

# AGAINST EPISTEMIC AGENCY

by

Andrew Puzzo

A thesis submitted to the Department of Philosophy

In conformity with the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

Queen's University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

(September, 2015)

Copyright ©Andrew Puzzo, 2015

## **Abstract**

A great many philosophers suggest that we exercise epistemic agency – a kind of agency that is distinctly epistemic in character and which allows us directly to exercise agency over our beliefs. In this thesis I will question the intelligibility of this suggestion. In order to do so, I will consider and argue against the four common views that are supposed to locate and explain epistemic agency. The first view suggests that we exercise epistemic agency because believing itself is a species of act or action, in the ordinary sense or in the rational sense. The second view suggests that we exercise epistemic agency because belief formation can be directly controlled, either voluntarily or evaluatively. The third view suggests that we exercise epistemic agency when we reflect upon and make judgments about what to believe. The fourth view suggests that we exercise epistemic agency because we are responsive to reasons. I will contend that these views either fail to intelligibly locate and explain epistemic agency or they do not offer the right explanation of it. This gives grounds to doubt the intelligibility of the very idea of epistemic agency.

## **Acknowledgements**

I could not have written this thesis without the help and support from a great many people. Special thanks are due to my supervisor, David Bakhurst, for his excellent guidance and valuable contributions. Thanks are also due to Henry Laycock for providing a new way of approaching philosophy. I would also like to give thanks to my fellow graduate students. Lastly, for their enduring support, I owe much gratitude to my family and friends; namely, Robert, Fiorella, Emily, JR, Frank, Luisa, Zara, Bruce, Daniel, and my friends on the interwebs.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Chapter 1 Introduction: What the Hell is Epistemic Agency? .....	1
1.1 What Epistemic Agency is Not .....	1
1.2 What Epistemic Agency Is .....	7
1.3 Against Epistemic Agency .....	8
1.4 The Science of Epistemic Agency? .....	9
1.5 Overview .....	12
Chapter 2 Doxastic Act/Action .....	13
2.1 Introduction .....	13
2.2 Believing As a Species of Ordinary Act or Action .....	14
2.3 Believing As a Species of Rational Act or Action .....	23
2.4 Conclusion .....	33
Chapter 3 Direct Doxastic Control .....	34
3.1 Introduction .....	34
3.2 Direct Doxastic Voluntarism .....	35
3.3 Evaluative Control .....	53
3.4 Conclusion .....	60
Chapter 4 Reflection and Judgment .....	62
4.1 Introduction .....	62
4.2 Reflection and Judgment .....	62
4.3 Conclusion .....	68
Chapter 5 Reason Responsiveness .....	70
5.1 Introduction .....	70
5.2 Reason Responsiveness .....	70
5.3 Conclusion .....	74
Chapter 6 Conclusion: Why Epistemic Agency is Unintelligible .....	75
Bibliography .....	78

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: What the Hell is Epistemic Agency?

*The object of this chapter is to introduce the topic of epistemic agency and provide an overview of philosophical treatments of it. This chapter is divided into five sections. I will commence by identifying what epistemic agency is not in §1.1. Subsequently I will provide a characterization of what epistemic agency is and provide a brief classification of the particular ways to locate it in §1.2. In §1.3 I will introduce the general argument against epistemic agency. I will follow this by considering the role of the (cognitive) sciences have in this discussion in §1.4. In the last section, §1.5, I will provide an overview of the chapters to follow.*

### 1.1 What Epistemic Agency is Not

A great many philosophers suggest that we can exercise epistemic agency. Notably, they include Ernest Sosa, Linda Zagzebski, Christine Korsgaard, John McDowell, Christopher Peacocke, Pamela Hieronymi, Martin Steup, Joseph Raz, Alvin Goldman, and Miranda Fricker.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, for a variety of reasons, it is supposedly crucial that we do. For example, the exercise of epistemic agency supposedly enters into the explanation of belief formation and knowledge acquisition; it is said to be necessary for knowledge attribution, rationality, normativity, and responsibility.

So what is epistemic agency? Of course, just as there is a plurality of philosophers who maintain that we exercise epistemic agency there is a plurality of ways in which it has been characterized. Nevertheless, we can get a general idea of what it is without getting caught up in the particulars of the accounts. It might be thought that epistemic agency is just the capacity to act in a way that puts one in a position to believe

---

<sup>1</sup> See Sosa (2015), Zagzebski (2001), Korsgaard (1996), McDowell (1994), Peacocke (1998), Hieronymi, (2009), Steup, (2008), Raz (2013), Goldman (2004), and Fricker (2007).

something.<sup>2</sup> According to this thought, when one reads a book, listens to someone talk, researches a topic, and so on, one exercises epistemic agency.<sup>3</sup> One might think this for the reason that those acts or actions are epistemic in that they have bearing on belief. Now, one can very well exercise agency in those cases. What's more, the term "epistemic agency" can even be used to refer to those particular exercises of agency. Language may be left as it is here. However, according to the above-mentioned philosophers, that is not what epistemic agency really is. There are two reasons that motivate this thought. The first reason is that using "epistemic agency" in that way does not refer to or even imply an agency that is *distinctly* epistemic. For, it does not provide a distinct agency over belief. At most, the agency one exercises when one puts oneself in a position to believe something is just ordinary agency. To understand this, consider a standard characterization of agency in the ordinary sense. According to David J. Velleman, a familiar characterization is as follows,

there is something that the agent wants, and there is an action that he believes conducive to its attainment. His desire for the end, and his belief in the action as a means, justify taking the action, and they jointly cause an intention to take it, which in turn causes the corresponding movements of the agent's body. Provided that these causal processes take their normal course, the agent's movements consummate an action, and his motivating desire and belief constitute his reasons for acting.<sup>4</sup>

Reading a book, listening to someone, researching a topic, and so on, all satisfy this standard characterization of what happens when one exercises agency in the ordinary

---

<sup>2</sup> Despite the obvious relevance of knowledge when considering the epistemic I will restrict consideration to belief. This is because belief is the focus of literature on epistemic agency.

<sup>3</sup> This is a common way of characterizing epistemic agency outside of the literature on it and agency in general.

<sup>4</sup> Velleman (1992), 461.

sense.<sup>5</sup> Now such acts or actions undoubtedly have bearing on belief. However, it is unclear here what is distinctly epistemic about them insofar as no distinct agency over belief is manifest. By way of illustration, paraphrasing Hilary Kornblith, though the turning of one's head may be a manifestation of one's ordinary agency, it does not show that the perceptual belief formed as a result of that exercise of agency is a manifestation of a distinct agency over belief.<sup>6</sup> For, as he writes, "once my head is turned in a certain direction, with my eyes open, and the lighting just so, my perceptual mechanisms will simply operate in me in ways which have nothing at all to do with the fact that I am an agent."<sup>7</sup> What this suggests is that it is an open question whether one exercises a distinct agency over belief when one exercises ordinary agency to put oneself in a position to believe something. If that is so, then the mere fact that one acts in the course of getting oneself into a position to believe something does not identify a form of distinctively "epistemic agency" in any interesting sense.

Moreover, the ordinary agency one exercises when one puts oneself in a position to believe something is not guided by the right kind of reasons to constitute a distinct species of epistemic agency. It is typically taken that there are two kinds of reasons: practical reasons and epistemic reasons. There are various ways to distinguish them.<sup>8</sup> Following Raz, practical reasons are facts that provide a case for or against an act or action and epistemic reasons are facts that provide (part of) a case for the belief in the

---

<sup>5</sup> For the present purpose, the legitimacy of this characterization does not need to be questioned or explored further. However, for criticism of it see the cited article by Velleman (1992) and Hornsby (2004).

