

**Title:**  
**The Perspective of Rational Deliberation**

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## The Perspective of Rational Deliberation

Many philosophers take there to be something epistemologically significant about having a view of the reasonableness of one's own beliefs. Internalists generally insist that knowledge requires the capacity to make some kind of positive epistemic self-assessment (such as that one's beliefs are reasonable),<sup>1</sup> and even many externalists are willing to acknowledge that there is something odd about believing that p while also either believing oneself to be unjustified in believing that p or having no view whatsoever on the matter.<sup>2</sup> The thought also motivates Ernest Sosa's dual account of knowledge, where Sosa places having a view of the reliability of one's own beliefs at the center of his account of reflective knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

But under what circumstances does a person count as having a view of the reasonableness of his own beliefs? A person engaged in conscious reflection who explicitly thinks "I have good reasons for believing p" would certainly qualify. But can a person count as having a view of the reasonableness of his own beliefs without thinking any second-order, self-reflective thoughts? I

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<sup>1</sup> This thought arises in various places, such as in Keith Lehrer's Truetemp case, where he argues that "Mr. Truetemp has no idea that the tempucomp has been inserted in his brain and is only slightly puzzled about why he thinks so obsessively about the temperature; but he never checks a thermometer to determine whether these thoughts about the temperature are correct. He accepts them unreflectively, another effect of the tempucomp. Thus, he thinks and accepts that the temperature is 104 degrees. It is. Does he know that it is? Surely not. He has no idea whether he or his thoughts about the temperature are reliable." (2000) *Theory of Knowledge*, p. 187. Bonjour also makes this point when he claims that "The intuitive difficulty with externalism...is this: on the externalist view, a person may be ever so irrational and irresponsible in accepting a belief, when judged in light of his own subjective conception of the situation, and may still turn out to be epistemically justified." (2001) "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge" in *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Alvin Goldman, for example, acknowledges the apparent oddness of such a case. Of course, not everyone is willing to admit that there is anything odd about this circumstance; see Kornblith, H. (2013) "Naturalism vs. The First-Person Perspective." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, Romanell Lecture, 87, 107-126.

<sup>3</sup> Sosa (1991) provides the following description of reflective knowledge: "One has *reflective knowledge* if one's judgment or belief manifests not only such direct response to the fact known but also understanding of its place in a wider whole *that includes one's belief and knowledge of it and how these come about.*" (emphasis mine) *Knowledge in Perspective: Selected essays in epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. There is, however, a question about whether the view of one's belief that Sosa has in mind is anything like what internalists prize when they require defensible belief for knowledge. For a more lengthy discussion, see Kornblith, H. (2009) "Sosa in Perspective". *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol. 144, No. 1, Selected Papers from the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division, 2008 Meeting, pp. 127-136.

believe so. Here I argue that there is a special circumstance in which a person who performs an entirely first-order rational deliberation and draws a first-order conclusion that involves no such self-regarding thoughts will count as having both a *second-order commitment* to taking herself to have good reasons for so-believing, as well a *second-order view* that she has good reasons for believing what she does. I defend two claims: first, when a person believes that p as the result of her rational deliberation, she is committed to taking herself to have good reasons for believing that p. This claim is about a second-order commitment a person undertakes when drawing a conclusion from rational deliberation, but the commitment may or may not be within a person's own view. The second claim is that when a person believes that p as the result of her rational deliberation, she will also take herself to have good reasons for believing that p. Here we move beyond identifying a commitment one undertakes to see that this commitment is also already within the deliberator's perspective. Importantly, a person has this view of the reasonableness of her own beliefs even when her deliberation and her conclusion occur in entirely first-order terms.

