NOTAS E DISCUSSÕES
NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

BELIEVING THAT *P* REQUIRES TAKING IT TO BE THE CASE THAT *P*: A REPLY TO GRZANKOWSKI AND SANKEY

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Abstract. In a recent paper in this journal, Alex Grzankowski argues, *contra* Howard Sankey, that to believe that *p* isn't to believe that *p* is true. In this short reply, I'll agree with Grzankowski that to believe that *p* isn't to believe that *p* is true, and I'll argue that Sankey's recent response to Grzankowski is inadequate as it stands. However, it'll be my contention that Grzankowski's argument doesn't demonstrate that believing that *p* doesn't require taking it to be the case that *p*.

In a recent paper in this journal, Alex Grzankowski (2019) argues, in response to Howard Sankey (2019a), that to believe that *p* isn't to believe that *p* is true.[1] Grzankowski offers, roughly, two objections to Sankey's view.

The first objection is that if believing that *p* includes the concept TRUE, alongside the conceptual ingredients of *p*, then believing that *p* demands "a level of cognitive sophistication" not necessary for believing that *p* (Grzankowski 2019, p.137). As Grzankowski (2019, p.137) puts it, some person who sincerely believes "that dogs bark may lack the sophistication to think thoughts concerning truth."

The second objection is two-fold. First, if we treat the belief that p as identical to the belief that *p* is true, then this leads to an absurdity. To see why he thinks this, consider the following line of reasoning from Grzankowski (2019, pp.137-8):

> Call the proposition that *P* is true '*Q*'. ... to believe that *P* is to believe that
> *Q*. But to believe that *Q* must be to believe that *Q* is true. Call the proposition

> that Q is true 'R'. To believe that R (which is the very same belief as the belief
> that P) must be to believe that R is true. And on and on … R … is … the
> very same belief as the belief that P is true is true is true … this is the very
> same belief as the belief that P. On the very face of it this seems absurd.

Second, and relatedly, "if to have the belief that P is to have the belief that P is
true is true is true … then in order to believe that P one must deploy her concept
true infinitely many times" (Grzankowski 2019, p.138). If deploying concepts takes
time, then, Grzankowski (2019, p.138) claims, "no belief could be had within a finite
amount of time." Yet, of course, many people have many beliefs right now. On the
above grounds, then, Grzankowski rejects the view that believing that p is believing
that p is true.

In the most recent paper in this exchange, Sankey (2019b) responds to Grzank-
owski's first objection and second objection. Sankey (2019b, p.362) tries to resist
Grzankowski's first objection by arguing that, even if believing that p is believing
that p is true, it's still possible for S to believe that p, even though, S doesn't possess
the concept of truth. It's not especially clear, though, how Sankey's argument delivers
this result. In any case, Grzankowski's first objection isn't a decisive objection anyway,
since Sankey could simply claim, with some plausibility, that creatures incapable of
thinking thoughts concerning truth cannot have proper beliefs, although they might
very well have proto-beliefs. So, I'll leave Grzankowski's first objection to one side
for now.

Let's turn to Grzankowski's more decisive second objection. Sankey (2019b,
p.364) attempts to navigate around this objection by claiming that he's not really of
the opinion that believing that p is believing that p is true. After all, as Sankey (2019b,
p.363) matter-of-factly puts it, "that … would be absurd." So, what is Sankey's view
then? "[T]o believe P is to believe P to be true" (Sankey 2019b, p.364; see also
p.365).[2] According to Sankey, this latter view avoids Grzankowski's second objec-
tion, since it doesn't require "the belief that P to be precisely the same belief as the
belief 'P is true,' as Grzankowski's argument requires" (2019b, p.364).

However, by my lights, Sankey is mistaken that his most recently proposed view
avoids Grzankowski's second objection, since believing that p is true isn't logically
distinct from believing p to be true. To see this, observe, that if S believes that p
is true, then S believes p to be true, and if S believes p to be true, then S believes
that p is true. In which case, S believes p to be true if and only if S believes that p
is true, and so the proposition that S believes p to be true is logically equivalent to
the proposition that S believes that p is true. Thus, *contra* Sankey, the view that to
believe that p just is to believe p to be true is going to inherit all of the problems of
the view that to believe that p just is to believe that p is true.

At this point, let's circle back to Grzankowski's argument against Sankey. It's am-
biguous between two readings. Does Grzankowski take it that he's shown that be-

lieving that *p* doesn't require taking it to be the case that *p*? Or does Grzankowski take it that he's merely shown that believing that *p* isn't believing that *p* is true? For me, it's not clear which interpretation Grzankowski endorses. If it's the latter, then Grzankowski's argument appears to yield his desired result. But if it's the former, then Grzankowski's argument, as we will see momentarily, fails to establish its conclusion.

