OF THE ONTOLOGY OF BELIEF

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1. *The project*

Over the last two and a half centuries three main strands of opinion can be discerned in philosophers' investigations of believing. One is the view that believing that *p* is a special kind of feeling associated with the idea that *p* or the proposition that *p*. The second view is that to believe that *p* is to be in a certain kind of mental state. The third is that to believe that *p* is to have a certain sort of disposition. Some philosophers have concentrated on elaborating one strand alone. Others have woven two or more strands together, arguing, for example, that to entertain a thought which one believes to be true, sometimes called "occurrently believing something", is indeed a feeling, but that non-occurrently believing something is a disposition occurrently to have the belief feeling. Others have suggested that to believe is indeed to be in a certain mental state, but stressed that the state in question is a dispositional state.

I shall examine each of these strands. The fruits of the investigation will, in one sense, be meagre. For I shall argue that to believe that *p* is neither a feeling, nor a mental state, nor yet a disposition to do or feel anything. In another sense, the investigation will, I hope, shed light on the concept of belief by exploring its affinities with and differences from related concepts of credal feelings (such as hope, fear, expectation, surprise, etc.), of mental states, and of tendencies and liabilities to feel, react or act, as well as doxastic dispositions such as credulity and gullibility. The illumination that was sought from a definition or analysis of belief in the generic terms of feeling, state or disposition, which would capture the essence of believing, can be derived from the connective analysis of the concept, which describes the links between the concept of belief and the plethora of related concepts in the same or adjacent semantic fields. It will, I hope, contribute to attaining a distinct idea, although not a clear idea, of what belief is. And a methodological moral hangs on that.

Before commencing analysis, one misconception should be mentioned and put aside. It is commonly suggested that to believe that *p* is a *propositional attitude*. That is patently misconceived, if it means that believing is an attitude towards a proposition. For believing that *p* is not the same as believing the proposition that *p*. To be sure, one can believe propositions, as one can believe stories, rumours, declarations and statements. But since what I believe, when I believe that *p*, may be what you fear or suspect, and since to fear or suspect that *p* is not to fear or suspect the proposition that *p*, what I believe when I believe that *p* cannot be a proposition. Only language users can believe stories, rumours, declarations, statements and propositions, but both small children and higher animals can believe that things are thus and so, so what they believe cannot be propositions. To believe that *p* is to believe things to be so; to believe the proposition that *p* is to believe things to be as the proposition that *p* describes them as being.[1]

2. *Belief and feelings*

The supposition that to believe that things are thus-and-so is to have a special kind of feeling associated with the idea that things are so originates in the modern era with Hume. He confronted the question of what the difference is between believing something to be so and not believing it to be so – the difference, as he put it, betwixt belief and incredulity. One can

[1] For comprehensive refutations of the idea that what we believe when we believe that *p* is a proposition, and of the thought that believing is an attitude towards propositions, see White (1972) and Rundle (2001).

entertain the idea that *p* without believing that *p*, or one can do so and also believe that *p*. What is the difference? Hume's answer was that it lies in the presence of a feeling in the case of believing what is entertained, and the absence of such a feeling when what is entertained is not believed. One 'entertains' the idea that *p* when, for example, one reads or hears that *p* without either believing that *p* or believing that not-*p*, or when one wonders whether *p* or imagines that *p*. In all such cases, the idea that *p* is 'before one's mind', although one does not believe that *p*.

> 'Belief', Hume wrote,
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> consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not masters. When we are convinc'd of any matter of fact, we do nothing but conceive it, along with a certain feeling, different from what attends the mere *reveries* of the imagination. And when we express our incredulity concerning any matter of fact, we mean, that the arguments for the fact produce not that feeling. (Hume 1976, 624)

His reasoning, transposed into modern idiom, was straightforward. The difference between merely understanding something said or read and believing it cannot lie in any difference between what was said to be so and what is then believed. For it must be possible for A not to believe that *p* and for B to believe precisely what A does not believe, just as it must be possible for A to wonder whether *p*, or suppose, for the sake of argument, that *p* or to imagine that *p* and for B to believe things to be exactly as A postulates but does not believe them to be. Nor can it lie in our voluntarily adding something to what is understood (or entertained). For then it would be within our power to believe or not to believe something at will. But, Hume insisted in opposition to Descartes, it is not.

When it came to characterizing the feeling in question, Hume notoriously had difficulties:

> An idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*. This variety of terms, which may seem so unphilosophical, is intended only to express that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and the imagination. Provided we agree about the thing, 'tis needless to dispute about the terms. ... I confess, that 'tis impossible to explain perfectly this feeling or manner of conception. We make use of words, that express something near it. But its true and proper name is *belief*, which is a term that everyone sufficiently understands in common life. And in philosophy we can go no further, than assert, that it is something *felt* by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgement from the fictions of the imagination. (Hume 1976, 629)

It is noteworthy that the Humean account commanded widespread assent more than a century later. At the end of the nineteenth century, William James (1890, 283-7) wrote "As regards the analysis of belief, i.e. what it consists in, we cannot go very far. *In its inner nature, belief, or the sense of reality, is a sort of feeling more allied to the emotions than to anything else.*" What sort of feeling is it? Like Hume and Mill before him, James thought that here one hits bedrock. "Belief, the sense of reality, feels like itself — that is about as much as we can say." Belief is a psychic attitude towards a proposition. "This attitude is a state of consciousness *sui generis*, about which nothing more can be said in the way of internal analysis." Russell (1921, 233) argued that 'believing is an actual experienced feeling'. He distinguished three kinds of belief: memory, expectation and bare assent. Each of these, he regarded 'as constituted by a certain feeling or complex of sensations, attached to the content believed'. What exactly is this feeling? Russell (1921, 250) hesitated: "I, personally, do not profess to be able to analyse the

sensations constituting respectively memory, expectation and assent, but I am not prepared to say that they cannot be analysed." Ramsey, in 1927, wrote that "The mental factors of ... a belief [are] words spoken aloud or to oneself or merely imagined, connected together and accompanied by a feeling or feelings of belief or disbelief ..." (Ramsey, 1931, 144).

Why might one be tempted to adopt this view? The traditional empiricist preconception that thinking is a process of combining images in the mind and that the meaning of a word is a mental image provided powerful motivation for such a conception. If entertaining the idea that *p* is a matter of having an imagist representation of the state of affairs that *p*, then it seems plausible to suppose that the difference between merely entertaining the idea that *p* and believing that *p* lies in an associated feeling, since what is merely entertained, namely that *p*, and what is believed, namely that *p*, are the same. This imagist conception of thought and meaning is now defunct, although it is noteworthy that it has a legitimate heir in the contemporary representational theory of the mind. Nevertheless, even if one rejects imagist theories, there are noteworthy connections between believing that *p* and feelings.

First, we do speak of feeling that things are thus-and-so, as we speak of believing that things are thus-and-so. I may feel very strongly or believe passionately that an injustice has been done or that we ought to take steps to remedy matters. One may not be able to help feeling, or to help believing, that the wrong should be righted. Feeling thus is not confined to moral concerns. One may feel that all will go well, or that one's party will win. But one cannot feel that 2+2=4, or that if it is raining then the pavements are wet, for one cannot feel things to be thus-and-so if one knows them to be so.

Second, believing is connected with a set of adjacent notions associated with feeling (see Price, 1969). It is linked with both hope and fear; and one can *feel* hopeful or fearful that *p*. To hope that *p* is not to believe that *p*, but if one hopes that *p*, one must believe that it is possible that *p*. One cannot believe that it is certain that *p* or believe that it is certain that not-*p* and also hope that *p*. Moreover, one must believe that the state of affairs that *p* is, in some way, good or desirable for one. To fear that *p* similarly involves belief in the possibility of its being the case that *p* and exclusion of the belief that it is certain; if one believes that it is certain that war will break out, one cannot fear that it will do so, although one may feel afraid *of* the war one believes to be immanent. It further involves belief that the state of affairs feared is dangerous or harmful. One can expect that *p* (and also hope or fear that what one expects will indeed eventuate), and expectation too is something that can be felt. To expect that *p* is not merely to believe that *p* is possible, but that it is likely or certain. Unlike hoping and fearing that *p*, expecting that *p* is not in itself affective. One may expect that *p* yet be affectively indifferent with respect to what is expected. But one may excitedly, anxiously, fearfully or hopefully expect that *p*. The non-satisfaction of one's expectation does not imply that one is or feels unsatisfied, but only that one's expectation is not fulfilled, and that one was therefore mistaken to believe that the anticipated event would occur. Nevertheless, to expect that *p* is not generally the same as to believe that *p*. I may have been expecting all week that you would telephone, but I cannot have been believing all week that you would telephone me. I can be in a state of excited expectation, but not in a state of excited belief. To be sure, one can expect something without having any feelings in the matter, but if one does feel expectant, one can describe the feeling, i.e. describe what it was like to feel expectant. Thus, for example, one might offer the following description: "My mouth was dry, my hands shook a little, and my heart was pounding. I said to myself, 'Any moment now!'" But there is no comparable description of believing.

