



Believing and Accepting (Philosophical Studies Series)

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(1) Beliefs are involuntary, and not normally subject to direct voluntary control. For instance I cannot believe at will that my trousers are on fire, or that the Dalai Lama is a living God, even if you pay me a large amount of money for believing such things. (2) Beliefs are normally shaped by evidence for what is believed, unless they are, in some sense, irrational. In general a belief is rational if it is proportioned to the degree of evidence that one has for its truth. In this sense, one often says that "beliefs aim at truth" . This is why it is, on the face of it, irrational to believe against the evidence that one has. A subject whose beliefs are not shaped by a concern for their truth, but by what she wants to be the case, is more or less a wishful thinker or a self-deceiver. (3) Beliefs are context independent, in the sense that at one time a subject believes something or does not believe it; she does not believe it relative to one context and not relative to another. For instance if I believe that Paris is a polluted city, I cannot believe that on Monday and not on Tuesday; that would be a change of belief, or a change of mind, but not a case of believing one thing in one context and another thing in another context. If I believe something, the belief is more or less permanent across various contexts.



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