Occurrent belief and dispositional belief

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Outline

1. Distinctions between dispositional belief and occurrent belief
2. Psychological effects on occurrent belief formation
3. Practical factors’ effects on occurrent belief formation
4. Two explanations of practical factors’ effects on occurrent belief formation
5. Relevant epistemic rationalities
6. Ramifications
**Distinction: common ground**

- **Dispositional belief**
  Information held in my memory and that could be manifested in certain circumstances

- **Occurrent belief**
  Thoughts are actively brought to mind whose contents vary depending on circumstances

- **Relation with knowledge**
  Dispositional belief but not occurrent belief is entailed by knowledge.
Occurrent belief and dispositional belief are different aspects of the same state.

- representationalism
- dispositionalism

If a subject holds an occurrent belief that \( p \), she also holds a dispositional belief that \( p \). Once a belief is occurrently formed for the first time, it would automatically be added to ‘the belief box’ and ready to be called into mind for future purposes.
Distinction: folk psychological

• **Closure:**
  “The juncture at which a belief crystallizes and turns from hesitant conjecture to a subjectively firm ‘fact’” (Kruglanski and Webster 1996: 266)

• **A hypothesis:**
  Occurrent belief requires closure, but dispositional belief does not.
Distinction – folk psychological (continued)

Unconfident Examinee (modified from Radford 1966)

Kate is taking a history test. She had studied carefully and has been doing well on all the questions so far. She has now reached the final question, which reads “What year did Queen Elizabeth die?” As Kate reads this question she feels relief, since she had expected this question and memorized the answer. But before Kate can pause to recall the date, the teacher interrupts and announces that there is only one minute left. Now Kate panics. Her grip tightens around her pen. Her mind goes blank, and nothing comes to her. She feels that she can only guess. So, feeling shaken and dejected, she writes ‘1603’—which is of course exactly the right answer.
Distinction – folk psychological (continued)

X-Phil on this case:

• Myers-Schulz and Schwitzgebel (2013):
  “Did Kate believe that Queen Elizabeth died in 1603?”
  - 63% deny belief to Kate.

• Rose and Schaffer (2013):
  Three probes eliciting the dispositional reading of belief.
  E.g. “Did Kate still believe (in the sense that she still held the information in her mind even if she could not access it) that Queen Elizabeth died in 1603?”
  - 74%, 58% and 71% ascribe belief to Kate.
There are reasons to think that Kate has dispositional belief but not closed-mindedness in the key proposition. Rose and Schaffer (2013)’s study elicits the notion of dispositional belief held by folks. Participants in Myers-Schulz and Schwitzgebel (2013)’s study deny the target belief to Kate in the occurrent sense.
My assumption about the two types of belief:

Occurrent belief that $p$ necessarily involves:

(i) closed-mindedness about whether $p$;
(ii) (defeasible) dispositions to rely on $p$ as a premise in reasoning and assert that $p$ in the actual circumstances – e.g., if asked whether $p$, the subject would answer affirmatively.

Dispositional belief doesn’t necessarily involve these conditions.

At time $t$, a dispositional belief is triggered but it does not turn into its occurrent form. I will explore under what conditions this could happen.
Psychological effects

As the previously mentioned empirical studies show, psychological factors such as panic and anxiety could block the proper activation of dispositional belief into occurrent forms.

Furthermore, one’s level of subjective confidence should be associated with occurrent belief and should be separated from whether one has dispositional belief.
**Practical factors’ effects**

- **Need-for-closure**: the desire of a definite answer to a question
  - *Need for non-specific closure* (henceforth “NFC”)
  - *Need for specific closure*
- **Need-to-avoid-closure** (henceforth “NTAC”): the desire of avoidance of closure

- Intrapersonal variations (i.e. variations within one person, depending on the circumstances)
  - Webster and Kruglanski 1994
- Interpersonal variations (i.e. variations of NFC between different people)
Practical factors’ effects (continued)

Practical factors triggering high NFC:

• When a settled judgment is required
• An expected benefit of closure (e.g. when attaining closure brings others’ approval)
• Increased costs of continuing in ambiguity under conditions (e.g. time pressures)
• Conditions rendering information processing more difficult and laborious (e.g. tiredness, distracting background noise and making the task seem dull)
Practical factors’ effects (continued)

Practical factors triggering high NTAC:

- Antecedent emphasis on accuracy of the judgment
- High costs of being wrong with the judgment
- Others’ esteem and appreciation for accuracy
- Making the task seem enjoyable and interesting

When there is no special situational factor, one’s NFC would be neutral (neutral NFC constitutes a baseline NFC that differs from one to another).
Practical factors’ effects (continued)

The level of NFC or NTAC has significant effects on the amount of evidence necessary for occurrent belief formation. E.g. Mayseless and Kruglanski (1987, Study 2):

The participants were asked to identify the digit very briefly shown on a tachistoscope. All subjects were able to repeat the stimulus presentation as many times as they wish.