Belief is also linked with surprise, astonishment and amazement, and they too can be felt. One is, and feels, surprised, astonished or amazed when what one believed to be so turns

out not to be so, or when what one believed to be impossible is found to be feasible or even done, or when something clashes with one's presuppositions or fundamental assumptions. What one is and feels surprised, astonished or amazed to be so is something which one now knows or believes to be so, but previously believed or assumed not to be so or to be highly improbable or impossible, or doubted whether it was so. Similarly, one may be surprised to hear someone say that *p* if one knows (and it is generally known) that it is not the case that *p*.

Belief is also linked with doubt, certainty, conviction and being sure, and hence with feeling doubtful, certain, convinced and sure. If one believes that *p* then, (a) one does not doubt that *p*, and (b) one will doubt whatever one apprehends as being improbable if it is the case that *p*. To feel doubtful whether *p* is to feel inclined not to believe that *p* or disinclined to believe that *p*. One can believe that *p* without being or feeling certain that *p* (for one may neither be nor feel either certain or doubtful), but one cannot be or feel certain that *p* without knowing or believing that *p*. One can believe that *p* without being or feeling convinced that *p*, but one cannot be or feel convinced that *p* without believing that *p*. Similarly, one can believe that *p* without feeling sure that *p*, although one cannot if one feels unsure whether *p*. But one cannot feel sure that *p* unless one believes that *p*. Though one cannot feel sure without feeling certain or feel certain without feeling sure, the two are not the same. If something is certain, then it is settled in as much as the possibility of its not being so is excluded by the circumstances of the case. Note that what is certain (probable or possible), when it is certain (probable or possible) that *p*, is not the proposition that *p*, any more than what is feared, suspected, lucky or curious, unfortunate or strange when it is feared, suspected, lucky, etc. that *p* is the proposition that *p*. One may feel certain that *p* without its being certain that *p*. So one may feel certain that Roaring Forties will win the 3.30 because one dreamt that it would, but the fact that one so dreamt does not make it certain that the horse will win. Certainty relates to the exclusion of a possibility, being sure to the exclusion of doubt. Certainty has an objective application ("It is certain that *p*") and a subjective or personal one ("He is or feels certain that *p*"), whereas being sure is primarily subjective ("He is or feels sure"). To feel sure that *p* is to feel secure in one's belief that *p*, to be free of any doubts or worries that the possibility of not-*p* has not been excluded. To feel certain that *p* is to be settled in the belief, however irrational, that the possibility that not-*p* can be ruled out (White 1975, 87).

Despite this intricate web of connections between belief and feelings, to believe that *p* is not the same as to feel that *p*. To feel that *p* is to have a hunch, intimation, intuition or presentiment that *p*. A vague feeling that *p* is not a vague belief, but a felt inclination to believe. A strong feeling that *p* may be tantamount to a belief that *p*, but one for which there are no, or no adequate, grounds or evidence. If so, this is the one kind of case in which belief *can* be said to be an epistemic feeling — but it is necessarily an exception to the rule. Alternatively, "a strong feeling that *p*" may be construed as indicating a strong inclination to believe. "Why do you believe that *p*?" is to ask for the reasons or grounds for believing, but "Why do you feel that *p*?" is to ask what features of the situation make one feel so. One can feel inclined to believe that *p*, but one cannot feel inclined to feel that *p*.

To believe that *p* is not to have a special kind of feeling, let alone an indefinable feeling with which each person who believes anything is acquainted. First, if it were, it would be unintelligible how anyone could learn the use of the verb "to believe". For private ostensive definition is not an option. We do not teach the use of "I believe ..." by teaching children how to identify a special indefinable feeling which we presume them to have in association with an idea or proposition. Rather, once the child has learnt to make assertions, we teach it how (and when) to qualify its assertions with the prefix "I believe", as well as how and when to qualify its reports of the information derived from others by the prefix "He

believes". The qualification is not called for by the detectible presence of a special feeling had by another, but by such altogether non-psychological features as the fact that the putative information derived from him is false or unfounded, or mere hearsay, or not so well supported as to exclude reasonable doubt, or a controversial opinion. In one's own case, it is called for by the fact that one is aware that one's grounds for saying that *p* do not establish that it is certain that *p*, or do not exclude reasonable doubt in the matter, that the evidence one has for its being the case that *p* is inconclusive, or that the issue is a matter of opinion, and so forth. But one does not say that one believes that *p* on the grounds that one has noted a special indefinable feeling that one associates with the idea that *p*.

Second, the supposition that belief is a feeling would absurdly imply that in order to know whether another person believes that *p*, we should have to establish that he has a special kind of indefinable feeling associated with the idea or proposition that *p*. But an interest in the beliefs of another is not, as such, an interest in his feelings. We find out what another person believes by observing what he says and does. He does not have to assert that he believes that *p*, although, if he does, that is a defeasible criterion for his so believing — but not because it is a defeasible report on some inner experience which he has. That he sincerely asserts that *p* by itself betokens the fact that he believes (or knows) that *p* — and it matters not at all what feelings he has in association with entertaining the proposition that *p*.

Third, there are degrees of feeling. One can feel a little depressed or very cheerful, less miserable and more contented. So too, one can feel a little suspicious, or very doubtful, less sure or more convinced. But there are no degrees of belief, so belief cannot be a feeling. I cannot believe that *p more* than you do, although I may be more certain than you that *p*. I cannot believe that *p* just *a little* or *very much*, although I can be inclined a little or very much inclined to believe that *p*. Of course, one may strongly or firmly believe that *p* (though not "weakly" or "moderately"), but this does not indicate a degree of belief. It signifies the strength or firmness with which one cleaves to the belief one has. It is the ease or difficulty of shaking the belief in question, and not the belief itself, that has degrees. It makes sense to ask how convinced, doubtful, suspicious, confident, etc. someone is that *p*, but not to ask how belief-ful or how much one believes that *p*. It is the belief-related adjectives that do this work, not the noun "belief". The evidence I have in favour of its being the case that *p* may increase, but my belief that *p* does not therefore increase, although my conviction, certainty or confidence that *p* will.

Fourth, the difference, which puzzled Hume, between merely entertaining the idea or proposition that *p* without believing that *p* and believing that *p* does not turn on the absence of feeling in the first case and its presence in the second. Merely to entertain the idea that *p* is to be able to say what "*p*" means, to wonder whether *p* or to imagine that *p*, without the idea that *p* constituting a fully qualified premise (by contrast with a mere assumption or supposition) in one's theoretical or practical reasoning. But if one believes that *p*, then that *p* is something which one accepts, *ceteris paribus*, as a reason for one's thinking, feeling or acting in a certain way if appropriate circumstances arise.[2]

Fifth, if having the belief that *p* were a feeling associated with the idea that *p*, and if the putative feeling is conceived to be a mere sensation, as Hume seems implicitly to suppose and Russell explicitly avers, then it would be altogether obscure why the evidence for its being the case that *p* should provide good reasons for believing that *p*. For such feelings can have causes but not grounds or reasons. But if the feeling is not a sensation, as feelings of conviction, confidence, doubt or suspicion, hope, fear or expectation, surprise, astonishment or

[2] This formulation requires further refinement in order to distinguish merely accepting that *p*, e.g. for the sake of argument, and believing that *p*.

disappointment are not, then it is not a feeling that can be *associated* with the idea or proposition that *p*, since it is not an *accompaniment* of the idea or proposition entertained, nor can it be detached from its content while remaining the same. For the identity of the feeling of F, when one Fs that *p*, is partly determined by that which is Fd. The difference between fearing that *p* and fearing that *q* is not that the very same feeling is attached now to the idea that *p* and now to the idea that *q*, for the *that p* and the *that q* which one fears are not kinds of objects with which feelings can be associated.

Sixth, if the feeling which one's believing is alleged to be is not a sensation but a doxastic feeling such as feeling that *p*, feeling convinced, certain or sure that *p*, or hoping, fearing or expecting that *p*, i.e. an 'intentional' feeling, then such feelings seem uniformly to presuppose the concept of belief and so cannot be invoked to explain it. Far from such feelings being indefinable, primitive or unanalysable, they are all explicable in terms of believing.

Finally, the claim that believing that *p* is a kind of occurrent feeling associated with presently thinking about the idea that *p* fails altogether to account for the fact that if one believes that *p*, one's belief does not cease when one ceases to reflect on the idea. Indeed, one may believe that *p* for many years, without the thought that *p* even crossing one's mind. One can try to budget for this by distinguishing between the putative belief-feeling and a disposition to have it. This will be examined below.