<sup>6</sup> Kornblith (2012), 89.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>8</sup> See Engel (2013) and Raz (2011).

truth of a proposition.<sup>9</sup> The reasons that guide exercises of ordinary agency that put one in a position to believe something are (typically) practical rather than epistemic reasons. This is because they do not concern what to believe but how to act in order to be in a position to believe. Of course, the latter reasons do concern belief, but that is not enough to make them epistemic reasons proper. They are still practical reasons. When one intends to exercise ordinary agency in a way that puts oneself in a position to believe something one will have to consider which facts provide a case for taking action in that way. For example, suppose one wants to find out something about the cognitive sciences. To do so, one will have to consider which acts or actions are most relevant to what one would like to know, provide the best means to find out what is the case, and so on. One might consider here whether to read a Wikipedia article, posts on a relevant internet forum, a popular science book, or an article published in a relevant scientific journal; whether to watch a YouTube video from a lay person who is strongly interested in the subject, or attend a lecture or talk on it, etc., So, the reasons that guide here are practical reasons rather than epistemic reasons. If this is so, then we don't seem to have identified a distinct form of agency that somehow enters into the nature of belief itself.<sup>10</sup> This provides further reason for supposing that using "epistemic agency" to refer to exercises of ordinary agency that put one in a position to believe something does not capture an agency that is specifically epistemic.

---

<sup>9</sup> Epistemic reasons are included in a larger category called "adaptive reasons"; see Raz (2011), 36.

<sup>10</sup> This argument seems to suggest that if those acts or actions were guided by epistemic reasons then they would exhibit distinctly epistemic agency. I do not believe that even this follows. As I will argue in later chapters, being guided by epistemic reasons does not entail that there is an agency that is distinctly epistemic.



One might wonder why this matters. Why not just settle for taking epistemic agency to be merely the exercise of ordinary agency that puts one in a position to believe something? There are two reasons why it matters. First, exercising ordinary agency in a way that puts one in a position to believe something does not provide the right explanation for belief. Consider the following example. In order to find out about some particular findings in the cognitive sciences one might decide to read some cognitive science book in which they appear. In doing so one undoubtedly exercises agency. If one ended up believing some particular findings in the cognitive sciences as a result then the explanation for one's belief would lie only in the space of causes.<sup>11</sup> Reading itself only offers a causal explanation for belief.<sup>12</sup> Agency is involved only to the extent to which one acts or takes action in a way that causes oneself to believe something (i.e. here the act or action is the efficient cause of belief).<sup>13</sup> But this is not the right kind of explanation for belief. The right kind of explanation for belief is not one that explains one's belief as being the *result* of an exercise of agency. The right kind of explanation is one that explains belief by the exercise of agency itself. The agency one has over one's belief has to be direct. The right kind of explanation for belief then is not causal but, for lack of a better term, agential. This is why reading itself does not explain belief in the right kind of way. This result can be generalized to apply to other exercises of ordinary agency that put one in a position to believe something. So, exercising ordinary agency in a way that puts one in a position to believe something does not provide the right explanation for belief

---

<sup>11</sup> Audi (2015), 39.

<sup>12</sup> Note that I am taking reading to be merely a physical process.

<sup>13</sup> Hacker (2007).

The second reason why it matters that we have not captured an agency that is distinctly epistemic concerns the norms one is subject to. It was suggested above that when one exercises ordinary agency in a way that puts one in a position to believe something the reasons that one is guided by are practical instead of epistemic reasons. If there is nothing more to epistemic agency than exercising ordinary agency in a way that puts one in a position to believe something then, when one exercises epistemic agency one is not subject to epistemic norms. As David Owens writes,

If we induce belief by means of a deed, the norms of practical reason determine the rationality of that deed. Action is governed by practical considerations: the theoretical rationality of a belief has, at best, an indirect bearing on whether we should take steps to induce that belief.<sup>14</sup>

So, if there is nothing more to epistemic agency than exercising ordinary agency in a way that puts one in a position to believe something the norms that one is subject to are practical rather than epistemic norms.

These considerations lead to a further reason why exercising ordinary agency in a way that puts one in a position to believe something is not what epistemic agency really is or should be. For the view I am rejecting does not illuminate how one is responsible for one's beliefs, which is what the appeal to epistemic agency is supposed to do. On such a view, we are, at most, derivatively (rather than directly) responsible for them. If the explanation for a belief lies only in the space of causes then it is not something for which one can be responsible. Indeed, insofar as responsibility is a condition for blameworthiness one could not be blameworthy either!<sup>15</sup> If the explanation is not in the space of reasons, then, to use McDowell's terms, one is left with exculpation rather than

---

<sup>14</sup> Owens (2001), 82.

<sup>15</sup> Raz (2011), 251.

justification.<sup>16</sup> Someone might counter that it is not that there is no responsibility at all. Rather, the responsibility here is merely derivative. Derivative responsibility for belief has the following form: if one is responsible for an act or action A, and if by A one brings about a belief B, then one is responsible for B.<sup>17</sup> Here, one is not directly responsible for one's belief, but only the acts or actions that were causal preconditions of the belief. That is all that exercising ordinary agency in a way that puts one in a position to believe something provides. And if that is so, then we are left without direct agency over beliefs and, as such, left without responsibility or, at least, direct responsibility for them. This is why exercising ordinary agency in a way that puts one in a position to believe something really is not and should not be epistemic agency.

## **1.2 What Epistemic Agency Is**

In light of the previous section, we can conclude that epistemic agency is a distinct form of agency which we directly exercise over our beliefs. But, as suggested earlier, what this amounts to is a matter of dispute among philosophers. For this reason it is useful to provide a classification of the particular ways to locate and explain epistemic agency. My classification is ordered by radicalness. There are four common ways to locate epistemic agency, which are, from the most to the least radical: (1) Doxastic Act/Action; (2) Direct Doxastic Control; (3) Reflection and Judgment; and (4) Reason-Responsiveness.

According to Doxastic Act/Action views, we exercise epistemic agency because believing itself is a species of act or action. On this account epistemic agency is located

---

<sup>16</sup> McDowell (1994), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Here I am appropriating Raz's principle of derivative responsibility for action and extending it to belief. Raz (2011), 265.

in and explained by the act or action of believing. If believing is an act or action then we exercise epistemic agency when we believe.

According to Direct Doxastic Control views, we exercise epistemic agency because we can, either voluntarily or evaluatively, control the formation of belief. On this account, epistemic agency is located in and explained by the direct control, either voluntary or evaluative, of belief formation. If we can directly control belief formation, either voluntarily or evaluatively, then we can exercise epistemic agency.

According to the Reflection and Judgment view, we exercise epistemic agency when we reflect upon and make judgments about what to believe. On this account epistemic agency is located in and explained by our capacity for reflection and judgment. If we reflect upon and make judgments about what to believe then we exercise epistemic agency.

According to the Reason Responsiveness view, we exercise epistemic agency because we are responsive to reasons. On this account epistemic agency is explained by and located in our being responsive to reasons. If we are responsive to reasons then we exercise epistemic agency.

This comprises the particular ways to understand epistemic agency.

### **1.3 Against Epistemic Agency**

It is my contention that epistemic agency is ultimately not intelligible. To show this I will object to each way of locating and explaining epistemic agency. It will be shown that the views either do not intelligibly locate and explain epistemic agency (i.e. Doxastic Act/Action views and Direct Doxastic Control views) or they do not provide the right

location and explanation of epistemic agency (i.e. the Reflection and Judgment view and the Reason-Responsiveness view). With respect to the former pair, I will contend that they do not intelligibly explain and locate epistemic agency because they are based on misunderstandings of the stative verb “believe” and other doxastic terms such as “form a belief”. This may come across as old-fashioned and unexciting. But, to quote Helen Steward, “It is not as fashionable now as once it was to trace philosophical mistakes to linguistic confusions, but sometimes there is no avoiding the conclusion that this is their source.”<sup>18</sup> With respect to the latter pair, I will contend that they do not provide the right explanation and location of epistemic agency because they fail to show there is a distinct agency that we directly exercise over our beliefs. Thus, my general argument is as follows: If these views do not intelligibly explain and locate epistemic agency, or they do not provide the right explanation and location of epistemic agency, then epistemic agency is unintelligible.

#### **1.4 The Science of Epistemic Agency?**

Insofar as a discussion of epistemic agency includes discussion of mental concepts (e.g. belief, think, etc.) and agential concepts (e.g. will, intend, etc.), it might be thought that epistemic agency is within the purview of the sciences, especially those of the cognitive variety. Though relevant it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address how and to what extent the sciences can deal with mental concepts and agential concepts.<sup>19</sup> But I can give

---

<sup>18</sup> Steward (2000), 105.

