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REPLY TO VAN GULICK

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The aim of "Attitudes as Nonentities" was to undercut what I take to be a central motivation for the Standard View of beliefs, and then to offer an alternative. I was not trying directly to refute the Standard View. Robert Van Gulick has raised a number of issues, of which I shall respond to three. I shall discuss (1) my reasons for rejecting the Standard View; (2) my reasons for denying that the casual-explanatoriness of beliefs requires that the Standard View be correct; and (3) my reasons for taking persons, not brains, to be the primary bearers of belief.

(1) Much of what I say is consistent with one version of the Standard View – the version according to which beliefs are *constituted* by brain states; yet, I reject it, and Van Gulick wants to know why. In addition to direct arguments against the Standard View that I give elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> there are two reasons for rejecting even the "constitution" version of the Standard View: The first reason is that it is a bare metaphysical thesis with no explanatory or epistemic import. Unlike supervenience – which, although theoretically interesting, does not hold between belief-properties and neural properties – constitution is simply not a theoretically interesting relation for most intentional phenomena. The fact that a contract is constituted by a piece of paper reveals nothing about the nature of contracts. And even when there is an undisputed relation of constitution between an intentionally-identified object and material elements that constitute it (as in the S&L's investments), the constituting elements typically shed no explanatory light on the intentionally-identified constituted object. Thus, there is no tension between what I say about supervenience vs. constitution in the S&L case and my rejecting the "constitution" version of the Standard View. The point, which holds in both cases, is this: if being an F is an inten-

tional property, then the constitution, *if any*, of a particular F is irrelevant to the causal-explanatoriness of being an F.

A second reason for rejecting the Standard View in all its forms is that the Standard View leaves neuroscience ultimately to determine whether anyone has ever believed anything or not. If neuroscientists found no brain states (distributed or not) that “match” our best-justified attributions of belief, then if one held that beliefs are constituted by brain states, one would have to conclude (as eliminativists urge) that nobody has ever believed anything. So, proponents of the Standard View may find themselves at the mercy of a nonintentional version of Descartes’ Evil Genius.

(2) One premise in my argument that the causal-explanatoriness of beliefs does not require them to be brain is (P4). In my defense of (P4), I point out that if the world had turned out to be Aristotelian (and hence that beliefs were not brain states), and if also the sensible and social aspects of the world had been just like the sensible and social aspects of our world, then beliefs would still be explanatory even though they were not brain states. Van Gulick counters that this hypothetical case is irrelevant to what makes beliefs causally explanatory in the actual world, a world that is not Aristotelian. From the fact that we can imagine a world in which genes did not turn out to be sequences of DNA, Van Gulick points out, it would not follow that the causal explanatoriness of genes in our world does not depend on their being sequences of DNA.

I have several replies: First, genes were causally explanatory before they were discovered to be DNA sequences; so, whatever genes turned out to be in our world – whether DNA sequences or something else – they would have been causally explanatory. Second, we expect the difference between having blue eyes and having brown eyes to show up in DNA sequences in some way that is detectable by looking at DNA. But we (or I) do not expect the difference between believing that shooting an intruder is often excusable and believing that shooting an intruder is seldom excusable will ever be apparent from a purely neurophysiological point of view. Yet, the difference in the latter beliefs is important: If I were a defense attorney for the person accused of shooting an intruder, I would be quite interested in whether jurors had one belief rather than the other (or neither). Third, I believe that the gene/DNA analogy (like

the water/H<sub>2</sub>O analogy) is generally misleading with respect to belief. There is a genetic *code* to break; the relationship between genes and DNA sequences is a kind of relativized type-identity. Inquiry into DNA will trump any other consideration about which features are genetic features; but, on my view, inquiry into brain states will not trump any other consideration about whether a person has a certain belief.

