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Abstract
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Why Believe in Contentless Beliefs?

Daniel D. Hutto

"Psychology, theory of knowledge and metaphysics revolve about belief, and on the view we take of belief our philosophical outlook largely depends".

– Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind,* Lecture xii, 1921

1. Introduction

This paper motivates the idea that the most basic kind of believing is a contentless attitude. It gives reasons for thinking that the most basic sort of belief – the sort that both we and other animals adopt toward situations – does not represent those situations in truth-evaluable ways. I call such attitudes pure intentional attitudes. They are not propositional attitudes, which I take to be linguistically mediated intentional attitudes.

The main claim to be defended in this paper is that not only is it coherently conceivable that the most basic kinds of beliefs are intentional attitudes – i.e. attitudes that exhibit a basic intentionality despite lacking content – but that we have every reason to believe in such states of mind. I call such attitudes pure intentional attitudes in order to distinguish them, conceptually, from propositional attitudes (see Hutto 1999, 2008a, 2008b). The latter are also directed at situations – and so qualify as intentional attitudes, but they differ from pure intentional attitudes in being contentful.

On the assumption that intentionality necessarily implies content the above suggestion will strike some as obviously absurd. But as I argue in sections 3 and 4 below (in line with more detailed arguments supplied elsewhere) the assumption that intentionality implies content is a questionable one – it over-intellectualizes the basic mind, reading properties into it that only belong to the sorts of minds that are built atop it (Hutto 2011, 2012, Hutto and Myin 2013).

If the idea of a contentless intentional attitude is tenable it puts us in a position to re-assess the root nature of belief. As a class, beliefs have a distinctive, if somewhat flexible, profile: they play characteristic roles in shaping our thinking and acting. These roles can be specified with more or less precision. It is by playing such roles beliefs are marked out as beliefs and not other attitudes, such as opining or hoping. But all beliefs exhibit a basic directedness; they target particular states of affairs. In addition some beliefs have propositional content. Beliefs of the latter sort are propositional attitudes. But if this analysis is right, far from being the paradigm of belief – as many philosophers hold, propositional attitudes are a sub-class of a more general type of believing attitude – intentional attitudes.

This essay challenges the popular idea that necessarily any belief is a propositional attitude. Section 2 describes the Content Requirement and what it entails for our understanding of belief. Sections 3 and 4 examine problems that arise for two standard proposals to non-verbal attitudes that respect the Content Requirement when it comes to making sense of our ordinary attributional practices.[1] The first attempt, discussed in Section 3, is implausible given the negative prospects of developing a metaphysically

acceptable theory of non-linguistic content. The second way of handling non-verbal attitudes, by denying that they can qualify as beliefs at all, is reviewed in Section 4. This proposal is problematic even when it is augmented by assuming that non-verbal attitudes might be a kind of belief-like contentful attitude. For the latter idea runs into the same trouble as the accounts discussed in Section 3; it too has no prospect of explaining the content of such attitudes. Taking a different tack, Section 5 shows how an analysis of belief that allows for intentional but contentless attitudes – and thus rejects the Content Requirement – (a) enables us to best deal with prominent puzzles about how to ascribe beliefs in certain cases and also (b) reveals what lies at the core of all cases of believing (while recognizing that believing comes in many forms).

2. The Content Requirement

It is widely supposed that beliefs, whatever other features they possess, must have content. Nothing counts as a belief if it lacks content. Call this the 'Content Requirement'. This seems to be an inviolable conceptual or analytic truth in light of the fact that if an individual holds a belief it must be possible to ask *what* it is that the individual believes. And, for many, that alone settles the matter. For they take 'what is believed' to be the content of a belief.

I think we have no choice but to raise doubts about this philosophical ruling – at least questioning its universality. While it is perfectly true that propositional attitudes are contentful – as one might say, 'by their very nature' – there are reasons for thinking that not everything that legitimately falls into the class of beliefs is a propositional attitude. Put otherwise, not all beliefs are propositional attitudes – despite what many philosophers are inclined to think. There can be contentless intentional attitudes.

To understand what is being claimed it is important to first establish what it means to say that an attitude is contentful. What is content, exactly? As Jackson and Pettit (1993) point out, "'Content' is a recently prominent term of art and may well mean different things to different practitioners of the art" (p. 269). Philosophers distinguish at least two senses of content – intensional content and extensional content. This distinction is well known and is easily illustrated by considering the sorts of examples that Frege made famous. Some co-extensive but intensionally distinguishable thoughts include:

1. The author of 1984 is George Orwell.

2. The author of 1984 is Eric Blair.

3. Next Tuesday is the first day of April.

4. Next Tuesday is April fool's day.

5. Next Tuesday is the first day of the month named after Aphrodite in the Julian calendar.

Beliefs, like many other mental states, exhibit 'aboutness' – they are directed at or target states of affairs, whether real or imaginary. Beliefs have subject matters or, as some philosophers are wont to say, they have extensional content. Here 'content' just means

what a mental state is directed at or what it targets – e.g. some possible state of affairs.