<sup>19</sup> I confess I sympathize with Bennett and Hacker on these matters. See Bennett and Hacker (2003) and Bennett, Dennett, Hacker, Searle, and Robinson (2009) for discussion. In addition, I am concerned that the disenchantment of nature, to use McDowell’s phrase, which may come to pass by (completely) placing these concepts within the purview of the sciences, will threaten agency in general. See McDowell (1994), 89-91.

three reasons for supposing that the cognitive sciences are unable to contribute to this discussion in a way that may settle it. First, in my view, the issue of epistemic agency is conceptual and logico-grammatical rather than empirical. Insofar as science is concerned with the empirical, it cannot resolve the issue. Second, even so, findings in the cognitive sciences are not immune to the conceptual and logico-grammatical confusions that trouble philosophy and even ordinary thought. As an example, some cognitive scientists state that believing is a process<sup>20</sup> and others even state that believing is an act.<sup>21</sup> As I will show below it is unintelligible to say that believing is either of those.<sup>22</sup> I say this not for empirical reasons, but because such mistakes are based on conceptual and logico-grammatical confusions. The upshot is that if a philosopher were to appeal to such cognitive-scientific views to give empirical support to her view that believing is a process or act, then she would simply beg the question. This gives grounds to doubt that (at least some findings in) the cognitive sciences can provide a justificatory contribution here.

Third, even if it were granted that the cognitive sciences could contribute to the discussion in a way that would settle it, it is not obvious that it would illuminate the issue by supporting the case for epistemic agency. It may very well undermine it. Here are some examples that might suggest that it does: (1) If, as it is typically taken, belief is a mental state, then believing cannot be an (ordinary) act or action. Indeed, even those who take it that believing is a process or act do not take it to be something that is “accessible

---

<sup>20</sup> See Connors and Halligan (2015) and see Langdon and Connaughton (2013).

<sup>21</sup> See Suigari, Seitz, and Angel (2014).

<sup>22</sup> A great many scientists also take for granted that beliefs are mental states. In this thesis I will not argue against this assumption but it is also something I take to be based on conceptual and logico-grammatical confusions. See Hacker (2013).

to conscious awareness”.<sup>23</sup> These views make it hard to see how epistemic agency could be located in the act or action of believing. (2) If the formation of belief is subject to the will then, as Matthias Steup notes, its status as free is as much in question as anything else that is subject to the will.<sup>24</sup> Some findings in neuroscience seem to suggest that we do not have free will.<sup>25</sup> If we do not have free will then the formation of belief is not free. If the formation of belief is not free then we do not have voluntary control over our beliefs. This provides a case against locating epistemic agency in Direct Doxastic Control, at least if it is conceived in the voluntary manner, and perhaps even in the Reflection and Judgment view if reflection and judgment are subject to the will. Of course, both philosophers<sup>26</sup> and scientists<sup>27</sup> alike have resisted this conclusion. So it remains an open question. But here again it looks like the science will preclude the idea of epistemic agency. (3) If reflection, reasoning, and responsiveness to reasons are automatic or mechanical then, despite appearances, they are not under our control.<sup>28</sup> If so, neither the Reflection and Judgment view nor the Reason Responsiveness view show that we have epistemic agency. (4) Some neuroscientists deny that we have agency at all.<sup>29</sup> If that is the case then we do not have epistemic agency. Rather than supporting the case for epistemic agency all of these examples appear to militate against it. This is controversial, and of course is not even close to a definitive reason to think that findings in the cognitive sciences are at odds with epistemic agency. Perhaps the cognitive sciences

---

<sup>23</sup> Suigari, Seitz, and Angel (2014), 20.

<sup>24</sup> Steup (forthcoming), 2.

<sup>25</sup> See Haggard (2005), see Davies (2013), and see Soon, Brass, Heinze, and Haynes (2008).

<sup>26</sup> See Mele (2006).

<sup>27</sup> Patric Ulric Tse maintains that there is in fact a neural basis for free will. See Tse (2013).

<sup>28</sup> Though not a scientist himself, Hilary Kornblith has an extensive discussion of the science of this in Kornblith (2012).

<sup>29</sup> See Davies (2013) and see Buller (2006).

might eventually come to give significant support to the idea that we exercise epistemic agency. But, as things stand, it is not obvious the cognitive sciences have much to contribute to the project as I see it. I will therefore continue to address the issue of epistemic agency in a way that is conceptual and logico-grammatical rather than empirical.

### **1.5 Overview**

In the sequels to this chapter I will argue against each view that is supposed to locate and explain epistemic agency. In Chapter 2 I will focus on Doxastic Act/Action views. I will consider the views that believing is an ordinary act or action and that believing is a rational act or action. I will contend that insofar as it is unintelligible to speak of believing as a species of act or action such views cannot explain and locate epistemic agency. In Chapter 3 I will focus on Direct Doxastic Control views. I will consider the idea that the formation of belief can be directly controlled either voluntarily or evaluatively. I will contend that insofar as it is unintelligible to speak of direct control of belief formation such views cannot explain and locate epistemic agency. In Chapter 4 I will focus on the Reflection and Judgment view. I will contend that it does not provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency. In Chapter 5 I will focus on the Reason Responsiveness view. I will contend that it does not provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency as well. Lastly, in Chapter 6, tying things together, I will conclude this thesis by arguing that epistemic agency is not intelligible.



## Chapter 2

### Doxastic Act/Action

*In this chapter I will consider a couple of ways to explain and locate epistemic agency by focusing on Doxastic Act/Action views, and then show that they do not succeed. The division of this section is fourfold. In §2.1 I will introduce Doxastic Act/Action views by briefly explaining them and showing how they might be thought to explain and provide a location for epistemic agency. In §2.2 I will explain how it can be that believing is a species of act or action in the ordinary sense and then contend that it cannot intelligibly explain and locate epistemic agency. In §2.3 I will explain how it can be that believing is a species of act or action in the rational sense and contend that it too cannot intelligibly explain and locate epistemic agency. §2.4 provides a conclusion to this chapter.*

#### 2.1 Introduction

Doxastic Act/Action views state that believing is a species of act or action. This might immediately strike as absurd. However, as J.F.M. Hunter writes,

we may want very much to suppose that it *is* an action, because we like to regard it as being up to us what we believe; and if it is not an action, it will threaten to be an event, which just happens when it happens, and with the occurrences and failures to occur of which we must just learn to live.<sup>30</sup>

So, on that note, it is worth considering such views. According to this approach, believing can be a species of act or action in two ways. In one way, believing is a species of act or action in the ordinary sense. That is, believing is an ordinary act or action. It is an act or action in the same way that reading is an act or action. To be sure, that is not to suggest that believing is analogous to an ordinary act or action in some or every respect. It is just to say that it is as much of an ordinary act or action as any other ordinary act or action.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Despite this Hunter does not agree that it is an act or action. Hunter (1980), 244.

<sup>31</sup> Most philosophers do not take believing to be a species of act or action in this way. But there are reasons to suggest that William James, Alexander Bain, and John Henry Newman held this view. See James (1981),

If believing is characterized as such then epistemic agency is straightforwardly located and explained. If agency is the capacity to act or take action, and believing is an ordinary act or action, then agency that is distinctly epistemic is provided. On this view, one is able to directly exercise agency over belief. But that is not the only way to understand believing as a species act or action. It might be thought that believing is not a kind of act or action that could be ordinary. Rather, believing is properly a species of act or action in a special, *rational* sense. That is, believing is a rational act or action (what this means will be explained further below). Epistemic agency is then explained by and located in the rational act or action of believing. As I will show, insofar as believing is not intelligibly described as an act or action, neither of these views intelligibly locates or explains epistemic agency.

## **2.2 Believing As a Species of Ordinary Act or Action**

It was noted above that one way to understand the claim that believing is a species of act or action is to take it to be an act or action in the ordinary sense; that is, as an act or action that is no different in kind from any other ordinary act or action. If we know how and why reading is a species of act or action then we know how and why believing is a species of act or action. But, why think that believing is a species of ordinary act or action at all? There are three reasons. First, the verb “to believe” seems to have an analogous grammar to action words. People use the word “believe” in a way that suggests that there is an act or action that one performs or takes. It is not unusual for people to say,

---

Bain (1865), and Newman (1979). The view that believing is a species of act or action in the ordinary sense has more support outside of philosophy. It is seen among some positive thinkers and some religious people (e.g. Christians).

