the entire approach. Obviously, this is not the place to attempt a full-fledged defense of *Single Power*. My strategy here is different: I take the fact that *Single Power* offers a simple explanation of *Connection* to lend at least some initial support to this view; and with this in mind, I will proceed to develop the implications of that view for an understanding of how reasoning aims at truth. I hope that the attractions of the resulting account provide further support to the view in question.

### 3.5 *The Self-Actualizing Power View*

If something along the lines of *Single Power* is indeed correct, then the contrast between dispositions and the sort of power at work in reasoning should be obvious. As we have seen, the actualization of a disposition depends on an independently given stimulus—a condition for whose obtaining that very disposition does not itself provide. By contrast, according to *Single Power*, the alleged stimulus of the power at work in reasoning—believing something—is a condition whose obtaining itself involves a distinct exercise of that very same power. We may put this by saying that, in contrast to dispositions, the kind of power at work in reasoning is a *self-actualizing* power: a kind of power that, ultimately, accounts for its own actualization, in the sense that its actualization doesn't depend on any conditions in whose obtaining it is not itself involved.<sup>30</sup> When you reason from P to Q, you respond to your believing P by forming the belief that Q. In so exercising your cognitive power, you respond to a condition—your believing that P—whose existence is itself a matter of exercising the kind of power engaged in inferring Q from P. Hence, when we explain your coming to believe that Q by pointing to the belief that P, we do not point beyond your cognitive power: we do not point to a trigger or stimulus in whose operation that power would not already be itself involved. In this sense, the kind of power at work in reasoning accounts for its own actualization (or, in short, is self-actualizing).<sup>31</sup> By contrast, if a sugar cube responds to being dropped into water by dissolving, it responds to a condition whose obtaining is not explainable by reference to the

disposition manifesting itself in the process of dissolution. Hence, in order to give a full account of what happens when a sugar cube is dissolving, we need to reach beyond its disposition.

Next, recall the general specification of aim-directedness from § 3.2. According to *Aim*, in general, for an act to count as being *aim-directed* it must meet two conditions: it must be *assessable* in light of a standard that, at the same time, *explains* its occurrence. With the foregoing specification of the relevant cognitive power in mind, I think we are now in a position to see how acts of reasoning meet both of these conditions. First, this power fixes a *standard* (i.e., truth) with respect to which particular of its exercises can be assessed, depending on whether or not they realize this standard (e.g., generate or retain true beliefs). Second, as we have now seen, this power also provides a full *explanation* of the acts manifesting it (e.g., the act of inferring Q from P), because and in the sense that its actualizations do not depend on any conditions in whose obtaining this power is not itself involved. Taking these two features together, I think we are entitled to our main claim: that it is in virtue of being exercises of this power that particular acts of reasoning meet the conditions on aim-directedness. Being exercises of the relevant power, acts of reasoning are explained by that which, at the same time, provides the standard for their assessment. Hence, we can say that acts of reasoning *aim at truth*, not because of the reasoner's intention, but simply because they are fully explained by a sort of power whose standard of perfection is the attainment of truth. As noted, this sort of power deserves the label "self-actualizing" because, unlike dispositions, it is capable of fully explaining its own exercises. This, then, yields the aforementioned account of reasoning's aim-directedness:

*Self-Actualizing Power View:*

In responding to your belief that P by forming the belief that Q you *aim* at truth just in case your response is an exercise of a self-actualizing power whose standard of perfection is the attainment of truth.

One of the chief attractions of this view, I think, is that it is able to avoid the pitfalls of the standard accounts of reasoning's aim-directedness discussed above. The problem of the *Intentional View* is that its appeal to the reasoner's intention threatens to engender familiar regress and/or circularity worries. There is no such risk on the present view, since it explains aim-directedness without appeal to the reasoner's intention. The problem of the *Dispositional View* is that it threatens to collapse the distinction between genuine aim-directedness and mere dispositional responsiveness. But, on the present view, there is no such risk either. For, in contrast to the *Dispositional View*, the present account of aim-directedness is built on a crucial difference between dispositions and the power at work in reasoning: what's distinctive of the latter is that it is a self-actualizing power, and it is because of this feature that acts manifesting this power meet the constraints on aim-directedness.

Before concluding, let me add some brief clarifications of my view, so as to help forestall certain potential worries.

