

# Transparency, Doxastic Norms, and the Aim of Belief

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**Abstract:** Many philosophers have sought to account for doxastic and epistemic norms by supposing that belief ‘aims at truth.’ A central challenge for this approach is to articulate a version of the truth-aim that is at once weak enough to be compatible with the many truth-independent influences on belief formation, and strong enough to explain the relevant norms in the desired way. One phenomenon in particular has seemed to require a relatively strong construal of the truth-aim thesis, namely ‘transparency’ in doxastic deliberation. In this paper, I argue that the debate over transparency has been in the grip of a false presupposition, namely that the phenomenon must be explained in terms of being a feature of deliberation framed by the concept of belief. Giving up this presupposition makes it possible to adopt weaker and more plausible versions of the truth-aim thesis in accounting for doxastic and epistemic norms.

## 1. Doxastic normativity and the aim of belief

It is a platitude that beliefs are subject to some sort of normative evaluation. We evaluate beliefs as being ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’, depending on whether or not they are true. We evaluate them as being ‘justified’ or ‘unjustified’ (perhaps identified by some other similar label), depending on the strength of the evidence on which they are based. And we evaluate them as being ‘rational’ or ‘irrational’, depending on how well they cohere with other held beliefs. Even leaving aside the exact shape of these forms of evaluation – an issue to which much recent work has been devoted – it

seems worthy of philosophical inquiry to ask what grounds these forms of belief evaluation, and explains their grip on us.

A very popular strategy for explaining these forms of belief evaluation, a strategy pursued in many variations, is to rely on a supposedly conceptual, necessary feature of belief itself, namely that belief essentially ‘aims’ at the truth. According to this explanation, true beliefs are correct and false beliefs incorrect because beliefs *just are*, by their very nature, the kinds of states that ought to be true, in some sense of ‘ought’ to be specified. Once this basic idea is accepted, a natural explanation of the norms of justification and rationality suggests itself: we ought to go for justified beliefs rather than unjustified ones, and rational ones rather than irrational ones, because that is the best way of ensuring that we end up with true beliefs rather than false ones. And truth is what belief is ultimately aiming at. An explanation of this sort carries the great advantage of applying to all beliefs, merely in virtue of them being beliefs. It is, in other words, any philosopher’s wet dream of an explanation: it promises to establish doxastic norms as *necessary* demands governing *everybody*, flowing from *essential* features of belief itself.

The sticking point, of course, is how exactly this idea of belief essentially ‘aiming at truth’ should be understood. One of the main camps on this issue are the ‘normativists’, who think that belief aims at truth in the sense of it being a conceptually constitutive *normative* feature of beliefs that they ought to be true.<sup>1</sup> A different answer is given by the ‘teleologists’, who think that belief aims at truth in the non-normative psychological sense that beliefs are intended to be true, either in

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<sup>1</sup> Recent examples include Boghossian (2003), Engel (2013), Fassio (2011), Gibbard (2005), Shah (2003), Shah and Velleman (2005), Wedgwood (2002). For critical discussion, see e.g. Glüer and Wikforss (2009), Steglich-Petersen (2008b; 2010; 2011; 2013)

the literal sense of being so intended by the believer, or in the weaker sense of having as their biological ‘proper function’ to be regulated to ensure truth.<sup>2</sup>

The main challenge shared by any attempt of this kind to ground doxastic norms in the nature of belief, is that it must come up with a theory of belief which is independently plausible as, or at least compatible with, a scientific account of the nature of belief, while at the same time being capable of explaining the doxastic norms in the desired way. So far, it has proven extremely difficult to come up with a theory of belief that satisfies both desiderata. The reason for this is that the desiderata seem to pull in opposite directions. On the one hand, the doxastic norms to be explained accord an importance to beliefs being true that seems to exclude the relevance of alternative considerations when evaluating beliefs, such as the pleasantness or truth-independent usefulness of holding certain beliefs, or forming them in a certain way. On the most prevalent construal of them, the doxastic norms don’t merely tell us that, other things being equal, beliefs that are true, justified and rational are preferable to beliefs that are not. The doxastic norms, it seems, make truth, justification and rationality *the only* relevant considerations when evaluating belief.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, however, evidence is amassing that an independently plausible account of the nature of belief should not make the functional connection to truth strong enough to in itself explain this exclusive interest in truth. Rather, what the evidence points to is the numerous non-truth tracking processes and mechanisms responsible for belief formation, and it seems that processes of these kinds aren’t at all accidental to the way we have been equipped by evolution to form beliefs.<sup>4</sup> So it appears that it will be difficult to motivate a version of the truth-aim thesis that is at

