

Attitudinal Control

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Abstract

Beliefs are held to norms in a way that seems to require control over what we believe. Yet we don't control our beliefs at will, in the way we control our actions. I argue that this problem can be solved by recognising a different form of control, which we exercise when we revise our beliefs directly for reasons. We enjoy this form of attitudinal control not only over our beliefs, but also over other attitudes, including intentions - that is, over the will itself. Closely tied to our capacity for reasoning, attitudinal control is in important respects more fundamental than the voluntary control that we exercise over our actions. In the course of developing this account I respond to two objections recently raised against an earlier version of it by Anthony Booth (2014).

It is widely held that there are prescriptive norms governing belief. On the face of it, this presupposes that we can be responsible for what we believe, and, in turn, that we have some form of control over our beliefs. Yet we do not seem to control our beliefs in the same way that we control our bodily actions. This is the problem of epistemic responsibility.

The solution, I argue, lies in recognising a form of *attitudinal control*, which differs from the voluntary control we exercise over our bodily actions. What is crucial for responsibility to certain norms is the capacity to respond to the reasons associated with those norms. Through attitudinal control we respond to the reasons that bear on our attitudes - attitudes including not only beliefs, but also, notably, intentions. Indeed, this form of control is in important respects more fundamental than voluntary control.

In what follows I set out more fully the problem of epistemic responsibility and argue for the solution just sketched. I then take up two objections from Anthony Booth (2014). In responding to them I

refine and deepen my account of responsibility, of attitudinal control, and of its relation to the way we control our actions. I argue that these kinds of control can helpfully be understood in terms of the different ways they are exercised through *reasoning*.

1. The Problem of Epistemic Responsibility and How to Solve It

1.1 The Problem

The problem of epistemic responsibility can be expressed through four claims that seem individually plausible but are jointly incompatible.¹

(i) Our beliefs, like our actions, are governed by prescriptive norms.²

(ii) If beliefs are governed by prescriptive norms, then we can be responsible for our beliefs, as we can be for our actions.

(iii) Being responsible for our beliefs requires that we have the same kind of control over our beliefs as we do over our actions.

(iv) We don't have the same kind of control over our beliefs as we do over our actions.

In the rest of this subsection I will clarify these claims and try to bring out their *prima facie* plausibility.

By prescriptive norms I mean norms of the sort that we express using terms like 'ought', 'may', 'must', 'obligation' and 'permission' in their ordinary senses. Such norms require, enjoin, permit or

¹ The contemporary literature on this problem was stimulated primarily by Alston (1988). See [Authorpaper1] for discussion and further references.

² In this paper, 'actions' refers to bodily actions. I will ignore mental actions.

forbid us to do certain things.³ They seem to apply to beliefs. For example, just as you ought to eat vegetables and ought not to take your colleagues' mugs, so you ought to believe that anthropogenic climate change is occurring and you ought not believe that your horoscope accurately predicts your future.

Prescriptive norms are associated with reasons. Plausibly, when you ought to do something, that's because you have reasons to do it that outweigh your reasons not to do it. When you may do something, that's because you lack decisive reason not to do it. You have strong reasons to eat vegetables and believe in anthropogenic climate change, and strong reasons against taking your colleagues' mugs and believing that your horoscope accurately predicts your future.

So (i) seems hard to deny. What about (ii)? Generally, if prescriptive norms can sensibly be applied to some domain of conduct, then we can be responsible for conduct in that domain. That's because responsibility is the main precondition for (or, perhaps, consists in the satisfaction of preconditions for) being appropriately held to such norms.⁴ For example, the actions of the sane and competent are held to prescriptive moral (and other) norms, whereas prescriptive norms never apply to things like headaches, since we are not responsible for them. What's more, it seems that we *do* hold each other responsible for our beliefs, and appropriately so. We think of epistemic norms as making demands on us, and we can be faulted and reproached for foolish beliefs.⁵

Turning to (iii): intuitively, the reason why we are responsible for our actions but not our headaches is that we control the former but not the latter. How could we be responsible for something over which we have no control? Some would reject (iii) by appealing to a conception of responsibility according to which we are responsible for those things that reflect our character. What reflects our character need not be under our control. For example, if someone doesn't care about the suffering of others because they are unable to (due to a brain injury, say), this shows something about their character,

³ I use terms like 'doing', 'conduct' and 'behaviour' broadly, to include believing. This is just a terminological expedient.

⁴ The relevant sense of responsibility here is a generalisation of something like what Scanlon (forthcoming) calls 'moral reaction responsibility', as opposed to 'substantive responsibility'.

⁵ See [Authorpaper3] for more.

even though they can't help it. Similarly, it might be suggested, our beliefs reflect our epistemic character, even if we don't control them.⁶

But this won't do. First, the proposed conception of responsibility is not convincing. Something that reflects your character might be grounds for evaluating you as a good or bad person, say, but that does not make you responsible for it. An agent who is unable to empathise is evaluable as a bad person. But she is not responsible for the failure to empathise. After all, she can't help it. So the general thought behind (iii) - how can you be responsible for what's wholly outside your control? - still stands.

