

DAS ERLÖSCHEN DES GLAUBENS: THE FATE OF BELIEF IN THE STUDY OF ROMAN RELIGION

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Abstract. This essay traces the development of a consensus against belief as a category relevant to the study of ancient religion, taking Roman religion as a case in point. The anti-belief position began with Christian disparagement of traditional worship and continued with late-20th-century cultural relativism. After dismantling arguments that belief is unique to western cultures, I introduce the cognitive theory of intentionality. On this theory, all mental states *represent* or *are about* objects and circumstances in the world. I distinguish two broad mental state types: the *practical*, such as desire, which represents circumstances as we would have them be, and the *doxastic*, such as belief, which represents circumstances as we take them to be. Insofar as the Romans represented circumstances as obtaining, they had beliefs. Three payoffs follow from this approach. First, beliefs often underlie *emotions*, because emotions amount to our *evaluations* of circumstances we take to obtain. So, when Romans record emotions in connection with religious events, researchers are licensed to ask about the beliefs at the root of those emotions. Second, beliefs (along with practical states) underlie *action*, because in order to act, agents require a cognitive map of the space of possibilities for action. This is provided in part by belief. So, when Romans record religious action, researchers are licensed to inquire into the beliefs that demarcated the parameters of the action. Finally, in

representing objects and circumstances, beliefs represent them in a *certain way*. This puts beliefs at the foundations of *social reality*, for it is only by virtue of being represented as a *pontifex* that any Roman ever counted as a *pontifex*, and it is only by virtue of being represented as a *sacrificium* that any act of animal slaughter ever counted as a *sacrificium*. Thus, far from being an irrelevant category for researchers, belief turns out to be central to Roman religious cognition, religious action, and religious reality.

This essay is both critical and constructive. Critical, because we must finish dismantling a longstanding edifice erected against belief in scholarship on Roman religion before we can construct anew.¹ Thus, in the essay's first section, I sketch a history of "the dying out of belief" in the scholarship. I show how a dichotomy between belief and action, accompanied by denial of belief, had sprung up by the early 20th century and had come to prevail by century's end. In the second section, I anatomize the premises and arguments of the anti-belief consensus in order to expose their flaws.

In the essay's third section, I propose that belief is not so fraught as has often been assumed. Indeed, our traditional scholarly ways of understanding belief have made it hard for us to appreciate the true nature of belief and its place in Roman religion. Rather than being synonymous with Christian faith, as belief's critics often assume, "belief" is just the English word for a basic sort of cognitive state, which represents how states of affairs stand in the world. On this definition, believing that the eagle is the shield-bearer of Jupiter amounts to representing the eagle as the shield-bearer of Jupiter. The cognitive capacity to represent states of affairs in this way is presumably shared by all human beings.

In defining belief, I present at some length a theory that is widely subscribed in the cognitive sciences but that will be new to researchers

¹ I do not treat of the related but quite distinct *faith* here. For *fides* in the Roman world see Morgan 2015. For a philosophical account of faith, see Audi 2011, 52-88.

of ancient religion, the theory of “intentionality.”² On this theory, the distinguishing feature of all mental states is that they are about something or represent something other than themselves, such as the eagle in our example. Our “doxastic” states, such as belief, represent the world as we take it to be, while our “practical” states, such as desire, represent the world as we would have it be. Once we grasp this distinction between doxastic and practical states, we are in a position to see the theoretical work that talk of belief, within a holistic conception of intentionality, can do for us. For it will turn out that belief plays a central role in our cognitive and practical lives, underlying emotion, action, and even socio-religious reality.

In the fourth, final section of this essay, I briefly sketch an application of the theory of intentionality to a passage from Livy on religious action. This section is meant to be merely suggestive. But its suggestions can only stand if the ground has first been cleared of the edifice of old prejudice against belief.

Before proceeding, I should offer an explanation of my use of the term “religion.” Many scholars now question whether the Romans had anything we could legitimately call religion.³ Such doubts seem to me to spring, on the etic side, from a kind of post-modern positivism. The reasoning seems to go like this: the concept named by our term “religion” is inflexibly and immutably defined by certain (historically contingent) criteria. Since no Roman phenomenon precisely and without exception meets all the criteria that supposedly define our concept, the Romans did not have religion.⁴ Surely this is too unsupple a stance. Romans engaged in all sorts of activities, such as prayer and sacrifice, that they themselves described as related to gods. These activities fit quite effortlessly within the extension of our (really rather loose and capacious) term “religion.”

² It is important to note that my goal here is not to synthesize all the latest developments in the cognitive science of belief.

³ E.g., most recently, Nongbri 2008 and Barton and Boyarin 2016.

⁴ I owe this observation *mutatis mutandis* to John R. Searle’s 1983 and 1994 articles about literary theory.

On the emic side, scholars fret that the Romans had no discrete concept of “religion” that was rigorously defined by exactly the same criteria that supposedly define our concept. Therefore, the Romans had no such thing as religion. However, on these grounds we may also doubt whether they had an economy and even tuberculosis.⁵ Such worries are ill-conceived. A community need have no explicit concept of “economy” in order to have an economy, i.e., the systematic and discoverable fallout of trading, buying, and selling. Nor need a community have any explicitly worked-out concept of “religion” to have religion, i.e., practices that involve (and that thus may be noticed by community members to involve) doing things to, for, or with gods, spirits, and other non-natural entities. I assume this latter definition of “religion” in this article.

1. A HISTORY OF BELIEF DENIAL AND THE BELIEF-ACTION DICHOTOMY

An important survey of Roman religion by John North closes by recapitulating its aim “to summarize and report on some fundamental changes in our way of looking at the religious life of Roman pagans.” North notes that “the understanding of” Roman religion had been “blocked in the past by expectations inappropriate to the Romans’ time and place.” One of these inappropriate expectations consisted in attributing too much importance to “any question of the participants’ belief or disbelief in the efficacy of ritual actions.” In contrast, scholars had concluded in recent decades that they had “good reason to suspect that the whole problem (sc. of belief) derives from later not pagan preoccupations.” Belief was now to be seen as largely anachronistic to Roman religion and reference to it usually a solecism. Evaluation of the new approach was welcomed “by the progress that may be made, or not made, in the future” under its auspices.⁶

Now, there can be no doubt that the past several decades, and especially the years since the publication of North’s survey, have wit-

⁵ For doubts about the ancient economy, see Morley 2004, 33-50. For doubts about tuberculosis in ancient Egypt, see Latour 1998 and cf. his recent *retractatio*, Latour 2004.

⁶ North 2000, 84-85.

nessed unprecedented growth in novel, productive, theoretically sophisticated, and self-reflective approaches to Roman religion. And yet I would plead that a tendency often in evidence throughout this period, the tendency to assert that belief is not a category of much relevance to the study of Roman religion, has hindered the progress that North anticipated. Despite some notable recent attempts to challenge it, a consensus against belief persists. In certain respects this consensus is quite old, rooted in, among other factors, Protestant disparagement of Catholicism's supposedly paganistic ritualism. In other respects, the consensus is rather new, stemming from the often relativistic anthropological theorizing of the 1960s and after. So let us begin by reviewing briefly the fate of belief in scholarship on Roman religion. For we must see whence we have come in order to grasp where we are and to decide where we wish to go.

Once upon a time, researching Roman religion meant, in part, reconstructing its "original" state from the evidence of necessarily later sources. This pursuit occupied scholars such as Johann Adam Hartung, who helped found the field with his *Die Religion der Römer* in 1836. In the striking image of his "Vorrede," Hartung describes authentic Roman religion as "ein alter Tempel" upon which a later structure ("Überbau"), assembled of Greek and other alien materials, had been imposed. Both of these structures collapsed, leaving to the scholar the task of excavating the remains ("die Trümmer") of the first structure from under the rubble of the later one.⁷ Hartung's image of architectural supersession and collapse proved canonical: Preller, Aust, and Wissowa, among others, cited it approvingly.⁸ Guided by Hartung's conceit, with its tragic motif of "das Erlöschen des alten

⁷ Hartung 1836, I: ix. The sketch offered here makes no claim to being exhaustive. On Hartung, Mommsen, Wissowa, Cumont and the history of the study of Roman religion, see Scheid 1987; Bendlin 2000; Stroumsa 2002; Bendlin 2006; Phillips 2007; Ando 2008, ix-xvii; Rives 2010, 244-251, esp. 247ff.; and Scheid 2015, 5-11.

⁸ Preller 1858, 41-42 n. 2; Aust 1899, 1; Wissowa 1902, 1 and 1912, 1. See further Bendlin 2006, 235-236.

Glaubens,"⁹ scholars could not but disparage the religion of the historical republic as contaminated or degenerate.¹⁰

This thesis sat well with Theodor Mommsen, for whom "the old national religion was visibly on the decline ('auf Neige') in the age of Cato and Ennius, undermined by Hellenism and other eastern influences.¹¹ But of course for Mommsen Roman religion *qua* religion had always fallen short.¹² At its best, it had served as a system of ritual marked by a practical legalism,¹³ but by the late republic it was merely a tool with which the élite cynically exploited "the principles of the popular belief, which were recognized as irrational ('als irrationell erkannten Sätze des Volksglaubens'), for reasons of outward convenience."¹⁴ Mommsen's view of republican religion as a means of manipulation has ancient authority, for example, that of Polybius (6.56), whom he cites.¹⁵ More importantly, it is surely no coincidence that this scholar, with his particular interests and expertise, should have identified a legalistic paradigm at the heart of Roman religion.

Mommsen's legalistic paradigm proved influential; Georg Wissowa absorbed its lessons. He dedicated the first edition of his still fundamental *Religion und Kultus der Römer* to the elder scholar, asserting that

⁹ Hartung 1836, 244.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Fowler 1911, 428-429, admiring by contrast the "revival of the State religion by Augustus."

¹¹ Mommsen 1862-1866, II: 402; 1856, 844: "So ging es mit der alten Landesreligion zusehends auf Neige."

¹² Mommsen 1856, 152: "den geheimnisvollen Schauer, nach dem das Menschenherz doch auch sich sehnt, vermag sie (sc. römische Religion) nicht zu erregen." Mommsen may have been "agnostic" but we can see his "education in the Lutheran tradition" (Scheid 2015, 10) reflected in this quotation. See below, text accompanying n. 29.

¹³ See the discussion at Mommsen 1862-1866, I: 222-227, which concludes (227): "Thus the whole criminal law rested as to its ultimate basis on the religious idea of expiation. But religion performed no higher service in Latium than the furtherance of civil order and morality by means such as these."

¹⁴ Mommsen 1862-1866, II: 433, cited in Fowler 1911, 2; Mommsen 1857, 417.

¹⁵ The manipulation thesis reaches an apex in Taylor 1949, 1-24.

without Mommsen's *Lebenswerk* — especially *Römisches Staatsrecht* (1871-1888) and his contributions on the *Fasti to CIL I, pars prior* (1893) — his own work would not exist.¹⁶ In the “Vorwort” to his book's second edition, Wissowa responded to the charge that his account lacked “Religiosität.”¹⁷ Defending his “juristische” perspective, that is, his “Gesichtspunkt des *ius pontificium*,” he explicitly aligned himself with Mommsen and his paradigm.¹⁸ It was for another scholar, Franz Cumont, to discover a source of the “religiosity” that Wissowa had neglected: the “Oriental religions.”¹⁹ Cumont adduced dry Roman legalism to explain the appeal of these foreign cults. He derogated Roman religion as “froide” and “prosaïque,” compared its priests to jurists,²⁰ and likened its observances to legal practice.²¹

Cumont's cold legalism stopped one step short of empty formalism. Arthur Darby Nock, otherwise an extraordinarily sensitive scholar of Greco-Roman religion, took that step. In his essay for the tenth volume of *The Cambridge Ancient History* (1934), Nock asserted that Roman

¹⁶ Wissowa 1902, x: “kein Kapitel dieses Buches hätte geschrieben werden können.” See Scheid 1987, 309 and Bendlin 2006, 236ff. On the epistolary relationship between these men, see Scheid and Wirbelauer 2008.

¹⁷ The charge reflects a Protestant notion of true religion as, in Schleiermacher's famous words, “Frömmigkeit,” “piety,” that is, a “feeling of absolute dependence on God” (“das Gefühl schlechthiniger Abhängigkeit von Gott”), Schleiermacher 2003, 32, 38, 44, 67, 265, 283, etc. See Bendlin 2000, 120 and 2006, 229.

¹⁸ Wissowa 1912, viii. On this moment in Wissowa's intellectual career and its import, contrast Bendlin 2006 and Scheid 2015, 7-21.

¹⁹ Cumont 1906, 37: “Les religions Orientales, qui ne s'imposent pas avec l'autorité reconnue d'une religion officielle, doivent pour s'attirer des prosélytes, émouvoir les sentiments de l'individu.”

²⁰ Cumont 1906, 36: “Ses pontifes, qui sont aussi des magistrats, ont réglé les manifestations du culte avec une précision exacte de juristes.” This is cited in Fowler 1911, 2-3, in the course of the author's acknowledgment of and departure from Mommsen and Wissowa's legalistic paradigm.

