

A PROCEDURE FOR COMPARING BELIEFS

Comparing beliefs requires identifying the belief that does the best job of providing the guidance you seek. For the sake of clarity, this procedure assumes that you'll be comparing two beliefs¹. It assumes that you're looking to the beliefs under consideration to satisfy the same need.²

PREPARING TO COMPARE HOW WELL THE BELIEFS IN QUESTION SERVE YOU

- 1) If you haven't read *The Trouble with Truth* and *Articles 1-20* and completed the exercises at the end of each numbered article, do so. Unless you're adequately prepared, the results of this procedure are likely to be worthless or misleading.
- 2) Obtain a copy of *The Periodic Table of the Beliefs with Comparison Tools* by sending a request to barnet.feingold@yahoo.com or barnet.feingold@hotmail.com.
- 3) Print a copy of that document.
- 4) Record the to-be-evaluated beliefs in the space provided at the top of that document's second page.
- 5) In the space provided on that document, finish the sentence, "I want the belief I choose to tell me . . ." Your first answer should pinpoint the most important issue you hope the belief will help you with. Include additional issues only if they're nearly as important. Three spaces have been provided.
- 6) Note that accurate belief assessment requires identifying the guidance you want the belief you choose to provide *before* identifying the guidance it actually provides.

DETERMINING THE NATURE OF THE GUIDANCE YOU WANT

STEP 1: DETERMINING WHETHER YOU WANT THE BELIEF YOU CHOOSE TO PROVIDE INFORMATION OR REASSURANCE

- 1) Determine the number of situations in which you want the belief you choose to
 - a) provide information to help you understand the situation, decide what to expect, figure out how to get things done, evaluate the vices and virtues of a situation, imagine what might be better, or establish goals.
 - b) enhance your commitment to openness and objectivity, your ability to deal effectively with reality (including the situation in question), or your devotion to promulgating an ethos that supports and values openness and objectivity.
 - c) help you *feel* more comfortable or confident (e.g., help you *feel* more informed, competent, powerful, righteous, safe, secure, connected, or valued), albeit without *making you* more informed, competent, powerful, righteous, safe, secure, connected or valued.

¹ It may easily be adapted to compare additional beliefs.

² An approach to choosing between beliefs that you expect to satisfy differing needs will be described in a separate document.

- d) help you contribute to creating, enlarging, or sustaining an ethos, social group, religious group, or political group that supports and values beliefs you find comforting or reassuring . . . or help you *feel* that you're doing so.
- 2) Tally the number of times you hope that the belief you choose will contribute to a) or b) (i.e., the number of times you described yourself as wanting the belief you choose to provide information), the number of times you described yourself as wanting the belief you choose to contribute to c) or d) (i.e., the number of times you described yourself as wanting the belief you choose to provide reassurance), and the number of times you described yourself as wanting the belief you choose to provide both information and reassurance.
- 3) Using that tally, determine whether you want the belief you choose to provide information, reassurance, or both. Check the appropriate box(es) on the evaluation tool.
- 4) If the exercise above suggests that you hope the belief you choose will be informative, go to **STEP 2 (INF)**; If the exercise above suggests that you hope the belief you choose will be reassuring, go to **STEP 2 (REAS)**.

STEP 2 (INF): DETERMINING THE VIEWPOINT YOU WANT THE BELIEF YOU CHOOSE TO ADDRESS . . . IF YOU WANT THAT BELIEF TO BE INFORMATIVE

- 1) Ask yourself whether you want the belief you choose to help you:
 - a) commit yourself to being objective (that is, to being genuine, to creating and sustaining noetic relationships, and/or to facilitating open communication). If so, you want the belief you choose to provide guidance regarding Existential Viewpoint issues.
 - b) understand the nature of reality. If so, you want the belief you choose to provide guidance regarding Realist Viewpoint issues.
 - c) accurately judge the goodness of current realities. If so, you want the belief you choose to provide guidance regarding Ethical Viewpoint issues.
 - d) imagine what improvement or perfection might look like, vividly and with discipline. If so, you want the belief you choose to provide guidance regarding Visionary Viewpoint issues.
 - e) determine what your visions of improvement or perfection demand of you and/or the constraints they inspire you to ignore when pursuing the improvement or perfection you envision. If so, you want the belief you choose to provide guidance regarding Quest and Commitment Viewpoint issues.
- 2) Check the box on the evaluation tool corresponding to the viewpoint of the issue(s) you want the belief you choose to address.
- 3) Go to **STEP 3**

