

Kent Academic Repository

Full text document (pdf)

Citation for published version

Radoilska, Lubomira V. (2017) Aiming at the truth and aiming at success. *Philosophical Explorations*, 20 (sup1). pp. 111-126. ISSN 1386-9795.

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2017.1287297>

Link to record in KAR

<http://kar.kent.ac.uk/61372/>

Document Version

Publisher pdf

Copyright & reuse

Content in the Kent Academic Repository is made available for research purposes. Unless otherwise stated all content is protected by copyright and in the absence of an open licence (eg Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher, author or other copyright holder.

Versions of research

The version in the Kent Academic Repository may differ from the final published version.

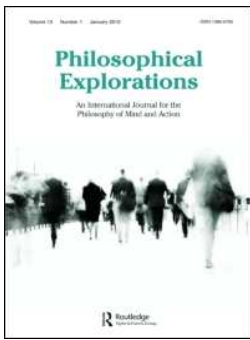
Users are advised to check <http://kar.kent.ac.uk> for the status of the paper. **Users should always cite the published version of record.**

Enquiries

For any further enquiries regarding the licence status of this document, please contact:

researchsupport@kent.ac.uk

If you believe this document infringes copyright then please contact the KAR admin team with the take-down information provided at <http://kar.kent.ac.uk/contact.html>



Philosophical Explorations

An International Journal for the Philosophy of Mind and Action

ISSN: 1386-9795 (Print) 1741-5918 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpex20>

Aiming at the truth and aiming at success

Lubomira Radoilska

To cite this article: Lubomira Radoilska (2017) Aiming at the truth and aiming at success, *Philosophical Explorations*, 20:sup1, 111-126, DOI: [10.1080/13869795.2017.1287297](https://doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2017.1287297)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2017.1287297>



© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 11 Apr 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Aiming at the truth and aiming at success

Lubomira Radoilska *

Department of Philosophy, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

(Received 22 November 2016; final version received 5 December 2016)

This paper explores how the norms of belief relate to the norms of action. The discussion centres on addressing a challenge from positive illusions stating that the demands we face as believers aiming at the truth and the demands we face as agents aiming at success often pull in opposite directions. In response to this challenge, it is argued that the pursuits of aiming at the truth and aiming at success are fully compatible and mutually reinforcing. More specifically, the link between the two takes the form of a two-way connection. In addition to succeeding in virtue of getting it right, it is normatively appropriate to get it right in virtue of succeeding. This two-way connection thesis is supported by a wide scope reading of how the truth norm of belief may be satisfied. On this reading, believing p is permissible both as a result of settling the question of whether p in light of the available evidence and as a result of engaging a believer's agency in making it the case that p .

Keywords: action; aim of belief; delusions; evidence; norms of belief; positive illusions; practical knowledge; truth; wrong kind of reasons

This paper will aim to explore how the norms of belief relate to the norms of action. The discussion will centre on addressing a challenge from positive illusions stating that the demands we face as believers aiming at the truth and the demands we face as agents aiming at success often pull in opposite directions. Responding to this challenge is important for proponents of a normative notion of belief and respectively action.¹ If the norms of belief and action are at odds with each other as the challenge states, either set of norms is ultimately reduced to a bundle of ad hoc recommendations. In response to this challenge, it will be argued that the pursuits of aiming at the truth and aiming at success are fully compatible and mutually reinforcing. More specifically, the link between the two takes the form of a two-way connection. In addition to succeeding in virtue of getting it right, it is normatively appropriate to get it right in virtue of succeeding. This two-way connection thesis is supported by a wide scope reading of how the truth norm of belief may be satisfied. On this reading, believing p is permissible both as a result of settling the question of whether p in light of the available evidence and as a result of engaging a believer's agency in making it the case that p .

The argument proceeds as follows. Section 1 sets out the normative notions of belief and action by reflecting on a pair of contrasting metaphors: “belief aims at the truth,” “action aims at success.” An intuitive way of linking up the norms of belief and action,

*Email: l.v.radoilska@kent.ac.uk

the one-way connection thesis is then introduced. On this thesis, the link between the two domains takes the form of succeeding in virtue of getting it right. Satisfying the success norm of action follows from satisfying the truth norm of belief. Section 2 clarifies the challenge from positive illusions. These illusions form a pattern of apparently false beliefs that agents are better off with rather than without. This looks like a counterexample where succeeding comes about in virtue of getting it wrong. To sharpen up the challenge a follow-up vignette is discussed. In this vignette, success in action correlates with delusional beliefs, which unlike positive illusions present extreme distortions of reality. Section 3 critically explores two responses to the challenge that can be derived from the so-called wrong kind of reasons argument. Each response reaffirms in its way that truth is the only standard of correctness for belief and so success in action ought to be rejected as a reason of the wrong kind. Yet, in so doing both responses fail to address the issue at the heart of the challenge, how the norms of belief relate to the norms of action. Section 4 addresses this issue by articulating the two-way connection thesis. In addition to a wide scope reading of the truth norm, the argument in favour of this thesis builds on an Anscombian notion of practical knowledge as non-observational and causally efficacious with respect to successful actions.² Positive illusions are then revisited and explained away as cases where the truth norm of belief is satisfied by satisfying the success norm of action. In anticipation of possible objections, the same interpretation is applied to the vignette of so-called positive delusions.