To begin, I wish to note that the distinction between first-order and second-order I employ here is a matter of whether or not the content of any of the propositions under consideration refers to a person's own mental states and, in particular, a person's own beliefs. So by indicating that a deliberation occurs in entirely first-order terms—a *first-order deliberation*—I mean to indicate that the deliberator's thoughts do not reference any of the deliberator's own mental states. For example, one might begin a deliberation with a question such as "Is the defendant guilty?" and proceed to consider evidence about the case. This deliberation may proceed without any reference to the deliberator's own beliefs. She may think "The defendant does not have an alibi" but in a first-order deliberation she will not think "*I believe* that the

defendant does not have an alibi.” What the deliberator believes is of course crucially important in her determination of the case, but her beliefs are not part of the evidence she considers.<sup>4</sup>

Consider the following instance of a first-order rational deliberation:

*Zac is on a jury, and at the outset of the trial he considers the question, “Is the defendant guilty?” He listens to the presentation of the evidence, which includes the following: The defendant stood to inherit a great deal of money from the deceased. The murderer was caught and testifies that the defendant paid him to kill the deceased. Financial records show that \$50,000 was transferred from the defendant to the murderer, and the conversation where the defendant arranged the hit was caught on tape. After all the evidence is in, Zac concludes that the defendant is guilty.*

In his role as a jury member who wants to fulfill his obligation in as responsible a manner as he can, Zac sets out to answer the question “Is the defendant guilty?”, and he strives to do so by examining the evidence. He attends to whether or not the evidence supports the conclusion and does not consider his own beliefs in the matter at all.

It is also important to note that the kind of circumstance under consideration here is one in which a deliberator engages in an intentional action, and insofar as it is an intentional action, it will be possible to identify an aim of that action.<sup>5</sup> Of course, not all rational management of beliefs is intentional.<sup>6</sup> But there is a kind of rational management of belief that is intentional, for

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<sup>4</sup> One consequence of defining second-order beliefs in this way is that it leaves open the possibility that a person may use second-order terms in her deliberations without referring to her own mental states. A deliberation that includes propositions that refer to the mental states of persons other than the deliberator would not count as a first-order deliberation. I have chosen this distinction in order to streamline the argument, but a more precise articulation of my view could be achieved by distinguishing between *first-personal second-order propositions* that involve a deliberator’s reference to her own mental states, and *third-personal second-order propositions* that involve a deliberator’s reference to the mental states of someone other than the deliberator. Here I am particularly interested in a deliberation that does not include any first-personal second-order positions, as perhaps the harder task is to explain how a person could have second-order commitments and a second-order perspective on himself (that he has good reasons for believing p) without having *any* self-referential, second-order thoughts (first-personal or third-personal).

<sup>5</sup> Following Anscombe, I take intentionality to require at least that a person is able to answer certain sorts of “Why?” questions.

<sup>6</sup> The scope of what might count as rational management of belief is not limited to those things that require a person’s awareness. Richard Moran, for example, suggests that activities such as “monitoring for gross inconsistency, [and] updating and revising beliefs in the light of the constant flow of experience” count as rational

one can set out to determine what is true by evaluating what the evidence supports. And when Zac sets out to answer the question “Is the defendant guilty?”, he is undertaking an action with this particular aim. What makes a deliberation *rational* is that it has the aim of truth, limiting what counts as a reason to only those considerations that concern whether or not a proposition is true (as opposed to pragmatic or other types of considerations).<sup>7</sup>

Now, when one believes that *p* as the conclusion of one’s rational deliberation, one has successfully achieved that aim by believing in accordance with one’s own determination about what the evidence supports. To say that a person believes that *p* as the result of her rational deliberation is, therefore, to say that a certain condition has obtained: the person’s judgment that the evidence supports *p* results in it being the case that she believes that *p*. Here the claim is not that *all* deliberations end in a circumstance where the deliberator’s belief can be described as being the result of the deliberation. It is certainly possible for a person to rationally deliberate

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management, and that these types of rational regulation could occur without a person’s awareness or involvement, much as the heartbeat is regulated. I would contend that this sort of rational management of belief would not, however, count as a case of rational deliberation, at least not rational deliberation of the intentional sort that concerns us here. See Moran, R. (1999). “The Authority of Self-Consciousness.” *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 26, No. 1 & 2, pp. 179-200.