STEP 2 (REAS): DETERMINING THE VIEWPOINT YOU WANT THE BELIEF YOU CHOOSE TO ADDRESS . . . IF YOU WANT THAT BELIEF TO BE REASSURING

- 1) Ask yourself whether you want it to help you:

- a) become someone who can effectively reassure him/herself (i.e., someone who can confidently cherry-pick facts, distort data and evidence, view fallacy as reason, and/or forge relationships and enforce rules of discourse that support your illusions). If so, you want the belief you choose to provide guidance regarding Existential Viewpoint issues.
 - b) create the illusion that you understand the nature of reality, especially if that alleged understanding supports moral judgments and other beliefs you find comforting. If so, you want the belief you choose to provide guidance regarding Realist Viewpoint issues.
 - c) convince yourself that your moral judgments – regardless how questionable or self-serving – accurately reflect the goodness of what you believe to be current realities, make you feel good about yourself (e.g., by supporting visions of perfection you find reassuring), or endorse your desire to see, do, and be whatever you wish. If so, you want the belief you choose to provide guidance regarding Ethical Viewpoint issues.
 - d) convince yourself that your reassuring visions of perfection, however fanciful and improbable, are thoroughly justified, make you feel good about yourself, and/or justify complete commitment and complete freedom to act any way you might wish. If so, you want the belief you choose to provide guidance regarding Visionary Viewpoint issues.
 - e) convince yourself that your commitments are right, righteous, and justify anything you might wish to do or be. If so, you want the belief you chose to provide guidance regarding Quest and Commitment Viewpoint issues.
- 2) Check the box on the evaluation tool corresponding to the viewpoint of the issue(s) you want the belief you choose to address.
- 3) Go to **STEP 3**

STEP 3: DETERMINING THE PRECISION OF THE GUIDANCE YOU WANT THE BELIEF YOU CHOOSE TO ADDRESS (WHETHER YOU ASSUME IT TO BE INFORMATIVE OR REASSURING)

- 1) Reflect on whether you want the belief you choose to provide . . .
 - a) guidance that, if followed, makes it likely you'll achieve your aims. If so, you want the belief you choose to be precise.
 - b) guidance that, if followed, increases your chances of achieving your goals without necessarily making it likely you'll succeed. If so, you want the belief you choose to be imprecise.
 - c) guidance that encourages you to attend to issues that are probably worth your while. . . albeit without providing information about what's likely to happen or how to achieve your goals. If so, you want the belief you choose to be a rule of thumb.
 - d) guidance that shapes your values and/or views of reality in ways that make it appear true . . . without providing guidance that helps achieve your goals. If so, you want the belief you choose to be a catalytic narrative.
- 2) Check the box on the evaluation tool corresponding to the degree of precision you assume the belief to possess.
- 3) Go to **STEP 4**

DETERMINING THE NATURE OF THE GUIDANCE YOUR BELIEF ACTUALLY PROVIDES

STEP 4: DETERMINING THE NEED(S) SATISFIED BY EACH OF THE BELIEFS THAT ARE COMPETING FOR YOUR CREDENCE

COMPLETE STEPS 4-7 FOR EACH COMPETING BELIEF

- 1) Use **A TOOL TO HELP YOU IDENTIFY THE DESIRE(S) THAT MOTIVATE YOUR BELIEFS**, which you can find at the end of Article 7, to determine the need(s) that you look to each competing belief to satisfy. (A reformatted version of that document, which is easier to print and use, is available from barnet.feingold@hotmail.com or barnet.feingold@yahoo.com.)
- 2) Check the box or boxes on the evaluation tool that correspond to your findings.
- 3) Go to **STEP 5**.

STEP 5: DETERMINING THE VIEWPOINT THAT IS ACTUALLY PROPER TO THE ISSUE EACH COMPETING BELIEF ADDRESSES

- 1) If you view the belief as informative, go to **STEP 5 (INF)**; if you view the belief as reassuring, go to **STEP 5 (REAS)**.