1. Linking the norms of belief and the norms of action: succeeding in virtue of getting it right

Belief aims at the truth. Since the publication of Bernard Williams's "Deciding to Believe" (1973), in which it first appeared, this formulation has gained traction in contemporary epistemology debates. Adopted across a variety of positions, it is meant to capture an essential feature of belief as distinct propositional attitude. This feature is belief's particular relationship to truth. There are two main ways to cash out this relationship. The first is to read "belief aims at the truth" literally, ascribing a natural telos, as it were, to belief. Hence the name of accounts that endorse such a reading: teleological. A central feature they have in common is to interpret the relationship of belief to truth in evaluative as opposed to prescriptive terms. It is good or valuable for beliefs to be true, bad or disvaluable for them to be false. Thus, beliefs are assessed exclusively on whether or not they achieve their aim, to have true as opposed to false content. This teleological assessment implies that truth is the only standard of correctness for beliefs. However, it does not necessarily ground any corresponding obligation or prescription for believers. As McHugh (2012, 10) points out expanding on a teleological interpretation of truth as the standard of correctness for beliefs:

Something may be bad without its badness being a matter of anyone's having done anything they ought not to have done, and without its being the case that there is anyone who ought to change it; some prospective state of affairs or object may be good without its being the case that there is anyone who ought to produce it or bring it about. Evaluations do not presuppose accountability or blameworthiness.³

By contrast, the second way to cash out belief's relationship to truth presupposes a metaphorical reading of the formulation "belief aims at the truth." Beliefs are said to aim at the truth to the extent that believers should aim at having true as opposed to false beliefs. As Littlejohn (2013, 293) puts it:

The talk of aims should be understood metaphorically, and the metaphor interpreted in normative terms. Your beliefs are defective if they don't fit the facts. They shouldn't be like that and you shouldn't have beliefs like that.

Like teleological accounts, normative accounts that endorse this metaphorical reading consider truth to offer the only standard of correctness for belief. This standard, however, is expressed in prescriptive or strictly normative as opposed to evaluative or weakly normative terms. And so the metaphor "Belief aims at the truth" is meant to showcase truth as the fundamental epistemic norm grounding the assessment of both beliefs and believers.⁴ The direct link between the two assessments is ensured by the idea of epistemic "oughts," normative requirements believers face with respect to how they form or refrain from forming new beliefs, maintain, revise or disavow existing beliefs. This feature of normative accounts makes them better suited than teleological accounts for the discussion to follow. In particular, the conceptual framework developed by normative accounts allows for a neater comparison with the normative requirements agents face with respect to how they form or refrain from forming new practical commitments, pursue, revise or disengage with existing ones. And so a normative notion of belief will be assumed throughout the discussion to follow.⁵ Having said that, the conclusions we'll reach are also consistent with a teleological notion to the extent that this notion implies some kind of recommendation for believers, such as: it would be better if you had true rather than false beliefs. This is because recommendations contain normative claims, albeit considerably weaker than the "oughts" of prescriptions and prohibitions. And in so far as a teleological notion of belief is meant to fit a cogent picture of epistemic reasons, including reasons to believe, weakly normative claims about the business of believers in the format of recommendations cannot be readily dismissed by teleologists.⁶

To recap, on the normative notion of belief adopted for the purposes of the present inquiry, the formulation "belief aims at the truth" is a handy metaphor. It captures the standard of correctness that defines epistemic assessment: beliefs are correct only if they are true. At the same time, it conveys the thought that believers should aim at having true as opposed to false beliefs.

If belief can be said to aim at the truth, action can be said to aim at success. The notion of action assumed in the discussion to follow is also normative. More specifically, it is premised on the Aristotelian idea of actions as various kinds of achievements that by the same token are open to various kinds of failures. This normative notion of action as achievement has been explored in detail elsewhere (Radoilska 2013). For the purposes of the present inquiry, suffices to say that on this notion, the formulation "action aims at success" captures the completion or satisfaction condition on an agent's intention.⁷ Intention here is understood in terms of trying that might or might not be successful. So-called instances of practical irrationality, such as weakness of will, accidie and procrastination provide clear examples where the satisfaction condition on intention has not been met. The issue is often attributed to some kind of qualified ignorance of what one is doing.⁸ By contrast, actions which meet that condition are defined as the particular objects of a special kind of knowledge only an agent as opposed to observer may have. Following Anscombe (1963) and the earlier scholastic tradition, on which she draws, the knowledge agents have of their own actions is referred to in current discussions as "practical knowledge."

Practical knowledge has two distinguishing features. Firstly, it has to be in some sense "prior to its objects." Secondly, it is said to be "without observation." The specifics of both features are subject of intense philosophical debates. For instance, the priority of practical knowledge over its objects might be fleshed out in terms of its being their efficient as

opposed to formal cause. Similarly, the non-observational character of practical knowledge might be explained in terms of its function as opposed to its source.⁹ These ongoing disagreements notwithstanding, there are important areas of consensus. They include, in particular, the thought that the two features are closely related in a way that takes into account the active role of agents in ensuring the fit between their own actions and the practical knowledge they have of them. A recent account put forward in Schwenkler (2011) provides a compelling articulation of this thought as it links directly the causal input of practical knowledge to its non-observational character. As Schwenkler puts it: “it is because an agent’s knowledge of what he is intentionally doing is essentially a part of the action itself that he knows about that action in a way that an outside observer cannot” (149–150). Thus, on Schwenkler’s account, practical knowledge is non-observational because of the active role that it plays in monitoring and guiding the action as it unfolds, from the inside. This is not to deny that practical knowledge is acquired partly through sensory perception. For an agent’s perception of her own action differs critically from the perception of a well-placed observer, which remains moot as to how the action unfolds. In Schwenkler’s words: “observation involves not just perceiving something, but doing so somehow passively; to observe something is to sit back, as it were, and simply take it in for whatever it happens to be” (146).¹⁰

As we can see from this account, practical knowledge forms an integral part of an action to the extent that it is instrumental in meeting the satisfaction condition on its agent’s intention. Returning to our initial formulation “action aims at success,” we are now in a position to specify the particular contribution of practical knowledge: to sustain agential achievement in addition to, sometimes independently of observational input.

Discussions on the normativity of belief do not always make an explicit connection to success or other, derivative norms that apply exclusively to actions. However, there is growing literature aiming to shed light on the interplay between the norms of action and the norms of belief.¹¹ This development is only natural as our lives of believers and agents are inexorably intertwined. For this reason, it is important to ascertain whether and how the requirements that apply to us as believers relate to the requirements that apply to us as agents. To do so, two related questions need to be addressed: Is aiming at truth always consistent with aiming at success? How do the norms of belief underpinned by truth as standard of correctness relate to the norms of action underpinned by success as standard of achievement?