But beliefs are also thought to have intensional contents, necessarily. Indeed a number of philosophers suppose that it is the intensional (with an 's') contents of such attitudes that mediate genuinely cognitive activity. They are moved by the thought that it is *how* we think about what we think about which matters cognitively. With this in mind, for example, contemporary defenders of representational theories of mind psychologise Frege's notion of 'Sinn' or 'sense' when thinking about the properties of mental states that are manipulated in reasoning processes; i.e. mental states with content. In line with this, intensional contents are variously construed as: abstract entities; bits of Language of Thought syntax; or interpretative takes.

Are there really *two* kinds of content? Is there *what* is believed – i.e. the extensional content?, and in addition, a mode of presentation (or the equivalent) – i.e. the intensional content – a way of 'grasping' what is believed? Extensional contents might be Russellian propositions. Russellian propositions are structured entities with which we can be intellectually acquainted. In modern parlance they are often identified with facts or obtaining states of affairs because they are structures composed of individuals, properties and relations. Nevertheless, this easy assimilation overlooks special properties of components of Russellian propositions and the complexes themselves. Although Russell thought of them as forming the ultimate bedrock of the world, he also conceived of them as – essentially – potential objects of thought. He imagined them not only to be facts but also, at once, propositional contents.

Accordingly, "True mental content is identical with worldly facts; it does not correspond to them … the content of the thought is the worldly fact" (Rowlands 2006, p. 24, emphasis original).

Yet, as Stalnaker (1998) helpfully reminds us, "it is essential to propositional contents that they have truth conditions" (p. 341). Given this, how might something be both a fact – an obtaining state of affairs – and a proposition at the same time? Well, "One might … identify the content with the truth conditions themselves" (ibid, p. 343). On this view, that which makes a given thought true is the very object of thought itself.

Nevertheless positing the existence of Russellian propositions is not without philosophical problems. I won't rehearse these here (but see Hutto 20003/2006 Ch. 1 for a discussion). Suffice to say that we ought to take seriously William James's (1909) views on these matters. He, long ago, exposed the fundamental confusion in Russell's thinking. James argued that the mistake is to conflate facts, or realities, with truths. On Russell's view great swathes of the world are literally composed of 'as yet unthought' contents. If, by contrast, we follow James's lead we can, without such metaphysical extravagance, swap a commitment to the existence of such contents for talk of virtual truths; that is, of truths that could and would be expressed if someone were to express them.

Accordingly, truth conditions only come into being when there are creatures that actually form propositional attitudes about some or other state of affairs. Hence, "If there is to be truth … both realities and beliefs about them must conspire to make it" (James 1909, p. 197). Strictly speaking, the existence of truth conditions, according to James, depends on

the formation of contentful beliefs about worldly states of affairs. This is because: "Realities are not true, they are: and beliefs are true of them" (ibid, p. 196). James puts philosophical confusion on this score down to what he describes as the 'vulgar' tendency to confuse 'truths' with 'facts' (ibid, pp. 78, 144, 223).

In all, Russellians owe us a convincing argument for thinking that facts logically entail contents. Surely, we are not compelled to accept this as a truism. If anything, *prima facie*, things seem to be as Bermúdez (2011) describes them:

Propositions are very different from states of affairs. In particular, propositions are true or

false, while states of affairs are not the sort of things that can be either true or false. On

many standard ways of thinking about propositions and states of affairs, states of affairs

are the things that make propositions true or false (p. 404).

To avoid buying into an extravagant metaphysics – or at the very least until it is acknowledged decisively that we should follow Russell over James – we would do better to reserve the notion of content exclusively for *what* is believed *about* X. If so, we get the following rule: To be in a contentful state of mind is to be in an intensional state of mind that is directed at some possible state of affairs.

One more wrinkle: Being in an intensional state of mind equates to representing the world in a way that has specifiable conditions of satisfaction. To use the familiar illocution, minimally this requires representing things *as* being a certain way. It has been much debated in recent years whether representing the world in this way entails a capacity for *conceptual* representation. Some adopt hard line views on this issue. Speaking for conceptualists Fodor, for example, holds that 'representing as', having concepts and intensional states of mind come as a package deal. He thinks that we can see this by considering the putative fact that "To represent (e.g. mentally) Mr. James *as* a cat is to represent him falling under the concept CAT" (Fodor 2007, p. 105).