Second, this response to the problem can be bypassed: we could collapse (ii) and (iii), eliminating mention of responsibility, and argue directly for a principle linking prescriptive norms and control.⁷ It's hard to see how we could be legitimately held to norms in a given domain if it wasn't under our control whether we satisfied them. If we lacked such control, how could it be our fault, and potentially blameworthy, if we violated these norms? The idea that there could be obligations governing headaches seems senseless precisely because these things are outside our control.⁸

As for (iv), to reject it is to endorse voluntarism about belief: the view that our beliefs, like our actions, are under voluntary control.⁹ Voluntary control is a matter of governance by the will - by decisions and intentions. We control our actions, both synchronically and diachronically, by forming, retaining, revising and executing intentions. Belief simply does not seem to be engaged by the will: in general, we don't, and can't, regulate our doxastic lives by forming and executing intentions about what to believe. This is shown by our systematic inability to believe things in response to incentives for believing them, incentives that could surely be sufficient to get us to intend to believe things, if only we thought we could execute such intentions. For example, if offered a great incentive to believe

⁶ Owens (2000) can be read as endorsing a view like this. Cf. also Heller (2000).

⁷ It is sometimes suggested that such a link follows from the 'ought implies can' principle. While there is something importantly right about this, in its simple form the inference is a *non-sequitur* (Chuard and Southwood 2009).

⁸ Emotions like fear might seem to constitute exceptions to some of these claims. After all, you can have reasons to be afraid, but it's not so clear that fear is under your control. It seems to me, though, that fear is under your control to the extent needed for my claims to go through (see §5 below and [Authorpaper3]). I intend to discuss this issue further on another occasion.

⁹ While clearly a minority view, voluntarism has its advocates (e.g. Ryan 2003, Steup 2008). Important discussions in which voluntarism is rejected include Williams (1972) and Alston (1988).

that the sky is green instead of blue, or that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday, you might want very much to believe it and even try hard to do so, but you will surely fail.

I am not claiming here that voluntary control *consists in* responsiveness to practical incentives. What I am claiming is that it *entails* it. Voluntary control is simply the sort of control we have over our actions, namely intentional control: control through the will. The point is that when we control things through the will, we can respond to incentives in doing so. The absence of such responsiveness is thus a *symptom* of the absence of voluntary control.¹⁰

That beliefs are not responsive to the will is also shown by diachronic considerations. We can't intentionally postpone believing something for five minutes, or believe something only on Tuesdays.

But one of the central functions of the will is to provide diachronic control of our conduct.

In sum, voluntarism, understood as the denial of (iv), must be rejected.

1.2 How to Solve It

The problem of epistemic responsibility arises because beliefs are neither like bodily actions nor like headaches. They are not under voluntary control, but nor are they like things that merely occur to or in us.

The problem turns on the implicit assumption that bodily action is the paradigm for norm-governed, responsible conduct, and that anything that does not resemble bodily action falls into the same category as headaches. This assumption is built in to claim (iii). The way to solve the problem is thus to reject this claim.

As we saw, it is plausible that there is a link between responsibility and control. But (iii) says more than this: it says that responsibility for belief requires that we have the *same kind* of control over our beliefs as we have over our actions. There's little reason to accept this. The prescriptive norms governing belief are (largely) epistemic;¹¹ that's why our responsibility for our beliefs can be called

¹⁰ Many voluntarists (e.g. Steup 2008) accept that beliefs are not responsive to practical incentives, but maintain that this does not show that they are not controlled through the will. For criticism of this view and further discussion, see [Authorpaper1].

¹¹ Arguably, if you ought to believe that anthropogenic climate change is occurring, that is not just because of the overwhelming evidence, but also because you have practical reasons to have a view on the matter. This raises interesting issues, but they don't affect what I want to say here.

epistemic responsibility.¹² If we had the same kind of control over our beliefs as we have over our actions, we would be able to believe that the sky is green, or that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday, in response to incentives for doing so. Such incentives do not give epistemic reasons, and beliefs held in this way would tend to violate epistemic norms. Why should responsibility to a set of norms require the ability to do things that involve ignoring these norms? Such a requirement would be arbitrary. It's therefore hard to see any convincing motivation for (iii) in the general considerations linking responsibility and control.¹³

Not only does (iii) lack a convincing motivation, but there are also good reasons to deny it. These reasons emerge when we consider the will itself. Intentions are not themselves controlled by intentions in the way that actions are. You can't intend to drink an unpleasant toxin in response to an incentive for intending this, if there is nothing to be said for (and plenty against) actually drinking the toxin (Kavka 1983). And you can't intentionally postpone forming the intention to ϕ for five minutes, or hold that intention only on Tuesdays (cf. Pink 2009 §6). Intentions are not under voluntary control.¹⁴

Yet, intentions are governed by prescriptive norms and are apt for attributions of responsibility. You ought not intend to betray your friend; if you hold this intention, you can rightly be faulted and blamed for doing so, even if you fail to execute it. Indeed, if we were not responsible for our intentions, it's hard to see how we could be responsible for the actions that constitute their execution. So, in general, responsibility for something does not require voluntary control over it, and we should reject (iii). This alone is not a satisfying solution to the problem of epistemic responsibility, however. The considerations that seemed to motivate (iii) still stand - in particular, a general connection between responsibility and control, and the contrast between belief and those things over which we

¹² This is not to confuse the question whether we're responsible for a certain domain of conduct with the question what the content of the norms governing that conduct is. You can be generically responsible for your conduct in a domain even if there are no norms *specific* to that domain. But in the case of belief there are norms proper to this domain - epistemic ones - and we're interested in your responsibility with respect to these.

¹³ See Chuard and Southwood (2009), [Authorpaper1], for more on this and other possible motivations for (iii).