An intuitive way to link up the norms of action and the norms of belief is to posit a robust one-way connection from true belief to successful action. For instance, if I am mistaken about the whereabouts of my new University’s library, I will fail to get hold of the books that I want to borrow. False beliefs are likely to stand in the way of success in action. Railton (1997, 58) pursues further this line of thought and argues that being “in the belief business” is a pre-condition of agency. Only to the extent that belief is held to account to truth and evidence, can our actions bring about their intended outcomes reliably. By satisfying the truth norm in our capacity of believers, we get on the way to satisfying the success norm in our capacity of agents.

The one-way connection thesis offers an attractive account of how the norms of belief relate to the norms of action: The direct link from the overarching norm of the one to the overarching norm of the other domain is a particular advantage. In addition to simplicity, it imposes a clear order of priority in how these two separate overarching norms should be attended. For on the one-way connection account, satisfying the truth norm of belief is non-accidentally conducive to satisfying the success norm of action but not the other way around.

Importantly, this account is not undermined by instances in which our believing falsehoods might lead us to success in action accidentally, just like we might chance on a fortune while taking the wrong way. Yet, establishing a stronger, reliable link from false belief to successful action would present a serious challenge. The positive illusions studies in psychology (Taylor and Brown 1988; Taylor 1989) and more recently philosophy (Elga 2005; Bortolotti and Antrobus 2015) seem to have done just that.

The following section will provide an overview of what positive illusions are. The challenge they pose to the one-way connection thesis will then be explained in contrast to another challenge that arises from, as we may call them, positive delusions.

2. Positive illusions or positive delusions: succeeding in virtue of getting it wrong?

Introducing the term for the first time, Taylor and Brown (1988, 1994) define positive illusions as “unrealistically positive self-evaluations, exaggerated perceptions of control and unrealistic optimism.” They argue that positive illusions are not only prevalent in the general non-pathological population but also provide important benefits, such as better adjustment to one’s environment, greater creativity and productivity and the ability to persist in the face of adversity. In sum, positive illusions “can be associated with higher motivation, greater persistence, more effective performance and ultimately, greater success” (199).

The correlation between positive illusions and success poses a challenge to the one-way connection thesis. The challenge is as follows. Some degree of self-enhancing inaccuracy correlates better with success in action than accurate self-appraisal. This correlation arguably points to a pattern of false beliefs that agents are better off with rather than without. These two aspects of the challenge – first that there is a clear pattern of false yet beneficial beliefs and second that their content represents a mild distortion of reality only – are closely related.

Taylor and Brown (1988, 1994) are careful to point out that positive illusions may have an enabling effect to the extent that they fall short of extreme distortion. For instance, their response to critics querying the positive role of exaggerated perception of control is as follows:

It is important to reiterate that the illusion of control typically represents a mild distortion in domains over which people actually have some control. Like the other illusions, the illusion of control is not typically held about things that are completely uncontrollable ... (Taylor and Brown 1994, 24)

In this respect, Taylor and Brown contrast positive illusions with delusions and in particular delusions of grandeur, which also have a self-enhancing aspect. Unlike positive illusions, however, delusions of grandeur depart from reality in a radical way, as it were, without keeping an eye on the facts. The contrast between illusions and delusions is further explored in Taylor (1989). Distinguishing another positive illusion, unrealistic optimism from delusions about one’s prospects, Taylor writes:

Unrealistic optimism about the future is highly and appropriately responsive to the objective qualities of the events ... When people receive objective evidence about the likelihood of risks, they change their estimates accordingly. These qualities most clearly distinguish illusion from delusion. Delusions are false beliefs that persist despite the facts. Illusions accommodate them, though perhaps reluctantly ... positive events are simply regarded as somewhat more likely and negative events as somewhat less likely to occur than it is actually the case. (55)

To recap, positive illusions challenge the one-way connection thesis because they form an identifiable pattern of beliefs, whose falsehood apparently promotes success in action. As we observed in the previous section, successful action may occasionally be propped up by a false belief. Such occurrences do not undermine the one-way connection thesis. Being accidental prevents them from grounding an alternative recommendation for believers who are also agents. By contrast, positive illusions seem to aptly support such a recommendation. With regard to “overrating oneself” (Elga 2005), they make a case for succeeding in virtue of getting it wrong. The well-defined pattern of false yet beneficial beliefs that emerges from discussions on positive illusions is particularly perplexing as it relates directly to the appraisal of a believer’s own agency and prospects of success.¹² For this kind of self-appraisal is also a central case for the one-way connection thesis, where satisfying the overarching norm of belief should lead straight to satisfying the overarching norm of action. So the challenge from positive illusions is that they show an apparent pattern of succeeding in virtue of getting it wrong in an area where succeeding in virtue of getting it right should be unproblematic. Thus, positive illusions mark a normative crossroads where aiming at the truth and aiming at success seem to bifurcate.

To widen up further the possible distance between these two aims and the competing normative requirements to which they give rise, let us consider an additional vignette. As we shall see, in this vignette successful action is apparently premised on delusional beliefs. In contrast to positive illusions, these positive delusions cannot be said to present a mild distortion of reality only. Instead, they exhibit head-on resistance to facts as indicated by Taylor (1989). In this respect, the vignette offers a further test case for the challenge to the one-way connection thesis we first formulated by reflecting on positive illusions. This is because the correlation between positive illusions and success in action might still be accounted for on the one-way connection model: as mild distortions, positive illusions might also be considered as accurate enough to support successful action. In other words, without a starker counterpart in the realm of delusions, the possible split between aiming at the truth and aiming at success in the realm of positive illusions could be explained away. More specifically, it could be argued that the benefits mild distortions offer to agents are due to their relative accuracy rather than relative inaccuracy. Following this line of thought, positive illusions would be recast as typical beliefs aiming at the truth and getting close enough to it to support successful action. If so, the one-way connection thesis would remain unchallenged. Considering a specific vignette of positive delusions in contrast to positive illusions will allow us to address the challenge in earnest. The vignette is as follows.

Simon, aged 40, lawyer

Simon was a senior, black, American lawyer from a middle-class, Baptist family. Although not a religious man he had had occasional relatively minor psychic experiences that had led him from time to time to seek the guidance of a professional “seer.” Otherwise his career and life generally were going well.