<sup>7</sup> We might say, then, that Zac’s deliberation is conscious, as long as one doesn’t take consciousness to require higher-order thoughts. There is a theory of consciousness known as the “higher-order thought” theory whose original development and defense is attributed to David Rosenthal. The higher-order thought theory posits that “consciousness is not an intrinsic property of any mental state. Instead, one mental state becomes conscious only by being the object of a second mental state, a higher-order thought that one is in the first mental state.” A widely acknowledged problem with such a theory is, of course, that it generates an infinite regress. If what it is for a mental state to be conscious is for it to be the object of a higher-order thought, then what is the state of that higher-order thought? If the higher-order thought is unconscious, then it is difficult to see how it could be what makes a lower-order state conscious. But if the higher-order thought is conscious, then what makes it so? There is only one alternative. It must be conscious because it is the object of another higher order thought. And so on. In order to stop the regress, at some point consciousness must be an intrinsic feature of a thought. But once one has acknowledged that consciousness can be an intrinsic feature of a thought, then there is no need to restrict this intrinsic feature to only higher-order thoughts. An alternative to the higher-order thought theory is one that takes having a conscious mental state to be an intrinsic, constitutive feature of that mental state, “one that is a part of its own internal character and depends not at all on any further apperceptive state.” Because of regress problems for higher-order thought theories of consciousness, its current defenders are few. Nevertheless, I bring up the issue of theories of consciousness in order to note that the claim that intentional rational deliberation is conscious does not exclude the possibility of the same deliberation occurring solely in first-order terms. Furthermore, the claim that a person engages in conscious, first-order deliberation does not require that the person also has higher-order thoughts in virtue of which the deliberation is conscious.

about p, judge that the evidence points to p, and believe that p without believing that p *as the result of* that judgment.<sup>8</sup> For example, a juror might conclude her deliberation by judging that the evidence points to the defendant's guilt and also believe that the defendant is guilty. But it might be that the juror believes the defendant is guilty regardless of the evidence because of some personal prejudice against the defendant. This juror may have concluded her rational deliberation, but she does not believe that the defendant is guilty *as the conclusion of her rational deliberation*. Believing that p *as the conclusion of one's rational deliberation* means that one's belief that p is tied to one's judgment about what the evidence supports.<sup>9</sup>

We are now in a position to see how it is possible for a person who believes that p *as the conclusion of her first-order rational deliberation* to have a second-order commitment to taking herself to have good reasons for believing that p. When a person engages in an intentional rational deliberation, she is engaged in the particular activity of determining what the evidence supports. When she believes that p *as the conclusion of that deliberation*, she believes that p *as a result of her own judgment* what the evidence supports. But in order to have concluded her rational deliberation, she must have made the judgment that the evidence supports p, and when a person judges *that*, she is thereby committed to having good reasons for believing p. That she is committed to taking herself to have good reasons is clear from the fact that in her deliberations, she thought those reasons constituted sufficient evidence to conclude that p. (After all, she would not have concluded that p if she thought there was insufficient reason to do so.)

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<sup>8</sup> Sometimes a rational deliberation can confirm a conclusion a person has already made. In this case, it may not be quite correct to say that a person's belief results from her rational deliberation, as though before embarking on the deliberation she had no view of matters at all. However, it must be the case that the *persistence* of that belief is due to the judgment she makes at the conclusion of her deliberation.

<sup>9</sup> I owe Kirk Ludwig here for first suggesting the exercise of a competency as a way to understand what it is to believe something as the conclusion of one's rational deliberation. Insofar as a person is a rational doxastic agent, she has the capacity for her judgments about what the evidence supports to result in the formation of her beliefs in accordance with those judgments. Believing that p *as the conclusion of one's rational deliberation* is the successful exercise of this particular competency.

This connection between one's belief and one's judgment about what the evidence supports holds even if what a person actually says is simply that p is true. The first-order statement "p is the case" when given as the conclusion of one's first-order deliberation is a claim about p, but insofar as it is the conclusion of one's rational deliberation it also carries with it the deliberator's commitment about what the evidence supports. Thus, when a person concludes that p as a result of her deliberation, she is also committed to the truth of the second-order claim 'I have good reasons for believing that p' as a description of what she has already done.<sup>10</sup> A person's commitment to the second-order claim is, then, a commitment to it as an accurate description of the state she is already in.