3. *Belief and mental states*

A much more popular view in the twentieth century has been that belief is a mental state, state of mind or psychological state, these being taken to be roughly synonymous; sufficiently so, at any rate, for the different nuances associated with each to be irrelevant to the categorial classification. So, for example, Donald Davidson (2001a, 40) held that beliefs are correctly called "states of mind", that "having a belief is ... being in a state" (Davidson, 2001b, 74). John Searle (1983, 1-4) holds that beliefs are "intentional mental states", and Timothy Williamson (2000, 21) writes of believing that *p* as "the paradigmatic mental state". What speaks for this view? First, "to believe" syntactically approximates verbs which belong to the grammatical category of "static" or "stative" verbs, which are commonly held to signify states. Second, like states, beliefs are often acquired at a time[3], are had for a time, and often cease at a time (e.g. when one discovers that things are not as one believed them to be) or fade away. It is held to be a mental state in which we are throughout our waking lives and, it has sometimes been added, often too when we are dreaming (cf. Price, 1969, 24). It is an intentional mental state which has a content (Searle, 1983,1). Some philosophers hold that the state which believing something consists in is also a state that can "interact" with other mental states. It is conceived to "underlie" sincere assertion, and to be implicated in the aetiology of many different kinds of action.[4] And it is commonly argued that it is identical with some neural state of the brain.[5] Whether these substantive claims make sense, *a fortiori*

[3] Why 'often'? One may be able to say when one came to believe that *p*, e.g. when someone imparted the relevant piece of information to one, or when one came to the conclusion that *p*. But can one say when in childhood one came to believe that there are fairies or ghosts, or when one came to believe that the path of virtue is better than the path of pleasure (or vice versa)?

[4] S. Stich (1983, 230) holds this conception to be part of what he calls 'the folk-psychological' idea of belief.

[5] For example, W. V. O. Quine 1990, 71; 1995, 87.

whether they are true, depends upon whether it is correct in the first place to conceive of believing something as a mental state.

Neither the general concept of a state of a thing or of a state of affairs nor the more specific concepts of a state of mind or mental state are sharply defined. Moreover, the relation between them is not perspicuous. At any rate, it would be precipitate to assume prior to investigation that a mental state is simply a species of the general category of a state, coordinate with that of non-mental states.

The concept of a state of things is no less of a rough and ready instrument than that of an object. Derived from the Latin *status*, what it signifies in its primary uses is associated in one way or another with the idea of a manner of standing, a condition, or a combination of circumstances or attributes belonging at a given time to a person or thing.

Like objects, states can be said to exist; unlike objects, events or processes, states *obtain* rather than happen or take place — as do events, or go on or occur — as do processes and prolonged events. They persist through a period of time and do not have temporal phases, for unlike the categories of processes and of prolonged events like parties and battles, they are not, *in their relevant individuative features*, dynamic. A thing or person is said to be *in* a given state. "State" has application, in one specialised use, to stuffs and quantities of stuffs, as when we speak of the solid, liquid or gaseous state of a given stuff or quantity thereof — solidity, liquidity and gaseousness being different states of matter. Ice is water in a solid state and steam is water in a gaseous state. The term "state" is at home when we are concerned with the various forms or conditions in which an object, mineral, vegetable or animal, is found to exist, or a phase or stage of the existence of such a thing. We speak of a substance as being in a crystalline state, of plants or animals as being in an immature state, of insects being in a larval or pupal state. In a more particularised manner, we speak of an animate creature's state of health, of a person's state of prosperity. A state of something, e.g. of the room (tidy and neat or untidy and dirty), of the lawn or garden (well-kept or gone to seed), of the economy (overheated or in a deflated state) or of the nation is the overall (context relevant) condition of the thing. More generally, we talk of the state of play with respect to a given stage or phase of an evolving matter. At an even higher level of generality, we speak of a state of affairs or state of things, signifying the way in which certain events or circumstances stand disposed at a given time.

It is important not to let this nebulous category spiral out of control. It is surely mistaken to conceive of our talk of states of things as no more than a stylistic variation on ordinary predication. For it is plainly false that whenever a predicate "F" is truly applicable to some object *a*, then it is true that *a* is in an F state or state of F-ness. The sun may be shining, but it is not in a state of shining; the lawn may be green, but would not be said to be in a green (as opposed to a well-kept) state; a building may be old, but hardly in an old, as opposed to a decrepit or dilapidated, state. A painting may be in an unrestored state, and it may be French or Italian, important or unimportant, but not in a French or Italian, important or unimportant state. It is not clear to me *why* that is so, but *that* it is so is evident. One factor seems to be that something can be said to be in an S state only if it might, without loss of identity, fail to be in an S state.

When we turn to the notion of a mental state, it is evident that mental states are both like and unlike states of things.[6] It is people (and other higher animals) who enjoy or endure different mental states. They are distinguished from other states in which people find themselves, such as states of welfare or illfare — e.g. of health or wealth, decrepitude or

[6] The following discussion is indebted, *inter alia*, to J. F. M. Hunter 1980, 239-60 and 1990, 17-23.

prosperity, as well as moral states such as innocence, grace or corruption. For mental states are states of consciousness, i.e. states in which a person is while conscious (awake). Paradigmatic mental states are moods and occurrent emotional states. We speak of being in a state of acute anxiety, depression, or excitement. We say that A is in a cheerful, elated, gloomy, despondent or agitated state of mind today, or that he is in a pensive, reflective, tranquil state of mind. When a person is in such a state of mind, he *feels* cheerful, elated, joyful, gloomy, melancholic, agitated, anxious, excited or depressed. It is, however, noteworthy that we also speak of states of attention or inattention, as when we say of someone that he is in a state of intense concentration or in a dreamy state of mind. Unlike the former group, these are not bound up with feelings. In general, mental states admit of degrees of intensity, for one can be mildly or acutely anxious, slightly or completely depressed, moderately or extremely cheerful, and hence too of quantity, for one may wish oneself or another less anxiety, more cheerfulness and much joy.

Because mental states are states of consciousness, they do not persist through periods of loss of consciousness or sleep. One does not cease to be in a healthy state or impecunious state just because one is asleep, but one does cease to be in a melancholic or dolorous mood. Sleep does not guarantee that one will not be in the same unhappy state of mind when one awakes, but it does give one respite from one's suffering. No matter how cheerful, joyous or elated one has been in the course of the day, one does not continue to feel cheerful, joyous or elated when one falls asleep — for one feels nothing while asleep. Mental states, therefore, have what Wittgenstein (1967, §§71-85, 472) denominated "genuine duration". They can be interrupted by distraction of attention, as when one's acute anxiety or melancholic feelings are alleviated by the visit of a friend, only to flood back when he departs, or as when one's state of concentration is disturbed and broken off by a telephone call but is later resumed. This makes for an important difference between mental states and other states of a person as well as non-personal states of things. The distinction is useful. Indeed, it is by reference to it that we distinguish between being in such and such a *mental state* and having a corresponding standing disposition, which is sometimes characterized as being in a *dispositional state*. Dispositions and dispositional states have duration all right, but not genuine duration. Being of an irritable disposition is not a mental state at all, but a trait of temperament. Feeling irritable, a mood which may last all morning but be alleviated by a pleasant luncheon party, is a mental state.

With these elucidations in mind, we can turn to the question at issue: is belief a mental state? Is to believe something, to have a belief, to be in a certain mental state? Many considerations speak against this supposition.

First, mental states are things one is *in*. One can be in a cheerful, depressed, or neurotic state, or in a state of intense excitement or elated anticipation. But there is no such thing as being in a state of believing that *p*, any more than there is such a thing as being in a state of knowing that *p*. No one would answer the question "What sort of mental state is A in today?" with sentences of the form "He is in a state of believing that *p*".

Second, commonly, though not uniformly, if a noun signifies a mental state, then there is a corresponding adjective which goes with the verb "to feel". Hence, corresponding to depression, anxiety, joy, cheerfulness, excitement, elation, agitation, despondency one may *feel* depressed, anxious, joyful, cheerful, excited, elated, agitated, despondent. A person's being in such a state is then describable by the use of the progressive or imperfect tense, as in "A *is feeling* cheerful, anxious, despondent" or "A has been feeling agitated, worried, depressed ever since hearing the bad news". But although one may hear the good news that *p* and believe what one hears, and although the good news may make one cheerful, it cannot make one belief-ful — since there is no such thing, *a fortiori* it cannot make one feel belief-ful either.

Nor do we have any use for such forms of words as "Ever since hearing the bad news, A has been believing ..." or "Having heard the good news I am now believing ..."

It is true that one may feel convinced that *p*. But a feeling of conviction is no more a state of mind than is believing that *p*. "... feels (more or less) convinced that *p*" signifies the degree to which one embraces or cleaves to the belief that *p*, the extent to which one places one's trust or reliance upon the premise that *p* in one's reasoning. What makes one feel convinced that *p*, if anything, is the evidence for its being the case that *p*. But what makes one feel depressed that *p* is not the evidence for its being the case that *p* but the fact that *p* itself. Similarly, as we have seen, one may indeed feel that *p*, e.g. have a presentiment that *p*. But to have a presentiment that *p* is not to believe that *p*; rather, *that p* is what, without determinate grounds, one is inclined to believe is the case.