Then, out of the blue, he was threatened by a malpractice legal action from a group of his colleagues. Although he claimed to be innocent, mounting a defence would be expensive and hazardous. He responded to this crisis by praying in front of an open bible placed on a small altar that he set up in his front room. After an emotional evening’s “outpouring” he found that wax from two large candles on the altar had run down onto the bible marking out various words and phrases (he called these wax marks “seals” or “suns”). He described his experiences thus.

I got up and I saw the seal that was in my father’s bible and I called my friend John and I said, you know, “something remarkable is going on over here.” I think the beauty of it was the specificity by which the sun burned through. It was . . . in my mind, a clever play on words.

From this time on, Simon received a complex series of “revelations” largely conveyed through the images left in melted candle wax. They meant nothing to anyone else including Simon’s Baptist friends and family. But for Simon they were clearly representations of biblical symbols particularly from the book of Revelations (the bull, the 24 elders, the arc of the covenant, etc.) signifying that “I am the living son of David . . . and I’m also a relative of Ishmael and . . . of Joseph.” He was also the “captain of the guard of Israel.” He found this role carried awesome responsibilities: “Sometimes I’m saying – Oh my God, why did you choose me, and there’s no answer to that.” His special status had the effect of “increasing my own inward sense, wisdom, understanding, and endurance” which would “allow me to do whatever is required in terms of bringing whatever message it is that God wants me to bring.” When confronted with scepticism, he said simply: “I don’t get upset, because I know within myself, what I know” . . .

Simon’s “seals” as we indicated empowered him. But more than this they guided him first to take on his accusers and then over how to run his case (as a lawyer he defended himself). To cut a long story short the result was that he won his case (it was shown to be a racially motivated attempt to undermine his growing practice), his reputation as a lawyer was further enhanced, he went on to make a great deal of money, and when last heard of was setting up a trust fund to support research not on schizophrenia but on religious experience. (Fulford and Radoilska 2012, 62)

The vignette brings into relief the elements of the challenge to the one-way connection thesis: apparent disregard for the overarching norm of belief and satisfaction of the overarching norm of action. Simon’s professional success is not undermined by his delusional beliefs. On the contrary, there is a credible link between his taking himself to be a person of increased wisdom, understanding and endurance beyond the ordinary and his daring defence against his former colleagues that ultimately pays off, against the odds. As indicated by Simon’s response to contesters, the self-assessment, which informs his actions, is not only unsupported by evidence at its initial formation, but also unresponsive to review in light of subsequently acquired contrary evidence. Thus, applying the test of whether delusions should be considered as faulty beliefs or, alternatively, described as a different state altogether, “beyond believing badly” that was recently proposed by Sam Wilkinson (2013), Simon’s delusions would be a clear-cut instance of “believing badly.” As Wilkinson puts it:

If we want to claim that delusional patients don’t really believe what they assert, it is not to resistance in the face of contradictory evidence, or to lack of supporting evidence during formation, that we should turn. This tells us whether they are believing badly (and actually presupposes that they are believing). Rather, we need to show that the deluded patient is, all things considered, failing to act or reason in accordance with her professed beliefs. Only then should we say that she doesn’t truly believe what she appears to. (166)

Since Simon’s delusions are integrated into the account he provides of his reasons for action, they would qualify as faulty and irrational beliefs (Bortolotti 2009) rather than some other cognitive attitude that does not require accepting the truth of the content it represents.¹³ And so, the vignette seems to offer a stark illustration of succeeding by getting it wrong where extreme distortion of reality is paired up with real success. As argued earlier, this illustration consolidates the challenge from positive illusions because it provides a clearer counterpart to the emerging gap between satisfying the truth norm of belief and satisfying the success norm of action in instances of mild self-enhancing distortions of reality. This gap is at odds with the picture of how the norms of belief relate to the norms of action supported by the one-way connection thesis. In the following section, we will critically explore two responses to this challenge that could be developed in light of the so-called wrong kind of reasons argument.

3. Could success in action be the wrong kind of reason for belief?

In a nutshell, the wrong kind of reasons argument states the following. Reasons that show p to be true are the only reasons to believe p . Any other kind of reason to believe p , such as finding it enjoyable or beneficial to believe p or wishing p to be true is a reason of the wrong kind.¹⁴ The wrong kind of reasons argument flows directly from the special connection between belief and truth that the metaphor “belief aims at the truth” is meant to capture. In particular, the argument expands on some of the implications of recognising truth as the only standard of correctness for belief: reasons for belief that do not bear on the truth of its content are either to be excluded from consideration altogether or at least confined to the very margins of epistemic assessment. Stronger versions of the wrong kind of reasons argument opt for the first strategy, weaker versions, for the second. Let us now look into the prospects of responding to the challenge to the one-way connection thesis that each of these two strategies can offer.

Adler and Hicks (2013) put forward a strong version of the wrong kind of reasons argument. In so doing, they introduce two related distinctions, the first between belief and commitment and the second between evidential and non-evidential reasons to believe. Adler and Hicks argue that only evidential reasons are reasons for belief in the strict sense. This is because on the normative notion of belief they endorse tracking the available evidence offers the only way of satisfying belief’s standard of correctness. On this notion, the formulation “belief aims at the truth” entails that belief is evidence-bound.¹⁵ By implication, non-evidential reasons to believe are not directed at the truth (147). Instead, they speak to the broader, pragmatic interests of believers as agents. According to Adler and Hicks, these interests can and should be taken into consideration while forming cognitive attitudes, such as commitment, but have no place in the process of forming beliefs. As they put it:

If pragmatic considerations were directed not at belief, but at nearby notions like commitment, they would fall into place as important features of our lives without conflicting with the evidentialist conception of belief. We, believers, do not always aim at truth, but belief . . . does. (146)

Adler and Hicks present positive illusions as a case in point. They agree that positive illusions may be pragmatically justified since there are “circumstances in which responsiveness to the evidence will lead one to succeed less well (to lose confidence), particularly when the beliefs are about oneself or a group with which one identifies” (158). However, they reject the account of positive illusions as false or unwarranted beliefs. Instead, positive illusions are recast as commitments. This is because although partly responsive to evidence, they are not exclusively regulated by evidential considerations. And so, unlike beliefs, they can reflect what we may call second-order epistemic strategies that tell believers, for instance, to accept indecisive evidence as good ground for what’s in fact an unrealistically positive self-evaluation. Still, this “anti-evidentialist manoeuvring,” as Adler and Hicks term it, does not provide believers with a reason to believe the content of their positive illusions. With respect to belief, such strategy inescapably yields only reasons of the wrong kind.