It is easy to see why one might think there are unbreakable logical connections here since "the word concept with its contemporary meaning, on which concepts are something like mental or semantic representations, [is] closer to the realm of sense than that of reference" (Williamson 2007, p. 30). What is of interest is that Fodor takes this quite a bit further, claiming that "The mark of the mental is its intensionality (with an 's') that's to say that mental states have content" (Fodor, *London Review of Books*, 12 Feb 2009).

Most philosophers would, no doubt, question the claim that intensionality *tout court* is the mark of the mental. Despite this, many would find it quite plausible that intensionality is the mark of belief; a view that is consistent with acceptance of a variety of theories of concepts and theories of content. That is, they are likely inclined to accept the 'Content Requirement' in the very sense Fodor understands it as a general rule about the nature of belief. It is this rule, so understood, that I seek to challenge.

3. Non-Verbal Believing: Take One

What should we say about Malcolm's barking dog (cf. Malcolm 1997, pp. 49-50)? Imagine a scenario in which a dog sees a cat, gives chase, barking madly. The cat leaps into a tree. The dog circles around the tree's base, continuing to bark. Yet unbeknownst to it the cat slips away. It continues to bark.

We are naturally inclined to attribute to the dog the belief that 'There is a cat up the tree'. Yet there is no wider interpretive evidence, based on its counterfactual behaviours or wider patterns of response to justify the assumption that it operates with the concepts 'tree' or 'cat'. Or, to put the point more carefully, *prima facie*, taking everything about the dog's full repertoire of behavior into account we have no grounds for supposing that it has the requisite concepts to form the belief. Or if we are very liberal in our thinking about what is required for concept possession then we have no evidence for thinking the dog has command of concepts in ways that would warrant speaking of the dog as entertaining propositions about how things stand with the 'tree' and the 'cat'.[2]

Our unease about assigning conceptual content in this case is easily brought out by the fact that the belief attribution is made on the fly – it is wholly driven by the particulars of the given case; by features of the episode and what the dog responds to in the immediate environment. There seems to be no way to interrogate the dog further to discover what the best way is to characterize its state of mind. Thus, had we seen the dog chase a squirrel up the tree (and assuming that the rest of the story stays the same: the squirrel subsequently leaves the tree while the dog continues barking, and so on) would we be warranted in attributing the dog a belief with a different content? Would the dog be making the mistake of thinking that there is a squirrel in the tree? Or would he be doubly wrong in thinking that (a) the squirrel is a cat and (b) the cat is still in the tree? Or is the dog operating with a more general concept and thinking only that there is 'something chaseable' in the tree? What sort of mistake is the dog making? These questions easily multiply but there appears to be no principled way to answer them. The nub is that, "We want to say the dog believes something – but we do not seem able to say what" (Armstrong 1973, p. 25, cf. also Stich 1979, p. 18).

As long as we remain faithful to the content requirement this is a puzzle, for if the dog believes then it must believe something. Perhaps there is no real problem here. For "although we may find ourselves forced, implausibly, to describe animal and infant thoughts using adult humans concepts and categories, this is our problem not theirs" (cf. Carruthers 1998, p. 220). A natural way to defend this idea is to support the hypothesis that non-linguistic believers operate with a Fodorian *lingua mentis* (or something near enough). Carruthers (2009b) takes this route. He defends the view that many nonverbal animals – even invertebrates, such as honeybees – have full-fledged propositional attitudes. Their contentful attitudes interact with one another in immediate, first order ways and thereby produce actions. This is possible, he holds, precisely because the contents of these mental states are composed of distinct, conceptual components.

Consider, for example, a honeybee's thought with the content [nectar is 200 meters north of the hive] (or some near equivalent). Is this genuinely composed of the concepts *nectar*, *200 meters* (or some roughly equivalent measure of distance), *north* (or some similar

solar-based measure of direction), and *hive*? Well, yes. (Carruthers 2009b, p. 98)

Carruthers goes further still. In an extreme move, he holds that what we regard as paradigms of human belief – verbalized judgements and commitments of the sort associated with explicit, conscious, 'system 2' thinking – are too removed from the coalface of cognitive activity, where real thinking gets done, to count as *bona fide* propositional attitudes.

