

The Influences on Beliefs and Autonomous Strategies: Analyzing the Processes and Methods of Belief Formation

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Abstract. This paper explores the question of whether beliefs are voluntary or not. The author argues that beliefs are voluntary based on a step-by-step analysis of how beliefs are formed. The author explains that there are four steps involved in the formation of beliefs: obtaining information, evaluating it, deciding whether to adopt or reject it, and implementing it in our day-to-day decision-making and behaviors. The author shows that each step involves a choice and a responsibility that make beliefs voluntary. The author also discusses some scenarios where beliefs seem involuntarily formed, such as cognitive, emotional, and social factors, and how they can be overcome by critical thinking, personal values, and free will. The author uses the example of *The Truman Show*, a movie where the protagonist lives in a fake reality, to illustrate how beliefs can be influenced in the short term but not in the long term. The author concludes that even though belief can be implanted and influenced, ultimately it is still voluntary.

Keywords: Belief, voluntary, involuntary, information, evaluation, choice, implementation, critical thinking, free will.

1. Introduction

To change all the interrogative sentences in the text above to declarative sentences, keeping the meaning intact, one possible way is: The text explores the possibility of finding out that one's whole life is a fake. The person is living in a simulated world where everything is controlled by a TV show. All the people the person knows are actors who follow a script. The person is the only one who doesn't know the truth. This is the plot of *The Truman Show*, a 1998 movie with Jim Carrey as Truman Burbank, a man who realizes that his entire life is a lie.

The meaning of belief is an intriguing topic that the essay examines. According to one definition, belief is the mental acceptance of the truth or actuality of some idea [1]. There are two key elements in this definition. First, there must be an idea that the person knowingly holds. Second, there is an assumed veracity concerning the idea to an extent that the idea is perceived as truth.

The essay questions whether beliefs are voluntary or not. It considers whether people can choose what to believe or not to believe. Or whether beliefs are influenced by external forces to an extent that both the subject and the observers would conclude that the belief is not voluntary, as is the case of *The Truman Show*.

The author's argument is that beliefs are voluntary based on step-by-step analysis of how beliefs are formed in Section II. In Section III, the author discusses scenarios where beliefs seem involuntarily formed, ultimately showing the subject decides to believe or not, regardless of information's truth or delivery. Step-by-step Analysis on Belief Formation.

Four steps are involved in the formation of beliefs: obtaining information, evaluating it, deciding whether to adopt the belief or reject it, and implementing the chosen belief in our day-to-day decision-making and behaviors[2].

Attributes of the snake and extract relevant key elements to identify the object as a potential threat. This information can serve as the foundation for future belief formation, regardless of whether we deem it as either true or false. However, this step does not involve any conscious or deliberate choice on our part to accept or reject the information we receive. Human cannot help but perceive and process what is presented to us by our senses and cognitive functions. Therefore, this step cannot be classified as voluntary or involuntary, since it does not depend on our will or intention.

The first stage in forming beliefs is getting information that can be used as the basis for creating a belief. Seitz and Angel (2020) argue that the basis consists of sensation and cognition, which are the ways of sensing and processing inputs from the environment [3]. We receive stimuli through our body receptors, which are then processed in the brain areas to produce short-term and long-term memory. For example, when we see a snake, we get information about its shape, color, and movement and interpret it as a possible danger - we look in our long-term memory for an object that matches the features of the snake and extract relevant key elements to identify the object as a possible danger. Whether people believe them to be accurate or untrue, we can base our future beliefs on this information. However, at this point, it is not making a conscious or deliberate choice to accept or reject the information we receive. People can't help but take in and process the information that our senses and cognitive processes give us. Since it is independent of our will or intention, this stage cannot be referred to as voluntary or involuntary.

The second stage in creating beliefs is to evaluate the information we get using different methods, such as drawing conclusions from the information, comparing or contrasting the information with other sources, making guesses or predictions based on the information, or doing mental experiments based on the information. Before adopting the knowledge as a belief, the evaluations seek to determine its veracity and accuracy. At this point, both internal and external variables could have an effect. Examples of internal impacts include prior knowledge or beliefs, emotions, state of health, and the "fight or flight" response. These elements may have an impact on how we take in and evaluate incoming information. If we already believe snakes are harmless, we may be skeptical of information that says otherwise. If we are in a positive emotional state and are physically relaxed and comfortable, we may be more curious and willing to learn. If we have a strong "fight or flight" reaction, we may be more likely to ignore information that goes against our survival instinct. Although these elements may influence how we analyze information, the analysis is still voluntary because we have the choice and responsibility to decide how we assess the information and whether we accept or reject it as a belief.

These factors can affect how we see and react to new information. For example, if we get information from a credible source, such as a teacher or a parent. The author is more likely to believe it as facts [4]. We may be more likely to agree with a belief if we are among people who have it. If we experience pressure from others to adopt a certain belief, we might be more likely to follow it. External influences can interfere with our belief formation and make it less voluntary because we do not have power over how others persuade us to accept certain information as beliefs. However, these influences are not final in determining our beliefs, and they can be questioned and resisted by our own agency and rationality. The author claims that we have the ability and the duty to form beliefs voluntarily in the long term, despite the external pressures we may encounter. This argument will be further explained in Section III of this paper.