Third, mental states, because of their relation to feelings, which may be pleasant or unpleasant to endure, or their relation to attention, which may involve effort, can be exhausting or tiresome, innervating or enervating. One may be tired of being depressed, exhausted by long bouts of concentration or attention. But one cannot be tired of believing that *p* or worn out as a result of believing that *q*. Nor can one enjoy believing that *p* or take pleasure in believing that *p*.

Fourth, mental states are states of consciousness. But believing that *p* is not a state of consciousness at all. One does not cease to believe all that one believes merely because one falls asleep or loses consciousness. States of consciousness such as cheerfulness or depression occupy one, colour one's thoughts and feelings. If one believes that *p*, then that it is the case that *p* may (or may not) from time to time *pre*occupy one. It may (but need not) colour one's thoughts about *related* matters, but will not colour one's thoughts in general unless it makes one cheerful or depressed, etc. — and then it is one's cheerfulness or depression, etc., that colours one's thoughts.

Though one may have believed that *p* for twenty years, one has not believed it intermittently — one's belief state being interrupted daily by sleep — nor continuously, any more than if one has learnt that *p* and not forgotten it, one has known that *p* continuously. There is such a thing as an intermittent belief, but it is not a belief that is interrupted by sleep or distraction. Rather it is a matter of first believing that *p*, then ceasing to believe it, being convinced again and then again coming to think that it is mistaken.

Fifth, being states of consciousness, mental states have genuine duration. But belief does not exhibit genuine duration. Reading such and such a report twenty years ago may have convinced one that *p*, and one may have believed that *p* ever since. The evidence in the report may have put one into a state of excitement or depression for an hour or two, but it cannot have put one into a state of believing that *p* for twenty years. One's state of depression or elation may be interrupted by something that distracts one's attention and later resumed. But distraction of attention cannot interrupt one's believing that *p* any more than it can interrupt one's knowing that *p*. We may ask someone whether he is still feeling cheerful or depressed, or whether he is still concentrating on the matter at hand. But we cannot query "Are you believing me?" as opposed to "Do you believe me?" or "Are you still believing the story?" as opposed to "Do you still believe the story?".

Sixth, one can be in a despondent state of mind and in an anxious state of mind at the same time, just as one can feel cheerful and excited. But one cannot be in indefinitely many states of mind simultaneously. By contrast, one holds indefinitely many beliefs at a given time. Indeed, countlessly many, for there are no clear criteria for countably individuating beliefs. If someone believes that a certain book cover is red, he believes that it is not green, blue, yellow, etc. — is his belief the same mental state or a number of different ones? If he believes a certain object to be three foot long, then he believes it to be more than one or two

foot long and less than four, five, six, etc. foot long. Are these all the same belief or different ones?

Seventh, mental states have characteristic behavioural manifestation and facial expression. A person who is feeling cheerful has a cheerful demeanour, a person who is in a state of anxiety exhibits his worry in his drawn face, and a person who is in a state of concentration has his attention sharply focussed and is relatively impervious to his surroundings. To be sure, incredulity has characteristic manifestations, as does believing a person who recounts a tale. But one cannot read off the indefinitely large set of my beliefs — the huge range of putative belief-states I am supposedly in — from my face and demeanour. It is true that one can conceal one's belief, but that is not at all like concealing one's anxiety or agitation. For in the former case, but not the latter, one does not suppress any natural expression of belief. (Of course, one *can* suppress one's manifestations of incredulity or disbelief when someone tells one a tall story.)

Eighth, the subjective epistemology of belief is unlike the subjective epistemology of mental states. One may be asked whether one is in an anxious, depressed or cheerful state of mind, and one may be asked whether one believes that *p*. Normally, if one is asked how one is feeling or what mood one is in, one says, without grounds or evidence, that one is feeling quite cheerful or that one is feeling thoroughly depressed, etc. One's sincere utterance, which may also be a report on how things are with one, is itself a manifestation of cheerfulness or misery, etc. One's word has special authority, not because one has privileged knowledge, but precisely because one's utterance, being a manifestation of one's state of mind, is a criterion for another to assert that one is in such and such a mood. In some cases, however, one may hesitate to avow that one is feeling thus or otherwise. One may be unsure whether one is really feeling depressed or just a little downcast, really anxious or just feeling a little trepidation, genuinely feeling cheerful or just keeping a stiff upper lip. In such cases, one introspects, which is not to "peer into one's mind", but rather to reflect on one's current or recent behaviour, responses and reactions, feelings and thoughts, on how one would respond if such and such were to occur.

One may similarly be asked whether one believes that *p* or not. In some cases, one will respond unhesitatingly yea or nay. But often one may hesitate, being unsure whether one believes that *p* or not. But if one is unsure whether one really believes that *p*, one will typically reflect on the evidence for its being the case that *p* — not on the evidence for one's believing that *p*, let alone on any evidence for one's being in one mental state rather than another. For to be unsure whether one believes that *p* is not to believe that *p* or not to believe that *p* and to be unsure which, rather it is not to have any firm belief either way. By contrast, to be unsure whether one is really feeling depressed or just tired, cheerful or just keeping one's spirits up, may well be to feel either depressed or not depressed, cheerful or just whistling in the dark, and unsure which it is. The upshot of reflection on the evidence for its being the case that *p* is not that one finds out that one "has been believing that *p*" all along or even that one believed that *p* all along, but rather that one comes to the conclusion that *p* (or not-*p*). One makes up one's mind, rather than delves into it to discover one's state of mind.

Similarly, I may realise, having reflected on my behaviour, that I am in an anxious or irritable state of mind today. But I don't realise, as I put on my raincoat and take an umbrella, that I believe that it is going to rain, let alone that I am in a believing-that-it-will-rain state of mind.

Ninth, it may be hard to believe that *p*, but that does not mean that it is hard to get oneself into a certain state of mind — as it is hard to be cheerful in the face of adversity. It means that it is difficult to explain away all the evidence that speaks against its being the case that *p*. Similarly, one sometimes cannot help believing that *p*, but that is not at all like not

being able to help feeling anxious, despondent or excited. It means that despite the absence of evidence or the thinness of the evidence for its being the case that *p* or despite the countervailing evidence, one still cleaves to the belief that *p*.

Tenth, a mental state could not have the consequences of believing that *p*. If A believes that *p*, then it follows that A is either right about whether it is the case that *p* or wrong.[7] No such consequences flow from the fact that A is in a cheerful state of mind or in a despondent one.

It is no coincidence that "I believe", like "I know", "I suppose", "I conjecture", "I guess", "I think", etc. can occur parenthetically, as in "Such and such is, I believe, thus and so". The focus of what is thereby said is on how things are being asserted to be, not on the mental state of the speaker. But expressions signifying mental states do not have such parenthetical occurrences.

4. *Is belief a disposition?*

The idea that to believe that *p* is a disposition has been popular among philosophers since Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, but the idea is older. Bain, for example, contended that belief must be defined in terms of behaviour. "Belief", he wrote (Bain, 1859, 568) at the beginning of his chapter on that subject, "has no meaning except in reference to our actions ... no mere conception that does not directly or indirectly implicate our voluntary exertions can ever amount to the state in question." In a later work (Bain, 1872, 100) he wrote: "I consider the correct view to be, that belief is a primitive disposition to follow out any sequence that has once been experienced, and to expect the result." The idea was further developed by Braithwaite in the 1930s, who argued that to believe that *p* is to entertain the proposition that *p* and to have a disposition to act as if *p* were true. Entertaining a proposition, which, on his view, is no more than understanding the sentence which "stands for" or "expresses" it, is "subjective or phenomenological"; the disposition to behave is "objective or behaviouristic"; and it is the latter which "is the *differentia* of actual belief from actual entertainment" (Braithwaite, 1932-3, 129-46). The dispositional account was made prominent by Ryle (1949, 134), who argued that neither "know" nor "believe" signify occurrences. They are both what he called "dispositional verbs", but of quite disparate types. "Know" is a capacity verb, whereas "believe" is a tendency verb, which, unlike "know" does not signify an ability to get things right or bring things off. "Belief", he noted, can be qualified by adjectives such as "obstinate", "wavering", "unswerving", "unconquerable", "stupid", "fanatical", "whole-hearted", "intermittent", "passionate", "childlike", some or all of which are appropriate to "trust", "loyalty", "bent", "aversion", "habit", "zeal" and "addiction", which are perspicuously tendency nouns. Beliefs, like habits, can be inveterate, slipped into or given up; like partisanships, devotions and hopes, they can be blind and obsessing; like aversions and phobias, they can be unacknowledged; like fashions and tastes, they can be contagious; and like loyalties and animosities, they can be induced by tricks. Quine (1990b, 20) adopted a like view, holding that "A belief, in the best and clearest case, is a bundle of dispositions. It may include the disposition to lip service, a disposition to accept a wager, and various dispositions to take precautions, or to book a passage, or to tidy up the front room, or the like, depending on what particular belief it may be."

Some philosophers who have argued that having a belief is a mental state have simultaneously assumed that it is a disposition. It is a disposition which obtains for a period of time, and so may be denominated "a dispositional state". *Qua* dispositional state it is held to be comparable to having a prolonged depression, being of an irascible or cheerful disposition.