¹⁴ Intentions to form or not form intentions of certain types can play a role in planning, and arguably in resolution. The fact remains that we don't form and revise particular intentions by forming and executing intentions to do so.

clearly lack any form of control, such as headaches. These considerations seem enough to support a weaker claim:

(iii*) Being responsible for our beliefs requires that we have an appropriate form of control over our beliefs.

We can accept (i), (ii), (iii*) and (iv) without contradiction.

Replacing (iii) with (iii*) is the first part of solving the problem of epistemic responsibility. The second part is giving an account of the relevant form of control and making plausible that we enjoy such control over our beliefs and intentions.¹⁵ This is the task I will focus on for the rest of the paper. I'll begin by looking more closely at responsibility.

2. Reasons-Responsiveness and Attitudinal Control

Responsibility is the central precondition for its being appropriate to hold you accountable to certain norms. As we saw, this doesn't require you to be able to ignore and violate these norms in response to incentives for doing so. Plausibly, it requires you to be able to satisfy these norms (ought implies can). But it requires more besides. Dogs can be loyal, but they are not subject to moral norms requiring loyalty. That's because such norms cannot guide them; dogs cannot respond to moral norms. Human beings, on the other hand, generally can, even though we often fail to.

What accountability to some set of norms thus requires is the capacity to be guided by these norms. Only when you have this capacity do the norms have the standing of prescriptions, making demands on your conduct.

Prescriptive norms guide us, when they do, through reasons. You are guided by what you ought to do when you respond appropriately to the reasons that determine what you ought to do. Therefore, what's

¹⁵ It is sometimes held that the relevant form of control must be a kind of indirect voluntary control - 'indirect' in the sense that it involves getting yourself to, e.g. acquire certain beliefs, by first doing certain other things that will bring this outcome about. But that misdiagnoses the error behind (iii). The error is in supposing that the only relevant kind of control is that which can get you to respond to incentives. Being able to get yourself to believe that the sky is green for an incentive isn't plausibly the sort of thing that matters for epistemic responsibility.

crucial for responsibility with respect to some set of norms is *reasons-responsiveness*: the capacity to respond to the reasons associated with those norms.

There are different ways in which you might fail to meet this condition. The insane or incompetent agent lacks the capacity to *recognise* reasons. They might be able to act on the reasons they take themselves to have, but they are systematically unable to tell what reasons they in fact have, or even to manifest a comprehensible point of view on what reasons they have. On the other hand, the agent who suffers from an irresistible compulsion lacks the capacity (with respect to the compulsive behaviour) to *react* to reasons. This agent might well recognise that they have strong reasons not to, say, wash their hands for the hundredth time that day. But they are unable to act accordingly, by refraining from washing their hands.¹⁶

In their classic defence of a reasons-responsiveness account of moral responsibility, Fischer and Ravizza (1998) label these two capacities *receptivity* and *reactivity* respectively. The insane or incompetent agent is disordered in their receptivity to reasons. The agent who suffers an irresistible compulsion is disordered in their reactivity to reasons. Both reasons-receptivity and reasons-reactivity are required for full reasons-responsiveness, and thus for responsibility.

How are these capacities to be understood? There are various possibilities. Following Fischer and Ravizza (*ibid.*), I understand them in terms of the truth of certain counterfactuals. The reasons-receptive agent changes their take on what reasons they have in a comprehensible way, across counterfactual variations in their situation. The reasons-reactive agent changes their behaviour, across such variations, in accordance with what reasons they take themselves to have.

The counterfactual scenarios that matter for responsibility for a given piece of conduct may not be the modally closest ones. As Frankfurt cases illustrate (Frankfurt 1969), the modally closest scenarios may involve some intervention that is irrelevant to the agent's possession in the actual scenario of the capacities that matter for responsibility. The counterfactual scenarios that matter are scenarios in which the *actual-sequence mechanism* - the mechanism that, in the actual scenario, leads the agent to

¹⁶ In distinguishing 'taking' something to be a reason from reacting to that reason, I am not assuming that doing something for a reason requires having a belief about that reason. I use talk of 'taking' just to mark the distinction between two ways for reasons-responsiveness to fail.

do what they do - is operative. The counterfactual intervention scenarios in Frankfurt cases are ones in which the actual-sequence mechanism is not operative (Fischer and Ravizza, *ibid.*).

Furthermore, the actual-sequence mechanism must be owned by the agent, in an appropriate sense. A neural implant that took over an agent's behaviour without their knowledge would not count as the agent's own mechanism (*ibid.*).¹⁷

This reasons-responsiveness account of responsibility can be applied to epistemic responsibility in a straightforward way:

A believer is epistemically responsible for a given belief only if that belief is formed or sustained by a mechanism that is the believer's own, and that is receptive and reactive to epistemic reasons.

That is, in an appropriate range of scenarios where this mechanism operates and the believer's epistemic reasons vary, she recognises those reasons, or at least manifests a comprehensible take on them. And, in an appropriate range of those scenarios she reacts to the reasons she takes herself to have by forming the doxastic attitude she takes them to call for.¹⁸

Mechanisms might be things like perception, memory and reasoning. As I understand it, a mechanism can operate without delivering a belief. For example, perception might count as a reasons-responsive mechanism precisely because, in certain scenarios, the agent would not believe that things were as they perceptually seemed. And note that the agent need not be responding to any genuine reason in the actual scenario, in order for the reasons-responsiveness condition to be met. What matters is the agent's behaviour across a range of scenarios. For example, you can be responsible for a belief formed through wishful thinking, if there are scenarios where you refrain from believing the deliverances of this mechanism.