“I want to believe.” (“I want to read.”), “I can’t believe it.” (“I can’t read it.”), “I will believe it when I see it.” (“I will read it when I see it.”), “He believes it.” (“He reads it.”), “Believe me!” (“Read it!”), “Don’t believe that!” (“Don’t read that!”), “Stop believing!” (“Stop reading!”), “Don’t stop believing!” (“Don’t stop reading!”), “Why won’t you believe me?” (“Why won’t you read that?”), “They all believed me.” (“They all read it.”), “They have all been believing that all their lives.” (“They have all been reading that all their lives”). These examples suggest that if believing were not an ordinary act or action it would not make sense to use the word "believe" in these ways. But, it is not just that the word "believe" shares an analogous grammar to action words. Second, it seems that we perform an act or take action in the ordinary sense when we believe something. This is evidenced, for example, from the fact that it seems like one performs an act or takes action in the ordinary sense when it is requested that one believe something. For example, one might be told that one must believe in oneself in order to achieve success. This seems like something one can do. In that case it seems that one performs an act or takes action in the ordinary sense when one believes in oneself. This is not any different from what sometimes comes to pass after someone requests that someone else read something. On account of this, it seems as if believing is an ordinary act or action. Moreover, it *feels* as if we are performing an act or taking action in the ordinary sense when we believe. This is evidenced when “we describe things as hard or easy to believe”, as Hunter notes.<sup>32</sup> This supports the claim that believing is an act or action insofar as “it is characteristic of actions that they can be difficult or easy to perform”,<sup>33</sup> as Hunter continues. For example,

---

<sup>32</sup> Hunter (1980), 244.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

one of Christian faith might feel that believing in God is difficult to do. Here, it seems believing can be felt. Again, this is comparable to reading something difficult. With that, it can be taken that believing is an ordinary act or action on phenomenological grounds. There might be other reasons to suggest that believing is a species of ordinary act or action. But no more need be noted. If these reasons give grounds for taking believing to be a species of ordinary act or action then epistemic agency is straightforwardly located and explained.

But is believing a species of ordinary act or action? I think not. I maintain that taking believing to be an ordinary act or action is based on conceptual and logico-grammatical confusions. Consider the semantics and syntax of the verb “believe”. (Insofar as I am using the English language and engaging with interlocutors who are doing the same my consideration will extend only to the semantics and syntax of the English language.) The first thing to consider is the kind of lexical verb “believe” is.<sup>34</sup> There are two kinds of verbs to consider: dynamic verbs and stative verbs. Dynamic verbs involve change over time. As such, they describe actions, activities, accomplishments, achievements – or, more broadly, events and processes. Dynamic verbs are contrasted with stative verbs. Stative verbs do not involve change over time. They describe states. Though states can change from one state to another there is no change that occurs in a state. Now, even though “believe” might share some similarities with some dynamic verbs,<sup>35</sup> it is properly classified as a stative verb.<sup>36</sup> This means that it is not

---

<sup>34</sup> For introductions and overviews of the syntax and semantics of verbs see Givón (2001) and van Valin (2004).

<sup>35</sup> For example, like states, dynamic verbs that describe activities (e.g. running), can be described as atelic. This means that they do not have an endpoint. Filip (2012), 728.

a dynamic verb. If it is not a dynamic verb then it does not describe actions, activities, accomplishments, achievements – or, more broadly, events or processes. This can be established by a stativity test. A stativity test determines whether a verb is to be classified as a stative verb rather than a dynamic verb. There are four conditions that determine this. They are: (1) Progressive Condition, (2) Imperative Condition, (3) Adverb Condition, and (4) Pseudo-cleft Condition.<sup>37</sup> To show that “believe” is a stative verb I will show that it satisfies every condition. (1) Progressive Condition: Only dynamic verbs are properly used in the progressive aspect. For that reason it is permissible to say, “I am reading”. The verb “believe” is not properly used in the progressive aspect. For that reason it is wrong to say “I am believing”. Believing is not ongoing, as reading is. It does not take time to believe, as it takes time to read. While there may be legitimate uses of “believing”, using “believing” to describe an ordinary act or action is wrong. Statives are not properly used in the progressive aspect. Therefore, “believe” is a stative verb. (2) Imperative Condition: Only dynamics can take the imperative mood. For that reason it is permissible to say, “Read this book!” Moreover, in response to that command one can rightly respond, “Maybe later.” The verb “believe” does not take on the imperative mood. For that reason it is wrong to say, “Believe this!” Furthermore, as P.M.S. Hacker notes, in response to that command “one cannot intelligibly reply, ‘Not now, but I’ll do it tomorrow’ . Nor can the person entreating you to believe her story ask ‘Well, have you

---

<sup>36</sup> That being said, there are reasons to think that “believe” is not really a state even though it is classified as one grammatically. See Hunter (1977).

<sup>37</sup> This popular test is derived mostly from Dowty (1979), 1-3, and from Jackendoff (1983), 4. Of course, not every stative verb passes this stativity test. However, insofar as “believe” does I will continue to use it.

done so?', but only 'Well, do you?'"<sup>38</sup> This is because one cannot believe something on command. Stative verbs do not properly take on the imperative mood. Therefore, "believe" is a stative verb. (3) Adverb Condition: Only dynamics occur with adverbs such as "deliberately" and "carefully". For that reason it is permissible to say, "I deliberately read the book." or "I carefully read the book." The verb "believe" does not occur with adverbs such as "deliberately" and "carefully". For that reason it is wrong to say, "I deliberately believed." or "I carefully believe". The reason this is wrong is that "believe" does not express (e.g.) a skill (this will be addressed further below). Stative verbs do not occur with adverbs such as "deliberately" and "carefully". Therefore, "believe" is a stative verb. (4) Pseudo-cleft Condition: Only dynamics occur in "What I did was..." sentences. For that reason it is permissible to say, "What I did was read the book". The verb "believe" does not occur in "What I did was..." sentences. For that reason it is wrong to say, "What I did was believe." This is because there can be no sense of completion when one believes, as there can be when one reads. Statives do not occur in such sentences. Therefore, "believe" is a stative verb.

Given that "believe" passes the stativity test it is to be classified as a stative verb. As a further note, the upshot of passing this test is that it shows that "believe" is not agentive either. This is because the conditions are also tests for agentivity. In passing the stativity test they fail the agentivity test. Agentivity is typical among dynamics. A sentence like, "I am reading" makes reference to an agent (i.e. the one who brings about and is engaged in the activity of reading). This is because reading is something one does. It is right to speak of an agent in such a case (i.e. one who is doing the reading). Insofar

---

<sup>38</sup> Hacker (2013), 213.

as “believe” is a stative verb and, as such, believing is not something that one does, “I believe” does not make reference to an agent. It is therefore wrong to speak of an agent in such a case.

Given those remarks, it comes across as confused to speak about believing as being an ordinary act or action. However, it might be thought that grammar is not accountable to reality, as Wittgenstein noted, and, because of that, those considerations should not lead to the conclusion that believing is not a species of ordinary act or action and that one is not an agent when one believes. Indeed, especially as it concerns agentivity, philosophers<sup>39</sup> and linguists<sup>40</sup> alike agree that we should keep apart the grammar of agentivity and the metaphysics of agency. I concede that grammar (i.e. syntax) is not accountable to reality. However, the stativity test is not merely syntactical. It is semantic as well. For that reason it shows that it is not intelligible to speak of believing as being an ordinary act or action. Furthermore, since the stativity test is also an agentivity test, if it is not intelligible to speak of believing as being an ordinary act or action then it is not intelligible to speak of agency either.

But someone might respond that the point was not that those words are action words but that they are used in a way *analogous* to them. It is not exactly clear what this point amounts to. If it is to say that the words are used as action words then, as pointed

---

<sup>39</sup> "More generally, where “to do” appears as a main verb in a sentence (not an auxiliary verb, as in “Do you believe what he said?”), only non-stative verbs can replace it. But again, this seems to be simply because “to do” is a generic instance of a verb that takes aspectual modifiers (is A-ing, A-ed), whereas stative verbs do not receive aspectual modification. No conclusion about the agency-status of stative verbs, or about the activeness of the modes of being they ascribe, follows directly from this. Any such conclusion must be mediated by a theory of agency and of how these grammatical distinctions relate to it.” Boyle (2009) 137

<sup>40</sup> “... it is widely accepted that both agentive and non-agentive verbs may be found in the Activity and Achievement classes, although all States are non-agentive, but that the features of agency, causality, and modality should be kept apart from consideration with the lexical classes of verbs.” Ziegler (2006) 37

out, the use of such words is unintelligible or it changes the subject. Pointing to people who use words in that way is not evidence that believing is an ordinary act or action as much as evidence that people misuse words and are unfamiliar with the semantics and syntax of the word to a more substantive extent than they are. People's uses of words are not right just because they use the words in the way they do. Many people frequently confuse and misuse "your" with "you're", "affect" with "effect", "which" with "that", "imply" with "infer", "i.e." with "e.g.", "irony", "literally", "ad hominem", commas, semicolons, colons, pronouns, active and passive voices, and so on. But it is no reason to suppose that they are right to do so just because they do.