Obviously, this is a shocking proposal. To take it seriously would violate our everyday attributional practices. Surely, our best and most secure evidence for the existence of beliefs construed as propositional attitudes comes from intricate and holistically interwoven patterns of behaviour exhibited in linguistically mediated reasoning and utterance, over time. It is for just this reason that we run into trouble in capturing what it is that the dog thinks. Yet despite this, by Carruthers's lights, such expressive activity "doesn't … involve any propositional attitudes … [thus] distinctively human thoughts are mere *faux-thoughts* compared to those we share with non-human animals … the real thing is done by animals" (Carruthers 2009b, pp. 106-107).

That only animal minds (including the animal minds of humans) exhibit real cognition is motivated by the assumption that this is where we find true content, the kind of content that causally explains the production of action. This content comes on the scene long before language does. Cognitive science is founded on this idea. It assumes that minds basically manipulate informational contents in well-defined ways in order to yield other, more interesting representations that interact in ways that eventuate in action. This thought trades on the textbook idea that informational content is a kind of basic commodity – the raw material of basic cognition.

To qualify as representational, an inner state must play a special kind of role in a larger cognitive economy. Crudely, it must, so to speak, have the function of *saying or indicating* that things stand *thus and so*, and be consumed by other systems because of its capacity to say or indicate how things stand. On this familiar view, trading in informational content is the basis of cognition. Nonetheless, as Wheeler (1995) underscores, this does not imply that the sub-systems "in any literal sense understand that information" (p. 218). But, even if they literally lack understanding of what they are dealing with, if this account is to have teeth then the imagined subsystems must nevertheless be literally trafficking in informational contents. They must be using and fusing these, even if they don't understand what such contents say.

But talk of using and fusing contents, although quite common, cannot be taken literally either. Cognitive scientists and other theorists use a range of metaphors to describe what is done with information (and different kinds of information content) in the fuelling of cognitive activity. Information is said to be extracted, retrieved, picked-up, fused, bounded up, integrated, brought together, stored, used for later processing and so on and so forth. How seriously should we take this talk?

At root, there must be some genuine way to explain what informational 'content' is and what it is for subpersonal mechanisms to 'communicate' with one another in terms of it – one that gets its force and meaning by drawing analogies with the communicative practices of those who have mastered language (for detailed arguments see Hutto and

Myin 2013). Otherwise it seems we must accept that talk of the reception, manipulation and production of content at this level is, as McDowell (1994/1998) noted some time ago, "irreducibly metaphorical" (p. 349).[3]

Now, it might be thought that the explanatory successes of positing contents in such systems obviates the need to supply a theory of content – that the explanatory need to make such attributions and the value of doing so is justification enough for taking them very seriously. But the value of representational talk has been brought into question even more fundamentally in recent times. Ramsey (2007), for example, raises 'the job description challenge' which identifies a "specific condition that needs to be met if a theoretical notion of representation is going to be explanatorily useful. Besides some account of what determines the content for a given state, we also (and perhaps more importantly) need an account of how the structure or state in question actually serves as a representation in (and for) the system"

(p. 124). Ramsey's considered assessment is that in a great many cases this challenge is not met in the cognitive sciences.

The best bet for those hoping to establish that animal minds are truly contentful minds (indeed 'the' truly contentful minds) is to try to augment purely functional accounts in order to show that the function or *purpose* of informationally sensitive responding might suffice, at least in some cases, and thus constitute a kind of contentful representing. Accordingly the interpretative response of the system does *all* of the work in fixing the content of a representation. To take this line is to surrender any and all commitment to the idea that informational content exists independently of the activities of cognitive agents; thus the responses of organisms carry *all of the weight* in fixing content. This idea gets its most developed expression in the work of Millikan (1984, 1993, 2004). As she makes clear, according to her consumer-based theory of content, "the content of a representation is determined, in a *very important part*, by the system that interprets it" (Millikan 2005, p. 100, emphasis added).

At first glance this is promising. Teleosemantic proposals are the clear front-runners among existing naturalistic proposals that seek to provide something-more-than-covariance in order to explain representing. Teleosemantic theories promise to account for the representational properties of mental states, by focusing on the purposeful way that certain kinds of organismic responding to aspects of an environment answers consumer needs. The guiding idea of this theory of content is that a device will have the teleofunction of representing Xs if it is used, interpreted, or consumed by the system because it has the proper function of representing the presence of Xs. Talk of proper function is meant to emphasize that content is fixed by what organisms are supposed to do in their interpretative activity as opposed to what they are merely disposed to do. Despite the normative language, the intention is to explain representational properties in wholly naturalistic terms; by appeal to standards set, for example, by natural selection and individual learning and training.