This account can be illustrated by showing how it applies to failures of epistemic responsibility. First, consider paranoid delusions. By this I mean beliefs that are not only held despite strong evidence

¹⁷ See McCormick (2011) for discussion of how to apply the ownership condition in the epistemic case.

¹⁸ See [Authorpaper1, Authorpaper3] for some discussion of what counts as an appropriate range.

against them, but that are highly tenacious in the face of such evidence - agents hold on to these beliefs no matter what counterevidence is put to them, often by finding ways of explaining this evidence away or interpreting it, perversely, as supporting their belief. Paranoid delusions are pathological, and, intuitively, believers are not responsible for them. The present account can explain why: paranoid delusions involve a failure of reasons-receptivity. It is precisely the incapacity to recognise reasons against them that distinguishes paranoid delusions from merely irrational beliefs. Paranoid delusions are the epistemic analogue of insane actions.

Next, consider alienated beliefs: beliefs that are repressed in the Freudian sense, and other beliefs that the agent sincerely disavows but nonetheless seems to hold (implicit prejudicial beliefs can be like this). While we might be obliged to take measures to get rid of such beliefs, we are not epistemically responsible for them in the ordinary way. According to the present account, that is because they manifest a failure of reasons-reactivity. What distinguishes alienated beliefs is that they fail to change, even when we sincerely judge that they are not supported by reasons. Alienated beliefs are the epistemic analogue of irresistible compulsions.

Finally, there are believers who are not responsible for any of their beliefs or actions, like small children and the severely cognitively impaired. These believers fail the mechanism-ownership condition and may also lack the global capacity to be reasons-responsive.¹⁹

If what matters for responsibility is reasons-responsiveness, as I have argued, then the notion of control that we need in order to account for epistemic responsibility is one that can be satisfied when you recognise and react to epistemic reasons for revising your beliefs. This is a familiar occurrence. You do it all the time. You revise your beliefs in response to evidence, just as you revise your intentions in response to considerations that favour or disfavour possible courses of action. What's more, you do so *directly*. That is, you do not respond to these considerations by forming an intention to revise your attitudes in a certain way, and then executing this intention. For example, presented with what you recognise as evidence for *p*, you simply judge that *p* and thereby come to believe it. The will is not involved.

¹⁹ For more details see [Authorpaper2, Authorpaper3].

Call the control that we exercise over our attitudes when we revise them directly for reasons *attitudinal control*.²⁰ We can exercise attitudinal control even though the considerations to which we are responding are not in fact (normative) reasons, but are merely treated as such. Here there is reasons-reactivity, but not necessarily reasons-receptivity. However, both components of reasons-responsiveness are required for responsibility. It is through reasons-responsive attitudinal control that we satisfy the requirement mentioned in (iii*).

This notion of control accommodates the points that made (iii) appear plausible. It respects the general connection between responsibility and control, since we have attitudinal control over the attitudes for which we are responsible. And it marks the difference between such attitudes and things like headaches. The latter cannot be responses to reasons and so are not under the sort of control that could ground responsibility.

Since it's plausible that we ordinarily have reasons-responsive attitudinal control of our beliefs, the account I have outlined allows us to accept (i), (ii), (iii*) and (iv). It also secures an attractive parallel between control of belief and of intention. And it suggests a plausible diagnosis of why we can be tempted to think, mistakenly, that voluntary control is necessary for responsibility. This is an overgeneralisation from the salient case of bodily action, where voluntary control *is* necessary for responsibility. In the case of bodily actions, but not the case of the attitudes, we can only respond to reasons through our wills - by exercising voluntary control of what we do.

I will develop this last point in more detail below. First, I want to consider two objections recently raised by Anthony Booth (2014), in a critical discussion of an earlier version of my account. Responding to these objections will enable me to develop the account further.

3. Is there a Coherent Notion of Non-Voluntary Control?

Central to my account is the claim that there is a kind of control distinct from voluntary control, which we ordinarily exercise over certain of our attitudes, including intentions. I claim, further, that this form of control is essential to our ordinary responsibility for these attitudes.

²⁰ This roughly corresponds to what Moran (2001) calls 'deliberative control' and what Hieronymi (2009a) calls 'evaluative control'. As my view differs from both of theirs, I use a different label.

This account seems to make room for cases in which we act intentionally but are not responsible for the intention on which we act. In such cases, on my view, we act voluntarily, but we lack full responsibility for our conduct, because we lack a dimension of control that is required for such full responsibility.

Booth doubts the coherence of this picture. He thinks that there's no such thing as an unfree intention, and so doubts that there is a dimension of control or freedom distinct from voluntary control, of which it makes sense to ask whether we have it or not when we act voluntarily. He writes:

“It seems to me plausible to suppose that “AX-ed intentionally” logically entails that “A X-ed freely”, such that it seems confused to say that an action can be voluntary yet not free. When we act intentionally, we necessarily exercise our power of choice, a power we cannot fail to exercise freely (when we exercise it)” (Booth 2014, 1874).

If that's right, then my general case for there being a notion of control distinct from voluntary control, yet relevant to freedom and responsibility, seems to be undermined.

I think I can give a flat-footed response to this objection, and simply deny that acting intentionally logically entails being free in the sense of enjoying the control required for full responsibility. I have given principled grounds for maintaining this distinction. Freedom in the relevant sense has to do with reasons-responsiveness, whereas intentional (voluntary) control merely requires that what you do is the execution of an intention.