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<sup>2</sup> Recent examples include Velleman (2000), McHugh (2011) and Steglich-Petersen (2006b; 2009; 2011; forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> For defenses of this claim, see e.g. Shah (2003), Owens (2003), Kelly (2003).

<sup>4</sup> See Hazlett (2013) for a comprehensive recent treatment.

once strong enough to account for the exclusive role of truth in doxastic norms, and permissive enough to allow for the many ways in which beliefs are in fact motivated by considerations other than truth, in seemingly essential ways.

A specific and particularly interesting arena in which normativists and teleologists have discussed how to best satisfy the troublesome double desiderata, is the debate on how to best explain the phenomenon of *transparency* in deliberation over belief.<sup>5</sup> Transparency is, roughly, the phenomenon that whenever we deliberate over whether to believe some proposition, we invariantly and immediately move to settle the deliberation by turning to an apparently different question, namely whether the proposition being considered for belief is *true*. Doxastic transparency (and similar phenomena) has played an important role in convincing philosophers that truth plays a privileged role in evaluating belief. But transparency has also proven particularly troublesome to explain in terms of belief aiming at truth, in a way that is compatible with an independently plausible account of belief, allowing for the many truth-independent ways in which beliefs are in fact formed and regulated.

In this paper, I wish to revisit this debate over how to best explain transparency. I have previously defended a teleological account of belief and doxastic norms, and have also sought to show that this account of belief can be qualified to explain transparency in a direct way (Steglich-Petersen 2006b). While I still endorse the general teleological approach, I now think that it would be preferable to avoid the qualifications needed for this account to explain transparency directly. What I want to suggest in this paper is that the debate over transparency has been in the grip of a false presupposition. The false presupposition is that transparency must be explained in terms it being a feature of a kind of deliberation that is framed in terms of the concept

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<sup>5</sup> Highlights from this debate include Shah (2003), Shah and Velleman (2005), Buleandra (2009), McHugh (forthcoming), Zalabardo (2010), Steglich-Petersen (2006a; 2006b; 2008a).

of belief, i.e. that it is our understanding of the concept of belief that moves us to settle deliberation over belief in terms of truth. Once we do away with this presupposition, transparency can be explained in more straightforward way, which doesn't rely on beliefs aiming at truth in an implausibly strong sense.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, I show how the quest for explaining transparency has shaped the debate between competing accounts of doxastic norms. In Section 3, I begin the search for an alternative explanation of transparency by narrowing down what transparency could plausibly be seen to consist in. In Section 4, I show that on its most plausible construal, transparency has a remarkably close cousin, governing deliberation aimed directly at settling the truth of some proposition. In Section 5, I argue that the similarity between the two phenomena makes a common explanation preferable, which rules out an explanation in terms of the concept of belief. I then go on to offer such an explanation.