There is, however, a well-known technical problem with teleosemantic proposals which threatens to cripple them. Compelling arguments show that it can, at best, account for states of mind exhibiting intentional (with a 't') directedness but it flounders when it

comes to accounting for states of mind exhibiting intensionality (with an ‘s’) – and the latter are required for having properly referential and truth-evaluable thoughts. Fodor (1990b) observed that selectionist explanations, like historical explanations, are transparent (i.e. extensional). This being so explanations in terms of proper functions do not suffice to specify the putative intensional content of naturally evolved states of mind. The assumption that representational states of mind gain their semantic content by having biological proper functions runs into serious trouble. Appealing to biology alone proves incapable of specifying under what guise such states represent what they target (indeed, this leads to deeper questions about why they would need to represent anything at all in order to do their work).

The best response to Fodor’s objection is to insist that content is determined by the needs of the consumer. One way to achieve this would be to look at what in the historical environment originally shaped the ancestor organisms so as to determine what their current descendants are meant to target. Accordingly, the putative semantic content of representations are fixed by what in fact originally promoted the continued proliferation of such representational devices, where the latter were ‘selected for’ targeting Xs not Ys or Zs (assuming Xs, Ys, and Zs are co-extensive). This sort of reply, championed by Millikan (1993), misses its mark. For it still only enables us to decide what a particular sort of device would have had to target, and thus what it now targets, extensionally speaking. But that does not get at the heart of Fodor’s worry.

To see why, let us assume that an appeal to biological proper functions tells us what a certain device or response is meant to be targeting. Take that as given. Still we have exactly no reason to think that in such cases the targeted item is represented in a truth conditional, referential or any other semantic way that is comparable to the semantics of natural language. Fodor’s objection is not dealt with. As he notes he is not concerned with the tension “between Darwinism and theories that are intentional (with a ‘t’) but the tension between Darwinism and theories that are intensional (with an ‘s’)” (p. 1). Remarkably, on this, even Fodor and Putnam agree. Thus the latter tells us:

The ‘reference’ we get out of … hypothetical natural selection will be just the reference

we put in our choice of a description. Evolution won’t give you more intentionality than

you pack into it (Putnam 1992, p. 33).

There are positive lessons to learn from this polemic. With important adjustments, much can be salvaged from teleosemantic attempts to naturalize representational content.

Teleosemantic accounts fail to provide an adequate basis for naturalizing content of the sort that is comparable to that exhibited by speech acts of natural language. Nevertheless they provide adequate tools for making sense of something more modest – i.e. responses involving only intentionality understood as a kind of targeted directedness. Biologically based accounts of proper functions can reasonably deliver the latter.

Some may baulk at counting such directedness as any kind of intentionality. Such resistance is to be expected from anyone who holds that intentionality necessarily entails content. But what might justify that assumption? Well, it might be thought that

intentional directedness must be fixed by mental content. That idea will be attractive as long as one subscribes to some version of the Fregean dictate that 'Sense (viz. intensional content) determines reference'. In the hands of those who model mental content on linguistic content the Fregean credo gets augmented by the further thought that "Intentional states represent objects and states of affairs *in the same sense of 'represent' that speech acts represent* objects and states of affairs" (1983, p. 5, emphasis added). Voilà! By this quick chain of reasoning we secure the result that intentionality entails the existence of content with semantic properties of the sort exhibited by the speech acts of natural language.

As we have just seen, a close examination of what teleosemantic accounts can offer reveals that securing this strong notion of content was never really on the cards (Hutto 2011, 2012). At best such accounts can provide something weaker. Even those who were initially optimistic about the prospects of teleosemantics concur. Godfrey-Smith (2006) provides an astute assessment "there is a growing suspicion that we have been looking for the wrong kind of theory, in some big sense. Naturalistic treatments of semantic properties have somehow lost proper contact with the phenomena" (p. 42). Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the driving idea behind teleosemantics – that evolved structures can have a kind of 'specificity' or 'directedness' – is essentially correct: "there is an important kind of natural involvement relation that is picked out by selection-based concepts of function. But this relation is found in many cases that do not involve representation or anything close to it" (ibid, p. 60).

In short, it is becoming clear to many in the field that purely biologically based accounts lack the right resources for naturalizing properly semantic properties, such as states of mind exhibiting truth conditions and reference.[4] If we reject teleosemantics in favour of teleosemiotics we can borrow what is best from the former, and covariance accounts of information, in order to provide a content-free naturalistic account of the determinate intentional directedness that organisms exhibit towards aspects of their environments (Hutto 2008b, ch. 3, Hutto and Myin 2013). This requires abandoning the attempt to understand the most basic forms of directedness in semantic terms – i.e. in terms of contentful states of mind that refer or have truth or accuracy conditions. This is to accept that organisms often act successfully by making appropriate responses to objects or states affairs in ways that are only directly mediated by their sensitive responding to natural signs, where this responding does not involve contentfully representing the objects or states of affairs in question.