Even bracketing my own specific views on what voluntary control and responsibility involve, I think there are good reasons to resist Booth's suggestion that we collapse the distinction. First, while it is commonly thought that determinism poses at least a *prima facie* threat to moral responsibility, it is not widely held that it also threatens the possibility of intentional action.²¹ This is not surprising, since, on a standard view, a piece of behaviour is intentional just in case it is non-deviantly caused by an appropriate intention (e.g. Davidson 1980). This condition could hold in a deterministic universe. So

²¹ Steward (2012) is an exception.

it seems that whatever intuitive pull incompatibilism possesses must be due to the fact that responsibility requires more than mere voluntary control.²²

Second, there seem to be compelling examples of cases in which agents act voluntarily, but lack full responsibility. Very small children are like this. So are agents whose intentions are manipulated in familiar responsibility-undermining ways. Certain kinds of compulsive conduct, such as handwashing, can be nonetheless under voluntary control. Consider also the insane agent: this agent may form intentions on the basis of their own consideration of reasons, incomprehensible as this consideration is, and execute these intentions like a normal agent [Authorpaper2, p. 12].

In response to the examples of manipulation, compulsion and insanity, Booth suggests that these agents shouldn't be considered as having genuine intentions (loc. cit., 1875). I don't see why we should accept this surprising claim. Perhaps, as Booth suggests, following Lowe (2008), these agents lack the "power of choice" (ibid.). But, if so, then we should refrain from identifying this power with the mere possession of intentions.

There are several positive reasons for maintaining that such agents have intentions. First, as the descriptions above suggest, it fits better with what we would naturally say about such cases. For example, it's not as if the compulsive handwasher doesn't intend to wash her hands; it's the inability to avoid forming this intention that is typically the problem.

Relatedly, attributing intentions to these agents best explains their behaviour. They select certain actions and then execute them in a coordinated way. That's what intentions do. Booth suggests that these agents may instead have mistaken beliefs about what they intend. But it's not clear why a belief that you intend to do something should get you to do it, if you don't in fact intend to do it.²³ While more could be said here, attributing intentions to these agents seems the most straightforward option.

Finally, it seems clear that the agents in these examples act intentionally, and it is widely held that intentional action requires causation by an intention (e.g. Davidson loc. cit.). In a footnote (n. 12),

²² I am neutral on whether determinism is, in general, compatible with responsibility, and for this reason I don't use the label 'doxastic compatibilism' for my view. The question I am interested in is whether there are any special reasons to be worried about epistemic responsibility in particular.

²³ Cf. Bratman (1987) for an influential account of intention. Some philosophers think that beliefs can get you to act because intentions *are* beliefs (e.g. Velleman 1989). This view does not support the idea that the agents under discussion lack intentions.

Booth suggests that, even if these agents *act*, they may not do so *intentionally*, saying that to insist otherwise would be to beg the question. But the behaviour in these cases is not like standard examples of non-intentional activity, such as habitually drumming one's fingers on the table (O'Shaughnessy 1980). It is complex and purposive. In any case the charge of begging the question misses the mark here. That there is an intention in these cases is not a surprising theoretical claim. It's an apparent datum (one I have here given further reasons to take at face value) that I use in support of my theory. To object to my argument one would need to show on independent grounds that the datum is spurious, not just point out that one could reject it. And, even if this part of my argument fails, it doesn't follow that the view it is supposed to support is false. So the burden is on Booth here, as I see it.

I have argued that there are good grounds for resisting Booth's claim that voluntary action is necessarily free in the sense relevant to responsibility. However, there is also a more concessive reply that I could make to the objection. Suppose that I accepted Booth's claim. This might be grounds for revising some of my claims about voluntary control of action and about the possibility of intention that is unfree. But it wouldn't follow that we can't ask what's involved in freedom of or control over intention. Even if intentions can't fail to be under the relevant form of control - because a state not under such control wouldn't count as an intention, say - there might be plenty to be said about what this control involves. And the correct account of it might carry over to belief.

4. Permissive Cases

If someone offered you untold riches for believing that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday, you might experience your inability to do so as a very real and inconvenient limitation on your control over, or freedom with respect to, your own beliefs. The fact that this does not impugn your *epistemic* responsibility might seem little consolation.

In previous work I have tried to argue that, despite appearances, there is no significant restriction on what I called your 'doxastic freedom' here [Authorpaper2]. I have done so by appealing to the idea that the regulation of the attitude of belief - the activity of forming and revising beliefs - has a constitutive aim, namely truth. Roughly, the claim was that, if you were to form the belief that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday for a reward, despite the lack of evidence, you would not be

pursuing the aim of truth, and so you wouldn't count as regulating a *belief* after all. It's not a significant restriction on your freedom that you can't pursue an aim by doing something you think likely not to satisfy it. It's just a fact about what pursuing an aim consists in.

Similarly for intention, I argued. To form the intention to drink the toxin, despite the excellent reasons not to actually drink it, would be to give up on the constitutive aim of regulating your intentions (something like acting correctly). So, again, there's no real restriction on your freedom here.

Booth (loc. cit.) raises the interesting question of how this account applies to what I will call 'permissive cases'. These are cases in which one is engaged in, for example, regulating one's doxastic attitude towards a given proposition, but the reasons generated by the supposed constitutive aim of the type of attitude one is regulating - the so-called 'right-kind' reasons - do not determine a unique permissible outcome of this regulation. As Booth puts it:

“the aim of belief does not rule out that one's epistemic reasons make it permissible to either believe that *p* or suspend judgement on that *p*. Nor does the aim of intention rule out that one's reasons make it permissible that one either intend to *X* or not intend to *X*” (loc. cit., 1876).