#### **4. Clarifications**

##### *4.1 More on the Notion of a Self-Actualizing Power*

I have argued that the sort of power at work in reasoning is one that accounts for its own actualization. This may raise the following worry: If any specific actualization of this power (e.g., in a particular act of reasoning) implies that this power is already engaged (e.g., in holding certain beliefs), how can we ever come to actualize this power? Don't we *need* an independent condition to effect the transition from the potentiality of the power to its being actualized in specific acts? In brief, I think the answer to this worry is this: the relevant sort of power is one that doesn't exist without its being or having been exercised. That is to say, it is a power that does not *precede* its actualization in, e.g., specific acts of reasoning. This is less strange than it might sound. For it is just a consequence of the apparent fact that the power in question is one that is acquired through *learning*, which is to say that it is a power that is acquired through doing the very things that it is a power to do (i.e., judging, believing, reasoning). Famously, Aristotle put this point by saying that

one learns to play the harp only by playing the harp.<sup>32</sup> Arguably, the idea behind this remark is that a student learning to play the harp can be credited with possessing the ability to play the harp to the *same degree* in which her actions become recognizable as something meriting the description “playing the harp”. That is to say, there is no priority either way: this ability and its acts come into existence *together*, through a gradual process of learning. Something similar, I think, holds for the relevant cognitive power: acquiring this power and becoming a subject correctly credited with holding proper beliefs and performing proper inferences is one and the same process of learning. Again, these things enter the scene together. If so, then it seems quite clear that the existence of such a power is *not* prior to and independent of its being or having been exercised. Consequently, there shouldn’t be any mystery how there can be a sort of power that accounts for its own actualization, such that particular exercises of that power imply that this power is already engaged.

Once again, mystery only threatens if we model the power at work in reasoning on the sort of power we find in dispositions such as solubility and fragility. For, in the case of such dispositions, it is indeed true that the power *precedes* its actualization. The existence of such powers doesn’t imply that they are or have been exercised. A sugar cube is disposed to dissolve in water, even though this disposition might never be actualized. This reflects the fact that such powers are possessed by their bearers, not through practice, but by nature.<sup>33</sup> The existence of these powers doesn’t imply their actuality because their possession is not a matter of having been acquired through learning. This, in turn, explains why the exercise of such powers usually requires an *independent* condition. Since their existence is prior to and independent of their actualization, they need to be stimulated by something other than themselves.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4.2 The “Taking Condition”

One might also wonder how the present account relates to Boghossian’s (2014) recently much discussed “Taking Condition” on reasoning:<sup>35</sup>

*Taking Condition (TC):* “Inferring necessarily involves the thinker taking his premises to support his conclusion and drawing his conclusion because of that fact.” (Boghossian 2014: 5)

I am sympathetic to this idea (at least under some interpretation), and, as I shall suggest below, I think that the present account can help vindicate (some version of) the TC. However, since the TC itself is highly controversial and my focus in this paper is specifically on reasoning’s aim-directedness, I want to remain neutral here on whether or not a full account of reasoning should accommodate the TC.<sup>36</sup> One might, of course, argue that the TC is, in fact, already a requirement on reasoning’s aim-directedness. Again, I don’t want to deny this. In the present context, however, such a claim threatens to be question-begging. For, many proponents of the *Dispositional View* would either deny that the TC is such a necessary requirement or claim that any plausible (i.e., non-regress-inducing) interpretation of the TC is already accounted for by their dispositional account of aim-directedness.<sup>37</sup> Thus, for the purposes of this paper, I won’t take a stand on the status of the TC.

That said, if one is inclined to accept the TC, I do think that the present view provides a natural starting point for an account of the TC. Of course, here is not the place to develop and defend such an account. I will merely indicate what I think is a promising direction for developing one. Arguably, the intuition behind the TC is that, in reasoning from P to Q, you do not simply move from one belief to another; you engage in an act that is itself expressive of your *epistemic point of view*: of your *stance* on what the available evidence supports (or on what follows from what). It is an act that reflects where you stand *as* a believer. This, I take it, is why it is so tempting to attempt to account for the TC by ascribing a *further* belief to the reasoning subject: a belief to the effect that P supports Q. However, as many have argued, this move threatens to be the first step in a Lewis Carroll-style regress.<sup>38</sup> In a nutshell, the worry is that just adding another belief to your premises will leave us none the wiser as to how moving from this new set of premise-beliefs to the conclusion-belief can *itself* be expressive of your stance *as* a believer.

