

Review of: "Either you know or you've gotta believe"

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I will keep this fairly informal: I will address the author in the second person, and I will leave my comments roughly in the order in which they occurred to me while reading. None of them are meant to be decisive counter-arguments. My aim will merely be to indicate where the argument might have been articulated or defended in a better way.

First, it might have been helpful to say a little more clearly in the beginning what “belief” means in the present context. In some cases, belief is understood to be mere opinion: that someone believes something means that they *merely* believe it, as opposed to actually knowing it. In other cases, someone’s belief might amount to their considered expert judgment, which might very well also be accepted as knowledge. In some contexts, knowledge and belief are categorically different: To know a person and to believe a person are clearly very different things (because knowing a person is knowing who they are, whereas believing a person is agreeing with what they say). In other contexts, e.g. in Aquinas, belief means faith, and knowledge means science.

You mention some such distinctions later on, in passing: occurrent vs. dispositional belief, “thin” vs. “thick” belief. But even then you continue as if the question was simply whether knowledge entails belief, where it might rather be: what kind of belief, if any, is involved in what sort of knowledge. In any case, I think that drawing clear distinctions between different possible uses of “believe” is important for two reasons: (1) To avoid initial confusion about what the exact topic is, (2) to strengthen the main thesis.

Your main thesis, I take it, is that knowledge does not entail belief. This thesis is weak if we take “belief” in a special sense. Of course, knowledge does not entail faith, but this is not what any proponent of the entailment thesis has in mind. Likewise, that I know someone does not entail that I believe them, and that I know something does not entail that I *merely* believe it. Again, this is not what any proponent of the entailment thesis has in mind.

So it is one thing to show that there are plausible and important uses of “believe” where someone may know something (or someone) without believing it (or them), and a quite different thing to refute the entailment thesis or the JTB account of knowledge. Certainly, anyone who articulates and defends the entailment thesis or a JTB account will simply respond by saying that they use “believe” in a suitable sense, which they might define as “entertaining a proposition as true” or “being disposed to affirm a proposition when asked”, or whatever they deem suitable. In general, where knowledge and belief appear to come apart, the entailment / JTB theorist may always argue that these uses of “knowledge” and “belief” are not relevant.

I myself am not a JTB theorist, and I think it is important to account for the intuition that Myers-Schulz and Schwitzgebel

and others articulate: that there is a sense in which belief is more involved than knowledge, so that one might know something without believing this same thing. It is important to register that there are forms of knowledge (e.g. practical knowledge, personal knowledge, ...) that have nothing to do with certain forms of belief, and forms of belief (faith, mere opinion, judgment, ...) that are not entailed by certain forms of knowledge. But, to repeat, proponents of the entailment thesis will probably not want to deny this.

Let me move on to how you support your thesis: by appeal to authority and by argument. As for the first, I am not convinced the authorities you quote support your point. In *Summa Theologiae* IIa IIae 1,5, which Antognazza is referring to, Aquinas is clearly talking about religious belief, i.e. faith (*fides*), and it is quite clear that he is operating with a rather involved notion of faith, which he takes more or less from St. Paul: "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (*Hebrews* 11:1). That the conviction of things not seen is not entailed by knowledge should be obvious.

I am less confident about Cook Wilson, but as far as I can see, he merely says that when someone knows something, it is sort of misleading to say that they believe it, because "believe" in that context is naturally taken to mean "merely believe". Also, what he says about judging, that it involves a decision, need not also apply to belief. After all, he writes: "In the case of a given belief, for example, that A is B, as long as we hesitate to call it knowledge, or at least betray ourselves by using the word belief and avoiding the word knowledge, we cannot really have decided that A is B unless, on reflection, we can say we know A is B" (*Statement and Inference*, p. 101). If this is true, *knowledge* involves a decision, but *belief* does not. Cook Wilson does not seem to support the idea that belief involves a decision.

As for the long quote from Ramsey, I find it odd that you present it as evidence that knowledge differs from belief - Ramsey clearly says about belief what you want to say about knowledge: that it need not involve any decision or judgment. As far as I can tell, Ramsey's point is that *both* belief and knowledge may be purely dispositional.

If Aquinas, Cook Wilson, and Ramsey do not support your point, it needs independent support. But at this crucial point, what you say is not helpful: "To believe is to think, to know does not actively involve thinking or deciding. It is stating a fact it does not involve a process of intellectual activity, it is only stating that such and such is the case." If knowing is *stating a fact*, how can it not involve thinking or deciding? Stating a fact clearly involves something like thought and decision - no one states facts without deciding or thinking anything. There must be a better way of expressing your intuition.

Your main argument is this: Belief requires action, knowledge does not, therefore knowledge does not entail belief. But does belief really require action? This needs to be shown. That others suggest it is not proof, and as I have pointed out, it is not even clear that others do suggest it. So you need to prove it. Is it supposed to be a conceptual truth? Can we not conceive of a case where someone mentally assents to something and does not at all act on it? That we know many things that we don't act on is, of course, eminently true. But there is nothing absurd about the claim that we believe just as many things, in some sense of "believe", without acting on them. Sure, people don't usually act on their knowledge that Pluto is no longer a planet, except that they might talk about it. But then, the same is true for their *belief* that Pluto is no longer a planet. Both of these have the same practical (in)significance.

Let me end by returning to the point I made in the beginning. After quoting Ramsey, you motivate your position by contrasting knowledge with *present* or *current* beliefs, and knowing things with *forming* beliefs. Sure, if we take belief to be present, current, or explicitly formed at some point, and if we take knowledge to be dispositional or implicit, then knowledge does not entail belief. But this is not a refutation of the entailment thesis, not any more than the point that knowledge does not entail religious belief. The reason why dispositional knowledge does not entail current belief is simply that “dispositional” does not entail “current”. The entailment thesis clearly ought to be stated as follows: dispositional knowledge entails dispositional belief, present knowledge entails present belief, etc. Your argument might succeed if you can show convincingly that belief *must* be present or current, or that knowledge *cannot* be present or current. I don’t see this case being made.