²¹ Cumont 1906, 37, cited in Fowler 1911, 2-3: “Sa liturgie rappelle par la minutie de ses prescriptions l'ancien droit civil.” None of this is to say, of course, that the Romans' was not a religion of law: in addition to Wissowa 1912, see Watson 1992 and 1993; Meyer 2004; Ando and Rüpke 2006; Tellegen-Couperus 2012.

religion was “in its essence a matter of cult acts” (465). It was a “religion made up of traditional practice;” “it was not a matter of belief” (469); it was, in a word, “jejune” (467). In Nock’s appraisal, we see clearly the dichotomy between belief and practice that came to inform even the most rigorous scholarship: Roman religion was strictly “a matter of cult acts,” “it was not a matter of belief.” Where Hartung had traced a “dying out” of belief, and where Mommsen had derided “irrational” belief, Nock saw no belief at all, only empty cult. Thus, a dichotomy between belief and practice, as well as a denial of belief, became *de rigueur* for the interpretation of Roman religion.²²

On the dominant view whose development we have sketched thus far, Roman religion had always been preoccupied with ritual action. But regarding belief we may discern a bifurcation into two schools of thought. If we back up a bit, we see that Bernard de Fontenelle, in his *Histoire des Oracles* of 1687, had been led by his survey of Cicero’s remarks on religion to opine that “among the pagans religion was only a practice, for which speculation was unimportant. Do as the others do, and believe whatever you like.”²³ Fontenelle’s assertion, though not intended as a compliment, has the merit of according the Romans a certain respect. For example, “believe whatever you like” credits polytheism with a cognitive autonomy that Christian traditions typically seek to curtail.²⁴ To his credit, Fontenelle had declined to declare the beliefs of the Romans inadequate, as one school of thought was soon

²² Kindt 2012, 30-32 and Harrison 2015a diagnose an analogous dichotomy in the study of Greek religion.

²³ Fontenelle 1687, 64: “Il y a lieu de croire que chez les Payens la Religion n’estoit qu’une pratique, dont la speculation estoit indifferente. Faites comme les autres, et croyez ce qu’il vous plaira.” On this passage and recent “neo-Fontenellian” approaches, see Parker 2011, 31-39.

²⁴ Indeed, the Jesuit Jean-François Baltus attacked as impious Fontenelle’s treatise and the work of Antonie van Dale (1683) upon which it was based (Baltus 1707). Following Dale, Fontenelle argued that the pagan oracles had been merely human frauds, not the work of demons. This thesis clashed with the received theory that Christ’s incarnation had silenced antiquity’s demonic pagan oracles. See Ossa-Richardson 2013.

to do, nor had he denied beliefs to the Romans, as a second school was later to do.²⁵

According to the first of these schools of thought, into which, as we have seen, Mommsen fell, Roman cult had beliefs associated with it, but they were nugatory. This view may be found expressed again and again in this period as, for example, with considerable violence, by Stephen Gaselee in the *Edinburgh Review*:²⁶

The indigenous Roman religion seems indeed to have been one of the least satisfying forms of belief ever possessed by any nation. It consisted of a large number of ritual observances, closely bound up with the routine of the household and of the State, in combination with a host of gods that can only be described as the palest and most bloodless personifications of ordinary and extraordinary actions.

The second school of thought, that of Nock, held that Roman religion simply lacked beliefs, nugatory or otherwise. We should note that this thesis was not original to Nock; he merely gave it particularly stark expression. Already in 1885, for example, Nettleship could remind his readers, without the air of a man imparting an especially novel insight, that “Roman religion was far more an observance than a creed” (143).

The two schools of thought represented by Mommsen and Gaselee, Nettleship and Nock, articulate in their respective ways what had become by the late 19th century a ubiquitous dichotomy between belief and ritual. But this dichotomy hardly had its origins in the disinterested findings of secular scholarship.²⁷ Instead, it drew both upon a new privileging of Greece over Rome that marked the transition from 18th- to

²⁵ Cf. Parker 2011, 32-33.

²⁶ Gaselee 1913, 89.

²⁷ Consider the framework, motivated by a teleological view of Christian religiosity, posited by W. R. Smith for ancient Semitic religions: “ritual and practical usage were, strictly speaking, the sum total of ancient religions;” such religion “was not a system of belief with practical applications; it was a body of fixed traditional practices” (Smith 1889, 21). On Smith, see Harrison 2015a.

19th-century Humanism,²⁸ as well as upon Protestant anti-Catholic (and, indeed, anti-Semitic) sentiment. If the religious beliefs of the Romans fared badly in this fraught scholarship, their religious practices hardly fared better. Here is Mommsen again (1862-1866, I: 222-223):

... the Latin religion sank into an incredible insipidity and dullness, and early became shrivelled into an anxious and dreary round of ceremonies.

Lest the reader fail to draw the parallel between ancient Romans and modern Catholics, Mommsen obligingly draws it himself: these unfortunate traits of Roman religion were “no less distinctly apparent in the saint worship of the modern inhabitants of Italy.”²⁹

The approach to Roman religion common to these scholars of the 19th and early 20th centuries, with its opposition of belief to ritual action, was not new, as the example of Fontenelle shows. Indeed, it was older than Fontenelle. It was situated within and structured by a polemic that dated back to the Reformation, when Martin Luther had elevated *fides* and “der Glaube des Herzens” of “der innere Mensch” over a supposed Catholic formalism that relied on “gute Werke” performed by what Luther termed “der äußere Mensch.”³⁰ And if “faith” (*fides*, Glaube) was a Protestant byword from Luther on, it is perhaps telling that the first attested use of “ritual” appears in the *Acts and Monuments* of the English anti-Catholic polemicist John Foxe, who faults an epistle of Pope Zephyrinus to the bishops of Egypt for “contayning no maner of doctrine ... but onely certayn ritual decrees to no purpose.”³¹ Here in

²⁸ See, for example, the unfavorable comparison of Rome (Book XIV) against Greece (Book XIII) in J. G. Herder’s *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791).

²⁹ See above, n. 12. It is hard to know whether Jew or Roman fares worse in Mommsen’s comparisons, as at 1862-1866, II: 400: “The catalogue of the duties and privileges of the priest of Jupiter ... might well have a place in the Talmud.”

³⁰ Luther 1520, *passim*. On the inner man/outer man distinction, see Rieger 2007, 80ff., 234ff.

³¹ Foxe 1570, I: 83, cited in *OED* s.v., which is cited in turn by J. Z. Smith (1987, 102), whose chapter (96-103) on Protestant construal of the emptiness of Catholic ritual is especially instructive. Smith 1990 studies the context of Protestant

the 16th century we can already discern the opposition that will come to determine the assumptions of so much scholarship on Roman religion, the opposition of unsatisfactory or absent beliefs (“no manner of doctrine”) to meaningless practices (“ritual decrees to no purpose”).³²

Indeed, this Reformation rhetoric, which cast a Catholic “paganism”³³ against the authentic Christianity of Protestantism, drew from ancient wellsprings, such as the writings of Lactantius, who in a characteristically polemical passage proposed a dichotomy between body and soul, action and cognition, which tracks his distinction between pagan and Christian (Lactant. *Div. inst.* 4.3.1):

nec habet (sc. deorum cultus) inquisitionem aliquam veritatis, sed tantummodo ritum colendi, qui non officio mentis, sed ministerio corporis constat.

Nor does the cult of the gods amount to any search for truth but merely a ritual of worshipping, which consists not in a function of the mind, but in employment of the body.

Here we already see, *in ovo*, not only Luther’s doctrine of “inner” versus “outer” and his castigation of Catholic work-righteousness, but also Foxe’s polemical contrast between doctrine and ritual. As the case of Wissowa, who was Catholic, shows, later scholars needed not have a dog in the denominational fight, nor a stake in religious polemic, in order to subscribe to this Lactantian dichotomy.

Now, scholars in recent years have shown themselves sensitive to the influence that ideological and confessional elements, even when attenuated and no longer matters of urgency, exert on the putatively objective narratives and judgments of historiography. They have not hesitated to expose and reject tendentious categories implicit in the paradigms of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Notions of an early, authentic Roman religiosity beset by contaminating external influences

anti-Catholic polemic in which modern religious studies — especially comparative studies of early Christianity and late antique religions — are situated. See Wiebe 1999 for more on the 19th-century Protestant context of the origins of the academic study of religion.

³² For a host of examples of the “empty ritual” thesis in classical scholarship, see the citations in Phillips 1986, 2697 n. 56.

³³ See Middleton 1729 for one of the most florid examples.

or degenerating internally from neglect, for example, have been rightly discarded, the manipulation thesis no longer exerts quite the explanatory allure it once did, and the legalistic aspects of Roman religion are no longer seen as failings of authentic sentiment. Progress, often dramatic progress, has been made.³⁴

As part and parcel of that progress, we have already seen scholars such as North seeking to root out of our assessment of Roman cult even unconsciously Christianizing presuppositions. This has involved questioning whether non-Christian religions should be evaluated in terms of belief. Surely both schools — the one that found the beliefs of the Romans wanting and the one that found the Romans wanting beliefs — were wrong to measure the ancients against this modern, Christian yardstick? Perhaps belief is not a necessary or even intelligible category of analysis in the study of non-Christian religions? Voicing such doubts was intended to expose the judgments of a Mommsen for what they were, to wit, condescending in their censuring of Roman religion's inadequate or "irrational" beliefs. In addition, this relativism about belief was intended to disarm the evaluations of a Hartung or a Nock. For how can we speak of "das Erlöschen des alten Glaubens" or chide the Romans for lacking belief, if belief was simply never a part of their religion? This stance, which was meant to be charitable, derived in part from developments in 20th-century anthropology, where the hazards of assessing non-western cultural traditions in light of western concepts and values had come vividly into view.

The signal anthropological study that encouraged scholars of Roman religion to cast off outmoded ideas about belief was Rodney Needham's *Belief, Language, and Experience*, which appeared in 1972. Needham concluded, on the basis of his attempt to locate belief among the Penan of Borneo and the Nuer of the Sudan, that it was a mistake for the western researcher to attribute beliefs to individuals of other cul-

³⁴ For overviews of this progress with rather different emphases, see Phillips 2007; Rives 2010; and the *Translator's Foreword* by Clifford Ando in Scheid 2015, xi-xvii. An exhaustive history of scholarship on Roman religion, attentive to the various intellectual contexts that have shaped its study, is a desideratum.

tures. As we shall see, Needham is often misinterpreted as asserting that belief is an inherently western, Christian mental state not shared by non-western, non-Christian peoples. However, his true thesis is much stronger and much more radical, to wit, that *no one* has ever believed.³⁵ He writes, for example, as follows (1972, 188):

[T]he notion of belief is not appropriate to an empirical philosophy of mind or to an exact account of human motives and conduct. Belief is not a discriminable experience, it does not constitute a natural resemblance among men, and it does not belong to "the common behaviour of mankind."

On this view, reference to belief in the anthropological study of religion should be eschewed as misguided and misleading. But this is not because belief is properly western or Christian. Rather, it is because belief is an incoherent category even within western, Christian culture. "Belief" refers to no psychological state of which we can speak meaningfully at all. Needham's views have done immense harm to the study of ancient religion. I shall attempt to demolish definitively some of his most pernicious arguments later in this essay.³⁶ For now I would note that if we should accept Needham's conclusions, we might well throw up our hands with him: "I am not saying that human life is senseless, but that we cannot make sense of it."³⁷

Scholars of ancient religion did not delay long in drawing inspiration from Needham's skepticism about belief,³⁸ although as I mentioned they have usually mistaken his most radical thesis. Simon Price, in his *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (1984), stands at the vanguard of and typifies this misprision of Needham, from whom he draws a relativist rather than a universalist lesson about be-

³⁵ I thank Joseph Streeter for helping me see, *per litteras*, the full implications of Needham's arguments.

³⁶ See, too, Streeter (forthcoming), which neatly defeats Needham's arguments using resources internal to them.

³⁷ Needham 1972, 244.

³⁸ In turn, Needham could comment on the work of ancient historians, as in a 1990 review faulting Veyne 1988 for lack of rigor in its discussion of the beliefs of the Greeks and Romans.

lief. Price helped to establish, and asserted perhaps the most vehemently, the new approach to belief that we have seen heralded by North, according to which belief is a Christian, not pagan phenomenon. It is worth quoting Price at modest length (1984, 10-11):

Indeed the centrality of "religious belief" in our culture has sometimes led to the feeling that belief is a distinct and natural capacity which is shared by all human beings. This of course is nonsense. [Here Price footnotes, without comment, Needham 1972]. "Belief" as a religious term is profoundly Christian in its implications; it was forged out of the experience which the Apostles and Saint Paul had of the Risen Lord. The emphasis which "belief" gives to spiritual commitment has no necessary place in the analysis of other cultures. That is, the question about the "real beliefs" of the Greeks is again implicitly Christianizing.

For the ancients, he continues, "Ritual is what there was." Price's animadversions have proved influential,³⁹ as has his appeal to Needham's study. I note here in passing a virtue of Price's book that is overlooked as often as its vice concerning belief is propagated. The disproportionate influence of Price's denial of belief has obscured his valuable conception of "ritual as a public cognitive system."⁴⁰ But if Roman ritual was a public cognitive system, then presumably it will have drawn upon and appealed to publicly manifest Roman *beliefs*, among many other cognitive states, events, and processes.