To be sure, I do not mean to suggest that, to use Hacker's metaphor, the philosopher's role here is to play the police officer of sense and prevent people from using language in whatever manner they want.<sup>41</sup> It is instead to point out what people are doing with the words they are using. In this case, it is to point out that people are not speaking intelligibly when they use those words in those ways. It is also to point out that the inferences one makes from those deviant uses will also be unintelligible. These remarks indicate that there is a distinction to be made between accepting a misuse of words and treating a misuse of words as correct and veridical. The former is legitimate. The latter is not. But, even if it is granted that the words are used as action words or, better stated, people are trying to describe an ordinary act or action with those words, then people are changing the subject in doing so. They are no longer talking about the ordinary concept of belief. Of course, that is not inherently a problem. Introducing a new concept is one thing. It may be disagreeable, but it may be done. However, extending it to

---

<sup>41</sup> Hacker (2013), 458.



the old concept is another thing. This is not acceptable. As shown above, the ordinary concept of belief does not admit of being an ordinary act or action. If it cannot admit of being an ordinary act or action then the ordinary concept of belief cannot be used to show that believing is a species of ordinary act or action and that it can explain and provide a location for epistemic agency. It would be something else. This is the problem with changing the subject. This could hardly be the result a *believer* in epistemic agency hoped for.

With all of this said, could there still be a *feeling* of believing, say, when one finds it hard to believe something? Might that at least give grounds for supposing that believing is an ordinary act or action? I do not think so. For, it seems to be based on a misunderstanding of what one means when one says one finds something hard to believe. When one says that something is difficult to believe one is not saying something about oneself but something about the putative belief. The one of Christian faith who finds it difficult to believe in God might be saying that while there is reason to believe in God there are also strong reasons against believing in God. This is easily explained without reference to something being done. But even if one were trying to draw attention to the performance of an act or taking of action one would be misusing words. As Hunter writes,

“It is hard to believe that she is the murderer” does not mean that it takes a skilled believer. We would not, to cope with the problem, prescribe a course in believing ever harder things, until the best students got so that they could believe six impossible things before breakfast, and then have them take on the proposition that she was the murderer.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Hunter (1980), 245.

Even if some feelings are associated with what one believes, believing is not what is felt. Perhaps what one feels is the apprehension one has about what one believes for example. So not even this shows that believing is an ordinary act or action. As this last example indicates, part of the problem here is that these sentences are being abstracted from their use in language and compared to sentences that involve dynamic verbs. But by looking at how “believe” is used we will often come to find that there is no reference to an ordinary act or action by the speaker. Indeed, sometimes there is no reference to the speaker either. As Wittgenstein noted, sometimes “I believe that p” functions neither as a description of an act or action nor an autobiographical report but an assertion that p.<sup>43</sup> “I believe that p” could function as an autobiographical report, of course. The point here is not that it could not. I even grant that one could try to make reference to the performance of an act or the taking of action in the ordinary sense. But, as noted above, this only shows a misuse of language rather than a report of the performance of an act or the taking of action in the ordinary sense, no matter how sincere the one who asserts it is. The point I would like to make here, which is a modest one, is that we ought to look at how “believe” and the sentences it features in are used.

The conclusion to draw from these remarks is that it is unintelligible to speak of believing as an ordinary act or action. This is primarily for the reason that “believe” is not to be classified as a dynamic verb. As such, there is no reference to an ordinary act or action. But if there is no reference to an ordinary act or action then there can be no reference to agency either. Accordingly, believing here cannot intelligibly explain and

---

<sup>43</sup> Wittgenstein (1953), §88.

locate epistemic agency. This leaves epistemic agency bereft of a location and an explanation.

### **2.3 *Believing As Species of Rational Act or Action***

Given the conclusion of §2.2 it might be thought that it is hopeless to continue trying to explain and locate epistemic agency in believing as a species of act or action. However, this might not be so. It may not be intelligible to suppose that believing is a species of act or action in the ordinary sense. But this is not the only way to suppose that believing is a species of act or action. As Matthew Boyle contends, “being occurrently up to something is not the only species of the genus: act, exercise of agency.”<sup>44</sup> Act or action in the ordinary sense is not the genus of act or action but something included within it. The genus is rational act or action. As Boyle writes,

... believing itself is an exercise of agency, one for which the subject bears a characteristically agential sort of responsibility... my beliefs are in important respects analogous to my actions themselves, rather than to objects on which I act – not because I can believe whatever I will myself to believe, but because both believing and willing are exercises of a more generic power of rational self-determination, a power that lies at the basis of both theoretical and practical self-control. I will refer to the claim that my agential relation to my own beliefs is relevantly analogous to my agential relation to my own actions as the *thesis of active belief*.<sup>45</sup>

If Boyle is right then perhaps epistemic agency can be explained by and located in believing as an act or action after all. That is as long as act or action is here understood in the “rational” rather than ordinary sense. This is need of much clarification. But I will motivate the account that is being suggested first. As Boyle correctly points out, we treat

---

<sup>44</sup> Boyle takes being occurrently up to something to be what act or action is in the ordinary sense. Boyle (2009) 138

<sup>45</sup> Ibid 121.

people as if they are in charge of and accountable for what they believe and why.<sup>46</sup> This is because they can meet two expectations we have of people who believe things. First, it is expected that they are able to say whether or not they believe it. Second, it is also expected that they are, in principle, able to answer the question, “Why do you believe that?” by giving and discussing the reasons for their belief. Meeting these expectations gives grounds for supposing that what people believe is at their discretion and “up to them”. Now, of course, it is not immediately obvious that believing is an act or action, in the rational sense, and that we exercise agency when we believe things because of this consideration. It is entirely consistent with maintaining that believing is not an act or action in any sense. Even Boyle concedes this when he says, “a natural first thought is that our discretion over what we believe lies in our capacity to deliberate and make judgments.”<sup>47</sup> As such, we might instead take the consideration to show that we have agency over our beliefs only to the extent that we can reflect upon and make judgments about what to believe, as the Reflection and Judgment view suggests. Boyle does not think that this is the case however. That we may have agency over our beliefs insofar as we can reflect and judge shows that the control and accountability we may have over our beliefs is indirect at most. It only shows that we are in charge of and accountable for looking after our beliefs. It is analogously no different, Boyle argues, from acquiring a bicycle and taking the necessary and sufficient steps to keeping it in good condition.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> The scope of “people” is to be restricted here. Boyle’s consideration only applies to the “cognitively mature human being, one who has reached what developmental psychologists call the ‘age of reason,’ one who can participate in open-ended discourse about what is the case and what claims are credible. We do not, of course, make such demands of nonlinguistic animals or small children.” Ibid., 123.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

One is responsible in these cases only to the extent that one can assess and act upon what is in one's care. But this is not enough. Boyle contends that we should want something more than this. We should want to be in control of and responsible for believing itself. The explanation of agency should not stop at our "ability to control their [beliefs] installation and removal"; it must further be explained "in something about the nature of our believing itself."<sup>49</sup>

But what does it mean to say that believing is a species of rational act or action? In order to see what Boyle means I will consider the grounds on which he makes this point. Boyle does this by making an analogy between ordinary action and belief. In particular, he focuses on an analogy between the "why?" questions for the former (i.e. "Why are you acting?") and the "why?" questions for the latter (i.e. "Why do you believe?"). In both cases the questions concern one's ongoing present. When one does something one can be asked and answer the question, "Why are you doing that?" Answering this question shows that one is continuing to regard what one is doing as something to be done. Moreover, this *makes it the case* that one is continuing to do what one is doing. This holds for believing as well. When one believes something one can answer the question, "Why do you believe that?" and answering this question shows that one is continuing to regard what one believes as something to be believed. To note, it is important to clarify what it means "to continue to regard what is believed as something to be believed". It is not the belief that *p* is to be believed. Rather, when one regards *p* as to be believed one must take *p* to be true,<sup>50</sup> as it meets "the measure that a proposition must

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 141, note 28.

meet to merit belief, namely truth”<sup>51</sup>. This is what makes it the case that one continues to believe. So Boyle takes it here that the “why?” questions for ordinary action and belief respectively show that one stands in similar (active, affirmative) relations to the actuality of the situations that one is in when one performs an act or takes action in the ordinary sense or believes something. The situation that one is in in the case of ordinary action is an ongoing event, where one is pursuing an aim. The situation that one is in in the case of belief is an enduring or persisting state, where one is holding a belief. In both cases the continuation of the situation shows that one presently endorses them.