## **2. Transparency and the teleologist's dilemma**

One of the earliest proponents of the teleological account of belief and its application to explain doxastic normativity in the modern debate is David Velleman. In his 2000 paper *The Aim of Belief*, Velleman asks what's distinctive about beliefs as opposed to other kinds of propositional attitudes. Beliefs, Velleman observes, are different from so-called 'connative' states in representing their contents *as* true, and not *to be made* true (this difference is sometimes referred to as a difference in 'direction of fit'). But many propositional attitudes other than belief share this feature. Supposing, assuming, and imagining, for example, share the feature of representing their contents as true. According to Velleman, what's distinctive about belief as opposed to these attitudes

lies in the *purpose* or *aim* with which beliefs represent their contents as true: beliefs represent their contents as true *with the aim of thereby representing a truth*. Velleman is quite permissive in his view of how this aim is realized in believers, resulting in a kind of disjunctive account. Sometimes the aim may be realized by an agent's intention in accepting a proposition. But more commonly, the aim is realized by a sub-personal cognitive mechanism having as its function to regulate the acceptance in such a way that it tends to be in accordance with the truth. But how strong must this regulation be for some attitude to count as a belief? Exactly how responsive to the truth must it be? Clearly, it couldn't be all that strong. Many genuine beliefs are the result, not of impartial truth tracking, but of wishful thinking or deeply entrenched biases designed to result in advantages not always afforded by a strict concern for believing the truth – a badly formed and epistemically irresponsible belief can still be a belief. Such advantages might include a positive self-image, the promotion of precautionary behavior, rapid formation of beliefs, and more. Still, some weaker degree of truth-regulation does seem distinctive of belief: if some attitude were recalcitrant to sufficiently obvious and transparent evidence that its content were false, it would become difficult to think of that attitude as a belief.

As plausible as this account may seem, Velleman abandoned it. The account faced a general and familiar problem: if we allow beliefs to be merely weakly regulated for truth, it seems difficult to explain the exclusive role that truth seems to play in the evaluation of belief. But Velleman was particularly moved by what I think we can regard as an interesting specific version of that general problem, developed by Nishi Shah, namely the so-called 'teleologist's dilemma.

The dilemma arises when the teleologist has to explain what Shah calls 'transparency'. Here is one of several characterizations offered by Shah:

To be clear, the feature that I call ‘transparency’ is this: the deliberative question *whether to believe that p* inevitably gives way to the factual question *whether p*, since the answer to the latter question will determine the answer to the former (Shah 2006: 481).

This doesn’t entail, of course, that the deliberation over whether to believe that *p* will always be settled in a way that is *in fact* sensitive to the truth. The deliberator may be confused in his reasoning over the truth of *p*, or biased in ways he does not himself realize. But according to the transparency thesis, we nevertheless always settle whether to believe that *p* by settling, to our own satisfaction at least, whether *p* is true. Shah presents this as a psychological fact, a piece of descriptive data, to be explained by any theory of belief.

Shah treats it as a presupposition that transparency should be explained in terms of it being a feature of a kind of deliberation that is ‘framed’ by the concept of belief, i.e. by the deliberator’s understanding of this concept, and the way in which this understanding directs the deliberation. If we accept this presupposition, Velleman and other teleologists seem to face a dilemma when explaining transparency. On the one hand, the teleologist seems forced to recognize that the concept of belief encompasses not only attitudes that are strictly regulated for truth, but also attitudes that are more imperfect in their truth-regulation. But if that is the case, it becomes unclear why being framed by the concept of belief should make doxastic deliberation exhibit transparency to the question of truth, in the strong way described by Shah. Why should the sensitivity to truth in deliberation over belief not be of the weaker kind exhibited by belief formation in other contexts? If the teleologist sharpens the

kind of truth regulation attitudes must exhibit to count as beliefs to account for transparency, the position would seem to exclude many plausible instances of belief. Hence the dilemma.

The obvious alternative explanation, developed by Shah (2003) and later accepted by Velleman in a joint paper (2005), is to rely on an inbuilt *normative* dimension of belief, making it a conceptual normative truth that beliefs are correct if and only if they are true. As this explanation goes, when we deliberate over whether to believe that *p*, and explicitly let the concept of belief frame the deliberation, we are motivated by the norm of correctness for belief, which we as believers accept in virtue of our competence with the concept of belief, to let our deliberation be settled by whether *p* is true. This explanation avoids the dilemma, since the *normative* feature of being correct if and only if true is compatible with beliefs *in fact* being regulated for truth in a weaker sense. The teleologists, on the other hand, construe truth-regulation in descriptive psychological terms, and therefore seem excluded from making a similar move to account for transparency.