As many virtues as Price's study may possess, we must focus here on the canonical status it helped Needham's book attain among classicists. Two years after the appearance of *Rituals and Power*, for example, C. R. Phillips III cited Needham in an article on "The Sociology of Religious Knowledge in the Roman Empire." He rightly took exception to the view expressed by Nock, recognizing that "Roman religion ... by its very postulation of superhuman beings and rituals for dealing with them cannot be mere actions." But he nonetheless declined to allow that the "postulation of superhuman beings" might constitute any-

³⁹ From Bowersock 1989, 206 to Collar 2013, 63-64, Price's belief denial continues to exert influence.

⁴⁰ Price 1984, 9; cf. 8.

thing resembling belief: "The very word 'belief' represents far too slippery a category to help investigators, while considerable doubt may be cast on contemporary models for mental life."⁴¹ Although Phillips expressed ambivalence about Needham's work,⁴² we can still see the latter's influence reflected in the former's skepticism as to whether the ancients entertained anything like what we call "beliefs." Needham's book continues to be cited by classicists when they wish to argue along the lines that "'Belief' is ... deeply problematic: it may be that this paradoxical concept is one peculiar to the Christianized West."⁴³

These latter quotations are addressed to *Roman* religion, but Price, it will be noted, was writing not about Romans *per se* but about Greeks under Roman rule. The dichotomy of belief and ritual with which he operated may accordingly be found echoed in scholarship on Greek religion. In 1985 for example Paul Cartledge wrote that "Classical Greek religion was at bottom a question of doing not of believing, of behaviour rather than faith."⁴⁴ Much more recently we have been told, "Ancient Greek religion had little to do with belief, and a great deal to do with practice and observance of common ancestral customs."⁴⁵ Andreas Bendlin, analyzing trends in the study of Roman religion, and Thomas Harrison, performing the same office for Greek religion, di-

⁴¹ Phillips 1986, 2710 and 2702.

⁴² Phillips 1986, 2689: Needham "offers a thorough and thought-provoking study of the problem" of belief, and his "enterprise has utility," but "the logic of Needham's analytic position produces paralysis." More recently, Phillips has argued for the relevance of belief, e.g., 2007, 13 (and cf. 26): "most specialists nowadays reject the idea that Roman religion constituted 'cult acts without belief.'" See n. 73, below, for a few such recent works of scholarship.

⁴³ Davies 2004, citing Needham 1972 at 5 n. 15; cf. Davies 2011, citing Needham at 398 *et passim*. On the Greek side, see, e.g., Giordano-Zecharya 2005, citing Needham at 330 n. 19 and 343; and Gagné 2013, citing Needham at 7 n. 17.

⁴⁴ Cartledge 1985, 98. Cf., much earlier, Burnet [1924] 1970, 5: "Athenian religion was a matter of practice, not of belief."

⁴⁵ Evans 2010, 7. Many more such remarks about Greek religion cited in Harrison 2000, 18-23; 2007, 382-384; Versnel 2011, 539-559, esp. 544-545; Harrison 2015a; Petrovic and Petrovic 2016, 1-37.

agnosed in this resurrected dichotomy between belief and action what both called a new “orthodoxy.”⁴⁶ This new orthodoxy is part and parcel of what we have seen North, writing in the same year as Bendlin and Harrison, herald as a new approach.

Statements of this orthodoxy dating from the two decades that straddle the millennium are not far to find. Here is a relatively unobjectionable example: “In the case of polytheistic religions, action, not belief, is primary.”⁴⁷ More tendentiously: “One of the hardest features of ancient religion for the modern student is the sheer unimportance of belief;” what was important was “correct observance of rituals.”⁴⁸ Similarly but boiled down: “For the Romans, religion was not a belief...: it was purely utilitarian practice.”⁴⁹ Now expanded: “For the Romans, *religio* was not a matter of faith or belief, of doctrine or creed, but rather of worship — of divination, prayer, and sacrifice.”⁵⁰ More expansively still: “For the Romans, *religio* especially denoted ritual precision. Being religious, ‘having religion,’ did not mean believing correctly, but performing acts such as sacrifice or oracles (*sacra et auspicia*) at the right point in time and in the right series of parts.”⁵¹ Most authoritatively and, as we shall see, least tenably: in Roman religious life, “experiences, beliefs and disbeliefs had no particularly privileged role in defining an individual’s actions, behaviour or sense of identity.”⁵² And most recently and quite briefly: Roman cult “was a religion of doing, not believing.”⁵³ In all of these dicta, which derive for the most part

⁴⁶ Bendlin 2000, 115 (cf. 2001); Harrison 2000, 18. Petrovic and Petrovic 2016, 2 speak of “a long tradition which peaked in the latter part of the twentieth century” of denial regarding belief in Greek religion.

⁴⁷ Rüpke 2007, 86.

⁴⁸ Dowden 1992, 8.

⁴⁹ Turcan 2000, 2.

⁵⁰ Warrior 2006, xv.

⁵¹ Auffarth and Mohr 2006, 1608-1609.

⁵² Beard, North, and Price 1998, I: 42.

⁵³ Beard 2015, 103.

from introductory texts,⁵⁴ we find both the dichotomy that opposes belief to action and the denial of belief's relevance to Roman cult.

So, in this new orthodoxy an updated dichotomy between belief and action returned, along with denial about belief. Now, however, both the dichotomy and the denial manifested as theoretical sophistication and sympathetic appreciation of Roman alterity rather than as denominational rancor and Christian sanctimony. Nor have the dichotomy or the denial been limited to classics; both continue to inform the study of religion in a variety of disciplines.⁵⁵ Of course, it would be wrong to say that this has been the only theory of Roman belief ever proposed. Some have discerned "*une foi dans la religion romaine.*" This Roman faith "*donnait pour acquise l'existence des dieux et posait la nécessité et l'efficacité du commerce rituelle avec eux.*"⁵⁶ Others have observed that the Romans did not just *have* religious beliefs, they also *talked about* them.⁵⁷ Despite such interventions, the dominant trend has been to see Roman cult as a paradigmatic case of religious *doing* rather than religious *believing*.

But here we must pause. After all, is there not *something* to these views that we have just rehearsed? I observed that Fontenelle's formulation — *faites comme les autres, et croyez ce qu'il vous plaira* — has its merits. Indeed, if the millennial consensus had favored expression in terms of Fontenellian cognitive autonomy rather than of non-cognitivism, it would have hit closer to the mark. The study of Roman religion is always at least implicitly a comparative endeavor, so it is

⁵⁴ From more specialized literature, see, e.g., Gargola 1995, 5; Gradel 2002, 4-5; Rasmussen 2002, 169.

⁵⁵ Recognition of the dichotomy: Bell 1992, 19-20. A plea to rethink it: Smith 2002. Review and assessment of belief denial: Bell 2002 and 2008. A recent re-assertion of belief denial: Lindquist and Coleman 2008.

⁵⁶ Linder and Scheid 1993, 55 (cf. Scheid 2005, ch. 5). Cf. Mueller 2002, 19: "the emotions (as well as terms like 'belief') should not be neglected;" Rives 2007, 48: "... we must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bathwater."

⁵⁷ Feeney 1998, 11: "This is not to say that language of belief is never an issue when we are discussing the 'ancient' religions. It certainly is, as we shall see in detail."

always worth attending to points of contact and departure between ancient ways of religious life and ways perhaps more familiar in the modern west. Let us consider three examples.

First, many Christianities and other “religions of the Book” have been or are organized around a definitive and obligatory set of explicit doctrines while Roman religion was not. Even so, it is important to recall the “*foi dans la religion romaine*,” just mentioned: all of Roman religious activity proceeded on the basis of an at least implicit theology, a set of beliefs as to the gods’ existence and susceptibility to cult.

Second, no traditional Roman would have supposed that *believing* in and of itself was effective for, say, the soul’s salvation. Such considerations, which are surely part of the point of the consensus against belief, inform the contrast scholars have rightly drawn between Roman cult and religions in which “believing as such” is “a central element in the system.”⁵⁸ Still, of course, there is no denying that some ancient people did have beliefs about the soul’s salvation. The gold leaves found in Italian and Sicilian graves witness a belief that one may find favorable or unfavorable reception in the afterlife, depending on one’s possession of privileged knowledge of what to do and say upon arrival in the underworld.⁵⁹ Of course, in such cases it was the *content* of the relevant beliefs, not the business of believing *per se*, that conduced to the soul’s salvation.

Finally, and no doubt owing to these latter two facts, traditional Romans neither put overt profession of approved beliefs in the foreground nor fretted over such highly self-conscious epistemological attitudes as have gone under the rubrics of πίστις, *fides*, or faith. Obviously, the ways in which belief may enter a people’s explicit conversation, and differing “cultures of belief,” are eminently susceptible to historical analysis and comparison.⁶⁰ But for this very reason we must take care not to rule out the possibility that Romans could engage in

⁵⁸ Beard, North, and Price 1998, I: 43.

⁵⁹ Tablets nos. 1-9, the latter from Rome, in the edition of Graf and Iles Johnston 2007.

⁶⁰ Mair 2013.

religious metacognition, that is, that they could think about their own religious thinking, and could even “believe in belief.”⁶¹

Seneca, for example, held that believing the gods to exist was the primary *deorum cultus*.⁶² And Cicero’s Cotta affirms, against Balbus’ insinuations, his endorsement of “the beliefs (*opiniones*) that we have received from our ancestors concerning the immortal gods.”⁶³ Again, speaking *propria voce*, Marcus could assert the utility of such *opiniones* for communal life and the keeping of faith among human beings.⁶⁴ Then there is Livy, who expected his readers to believe that belief in the divinity of Romulus soothed the grief of his followers after his mysterious disappearance.⁶⁵ Recall, too, that in his *De republica*, Cicero has Scipio worry over this supposedly historical datum: how could the *maiores*, living in a cultured age, have *believed* myths such as the apotheosis of Romulus? Their proclivity to believe is a problem to be explained.⁶⁶ Similarly, Livy and Cicero both attest a tradition that the liturgical reforms of Numa had a salutary effect on the minds, *animi*, of the warlike Romans and that he made his reforms acceptable by leading people to believe that the nymph Egeria had guided him.⁶⁷ And Cicero could divide even his own contemporaries into those who believed such myths and those who did not.⁶⁸ So even though, or perhaps because, cognitive autonomy was the rule, Romans could and did

⁶¹ In the happy expression of Dennett 2006, 200ff. For “belief in belief” in Ptolemaic Egypt, see Roubekas 2015.

⁶² Sen. *Ep.* 95.50: *primus est deorum cultus deos credere*. Cf. Cic. *Dom.* 107: *nec est ulla erga deos pietas nisi honesta de numine eorum ac mente opinio*.

⁶³ Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.5: *opiniones quas a maioribus accepimus de dis immortalibus*.

⁶⁴ Cic. *Leg.* 2.16: *utilis esse autem has opiniones quis neget...?*

⁶⁵ Liv. 1.16.8: *mirum, quantum illi viro nuntianti haec fidei fuerit quamque desiderium Romuli apud plebem exercitumque facta fide immortalitatis lenitum sit*.

⁶⁶ Cic. *Rep.* 2.17-20. The language of belief and disbelief runs throughout this passage. In order: *putaretur, opinionem, ad credendum, recepit, respuit, creditum, crederetur, credidissent*.

⁶⁷ Cic. *Rep.* 2.26: *animos ... religionum caerimoniis mitigavit*; cf. Liv. 1.19.4-5.

⁶⁸ Cic. *Leg.* 1.4: *nec dubito quin idem et cum Egeria conlocutum Numam et ab aquila Tarquinio apicem impositum putent*.

freely discuss beliefs, entertain beliefs about belief, and even believe or disbelieve in the value of various religious belief(s).

Now, I would be happy to tender the foregoing considerations, with the qualifications I have appended, as charitable if non-literal interpretations of the quotations affirming the belief-action dichotomy and belief denial that we have reviewed. To recapitulate: I acknowledge, first, that Roman religion was not distinguished by a set of core tenets, even if it did presuppose certain beliefs about the gods; second, Romans typically did not accord salvific efficacy to believing *per se*, though this does not mean that Romans could not have beliefs of one sort or another about the soul's salvation; therefore, third, Roman religion did not accord a central place to creedal confession, even if this obvious fact does not entail that Romans could not be reflective about and even "believe in" the value of religious belief.

I have found, especially in the "oral tradition" of the classroom, the conference, and the lecture series, that many hold views no more exceptionable than those I have just outlined. Nonetheless, a great many published statements of the consensus militate against the charitable interpretations I have tendered above and seem to demand a literal reading. Indeed I have found, also in the oral tradition, that many scholars insist on just such a literal reading and refuse to countenance any reference to belief. We have been told that belief is not a "natural capacity which is shared by all human beings,"⁶⁹ that "beliefs ... had no particularly privileged role in defining an individual's actions,"⁷⁰ and that the Romans had no beliefs one way or the other about "the efficacy" of the "ritual actions"⁷¹ that they performed at the cost of so much time, trouble, and material expense. The consequence of such authoritative pronouncements has been, as Andreas Bendlin notes, a focus on

⁶⁹ Price 1984, 10.

⁷⁰ Beard, North, and Price 1998, I: 42.

⁷¹ North 2000, 84.