Now, I think, the present account equips us with a framework for envisioning an alternative way of accommodating the intuition underlying the TC. To see this, consider that, on the view in question, believing P, believing Q, and the mental act you engage in when reasoning from P to Q are all different actualizations of the *same* general cognitive power. Hence, there is a clear sense in which the relevant mental act is attributable to you *as* a believer: as a subject capable of belief. Both your beliefs and your acts of reasoning have their source in the same mental power and, as result, are governed by the same standard of perfection (i.e., truth). Presumably, this is at least a necessary condition for these acts to count as reflecting your stance on what the evidence supports.

Contrast this with how things would look on the *Dispositional View*. As we have seen, on this view, the power allegedly at work in reasoning is distinct from whatever power (competence, faculty, etc.) you manifest in the beliefs that serve as the former power's stimuli or input, just like a vase's disposition to break when dropped is distinct from the agential power exercised in dropping it. Intuitively, this makes it hard to see how the alleged acts of reasoning can be attributable to you *as* a believer and, thus, truly reflect your own epistemic standpoint. The fact that you are disposed to form certain beliefs whenever you believe certain other things might have nothing to do with where you stand *as* a believer. To illustrate, suppose the relevant belief-forming disposition has been implanted in you by a neuroscientist. If so, we may well imagine that, from an epistemic point of view, you honestly disapprove of the mental transitions in which the disposition issues.<sup>39</sup> Arguably, the *Self-Actualizing Power View* avoids such difficulties simply because it doesn't separate the power at work in reasoning from the one you manifest in your beliefs.

Again, to properly develop and argue for these claims would require a paper of its own. My hope here is simply that these brief remarks convey a sense of how the present view may serve as a framework for an account of the TC, one that steers clear of the problems confronting accounts that appeal to either a further belief or mere dispositions.<sup>40</sup>



## 5. Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the question of what it is for reasoning to aim at truth. I have argued that standard answers to this question—views that appeal to intentions, dispositions, or rule-following—are not satisfactory. As an alternative, I have proposed the following account: acts of reasoning aim at truth in virtue of being explained by a sort of power whose standard of perfection is truth. As we have seen, this view builds on a number of claims about powers in general and about the relation between belief and reasoning more specifically (i.e., *Connection* and *Single Power*). Though, like many others, I find these claims very plausible, certainly none of them is entirely uncontroversial. But I think these claims gain further support from the attractions of the resulting account of reasoning’s aim-directedness: specifically from the fact that the present account avoids the pitfalls of the standard accounts of how reasoning aims at truth.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I will mostly drop the qualification “theoretical”.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Shah (2003: 466), McHugh/Way (2018: 179), and Hieronymi (2005: 444).

<sup>3</sup> See Wedgwood (2002: 267) and Kelly (2003: 631).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., McHugh/Way (2018: 185), McHugh (2012: 22), and Velleman (2000).

<sup>5</sup> For a recent defense of the truth-aim view, see McHugh/Way (2016; 2018). Schafer (Forthcoming) makes a general case for a more expansive conception of our cognitive goals (i.e., in terms of understanding, not just truth).

<sup>6</sup> See Müller (1991) for a similar objection. McHugh/Way (2018: 180) object to (something like) the *Intentional View* on more general grounds.

<sup>7</sup> Versions of the dispositional account are endorsed by Winters (1983), Wedgwood (2006), Schlosser (2011), Broome (2013; 2014), McHugh/Way (2018), and many others.

<sup>8</sup> See McHugh/Way (2018: 180–84). In fact, McHugh and Way speak of fittingness-preservation instead of truth-preservation, but the latter is just what the former amounts to in the case of theoretical reasoning.

<sup>9</sup> See Broome (2013: 237f.). Here I am slightly adapting Broome’s account to fit present purposes. I think McHugh and Way (2018: 182f.) can be read as offering a similar amendment.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Broome (2013), McHugh/Way (2018), Wedgwood (2006), and Schlosser (2011). The main rival of the dispositional account of rule-following is the intentional account. The latter view however is widely seen to fall prey to a Lewis Carroll-style regress problem (see Boghossian 2008; 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Though, as will become clear in what follows, I think it is a notion with a venerable tradition in philosophy (not necessarily under that name, of course).

<sup>12</sup> As should be clear from the context, here and elsewhere I am using “act” in a very broad sense, not restricted to action, nor even to events or processes. As is commonly acknowledged, actualizations of powers can also take the form of being in a certain condition or state.