4. Non-Verbal Believing: Take Two

The previous section pushes us to conclude that creatures that only have biologically-based intentionality cannot have contentful attitudes. Thus if we accept the 'Content Requirement' they do not qualify as believers. This result fits snugly with the idea that to be a believer demands "the gift of tongues" (Davidson 1985, p. 473). A variety of arguments are offered for thinking that mastery of complex language is necessary for having thoughts with the requisite content, i.e. needed for having truth evaluable attitudes – i.e. beliefs – about how things stand with the world (for further discussion see Hutto 1999 ch. 5, Gauker 2011). Whatever one makes of such arguments, restricting the class of believers to the class of language users is apparently at odds with our actual

attributional practice. We are quite at home in making attributions of beliefs when witnessing only non-verbal attitudes in the commerce of everyday life.

In making everyday attributions, when an individual's responses are sophisticated enough we readily regard such contentless but directed attitudes as doxastic states of mind – i.e. as beliefs. It has been argued that classifying an attitude as a belief, based on purely non-linguistic behavioural factors, is a mistake; albeit one that we are naturally inclined to make (Gendler 2008b, p. 564). Gendler (2008b) holds that this tendency is the result of "an overextension of a heuristic: it depends on treating something that is a *general indicator* of belief [i.e. exhibiting a certain non-verbal behavioural profile] as if it were a *necessary and sufficient correlate* of belief" (p. 566).

In line with Davidson's sentiments, Gendler thinks we should reserve the title of belief only for states of mind with other features as well: "belief aims to 'track truth' in the sense that belief is subject to immediate revision in the face of changes in our all-things-considered evidence" (Gendler 2008b, p. 565). But softening the blow, she also holds that if we insist on this criterion then it turns out non-verbal attitudes (those with an appropriate behavioural profile and motivational force) are not beliefs, they are only belief-like states: they are *aliefs*.

To have an alief is, to a reasonable approximation, to have an innate or habitual propensity to respond to an apparent stimulus in a particular way. It is to be in a mental state that is … *a*ssociative, *a*utomatic and *a*rational. As a class, aliefs are states that we share with nonhuman *a*nimals; they are developmentally and conceptually *a*ntecedent to other cognitive attitudes that the creature may go on to develop. Typically, they are also *a*ffect-laden and *a*ction-generating (Gendler 2008b, p. 557).

The apparent good news is that since beliefs and aliefs are different kinds of mental state, there is no difficulty in believing that P, while alieving its contrary. This appears to be good news because it explains some otherwise puzzling cases. For example, an avowed anti-racist, McX, explicitly and sincerely believes and asserts that the members of all races deserve the same respect and treatment, but McX harbours an alief with representational content that apparently opposes this. More importantly, McX's alief is also an attitude with a different behavioural profile – as revealed by McX's startle responses to Caucasian and African faces.

The trouble is that in positing aliefs, so characterized, one still encounters the major problem that makes the positing of non-verbal beliefs problematic: How to account for their content? For, as Gendler defines them, aliefs are *contentful* belief-like states. Paradigmatic aliefs, we are told, have content that is representational, affective and behavioural. Thus the frog's chasing of BBs "can be explained by an alief with the content that might be expressed, among other ways, as follows: The frog alieves (all at once, in a single alief): small round black object up ahead; appealing in foody sort of way; move tongue in its direction" (Gendler 2008b, p. 559).

By assuming that aliefs are different kinds of attitude Gendler's proposal avoids the sting of contradiction in having to assume that an individual is capable of both believing that P while believing that ~ P at the same time. But it doesn't avoid all of the problems. Indeed, it takes us back to square one on the issue of non-verbal contents. For how can

we justify such ascriptions of non-verbal content – not just epistemically and interpretatively, but metaphysically?

The lesson of the last section is that the best chance for providing a metaphysically satisfactory theory of non-linguistic content – teleosemantics – has failed. Yet from the ashes teleo*semiotics* is born. And this is good enough for understanding intentionality if not intensionality. But to understand the kind of directedness of the non-verbal attitudes this suffices. To quote that famous Rolling Stones lyric, "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find, you get what you need".

In short, there are powerful reasons to think that non-linguistic forms of cognition are contentless (in the relevant sense): they lack non-derived intensionality. Despite this, they exhibit a basic kind of intentional directedness toward states of affairs. Organisms are fashioned to act successfully (often enough, in historically normal environments) by responding to objects or states of affairs in ways mediated by their sensitivity to natural signs. These ways of responding can be extended by habit, imagination, and individual learning. But they do not involve contentfully representing the objects or states of affairs in question.