This upshot has direct implications for the challenge from positive illusions. In a way, it eases the pressure on a normative notion of belief in instances, where success in action pairs up with disregard for the truth or at least the available evidence. The distinctions between belief and commitment, evidential and non-evidential reasons reaffirm that truth supplies the only standard of correctness for belief. The implication of succeeding by getting it wrong is then resisted to the extent that it is conceived as a challenge to truth as overarching norm of belief. This reprieve, however, does not work in favour of the

one-way connection thesis. For it is achieved at the expense of denying any interesting connection between the norms of belief and the norms of action. We end up in the unenviable position that the one-way connection thesis seeks to avoid: believers who are also agents are routinely pulled in opposite directions. For the strong version of the wrong kind of reasons argument admits that aiming at the truth and aiming at success may come apart at any point.

By contrast, a weaker version of the wrong kind of reasons argument could allow for a significant normative link between the domains of belief and action. This link flows from the belief norms to the action norms. Nevertheless, it does not conform to the expectations set out by the one-way connection thesis. This is because on the weaker version of the wrong kind of reasons argument, the normativity of belief offers a model for the normativity of action. To see whether this move can provide a viable alternative in response to the challenge from positive illusions, let us consider in some detail the relationship that obtains between these two normative domains on Pamela Hieronymi's weak version of the wrong kind of reasons argument.

Hieronymi (2005) makes a case for a comprehensive conception of reasons, including both reasons for belief and action. On this conception, reasons are understood as considerations that stand in a particular relation. According to Hieronymi, this relation is not sufficiently well-defined in terms of "counting in favour." The formulation is likely to be misleading in virtue of being ambiguous. For instance, in the case of belief, "counting in favour" could mean either showing that a belief's content is true or alternatively showing that having a belief with this content is in some way beneficial for a believer. As a result, the important distinction between these two kinds of reasons does not come to light. To remedy this situation, Hieronymi proposes that we sharpen up our conception of reason. On this proposal, reason is an "item in a piece of reasoning" that bears on a question and stands in a set of rational relations, for which a person is answerable (443–444). This alternative formulation makes room for the distinction between constitutive and extrinsic reasons. Returning to the case of belief, my reasons for believing p are constitutive if by finding them convincing, I form the belief that p . They settle the question whether p for me. By contrast, extrinsic reasons for believing p do not settle that question. Instead, they settle another question, whether to form a second-order attitude in favour of bringing about the belief that p (447–448). Importantly, this conception also applies to reasons for action. For these reasons are understood as pieces of reasoning that settle the question of whether to φ for an agent. In this respect, both reasons for action and belief are alike. Yet, unlike beliefs, ordinary intentional actions do not always allow for a sharp distinction between constitutive and extrinsic reasons. This is because the question of whether to φ may be settled by taking into account a much greater variety of considerations than that of whether to believe p . On this point, the weaker version of the wrong kind of reasons argument in Hieronymi (2005) is in agreement with the stronger version in Adler and Hicks (2013). However, the disanalogy between the domains of belief and action plays a different dialectical role. For in the weaker version, this disanalogy points to a difference in degree only. Both belief and action are understood as rational activities that equally engage a person's responsibility.¹⁶ They are both open to direct rational criticism in terms of answerability for the kinds of considerations that a person takes into account in order to settle questions, such as whether to believe p or whether to φ . The upshot is that extrinsic reasons for believing are acknowledged as bona fide reasons, albeit peripheral ones. At the same time, however, the domain of belief takes precedence over that of action. This is because settling the question of whether to believe p provides a clearer picture of how to satisfy a normative requirement. This picture is then applied in order to make sense of the norms of action. For even though the distinction between constitutive and extrinsic reasons is more difficult to

draw when settling the question of whether to φ , it has to be drawn nevertheless. So the weaker version of the wrong kind of reasons argument supports a one-way connection from the norms of belief to the norms of action. This connection is to model aiming at success on aiming at the truth. For action is construed as a messier though relevantly similar counterpart of belief.

This move helps mitigate the most obvious drawback of the stronger version of the wrong kind of reasons argument: the rejection of any interesting normative connection between the domains of belief and action. Nevertheless, it cannot provide a satisfactory reply to the challenge from positive illusions. True, this challenge might not seem as pressing in light of the new way of linking up the norms of action to the norms of belief. For, unlike the original one-way connection thesis, the weaker version of the wrong kind of reasons argument does not suggest that the link takes the form of succeeding in virtue of getting it right. However, if the normative requirements for agents are to be modelled on the normative requirements for believers, the prominent role extrinsic reasons for belief seem to play in satisfying the success norm of action in cases of positive illusions should come as a surprise. The steady correlation between avoiding the truth and successful action these cases seem to illustrate is at odds with the idea that aiming at success is in principle like aiming at the truth.

A related difficulty emerges when we take into consideration instances of positive delusions. Looking at the vignette introduced in the previous section, we can see that Simon's approach fits the description of settling a question in earnest. Granted, the means he deploys in this task are, to say the least, idiosyncratic. Yet, they do not amount to wishful thinking or fantasising about success. The only way to differentiate between the two the weaker version of the wrong kind of reasons argument gives us is to apply the distinction between constitutive and extrinsic reasons. Simon's thoughts would then qualify as constitutive reasons since unlike fantasies they bear directly on the question of what to do in his challenging circumstance. If we did so, however, we'd collapse the distinction between considerations that faithfully track the available evidence and considerations that like Simon's are markedly resistant to it. This move would lead us beyond the wrong kind of reasons argument. For any recognisable version of it is premised on the idea that to satisfy the underling truth norm a believer must satisfy the derivative evidence norm. An alternative proposal that rejects this idea will be articulated in the following section.