<sup>13</sup> See Johnston (1992) for the terminology of “masking”. The possibility of “masking” is the reason why standard conditional analyses of dispositions are thought to fail: sugar is disposed to dissolve in water, yet it is not true that, if it were placed in water, it would dissolve. For further discussion, see Bird (1998), Martin (1994), Molnar (1999), and Fara (2005).

<sup>14</sup> Alternatively, one may think that a fully successful exercise of the relevant cognitive power culminates, not just in true belief, but in something richer like knowledge or understanding. For present purposes, nothing much hangs on this, since my main concern here is not with the precise content of our epistemic aims, but with the possibility of aim-directedness more generally.

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<sup>15</sup> Here and throughout I am assuming that our cognitive power stands in an *explanatory* relation to the acts manifesting this power. That powers in general constitute a “positive explanatory factor” (Kenny 1975: 133) in accounting for their exercises is now a fairly widespread view in the literature on powers, though there is less agreement about the details of the sort of explanation involved. See, in particular, Mellor (1974), Molnar (1999), and Thompson (2008).

<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that dispositions must be tied to a *particular* set of stimuli. As has been observed, some dispositions can be triggered by all kinds of situations (e.g., someone’s disposition to get angry for no particular reason) (see Manley/Wasserman 2008: 72).

<sup>17</sup> I don’t want to deny that dispositions can be said to play *some* explanatory role with respect to the occurrence of their manifestations, at least in the sense that they show their occurrence to be *not accident* when the relevant triggering-conditions obtain. My point however is that a disposition’s explanatory power is *contingent* on conditions whose obtaining is, in turn, not itself explained by that disposition.

<sup>18</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for help with this point.

<sup>19</sup> Compare, e.g., Ernest Sosa’s introduction of what he calls “epistemic competences” (of which the power to reason is, arguably, an example): “Epistemic [...] competences are abilities. These are a special sort of disposition, familiar examples of which are fragility and solubility.” (Sosa 2011: 80).

<sup>20</sup> I should note that Schlosser calls the disposition at work in reasoning a “rational disposition”, presumably to mark a contrast with merely physical dispositions. However, his explanation of what this means isn’t very helpful: “It is a rational disposition because it disposes the agent to make inferences in accordance with a rational rule” (Schlosser 2011: 346). This isn’t very illuminating: after all, we are supposed to understand what it is to make inferences by appeal to the relevant sort of disposition, not the other way around.

<sup>21</sup> See Hieronymi (2005) for a characterization of reasoning in terms of answering questions.

<sup>22</sup> I am calling this a “structural” difference because it is a difference in the *way* in which the power relates to its alleged stimulus-condition, not just a difference in the *contents* of what figures in the position of stimulus and response.

<sup>23</sup> A view of this sort is suggested by Wedgwood (2006: 669).

<sup>24</sup> As will become clear in what follows, the general shape of the sort of view I have in mind here is Kantian in inspiration. A forceful contemporary exposition and defense of this view can be found, e.g., in the writings of John McDowell (1996; 2009). McDowell cites Evans (1982), Geach (1957), and Sellars (1956) as further inspiration.

<sup>25</sup> But compare Boyle (2011).

<sup>26</sup> There shouldn’t be any worry regarding the general possibility of powers capable of being exercised in different sorts of ways: the ability to build a house, for instance, certainly enables its possessor to engage in a vast variety of different kinds of actions (mixing mortar, measuring, etc.).

<sup>27</sup> See, in particular, Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A130f./B170f., A51/B75, and *Anthropology*, 196f.). As an anonymous referee helpfully pointed out, Kant’s own view might be more accurately described as a “single system of powers” view, since, for Kant, the “higher faculty of cognition” (or “understanding in general”) is a faculty that is itself articulated into the three powers of understanding (in the narrow sense), judgment, and reason. However, I don’t think this undermines the general point I am trying to bring out: namely that belief, judgment, and reasoning can be seen to ultimately trace back to a common source. Thanks to Thomas Land for discussion of this point.

<sup>28</sup> As noted, a particularly influential exponent of this tradition is McDowell (1996; 2009). But again, at least aspects of the Kantian tradition are certainly widespread among many contemporary philosophers (see, e.g., Boyle (2009; 2011; 2016), Kern (2017), Rödl (2007), Marcus (Forthcoming), and, with some qualifications, also Brandom (1994)).

