

LSU PHIL 4941 / Spring 2016 / John Protevi

<http://www.protevi.com/john/PhilMind>

Classroom use only.

Tamar Szabó Gendler, "Alief and Belief," *Journal of Philosophy* 105 (10): 634-663 (2008)

<http://www.pgrim.org/philosophersannual/pa28articles/gendleraliefbelief.pdf>

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#### ABSTRACT

ALIEF: a mental state with associative-linked content that is RAB (representational, affective, and behavioral) and (consciously or unconsciously) activated by (internal or external) environmental features. Alief is more primitive than belief or imagination, as it directly motivates behavior response patterns, whereas belief motivates in conjunction with desire (recall how FP is based on belief plus desire).

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#### STRUCTURE

0. Four opening examples
1. Introducing Alief
  - 1.1. Belief-behavior mismatch and belief-discordant alief
  - 1.2. A provisional characteristic of alief
  - 1.3. Examples and usage
2. Alief and other attitude
  - 2.1. Alief, belief, and imagination
  - 2.2. Alief and behavior
3. Automaticity
4. Alief, persuasion, and habit

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#### ARGUMENT

0. Four opening examples:
  - a. belief-behavior mismatches:
  - b. the mental states all have RAB content that should not have been activated if beliefs were in control of RAB.
- 1) Introducing Alief
  - a) Belief-behavior mismatch and belief-discordant alief
    - i) Not covered by
      - (1) Deliberate deception
      - (2) Self-deception
      - (3) Doubt or uncertainty
      - (4) Temporary forgetting
    - ii) Rather, the alief experience
      - (1) Activates different "affective, cognitive, and behavioral association-patterns" from those in which there is a belief-behavior match

- (2) Discussion of psychological mechanisms
  - (a) Belief-behavior matching
  - (b) Belief-behavior mismatch
    - (i) Visual input activates
      - 1. Affective responses (anxiety, disgust, fear ...)
      - 2. Motor routines (gagging, freezing ...)
    - (ii) Visual-vestibular mismatch
  - iii) Belief-discordant alief: RAB content counter to beliefs
- b) A provisional characterization of alief
  - i) Alief: associative, action-generating, affect-laden, arational, automatic, agnostic about content, shared with animals, antecedent (developmentally and conceptually) to other cognitive attitudes.
  - ii) Repeats definition from abstract (adding “occurrent or dispositional”) then comments on each aspect: important points
    - (1) Aliefs activate motor responses, making it more likely they are actually performed
    - (2) Aliefs can be dispositional: non-actual, but potential, so that able to be triggered
      - (a) JP: this is really important for me: our experiences lay down alief dispositions, but our experiences are socially patterned, so that our RAB potentials are laid down in accord with our societies. This is interestingly very close to Deleuze and Guattari’s “desiring production,” where social patterns are affectively-cognitively “invested” by individuals.
      - (b) JP: this is not to say, of course, that societies with multiple practices don’t produce multiple and conflicting (though sometimes reinforcing) experiences and hence multiple alief dispositions.
  - c) Examples and usage
- 2) Alief and other attitudes
  - a) Alief, belief, and imagination
    - i) Alief is not a propositional attitude, but we can have a loose sense of “I alieve that p”
    - ii) Alief does not accept or hold-as-true the state-of-affairs expressed in the R
    - iii) Alief involves activating associative chains, and that happens regardless of the attitude you have toward the content activating the associations
    - iv) This means alief is “hyperopaque”:
      - (1) Does not permit substitution of coreferential expressions
      - (2) For example, a “not poison” sign and a “safe to eat” sign both refer to sugar but they have different aliefs: the “not poison” sign triggers alarm and hesitancy by association with “poison”
    - v) Also that alief is beyond voluntary control
      - (1) We might be able to train ourselves to keep dispositional aliefs from becoming occurrent
      - (2) But we really aren’t totally free in our contracting dispositional aliefs as they depend
        - (a) On our experiences (recall above the point about social patterns)
        - (b) Genetic predispositions (disgust at vomit, for instance, is pretty good candidate for being hard-wired – or at least very robust given a very wide range of early experiences)
  - b) Alief and behavior
    - i) The “purely motivational view of belief”
      - (1) A belief disposes the subject to behave in ways that would promote satisfaction of desires if content of belief were true
      - (2) There are a number of objections here
    - ii) The real problem however is the idea that it’s belief that motivates action
      - (1) Aristotle and Hume knew this

(2) Contemporary psychology is turning to this problem

3) Automaticity

- a) Recent psych experiments show “behavior-inducing mental representations may be activated by awakening associative patterns linked to objects, stereotypes, protocols, or mental image”
- b) What they show is that inducing different sorts of occurrent alief, with their RAB repertoires.
- c) “All depictive representations – even those we explicitly disavow as false – feed into our behavioral repertoires, and it is only through a process of conscious or habit-governed inhibition that representations whose accuracy we endorse come to play a distinctive role in governing our action”
  - i) In other words, you can be primed to behave in a certain way even by a representation we think of as false
  - ii) And you need to interrupt the behavior-priming to keep it from becoming occurrent

4) Alief, persuasion, and habit.

- a) Hume example: by not having details to project, the Athenians didn’t alief the plan, and so their abstract rational commitment to justice could prevail
- b) Aristotle:
  - i) Bring our alief-producing habitual encounters in line with our reflective beliefs
  - ii) In that way we can take advantage of alief-belief-behavior concordance: we want to do that which our beliefs tell us we should do
  - iii) JP: Here’s the social patterning bit: we have to design institutions that will maximize the probability of experiences producing aliefs reinforcing a commitment to justice.