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[7] See Collins, 1987, ch. II, where this point is developed at length.

These have duration, but not genuine duration. One may contrast being in a depression for many weeks, with feeling depressed during the afternoon — the former being a dispositional state, the latter a mental state with genuine duration. Applied to belief, this can be taken in various ways. One may take the having of the belief that *p* as a dispositional state, which is manifested in doing whatever having the belief that *p* is taken to be a disposition to do. Alternatively, it can be taken to capture the difference between believing that *p*, construed as a state lacking genuine duration, and having the belief that *p* in mind, currently occupying one's thoughts. Thus construed, the distinction might be thought to coincide with the distinction between unconscious and conscious beliefs. Thus Searle (1992, 188) holds that "when we describe a man as having an unconscious belief, we are describing an occurrent neurophysiology in terms of its dispositional capacity to cause conscious thoughts and behaviour."

Dispositions or dispositional properties are defined by what they are dispositions to do. Some dispositions may manifest themselves in appropriate circumstances in only one way — sometimes called 'single-track dispositions'; others manifest themselves in multiple ways, and are accordingly referred to as 'multi-track dispositions'. Among inanimate dispositions, solubility is a single-track disposition which is exhibited in dissolving in a given solvent in appropriate conditions, whereas hardness is a multi-track disposition which is manifest in resistance to deformation, in emitting a sound if struck, in scratching softer surfaces, in resilient objects' bouncing off the hard object on impact, etc. If believing that *p* is held to be a disposition and having a belief a dispositional property, then one must specify whether it is a single-track or multi-track disposition, and what it is a disposition to do.

It has been suggested by L. J. Cohen (1992, 1-39) that to believe that *p* is not a disposition to *do* anything, but rather a disposition to *feel* — in particular, a disposition to feel it true that *p*, irrespective of whether one is or is not willing to act, speak, or reason accordingly. Others have argued that to believe that *p* is a disposition to *act*. If so, the character of the act that exhibits the disposition must be specified. Some have suggested that it is a disposition to bet that *p*. Others, such as Braithwaite, that it is a disposition to behave as if it were true that *p*. The plausibility of this construal is increased when it is explicitly argued, as it was by Ryle, that belief is a multi-track disposition. "To believe that the ice is dangerously thin", he wrote (Ryle, 1949, 134f.), "is to be unhesitant in telling oneself and others that it is thin, in acquiescing in other people's assertions to that effect, in objecting to statements to the contrary, in drawing consequences from the original proposition, and so forth. But it is also to be prone to skate warily, to shudder, to dwell in the imagination on possible disasters and to warn other skaters." White (1991, 131; see also Quine (quoted above)) moulded Ryle's account to fit the general contours of Braithwaite's, arguing that belief is a multi-track disposition to behave as if it were the case that *p*, where "behave" includes both acting and reacting, in both word and deed, in thought and action.

The affinities between believing that *p* and dispositions are certainly greater than its affinities with mental states. In the first place, dispositions, unlike mental states but like beliefs, are not states of consciousness. So, like beliefs but unlike mental states, they lack genuine duration. Secondly, belief, like behavioural dispositions, is connected to action. It is so connected in three very general ways. (a) The criteria for whether a person believes that *p*, like the criteria for whether a person has a disposition to V, are what the person does (and says) in certain circumstances. (b) An agent's V-ing is often explained by reference to the fact that he believed that *p*, as it is also commonly explained by reference to the fact that he has a disposition to V or a tendency to V. So both beliefs and dispositions have a role in explaining action. But whether it is the same role or a different one needs investigating. (c) What is believed when it is believed that *p*, namely that *p*, is what the agent may give as his reason for

V-ing. This feature, however, is obscured rather than highlighted by the dispositional analyses of belief. Thirdly, it is correct that many of the adjectival and adverbial modifiers appropriate to 'belief' and 'believes' are also appropriate to human dispositions, tendencies, pronenesses, habits, inclinations, liabilities and susceptibilities. But whether these affinities justify either the implausible claim that belief is a disposition or the more plausible claim that the concept of belief is a dispositional, i.e. tendency, concept is debatable. Before animadverting upon these claims, some elucidation of the general concept of a disposition and the more specific concept of a human disposition is needed.

5. *The concept of a disposition – inanimate and human*

Dispositions of the inanimate are the active and passive powers of inanimate things or stuffs. Salt dissolves in water under certain specifiable conditions — the disposition to dissolve under those conditions is a passive power of salt and the disposition to dissolve salt under those conditions is an active power of water. The brittleness of normal glass and the fragility of a glass ornament are passive powers. The disposition of a magnet to attract iron filings is an active power. A kind of stuff or an object may have one kind of disposition or set of dispositions under certain conditions and different, even contrary, dispositions under other conditions. Steel is not brittle under normal conditions, relative to standard impacts, but it is brittle at very low temperatures. So too, a stuff or object may have a certain active power with regard to one kind of object or stuff but not with respect to another — as hydrochloric acid has the power to dissolve zinc or iron, but not gold, and as certain substances are poisonous (or nourishing) for one kind of living being but not for other kinds. So ascription of an active or passive disposition to a thing or stuff often requires, for full specificity, completion by mention of the conditions under which the disposition *will be* actualized or manifested and the patient or agent in relation to which it has the disposition in question.

While solubility, fragility, brittleness, being magnetic or poisonous are dispositions, dissolving and being dissolved, breaking or being broken, magnetically attracting or being drawn towards a magnet, poisoning or being poisoned are *actualizations* or *manifestations* of active or passive dispositions. It is important to bear in mind the obvious fact that an object may have active or passive dispositions which it never manifests — for not every poisonous plant poisons anything and not every fragile vase gets broken. It is mistaken to identify a power with or reduce it to its actualization, as the Megarians and, much later, Hume did. The Megarians claimed that an agent can V only when it does V. Hume suggested that the distinction between a power and its exercise is entirely frivolous. But this is wrong. For salt is soluble even though in the salt cellar, paper is flammable even though not in contact with a flame, as billiard balls are movable even though not moving. To say that something has a power or disposition to V is, *inter alia*, to say that *if* certain conditions, consistent with the laws of nature, *were* satisfied, it would V. The fact that those conditions *are* not satisfied does not mean that the conditional is false. An inanimate object may have a disposition to V for a prolonged period or for a very short time and only under special circumstances (the adhesive power of a piece of sealing wax lasts for only about ten seconds after being heated).

The moot question is whether human dispositions are akin to natural dispositions. The answer is surely: we must distinguish. Solubility, elasticity, flammability, conductivity, brittleness, etc. are dispositions of stuffs and of things. They are active or passive powers, abilities of stuffs and things to affect or be affected in certain ways by other stuffs or things. However, the powers of the inanimate are one-way powers. A magnet has the power to attract iron filings under appropriate circumstances. But it does not have the power not to attract such filings under those circumstances. Sugar is water-soluble — if it is immersed in water under appropriate circumstances, it will dissolve. It does not have the power not to

dissolve in those circumstances. Things, or quantities or pieces of stuff, *do* things, *act on* other things, and in some cases can be said to *have an action* — but they do not *take action*, i.e. *act*, or *perform an act* or *deed*, they cannot *be caught in the act* or *pursue a course of action*. Though their powers are only manifested if appropriate conditions obtain, the obtaining of those conditions does not constitute an *opportunity*, but only an *occasion*, for the inanimate agent to do what it does and for the inanimate patient to undergo what it undergoes — for only what can forgo an opportunity can also have an opportunity, only what can take action can seize an opportunity to act.

It is only animate beings with desires or will that have two-way powers, i.e. the power to V or not to V. The volitional abilities of animate creatures, i.e. the abilities which they can exercise at will, are two-way powers. Creatures such as we, with goals and purposes of their own, with wants and intentions, are not only beings who do things, but also beings who can do or refrain from doing things which they have an opportunity to do. We have the power to take action or refrain from so doing, to act or abstain according to our choice. Indeed, it is only in as much as we have the two-way power to V or not to V, that we can be said to V voluntarily, to V because we want to V or to V intentionally, and hence too, to choose to V, to try to V or to V on purpose. And it is immediately evident that two-way powers are not dispositions — although, to be sure many dispositions are exhibited in the exercise of two-way powers. We do not say of a person who *can* or *has the ability to* V that he therefore has a disposition to V — for each person possesses innumerable abilities without having any disposition to exercise them (including the ability to kill, maim, mutilate or immolate oneself or others). It may well be that there are certain circumstances under which a certain person would kill himself or another — as there are certain circumstances under which even gold will dissolve. In the latter case it follows that gold is, under those circumstances, soluble — has a disposition to dissolve, for example, in *aqua regia*. But in the former case, it does not follow that the person has a murderous or suicidal disposition. Not everything which a human being *can* or *is able to* do, and under certain circumstances *would* do, qualifies as something which he has a disposition to do.