Permissive cases do not paralyse us: we can still come to hold a specific attitude, even though the putative aim of our activity does not determine which one. How do we do this? Booth's worry, if I understand it, is that it is hard to see how to answer this question consistently with the claim that the aim in question is *constitutive* of regulation of the attitude-type. In opting for one of the two attitudes that is permitted by the supposedly constitutive aim - belief or suspension, say - you must either do so arbitrarily, or be guided by something other than the supposedly constitutive aim. And at that point you are *not* being guided by that aim. Yet you are regulating your beliefs, or intentions, as it may be. So the aim is not constitutive after all. And if regulation of these attitudes is not after all directed at a constitutive aim, then my explanation of why we can't form beliefs and intentions in order to win rewards, in examples such as those above, fails. More importantly, my argument that this inability does not constitute a genuine restriction on our freedom is undermined.

Before responding to this objection, let me first emphasise that my primary concern in this paper is solving the problem of epistemic responsibility. We should distinguish the question whether epistemic responsibility is threatened by the lack of voluntary control over belief, from the question whether our doxastic freedom is importantly restricted. It might be that it is restricted, but not in a way that affects specifically epistemic responsibility.

It seems hard to deny that there can be permissive cases, at least when it comes to intention (it is less clear for belief): it often happens that each of two incompatible courses of action can permissibly be intended. But we can reject an assumption that seems to be implicit in the objection: namely, that a process with a constitutive aim can't at any point be responsive to considerations that are not relevant to its aim. If we reject this assumption, then we don't have to think that, when you opt between two attitudes that seem equally likely to attain an aim, you cease to be guided by that aim. Indeed, our pursuit of an aim often involves deciding between incompatible ways of trying to satisfy it. While building a house, you might have to decide between two ways of laying bricks that seem equally likely to be effective for the purpose of providing shelter.²⁴ You might then choose the one that is aesthetically superior. When making this choice and executing it, you need not cease to be guided by the purpose of providing shelter. It's just that you are guided by other aims at the same time. Otherwise, why would you limit yourself to just these two options, instead of also considering others that are no good for providing shelter?

In sum, I think Booth's second objection does not bear on the core of my view, and I also think there are some promising avenues for responding to it. But what I want to do here, rather than trying to explain away the apparent restrictions on doxastic freedom, is suggest that these apparent restrictions are not ultimately all that interesting. This can be seen when we understand better the role of reasoning in attitudinal and voluntary control.

5. Attitudinal Control and Reasoning

I claimed that we exercise attitudinal control when we revise our attitudes by responding directly to reasons. How do we do this? In the paradigm case, we do it by *reasoning*.

²⁴ The house-building example is from Korsgaard (2009).

Reasoning is a kind of personal-level, conscious transition between attitudes or other responses. For example, you might reason from the intention to get beer and the belief that in order to get beer you must go to the shop, to the intention to go to the shop. We can call the attitudes you reason from ‘premise-attitudes’, and the attitude you reason to the ‘conclusion-attitude’ (Broome 2013).²⁵

When you reason to a conclusion-attitude, this attitude thereby comes to be based on the premise-attitudes. If the premise-attitudes include beliefs, then the contents of these beliefs are reasons for which you hold the conclusion-attitude - what are sometimes called ‘motivating reasons’.²⁶ If these contents correspond to facts that are normative reasons for the conclusion-attitude, then, all going well, you thereby count as responding to these reasons. In the example above, the intention to go to the shop is based on the intention to get beer and the belief that in order to get beer you must go to the shop. Your motivating reason for intending to go to the shop is that you must do this in order to get beer. And, if this is indeed the case, and is a reason to go to the shop, then you thereby count as responding to this reason.

Arguably, we can revise our beliefs and intentions in response to reasons, without engaging in reasoning. Much of our belief-revision goes on more or less automatically, without our active involvement. Yet beliefs revised in this way can still count as held for reasons. For example, you might believe that the wall in front of you is white for the reason that this is how things look, without having reasoned to this belief or even explicitly considered it. But it remains plausible that there is a close connection between responding to reasons and reasoning. A belief arrived at automatically can count as held for a reason only if you are *disposed* to do the corresponding reasoning. If your visual experience causes you to acquire the belief that the wall is white, but you are in no way disposed to reason from the belief that the wall looks white to the belief that it is white - should your belief that it is white be challenged, say - then you don’t count as basing the latter belief on the former, and thus as responding to the putative reason given by its content.

²⁵ Reasoning can also lead to dropping or withholding an attitude. For simplicity I focus on reasoning that leads to acquiring an attitude.

²⁶ It is sometimes held that only truths can be motivating reasons (e.g. Alvarez 2010). Still, falsehoods can be considerations in the light of which one holds an attitude, and in that sense can be reasons for which attitudes are held. It doesn’t matter for my purposes whether we restrict the label ‘motivating reasons’ to truths.

We can thus count attitudes as under attitudinal control if they are held through reasoning, or at least are disposed to be reaffirmed or revised through reasoning. Only when attitudes meet this condition will they be reasons-responsive. In particular, attitudes that fail this condition will not be reasons-*reactive*. Consider repressed and other alienated beliefs. These beliefs are not susceptible to revision through reasoning, and thus do not change even when the agent takes there to be decisive reasons against them. By contrast, automatically formed perceptual beliefs, even if not formed through reasoning, are nonetheless normally susceptible to being reaffirmed or revised through reasoning. If you acquired evidence that your vision was malfunctioning, for example, you could reason from this to revising your belief that the wall is white. Such beliefs are thus reasons-reactive because under attitudinal control.