Now, *contra* Sankey, to believe that *p* isn't to believe that *p* is true (or to believe *p* to be true). Grzankowski is right to reject such characterizations of what it is for someone to believe some proposition. Of course, this invites a question: What is it to believe that p? Standardly, to believe that *p* is to take it to be the case that p—i.e., *S* believes that *p* if and only if *S* takes it to be the case that p (cf. Searle 1983; Zagzebski 1999, p.93; Schwitzgebel 2011, p.14; Foley 2011, p.41).[3]

Let's assume, then, that believing that *p* just is taking it to be the case that *p*. How does such a characterization of belief fare with respect to Grzankowski's argument? Quite well. To see this, observe two things.

First, uncontroversially, those with very little cognitive sophistication can take the world to be such-and-such a way—e.g., very small children can recognize the difference between there being food in front of them and there not being food in front of them. Hence, on such an understanding of belief, those with very little cognitive sophistication can believe that *p*, where *p* is some everyday proposition, without needing to apply the concept TRUE to it, as something, over and above, the concepts involved in the belief itself. All one needs to do to, say, believe that dogs bark is to take it to be the case that dogs bark, which one can do, even if he can't think thoughts concerning truth.

Second, if believing that *p* just is taking it to be the case that *p*, then adding that, for *S* to believe that *p*, she also must believe that p is true or believe *p* to be true is, if not ungrammatical, conceptually redundant, at least where the object of the belief is *p*. Taking *p* to be true to be the case, where *p* is the proposition at issue, adds nothing at all conceptually that's not already present in taking *p* to be the case, that is, in believing that *p*. Although we often talk of believing p to be true, where *p* is the proposition in question, this is an infelicitous way of speaking—i.e., taking *p* to be true to be the case is simply redundant of taking *p* to be the case. This isn't to suggest, however, that it's infelicitous to say that *S* believes that *p* is true, where the proposition under consideration is '*p* is true,' since, then, what *S* takes to be the case is that '*p* is true'. Indeed, the preceding line of reasoning helps explain why, when we allow the proposition at issue to appropriately shift between believing that *p* and believing that *p* is true (or believing *p* to be true), Grzankowski's two-fold second objection for rejecting Sankey's view doesn't get any traction with the view I sketch above. In believing that *p*, the belief is about p, whereas in believing that *p* is true, the belief is about *p* is true. These are different beliefs about different things and having the belief that *p* isn't (and doesn't entail) having some other belief about the

different proposition p is true.[4] And so, of course, Grzankowski's dual-aspect second objection doesn't arise for the view I sketch above.

So, if Grzankowski's aim in (2019) is to show that believing that p doesn't require taking it to be the case that p, then he'll need to do much more to establish that conclusion. Of course, if Grzankowski's aim in (2019) isn't to show that believing that p doesn't require taking it to be the case that p, then, in this paper, I'll have demonstrated that at least one view—believing that p is taking it to be the case that p—is in much better shape with respect to Grzankowski's objections than Sankey's view.

References

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Notes

[1] In this paper, "belief" means "outright or full-blown belief."

[2] Sankey (2019b, p.364) also claims that believing that p is to believe-true p. But it's not clear what "believe-true p" means and how it's distinct from believe p to be true. So, I leave this alternative expression of Sankey's view to the side.

[3] Interestingly, although he expresses it rather awkwardly, I think that the view Sankey has in mind to defend is one very much like this—see, e.g., Sankey's comments that "the concept of believing is the concept of believing true" (2019b, p.362) and "[t]ruth is in a sense embedded in belief" (2019b, p.364).

[4] To see that believing that p doesn't entail believing that p is true, consider the following scenario:

> **CHALK.** Let p = "this sentence (p) is false." Now, suppose Bill, not knowing anything about the liar paradox, sees his reliable and honest mathematics professor write p on the chalkboard first thing in class. And Bill knows that his mathematics professor is reliable and honest, and Bill has only ever known him to write true things first thing on the chalkboard. On this basis, Bill nearly automatically comes to believe that p when he sees

his math professor write it on the board. But in believing that p, Bill doesn't believe that p is true, since, being familiar with some logic, but not very much, he immediately recognizes—though he doesn't follow this line of reasoning to its logical terminus—that if p is true, then p must be false. But his math professor wrote p on the board first thing and Bill doesn't believe that his professor would write false things on the board first thing. What's described in CHALK strikes me as perfectly metaphysically possible. Bill legitimately believes that p, and he comes to believe that p in an almost automatic way, as we sometimes do, but Bill believes something else, which he doesn't adequately connect up with p, and this brings him to avoid believing that p is true. In which case, S can believe that p, even though, S doesn't believe that p is true, and so believing that p doesn't entail believing that p is true.

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