“the ritual dimension of the Roman religious experience rather than a possible cognitive dimension.”⁷²

So a rethinking of the dichotomy between belief and action and of the denial of belief was clearly due. Just such a rethinking commenced at the turn of the millennium. Scholars of classical antiquity have reopened the question of belief and have been looking afresh at it and at cognition more generally as necessary components in any holistic picture of ancient religious life.⁷³ This essay joins and seeks to contribute to these efforts. I argue that on both theoretical and evidentiary grounds the consensus about belief and its relationship to action that was in place at the beginning of this century, however valuable much of the work carried out under its auspices, has impeded the progress North envisioned and therefore stands in need of reconsideration.⁷⁴ I concur, *mutatis mutandis*, with Thomas Harrison when he writes of Greek religion, “Rather than dismissing ‘belief’ ..., we need to reclaim it.”⁷⁵ This essay represents an attempt at reclamation. Now, it will not suffice to affirm of the Romans that, yes, they had beliefs. We must understand belief as one among many intentional states (section 3.1), see how it underpins emotions and its role in the etiology of cult action

⁷² Bendlin 2001, 193. Cf. Phillips 2007, 26: “Perhaps it is time for specialists in Roman religion to renew contact with their erstwhile colleagues in religious studies and anthropology — those fields are rife with promising approaches such as the cognitive.”

⁷³ For the emerging approach to belief in Greek and Roman religion, see Bendlin 2000; Harrison 2000; King 2003; Harrison 2007; Phillips 2007; Parker 2011; Versnel 2011; Kindt 2012; Harrison 2015a; and Petrovic and Petrovic 2016. Cognitive theory, broadly construed, now informs many studies of the Greco-Roman world. For a fully committed, rather than piecemeal, cognitive approach to Greek religion, see now Larson 2016. Other cognitive theorizations of ancient religion may be found in Whitehouse and Martin 2004; Beck 2006; Bowden 2010. For cognitive theory in Greco-Roman literary, cultural, and historical studies, see, e.g., Fagan 2011; Meineck 2011.

⁷⁴ Cf. Kindt 2012, 31, on scholarship on Greek religion: “The neglect of religious beliefs came at a high price...”

⁷⁵ Harrison 2000, 22.

(3.2), and consider how, in being shared among individuals collectively, it contributes to creating religious reality and the social powers attendant upon it (3.3). So, we must go well beyond debating whether the Romans did or did not entertain beliefs in the domain of religion.

So, how to proceed? As we have seen, an understanding of what belief actually amounts to has proved elusive. The word “belief” is often used idiosyncratically in the study of religion, especially ancient religions. The term is often used in ways that do not correspond to the way belief is typically understood in the cognitive sciences, philosophy, social sciences, or even daily life. The effect of this idiosyncrasy is to preclude interdisciplinary conversation. Even more basically: not all understandings of belief are equally adequate to the phenomenon itself, so why retain inaccurate ones? I propose, in the following section, to offer a brief anatomy of some oft-encountered misleading propositions about belief. I do not pretend to answer nor do I have the space to address every last objection raised against the propriety of belief to the study of Roman religion. But I hope to destabilize the most venerable arguments against belief enough to suggest that a reassessment is in order. My positive theory of belief follows, in section 3.

2. AN ANATOMY OF BELIEF DENIAL AND THE BELIEF-ACTION DICHOTOMY

2.1. BELIEF IS CHRISTIAN

The first misleading proposition to address is that both the phenomenon and the term “belief” are uniquely Christian. More than misleading, this is simply false.⁷⁶ We saw this view expressed by Price, whose gambit was to historicize the phenomenon and lexeme and thereby assert their contingency. He condemns the word in his admonition that “‘Belief’ as a religious term is profoundly Christian in its implications.”⁷⁷ And he posits that the phenomenon of believing is the result of a unique religious experience undergone by particular individuals (the Apostles) at parti-

⁷⁶ Cf. King 2003, 279: “Far from being ‘implicitly Christianizing,’ belief is not even intrinsically connected with religion or religious concepts.”

⁷⁷ Price 1984, 10. More recently Gagné imagines that “belief” cannot escape its “fundamental ties to conviction and devotion and so many other heirs of the Christian *credo*” (2013, 7).

cular moments in time (post-resurrection meetings with Jesus) and is thus inextricably tangled up with Christian origins.

The historical claim that not beliefs with certain contents but rather belief *itself*, as a type of cognitive state, “was forged out of the experience which the Apostles and Saint Paul had of the Risen Lord” is *prima facie* hard to accept.⁷⁸ Indeed, it is a claim that participates in the very Christianizing that Price expressly wishes to avoid. Jonathan Z. Smith has laid bare the implications that allegations of Christian uniqueness such as this have for the comparative study of religion:⁷⁹

The centre, the fabled Pauline seizure by the “Christ-event” or some other construction of an originary moment, has been declared, *a priori*, to be unique, to be *sui generis*, and hence by definition, incomparable.

Thus, as for scholars of previous centuries, so for Price, a latent commitment to Christian exceptionalism underpins his verdict on the applicability of belief to ancient religions.⁸⁰

In attempting to extirpate Christianizing categories of analysis, Price and scholars of like persuasion have allowed those very categories to inform their first principles. They imagine that the word “belief” of necessity baldly refers to or covertly connotes “the Christian virtue of faith.”⁸¹ Just as bachelors are unmarried, so belief, on this misprision, is analytically, by definition Christian.⁸² I should hope it would be ob-

⁷⁸ Cf. Johnson 1987, contending, in what is best read as a prank, “that no one believed anything, strictly speaking, until Greek thinkers of the sixth century B.C. showed people how to do this.”

⁷⁹ Smith 1990, 143. Cf. esp. 36-53.

⁸⁰ Cf. Harrison 2000, 20: “Ironically,” Price’s “position falls into exactly the trap that it seeks to avoid” and King 2003, 276: “... the product of a Christianizing bias in favor of Christian uniqueness.”

⁸¹ A definition marked as *arch.* or *Obs.* in *OED* (1989) s.v. 1.b, but curiously elevated in *OED* (2011) to I.1.a.

⁸² Further examples: Davies 2004, 5 (quoted above and just below) and *mutatis mutandis* Davies 2011, 411: “if we were to say that ‘group X believed in Y/believed Y’ then we would be concluding that a group in antiquity took up a position comparable to a modern religious group.” This only holds on the troubled assumption that belief is inherently a “modern religious” cognitive state.

vious to any fluent speaker of English that the word gets used in non-Christian ways with non-Christian connotations all the time, even when it is used “as a religious term.”

We shall return to this question below, but for now please note that Price’s position exhibits the genetic fallacy, that is, the mistake of supposing that some moment in a thing’s history discredits, authenticates, or mechanically determines the current significance of the thing.⁸³ Since Christians once used or even still use the English word “belief” to refer to Christian faith, the word is hopelessly linked to Christianity. Should we generalize this genetic method, we would have to stop speaking of *atoms*, on the grounds that the word’s etymology links it to theories of Leucippus and his successors that are incommensurable with modern physics. We would have to quit referring to the *cosmos*, given the term’s redolence of pre-Copernican astronomy. Finally, we would have to wonder how early Christians managed to cleanse words like *fides* and *credo* of their pagan overtones. Were they not profoundly *polytheistic* in their implications? After all, *Fides* had a temple on the Capitol.⁸⁴ Obviously, we can use all these terms in their current or secular senses and still talk about *Christian* (or *Roman*) belief, *Epicurean* atoms, and the *Ptolemaic* cosmos. We shall see that Price’s Christianizing assumptions do not hold and that belief is not an anachronism.

2. 2. BELIEF IS A CONCEPT

Our second misleading proposition holds that belief is first and foremost a *concept*, and therefore may or may not be found in cultures other than our own. This misprision is closely related to or perhaps a more ecumenical version of the idea that belief is inherently Christian. We have already seen the belief-as-concept line expressed thus: “‘Belief’ is ... deeply problematic: it may be that this *paradoxical concept* is one peculiar to the Christianized West.”⁸⁵ A similar perplexity infor-

⁸³ Cf. Versnel 2011, 548, with original emphasis: “The argument ... that ‘believing’ originally meant ‘having faith’ or even ‘to pledge allegiance to’ (and that our word ‘belief’ still betrays traces of those connotations) is *in this respect* irrelevant.”

⁸⁴ Ziolkowski 1992, 28-31.

⁸⁵ Davies 2004, 5, my emphasis.

med Needham's study and an oft-cited article by Pouillon.⁸⁶ It is true that one may or may not have an explicit, theoretical concept of "belief," just as one may or may not possess the concept of "tubercle bacillus." But to be bereft of a well-articulated concept of belief is no more to be free of beliefs than to lack the concept of tubercle bacillus is to be insusceptible, as Latour allowed himself to be interpreted,⁸⁷ to tuberculosis.

Conceptual relativity, in this domain at least, does not entail ontological relativity.⁸⁸ Belief, unlike *auspicatio* or the *tribunatus plebis*, does not depend for its existence on how it is implicitly or explicitly conceptualized. Believing, that is, at a first approximation, representing states of affairs to obtain, is simply what minds do. Indeed, it is in part the mind's capacity to believe that allows us to form and entertain concepts, such as the mistaken concepts of belief promulgated by Needham, Price, Davies, and others. If they did not believe a lot of misguided things about belief, they would not have the concepts of belief that they have. So while their *concepts* of belief only exist in virtue of their *beliefs* about belief, belief *as such* does not exist in virtue of any concept of belief or any belief about belief. I would hazard that confusion to the contrary has arisen because there *are* some entities that really *do* depend on our beliefs and concepts, and therefore exist only relative to certain beliefs and conceptual schemes, such as *auspicatio* or the *tribunatus plebis*. There can be no *auspicatio* absent a reasonably determinate concept of *auspicatio* and likewise for the office of *tribunus plebis*.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Needham 1972, with my emphases: "The *concept* of belief is an historical product..." (41); "The English *concept* of belief has been formed by a Christian tradition" (44). Cf. Pouillon 1982, 8, my emphasis: "... this *notion* [sc. religious belief] does not have universal value." Appeal to Pouillon 1982 in classical scholarship: e.g., Giordano-Zecharya 2005 *passim*; Davies 2004, 5 n. 15; Gagné 2013, 7 n. 17; in anthropology: e.g., Lindquist and Coleman 2008, 5-6 and Dein 2013.

⁸⁷ Doubts about tuberculosis in ancient Egypt: Latour 1998. Cf. his recent *retractatio*: Latour 2004.

⁸⁸ See further, Searle 1995, 160-167.

⁸⁹ See Searle 1995 and 2010.

2.3. BELIEF IS A LINGUISTIC PRACTICE

There is a linguistic version of the epistemological thesis that we must find a concept of belief in a given society in order to attribute beliefs to its people. It holds that in order to attribute beliefs to non-western or pre-modern people, we must at a minimum find a word in their language that translates as “belief” or “believe” and then ideally observe them making first-person affirmations of belief using that word. These premises underwrite the projects of Needham and Pouillon and, as might be expected in a philological discipline, may be found among classicists.⁹⁰ Needham puts it thus (1972, 108):

Where, then, do we get the notion of belief from? From the verb “believe,” and its inflected forms, in everyday English usage. Statements of belief are the only evidence for the phenomenon; but the phenomenon itself appears to be no more than the custom of making such statements.

Not only do we get our “notion of belief” from the verb “believe” but, what is more, “[s]tatements of belief are the only evidence” for belief. Finally, believing is nothing more than using the verb “believe.”

On his first page, Needham describes the epistemological crisis, occasioned by a concern about language, that inspired his book. Although “[i]t was certain that the Penan spoke of the existence of a spiritual personage named Peselong” and although “his attributes were well agreed,” nonetheless, the western anthropologist “had no linguistic evidence at all” about the beliefs of the Penan. This is because the Penan have “no formal creed, and ... no other conventional means for expressing belief in their god.”⁹¹ Needham spends many pages studying the etymology of the English belief/believe lexeme and surveying words in the tongues of the Penan, Nuer, and others that might trans-

⁹⁰ See, e.g., Davies 2011, 401-402 (worrying about the word *credo*); cf. 404 n. 32 and 406-407. An example from the oral tradition: I was once scolded by a very senior Latinist for attributing religious beliefs to the Romans. He could not imagine any Roman pagan saying *credo in deum/deos*. This consideration, which he regarded as decisive, is perfectly irrelevant, as we shall see.

⁹¹ Needham 1972, 1.

late as “belief” or “believe.”⁹² These are worthy endeavors in their own right. Yet one cannot help but wonder if the fact that “the Penan spoke of the existence of” their god might not have counted as the “linguistic evidence” of belief that Needham was seeking.

Before exposing the full extent of Needham’s error, let us turn to Jean Pouillon to see structuralism’s contribution to the confusion. Pouillon’s ethnographic problem is the Danggaléat people. He wonders, “how can one tell whether they believe [*croire*] and in what way? What question can one ask them, using what word of their language, in what context?”⁹³ His linguistic question is this: “is a translation of the verb (sc. *croire*) in all its senses possible in other languages, using a single term?”⁹⁴ Pouillon’s structuralism leads him, after he has spent some pages identifying the semantic range of *croire* in its various constructions, to determine that all possible “meanings” of the verb *croire*, “even the contradictory ones, are intrinsically linked.”⁹⁵ He finds that although “we can translate all aspects of the verb ‘to believe’,” we cannot translate “the verb itself” into Danggaléat.⁹⁶ The assumption that *croire* expresses all of its possible meanings whenever it is used, and the finding that the Danggaléat have no comparable verb, motivate Pouillon’s conclusion that a vast gulf separates Christian and Danggaléat modes of religiosity.⁹⁷

We shall take these claims apart in the order of presentation, but let us start with a fact about cultural cognition. There is no question that

⁹² Needham 1972, 32-50.