The difference between inanimate powers and human volitional powers is important. It would be surprising if it did not affect our concept of a human disposition. Indeed, it would be precipitate to assume without argument that human dispositions in general are a species of a genus of which natural dispositions of the inanimate are another species. Hence too, it would be rash to infer from the fact that inanimate dispositions have a certain feature, for example that a disposition may be possessed by a substance for only a few seconds, that it therefore makes sense to say of a human being that he has a disposition to V for a few seconds. Nor should one assume that because an inanimate object can be said to have a dispositional property which is never manifested (because, for example, there was no occasion for its manifestation), that it *therefore* makes sense for a human being to have a disposition which is never manifested. If these assumptions are correct, they must be shown to be so by independent argument and not by analogy with inanimate objects, for the animate and inanimate are not analogous in all respects.

Of course, there are connections. Frequency concepts apply to both inanimate things and human beings. Hence we can speak, in the same sense, of inanimate and human tendencies or pronenesses: stressed metal is prone to metal-fatigue, linen tends to crease, and indolent people are prone to take things easy, whereas Stakhanovites tend to overwork. Tendencies and pronenesses are linked to frequencies of behaviour. Increases in tendencies or pronenesses are increases in the frequency of the occasions upon which they are manifest. So too, the notions of liabilities and susceptibilities apply to both inanimate things and to human beings. A fragile object is liable to break if dropped, although it (as opposed to things

of its kind) does not have a tendency to break if dropped — it will break; and a person may be liable to succumb to temptation if the opportunity arises, but does not have a tendency to give in to temptation if no temptations ever occur. Human tendencies and pronenesses, unlike inanimate ones, can sometimes be controlled by their subject, suppressed or eradicated — as when one breaks a habit, controls one's stammer, or overcomes one's shyness. The concepts of tendency, proneness, liability and susceptibility might all be termed 'dispositional concepts' in the Rylean, technical sense of this term. But they do not signify dispositions. Smokers tend to smoke more when under pressure, are prone to spend too much money on cigarettes, and are liable to contract cancer if they do not curb their habit.[8] But smoking is a habit, not a disposition, and the frequencies and liabilities associated with the habit are not dispositions either. Nevertheless, genuine human dispositions are linked with various tendencies, pronenesses and liabilities. A person of indolent disposition tends not to strain himself, a vain person is prone to boast, and a tactless man is liable to drop clangers. Dispositions are typically manifest, *inter alia*, in regularities of behaviour.

What then are deemed dispositions? Primarily dispositions of health and traits of temperament and personality. It is less clear whether virtues and vices are rightly characterised as dispositions, although it is obvious that there is a blurred boundary-line between traits of personality and the virtues and vices.

Dispositions of health do resemble inanimate dispositions. To have a disposition to catch cold is a liability or tendency. A person has a liability to catch cold if, were he exposed to infection or draughts, etc. he would more often than not catch cold. A person has a tendency to catch cold if he catches cold more often than not when he is exposed to infection, drafts, etc. Such a tendency involving something untoward implies a liability, but not vice versa. For what tends to happen must happen reasonably frequently, whereas what is liable to happen may never happen because the conditions for it to happen may never be satisfied (White, 1982, 114). Allergies are likewise physiological tendencies or liabilities, for example, to break out in a rash, to sneeze, or to have breathing difficulties in response to stimuli such as pollen, horsehair, pollution, etc. These are passive tendencies or liabilities of the animate organism. Dispositions of health are susceptibilities of the organism, exhibited in the physiological reactions of the body. They are aspects of the physiological nature of the person. Like the dispositional properties of the inanimate, they are called forth by characteristic circumstances, defined by their causes and by what they are dispositions to do or undergo, and hence too by their characteristic manifestations.

Dourness, taciturnity, cheerfulness, melancholy, vivacity, stolidity, sensitivity, delicacy, excitability, placidity, irascibility and irritability are very different. They are dispositions of temperament, and as the etymology of 'temper' suggests, they are aspects of the nature of a person. They are dispositions concerning attitudes and modes of responsiveness, traits defined by what they are dispositions to be, feel, become or do, by the manner of one's actions and reactions, e.g. to be stern or sullen, sensitive, delicate or excitable in one's responses, to become annoyed with but little reason or to lose one's temper. They are manifest in one's facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and demeanour, and in the way

[8] Note that a habit implies a regularity, but not every regularity implies a habit. One may have a habit of taking a nap in the afternoon, but it is not a habit to sleep at night. What is customary in a social group is not a habit. It was customary of Romans to wear togas and is customary for men in western society to wear trousers, but it was not a habit of Romans to wear a toga and is not a habit of ours to wear trousers — although a Scotsman may be in the habit of wearing a kilt. What is a social (or medical) requirement (e.g. that one regularly brush one's teeth) is not a habit.

one reacts to what befalls one.

Traits of personality, such as gentleness, brashness, timidity, pedantry, as well as sociable characteristics such as courteousness, politeness, tactfulness, and perhaps self-evaluative traits such as conceit, vanity, pride, humility are also dispositions. They verge upon, and in the case of the latter group, cross the boundary into, the sphere of the virtues and vices. Whether the virtues and vices are also dispositions is a disputed matter. Prudence, fortitude, industry, temperance, courage are among the self-regarding virtues, honesty, generosity, kindness, benevolence, charity, justice among the other-regarding virtues. We do say such things as "He is of a prudent (kindly, benevolent, charitable) disposition". The virtues and vices are character traits, and one may be inclined to consider character traits and traits of temperament alike as human dispositions. Von Wright (1963, 142f.) has questioned this on the grounds that no act-category (i.e. category of acts named after the generic state of affairs instances of which result from their performance) or specific activity answers to a virtue or vice. Almost any act could, in some circumstance or other, be courageous. An act which is courageous in one circumstance and done by A need not be so in the same or different circumstances if done by B. The results of courageous acts need have no overt feature in common — what makes them courageous is not their result. Indeed, the result of any courageous act could also have been achieved through action which was not courageous. Hence virtuous acts cannot be characterized in terms of their results, and the virtues cannot be characterized in terms of their achievements. Rather, the acts which manifest a virtue or vice are characterized by reference to the virtue or vice they exemplify. This marks a conceptual difference between the virtues and vices on the one hand and habits on the other.

However, dispositions of temperament are similarly not defined by an act-category which answers to each trait. And habits are not dispositions. Unlike human dispositions, habits are not generally viewed as aspects of the nature, personality or character of a human being, as both traits of temperament and the virtues and vices are. The habit of taking a walk every afternoon is not a trait or aspect of the temperament, personality or character of a person, although if done with clockwork regularity (as in Kant's case), the habit may exemplify his rigorous punctuality. One may, like Kant, be of an orderly, reliable disposition, but not of a taking-a-walk-in-the-afternoon disposition. But it is true that concepts of traits of temperament and personality approximate tendency or frequency concepts. Someone who but rarely manifests charm, courtesy, or tact in his social relations is not a charming, courteous or tactful person, but rather a person who can be charming, courteous or tactful. It seems true of at least some of the virtues and vices that they are less closely tied to tendency and frequency than traits of temperament and personality. A magnanimous or courageous man, by contrast with an irascible man, an alcoholic, or a pedant is not a person who has a *tendency* to do anything in particular, for the occasions in which magnanimity or courage is called for may be rare in his life. If that is correct, it may be a symptom of a deeper difference, namely that the exemplification of the virtues and vices is linked with motivation and reasons for action in a way in which the exemplification of the other traits is not. Consequently, the characterization of manifestations of traits of temperament and personality does not always involve reference to the motivation or rationale of the act which exemplifies the trait. Whether such differences justify denying that the virtues and vices are dispositions need not be settled here. The indisputable cases of dispositions suffice for drawing a variety of conclusions which can be brought to bear on the question of whether believing something is a disposition.

Human dispositions may be innate or acquired, permanent or impermanent, modifiable or unmodifiable. Even if impermanent and modifiable, they are, at any rate, relatively abiding. Unlike inanimate dispositions, one cannot have a kindly, dour or cheerful

disposition for only a few minutes, although one may feel cheerful for a few minutes and be disposed to be kind to A for only a few minutes. It is important to note that in the case of human beings, having a disposition to V is not the same as being disposed (inclined, or tempted) to V. One may indeed be and feel disposed to do something for a few moments, until one learns of a good reason not to, but one cannot have, for a few moments, a disposition to do something. Whereas one may be disposed to do a particular act on an occasion, e.g. go to the cinema tonight, one cannot have a disposition to perform a specific act on a given occasion, for dispositions are inherently general. While a vase can be fragile yet never be broken, a book inflammable yet never be burnt and a cyanide tablet poisonous yet never poison anyone, a person cannot have a cheerful disposition yet never be or feel cheerful, have a placid temperament but never be placid, be irritable by nature yet never get irritated. A timid man hesitates to speak in company, lacks confidence, shrinks from peril, etc., just as a pedant insists on dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't' and a tactful person avoids embarrassing others. Roughly speaking, the criterion for whether a person has a certain disposition is whether, in appropriate circumstances, it is regularly exhibited as a manifestation of his temperament and personality. If, with respect to some disposition, *no* circumstance arises for A to exhibit it, then other things being equal, he cannot be said to have that disposition — the most one can say is that were circumstances to be or to have been different, then he would be or would have been ... Finally, note that disposition names are typically abstract nouns, and that dispositions are essentially specified by what they are dispositions to do, to be, to feel, etc., i.e. by an infinitive and not by a that-clause.