Through reasoning we can control not only our attitudes but also our bodily actions. We can control our actions by reasoning *about* them - by thinking about what to do. Actions are represented in the contents of attitudes such as intentions and means-end beliefs. You can come to act in a certain way by reasoning to the intention to act in that way. This intention represents what is to happen - what you are to do - and, all going well, makes it happen. In this way reasoning can form part of our voluntary control of our actions.

Reasoning alone does not suffice for such control, of course. For all to go well you must retain the intention, and successfully execute it. Execution *per se* is not a job for reasoning, but for the will, and, for example, certain motor systems.

The way that we control our attitudes through reasoning is very different. We don't typically make ourselves believe or intend things by reasoning to the intention to believe or intend them, and then executing this intention. We reason directly to believing or intending. Indeed, if this wasn't so, we would never manage to reason to any attitude, since in order to reason to an attitude we would first have to reason to another one, namely the intention to form that attitude. Reasoning could never get off the ground.

We reason with our beliefs and intentions, and in doing so we reason about what is the case, or what to do. We can also, in principle, reason about our beliefs or intentions in order to revise them intentionally. But this can't be the primary way in which we control our attitudes: as just noted, any

such intentional revision depends on a prior exercise of attitude revision that is *not* intentional. There must be a kind of transition between attitudes that we can make directly - a way of controlling our attitudes without intentionally manipulating them. And that's precisely what reasoning is. Even when reasoning is directed at the intentional manipulation of certain attitudes, it constitutes a direct form of control of certain others, such as the intention to manipulate our attitudes in this way (Hieronymi 2009a).

Thus, there are two different ways in which we can respond to reasons. These correspond to two different ways in which we can control our conduct, be responsible for it, and be accountable to norms. Both involve reasoning at some stage, at least dispositionally. But only one involves voluntary control.

It is therefore a mistake to see bodily action as the paradigm of conduct for which we are responsible. While voluntary control is a requirement for responsibility for bodily action, this is because of features particular to bodily action, and not because of the requirements for responsibility in general. Our actions respond to reasons, when they do, through the will - through voluntary control. How else could they do it? After all, full-blown actions just are those bits of conduct that get done through the will. To perform such an action is to execute an intention; to act for a reason is to execute an intention held for that reason.²⁷

As I have emphasised, voluntary control is not *sufficient* for responsibility: through voluntary control you typically react to the reasons as you see them, but you may be wholly unresponsive to the reasons as they in fact are. But voluntary control is *necessary* for responsibility, in the case of action.

By contrast, if the will itself can respond to reasons, it must be able to do so directly. What this requires is attitudinal control.

Our ordinary control of belief is like our ordinary control *of* the will, not like our control of action *with* the will. This is true not just of belief but also of everything else that we do for reasons, besides action. Judging and deciding, as well as wanting, admiring, fearing, hoping, regretting, and being glad

²⁷ I say 'full-blown' in order not to rule out 'sub-intentional actions' (O'Shaughnessy 1980). These are not done for reasons. If there are such actions and we are responsible for them, then this is because they are *susceptible* to being performed, modified or stopped intentionally and hence for reasons.

- we reason directly to these responses. Voluntary action, that which occurs when we execute intentions, is the exception among reasons-responsive conduct, not the paradigm of it.

I have distinguished two forms of control that can ground responsibility: voluntary control and attitudinal control. But these forms of control are connected. That's because, as indicated above, we reason about our actions by reasoning with our attitudes. A central component of our ordinary voluntary control of our actions happens via attitudinal control of our intentions.

Could there nonetheless be voluntary control of action without attitudinal control of intentions? It seems so - the compulsive handwasher is an example. But note that, in these sorts of cases, the agent's control of their action is shallow. While their actions are executions of their own intentions, and are in this sense the agent's own actions, they are not shaped by the agent's take on the reasons for or against them. The agent is alienated from them, as from the intentions that lead to them. In this sense, our control of our actions depends asymmetrically on our control of our attitudes. While the existence of voluntary control does not depend on attitudinal control, its significance does.

Let us now return to the seemingly problematic phenomenon that we started with: our apparent inability to believe or intend things in response to incentives for doing so. What the foregoing considerations show, I think, is that we should not first conceive of controlled conduct on the model of bodily action, and then, as a consequence, be puzzled by the fact that, unlike bodily action, belief and intention can respond to one sort of reason - 'right kind' ones - but not to another - 'wrong kind' reasons. Rather, we should pay attention to the very different ways in which we control belief and intention, on the one hand, and action, on the other. We can control our actions by reasoning about them, and thus by taking into account considerations that bear on the desirability of performing them. But we control our beliefs and intentions, in the fundamental case, by reasoning with them, and thus by taking into account considerations that bear on what is the case, or what to do.

This does not by itself explain why you can't believe that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday in order to win a reward. But it clarifies what the phenomenon is. It has two aspects. First, you can't *reason* from the belief that you will be rewarded for believing that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday, to the belief that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday. I think that the burden of fully explaining this falls on an account of reasoning, combined with an account of the nature of belief (and similarly for the

corresponding phenomenon involving intention).²⁸ For present purposes, we can note that the relevant reasoning - which you might express by saying, ‘I will be rewarded for believing that it rained on Aristotle’s 30th birthday, so it rained on Aristotle’s 30th birthday’ - would be obviously bad reasoning. And it’s plausible that we can’t deliberately reason very badly without ceasing to count as reasoning, just as there are limits on how grossly irrational our behaviour can be without ceasing to count as intentional action.