⁹³ Pouillon 1982, 4.

⁹⁴ Pouillon 1982, 1.

⁹⁵ Pouillon 1982, 5 (for “linked” the text reads “liked”). Cf. 8: “All the meanings of the verb ‘to believe’ should then come together.” Pouillon’s mistake continues to damage the study of ancient religion, e.g., Giordano-Zecharya 2005, 331: “... the Christian and modern use of the word ... subsumes three senses, inextricably.” Similarly, for Gagné 2013 the “vast semantic range of the word ‘belief’” (7) and “the force of its connotations” (8) prove intellectually insurmountable and thus apotropaic.

⁹⁶ Pouillon 1982, 5.

⁹⁷ Pouillon 1982, 5-8.

the lexicon of mental-state words in any given language plays an important role in language-users' reasoning about the mental-states of self and other, that is, their metacognitive abilities.⁹⁸ But it is mistaken to suppose that *believing itself* depends on any specific lexicon or linguistic practice, or that "[s]tatements of belief are the only evidence" we have for belief. Far from it. Needham could have saved himself the trouble of writing his book based solely on the evidence that he presents on page one. For all he required in order to attribute belief to the Penan was the fact that, as he admits, they speak of and agree about their god and his attributes. No linguistic construction for "expressing belief" is needed beyond simple assertion.⁹⁹

The same answer may be given to Pouillon's series of questions about the Danggaléat: "How can one tell whether they believe...? What question can one ask them, using what word of their language...?" Again, Danggaléat assertions would typically count as evidence of Danggaléat beliefs, regardless of whether there is any "word of their language" for "croire." Pouillon would no doubt have rejected this, because he assumed that belief was a Christian mental state whose unique quality could be captured and expressed only by *croire*, as understood in all of its conceivable meanings taken at once. As he says, "it seems impossible to overcome the polysemy of the word."¹⁰⁰ However, this assumption that all the semantic potential of a term is gratuitously deployed with every use is groundless.¹⁰¹ As every dictionary editor knows, a term's meaning differs from use to use and from context to context: this is why dictionaries offer multiple definitions of single words. So Pouillon's quest for a single Danggaléat word whose

⁹⁸ See, e.g., Wellman 2014, 25-26, 160-167; Zufferey 2010, 27-51. Needham has a useful discussion of this point: 1972, 25-28.

⁹⁹ As forcefully argued against Needham from Needham's own Wittgensteinian perspective in Streeter (forthcoming). For assertion and belief, see Searle 1979, 12-13; Searle and Vanderveken 1985, 18-19, 54-55, and 59-60; Jary 2010, 32-51; MacFarlane 2011; Goldberg 2015, 144-203.

¹⁰⁰ Pouillon 1982, 4.

¹⁰¹ Barr (1961, 219) identified this tendency in Biblical scholarship as "illegitimate totality transfer."

semantic range maps precisely onto that of *croire* is a red herring, for *croire* does not express its entire semantic potential each time and in every context that it is used.¹⁰²

In sum, we can often safely attribute beliefs to agents on the basis of their assertive speech acts. An assertive need not be embedded as a sentential clause dependent on a verb of believing (“I believe that...”) because assertives alone, independently of a verb of believing, characteristically express a speaker’s beliefs regarding a state of affairs.¹⁰³ Indeed, the most telling result of our discussion, and the greatest indictment of the methods of Needham and Pouillon, is the realization that we could attribute beliefs to people who speak a language with no mental-state lexicon at all, no so-called “intensional transitive” verbs like “believe,” simply because in order to attribute beliefs we do not require confessions of belief employing first-person mentalizing verbs of believing. Unlike this hypothetical language that does not lexicalize mental states, Latin has a rich thesaurus of psychological terms, including numerous words for doxastic states of differing intensities, for example, *opinio* and *opinor*, *scientia* and *scio*, *cognitio* and *cognosco*, *fides*, *coniectura*, *sententia*, *credo*, *arbitror*, and *puto*, among many others. Any language with resources for denoting mental states, episodes, and processes grants its users certain capacities for metacognition, that is, the ability to think about thinking and to talk about thinking about thinking. But even if Latin had not a single term for any mental episode whatsoever, nonetheless, when Camillus asserts *urbem auspiciato inauguratoque conditam habemus; nullus locus in ea non religionum deorumque est plenus*, we, like his imagined audience, are entitled to credit

¹⁰² Roughly this thesis is vividly argued using the example of αἰδῶς/αἰδέομαι, in Cairns and Fulkerson 2015, section II.

¹⁰³ Assertive speech acts can, of course, be used in writing fiction, playing a role in a drama, lying, or with the perlocutionary intention of getting another to believe something regarding which one has no settled belief oneself. In these cases, the aesthetic, dramatic, deceptive, or persuasive effects of assertives *depend upon* the fact that their illocutionary point is to tell how the world is and, as such, express a psychological state of belief regardless of whether one *really* has the expressed belief.

him with certain beliefs about Rome, her divine charter, and her sacred relationship with the gods.¹⁰⁴

2.4. BELIEFS ARE UNKNOWABLE

There is a diffidence in some recent literature concerning our ability to divine anything about the Romans' cognitive and affective states and indeed, most broadly speaking, their experience.¹⁰⁵ So this subsection extends to the study of ancient experience as well as of ancient belief. Regarding belief, we are warned that "it is a mistake to overemphasize any question of participants' belief or disbelief in the efficacy of ritual actions, *when we have no access to their private thoughts.*"¹⁰⁶ As to experience, we are admonished:¹⁰⁷

We can never know what any Roman 'felt', at any period, when he decided to use his wealth to build a temple to a particular god; still less how Romans might have felt when entering, walking past or simply gazing at the religious monuments of their city.

Note the scare quotes around *felt*. If these passages advise us that we can never know what the Romans might have thought or experienced in the privacy of their hearts, other passages go further, suggesting that we cannot know whether the Romans even had psychological states that we could recognize, for "considerable doubt may be cast on contemporary models for mental life."¹⁰⁸ Indeed, preemptory surrender has been enjoined as a methodological principle:¹⁰⁹

même si nous pouvions déduire de telles croyances religieuses et les interpreter correctement, nous aurions bien tort de croire que nous

¹⁰⁴ Liv. 5.50.2. See Ando 2015, 17-24. The occasion finds Camillus urging his fellow Romans not to move to Veii after the Gallic sack of Rome of 390. Even if this *diligentissimus religionum cultor* (Liv. 5.50.1) is in reality a thorough Polybian, cynically manipulating a credulous audience, his project still requires the activation, appeal to, and elicitation of *beliefs*.

¹⁰⁵ Experience as such has been gaining attention in scholarship on ancient religion: see Rüpke 2013, 20-22 for references and reflections.

¹⁰⁶ North 2000, 84, my emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ Beard, North, and Price 1998, I: 125.

¹⁰⁸ Phillips 1986, 2702.

¹⁰⁹ North 2003, 344.

pourrions alors comprendre ces ‘croyances’ de la même manière que nous comprenons les ‘croyances’ des religions modernes.

Ex hypothesi, even if we could work out and interpret Roman religious beliefs, and do so correctly, we *still* could not understand them.

The premise informing these self-defeating proposals is that ancient texts, artifacts, and behaviors that have survived to us or for which we have evidence do not necessarily constitute any “index” of any “experience,”¹¹⁰ thoughts, or feelings the Romans may have had. What is more, even when ancient materials may licitly be taken, albeit with all due caution, as indices of Roman experiences, feelings, or beliefs, we still cannot understand these Roman mental episodes due to the irreducible alterity, the “sheer difference”¹¹¹ of these ancients. Now, of course, we hardly want to come to our encounter with the Romans assuming that we already know them, that they do not differ from us, that their relics are self-interpreting. But whence this extreme of epistemological reserve?

We may look again to Needham for an answer. Skepticism about the psychological states of his ethnographic informants, and thus about the entire *Verstehen* project, was a motivating mystification of his book. In the first chapter, titled “Problem,” he had found fault with the practice of his colleagues (1972, 2):

If ... an ethnographer said that people believed something when he did not actually know what was going on inside them, ... then surely his account of them must ... be very defective in quite fundamental regards.

Even when informed by a Nuer man that several Nuer verbs readily translate as “to believe” in religious contexts,¹¹² Needham serenely persisted in maintaining that “we remain completely ignorant of what is the interior state of the Nuer toward their god.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Beard, North, and Price 1998, I: 125.

¹¹¹ Beard, North, and Price 1998, I: x. Cf. Versnel 2011, 10-18, criticizing this thesis *vis-à-vis* the Greeks.

¹¹² Needham 1972, 30 n. 13 and accompanying text.

¹¹³ Needham 1972, 31.

In one very specific sense, Needham and the classicists who follow his lead are quite right that we are “completely ignorant” about the inner lives of cultural others. We do “not actually know what was going on inside” of the Romans. For consider: sensory perceptions, bodily feelings, emotions, and beliefs are first-person episodes. This entails that one has no *immediate* access to any sensory, cognitive, or affective experience but one’s own, whatever the cultural similarities or differences between self and other. Yet this hardly justifies solipsism. Others *obviously* have inner states, even if our only evidence for these states is their outward behavior.

Consider the following ancient instance of bodily pain, emotion, and belief. Augustine tells of Innocentius, a prominent Carthaginian, who had undergone surgery for fistulas *in posteriore atque ima corporis parte*.¹¹⁴ In surgery, he had suffered horrific pains (*dolores*).¹¹⁵ But his surgeons had missed a fistula, so deeply was it hidden *inter multos sinus*. The wretched man anticipated a second surgery with great fear (*tantus ... metus*), because he believed (*non dubitare*) that he would not survive it.¹¹⁶ His entire *domus*, in sympathy with its *dominus*, wept “like the lamentation at a funeral.”¹¹⁷ Yet in the end, after much pitiable prayer, Innocentius was miraculously cured by a *misericors et omnipotens Deus*, to the great joy (*laetitia*) of the man and his family, who immediately offered prayers of thanks amid tears of rejoicing (*lacrimantia gaudia*).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ August. *De civ. D.* 22.8.3: *curabatur a medicis fistulas, quas numerosas atque perplexas habuit in posteriore atque ima corporis parte. iam secuerant eum et artis suae cetera medicamentis agebant.*

¹¹⁵ August. *De civ. D.* 22.8.3: *passus autem fuerat in sectione illa et diuturnos et acerbos dolores.*

¹¹⁶ August. *De civ. D.* 22.8.3: *tantus enim eum metus ex prioribus invaserat poenis, ut se inter medicorum manus non dubitaret esse moriturum.*

¹¹⁷ August. *De civ. D.* 22.8.3: *ex maerore nimio domini tantus est in domo illa exortus dolor ut tamquam funeris planctus.*

¹¹⁸ This miracle is not incidental to Augustine’s motivations: *De civ. D.* 22.8.1: *nam etiam nunc fiunt miracula in eius nomine.*

Now, none of us in Innocentius, and no one, not his *domus*, not Augustine, has experienced precisely his fistulas, his pains in surgery, his beliefs and fears anticipating a second surgery, or his joy at his miraculous cure. Innocentius' bodily pains, his belief that he could die, and his successive emotions of fear and joy had a first-person, private, subjective existence rather than a third-person, public, objective existence. No matter how empathetic, tuned-in, and close to him were his *domus* and his friends such as Augustine, Innocentius alone was *directly* acquainted with these things. It is worth remarking that all of this holds as much for us and our own closest kin as for the Romans or the Nuer.

But these facts about the subjectivity of the psychological episodes occasioned by Innocentius' fistulas hardly sponsor Needhamian solipsism, i.e., doubt as to whether minds enculturated differently than one's own possess underlying features anything like one's own,¹¹⁹ such as the sorts of cognitive episodes that Innocentius experienced: bodily pain, belief, emotion.¹²⁰ The *content* of those episodes as well as the *individual episodes themselves* were unique to Innocentius and were of course determined by his life history, including his cultural situatedness. But the *types* of episode — bodily pain, belief, and emotion — are universal to the minded being that is *Homo sapiens*.

Moreover, the fact that Innocentius' psychological episodes and experiences were personal, or *ontologically subjective*, does not entail that we can make no claims or have no knowledge about them that is factual, or *epistemologically objective*.¹²¹ What we or Augustine think or say about Innocentius' pain is either accurate or inaccurate. In principle, if not always in practice, we can *really know* that Innocentius felt pain *in posteriore corporis parte* and thus be far from ignorant about "what was going on inside" of him. This holds for any Roman about whom we

¹¹⁹ Versions of cultural solipsism continue to be regarded as paradigm-subverting methodological interventions among some anthropologists, e.g., Robbins and Rumsey 2008.

¹²⁰ For the intentionality of beliefs, see Searle 1983; for the intentionality of emotions and feelings, see Goldie 2002.