As I have explained in previous work, however, the normative explanation ultimately fails. A phenomenon as invariant and psychologically necessary as transparency could not plausibly be explained as a matter of norm-adherence. I have also shown that the apparent dilemma facing the teleological account is spurious. It is perfectly compatible with *de facto* weak truth-regulation, that believers, when deliberating about what to believe, by necessity are strictly and exclusively guided by a concern for satisfying the aim of truth, at least as far as they are themselves aware (Steglich-Petersen 2006b).

I now think, however, that this explanation saddles the teleologist with an unnecessary cost, shared by the normative explanation. Both accounts assume that



whenever we consider what to believe, the awareness that the attitude being considered is that of belief is what forces us to regard only truth-relevant considerations as relevant to the deliberation. But since it is an open question whether truth really *is* the only relevant consideration when deciding what to believe (the philosophical debate on the subject reveals this<sup>6</sup>), it seems a tall order to require that merely being competent with the concept of belief should make it psychologically impossible to let other considerations guide one's doxastic deliberation, the way that transparency seems to suggest. This motivates the search for an alternative explanation that does not rely on this presupposition.

### **3. What exactly is transparency?**

My strategy in motivating an explanation of transparency that doesn't rely on competence with the concept of belief will be to first properly characterize the phenomenon of transparency, and the constraints that an explanation of it must meet. Once we get the phenomenon narrowed down, and separated from various inadequate characterizations of it, it can be shown to be an instance of a more general feature of deliberation, which doesn't rely on being framed by the concept of belief.

As our point of departure, we can take Shah's characterization of transparency in the passage quoted above, namely that transparency is the fact that *the deliberative question whether to believe that p inevitably give way to the factual question whether p, since the answer to the latter question will determine the answer to the former* (Shah 2006, p. 481). It should be immediately obvious, however, that this characterization should be qualified. First of all, it clearly *is* possible, without

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Reisner (2009) and Hazlett (2013).

betraying any sort of conceptual confusion, to move in one's deliberation from the question of whether to believe that *p* to a question *other than* that of truth. Reporting from my own experience, I find it entirely possible when asking myself whether to adopt some belief, to consider, for example, whether adopting that belief would be unpleasant, what it would do to my self-esteem, and other such truth-irrelevant concerns. I also find it entirely possible to regard such considerations as relevant to whether it, on the whole, would be a good idea for me to adopt the relevant belief. For instance, I may very easily convince myself that it would be better on the whole if I believed in life after death, even if I have no evidence whatsoever bearing on this. What I *do* find impossible is for deliberation of that kind to issue directly in a belief. No matter how firm my opinion that living would be easier if I believed in the afterlife, this will not in itself result in such a belief, nor does it help me form one in any direct sense. So a more accurate statement of transparency should not focus on the impossibility of certain transitions in deliberation from one question to another, or even on the impossibility of attaching normative importance to the answer one gives to such questions, but on the impossibility of certain kinds of deliberation to result directly in belief. A more accurate statement of transparency would therefore be the following [T1], where the brackets highlight the two separate questions that the deliberative process moves between:

[T1] One can consciously decide [whether to believe that *p*] in a way that issues directly in forming a belief as to whether *p*, only by deciding [whether *p* is true].

But [T1] stands in danger of making transparency appear as a mere platitude. After all, there is a good sense in which forming a belief as to whether *p* *simply amounts* to deciding whether *p* is true. Believing *p* just is believing *p* to be true. So when forming a belief as to whether *p*, one thereby comes to make up one's mind as to whether *p* is true. But in that case, it is no wonder that one can consciously come to believe that *p* in the way stated by [T1] only by deciding whether *p* is true. It is unclear why we should seek an explanation of something as obvious as that!