I now turn to a defense of my second claim, that a person who believes that p as the result of her first-order deliberation will not only be committed to having good reasons for believing p, but that her commitment will already be within her own perspective. For to speak of a person's commitments in the way I have been doing still leaves open the question of what a person has within her own view. The question now is this: In what sense does a person who believes that p as the result of her rational deliberation also have the reasonableness of that belief within her own view? It is certainly not within her view as a self-referential thought. Rather, we might say that her commitment is within her view in at least these two senses: first, it is an accurate expression of her current view of matters. Second, when she does explicitly consider the matter, she does not consider there to be any further judgment for her to make. She treats the matter as settled and can speak about her commitment without engaging in any additional inquiry or self-assessment.

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<sup>10</sup> Moran, R. (2001) *Authority & Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. As Moran puts it, "It is part of the ordinary first-person point of view on one's psychological life both that evidence is not consulted, and that, for example, the expression of one's belief carries with it a commitment to its truth."

The crucial step here is to see how a statement about a first-order matter such as a defendant's guilt could also incorporate a second-order perspective about the rationality of the deliberator's beliefs. It may help to begin by observing a certain move from a second-order deliberative question about what one believes to an entirely first-order deliberative question of what is true. This move from a question about what one believes to a question about matters that do not concern one's own state of mind is often referred to as a kind of transparency thesis. Gareth Evans describes it this way: "If someone asks me 'Do you think there is going to be a third world war?', I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were answering the question 'Will there be a third world war?' I get myself in a position to answer the question whether I believe that *p* by putting into operation whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether *p*."<sup>11</sup> According to this transparency thesis, the theoretical question about what one believes is *transparent* to the deliberative question about what one ought to believe. In order to proceed in one's deliberation, reference to one's own beliefs is certainly unnecessary, and perhaps worse.<sup>12</sup> The way to address the question of what one is to believe is to look at the facts relevant to whether or not *p* is true, rather than turning to introspection about the contents of one's own mind.

The transparency thesis identifies something about intentional rational deliberation that warrants the transition between attending to what it is one believes regarding *p* and attending to whether or not it is the case that *p*. It is worth noticing within this context that the move described by the transparency thesis is not prescriptive as the way one must begin a deliberation about what she ought to believe; it is not required that one begin one's rational deliberation with

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<sup>11</sup> Evans, G. (1982) *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See p. 225.

<sup>12</sup> Moran goes even further here by claiming that this kind of transparency is essential to a healthy mind. A person who cannot address the question of what he believes regarding *p* by attending to the evidence in favor of *p* is subject to a serious limitation indeed.



a second-order question. A deliberation could start when a person simply asks ‘Is p the case?’, omitting any self-reference altogether. Furthermore, the absence of second-order claims at the outset does not alter the position the deliberator is in upon concluding her deliberation. A deliberation that begins by asking “Do I believe that the defendant is guilty?” is no different in regard to the deliberator’s position to make a second-order claim about her conclusion than a deliberation that begins with the question “Is the defendant guilty?” And a person who concludes her deliberation by simply concluding that p is certainly in a position to express that conclusion as a statement of her belief; one might just say “I believe that p.”

The transition from “p is the case” to “I believe that p” is warranted because the deliberator is the one who has concluded that p, and is therefore in a position to say so. The transition from “p is the case” to “I have good reasons for believing that p” is warranted because engaging in an intentional, rational deliberation requires that a person operates under a certain conception of what she is doing. Moran emphasizes this thought in his analysis of akrasia when he remarks that “One must see one’s deliberation as the expression and development of one’s belief and will, not as an activity one pursues in the hope that it will have some influence on one’s eventual belief and will.”<sup>13</sup> In order for a person to be rationally deliberating about what she ought to believe, rather than, say, merely reciting a list of evidence, a person has to see her belief as bound to the outcome of her deliberation.<sup>14</sup> And just as someone who concludes that p will be aware that she believes that p because she is one who has concluded that p, someone who