6. *Why believing is not a disposition*

Is believing that *p* a disposition? It seems evident that it is not. There are doxastic dispositions, to be sure. Gullibility and credulity are such. They are not dispositions to *act*, but rather dispositions to *believe*. One may say such things as "I believe any bad news these days", and that, like "I am very irritable these days", arguably does specify a disposition — credulity with respect to bad news. But "believing that *p*" is no disposition.

First, dispositions are essentially characterized by what they are dispositions to do or undergo. Beliefs are essentially characterized by reference to what is believed to be so. The dispositionalist will respond that he is proposing an analysis of "A believes that *p*" — it means the same as "A has a disposition to V (or to V_1 if C_1, V_2 if C_2, etc.)". But this is wrong. If A believes that *p*, he may be disposed to V. But (a) as we have seen, to be disposed to V is not the same as having a disposition to V. If one believes that N is arriving on the 12.53, one may be disposed (feel inclined) to meet him. But one cannot have a disposition to meet N today at 12.53, since dispositions are inherently general. Of course, one may have a kindly disposition, which is exemplified in one's feeling disposed to meet one's friend and, accordingly, in meeting him. But equally, one may have no such disposition, but be acting out of character. (b) If one *is* so disposed, it is because one believes that N is arriving on the 12.53 — it is not what having that belief consists in.

Second, to explain behaviour by reference to a disposition is to explain it by reference to the nature, temperament or personal traits of a person. It is typically to explain it as instantiating a tendency, proneness or liability of the person. We explain A's surprising response by pointing out that A is excitable, so tends to over-react, or that he is unflappable and dour, so is prone not to show his feelings, or that he is tactless, and so liable to drop clangers. But to explain A's V-ing by reference to his belief that *p* is to explain it in terms of what A took as his reason for Ving. "A V-ed because he has a disposition to V (is X-ful or Y-able)" explains A's V-ing as instantiating a trait, tendency or liability of A. "A V-ed because he believed that *p*" explains A's V-ing by reference to its rationale.

Third, and correspondingly, one can justify or try to justify one's V-ing, on a certain occasion, by reference to what one believes. One's V-ing may exemplify one's disposition to V, but that one has a disposition to V cannot justify V-ing as citing what one believes may justify one's V-ing. For if one believes that *p*, then *that p* may feature in one's *reasons* for acting, reacting or thinking in a certain way.

Fourth, attributing a disposition to a person, saying that he is dour or cheerful, placid or excitable, polite or tactless, timid or rash, is ascribing a trait to him. It is to characterize his nature, temperament or personality. To ascribe a belief to a person is to do no such thing, although the fact that he believes what he believes may reflect his credulous, gullible or suspicious nature. Believing that *p* may manifest different dispositions, but it is not itself a trait of any kind.

Fifth, to know that A has a certain disposition, that he is irascible, gentle, timid, etc., is to know that he is prone or liable to act or react in certain ways in response to certain circumstances. But one can know that A believes that *p* without having any idea of what, if anything, A is prone or liable to do. A may believe that it will rain this afternoon — but there is no saying what A will therefore do (unless we also know his goals). He may stay at home or go for a walk, with or without an umbrella; bring in the deckchairs or leave them outside; tell someone that rain is likely or not tell anyone; answer the question whether it will rain truthfully or tell a lie, etc. — and none of these is what believing that it will rain consists in.

Sixth, to know of one's own dispositions is to know oneself, to know something about one's own character and personality. One's ability to say what dispositions one has typically rests on one's knowledge of one's past behaviour, feelings and responses. But one's ability to say truthfully that one believes something or other is not typically an aspect of self-knowledge, and has no such grounds.

Seventh, one may believe that *p* for a few moments, until one realises that what one was told cannot be true or until the triviality one read in the newspaper slips from one's mind and is forgotten. But, as has been argued, it does not follow that one has a disposition of any kind for a few moments. Indeed, unlike inanimate objects, a person cannot have a disposition to V (as opposed to feeling disposed to V) for a few moments. Similarly, many of the passing beliefs one has never get expressed. But a human being, unlike an inanimate object, cannot have a disposition (as opposed to a liability) which is never manifested.

Eighth, the criteria for whether a person has a disposition to V consist in what he says and does. Similarly, the criteria for whether a person believes that *p* consist in what he says and does. But that no more shows believing that *p* to be a disposition than does the fact that the criteria for whether a person is in pain also consist in what he says and does shows that being in pain is a disposition.

Ninth, "I believe that *p*, but it is not the case that *p*" is a (kind of) contradiction. But "I have a disposition (or, better, I tend, am inclined, or prone) to behave as if it were the case that *p*, but it is not the case that *p*" is not a contradiction of any kind, even though it calls out for an explanation of why one has such a tendency, given that one knows that it is not the case that *p*. It is easy enough to imagine appropriate explanations. (To be prone to behave as if it were the case that Stalin was a great and benevolent leader, even though he was not, was a dictate of self-preservation in Stalinist Russia.)

Tenth, as noted above, if A believes that *p* then it follows that A is right if it is the case that *p* or wrong if it is not the case that *p*. But ascription of a disposition to A does not generally involve any such thing.

But, if one ingenious dispositional account of belief is correct, this objection can be turned. L.J. Cohen (1992, 1-39) has married the merits of Hume's analysis of belief as a feeling with the merits of the dispositional account of belief, while also preserving the crucial

feature that believing that *p* involves being right or wrong about how things are. According to his analysis, to believe that *p* is a disposition, when attending to the issues raised by the proposition that *p*, normally to feel it true that *p* and false that not-*p*, whether or not one is willing to act, speak or reason accordingly. One discovers whether one believes that *p* by introspecting whether one is normally disposed to feel it true that *p* when considering the matter. To acquire new beliefs is to widen the range of credal feelings one is disposed to have. Contrary to Hume, belief is a disposition, not a current feeling. Many beliefs antedate their first being felt. One may have beliefs one never feels, and some beliefs may last only a few moments (as a glass which is smashed as soon as made was fragile for a few moments).

Despite the ingenuity of this account, it is incorrect. Believing that *p* does not stand to feeling it true that *p* as being irascible stands to feeling angry. (i) To be of an irascible temperament is indeed to have a disposition, namely a disposition to lose one's temper with minimal provocation. It is actualized when one becomes or feels angry. The criteria for being or feeling angry are behavioural manifestations of anger. The recurrent display of such behaviour in circumstances of minimal provocation constitute criteria for having the disposition. By contrast, believing that *p* is not a disposition which is actualized in feeling it true that *p*, for to feel it true that *p* is to have a hunch, intuition, intimation or suspicion that it is true that *p* (for brevity's sake the prefix 'that it is true' will be omitted henceforth). But, (a) to have a hunch or intuition that *p* is to feel some inclination to believe that *p*. Hence to explain what it is to believe that *p* by claiming that it is a disposition to feel some inclination to believe that *p* is either circular or generates an infinite regress. (b) the criteria for feeling that *p*, i.e. for having a hunch or intuition that *p*, are avowing or averring such a hunch or suspicion. But the criteria for believing that *p* are not recurrent manifestations of a feeling that *p* (of having a hunch that *p*), but rather asserting or assenting to the assertion that *p*, justifying or explaining one's action by reference to its being the case that *p*, dissenting from the denial that *p*, etc.

(ii) An irascible person is one who has a disposition to feel angry on the slightest provocation. If one is irascible, one may feel and become angry because, for example, A made a noise just now. But one cannot have a disposition to feel angry because A made a noise just now, although one may be liable to be angry *if* A makes a noise and prone to feel angry *whenever* A makes a noise. One may believe that A is making a noise now. But one cannot have a disposition to feel that A is making a noise now — for dispositions are general. So too, one may perhaps have a disposition to have hunches, intimations, presentiments, intuitions. One may clearly have a tendency or proneness to have hunches. But one cannot have a disposition, tendency or proneness to have a hunch that A is making a noise now. Of course, one may feel inclined (even disposed) to believe that he is. But it is not clear that it even makes sense to feel inclined or disposed to feel that A is making a noise now. For to feel that A is making a noise now is itself to feel inclined to believe that — so being disposed or inclined to feel would be a second-order felt inclination, and it is not obvious that there is any such thing as feeling inclined to feel inclined.

(iii) One can have a vague feeling that *p*, i.e. a hunch or intimation. One can have a very strong feeling that *p*. But to believe that *p* is not a disposition to feel that *p*. For to have a vague feeling that *p* is not to believe that *p*, *a fortiori* not to have a disposition to do so, but to be inclined to believe that *p*. And to have a strong feeling that *p* is not to realize a disposition which believing that *p* is alleged to be, but rather to believe or to be strongly inclined to believe that *p* without adequate grounds. So one can feel very strongly that Jack and Jill will be happy. But while one can believe that they have been married (it was announced in the press), one cannot then feel very strongly that they have, any more than one can feel very strongly that if winter is here spring can't be far behind or than, on seeing the wet pavement,

one can feel very strongly that it has been raining.