4. Getting it right in virtue of succeeding

To recap, proponents of a normative notion of belief may resort to a version of the wrong kind of reasons argument in order to respond to the challenge from positive illusions. If they opt for the stronger version, the response is as follows: the lesson we learn from the literature on positive illusions and follow-up vignette on positive delusions is that there is no interesting connection between the norms of belief and the norms of action. If they opt for the weaker version, the response is instead that aiming at success is anchored to aiming at the truth but not in a way that warrants the compatibility of the two pursuits. Thus, neither response manages to preserve a robust link between the normative requirements we face as believers and the normative requirements we face as agents. This negative upshot paves the way to a third alternative.

On this alternative response, the lesson we learn from the literature on positive illusions and follow-up vignette is that the link between the norms of action and the norms of belief is as robust as assumed by the initial thesis. However, this link takes the form of a two-way rather than one-way connection. In addition to succeeding by getting it right (achieving the

aim of action in virtue of achieving the aim of belief), it is normatively appropriate to get it right by succeeding (achieving the aim of belief in virtue of achieving the aim of action).

The two-way connection thesis builds on a notion of practical knowledge as both non-observational and causally efficacious with respect to successful actions. As argued in the opening section of this paper, expression of intention for the future falls within the scope of this kind of knowledge, along with intentional action that unfolds in the present. Bringing in the subsequent discussion of reasons for belief and action as items of reasoning that bear on questions, such as whether to believe p and whether to φ , it becomes apparent that an agent's expression of intention may suffice to support a corresponding belief. This is because the question of whether to believe p is appropriately settled by settling the question whether to φ when the believer's φ -ing can reliably bring about that p .¹⁷ On this occasion, aiming at the truth follows from aiming at success. The satisfaction of the overarching norm of belief is achieved through the satisfaction of the overarching norm of action. Getting it right as a believer comes about in virtue of succeeding as an agent.

As we can see from the above description, the two-way connection thesis recognises truth as the only standard of correctness for belief. However, unlike the one-way connection thesis and the two versions of the wrong kind of reasons argument we discussed, the proposed alternative rejects the assumption that this standard can only be met by tracking the available evidence. Instead, it maintains that this can also be done by engaging the believer's agency in making it the case that p .¹⁸ This fundamental difference derives from the distinction between two possible readings of what the truth norm actually requires from believers. A narrow scope reading imposes a further restriction on them, to satisfy the truth norm by considering the available evidence only. By contrast, a wide scope reading affirms that the aim of believing truths as opposed to falsehoods can be legitimately pursued by engaging a believer's agency in line with the two-way connection thesis outlined above. To see why a wide scope reading would serve a normative notion of belief better than a narrow scope reading, it is helpful to first consider the distinction between the two in its original context, a discussion on the nature and scope of what rationality may require from us in Broome (2007).

According to Broome, on a narrow scope reading, the rationality requirement is as follows: "Necessarily, if you believe that you ought to φ , then rationality requires you to intend to φ " (359). By contrast, on a wide scope reading, the rationality requirement is instead: "Necessarily, rationality requires of you that, if you believe you ought to φ , you intend to φ " (360). So, while there is only one way to satisfy the narrow scope requirement, by forming a corresponding intention, there are two ways of satisfying the wide scope requirement, either by forming a corresponding intention or by abandoning the initial belief.

The distinction is introduced to weigh in on a debate on whether rationality requirements, in and of themselves, offer us reason to satisfy them or not. The claim is that, by ignoring the possibility of a wide scope reading, we would be tempted to conclude that rationality requirements are unable to provide us with such a reason. Nevertheless, as Broome points out, the advantages of the wide scope reading do not amount to a definitive argument against the alternative, narrow scope reading. What they do instead is to show that understanding rationality requirements as wide in scope enables rational agents to tackle possible contradictions between such requirements, while the alternative understanding leaves them exposed to spiralling irrationality. This striking difference in outcomes is illustrated by the conundrum of a person who believes that he ought to φ and also believes that he ought not to φ . As Broome (2007, 365) argues, a narrow scope rational requirement

would commit that person to further irrationality; conversely, a wide scope rational requirement would make it possible for them to put things in good order:

But just because you are in an irrational state, that does not mean rationality can be expected to impose conflicting requirements on you. We should expect rationality to require you to get out of your irrational state, not to get in deeper, into the further irrationality of having contradictory intentions.

Applying the distinction between wide and narrow scope reading to the truth norm of belief, there is a clear analogy with respect to the argument this distinction can provide in support of the two-way connection thesis. To summarise, the point of a wide scope reading is to demonstrate that there is an alternative way to satisfy the truth norm, in addition to tracking the available evidence. This alternative way involves the believer's agency and is confined to its domain. Hence, the two-way connection thesis is not meant to undermine the evidence sensitivity commitment at the heart of the one-way connection thesis, but to restrict it suitably. As a result, the two-way connection thesis is in a position to address the challenge to the one-way connection thesis without jeopardising the normative notion of belief that underpins both theses. For instead of construing the so-called positive illusions as paradoxical cases of succeeding in virtue of getting it wrong, a wide scope reading allows us to see them for what they are: illustrations of how getting it right as a believer comes about in virtue of succeeding as an agent.

Still, it might be objected that the two-way connection thesis cannot be extended to account for the cases we termed positive delusions. For instance, it could be pointed out that the vignette we discussed involves delusional beliefs with religious as opposed to factual content that can be proven or disproven by observation. This feature, however, is only relevant to the argument put forward here to the extent that it provides an extreme as opposed to mild distortion vis-à-vis the picture supported by the evidence available to Simon. Since on a wide scope reading the truth norm can be also satisfied by engaging a believer's agency in making it the case that *p* instead of minding the evidence of whether *p*, such extreme distortion is compatible with getting it right in virtue of succeeding.