¹²¹ More on this distinction: see Searle 1995, 7-13 and 2010, 17-18.

have any data. True, we must never forget that any ancient experience that we can study “is always something which is already told, spoken about, and thus constructed.”¹²² Indeed, the surviving tellings and constructions are the only indices available to us of the experience. And we reconstruct from these constructions, as I have reconstructed Innocentius' experience from Augustine's construction of it, retold it from his telling, and turned it to my own use, as Augustine turned it to his. We cannot capture or recapture the intrinsic first-personal subjectivity of ancient experience but we can surely glean some genuine *understanding* of it.¹²³

Now, how can I possibly justify such a claim about the “knowability” of other minds, the epistemological objectivity of the ontologically subjective? Rather than attempt such a whimsical project, I shall limit myself to a point about the condition of the very possibility of disciplines such as classics. When we treat Roman behavior as behavior we implicitly treat it differently than we treat electrons, dimethyl sulfoxide, the circulation of blood, or the seasonal abscission of deciduous trees. We treat it as the intentional activity of *agents* who *act* for reasons explicable in terms of what we really have no choice but to see as their perceptions, perspectives, fears, desires, intentions, bodily feelings, and yes, beliefs. For example, when we treat Roman linguistic artifacts *as linguistic artifacts* — as purposeful, meaningful uses of language, as questions, commands, assertions, *vota*, *carmina*, *orationes*, or epitaphs — we thereby *necessarily* ascribe to the ancients intentional states appropriate to these speech acts. If we did not take this “intentional stance,”¹²⁴ we would fail to see these linguistic artifacts as *artifacts* at all, but merely register them, if at all, as mindless marks, like patterns in the sand.¹²⁵

So we are simply *in the business* of taking Roman behaviors as indices of Roman psychological states. We must not be naive about this pro-

¹²² Vuolanto 2016, 16.

¹²³ Cf. Rüpke 2016, 62-63.

¹²⁴ The term comes from Dennett 1987.

¹²⁵ In the famous image of Knapp and Michaels 1982, 727-728.

ject but equally we must not reckon a facile solipsism the *ne plus ultra* of methodological circumspection. It is easy to fail to recognize the foregoing considerations, to overlook them because they are the half-buried foundations upon which not only historical research but also textual criticism, literary study, anthropology, cultural psychology, and indeed any *social* endeavor at all stands, the unconscious background and unstated condition of the possibility of approaching others, of any time or place, *as others*, that is, as fellow human creatures, but not *as other*, that is, as utterly incommensurable beings. Indeed, even those scholars who pointedly eschew the belief/believe lexeme nonetheless covertly ascribe beliefs to the subjects of their study,¹²⁶ though they fail to recognize their own practice for what it is and the beliefs of their Roman subjects for what they actually are.

3. WHAT IS BELIEF?

3.1. THE INTENTIONALITY OF BELIEF

So, what is belief?¹²⁷ I have said that belief is not inherently Christian, and that believing does not depend upon possessing a concept of belief or upon engaging in some special linguistic practice. Instead, believing is simply one of the things that human minds do. This view of belief is captured in a functionalist definition offered by cognitive scientists of religion Justin Barrett and Jonathan Lanman. According to them, belief is “the state of a cognitive system holding information (not necessarily in propositional or explicit form) as true in the generation of further thought and behavior.”¹²⁸ This deflationary definition, informed by decades of research in philosophy of mind, has much to recommend it.

¹²⁶ Some low-hanging fruit: Davies 2011: “The Romans would have vigorously contested the claim that they had no evidence for religious deductions” (403); “it was almost universally axiomatic that one could influence gods through ritual” (422). The troublesome lexeme is avoided even as the psychological state is attributed. See Versnel 2011, 548 for a similar observation regarding scholarship on Greek religion.

¹²⁷ The topics touched upon here are covered more systematically in my forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Belief and Cult: From Intuitions to Institutions in Roman Religion*.

¹²⁸ Barrett and Lanman 2008, 110; so too Lanman 2008, 54.

Most importantly, for a “cognitive system,” a mind, to “hold information as true” just means that it treats some information as an accurate representation of states of affairs. If you allow that human minds are constituted to represent states of affairs as obtaining, that is, to hold information as true, then you allow that belief is a human universal. When people hold as true information about gods, ancestors, spirits, extramundane forces, ritual efficacy, and so on, then they are entertaining religious beliefs. Religious believing is just one sort of religious cognition among many others, but given the universality of belief posited here, it is presumably a very widespread sort.

Barrett and Lanman’s definition also captures succinctly the connections between belief and other cognitions and between belief and action. Beliefs may, for example, serve as premises for inference or reflection or as the bases of emotions. And beliefs play a central role in the etiology of action. Finally, moving to the parenthesis, the definition allows that beliefs need not be held in “creedal” form, as explicitly spelled-out propositions. This removes any temptation to suppose that only creedal religions foster believing.

Now allow me to return to the definition’s notion of “information.” Information is representational. It has content. Information is *about* this or that state of affairs. This quality of *representationality*, or *contentfulness*, or *aboutness* is called by cognitive scientists and philosophers “intentionality.” Here, intentionality denotes the quality not of *purposiveness*, as when we say that an action was “intentional,” but of *aboutness* or *directedness toward* an object.¹²⁹ It is worth noting that intentionality in this sense was of theoretical interest to ancient philosophers, upon whose work the modern study of intentionality is founded.¹³⁰ Franz Brentano is usually given credit for initiating the modern study of intentionality. Inspired by Aristotle and the Scholastics, he posited that intentionality was the “mark of the mental.” That is, unlike trees, grav-

¹²⁹ Crane 2001, 4-8. See Searle 1983, 1-4.

¹³⁰ See Sorabji 1991 and Caston 2008. Brentano 1874, influenced by Aristotle and the Scholastics, launched the modern study of intentionality. See Crane 2001, 8-13 for a brief history of research on intentionality; see further Sorabji 1991.

ity, or helium, mental states are unique in being *about* or *directed upon* objects (1995, 68):

Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.

We have already seen that the term “intentionality” is ambiguous. In a narrow sense, we speak of *intentions* to act (plans) or actions done *intentionally* (on purpose). But most broadly, “intentionality” denotes the fact that mental states, including intentions to act, are directed upon or are about *objects*.

Like information, beliefs exhibit intentionality. They represent the objects toward which they are directed, they have content, they are *about* this or that quality, thing, situation, or circumstance. Belief is but one of many sorts of intentional mental state, which may be divided into two broad classes: the doxastic and the practical. Doxastic states are directed upon and represent how the world *is* or how we take it *to be*. Such states may be positive, such as *belief, knowledge, memory, assumption, presupposition, conjecture, recognition, and acceptance*, and negative, such as *denial, rejection, and disbelief*, or indeed neutral, such as *uncertainty*. Doxastic states are also sometimes called “representational,” “theoretical,” or “cognitive.” All these intentional states are distinguished as doxastic by the fact that they seek to fit, match, or be adequate to the way things stand in the world. It is important to note that doxastic states are mutually implicating. If you suppose that Romans could *deny* or *reject* propositions then you have accepted that Romans could *affirm, accept, and believe* propositions. So, doxastic states are not modular. We cannot accept the existence of the ones we like and reject the ones that we do not like.

In contrast to doxastic states, practical states are directed upon and represent states of affairs as we wish they *were* or intend to make them *be*. Such states include desire and *intention* and are often classed under the rubrics “motivational,” “volitive,” or “conative.” Our practical attitudes have as their content or are *about* things that we wish were the case or plan to make the case. They represent our interventions in the world or

the world as we wish it were. Conversely, our beliefs are about things that we take to be the case. They represent the world as we take it to be, irrespective of our wishes.

Allow me to elaborate upon these points by introducing six interrelated features of all intentional states, including belief: subject, object, content, psychological mode, direction of fit, and conditions of satisfaction.¹³¹ When belief is understood in light of these six features, its central place in cognition as well as its systematic relationship to other sorts of mental states becomes clear.

3.1.1. INTENTIONAL STATES REQUIRE A *SUBJECT* IN ORDER TO EXIST

Every mental state's existence depends upon a subject with a mind to own or have or bear it. Mental states are thus ontologically subjective. Mental states differ from ontologically objective entities, such as carbon, trees, and galaxies, which exist independently of subjects or minds. It is worth noting now, in passing, that social reality is ontologically subjective as well. That is, it depends for its very existence upon subjects and their intentionality. We shall return to this below.

3.1.2. INTENTIONAL STATES ARE ABOUT *OBJECTS*

Intentional states are about or directed at *stuff*, where *stuff* amounts to states of affairs, entities, events, situations, processes, properties, relations, and so on.¹³² The stuff an intentional state is about is its *object*.¹³³ *Intentionality* is the quality of directedness toward an object exhibited by intentional states. Beliefs are about states of affairs that one takes to exist, desires are about states of affairs one wishes did exist, while intentions are about states of affairs one plans to cause to exist. More on these distinctions below.

3.1.3. INTENTIONAL STATES HAVE *CONTENT*

Intentional states are *contentful*. A belief's content is the perspective from which, the aspect under which, or the way in which it represents

¹³¹ I rely primarily on Searle 1983, 1-36; Crane 2001, 1-33; 2013, 89-117. For phenomenological takes on intentionality, see Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 107-128; and Drummond 2012.

¹³² Searle 1983, 16-19; Crane 2001, 13-18; 2013, 90-96, esp. 92.

¹³³ Crane 2001, 15-16; 2013, 4.

its object. Just as one cannot gaze upon the Capitoline Hill from no particular vantage point, so intentional states cannot neutrally represent their objects in a view from nowhere. All intentional states present or represent their objects under some aspect, from some perspective, from one point of view and not others.¹³⁴

This aspectual or perspectival feature of intentional states determines the *content* that each one has. The perspectival nature of content entails that two beliefs (for example) can be about the same *object* but have different *contents*, that is, represent the same object under different aspects.¹³⁵ For example, one person can believe that *the eagle is never killed by lightning* while another believes that *the eagle is the shield-bearer of Jupiter*.¹³⁶ Both beliefs share an object, the eagle, but they differ in content, that is, in the way they represent this shared object. Content, that is, the *way* objects are represented, is consequential. Oedipus wanted to marry *the woman* he believed *was the queen of Thebes* but not *the woman* he believed *was his mother*. The content of Oedipus' belief about Iocasta — the way he represented this object of his thought — contributed to his undoing.

Another aspect of cognition that comes to light when we characterize it in terms of intentionality is neatly brought out in Robert Brandom's elaboration of an insight of Brentano. Brentano saw that extra-mental stuff "can only stand in physical or causal relations to actually existing facts, events, and objects." But "intentional states can 'refer to contents' that are not true (do not express actual facts) and be 'directed upon objects' that do not exist." So the content of my belief about you can be wrong, even though you (the object of my belief) do exist. Or I may entertain beliefs that are directed upon an object, such as a god, that does not exist. Cognition is unique in this way: "I can only kick the can if it exists, but I can think about unicorns even if they do not."¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Searle 1983, 4-22 *passim*; Crane 2001, 18-21, 28-30; 2013, 96-102.

¹³⁵ See Crane 2001, 345, 348; 2013, 97.

¹³⁶ Examples derived from Plin. *HN* 10.6.15.

¹³⁷ Brandom 2014, 348. For non-existent objects of intentional states and episodes, see Crane 2013.

3.1.4. INTENTIONAL STATES OCCUR IN A DISTINCTIVE *PSYCHOLOGICAL MODE*

All intentional states represent their objects from a perspective and this perspective constitutes their content. But what makes a given intentional state a *belief*, a *desire*, an *intention*, and so forth? The determinant here lies neither in object nor in content, but in the subject's *attitude* toward the content. Attitude is sometimes referred to, more technically, as *psychological mode*.¹³⁸ "Belief" names a basic psychological mode, as do "desire," "intention," "fear," "hope," and so on.

Attitude (or psychological mode) and content are independent features of mental states. Thus, one may *desire*, *intend*, *fear*, *hope*, and of course *believe* or *doubt* that (for example) the eagle is never killed by lightning. The content (how the eagle is represented) remains the same in each case (*never killed by lightning*). What changes here is the subject's attitude toward that content. One *believes* when one's attitude toward an intentional content is that it *is the case*. In contrast, one *desires* when one's attitude toward that content is that of wishing *it were the case*. And so on.

3.1.5. INTENTIONAL STATES HAVE A *DIRECTION OF FIT*

For all intentional states, direction of fit follows directly from psychological mode.¹³⁹ We may distinguish between mind-to-world and world-to-mind directions of fit. Perception, belief, and memory¹⁴⁰ have mind-to-world direction of fit, while desire and intention have world-to-mind direction of fit. When one *believes* that a state of affairs obtains, one's representation "aims," in the traditional metaphor,¹⁴¹ to fit or be adequate to the world. Intentional states with the mind-to-world direction of fit often go under a heading we have already encountered, "doxastic."

Conversely, some intentional states have the opposite direction of fit: world-to-mind. In these cases, the mind does not conform to the way

¹³⁸ Searle 1983, 15-16; Crane 2001, 31-32.

¹³⁹ Searle 1983, 7-9, 15-16.

¹⁴⁰ Memory's mutability is one of its *psychological* rather than *logical* features. Memory, however changing and "constructive" (e.g., Schacter 2012), remains an intentional state with mind-to-world direction of fit, like belief.

¹⁴¹ See Chan 2013, 1.

the world is but rather, ideally, the way the world is conforms to the way the mind represents it. So, if the *pontifex maximus* desires that the *res publica* be preserved for five more years,¹⁴² he wants something about the world to conform to the content of his intentional state. These world-to-mind mental states are the practical states we discussed briefly above, desire and intention chief among them. We must not let all of this terminological variety cause us to miss the fact that both mind-to-world and world-to-mind states are representational. It is merely that the former seeks to represent the way the world *is* while the latter represents the world and our interventions in it as we would have them *be*.