Even if you can’t do this bad reasoning, you might be able to reason from the belief that you will be rewarded for believing that it rained on Aristotle’s 30th birthday to the *intention* to believe that it did. And you might somehow manage to execute this intention. In practice, we can’t easily intentionally get ourselves to believe things in this way. This is the second aspect of the phenomenon. In a way, it is not a very deep fact. As Bennett (1990) argues, in principle we could have some mechanism - some mental button that we could press - to easily and directly get ourselves to believe things for rewards. Even if you could somehow make the transition from intending to believe to believing, this would not itself be a step in reasoning, any more than executing any other intention is. You would thus not have reasoned from the belief about the reward to the belief about rain. The belief about rain would not count as based on the belief about the reward, nor as held for the reason that it would be rewarded. Rather, in executing your intention you *get yourself to believe* that it rained on Aristotle’s 30th birthday, and this action is done for a reason. In this sense, the impossibility of believing at will goes deep, and is not a mere contingency of our psychology.²⁹ Similar points apply to intention. So Hobbes (1656/1991) was not quite right. It’s not “absurd” to say that I can will if I will, if this means getting myself to intend something, by intending to intend it. But the impossibility of willing *at will*, parallel to the impossibility of believing at will, goes deep.

²⁸ See Shah (2013) for such an account.

²⁹ Hieronymi (2009b) makes similar claims. One might wonder why a belief that you get yourself to have by executing an intention doesn’t thereby count as held for whatever reason the intention was held for. After all, an action counts as performed for the reason for which the corresponding intention was held, and if the action is one of getting yourself into a certain state, you can also count as being in that state for that reason. But even if you can count in this derivative sense as *being in the state* of believing for a practical reason - and there are serious difficulties with this (Williams 1972, Winters 1979, Bennett 1990) - your situation would be very different to that of someone who believes for a reason in the ordinary sense. Believing for a reason in the ordinary sense involves reasoning, or being disposed to reason, from that reason to that belief, as opposed to reasoning to an intention concerning that belief. This deep difference is worth marking in our terminology.

It is a genuine, contingent restriction on what we can do, and thus on our freedom, that we lack any mechanism for getting ourselves to believe or intend things in response to incentives. But it's not an especially regrettable one. The primary use for such a mechanism would be to get ourselves to believe things that are not supported by our evidence, or, in the case of intention, to intend things we lack reasons to do. The upshot would be inaccuracy and incoherence in our belief system, and irrationality in our intentions. Our overall reasons-receptivity would be diminished: our beliefs would be less successful at tracking the facts that give us reasons, and in maintaining a coherent take on our reasons. So would our reasons-reactivity, since we would believe, intend and act in ways contrary to what we took our reasons to recommend. Thus, paradoxically, this new freedom would tend to *reduce* our overall responsibility. Fabulous rewards might make this worth it. But since incentives for having silly beliefs and intentions are relatively rare, we should be glad that we lack this freedom.

Furthermore, we must be careful not to overstate the contrast between the restrictions on attitudes and on action. We can't get ourselves to have any attitude that would be desirable. But nor can we act however would be desirable. We are subject to all sorts of constraints due to physical limitations and uncooperative environments. We don't think this means we lack control, or are unfree.

Indeed, our control of our actions is subject to failures and limitations that our control of beliefs and intentions isn't subject to. You can have all the reasons in the world to act in a certain way, and be moved by them, but suffer a failure of execution. Our attitudes are not like this. Typically, when you have reasons for a certain belief or a certain intention, you can reason directly to holding this attitude. You do not have to form and execute the intention to bring the attitude about, so there is no room for this execution to go wrong.

6. Conclusion

The problem of epistemic responsibility is the problem of explaining how we can be responsible for our beliefs, and thus how they can be governed by prescriptive norms, given that we lack the sort of control over them that we have over our actions. In fact this problem arises not only for beliefs but also for other attitudes, such as intentions. I have argued that what responsibility fundamentally requires is responsiveness to reasons, and that, while this is secured through voluntary control in the

case of bodily actions, it is not so in the case of attitudes. We revise our attitudes for reasons directly, without controlling them voluntarily. Indeed, we *must* be able to do this, if attitude-revision is ever to get started. In the basic case we do it by reasoning with them. We thereby exercise what I called attitudinal control over them. I argued that careful consideration of the relation of reasoning to these two forms of control can help us see that, while there is a sense in which believing at will is deeply impossible, this should not be confused with the existence of any especially interesting restriction on our control of our beliefs.

By focusing on reasoning, I have left aside other dimensions in which we control our attitudes, albeit more indirectly - for example, by selecting what matters to reason about, deciding when to close certain questions and when to look for more evidence, and so on. These are features of the broader activity of inquiry. A full account of responsibility for attitudes would have to take them into account. A general lesson of this paper is that we should not take the case of bodily action as a paradigm of norm-governed, responsible conduct. In many ways, action is an exception, and attitudes are the more central case. Focusing on action can lead us astray in various ways. It can make us neglect the connections between reasons and reasoning. This, in turn, leads to problems about so-called 'wrong-kind' reasons. And this focus can make us think, mistakenly, that our control of our beliefs and other attitudes is subject to some significant, unfortunate limitations.

Above all, starting with the case of actions makes us exaggerate the significance of voluntary control. In fact, voluntary control alone is shallow. We exercise significant control in the first place by revising our attitudes for reasons. This is where responsibility begins.

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