<sup>29</sup> Again, if you think that what counts as ultimate success in the exercise of our cognitive power is not just truth, but understanding or knowledge, the point can be easily adapted: reasoning, on such a view, would be *one* way of exercising a capacity for attaining understanding or knowledge (for a view of roughly this shape, see, e.g., Schafer (Forthcoming)). As such, *Single Power* is neutral with respect to the precise content of our cognitive goals.

<sup>30</sup> To be sure, this doesn’t mean that one can exercise one’s cognitive power *no matter what*: as noted, conditions must be such that nothing prevents the exercise of this power. But one must not confuse such background or enabling conditions with the triggering conditions characteristic of dispositions. Background conditions must be in place for the actualization of both dispositions and the power to reason. But dispositions require *more*: in addition to background conditions, dispositions also need specific stimuli for whose obtaining they cannot provide by themselves.

<sup>31</sup> It’s important to bear in mind that, as noted earlier (§3.4), it’s not essential to the present view that the proper stimulus of our cognitive power is believing that P, rather than the act of considering this belief or the question whether Q is true. What matters is that each one of these potential stimuli can be seen to be itself an exercise of the relevant cognitive power.

<sup>32</sup> See Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, IX.8, 1049b and *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1, 1103b).

<sup>33</sup> See Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1, 1103a).

<sup>34</sup> Another worry one might have is this: sometimes we form beliefs on the basis of perception, but, one might claim, perception is a condition whose obtaining does not involve *any* engagement of the sort of conceptual power at work in believing, judging, and reasoning. Hence, one might think that the phenomenon of perceptually based beliefs spells trouble for the present account: in forming beliefs in this way, we seem to be aiming at truth, but forming beliefs in this way doesn’t seem to be an exercise of a self-actualizing power. In response, I just want to note that the assumption on which the worry is based—that perception can provide or constitute a reason for belief, even though it doesn’t involve any engagement of our conceptual powers—is in fact highly controversial. Thus, some have argued that, since

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perception can provide or constitute a reason for belief, it must itself involve some engagement of our conceptual powers (see, in particular, McDowell (1994; 2009), Boyle (2016), and Kern (2017)). Others have argued that, since any reason or evidence for belief must be a believed or known proposition, perception—conceived of as “extra-conceptual”—cannot itself constitute a reason or evidence for belief (see, e.g., Davidson (2001) and Williamson (2000)). What these views have in common is that they reject the assumption on which the present worry rests. My sympathies are with views of the first sort, but for present purposes, I just want to stress that my conception of our cognitive power is compatible with a variety of well-established views on the relation between belief and perception. Thanks to Sergio Tenenbaum and an anonymous referee for encouraging me to address this worry.

<sup>35</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to address this issue.

<sup>36</sup> For discussion of the TC, see, among others, Boghossian (2014), Hlobil (2014), Broome (2013; 2014), Valaris (2014), McHugh/Way (2018), and Marcus (Forthcoming).

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Wedgwood (2006: 674f.), McHugh/Way (2018: 190f.), and Broome (2014: 24). Of course, since I have argued that the *Dispositional View* fails to account for reasoning’s aim-directedness, I don’t think it can account for the TC either (even assuming some minimal interpretation of “taking”).

<sup>38</sup> See, among many others, Boghossian (2014). For a more extensive discussion, see Valaris (2014). According to Valaris, however, the problem is not with attempting to account for the TC in terms of a further belief *per se*, but with ascribing a causal (instead of a constitutive) role to that belief.

<sup>39</sup> For an example of this sort, see, e.g., Wedgwood (2006: 670). Wedgwood goes on to introduce further conditions to ensure that the relevant disposition is of the *right kind* (i.e., one that isn’t implanted by a neuroscientist). I am not suggesting that such amendments of the *Dispositional View* cannot succeed. Rather, my point is that we *don’t need* to go looking for ways to amend this view if we can avail ourselves of the *Self-Actualizing Power View*.

<sup>40</sup> For an account of the TC that, I think, fits well with the framework sketched here, see Marcus (Forthcoming).

<sup>41</sup> Special thanks are due to Kim Frost, Matthias Haase, Ulf Hlobil, David Hunter, Thomas Land, Eric Marcus, Marco Ruffino, Sergio Tenenbaum, Josh Thorpe, and several anonymous referees for comments and discussion at various stages of this work. Thanks also to audiences at the University of Campinas, Ryerson University, and SLACRR 2017 for helpful feedback on some of the ideas that made it into the present paper. This work was supported by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) (grant number: 2016/02075-6).

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