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ABSTRACT: Factive and non-factive mental state attribution

Unlike states of knowledge, states of belief can diverge from reality. This divergence can be interestingly predictable: humans have natural capacities to anticipate the false beliefs that other agents naturally have in a variety of situations. However, even in the simple situations probed by classic tests of false belief attribution, calculating the contents of the misled agent's beliefs is a non-trivial task. To explain how we instinctively manage this task, researchers have directed tremendous energy to figuring out what is special about reality-incongruent or counterfactual states, in contrast to reality-congruent or accurate states of mind. This article argues that a better line of contrast runs between factive states, such as knowing or being aware, which can only link an agent to the truth, and non-factive states such as believing or thinking, which can link an agent to either truth or falsehood. After reviewing salient linguistic and functional features of this contrast, I apply these features to the problem of calculating belief contents, aiming to show how it is that attributions of the non-factive state of belief are initially launched, and subsequently guided by, attributions of factive mental states.