Finally, and most important, there is a single relation of causal explanatoriness that holds across worlds. If genes are causally explanatory both in our world and in a world in which they are not identical to DNA sequences, then their being related to the causal explanatoriness relation does not depend on their being identical with DNA sequences. Although *which* properties are causally explanatory changes from world to world, the relation of causal explanatoriness itself does not. What makes it the case both in our world and in the Aristotelian world that beliefs are causally explanatory is that certain counterfactuals hold. Indeed, the same high-level counterfactuals about social and sensible phenomena hold in both worlds. So, even if causally-explanatory beliefs were brain states in our world, but beliefs were also causally explanatory in a world in which they were not brain states, it follows that their causal-explanatoriness – their second-order property of being causally-explanatory properties – does not require them to be brain states.

Van Gulick gives an argument for the Standard View based on the causal explanatory role of beliefs: Suppose that S's realization that he had forgotten his wallet explains his hitting the brakes. The only candidates for filling the relevant internal causal role in the actual world are brain states. So, S's realization that he had forgotten his wallet must be a brain state. A key assumption of the argument is that what is causally explanatory is what fills a particular internal role. However, this assumption is part of a conception of causal explanatoriness that can be seen to be inadequate on grounds having nothing to do with the attitudes.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, reference to a particular internal causal role to be filled by a brain state seems gratuitous. Presumably, all of our brains are changing in all manner of ways all the time. What distinguishes the particular change that is supposed to be S's realization that he has forgotten his wallet from all the other changes in the brain at the same time (including the one that caused him to swerve to miss the pedestrian)?<sup>3</sup> The

question for the Standard View is whether for every belief acquired, there is a particular brain state that can be coherently identified with the acquisition of just that belief.<sup>4</sup> If not, the proponent of the Standard View will have to retract the explanation. By contrast, according to my alternative, S's realization that he had forgotten his wallet is vouchsafed by the fact that relevant counterfactuals became true of S – no matter how his brain is organized.

Van Gulick summarizes his response to the Aristotelian-world example in terms of the scope of the word 'must.' Let me clarify my own use of the word 'must.' I do not deny that, in the actual world, having certain brain states is a necessary condition for having beliefs. (But this is a far cry from holding the Standard View.) What I do deny is that our actual explanatory practice requires particular beliefs to be identical with, or to be constituted by, particular brain states. Van Gulick says that the Standard-View claim that beliefs must be brain states "is a claim made relative to the actual world and its actual causal structure. Counterfactual Aristotelean worlds have no bearing on such claims solely about what must be true in the actual world to account for our actual explanatory practice." But the point of the example of the counterfactual Aristotelean world was precisely to show that *actual* explanatory practice does not require beliefs to be brain states. Since 'causation' and 'explanation' are modal notions, we cannot understand causation or explanation in the actual world without considering nonactual worlds.

(3) On my view, the bearer of a belief, in the first instance, is a person, not a brain. Van Gulick points out, "People, not lungs, have emphysema, but emphysema is a state of one's lungs. Similarly, it is people not brains that are comatose, but to be comatose is surely to be a certain type of brain-state." Yes, indeed, and being comatose supervenes on a certain type of brain-state; but, as Van Gulick and other externalists agree, believing that *p* does not supervene on brain-states at all. Moreover, an investigator can look at one's lungs to see whether one has emphysema, but short of brainwriting, investigators cannot look at a person's brain and see whether or not she believes that winters are long in Vermont, still less to see whether or not she believes that if she had left an hour earlier, she would have avoided the storm. Having such beliefs is more

like eating or winning a race than it is like being comatose or having emphysema.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I argue directly against particular versions of the view that beliefs are brain states (the Standard View) in Chapters Two-Four of *Explaining Attitudes: A Practical Approach to the Mind* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), and in *Saving Belief: A Critique of Physicalism* (Princeton University Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> For detailed argument, see Chapters Four and Five of *Explaining Attitudes*.

<sup>3</sup> I have the same question in response to Van Gulick's example about his grandmother Agnes.

<sup>4</sup> I agree with Van Gulick that the proponent of the Standard View need not be committed to beliefs being discrete brain states. But for every belief (token), according to the Standard View, there must be some particular brain state (token), discrete or distributed, identifiable in terms of neurophysiology. Otherwise, the claim that beliefs are constituted by brain states seem empty.

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