3.1.6. INTENTIONAL STATES REPRESENT THEIR OWN *CONDITIONS OF SATISFACTION*¹⁴³

An intentional state's "conditions of satisfaction" are represented in its *content*. For example, one's *desire* that this or that occur is *satisfied* on the *condition* that this or that actually occurs. The desire's content represents exactly what it would take to satisfy that very desire. So, the desire represents the conditions of its own satisfaction. Analogously for belief. The *belief* that the altar of Jupiter Soter is on the Capitoline is *satisfied* (i.e., true, accurate, correct) on the *condition* that the altar of Jupiter Soter really is on the Capitoline.¹⁴⁴ Like desire, belief represents the conditions of its own satisfaction.¹⁴⁵ Where desires may be *fulfilled*, beliefs may be *true*, and intentions may be *acted upon*. *Satisfaction* is the broad term, encompassing *fulfillment*, *truth*, and so on.

The critical difference between a practical state with world-to-mind

¹⁴² Example from Liv. 22.10.2.

¹⁴³ Searle 1983, 10-13, 19-21; 1992, 175-177.

¹⁴⁴ *Serv. ad Aen.* 8.652: *ara in Capitolio est Iovis Soteris*.

¹⁴⁵ It is well known (a) that we often believe things because we *want* to believe them (confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, etc.) and (b) that many of our beliefs are not mutually consistent. These are psychological rather than logical features of belief. As to (a), see Kunda 1990; Harmon-Jones 2000; Oswald and Grosjean 2004. As to (b), see Feeney 1998, 14-21 on the "brain-balkanisation" thesis of Veyne 1988 and see Versnel 1990 on cognitive dissonance in Greco-Roman religion. For some relevant cognitive theory, see, e.g., Cherniak 1981; Egan 2008; Davies and Egan 2013, esp. 705ff.

direction of fit, such as desire, and a doxastic state with mind-to-world direction of fit, such as belief, is this: If the practical state is not satisfied, something in the world has not been made to conform to the mind. But if the doxastic state is not satisfied, something in the mind has failed to conform to the world.¹⁴⁶

Let us now summarize how these six features fit together. Intentionality requires a minded *subject*. The subject's *intentional* states, such as belief, are about or directed toward *objects*, that is, features of the world. An intentional state's *content* is the way the state represents the object that it is about, its perspective on the object. There are various *psychological modes* or *attitudes* through which subjects may relate to such contents. In *belief*, a subject relates to a content by taking it to be the case (rather than hoping, wishing, or fearing it to be the case, for example). Belief has a mind-to-world direction of fit: its content ideally conforms to or matches up with states of affairs. Desires and intentions exhibit world-to-mind direction of fit: the world ideally comes to match their content. The content of an intentional state describes its *conditions of satisfaction*. So, if states of affairs *come to be* as represented in the content of a desire, the desire is satisfied, i.e., *fulfilled*, and if states of affairs really *are* as represented in the content of a belief, then the belief is satisfied, i.e., accurate.

3.2. BELIEF, EMOTION, AND ACTION

Seen this way, several reasons why it is valuable to talk about belief present themselves. First, far from being a Christianizing term, "belief" is just the broadest, most neutral term for a positive doxastic state currently in wide use. Unlike, say, "knowledge," it does not imply that a given representation is epistemically justified. Unlike "conjecture" it need not imply ambivalence or uncertainty. A belief may be indifferently true or false, strongly or weakly held, more or less reflective. Because believing is simply one of the basic things minds do, we should expect both ancients and moderns to incorporate it into, and

¹⁴⁶ Anscombe (1957, 56) first presented this idea by contrasting two lists, one used by a shopper to buy groceries (cf. desire) and the other made by a detective recording the shopper's actions (cf. belief).

participate in, their own distinctive discourses of belief. It is not that early Christians believed while traditional Romans did not; rather, early Christians and traditional Romans made belief a part of differing discourses and subjected belief to differing evaluations. We need first to be attentive to the nature of belief if we hope to be alive to differing “cultures of belief.”¹⁴⁷

A second reason that it is valuable to talk about belief is that belief is constitutive of emotion.¹⁴⁸ If we acknowledge that the Romans could experience emotions in their religious lives, then we must admit that they had beliefs. Here is why: emotions have intentionality, but they inherit their intentionality from beliefs and other doxastic states, as well as from immediate perceptions. That is, one can only be *angry* about, *frightened* about, *sad* about, or *happy* about a state of affairs *about which* one has beliefs (or *of which* one has perceptual information).¹⁴⁹ Innocentius could only feel *fear* about his upcoming surgery because he *believed* certain things about surgery for deep fistulas, such as that it might kill him. His later *joy*, in contrast, was predicated upon his *recognition* of the sudden reversal in his fortunes and, what is more, its specific quality depended upon his *belief* that God had intervened to effect that reversal.¹⁵⁰ And this cuts both ways: for emotions contribute to the formation and fixation of beliefs by disposing us to attend to some information, which our emotions render more salient, in preference to other information. So beliefs may have affective origins and supports: “emotions can awaken, intrude into, and shape beliefs, by creating them, by amplifying or altering them, and by making them resistant to change.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ See Mair 2013.

¹⁴⁸ I draw upon the so-called “appraisal theory” of emotion. See Frijda 1986 and, concisely, from psychological and philosophical perspectives, Mulligan and Scherer 2012.

¹⁴⁹ This is a “cognitivist” theory of the emotions: see, e.g., Nussbaum 2001.

¹⁵⁰ For the role of culture-specific beliefs in generating culture-specific emotions, see Mesquita and Ellsworth 2001 and cf. De Leersnyder, Boiger, and Mesquita 2015.

¹⁵¹ Frijda, Manstead and Bem 2000, 5.

A third reason why we should recover belief for scholarship on Roman religion is this: belief is essential to action. This fact, well-understood in theoretical terms since at least Aristotle,¹⁵² contrasts as strongly as possible with the venerable belief-action dichotomy, according to which ancient cult was a matter of ritual action alone, not belief. Why accept this alternative view? Don't people sometimes "just do stuff" without believing anything one way or another? Consider this: Agents require a sense of their world and its affordances for action, even when they are "just doing stuff." Sometimes this sense of a world comes through perception, the direct sensory coupling of agent to environment, whereby the agent perceives directly its immediate possibilities for action and tracks the changes effected by its actions upon itself and the environment. But "planning agents,"¹⁵³ and especially other-regarding planning agents like ourselves, engaged with other such agents in cooperative social activities extending over indefinite periods of time, require in addition to direct perceptual coupling a cognitive model of the world. This cognitive model is composed of doxastic states such as belief that serve to define the space not only of possible but also of permissible, impermissible, and obligatory action.¹⁵⁴ Finally, we need practical attitudes, such as desire and intention, as well as affective episodes, such as emotion, to get us moving within the space of possibilities for action pictured for us by our doxastic states and our perceptions. So, if you accept that humans act, for example, by engaging in complex cult behavior with all of its obligations, dos, and don'ts, then there really is no avoiding belief.

3.3 BELIEF AND SOCIAL REALITY

A final reason that we should care about belief, a reason that deserves its own heading, is that belief is indispensable to the ontology of the social world. To put it very simply, much of social reality is how it is

¹⁵² Arist. *De motu an.* 701a-702a; *De an.* 433a-b; *Eth. Nic.* 1147a-b; see Nussbaum 1978 and Reeve 2012, 130-194. Anscombe 1957 and Davidson 1963 are seminal texts in modern action theory with Aristotelian roots.

¹⁵³ Bratman 1987; 2014.

¹⁵⁴ See Miller 2006; cf. Searle 2005, 66-73; 2010, 9, 123-132.

because of the beliefs and other representational cognitions, doxastic and practical, shared by people in a community. Consider: In a world without human subjects, there would be no institutions, no practices, no social statuses, no obligations, rights, or responsibilities. But this means that institutions and other features of the social world are subject-dependent entities: they depend on subjects for their existence.

How can this be, precisely? On what property, faculty, or activity of subjects depended an institution such as the pontificate, a status such as *pontifex*, a practice such as sacrifice, or a cult obligation such as that exerted by the calendrical recurrence of a festival? These and countless other social realities depended on Roman subjects *representing* them as existing in their practical and doxastic cognitions, such as intention and belief, as well as in their speech acts, and consequently *treating* them as existing in their practical lives. More precisely, in intentionalist terms (section 3.1), social reality is created and maintained when subjects collectively represent some *object*, some feature of the world, under a certain aspect, or in a certain way, in the *contents* of their *attitudes* and speech acts, and treat these objects accordingly in their actions and interactions. Thus, a certain person is represented *as a pontifex*, certain gestures *as sacrifice*, a certain day on the calendar *as a festival*, and so on, with all the social empowerments, disempowerments, and obligations to action concomitant with such statuses.

There is far more to say on this topic but these brief remarks and the few additional comments I offer in the following section will have to suffice here to indicate belief's centrality to the ontology of the social.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ I take up social ontology at much greater length in my forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Belief and Cult: From Intuitions to Institutions in Roman Religion*. My discussion here and in my forthcoming book reflects primarily the theory developed in Searle 1995 and 2010, with refinements from Tuomela 2007, 182-214; Elder-Vass 2010; Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2011; List and Pettit 2011; Elder-Vass 2012; Lawson 2012; Tuomela 2013, 214-241; Gilbert 2013; Schmitz, Kobow, and Schmid 2013; Gallotti and Michael 2014; Tollefsen 2015; Ziv and Schmid 2014; Guala 2016; Lawson 2016. While perhaps appearing similar on the surface, social ontology is not to be confused with radical versions of social constructionism. See Elder-Vass 2012 for discussion.

4. APPLICATION OF THE THEORY

We can appreciate the interplay of belief, emotion, intention, and action, as well as the role of belief in the creation and maintenance of social reality, by looking at religious action in Livy. He repeatedly tells us that outlandish occurrences and adverse events could induce beliefs and fears in the Roman people, and that these beliefs and fears could cause religious action. For example, in Book 21 we learn that in 218 B.C. Hannibal has begun to harass Tiberius Sempronius Longus in Italy and Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Calvus has clashed with Hasdrubal in Spain. The Romans are spooked. Livy describes the situation at Rome as follows (21.62.1-11):

Romae aut circa urbem multa ea hieme prodigia facta aut, quod evenire solet motis semel in religionem animis, multa nuntiata et temere credita sunt, (2) in quis ingenuum infantem semenstem in foro holitorio triumphum clamasse, (3) et in foro boario bovem in tertiam contignationem sua sponte escendisse atque inde tumultu habitatorum territum sese deiecisse, (4) et navium speciem de caelo adfulsisse, et aedem Spei, quae est in foro holitorio, fulmine ictam, et Lanuvi hastam se commouisse et coruum in aedem Iunonis devolasse atque in ipso pulvinari consedissee, (5) et in agro Amiternino multis locis hominum specie procul candida veste visos nec cum ullo congressos, et in Piceno lapidibus pluvisse, et Caere sortes extenuatas, et in Gallia lupum vigili gladium ex vagina raptum abstulisse. (6) ob cetera prodigia libros adire decemviri iussi; quod autem lapidibus pluvisset in Piceno, novendiale sacrum edictum; et subinde aliis procurandis prope tota civitas operata fuit. (7) iam primum omnium urbs lustrata est hostiaeque maiores quibus editum est dis caesae, (8) et donum ex auri pondo quadraginta Lanuvium Iunoni portatum est et signum aeneum matronae Iunoni in Auentino dedicaverunt, et lectisternium Caere, ubi sortes attenuatae erant, imperatum, et supplicatio Fortunae in Algido; (9) Romae quoque et lectisternium Iuventati et supplicatio ad aedem Herculis nominatim, deinde universo populo circa omnia pulvinaria indicta, et Genio maiores hostiae caesae quinque, (10) et C. Atilius Serranus praetor vota suscipere iussus, si in decem annos res publica eodem stetisset statu. (11) haec procurata vota ex libris Sibyllinis magna ex parte levaverant religione animos.

During this winter, at Rome or in the vicinity many *prodigia* occurred or, what typically happens once minds have been stirred with religious concern, many *prodigia* were announced and rashly believed. (2) Among them: a six-month-old freeborn infant shouted "Triumphe!" in the Forum Holitorium; (3) in the Forum Boarium, a cow climbed of its own accord to a third floor and then, terrified by the uproar of the occupants, threw itself down; (4) an image of ships appeared in the heavens; the Temple of Hope, which is in the Forum Holitorium, was struck by a thunderbolt; at Lanuvium, Juno's spear shook itself and a crow flew into the Temple of Juno and settled on her couch; (5) at many places in the territory of Amiternum, beings were seen at a distance, looking like human beings dressed in white, but they did not engage with anyone; in Picenum, there was a rain of stones; at Caere, the records of oracles shrank; in Gaul, a wolf snatched a sword from a watchman's sheath and ran off. (6) On account of the other *prodigia*, the *decemviri* were ordered to consult the Sibylline books. But with respect to the rain of stones at Picenum, a nine-day sacrifice was declared. After that practically the whole city was busied with taking care of the other *prodigia*. (7) First of all, the city was lustrated and full-grown victims were sacrificed to the gods that were specified. (8) A gift of fifty pounds of gold was brought to Lanuvium for Juno. The matrons dedicated a bronze statue to Juno on the Aventine. At Caere, where the records of oracles had shrunk, a *lectisternium* was ordered and a supplication to Fortuna on Algidus. (9) At Rome, also, a *lectisternium* was enjoined for Iuventas and a supplication at the Temple of Hercules, then, for the whole people, one around all the couches of the gods. Five full-grown victims were sacrificed to the Genius (10) and the praetor Gaius Atilius Serranus was ordered to undertake vows if for ten years the *res publica* should stay in the same condition. (11) These ministrations and vows from the Sibylline books for the most part relieved minds of religious concern.