But even if there is a platitudinous sense in which deciding whether to believe that *p* in a way that issues in a belief that *p*, by definition involves deciding whether *p* is true, transparency is not a mere platitude. What makes transparency worthy as an interesting target for explanation is brought out by the explanatory constraint that the teleological account according to Shah failed to satisfy, namely that the explanation must be compatible with the fact that one can, subconsciously, come to believe that *p*, or even decide whether *p* is true, in a way that is motivated by considerations that are *not* relevant to the truth of *p*. Call this constraint [C]:

[C] The explanation of transparency must be compatible with the fact that, subconsciously, one can be caused to form a belief as to whether *p* on the basis of considerations that are not relevant to the truth of *p*.

In order to bring out the contrast to [C], transparency seems better captured by a statement focusing on the considerations on the basis of which one can decide whether to believe that *p*, as in the following version [T2]:

[T2] One can consciously decide [whether to believe that  $p$ ] in a way that issues directly in forming a belief as to whether  $p$ , only on the basis of considerations relevant to [whether  $p$  is true].

But even [T2] is not quite right either: it states that we can consciously decide the deliberative question of whether to believe that  $p$  in a way that issues directly in belief only on the basis of considerations that are *actually* relevant to whether  $p$  is true. But we can clearly decide such deliberation in the relevant way on the basis of considerations that we merely *wrongly regard* as relevant to the truth. In fact, this is a very common occurrence, as when we respond to misleading evidence, or are confused about what our evidence suggests. I may, for example, wrongly regard a crucifix-shaped pattern on a piece of toasted bread as evidence of the existence of God, and come to believe in God's existence directly in response to this. So what matters for transparency is that I *regard* certain considerations as relevant to the truth of the relevant proposition, not that they in fact *are* relevant. Hence [T3], which will be my final statement of transparency for the purposes of the present discussion:

[T3] One can consciously decide [whether to believe that  $p$ ] in a way that issues directly in forming a belief as to whether  $p$ , only on the basis of considerations one takes to be relevant to [whether  $p$  is true].

The explanatory task that transparency presents us with is to explain [T3] in a way that is compatible with [C]. Henceforth, I will refer to [T3] simply as 'transparency.'

#### 4. A very similar principle

We are now in a position to move on to the next stage of the argument. I begin with the observation that if transparency as stated above is true of conscious deliberation over whether to *believe* that *p*, a very similar principle holds for conscious deliberation over whether *p* is *true*, i.e. deliberation aimed at deciding the truth of some proposition *p*. Call this principle transparency\* or [T\*] for short:

[T\*] One can consciously decide the question [whether *p* is true] in a way that issues directly in forming a belief as to whether *p*, only on the basis of considerations one takes to be relevant to [whether *p* is true].

If transparency stood in danger of being platitudinous, this is no less the case for transparency\*. But as before, the interest of the principle derives from the fact that any explanation of it is constrained by a fact similar to that constraining any explanation of transparency. Call this constraint [C\*]:

[C\*] The explanation of transparency\* must be compatible with the fact that, subconsciously, one can be caused to decide whether *p* is true on the basis of considerations that are not relevant to the truth of *p*.

Again, the motivation for C\* should be obvious – we can clearly be biased and unreliable in various ways when considering whether some proposition is true, even when we take ourselves not to be.

Transparency and transparency\* are clearly not identical principles. While transparency concerns deliberation that is explicitly framed by the concept of belief,

the type of deliberation targeted by transparency\* does not explicitly invoke this concept in framing the deliberation. Yet, in every other respect, the two principles are identical. They both concern a process of deliberation aimed at settling a question, in the one case whether to believe that  $p$ , in the other case whether  $p$  is true; both processes will, if all goes well, result in a belief; the principles express identical constraints on such processes, namely that they can be decided only on the basis of considerations that the deliberator regards as relevant to the truth of the proposition being considered; and they are both made interesting and non-trivial by the contrast to the absence of a similar feature of subconscious processes of belief formation.