- High NTAC condition - 18.28 times
- Neutral condition - 5.14 times
- High NFC condition - 3.24 times
Practical factors’ effects (continued)

Practical sensitivity of occurrent belief formation:

*Effects of high NFC*

- Feel uneasy with an absence of settled opinion
- Considerably cognitively impatient and hasty
- Generating less alternative hypotheses

*Effects of high NTAC*

- Cherish uncertainty
- Cognitively cautious
- Generating more alternative hypotheses
  - Inhibiting a previously held dispositional belief turn into its occurrent form
Practical factors’ effects (continued)

Consider a typical high NTAC situation—a perceived high stakes case (e.g. the bank case)

The doxastic attitudes of the high-stakes subject:

• Absence of occurrent belief that \( p \)

• Whether the subject has dispositional belief that \( p \) depends on her baseline NFC

  With high baseline NFC: probably maintain the dispositional belief (and hence also knowledge)

  With high baseline NTAC: probably lose the dispositional belief (and hence also knowledge)
Explanations of the practical sensitivity of occurrent belief formation

Two possible explanations of the practical sensitivity of occurrent belief formation:


I will argue for credal pragmatism based on relevant empirical data and theoretical considerations.
Explanations of the practical sensitivity of occurrent belief formation

Empirical data for practical sensitivity of credence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Confidence in the initial hypothesis (0-100)</th>
<th>Shift of confidence after acquiring new evidence</th>
<th>Final confidence (0-100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High NTAC condition</td>
<td>27.43</td>
<td>13.46</td>
<td>90.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral condition</td>
<td>34.78</td>
<td>20.44</td>
<td>57.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High NFC condition</td>
<td>50.84</td>
<td>38.49</td>
<td>78.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“unfounded confidence paradox” (Kruglanski)
Explanations of the practical sensitivity of occurrent belief formation

Practical sensitivity of credence:

Under high NFC:

• Assign more importance to early information
• Readily give credibility to whatever early evidence
• Finish with a relatively high confidence in spite of having relatively less evidence.

Under high NTAC:

• Assign less importance to early information
• Give less credibility to each piece of evidence
• Settle with a high confidence judgment only after exploring evidence thoroughly.
Explanations of the practical sensitivity of occult belief formation

Empirical data concerning the practical sensitivity of the threshold:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Final confidence (0-100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High NTAC condition</td>
<td>90.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral condition</td>
<td>57.98</td>
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<tr>
<td>High NFC condition</td>
<td>78.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practical sensitivity of threshold alone cannot explain why final confidence in the high NFC condition is much higher than in the neutral condition, even though the evidence in the neutral condition is stronger than the high NFC condition.
Explanations of the practical sensitivity of occurrent belief formation

Other consideration favouring credal pragmatism over doxastic pragmatism:
- simplicity and ontological parsimony

Assuming a variable threshold seems unnecessary and would require burdensome ontological and psychological commitments.

In conclusion, credal pragmatism is better than doxastic pragmatism.
Dispositional belief

Dispositional belief is more resistant to the effects of psychological and practical factors than occurrent belief.

Dispositional belief depends on credence one would have in normal circumstances.

-By normal circumstances I mean those circumstances in which there are no psychological factors that could temporarily block the access to one’s possessed information or opinion and in which one’s need-for-closure is neutral.
The rationality for practical sensitivity of occurrent belief formation and credence

Three types of epistemic rationality:
1. *Ideal epistemic rationality*: relative to procedures leading to highly accurate epistemic achievements in ideal circumstances
2. *Purist rationality*: relative to epistemic achievements accessible to a human cognition exclusively affected by truth-relevant factors
3. *Adaptive rationality*: relative to the cognitive regulation for non-ideal agents with limited cognitive abilities in real-life environments

Practical sensitivity of occurrent belief formation and credence is adaptively rational, but not purist or ideally rational.
Ramifications

• Compatibility with moderate invariantism
  - Dispositional belief is the relevant type of belief required for knowledge and dispositional belief is governed by purist rationality standards (i.e., not influenced by conditions present in abnormal circumstances such as high stakes, urgency…).

• Credal pragmatism explains data concerning knowledge ascriptions in terms of the dispositional nature of occurrent belief
  - Intuitive judgments of all high stakes cases
  - Infallibilist intuition of knowledge
  - Concessive knowledge attributions and other related data
References


• Myers-Schulz, B., & Schwitzgebel, E. (2013). Knowing that P without believing that P. *Noûs, 47*(2), 371–384.


Thank you!