Livy alludes here to most of the steps for determining and expiating prodigies.¹⁵⁶ Unusual events might be reported to a magistrate as a potential *prodigium*. This is the *nuntiatio*, marked by Livy with the words *multa nuntiata* (21.62.1). The magistrate then refers the report to the

¹⁵⁶ Linderski 1993, 58 lays out the procedure. See Satterfield 2012 for an important reassessment of the timing and relative chronology of the stages of the process.

senate for evaluation: this is the *relatio*. The senate may accept or reject, *suscipere* or *non suscipere*, the report as a genuine *prodigium*. Livy does not use the verb *suscipere* but rather writes of “what typically happens once minds have been stirred with religious concern,” i.e., the reported prodigies “were rashly believed” (*credita sunt*, 21.62.1). *Credere* here is either a synonym for *suscipere* or, more likely, it refers not to senatorial acceptance but to the credulousness of the people, as parallel passages featuring *credere* in relation to prodigies appear to suggest.¹⁵⁷

Once a *prodigium* was accepted, the senate deliberated or ordered priests to deliberate about what actions to take. In Livy’s account, ten *prodigia* were accepted by the senate. Nine of these the senate ordered the *decemviri sacris faciundis* to interpret and expiate in light of the Sibylline Books: *libros adire decemviri iussi* (21.62.6). The senate itself determined that the rain of stones at Picenum should be expiated by nine days of sacrifice (21.62.6). Following this, we must infer, the *decemviri* delivered their proposal regarding the remaining nine *prodigia*. Everyone, *prope tota civitas*, was to participate in making a variety of gifts for the gods, in sacrifices, lustrations, *supplicationes*, and *lectisternia*, while the praetor made vows (21.62.7-10). We return to our credulous Roman people after all this cult activity. The result is that their “minds have been relieved of religious concern” (21.62.11). Livy’s formula here is *animos* (or *mentes*) *religione levare* (or *liberare*).¹⁵⁸

Belief permeates this Livian episode. The Roman people come to believe that certain events count as *prodigia*, a religious category that the Romans antecedently believed to signal a need to secure the *pax deum*.¹⁵⁹ The role of the people’s beliefs about the current *prodigia* in elic-

¹⁵⁷ See, e.g., Liv. 24.10.6: *Prodigia eo anno multa nuntiata sunt, quae quo magis credebant simplices ac religiosi homines* (hardly a description of the senate), *eo plura nuntiabantur*; 43.13.1-2: *non sum nescius ab eadem neglegentia qua nihil deos portendere volgo* (again, obviously not senators) *nunc credant neque nuntiari admodum ulla prodigia in publicum neque in annales referri*; 29.14.2: *impleverat ea res superstitionum animos, pronique et ad nuntianda et ad credenda prodigia erant; eo plura volgabantur*.

¹⁵⁸ See, e.g., Liv. 7.3.1, 21.62.11, 25.1.11, 27.37.5.

¹⁵⁹ Prodigies did not signal “breaches” in the *pax deum*: see Satterfield 2015.

iting emotion and, indeed, emotion's role in promoting belief are both on display here. For the people's belief that *prodigia* have occurred and their appraisal of this situation appear to heighten the cognitive-affective episode that in Livy goes under the term *religio* (21.62.1, 11). Yet it was because their minds were already disposed by *religio* to form such beliefs (their minds were already "moved in *religionem*") that they "rashly" (*temere*) came to form beliefs about prodigies in the first place (21.62.1). Note the emotion-belief/belief-emotion feedback loop implied here. The emotion of *religio* produces a disposition to form certain sorts of beliefs, here, beliefs about *prodigia*; these beliefs about *prodigia* then play a part in eliciting more *religio*.

Let us pause for a moment over *religio* in order to trace the etiological contributions of belief and emotion to action. The young Cicero offers the following definition (*Inv. rhet.* 2.161):¹⁶⁰

Religio est, quae superioris cuiusdam naturae, quam divinam vocant, curam caerimoniamque affert.

Religio is that which occasions concern for (*cura*) and worship of (*caerimonia*) a certain higher nature, which men call "divine."

Following Cicero, we may gloss *religio* in Livy as a religious emotion, that is, an affective state of concern (*cura*), which carries with it a motivation to cult action (*caerimonia*).¹⁶¹ The affective state that Cicero and Livy call *religio* inherits its intentional content from a belief or set of beliefs to the effect, at the very least, that there exists some higher "divine" nature, *superior quaedam natura* (see section 3.2 above). So, in Livy's narrative, the Romans' beliefs about *prodigia* and *prodigia's* relation to the divine elicit heightened religious concern, and this concern moves them to cult action. Not that emotion leads straightaway to spontaneous action here. Rather, space is allowed for the formulation of practical attitudes under the guidance of the authorities — deliberation and its resulting intentions to act — as well as for the promulga-

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 2.66, where we find *metus* instead of *cura*.

¹⁶¹ For the "action readiness" or "action tendencies" of emotion, see Frijda 1986, 69-93. Cf. Nussbaum 2001, 129-137. For a neuroscientific view of emotion's role in behavior more holistically, see Damasio 1994.

tion of directive speech acts, i.e., orders (21.62.6, 9-10). In all of this, we see the roles of belief, emotion, and intention in the etiology of cult action. For without determinate beliefs — certain representations of states of affairs — and without the emotion that promoted but was also exacerbated by those beliefs, and finally without intentions to act, the Romans would not have engaged in the cult acts that Livy describes: gifts for the gods, sacrifices, lustrations, *supplicationes*, *lectisternia*, and vows. So, belief, emotions that derive their intentionality from belief, and practical intentions: all are causally implicated in Roman cult action.

On Livy's account, it is through these deliberate acts of cult that the Romans achieve relief from *religio* (21.62.11). This relief depends, like *religio* itself, upon pre-existing beliefs about the efficacy of cult as well as upon the Romans' real-time appraisal of the relevance to their current religious concerns of the cult that they actually perform. In other words, what the Romans believe about the cult that they perform is constitutive of that cult's psychological effects, i.e., its relief-producing effect. Livy's formula for cult's success here is *animos religione levare*, "relieve minds of religious care." What we see in this passage of Livy, then, is a "script"¹⁶² for the unfolding of an entire collective cognitive-affective-behavioral episode: belief, emotion, intention, and action.

We have discussed the role of belief in emotion and in action. Let us now consider the role of belief in Roman socio-religious reality. Recall that all intentional states have an object, i.e., some feature of the world that they are about. Recall, too, that all intentional states have content, that is, a way that they are about what they are about. Every intentional state represents its object from a perspective, under an aspect, in this way rather than that way. Now, note that the *objects* of Livy's prodigy list and hence the *objects* of the Romans' doxastic, practical, and affective states include, in order, an infant, a cow, an image of ships, the Temple of Hope, Juno's spear, a crow, beings dressed in white, a rain of stones, the records of oracles, and a wolf (21.62.2-5). But none of these objects is or even can be represented "neutrally" or under some perspective-free

¹⁶² In the sense of Kaster 2005, 7-9 *et passim* with references at 151 n. 17.

aspect. Rather, Livy represents the baby as *ingenuus infans semenstris*, "a six-month-old freeborn infant," who shouted "Triumphe." Moreover, insofar as the senate accepts this representation, Livy, and indeed the Roman people, may represent him as a *prodigium*.

Presumably, at various other times, in various other contexts, the child might have been represented as, for example, *filius*, "son," *nepos*, "grandson," *frater*, "brother," or as standing in some other kinship relation. In a few years, for legal purposes, he may be represented as *minor*, "a minor," or as *impubes*, "pre-adolescent," and even more specifically as *impubes infantiae proximus*, "pre-adolescent just beyond infancy," and later as *impubes pubertati proximus*, "pre-adolescent bordering on puberty." He might also be represented as *heres*, "heir," as *filius familias*, "son subject to *patria potestas*," as *pupillus*, "boy under guardianship," and so forth, on and on.¹⁶³

In each of these cases a single, entity — the child — is the *object* of cognitive and linguistic representations. However, the content of these representations, the ways in which one and the same object is represented in each case, differs in ways that have tremendous cognitive, cultural, and practical import. For the content of these representations helps determine the familial, legal, and as we saw even religious status of the child, and along with any given status, the practices, rights, and obligations that pertain to it. So, the content of Roman beliefs about the child play a role in determining his social ontology, i.e., what he is socially and how he should be treated.

One could perform this same analysis on each of the objects in Livy's catalog of prodigies and indeed, I emphasize, on the very category of *prodigium* itself. For a *prodigium* was a *prodigium* not due to some feature intrinsic to the object or event in question. It was not the physics, chemistry, or biology of the child, the cow, the wolf or of any of the other entities that made them prodigious. Rather, it was the ways in which Romans represented these things in their beliefs, practical intentions, and speech acts, and the way they therefore treated them in practice, that made them *prodigia*. One assumes that Romans were usually blind to

¹⁶³ Berger 1953.

this fact about their social reality. Presumably, they saw the senate's role in accepting prodigies as a matter of recognizing objective facts for what they were rather than as a matter of constructing facts, which would then depend for their continued existence on recognition, acceptance, and belief. Indeed, Livy's emphasis on "rash belief" (21.62.1) may be read to support this. He finds fault with the people's credulousness not because he is skeptical of the category of *prodigium* as such but rather because he is concerned to distinguish genuine from spurious prodigies.¹⁶⁴ So, Romans accept that prodigies are part of the furniture of the world. The live question is a question of belief: to which reports of prodigies do we have good reason to lend credence?¹⁶⁵

Now to sum up. We have seen that Livy attends carefully to the psychological effects of prodigies. We need not attribute to Livy any explicit theory interrelating belief, emotion, and action to interpret the patterns we find in his text. In the episode we examined, we saw that events generate beliefs, often as a result of beliefs already held. For example, such-and-such an event-type counts as prodigious; this event is of the relevant type; the resulting belief is that this event is a prodigy. Next, appraisal of the content of the new belief might elicit emotion. Equally, emotions to which one is already subject might promote religious beliefs. Finally, we saw that Livy focuses on the behavioral consequences of beliefs and emotions. Together with intentions to act, they guide, motivate, and cause behavior.¹⁶⁶ Finally, cult behavior, if deemed successful by participants, might generate new beliefs, for example, to the effect that all prodigies have been expiated. The content of such beliefs, in turn, might result in the emotion of relief.

On the theory offered here, the distinction between Augustine's good Christian Innocentius and Livy's Roman *populus* is not that the

¹⁶⁴ Linderski 1993, 66 n. 2.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. similar concerns about what to believe about prodigies at Cic. *Har. resp.* 62-63.

¹⁶⁶ Note that I have not offered here a creation narrative that would seek to explain how beliefs and emotions generated, *ex nihilo*, cult action and the particular forms it takes. I am merely asserting that an individual's beliefs, emotions, and intentions contribute causally to her participation in already established forms of cult.

one had beliefs and the other did not. Rather, the distinction lies in the *content* of their respective beliefs, in what they take to be the case. And what they take to be the case — their beliefs — has important downstream effects on their emotions, their practical attitudes such as intentions to act, their actions, and indeed on their social reality. We can appreciate Livy's remarks about the beliefs of the people, as indeed we can appreciate any evidence for Roman religion, only if we appreciate the causal relations in which belief stands to emotions like *religio* and to actions like cult. What is more, we can only hope to account for the ontology of the Roman social world, with its institutions, practices, statuses, obligations, permissions, and disabilities to action, if we have recognized belief for what it is and located it among other doxastic and practical mental phenomena.

In this view of Roman religion, belief takes center stage. It is neither a "penumbra to ritual action" nor "secondary," "somehow less substantial than ritual action."¹⁶⁷ On my account, any story about ancient religious behavior that does not take into account the beliefs as well as desires, intentions, and emotions that motivate that behavior is not truly explanatory but at best descriptive, at worst partial and misleading. If my arguments have any force, they have rendered the thesis that ancient religion was "a question of doing not of believing"¹⁶⁸ and the insistence that "beliefs ... had no particularly privileged role in defining an individual's actions"¹⁶⁹ much less attractive. It remains to nurture a new conversation about the nature of belief and how we as historians of religion should treat it in our necessarily etic discourse.¹⁷⁰ I hope to have contributed to that conversation here.

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¹⁶⁷ Harrison 2015b, 173, pointing to shortcomings even in recent reassertions of the relevance of belief.

¹⁶⁸ Cartledge 1985, 98.

¹⁶⁹ Beard, North, and Price 1998, I: 42.

¹⁷⁰ Versnel 2011, 548: "Scholarly discourse is always etic and should therefore be conducted in etic terms."

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