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<sup>13</sup> Moran (2001), p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> While rational deliberation requires a certain “binding” of one’s belief to the outcome of the evidence, it is certainly possible for a person can unbind her belief to this conclusion. She may not believe that p once the evidence is in, saying something like “It looks like the evidence shows that the defendant is guilty, but I have fallen in love with the defendant and I simply can’t believe it.” But a person who stops short of claiming that she believes that p after concluding that the evidence supports p can no longer be conceiving of what she is doing as deliberating in order to determine what to believe, and will certainly not believe what she does as a result of her deliberation.

concludes that p will be aware of binding her belief to the evidence because she is the one who bound it. Moreover, she will be aware that the belief that results from her conclusion has a certain history that connects it to her judgment about what the evidence supports because she is the one who so-judged. When a person is aware both that she believes that p and that her belief that p is the result of her rational deliberation, there is nothing more required for her to be aware that she takes herself to good reasons for believing p.<sup>15</sup> When a person has concluded that p as the result of her rational deliberation, she will have within her perspective not only that p is the case, but also that she believes that p *as the result of her rational deliberation*, and thus that she has good reasons for believing p.

It may be helpful to return once again to Zac's deliberation to illustrate the point. We might imagine that after the case is over, Zac's friend Zoe asks him, "When you voted 'guilty', how did you know you had good reasons for doing so?" One way Zac could respond to Zoe's question is by giving an account of his first-order deliberation, simply going through the details of the case that led to his conclusion: "All the evidence supported only one possibility. The defendant was guilty." Insofar as an account of his first-order deliberation suffices as an answer to the question "Do you have good reasons for believing that p?", and it certainly seems to, it is clear that in giving that account Zac takes himself to be describing his reasons for believing p.

Consider, also, that it would be very odd for Zoe to respond by saying "Yes, that does look like it is what the evidence supports. But do you have good reasons for thinking that the defendant is guilty?" If Zoe were to ask such a question, Zac's response could very well be something like "Weren't you listening? I just explained my reasons. Of course I have good

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<sup>15</sup> There is a parallel here between what I am claiming and Moran's notion that rationally endorsing p entails being able to self-ascribe the belief that p. To use Moran's terms, concluding a rational deliberation results in the formation of a belief that one has rationally endorsed, and provided one is operating rationally, the rational endorsement itself is itself a "mode of self-knowledge."

reasons for believing that the defendant was guilty!” For, after giving an account of his deliberation, Zac simply doesn’t take there to be any additional question about whether or not he has good reasons for believing that the defendant is guilty. But he would do this only if the judgment that he has good reasons for believing that p is already within his perspective.

Furthermore, we don’t just think that Zac *can* answer Zoe’s question by giving an account of his deliberation. We *expect* that a person who gives p as the conclusion of his rational deliberation takes himself to have good reasons for believing that p. Suppose Zoe says this: “Well, from what you say, clearly you think you have good reasons for believing that the defendant is guilty.” Zac responds, “I said no such thing! I merely gave my reasons for concluding that the defendant is guilty.” Now it is Zoe’s turn to be puzzled. It seems as though Zac *ought* to take himself to have good reasons for believing that p if he really does believe that p as the conclusion of his rational deliberation.

When Zac concludes that the defendant is guilty as the result of his rational deliberation, he does not need to do any further reasoning or make any further judgment beyond what he has already done in his deliberations about p in order to be in a position to claim that he has good reasons for believing p. He can point directly to his first-order deliberation as the evidence for the second-order claim, and when he encounters the question “Do I have good reasons for believing p?” he does not need to discover anything about his own doxastic states. He can simply assert “I have good reasons for believing p” straight-off, as it were, without having to consider anything further. His own judgment about the reasonableness of his belief is already within his own view as the person who has already so-judged. And a person counts as having this second-order perspective even if his thoughts and the content of his rational deliberation concern entirely first-order matters that pertain to p without referring to himself at all.