Even though, as Boyle concedes, ordinary action is an activity in progress and belief is, as he puts it, an activity in stasis,<sup>52</sup> the analogy provides grounds for supposing that we have rational agency. Boyle writes, “it is this general relationship between endorsement and actuality, I suggest, that is the crux of rational agency.”<sup>53</sup> Rational agency, in the most general way, can be understood as such: where one’s present endorsement of X-ing (for whatever reason) is the ground of one’s present X-ing, in virtue of a capacity one possesses to be the source of the latter through the former, X-ing is one’s act and one is the agent of the X-ing.<sup>54</sup> This is the crucial point of Boyle’s position. By being the ground of one’s present situation, whether in ordinarily acting or believing, through the act of endorsing its actuality, insofar as one has a capacity to do so, one should count as rationally acting and as a rational agent. Neither being occurrently up

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>52</sup> This seems incoherent. As noted above, if “believe” is a stative verb it wrong is to speak of activity.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

to something, as Boyle puts it, or voluntariness<sup>55</sup> – typical features of agency in the ordinary sense – are necessary conditions for rational agency. That is why it is broader than the species of act or action in the ordinary sense and the latter is a species of the former genus. All that is required for rational agency is that the subject is the ground of the present actuality of her situation through endorsing it, if the subject has a capacity to do so. This allows believing to be a rational act or action. Accordingly, in believing one exercises rational agency. When one believes that *p* one can be regarded as rationally acting because by endorsing *p* as to be believed one is the ground of that enduring or persisting belief that *p*. In other words, as Boyle states,

Her persisting belief that *P* is grounded in her assent to *P* as meeting the measure that a proposition must meet to merit belief, namely truth. This assent is not an act that precedes her belief and produces it; the very existence of her belief that *P* is constituted by her persisting assent to *P*. Her believing *P*, we might say, just is her enduring act of *holding P* true, and hence to-be-believed.<sup>56</sup>

It may help to provide an example here. My persisting belief that jazz is a great genre of music is grounded in my continuing to hold, as to be believed, that jazz is a great genre of music. This makes believing an act of mine in the rational sense. I exercise rational agency when acting in that way. Again, I do not have to be occurrently up to something in order to be regarded as acting or exercising agency. As Boyle writes,

This relationship between her believing and her sense of what is reasonable is *brought to the forefront of her attention* when she occurrently considers whether

---

<sup>55</sup> “It should be clear that, on the present view, the notion of rational activity is broader than the notion of voluntary rational action: the latter stands to the former as species to genus. What distinguishes voluntary rational action, roughly, is that it is a form of rational activity that is structured by the pursuit of an aim, something not yet realized but whose realization is desired or intended. I am not suggesting that we are the agents of our believing in *this* sense: believing is neither an aim we pursue nor an activity structured toward an aim. But that should be a welcome result: it confirms the widespread idea that believing is not the sort of thing that can be done “at will”. Ibid., 144.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 143.

she accepts *P* and what grounds she has for doing so, but it is present – actually, not merely potentially – even when she does not occurrently reflect.<sup>57</sup>

What matters is merely that one’s “attitude toward the question whether *P* is persistently affirmative”.<sup>58</sup> That is what makes believing an exercise of agency, in the rational sense. Connecting back to the motivation for this account, this is how one can, and according to Boyle should, be in control of and responsible for the beliefs one holds.

According to Boyle, when one believes one performs an act in the rational sense. One thereby exercises epistemic agency through exercising rational agency. I dare say Boyle’s account provides the best way (so far) to locate epistemic agency. This is because it provides a distinct and direct agency over belief in a way that does not reduce it to ordinary agency. The upshot is that it is not obviously susceptible to criticisms that the previous view faced. Boyle concedes that “believe” is a stative verb. He can agree that “believe” is not properly used in the progressive aspect. But this is only so far as it concerns ordinary act or action. It might be properly used if believing is a rational act or action. Boyle seems to be introducing a new concept here. The ordinary concept of belief is not what is being changed. Rather, it is the concept of act or action. Boyle is suggesting that the ordinary concept of belief is an act or action according to a new sense of action.

So, with that, does Boyle’s view succeed? I think not. While it may not be susceptible to the objections noted above it is susceptible to another which is just as damning. The characterization of believing as an exercise of rational agency is not any less unintelligible. Recall that one’s persisting belief that *p* is just one’s persisting act of

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



assenting to or holding or, more broadly, endorsing  $p$  as true, and to-be-believed for meeting the measure that a proposition must meet to merit belief (i.e. truth).<sup>59</sup> In order to assess what this means the semantics and syntax of the words “assent”, “hold”, and “endorse” must be considered. “Assent”, “hold”, and “endorse” are all verbs. What is important to note about these verbs is that they are not stative verbs. They are dynamic verbs. This means that they are unlike the verb “believe”. It at least seems right to say that “assent”, “hold”, and “endorse” are properly used in the progressive aspect (e.g. “I am assenting to this.”, “I am holding that.”, “I am endorsing it.”), take on the imperative mood (e.g. “Assent to this!”, “Hold that!”, “Endorse it!”), can occur with adverbs such as “deliberately” and “carefully” (e.g. “I deliberately assented to that.”, “I carefully held that.”, “I deliberately endorsed it.”), and can occur in “What I did was...” sentences (e.g. “What I did was assent to that.”, “What I did was hold that.”, “What I did was endorse it.”) Insofar as “assent”, “hold”, and “endorse” fail the stativity test they pass the agentivity test. Accordingly, they introduce the appearance of agency.<sup>60</sup>

While that might appear to vindicate Boyle I think that it presents a problem for him. The trouble that I would like to bring attention is that it is unclear what “assenting to  $p$ ”, “holding  $p$ ”, and “endorsing  $p$ ” amount to. “A persisting act of assenting to or

---

<sup>59</sup> It is interesting to note that this way of characterizing believing seems to suggest that believing is a disposition or dispositional state. What’s more, Boyle even states that, “to ascribe a belief that  $P$  to a person seems at most to imply something about his dispositions, about what he would do if \_\_, not what he is actually doing.” Boyle (2009), 137. It seems then that he is taking believing to be a disposition; Taking believing to be dispositions to assent is not unprecedented. Notably, Ronald De Sousa says that believing that  $p$  is a disposition to assent to  $p$  – if one assents to  $p$  then one believes that; De Sousa (1971), 63-64. If this is what Boyle is suggesting then he opens himself to the objection that believing is not a disposition or dispositional state. (See Hacker (2004) and Hacker (2013) for objections.) So if believing is not a disposition or dispositional state it seems that Boyle’s account fails. I will leave this as an open question. Furthermore, if Boyle is committed to offering a defense of the claim that believing is a disposition or dispositional state it cannot be taken for granted that it will yield an account of how assenting to  $p$ , holding  $p$ , and endorsing  $p$  can be ongoing.