STEP 5 (INF): DETERMINING THE VIEWPOINT OF AN INFORMATIVE BELIEF

- 1) Ask yourself whether the competing belief helps you:
 - a) commit yourself to being objective (that is, to being genuine, to creating and sustaining noetic relationships, and/or to facilitating open communication). If so, the belief under consideration provides guidance regarding Existential Viewpoint issues.
 - b) understand the nature of reality. If so, the belief under consideration provides guidance regarding Realist Viewpoint issues.
 - c) accurately judge the goodness of current realities. If so, the belief under consideration provides guidance regarding Ethical Viewpoint issues.
 - d) imagine, within the constraints of prudence and logic, what improvement or perfection might look like. If so, the belief under consideration provides guidance regarding Visionary Viewpoint issues.
 - e) determine what your visions of improvement or perfection demand of you and/or identify the mundane constraints you can justifiably ignore when pursuing the improvement or perfection you envision. If so, the belief under consideration provides guidance regarding Quest and Commitment Viewpoint issues.
- 2) Enter a tentative check in the box on the evaluation tool corresponding to the viewpoint of the issue(s) the belief under consideration appears, at first blush, to address
- 3) Identify and document the lower-viewpoint beliefs that support the belief in question.

- a) Determine (ideally, with the aid of someone who doubts or disagrees with the belief under consideration) whether the belief biases its supportive lower-viewpoint beliefs.
 - i) If the belief under consideration does not appear to bias the lower-viewpoint beliefs that support it, affirm the tentative mark on the evaluation tool and proceed to **STEP 6**.
 - ii) If the belief in question appears to bias the lower-viewpoint beliefs that support it, negate the tentative mark on the evaluation tool and check the box on the evaluation tool corresponding to the Existential Viewpoint. Proceed to **STEP 6**.

STEP 5 (REAS): DETERMINING THE VIEWPOINT OF A REASSURING BELIEF

- 1) If **STEP 4** suggests that you're seeking reassurance from the belief you choose, negate the mark on the evaluation tool (if necessary) and check the box on the evaluation tool corresponding to the Existential Viewpoint. Note that all reassuring beliefs are proper to the Existential Viewpoint because they bias the lower-viewpoint beliefs that support them.
- 2) Proceed to **STEP 6**.

STEP 6: DETERMINING THE PRECISION THAT, IN REALITY, CHARACTERIZES A BELIEF

- 1) If you view the competing belief as informative, go to **STEP 6 (INF)**; if you view the competing belief as reassuring, go to **STEP 6 (REAS)**.

STEP 6 (INF): DETERMINING THE PRECISION OF INFORMATIVE BELIEFS

- 1) Reflect on the guidance the belief in question provides.
 - a) If it
 - i) provides you with guidance that, if followed, demonstrably makes it likely you'd achieve your aims, it is a precise belief. However, as you'll see below, that status is conditional.
 - ii) provides you with guidance that, if followed, demonstrably increases the chance that you'll achieve your goals – but doesn't make it likely that you'd do so, it is an imprecise belief. However, as you'll see below, that status is conditional.
 - iii) encourages you to attend to issues that are likely worthwhile to think about – but doesn't provide guidance about what's likely to happen or how to achieve your goals, it is a rule of thumb. However, as you'll see below, that status is conditional.
 - iv) shapes your values and/or views of reality without providing guidance that helps you achieve your goals, it is a catalytic narrative.
 - b) Record the conditional precision of the belief by checking (ideally, in pencil) the appropriate box on the evaluation tool.

- c) If the belief is catalytic and not already classified as proper to the Existential Viewpoint, reclassify it as Existential.
 - i) If necessary, change the box checked on the evaluation tool.
- d) Use the *Periodic Table of the Beliefs* to determine whether the viewpoint to which the belief is conditionally proper can, in fact, be as precise as tentatively claimed. If not, reassess the precision of the belief.
 - i) If necessary, change the box checked on the evaluation tool.
- e) Attend to the ambiguity of the lower-viewpoint beliefs that provide critical logical grounding for the belief in question. If one of those beliefs is categorized as more ambiguous than the belief in question, change (i.e. appropriately reduce) the conditional precision of the belief in question.
- f) If necessary, change the box checked on the evaluation tool.
- g) Go to **STEP 7**

STEP 6 (REAS): DETERMINING THE PRECISION OF REASSURING BELIEFS

- 1) All reassuring beliefs are difficult-to-impossible to falsify. They are thus appropriately classified as catalytic. Document the precision of the belief by checking the appropriate box on the evaluation tool.
- 2) Go to **STEP 7**

STEP 7: DETERMINING WHICH COMPETING BELIEF SERVES YOU BEST

- 1) Complete **PART 2: CONTEMPLATING ASSUMPTION-REALITY DISPARITIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS** on the evaluation tool.