Saying that the vignette offers a case where the truth norm of belief is satisfied by satisfying the success norm of action does not commit us to the implausible claim that Simon's delusional beliefs have been proven correct in virtue of his professional success. Instead, the thought is that his set of beliefs whose content can be summed up as "I will win my case" should be assessed in light of his actually winning the case rather than the delusional beliefs he cites. Making this point does not hang on favouring an externalist as opposed to internalist interpretation of what counts as evidence or worse, switching imperceptibly between two incompatible conceptions of evidence. For it could be said, assuming an internalist conception, that the delusional beliefs with religious content are Simon's evidence for his belief "I will win my case." By contrast, assuming an externalist conception, Simon's evidence for this belief could be seen as provided by the facts of the matter, his winning the case. This line of thought is not promising. For it would lead us back to the one-way connection thesis, with its difficulties unresolved. The argument on offer here is different. To recap, it says that it is permissible to satisfy the truth norm of belief by exercising a believer's agency, in addition to considering the available evidence. This claim implies a wide as opposed to narrow scope interpretation of the truth norm, not an externalist as opposed to internalist interpretation of the evidence norm.

5. Conclusion

This paper offered an account on how the norms of belief relate to the norms of action. The two-way connection thesis defended here grounds a compelling picture, according to which the overarching truth norm of belief may be satisfied in virtue of satisfying the overarching success norm of action, just as the overarching success norm of action may be satisfied in virtue of satisfying the overarching truth norm of belief. This picture has the advantage of explaining away so-called positive illusions and other apparent instances of satisfying the success norm as a result of disregarding the truth norm. This is because unlike competing accounts, such as the one-way connection thesis and the wrong kind of reasons argument the two-way connection thesis integrates a wide scope reading of the truth norm. On this reading, engaging a believer's agency in making it the case that p is as normatively appropriate way of aiming at the truth as settling the question of whether p in light of the available evidence. An immediate implication is to strengthen the case for a normative notion of belief and respectively action. For on the proposed account aiming at success and aiming at the truth are recognised as not just compatible but interlocking pursuits.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank this Issue's Editors, Lisa Bortolotti and Ema Sullivan-Bissett, and two anonymous reviewers for their generous comments on earlier versions of this paper. I am also grateful to Anandi Hattiangadi for pressing me on the significance of a wide as opposed to narrow scope interpretation of the truth norm and Alexander Greenberg for a helpful discussion on the aim of belief. The paper greatly benefited from feedback received at the ERC-PERFECT 2016 workshop on "False but Useful Beliefs." I would also like to gratefully acknowledge support from the British Academy (SG150194).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by The British Academy [grant number SG150194].

Notes

1. Some philosophers who claim that belief aims at the truth in more than a metaphorical sense explicitly reject the thought that belief is a normative notion that would generate distinctive requirements for believers. Similarly, some normative theorists explicitly reject the thought that belief aims at the truth in anything but a metaphorical sense. The present discussion recognises the important differences between these two approaches. The following section expands on how, in spite of these, there are also important areas of convergence that make the proposed account applicable to both.
2. Throughout the discussion, "causally efficacious" and "causal efficacy" are meant to refer to the workings of an efficient as opposed to, for instance, a formal cause, two competing ways of accounting for the role of practical knowledge in action. I say more on this in the following section.
3. Further examples of recent teleological accounts include Steglich-Petersen (2006, 2009) and McHugh (2011). See also Velleman (2000) which offers the first distinctly teleological account of belief in terms of aims.
4. See, for instance, Owens (2003), Shah (2003) and Shah and Velleman (2005), which exemplify this normative approach.

5. It falls beyond the scope of the present inquiry to argue in favour of such a notion, against possible alternatives. Thus, I will not discuss either radical critiques of the thought that believing is something we do in any interesting sense (Heal 1987–1988) or radical rejections of even weaker epistemic normativity (Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2007). Similarly, I will not defend a truth-first against a knowledge-first view, according to which knowledge is a fundamental epistemic norm, irreducible to the truth norm (cf. Williamson 2000). I consider the account put forward here to be consistent with a knowledge-first view also; however, I will not undertake to show this to be the case in the present paper.
6. See, for instance, Steglich-Petersen (2011) on the challenge of providing a teleological account of epistemic reasons.
7. “Agent’s intention” should be read comprehensively to include all three instances discussed by Anscombe: the expression of intention for the future, intentional action and intention in action (1963, 1). This comprehensive reading leads to the rejection of the so-called Simple view of intention Bratman (1984) criticises for being misleadingly restrictive. In a nutshell, on the Simple view intention precedes action. This covers only the first instance of the Anscombian triad, expression of intention for the future but not the second and the third, intentional action and intention in action, which are just as fundamental.
8. Plato’s *Gorgias* (2008, 352b–358d) and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 7 offer two classical formulations of this approach (2001). See also Tenenbaum (2007) for a more recent development.
9. The essays in Ford, Hornsby, and Stoutland (2011) are representative of main trends in recent debates. Millgram (2001) also contains some important contributions, see in particular Vogler (2001).
10. See also Setiya (2008) for an alternative account of practical knowledge, which also links closely its non-observational character and causal efficacy. This is achieved by introducing a know-how component: the agent knows what she’s doing without observation because she knows what she intends to do and she knows how to do it.
11. See in particular the essays in Hunter (2011).
12. See also Hazlett (2013, 39–86) for another argument, which highlights – in the context of a different discussion, on the eudaimonic value of belief – the significance of positive illusions forming a cohesive pattern where believing falsehoods appears to be consistently preferable to believing truths.
13. Examples include imaginings and make-belief. Like belief, such attitudes represent their propositional content as true. However, in contrast to belief’s content, the content represented by, say, an imagining is not thereby accepted as true. See Velleman (2000) for a comprehensive discussion of this contrast.
14. See, for instance, Hieronymi (2005) and Adler and Hicks (2013).
15. See also Littlejohn (2013) for a discussion on how a commitment to truth as overarching norm of belief seems to also commit us to a derivative evidence norm. In essence, the thought is that the truth norm cannot be directly satisfied. Instead, believers are required to first satisfy the evidence norm.
16. See Hieronymi (2011) and (2014) for a further discussion on how responsibility for belief relates to responsibility for action within a unified account of normativity meant to cover both domains.
17. In a similar vein, the concluding paragraphs of Anscombe’s *Intention* discuss the natural fit that exists between expression of intention and expression of belief about what one will do in the future. These two expressions come apart only in exceptional cases, for example, in anticipation of obstacles beyond the agent’s control (1963, 91–94).
18. The two-way connection thesis differs significantly from a recent proposal by Reisner (2013), in which the possibility of non-evidential truth norms is illustrated by a series of thought experiments where a believer knows that his believing p will make it the case that p . These “leaps of knowledge” are not instances of getting it right by succeeding as they do not engage the believer’s agency. More importantly, they do not advance any hypothesis on how belief norms relate to action norms. Instead, their role is to explain how different norms within the domain of belief relate to each another.