<sup>60</sup> Thanks go to David Bakhurst for help with this point and the following discussion.

holding or, more broadly, endorsing  $P$  as true” describes an ongoing agential event or process. This agential event or process has to be ongoing so as long as one continues to believe  $p$ . But what kind of agential event or process could this be? Since “assenting”, “holding”, and “endorsing” are dynamic verbs they suggest that one is up to something in some way when one assents to, holds, or endorses something. This is why one could use “assenting”, “holding”, and “endorsing” intelligibly to describe ongoing agential events or processes that one is occurrently up to. In other words, it makes sense to use them to describe ongoing ordinary acts or actions. For example, “I am endorsing that candidate for the duration of her running.”, “I am holding the guitar for the guitarist for now.”, “I am assenting to these agreements.”, etc. However, Boyle does not believe that believing is or requires being occurrently up to something in order to be a rational act or action. Believing is just the ongoing non-occurrent act of assenting to or holding or, more broadly, endorsing  $p$  as true. But it is left without explanation as to what that means. For that reason it is not evident that “endorsing  $p$ ”, “holding  $p$ ”, and “assenting to  $p$ ” intelligibly describe ongoing agential events or processes as “I am endorsing that candidate for the duration of the running.”, “I am holding the guitar for the guitarist for now.”, and “I am assenting to these agreements.” do. It cannot be taken for granted that they are just as intelligible solely by virtue of the fact that “assent”, “hold”, and “endorse” are dynamic verbs. In fact, despite appearances, it does not seem that such uses are intelligible at all so as long as there is no explanation for them.

With that I offer the following argument to show why such uses are unintelligible. If it is intelligible to say that “assenting to  $p$ ”, “holding  $p$ ”, and endorsing  $p$ ” describe acts or actions then it is intelligible to say that they describe either ongoing occurrent acts or

actions (i.e. ordinary acts or actions) that one is up to or ongoing non-occurrent acts or actions (i.e. rational acts or actions that are not ordinary) that one is up to. But they cannot describe ongoing occurrent acts or actions because they pass the stativity test and fail the agentivity test. They seem to describe states rather than actions, activities, accomplishments, achievements – or, more broadly, events or processes. Consider how they are used in the progressive aspect, for instance. In response to the question, “What are you doing right now?” it sounds just as deviant to reply, “I am assenting to  $p$ ”, “I am holding  $p$ ”, and “I am endorsing  $p$ ” as it does to reply, “I am believing  $p$ ”. They seem no more able to describe an ongoing occurrent act or action that one is up to than “believing  $p$ ” does. One should not be misled by the fact “assent”, “hold”, and “endorse” are dynamic. Their uses here cannot be taken for granted. They come across as just another way of saying that one believes  $p$ . So, just as it is unintelligible to say here that “believing  $p$ ” describes an ongoing occurrent act or action, it is unintelligible to say that “assenting to  $p$ ”, “holding  $p$ ”, and “endorsing  $p$ ” do as well. This means that if they describe acts or actions they have to describe ongoing non-occurrent acts or actions, which Boyle maintains. This requires an explanation for what it means for assenting to  $p$ , holding  $p$ , and endorsing  $p$  to be ongoing non-occurrent acts or actions that one is somehow up to. But no explanation is provided as to what it means for assenting to  $p$ , holding  $p$ , and endorsing  $p$  to be ongoing non-occurrent acts or actions. Note that they cannot be explained in terms of “believing”, “assenting”, “holding”, or “endorsing” because that would be circular. Furthermore, without such an explanation, there is no reason to think that “assenting to  $p$ ”, “holding  $p$ ”, and “endorsing  $p$ ” are not just other ways of saying that one believes  $p$  and therefore describe states as well. So, as it stands, it is

unintelligible to say that “assenting to  $p$ ”, “holding  $p$ ”, and “endorsing  $p$ ” describe ongoing non-occurrent acts or actions. Now, if it is not intelligible to say that “assenting to  $p$ ”, “holding  $p$ ”, and endorsing  $p$ ” describe either ongoing occurrent acts or actions that one is up to or ongoing non-occurrent acts or actions that one is up to then it is not intelligible to say that they describe acts or actions.

The upshot is that assenting to  $p$ , holding  $p$ , and endorsing  $p$  do not explain how believing is an act or action in the ordinary or rational senses. Indeed, rather than explaining how believing is an rational act or action, stating that believing is just the act of assenting to  $p$  or holding  $p$  or, more broadly, endorsing  $p$  pushes the explanation back further. Without an explanation as to how the latter is a rational act or action it is unclear what it means for believing to be a rational act or action. To say that believing is activity in stasis remains obscure if not absurd. With that, reason is provided to doubt that there is any real introduction of agency here. For, if it is unintelligible to say that “assenting to  $p$ ”, “holding  $p$ ”, and “endorsing  $p$ ” describe rational acts or actions, which means it is unintelligible to say that “believing” does as well, it is unintelligible to speak of agency too. Worse, if “assenting to  $p$ ”, “holding  $p$ ”, and “endorsing  $p$ ” are just other ways of saying that one believes  $p$  and therefore describe states, then again no real sense of agency is introduced. This serves to undermine the case for epistemic agency. To explain and locate epistemic agency in terms of rational agency is to explain the obscure by the just as obscure. Boyle’s attempt fails.

## 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I considered two ways to explain and locate epistemic agency. These ways suggest that epistemic agency is explained by and located in believing as a species of act or action. One way suggested that believing is an ordinary act or action. By considering the semantics and syntax of “believe” it was found that it is unintelligible to speak of believing as an ordinary act or action. On this ground the view fails to offer an intelligible explanation and location for epistemic agency. Another, more promising way suggested that believing is a rational act or action. The difficulty with this suggestion is that there is no intelligible explanation for what it means for believing to be a rational act or action. This is because there is no explanation for how “assenting to  $p$ ”, “holding  $p$ ”, and “endorsing  $p$ ” describe ongoing non-occurrent acts or actions. Until such an explanation is provided the notion remains obscure. So, given that it is not intelligible to speak of believing as being an act or action in any sense, this approach cannot explain and locate epistemic agency. If epistemic agency is to be located and explained it must be done another way.

## Chapter 3

### Direct Doxastic Control

*In this chapter I will consider a couple of more ways to explain and locate epistemic agency by focusing on Direct Doxastic Control views, and then show that they too fail. The division of this section is fourfold. In §3.1 I will introduce Direct Doxastic Control views and show how they might be thought to provide an explanation of and location for epistemic agency. In §3.2 I will explain how it is thought that belief formation can be voluntarily controlled (Direct Doxastic Voluntarism) and contend that this cannot intelligibly explain and locate epistemic agency. In §3.3 I will explain how belief formation can be evaluatively controlled (Evaluative Control) and show that it cannot explain and locate epistemic agency either. In §3.4 I will offer a conclusion.*

#### 3.1 Introduction

Direct Doxastic Control views suggest we exercise epistemic agency because we can, either voluntarily or evaluatively, directly control the formation of belief. To say that we can directly control the formation of belief is not to say that the formation is mediated by some other act or action. Rather, it is to say that one directly controls the formation of one's beliefs itself. These views are weaker than Doxastic Act/Action views because they do not suggest that believing is itself a species of act or action, in the ordinary or rational sense. Focusing on belief formation does not imply that believing is a species of act or action in any sense, even if belief formation is. This seems to allow for epistemic agency without the commitment to Doxastic Act/Action views. Now there are two ways that it could be said that the formation of belief is directly controlled. One way states that the formation of belief can be voluntarily controlled. This is the infamous view known as (Direct) Doxastic Voluntarism. If the formation of belief can be voluntarily controlled then the formation of belief can be directly controlled. Direct control implies agency.

Since the direct control here is doxastic it follows that the agency that is implied is epistemic. We can take it then that voluntary control of belief formation would locate and explain epistemic agency. (Direct) Doxastic Voluntarism is not the only way to suggest that we directly control the formation of belief, however. Another way suggests that we evaluatively control the formation of belief. Evaluative control consists in forming and answering questions concerning whether  $p$ . Evaluative control is a distinct kind of direct control. This is in part because it is not voluntary. Now, insofar as direct control implies agency, this distinctive kind of direct control implies a distinctive kind of agency, which is similar to Boyle's suggestion.<sup>61</sup> What this means will be explained below. Importantly, epistemic agency is implied in the same way here as well. To that end, Evaluative Control explains and locates epistemic agency. However, in this chapter I will show that neither of these views succeeds in intelligibly explaining and locating epistemic agency insofar as it is unintelligible to speak of the direct control of belief formation.