## **6. A common explanation**

The similarity between transparency and transparency\* strongly suggests that the two principles have a common explanation, i.e. that the features they ascribe to the two kinds of deliberation exist for *the very same reason*. It would be quite strange if such similar processes were characterized by identical features, but for different reasons. But if there is a common explanation, that explanation can only rely on features that are *common* to the two kinds of deliberation. In that case, transparency should not be explained in terms of it being framed by the concept of belief, in a way that would be unavailable in explaining the similar feature of transparency\*. This gives us strong reason to prefer an explanation of transparency that does not rely on transparent deliberation being framed by the concept of belief. But what could such an explanation look like? I will begin by suggesting an explanation of transparency\* that doesn't invoke the concept of belief, and then explore if this explanation can be applied to explain transparency as well.

Transparency\*, it seems to me, can be explained as a particular instance of the following general constraint on aim-directed activities – call it [G]:

[G] It is not possible to  $\emptyset$  with aim A while being aware that  $\emptyset$ -ing will not further A.

Providing a full motivation for [G] is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is clearly graced by significant *prima facie* plausibility. If someone claimed to be  $\emptyset$ -ing with some aim, but at the very same time professed to be aware that  $\emptyset$ -ing will not in fact further that aim, we would doubt the sincerity of either his aim or his conviction that  $\emptyset$ -ing won't further it. If someone claimed to be rolling over in bed twice every morning with the aim of improving his health, but at the very same time professed to be aware that doing so won't help him become more healthy, we would doubt the sincerity of either the aim of health or the conviction that rolling over in bed twice every morning aids it. Apparent counterexamples to the principle can usually be explained as cases of such insincerity. For example, someone might claim to wear a particular jersey to his home team football matches with the aim of helping their team win, while at the same time insisting of being aware that wearing the shirt will do nothing to help the team. But in such cases, the most natural interpretation would be that the person, despite his insistence, either has some small degree of belief that wearing the jersey will help his team, or that he, again despite his insistence, isn't really wearing the jersey with that purpose in mind.

If [G] is acceptable, how does it help explain transparency\*? We can begin by noting that trying to decide whether  $p$  is true is an aim-directed activity: trivially, it involves the aim of getting it right as to whether  $p$  is true. If one weren't aiming at

getting it right as to whether  $p$  is true, one wouldn't be trying to decide whether  $p$ , but instead be doing some other thing. Furthermore, deciding whether  $p$  is true *on the basis of some consideration* is a way of deciding whether  $p$  true. And deciding whether  $p$  is true on the basis of some consideration that is *not* relevant to the truth of  $p$ , is a way of deciding whether  $p$  is true that will not further the aim of getting it right as to whether  $p$  is true. So if someone is deciding whether  $p$  is true on the basis of considerations that she is aware are not relevant to the truth of  $p$ , [G] implies that it would be difficult to seriously think of her as genuinely trying to decide whether  $p$  is true in the first place.

If that is plausible, we have an explanation of transparency\*, in the sense that we have shown it to be an instance of a much more general principle governing aim directed activities as such. What is more, this explanation is compatible with the constraint [C\*] since it is compatible with the fact that we, subconsciously, can be caused to decide whether  $p$  on the basis of considerations that are not relevant to the truth of  $p$ . And again, this can be seen as an instance of the general fact that we, in ways that we are not aware of, can be moved to attempt to further certain aims in ways that are in fact irrelevant to those aims.

Can transparency in deliberation over *belief* be explained in the same way, as an instance of the general principle [G]? The main stumbling block for this is that whereas transparency\* concerns a relation between deciding whether  $p$  is true, and being moved to settle this question on the basis of considerations one takes to be relevant to settling *that very question* (i.e. whether  $p$  is true), thus making it immediately obvious how it is an instance of [G], transparency concerns a relationship between deciding whether to *believe that p*, and being moved to settle this question on basis of considerations one takes to be relevant to an apparently



*different* question, namely whether  $p$  is true. It is therefore not immediately obvious how transparency could be seen as an instance of [G].

