

BELIEF

WHAT IS A BELIEF?



HELLO AND WELCOME

- It is common to hear that a belief is 'something accepted without evidence' or 'I don't have any beliefs'.
- The former might be linked to an erroneous or biased reading of the top google definition, and the latter is just plain wrong.
- With this SciPhi short, we will be exploring the basics of belief.



WHAT IS A BELIEF?

- A belief can be defined a number of ways, that are all essentially saying the same thing. We will explore a few tonight with examples.
 - Something accepted as true
 - Something thought most likely
 - A positive attitude towards a proposition
 - Something concluded is the case

SOMETHING ACCEPTED AS TRUE

- By accepted as true we are not making the claim that it definitely is true, just that we accept that it probably is.
- For example:
 - If I tell you my name is Joe, and you accept that, you hold the belief my name is Joe.
 - If you check your phone for the weather forecast and accept the prediction, you believe the prediction (and will most likely change you plans if they are weather dependent.
 - If you accept your friend's story that they went to the beach at the weekend as true, you believe they went to the beach at the weekend.
- Put in those terms, it's quite simple to see we have plenty of beliefs, right?

SOMETHING THOUGHT MOST LIKELY

- By most likely we are in to the realms of probability.
- In other words, if there was a 3 in 4 chance something would happen, it is the most likely event to happen.
- For example:
 - If you think it likely it will rain tomorrow, you believe it will rain tomorrow.
 - If you think it likely that you will injure yourself doing something dangerous, you believe doing something dangerous will cause you injury
 - If you think your preferred sports team has a good chance at beating their opponent in the next game, you believe they will beat their opponent
- Again, it is quite easy to see how we actually have a number of beliefs.

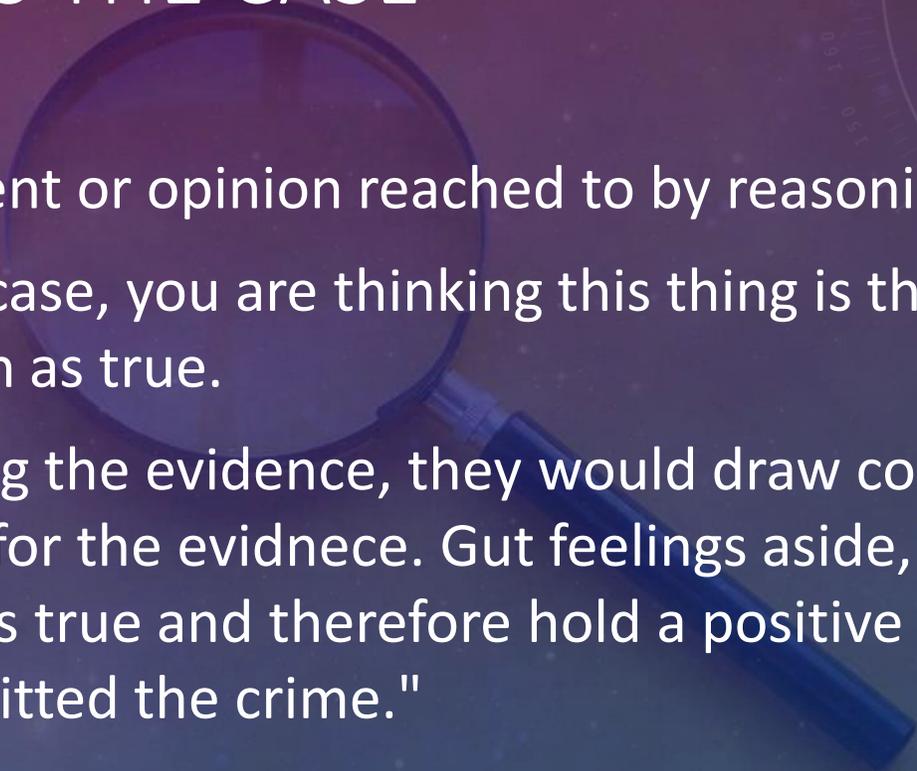
A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS A PROPOSITION

- A proposition is a truth-apt statement. It can be true or false.
- For example
 - The Light Switch is On: True = on, False = Off
 - It is Raining Outside: True = it is raining, False = it is not raining
 - God Exists: True = God Exists, False = God Does Not Exist
- Propositions can be expressed in various ways, but usually are the flat proposition or phrased as a question, like "Does God Exist?"
- Please note, a question is not a proposition, but it can hold propositional content.
- Now that we are clear on what we mean by proposition, we can move on to attitude.

A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS A PROPOSITION

- A positive attitude is essentially one of agreement or affirmation.
- If we were to affirm the proposition "God Exists" or propositional question "Does God Exist?" We would essentially be saying "Yes, God Exists."
- By affirming, we are saying "it is true god exists" aka We are saying we believe God exists.
- This is not a claim of absolute certainty or knowledge, just what we think is most likely the case.
- If we answer the proposition "NO" we are essentially saying we think it false. If "God Exists" is false, we are essentially holding the inverse positive attitude, that "God does not Exist" is true.
- You can also be unsure, and not think either yes or no. This is known as suspending judgement.

SOMETHING CONCLUDED IS THE CASE



- A conclusion is usually seen a judgement or opinion reached to by reasoning.
- When you conclude something is the case, you are thinking this thing is the most likely, you are accepting the conclusion as true.
- If we think about a detective examining the evidence, they would draw conclusions about the most probable explanation for the evidence. Gut feelings aside, they would usually accept this conclusion as true and therefore hold a positive attitude towards the proposition "Agent X committed the crime."
- Of course, a conclusion doesn't need to be as well reasoned as this, in fact, the reasoning speaks more to rationality which I will discuss in a future video.

SO CAN YOU HAVE NO BELIEFS?

- If you can understand that a belief is anything we accept as true, it is pretty impossible to hold no beliefs.
- Even someone saying "I hold no beliefs" essentially accepts it as true that they hold no beliefs, and therefore believes they hold no beliefs.
- If anyone truly held no beliefs they wouldn't be able to operate. Imagine not believing the floor would hold your weight, that food would sustain you, that you needed to breath etc.
- Mostly, folks who say this sort of thing are afraid of appearing irrational because they only attribute belief with beliefs they see as irrational and assume that is all beliefs. Ironically, in the process, they then hold an irrational process themselves.
- Rationality is a big part of belief, but not all beliefs are irrational. This is a future topic.

SUMMARY

- Whilst a belief can be defined in a number of different ways, they are all essentially saying the same thing.
 - Something accepted as true
 - Something thought most likely
 - A positive attitude towards a proposition
 - Something concluded is the case
- It is impossible not to have any beliefs, because even thinking you hold no beliefs is a belief.
- A belief by default is not something irrational, and we will cover the rationality of beliefs in a future episode.