(iv) "Why do you believe that *p*?" is a request for one's reasons for believing, or evidence for its being the case, that *p*. "Why do you feel that *p*?" or (if it makes sense) "Why do you have the disposition to feel that *p*?" is not a request for one's reasons or evidence that *p*, but rather for an explanation of what induced the hunch or feeling (or the disposition to have it, if there is any such thing).

(v) One may believe rationally, reasonably, wisely or foolishly that *p* if one's reasons for believing that *p* are good or foolish ones. But one cannot rationally, reasonably, wisely or foolishly have a feeling or hunch that *p*, let alone the more dubious disposition to have such a feeling, since credal feelings and hunches do not rest on reasons, *a fortiori* not on good or foolish ones, the general proneness or tendency to have hunches or intuitions does not rest on reasons, and it is doubtful whether it makes sense to say that one has a disposition to have a hunch or intuition that *p*.

Hence, (vi) one can ask "What should I believe about X?" But that is not to ask "What disposition to feel true should I have about X?" (which makes dubious sense) or "What should I be disposed to feel true about X?", which, like "What hunch should I be disposed to have?" can have no answer. For were an answer forthcoming it would be a reason for believing, not for being disposed to feel something to be true, i.e. for being inclined to have a hunch (if there is any such thing). Similarly, "What reasons are there to believe that *p*?" does not mean the same as "What reasons are there for having a disposition to feel it true that *p*?". For even if there is such a disposition to have a particular hunch, the reasons for believing that *p* — if there are adequate reasons — eliminate any need for a hunch.

What of the alternative dispositional analyses of believing? Is believing that *p* a disposition to act as if it were true that *p* or as if it were the case that *p*? The same verdict must be returned. For it is clear that believing that *p* is not, in the ordinary sense of the term, a disposition of any kind. It is not a trait of temperament, personality or character. Believing that *p* is no feature of the nature of a person. Explaining behaviour by reference to a person's beliefs is not explaining his behaviour by reference to his dispositions to behave. What one believes when one believes that *p*, one may take to be a reason for Ving in certain circumstances, but what one has a disposition to do cannot as such be taken as a reason for one's doing anything, even though *that* one has such a disposition may be a reason for doing certain things, e.g. striving to eradicate it. And so forth.

Nevertheless, it might be argued, the claim that to believe that *p* is a disposition to act as if *p* is not intended to equate belief with a disposition in the ordinary sense of the term. Rather it equates believing that *p* with a proneness or tendency to act in a certain way, namely to act as if it were the case that *p* or as if it were true that *p*. To claim, as Ryle did, that the concept of belief is a dispositional one is merely to classify the concept as a tendency or frequency concept. But this too is unsatisfactory.

First, it is unclear whether one can obtain any grip on the phrase "acting as if it were true that *p*" or "acting as if it were the case that *p*" other than in terms of the explanation "acting as if one believes that *p*". For what is it to act as if it were true that *p*? When one walks or jumps, is one acting as if the laws of gravity are true? Evidently, that is not what is meant. One might suggest that acting as if it is true that *p* is to act as if one took the putative fact that *p* as one's reason (or part of one's reason) for acting. But that is to act as if one believed that *p*, and there is no mileage in explaining what it is to believe that *p* in terms of acting as if one believed that *p*.

Second, one decides to act, and consequently acts, *as if* it were the case that *p* precisely when one does *not* believe that *p*, indeed sometimes when one knows that it is not the case that *p*. It was rational, in Stalinist Russia, to resolve always to act and speak as if Stalin were a

benevolent leader. More commonly, one may act as if it is the case that *p* despite knowing that not-*p*, precisely in order to prove that it is not the case that *p* — which, if Popper is right, is standard scientific methodology. If one believes that *p*, by contrast, one may decide to act, and consequently act, not *as if* it were the case that *p*, but *because* it *is* (unless one is mistaken, as far as one knows) the case that *p*.

Third, one may have a tendency or proneness to act as if it were true that *p* without having any belief in the matter at all. Carnivores act as if it were true that proteins are nutritious, and herbivores act as if it were true that vegetable vitamins are beneficial. But it would be absurd to ascribe any such beliefs to foxes or rabbits.

Fourth, one may believe that *p*, yet have no tendency whatsoever to act as if *p*. For what one believes in a particular case may have no bearing on anything one does. One may remember the trivial bit of news or gossip too briefly for it to enter into any piece of practical reasoning. Of course, one might be asked whether Kublai Khan was married to a Nestorian Christian, and answer that that is so. But one such answer no more makes a tendency than one swallow a drunk. Certainly, to believe that *p* is not the same as having a tendency to bet that *p*. For one may tend to bet on horses with pretty names, without believing that they will win. Equally, one may believe that Roaring Forties will win the 3.30 and not be the slightest disposed or feel in the least inclined to bet on it, since one is not a betting man; and there is no such thing as having a tendency to bet on Roaring Forties in today's 3.30.

To this it might be replied that if believing that *p* is not a tendency, surely it is at least a liability. If someone believes that *p*, then he is liable to act as if *p* if the occasion arises, i.e. if such and such circumstances were to arise, then he *would* act as if *p*. But this too does not work. For (a) someone may believe that *p*, but be sworn to secrecy or otherwise committed to not revealing that, unless he is mistaken, *p*. And (b) in so far as someone who believes that *p is* liable to act "as if" *p*, that is precisely *because* he believes that *p*. The liability to act, if such there be, is not what believing that *p* consists in, but that A believes that *p* explains *why* he is liable to V if such and such circumstances arise.

7. *The moral of the tale*

Having a belief is not a feeling or a mental state or a disposition. It is neither a behavioural tendency or proneness nor a liability to behave. What then is it? It is not at all obvious that there is *any* categorial term under which believing can illuminatingly be subsumed. There is certainly no reason for thinking that there must be. Our concepts evolved to meet the needs we have, not to satisfy the classificatory demands of a concept-classifying, category-hungry, Linnaeus. Our investigation has, as promised, given us a distinct idea of the nature of belief – or so I hope. But it has not yielded a clear idea. For that what must be done is to examine the needs which the concept of belief satisfies, what purposes it fulfils. We need to look closely at the use of the verb and the contexts of its use. That is an exercise for another occasion, but our investigation has at least thrown up some directions and guidelines.

It should be evident that one primary use of the verb is to serve as a qualifier on assertions. The function of the qualifier is to indicate that the information being conveyed is not certain (which is not the same as the speaker's not being certain) – that the possibility of things being otherwise cannot, on the speaker's available evidence or sources, be excluded. Far from the speaker's feelings, state of mind, or behavioural dispositions being thereby described, it is the evidential weight behind, or grounds of, the qualified assertion that are being indicated. This is *one* centre of variation, around which *some* of the uses of "I believe" can be illuminatingly arranged, and with which the corresponding uses in the third-person and in other tenses can be juxtaposed. Here belong the parenthetic uses of "I believe", as in "Things are, I believe, thus-and-so" and "Things are thus-and-so, I believe". Here "I

believe" converges on *one* facet of "I think". It is plausible to view this as the prototype. Having learnt the use of assertoric sentences, the child can then learn qualifiers such as "I believe" and "I think", and the rather different uses of their third-person cognates.

A second centre of variation is not far removed from the first. This is the use of 'I believe' not so much to qualify an assertion, but to indicate the derivative source of the information being conveyed. Here "I believe" approximates "I gather", and diverges from "I think". "I believe (gather) that you have a beautiful garden" indicates information imparted by others, "I think that your garden is beautiful" is the expression of a judgement or opinion after seeing for oneself (Rundle, 1997, 77f.). Here the use of "I believe" emphatically eschews taking a stand on the matter. Rather, the speaker indicates that he is taking it on trust that things are so – that is what he has heard.

A very different role of "I believe" is being fulfilled when the phrase is used as a prefix to an assertoric sentence to indicate endorsement or commitment. Here the speaker manifestly does take a stand. Here, unlike the previous cases, the utterance is also, and may be primarily, autobiographical. In this use, the phrase "I believe" is not happily moved to a parenthetical position, for the content of the declarative sentence operated on is not being qualified. Rather the speaker's stand is being announced. Hence too, "I believe", thus used, is unlike the more tentative "I think". It is often linked with having faith, trust or confidence in something or someone. And, of course, that is no coincidence, in as much as it connects the use of "I believe that" with, "I believe A" and "I believe in A".

These are the directions to explore – not the futile search for an appropriate category, let alone an unreflective commitment to an inappropriate one. What we shall find will be, as it were, an untidy scatter of points on a graph. But, as Wittgenstein observed, if we try to tidy them up so that a line can be drawn through them, we shall do no more than falsify the grammatical facts and distort the very concept we are trying to survey.

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21 October 2003

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