Perhaps it helps that transparency is a condition on how one could decide whether to believe that  $p$ , if the deliberation *is to result directly in a belief*. If one is aware of this condition, [G] might get a grip since it would imply that one could not count as someone trying to decide whether to believe that  $p$  *in a way that results directly in a belief* on the basis of considerations that one does not take to be relevant to whether  $p$  is true, since one would then be trying to achieve an aim (forming a belief) in a way that one would be aware is going to be ineffective to achieving that aim. But Shah would object to this strategy, and perhaps rightly so, since it would make transparency a matter of one realizing that *if one is to end up with a belief that  $p$  as a result of the deliberation, one better move to decide whether  $p$* . That introduces a step of instrumental reasoning between the deliberative question of whether to believe that  $p$ , and the factual question to which it is transparent, but as Shah points out, such a step does not exist in paradigmatic cases of transparency. In Shah's words, in paradigmatic cases of transparency, the transition from the one question to the other is *immediate* (e.g. Shah 2003: 453).

A clue to a more promising strategy comes from the qualification to Shah's picture of transparency motivated above, namely that it isn't in fact psychologically impossible to move from deliberation of whether to believe that  $p$  to some question other than whether  $p$  is true. In fact, deliberation over whether to believe that  $p$  can very easily lead one to consider truth-independent questions, such as whether believing  $p$  would be pleasant, or would inspire one with confidence, or some similar thing, and it is certainly not psychologically impossible to regard such considerations as genuinely relevant to whether one should believe that  $p$ . What isn't possible is for

such deliberation to result in belief in a direct way. But if paradigmatic cases of transparency are *immediate*, that should strike us as puzzling. Why should the deliberative question of whether to believe that *p* sometimes give way to the question of whether *p* in an *immediate* way, if it is neither impossible nor particularly rare that we move in our deliberation to a question other than that of truth? The most straightforward explanation of this is that we have slightly different questions in mind when asking ‘whether to believe that *p*’ in different contexts. If we are open to that possibility, a strikingly simple explanation of transparency suggests itself: paradigmatic cases of transparency move in an immediate way from the deliberative question of whether to believe that *p* to whether *p*, because in paradigmatic cases of transparency, what we mean by the question ‘whether to believe that *p*’ is really just *whether p is true*. But if paradigmatic cases of transparency are really just cases of the subject expressing a question about truth by using the term ‘belief’, paradigmatic cases of transparency would be identical to the phenomenon identified here as transparency\*, and the explanation of transparency\* in terms of [G] would thus apply to transparency as well.

But is it at all plausible that what we have in mind with questions phrased in terms of ‘belief’ is sometimes just questions concerning truth? Examples such as the following suggest that it is:

Bob has been trying to find out whether it’s currently sunny on Costa Brava. He first consults the Weather Network, which says it’s sunny, but to make sure, he also consults the BBC Weather Service, which says it’s cloudy. Frustrated by the conflicting messages, he exclaims ‘Now I wonder *what* to

believe!’ and starts investigating which weather network is generally considered more reliable.

It seems clear that in this case, by ‘Now I wonder *what* to believe!’, Bob is really just expressing uncertainty concerning the *truth* about the current weather on Costa Brava. He is not expressing some deeper puzzlement about which belief the current situation recommends, for which a proper appreciation of the constitutive normative or teleological features of belief would be a remedy. He is just wondering what the truth of the matter is. But if that is what his question boils down to, it is no wonder that the transition to further investigations into the truth is transparent in the relevant way.

It is, of course, easy enough to think of cases where we have something deeper in mind with deliberative questions concerning belief:

Bob is pondering the finitude of life. He entertains the dreadful thought that it may well be all over much sooner than he cares to think about. Being a philosophical sort of guy, he asks himself if it, all things considered, might be a good idea to adopt belief in an afterlife, despite the lack of evidence.

In this case, Bob is clearly not simply considering what the truth of the matter is concerning the afterlife. Instead, he is wondering if truth is all that is relevant to whether he should adopt belief in it. So in this case, it seems that we find an example of a genuine deliberative question concerning belief, and not mere truth. But it should also be clear that this is not a paradigmatic case of transparency. Even if Bob might eventually move to settle his deliberation by settling on an opinion about the truth of the matter, this move will certainly not be immediate. And it is not at all certain that

Bob will in fact settle his question in this way. So it seems that deliberative contexts that are framed in terms of the concept of belief in a real, and not merely apparent way, as in the case above, are not in fact likely to exhibit transparency.