So, at this point "why shouldn't one just give up on talk of truth conditions in connection with the thought of lower animals?" (Putnam 1992, p. 32). The answer is simple. We should.

Indeed, we should adopt the same line with respect to attributions of any other kind of content to non-verbal attitudes. What follows? It surely follows that purely non-verbal attitudes are not propositional attitudes. But does it follow that non-verbal attitudes are not beliefs? No. The notion of belief at play in our everyday, folk psychological practice is more flexible and inclusive than the notion of propositional attitude, and that gives us room to maneuver.

We can reject the idea of positing contentful belief-like attitudes in order to deal with puzzling cases of belief ascription in favour of acknowledging the existence of both contentful and contentless beliefs. Not only is this independently motivated by the considerations sketched above, it sits well with our existing attributional practices – or at least it makes good sense of them without any need for major reform.

5. Intentional Attitudes: The Ur-category of Belief

My proposal is that we accept that our quotidian notion of belief is broad church – it includes pure, contentless intentional attitudes as well as contentful, linguistically mediated intentional attitudes – or propositional attitudes proper. Still there is something -a common core – to any and all attitudes worthy of being counted as beliefs. Minimally and necessarily, all beliefs are intentional attitudes. All beliefs are directed at some possible situation or state of affairs. Whatever else a belief is, it is an intentional attitude *of some sort*.

The notion of an intentional attitude is the Ur-category that encompasses both contentless and contentful, intensional attitudes that are directed towards possible situations. Within this class we can distinguish beliefs-as-pure-intentional attitudes and beliefs-as-

propositional attitudes (Hutto 1999, pp. 109–110). This analysis has important advantages. It has the potential to *explain* some important differences between states of mind that are pure intentional attitudes as opposed to propositional attitudes. It offers a straight explanation why there is no direct way to alter pure intentional attitudes by direct rational means, such as argument or rhetorical persuasion. If an individual's belief is a pure intentional attitude it is not contentful. Hence it will not enter into standard logical relations and thus is open to revision by rational means.

It is artificial to count only articulable sentential or propositional attitudes, those of the sort we can profess or avow as beliefs. Indeed, there has been much recent discussion about this, driven by concerns about how best to characterize the states of mind of individuals whose overall patterns of speech and action suggest both that they ought to be ascribed the belief that P and the conflicting attitude of believing ~ P.

These kinds of cases crop up in the daily lives of normally developing, language using adult human beings on a regular basis (unsurprisingly, on my view, since we – unlike other animals – are capable of having both pure intentional as well as propositional attitudes). In a recent discussion, Schwitzgebel (2010) provides a tidy set of examples that include: Juliet the implicit racist; Kaipeng the trembling Stoic; and Ben the forgetful driver. I will not delay over the details – I recommend reading Schwitzgebel's paper if anyone is interested in these. What matters is that the cases are all quite ordinary and that they exhibit a common form. In each one, on the one hand, we have grounds for thinking that the individual in question truly and sincerely believes that P based on his or her explicit avowals, linguistic utterances and range of related behaviours. Yet, on the other hand, there are equally compelling grounds for thinking that he or she believes that ~ P, when we consider his or her more spontaneous and non-linguistically mediated reactions and responses. So we encounter this puzzle:

With genuine conviction and complete sincerity you endorse some proposition P. Every time you think about P, you reaffirm it; to you, it seems unquestionably true. Yet if we look at the overall arc of your behavior – at your automatic and implicit reactions, at your decisions, at your spontaneous remarks on nearby topics – there's a decidedly un-P-ish cast. What should we say you believe in such cases? (Schwitzgebel 2010, p. 531).

None of the answers proposed to date are wholly satisfactory. Schwitzgebel (2010) reveals this, providing useful analysis of the existing options, which are:

The pro-judgment view, on which the subject believes that P and fails to believe ~ **P** (Zimmerman, 2007; Gendler, 2008a, 2008b); The anti-judgment view, on which the subject fails to believe that P and instead believes ~ **P (Hunter, 2009)**; The shifting view, on which the subject shifts between believing P and believing ~ **P** (Rowbottom, 2007), and; The contradictory belief view, on which the subject believes both P and ~ P (Gertler, forthcoming; maybe Sommers, 2009). (p. 537)

The problems with these accounts are easy to see. The contradictory belief view is particularly difficult to swallow. It takes the line of least resistance with respect to the full set of evidence but requires acceptance that the individuals in question occupy contradictory states of mind. But it is difficult to understand, let alone accept, how it is possible to be in literally contradictory states of mind.