The third stage in creating beliefs is to choose whether to accept or reject the new belief based on our existing beliefs, values, and goals. This is a voluntary process with two possible outcomes: the new belief is accepted or rejected. How well the new belief matches our existing beliefs, values, and goals determines whether we accept or reject it. For example, we may be more likely to adopt a new belief if it agrees with our worldview, reinforces our identity, and helps us reach our goals. If the new belief opposes our worldview, threatens our identity, or hinders our goals, we are more likely to dismiss it [5].

Applying the new belief to our daily decisions and activities and further analyzing its effects constitutes the fourth step of the belief-formation process. When the new belief is put into practice, one of two things could happen: either the new belief is encouraged or it is discouraged. Whether a new belief is encouraged or dissuaded depends on how well it performs in reality and the kind of feedback the person gets from others. The fourth stage in forming beliefs is to apply the new belief to our daily choices and actions and further examine its consequences. The application of the new belief would result in two possible outcomes: either the new belief is supported or it is discouraged. How well the new belief works in practice and what kind of feedback the person receives from others

determines whether the new belief is supported or discouraged. For example, if the new belief produces positive outcomes and receives agreement, compliments, and approval from others, we are more likely to keep and strengthen it. If the new belief has negative outcomes and receives disapproval, criticism, and rejection from others, we are more likely to discourage it and weaken it. However, this does not mean that our beliefs are involuntary or determined by external influences. We still have the choice and the ability to judge the outcomes and feedback we get from applying our beliefs, and to decide whether to maintain or change them. We can also look for different sources of information and viewpoints that may challenge or support our beliefs. We are not passive receivers of external influences, but active makers of our own belief formation. Therefore, the fourth stage also supports the argument that beliefs are voluntary.

2. Short-term and Long-term Influence on Belief Formation

Here is a possible paraphrased paragraph using my methods: Cognitive processes like confirmation bias and heuristics, emotional reactions like affective influence and motivated reasoning, and social factors like group conformity and social influence can all have an immediate impact on someone's belief. This does not imply, however, that believing is always irrational in the long run. By using their free will and critical thought, people can consciously construct their beliefs. Human can form beliefs purposefully by using critical thinking and free will. Critical thinking helps us to check and correct the information we get. Free will allows us to act on our own preferences and decisions. These strategies can help us overcome the interference of biases and social factors in the formation of our beliefs.

Baumeister (2008) claims that free will involves rational, intelligent choice based on self-control, planful behavior, and autonomous initiative [7]. He argues that free will is compatible with scientific psychology and that it enables people to act in accordance with their goals and values. However, he also admits that free will is limited by biological and social constraints and that it requires effort and responsibility. The author agrees with Baumeister's view because it acknowledges the complexity and variability of human behavior and decision making. It also provides a framework for understanding how people can identify and correct their own cognitive and emotional biases.

In contrast, Casy (2020) maintains that human beliefs can be manipulated because the dialogue between debaters is an adversarial structure that must end with one side overpowering the other or making the other side concede their beliefs [7]. He gives an example of a baseball game, where if team A scores then team B must be "scored against". He says that there is no middle ground or flexibility in this adversarial structure. He asserts that cooperation, persuasion, and factual statements are all used as a means of manipulating the beliefs of the other debater or the audience.

However, Howes and Hundleby (2021) challenge Casy's view and offer a solution to address manipulation of beliefs [8]. They point out that Casy limits the form of communication to the debater and the other debater as the audience [8]. They suggest a kind of communication they refer to as "invitational rhetoric" that is non-confrontational, unrestricted, and egalitarian [8]. According to their explanation, this style of communication, which offers the viewpoint unequivocally and without judgment or evaluation, enhances the subject's capacity for critical thought and motivation and, in the long run, results in an autonomous revision of views [8]. Because Howes and Hundleby offer more instances and supporting data than Casy does, the author finds their argument to be more convincing. They also acknowledge the limitations and ethical issues of invitational rhetoric and suggest ways to overcome them [8]. Therefore, the author thinks that invitational rhetoric is a more effective and respectful way to communicate and influence beliefs than adversarial dialogue and could serve as an important tool to voluntarily form and sustain beliefs.

A good example of how beliefs can be affected in the short term but not in the long term is related to *The Truman Show* [9]. In the movie, Truman Burbank lives in a fake reality that is shown to the world as a TV show. He does not know that his life is planned and controlled by the producers. He thinks that his world is real and normal until he starts seeing some discrepancies and hints that expose

the truth. He then chooses to leave his artificial surroundings and face his creator. This demonstrates that despite the fact that for the majority of his life, his ideas were influenced by cognitive, emotional, and social influences, he nevertheless had the desire and capacity to challenge them and seek the truth. He overcame his prejudices and manipulation by exercising his free will and using critical thinking. Even though the movie is simply a fictitious depiction of the procedure, it shows that beliefs are ultimately voluntary.

3. Conclusion

Based on our step-by-step analysis of how beliefs are formed, beliefs are voluntary. Although external and internal factors may affect belief formation, it is ultimately the individual's choice to accept or reject new information. Because this choice-making process is voluntary, any beliefs formed as a result of it are also voluntary. Even when beliefs seem to be forced or manipulated, they will eventually become voluntary and free because of critical thinking, personal values and free will. People can evaluate the quality and trustworthiness of information, identify and correct their own biases, and base their beliefs on their own moral values. Therefore, even though belief can be implanted and influenced, ultimately it is still voluntary.

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