Shah and Velleman do not consider very many concrete cases of transparency, but the ones they do offer seem to support the proposed explanation. Consider the following example:

We think that doxastic deliberation is not only possible but commonplace.

When someone makes an assertion that is not in itself convincing, the question that naturally comes to mind is whether to believe what he has said. When the president asserts that Iraq is harboring weapons of mass destruction, the natural question to ask is not "Is Iraq harboring weapons of mass destruction?" but rather "Should I believe that?" – whereupon this question transparently gives way to an inquiry into the truth of the president's claim. (Shah and Velleman 2005: 502)

In this case, I think there are two natural interpretations of the deliberative question. One interpretation is directly in terms of truth, despite Shah and Velleman's claim to the contrary. On this interpretation, the deliberator is not expressing a kind of puzzlement for which it is important that it is framed in terms of the concept of belief, but is rather just wondering whether it is true that Iraq is harboring weapons of mass destruction, in which case the transparency to the should be explained without the concept of belief playing a role. The mere fact that a natural way of *expressing* this question is in terms of 'belief' does not show that what the deliberator has in mind is a question that concerns belief in some more substantive way. The other possible and

perhaps more natural interpretation, concerns *trust*. On this interpretation, the question is phrased in terms of ‘belief’, because, rather than being exclusively concerned with the truth of the claim, the deliberator is concerned with the *trustworthiness* of the president. Indeed, ‘trusting’ somebody is commonly described in terms of ‘believing’ somebody, as in ‘I believe you’. But if that is the most natural interpretation, we should not expect the case to exhibit transparency, at least not in the paradigmatic immediate way, because rather than being moved to consider the truth of the president’s claim directly, we’d be moved to consider whether the president is to be trusted on issues such as this. And even if the case *did* exhibit transparency, this would not speak in favor of Shah and Velleman’s thesis, since it wouldn’t be transparency from a question concerning belief to a question concerning truth, but rather transparency from a question concerning trust.

The cases above support the hypothesis that when cases of deliberation phrased in terms of ‘belief’ exhibit transparency, the relevant deliberative question is best interpreted directly in terms of truth. By contrast, cases of deliberation phrased in terms of ‘belief’, in which the concept of belief genuinely does play a role in shaping the deliberation, do not seem to exhibit transparency. This suggests that cases of transparency should be understood as cases of transparency\*. But in that case, the explanation in terms of [G] applies.

More details will no doubt be needed to convince those who find it important to explaining transparency that it is framed in terms of the concept of belief. But I want to stress that even if the above explanation in terms of [G] turns out to fail at the end of the day, it still seems difficult to deny that the similarity between transparency and transparency\* makes an explanation of transparency that does not rely on being

framed in terms of the concept of belief preferable, since we would otherwise exclude a common explanation of these two very similar phenomena.

One objection that may be raised against the explanation in terms of [G], is that transparency\* does not require explanation in the first place. Perhaps it is just trivial that one can consciously decide the question of whether  $p$  is true in a way that issues directly in forming a belief as to whether  $p$ , only on the basis of considerations one takes to be relevant to whether  $p$  is true. But in that case, the above would show that transparency is trivial as well, and thus not in need of explanation. As mentioned, I do not think that transparency is a mere triviality. But either way, my aim would be achieved, namely to show that transparency shouldn't be explained in terms of being a feature of deliberation framed by the concept of belief.

Where does this leave us with respect to the original issue on whether belief aims at truth? If transparency shouldn't be explained in terms of the concept of belief, we no longer have to harness the truth-aim thesis to explain this feature of doxastic deliberation. This opens up the possibility of adopting weaker versions of the thesis, versions that are more in line with the relatively weak ways in which beliefs are actually regulated for truth. Exploring such versions, however, will be the task for another occasion.<sup>7</sup>

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