The shifting view is equally implausible. It assumes that individuals have shifting attitudes: beliefs that alter with the context, such that the person in question determinately believes that P on some occasions but switches to determinately believing that ~ P on other occasions. This is hard to square with the general conviction that beliefs are dispositional states of mind. Yet if that is accepted its difficult to make sense of the idea that an individual's beliefs can shift in the required ways. For in taking stock of his or her wider, longer term patterns of counterfactual behavior will require making both belief attributions.

The remaining views – the pro and anti-judgment views – are mirror images of one another and both suffer from the same flaw. Each gains all of its credibility by laying stress, unevenly and unjustifiably, on one or other aspect of an individual's tendencies and patterns of behavior in order to justify a preferred belief ascription at the expense of, and thus ignoring, a whole other range of the individual's tendencies – tendencies which suggest that exactly the opposite belief ascription is justified.[5] Schwitzgebel (2010) summarizes the central problem with these proposals very neatly:

in real cases of the sort at hand, the divisions between 'lower' and 'higher' or daily behavior and mere talk are likely to prove messy, the cognitive patterns unstable, our attempts to clean it up with sharp distinctions likely to fail or to apply only to a minority of cases. Zimmerman and Gendler privilege the intellectual aspect of a person's psychology in belief ascription, while Hunter privileges the in-the-world spontaneous behavior. But I recommend that we treat both as an important part of what it is to believe. Shouldn't belief be seen as what animates my limbs and my mouth, what shows itself diversely in my action and my reasoning and my emotional responses, not just in some pried off subclass of these things? (p. 542)

In light of this, Schwitzgebel recommends "regarding cases like these as vague, or (as [he prefers] to say) *in-between*, such that careful description of the subject's mental state requires refraining from either ascribing or denying belief" (ibid, p. 533, emphasis original). What his observation correctly underlines is that as long as we stick with our everyday ascriptive practices we will have reason to ascribe a belief-as-propositional-attitude that P to certain individuals while at the same time ascribing them a belief-as-intentional attitude that is directed at the same state of affairs in ways that apparently performatively conflict with the person's professed belief. That is the correct way to capture the tension between the separate, first order states of mind of these individuals. But we need neither ascribe a single belief with an indeterminate or in-between content, nor two beliefs with contradictory contents, nor a conflict between a contentful belief and contentful belief-like attitude. What we are dealing with is a tension between a contentful propositional attitude and a contentless purely intentional attitude. The really urgent and pressing practical question is by what means – if direct rational means is ruled out – can one bring one's pure intentional attitudes in line with one's professed, linguistically based beliefs.

Apart from providing an attractive solution to the ascriptive puzzles, this analysis reminds us that it is not the notion of belief-as-propositional (sentential)-attitude that ultimately unifies the motley crew of things we are unguardedly inclined to call beliefs (pace Ratcliffe 2007, 2008). Rather it is the more inclusive idea of an attitude directed at

a particular state of affairs that does such work. Moreover, it shows us how such unification is possible while allowing that believing comes in many forms.

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Notes

1 Non-verbal attitudes are an appropriate focus because they are defined, by stipulation, as attitudes that target situations but without the involvement of capacities relating to the use of natural language.

[2] Crary (2012) advocates adopting a notion of concept that is “flexible enough to enable us to accommodate the prospect of finding that some non-rational animals are concept-users” (p. 217).

[3] As Matthen (2006) observes that ‘representation’ is “a new and controversial concept … The natural home of this concept is in the study of communication between agents who possess intentions and goals. It is not immediately clear how it can be extended to states issued by automatic sub-personal systems” (p. 147).

[4] Putnam puts it, punchily, “Evolution didn’t ‘design’ dogs’ ideas to be true or false, it designed them to be successful or unsuccessful” (Putnam 1992, p. 31).

[5] Schwitzgebel (2010) puts his finger on the problems with each of these proposals. “The fundamental problem with the pro-judgment view is that it artificially hives off our rational and thoughtful responses from our habitual, automatic, and associative ones … People judge in part automatically, associatively, and arationally, and they often show high intelligence in their habits and their unreflective, spontaneous responses” (p. 540). By way of contrast, the anti-judgement view “omits what the subject explicitly endorses, how she is disposed to judge the overall state of affairs all things considered, what side she would take in an argument, how she is disposed to reason about the case in reflective moments, her best conscious assessment of the evidence. All these, furthermore, will often be intertwined with daily behavior, even if not dependably” (p. 542).