Notes on contributor

Lubomira Radoilska is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK. Her main research interests are in philosophy of action, moral psychology and moral epistemology. She is the author of *Addiction and Weakness of Will* (OUP, 2013) and editor of *Autonomy and Mental Disorder* (OUP, 2012).

References

- Adler, J., and M. Hicks. 2013. "Non-Evidential Reasons to Believe." In *The Aim of Belief*, edited by T. Chan, 141–166. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Anscombe, G. E. M. 1963. *Intention*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Aristotle. 2001. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated and edited by R. Crisp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bortolotti, L. 2009. *Illusions and Other Irrational Beliefs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bortolotti, L., and M. Antrobus. 2015. "Costs and Benefits of Realism and Optimism." *Current Opinion in Psychiatry* 28 (2): 194–198. doi:10.1097/YCO.0000000000000143.
- Bratman, M. 1984. "Two Faces of Intention." *The Philosophical Review* 93 (3): 375–405. doi:10.2307/2184542.
- Broome, J. 2007. "Wide or Narrow Scope Commitment?" *Mind* 116 (462): 359–370. doi: 10.1093/mind/fzm359.
- Bykvist, K., and A. Hattiangadi. 2007. "Does Thought Imply Ought?" *Analysis* 67: 277–285. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8284.2007.00691.
- Elga, A. 2005. "On Overrating Oneself . . . and Knowing It." *Philosophical Studies* 123: 115–124. doi:10.1007/s11098-004-5222-1.
- Ford, A., J. Hornsby, and F. Stoutland. 2011. *Essays on Anscombe's Intention*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Fulford, K. W. M., and L. Radoilska. 2012. "Three Challenges from Delusion to Theories of Autonomy." In *Autonomy and Mental Disorder*, edited by L. Radoilska, 44–74. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hazlett, A. 2013. *A Luxury of the Understanding: On the Value of True Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Heal, J. 1987–1988. "The Disinterested Search for Truth." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 88: 97–108. doi:10.1093/aristotelian/88.1.97.
- Hieronymi, P. 2005. "The Wrong Kind of Reason." *Journal of Philosophy* 102 (9): 437–457. doi:jphil2005102933.
- Hieronymi, P. 2011. "Believing at Will." In *Belief and Agency*, edited by D. Hunter, 149–187. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.
- Hieronymi, P. 2014. "Reflection and Responsibility." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42 (1): 3–41. doi:10.1111/papa.12024.
- Hunter, D., ed. 2011. *Belief and Agency*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.
- Littlejohn, C. 2013. "The Russellian Retreat." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 113: 293–320. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9264.2013.00356.
- McHugh, C. 2011. "What Do We Aim at When We Believe?" *Dialectica* 65 (3): 369–392. doi:10.1111/j.1746-8361.2011.01270.
- McHugh, C. 2012. "The Truth Norm of Belief." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93 (1): 8–30. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0114.2011.01413.
- Millgram, E. 2001. *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Owens, D. 2003. "Does Belief Have An Aim?" *Philosophical Studies* 115 (3): 283–305. doi:10.1023/A:1025157101089.
- Plato. 2008. *Protagoras*. Translated and edited by N. Denyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Radoilska, L. 2013. *Addiction and Weakness of Will*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Railton, R. 1997. "On the Hypothetical and Non-Hypothetical in Reasoning about Action." In *Ethics and Practical Reason*, edited by G. Cullity and B. Gaut, 53–79. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Reisner, A. 2013. "Leaps of Knowledge." In *The Aim of Belief*, edited by T. Chan, 167–183. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schwenkler, J. 2011. "Perception and Practical Knowledge." *Philosophical Explorations* 14 (2): 137–152. doi:10.1080/13869795.2011.569749.
- Setiya, K. 2008. "Practical Knowledge." *Ethics* 118: 388–409. doi:10.1086/528781.

- Shah, N. 2003. "How Truth Governs Belief." *Philosophical Review* 112 (4): 447–482. doi:10.1215/00318108-112-4-447.
- Shah, N., and J. D. Velleman. 2005. "Doxastic Deliberation." *Philosophical Review* 114 (4): 497–534. doi:10.1215/00318108-114-4-497.
- Steglich-Petersen, A. 2006. "No Norm Needed: On the Aim of Belief." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56 (225): 499–516. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9213.2006.455.
- Steglich-Petersen, A. 2009. Weighing the Aim of Belief. *Philosophical Studies* 145 (3): 395–405. doi:10.1007/s11098-008-9239-8.
- Steglich-Petersen, A. 2011. "How to Be a Teleologist About Epistemic Reasons." In *Reasons for Belief*, edited by A. Steglich-Petersen and A. Reisner, 13–33. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, S. E. 1989. *Positive Illusions: Creative Self-deception and the Healthy Mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Taylor, S. E., and J. D. Brown. 1988. "Illusion and Well-being. A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health." *Psychological Bulletin* 103: 193–210.
- Taylor, S. E., and J. D. Brown. 1994. "Positive Illusions and Well-being Revisited: Separating Fact from Fiction." *Psychological Bulletin* 116: 21–27. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.
- Tenenbaum, S. 2007. *Appearances of the Good: An Essay on the Nature of Practical Reason*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Velleman, J. D. 2000. "On the Aim of Belief." Chap. 11 In *The Possibility of Practical Reason*, 244–281. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Vogler, C. 2001. "Anscombe on Practical Inference." In *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*, edited by E. Millgram, 437–464. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Wilkinson, S. 2013. "Beyond Believing Badly." *Teorema* 32 (3): 105–119.
- Williams, B. 1973. "Deciding to Believe." Chap. 9 In *Problems of the Self*, 136–151. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williamson, T. 2000. *Knowledge and Its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.