### **3.2 Direct Doxastic Voluntarism**

As stated above, one way to directly control the formation of belief is to voluntarily control the formation of belief. This is Direct Doxastic Voluntarism. Now, this way of characterizing Direct Doxastic Voluntarism might seem odd. Direct Doxastic Voluntarism is typically regarded as suggesting that one can believe voluntarily or, in other words, believe at will. But given what was argued in the previous chapter, this cannot be right. Believing is not a species of act or action in the ordinary sense. It cannot

---

<sup>61</sup> It may have been noticed that I have excluded what is called reflective control, which is recognized as a kind of control we have over our beliefs. See Bakhurst (2011), Boyle, (2009), Engel (2013), Hieronymi (2009), and Owens (2001). Reflective control is, on my account, indirect. So it has no place here. It will be considered in the next chapter.

be voluntary or even involuntary or non-voluntary for that reason. Whereas we might come to regard the view that believing is a species of ordinary act or action as a kind of Direct Doxastic Voluntarism, it cannot be the only kind.<sup>62</sup> Someone who defends Direct Doxastic Voluntarism can suggest that the formation of belief is a species of ordinary act or action. As such subject to the will. Believing at will then is just another way to say *form* beliefs at will.

It should be noted that Direct Doxastic Voluntarism is not the only species of Doxastic Voluntarism. Doxastic Voluntarism has two species.<sup>63</sup> There is also Indirect Doxastic Voluntarism. This view holds we can voluntarily control the formation of belief only to the extent that we can voluntarily do various other things to bring it about that we form a belief. As its name suggests, it could not be of any help in providing an explanation and location for epistemic agency. For, it is no different from the kind of agency discussed in §1.1. To have indirect voluntary control of belief formation is just to exercise agency by putting oneself in a position to believe something. Again, consider the reading example in §1.1. One may bring it about that one forms a belief about some findings in the cognitive sciences by reading cognitive science books. Or, using Richard Feldman's example, one may bring it about that one forms the belief that the light is on in one's office by turning

---

<sup>62</sup> Robert Audi suggests this. On the distinction he writes, "On a strong interpretation, it expresses the view that believing itself is an *action-type* having some tokens that are directly voluntary. On a weaker interpretation, it expresses the view that *forming* a belief is sometimes such an action-type. Call the first view the *behavioral version* of doxastic voluntarism and the second the *genetic version*." Audi (2015), 28. For my purposes it does not matter whether the behavioural version really is a version of Direct Doxastic Voluntarism because I am not concerned with classifying in a technical categorial sense.

<sup>63</sup> William Alston notes that there is more than two; Alston (1989), 119-142. However, given complications with his taxonomy I have, as others have, come to regard Doxastic Voluntarism as only consisting of two forms. For reasons see Feldman (2001) and Nottelman (2007).



it on.<sup>64</sup> Since exercising ordinary agency in a way that puts one in a position to believe something cannot provide an explanation and location for epistemic agency indirect doxastic voluntarism cannot either. It is, as Feldman correctly states, “of absolutely no epistemological significance and that it does nothing to help resolve the real puzzle concerning voluntarism”.<sup>65</sup> On account of this there will be no further consideration given to it. Henceforth, the focus will only be on Direct Doxastic Voluntarism.

Even if Direct Doxastic Voluntarism can provide an explanation and location for epistemic agency, what motivation is there to think that belief formation can be voluntarily controlled? Despite its infamous status, Direct Doxastic Voluntarism has received a lot of support.<sup>66</sup> Three of the reasons that motivate it are similar to, if not the same as, those noted in §2.2. First, it seems in line with how we use language at times. We sometimes say, “I will form the belief when I am provided with a reason to.”, “I formed a belief.”, “I decided to believe (i.e. form the belief).”. These seem to make sense and, unlike a sentence such as “I will believe that p”, seem to describe an act or action. Second, belief formation seems to be analogous to action in various ways.<sup>67</sup> Consider what Sharon Ryan says.<sup>68</sup> Just as one can act when one decides to do so, one can form a belief when one decides to. They are subject to similar conditions. They both need good reasons. So Direct Doxastic Voluntarism need not hold that one can simply form beliefs because one just decides to do so. One needs good reasons to make that decision. Only

---

<sup>64</sup> Feldman (2001), 81.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>66</sup> For some contemporary support see Chisholm (1977), Heller (2000) Ginet (2001), Ryan (2003), Steup (2008), Weatherson (2008). But, of course, support goes back even further, beyond the last century. One notable philosopher who supported doxastic voluntarism was Rene Descartes (1641).

<sup>67</sup> See Ryan (2003) and see Steup (2008), (2012), (forthcoming).

<sup>68</sup> Ryan (2003), 65-66.

then can one form a belief. The same holds for action. One could not just act. One needs reasons to decide to do so. If we should accept that action motivated by reasons can be voluntary, we should accept that belief formation is too. Third, it seems that there are some cases where we really do voluntarily control the formation of belief. Consider the following example by Carl Ginet:

Sam is on a jury deliberating whether to find the defendant guilty as charged; if certain statements of a certain witness in the trial are true, then the defendant cannot have done what he is charged with; Sam deliberates whether to believe those statements, to believe the prosecutor's insinuations that the witness lied, or to withhold belief on the matter altogether. He decides to believe the witness and votes to acquit.<sup>69</sup>

Here it looks as if Sam voluntarily controls the formation of that belief. Finally, the exercise of direct doxastic control seems to be a necessary condition for treating believers as responsible.<sup>70</sup> As Mark Heller notes, praise and blame for our beliefs seem to require voluntary control over our beliefs. If Direct Doxastic Voluntarism is false then it seems that we cannot be praised or blamed for our beliefs.<sup>71</sup> So, if we think that we can be then we should suppose that we voluntarily control the formation of our beliefs.

These reasons may support Direct Doxastic Voluntarism. But, no such assessment can be made unless the conditions for the voluntary control of belief formation are specified. In doing so I will focus on recent work by Steup.<sup>72</sup> This is because he is the foremost and most rigorous defender of this view.<sup>73</sup> There seem to be four conditions for

---

<sup>69</sup> Ginet (2001), 64. Ginet mentions other cases as well. See also Ryan (2003) and Weatherson (2008) for further examples.

<sup>70</sup> See Heller (2000) and see Steup (2000)

<sup>71</sup> Heller (2000), 130.

<sup>72</sup> See Steup (2008), (2012) and (forthcoming).

<sup>73</sup> Nikolaj Nottelman writes, "Over the last decades Matthias Steup has been perhaps the most persistent opponent of doxastic involuntarism" Nottelman (2006), 567. Margaret Schmitt similarly writes, "One of

voluntary belief formation. They are: (1) Intentionality, (2) Volitional Control, (3) Executional Control, and (4) Reason Responsiveness. I will explain each in turn.

(1) *Intentionality*: Intentionality (i.e. intentionally forming a belief) is essential to a defense of Direct Doxastic Voluntarism. As Steup writes,

if the thesis of doxastic intentionality is shown to be true, this will go a long way towards defending doxastic voluntarism... if the thesis of doxastic intentionality is true, then the only avenue towards blocking doxastic voluntarism will be that of hard determinism.<sup>74</sup>

So if one can intend to form a belief then the formation of one's belief is voluntary. Steup expresses this as follows: "an instance of an agent's behavior – an agent's  $\phi$ -ing – qualifies as an action, that is, as being under the agent's voluntary control, only if it is intentional."<sup>75</sup> For example, my writing this thesis qualifies as under my voluntary control because it is intentional. Steup, borrowing from Searle's analysis of intention,<sup>76</sup> suggests that there are two kinds of intention that we may speak of here: implicit intention and explicit intention. One's  $\phi$ -ing is implicitly intentional "if, although by  $\phi$ -ing the agent does not carry out a prior intention to  $\phi$ , there is nevertheless an intention somehow 'in' the action."<sup>77</sup> This is to say that  $\phi$ -ing does not require a prior intention to  $\phi$ . The implicit intention to  $\phi$  manifests itself in the  $\phi$ -ing. For example, when I am strumming a Cmaj11 chord for the duration of a couple of measures the intention to hit the third string while strumming is implicit in it. It is not explicitly intentional. The implicit intention to hit the third string manifests itself in my strumming the Cmaj11

---

the leading opponents of doxastic involuntarism in the current literature is Matthias Steup." Schmitt (2015), 26.

<sup>74</sup> Steup (forthcoming), 2.

<sup>75</sup> Steup (forthcoming), 3.

<sup>76</sup> Searle (1983).

<sup>77</sup> Steup (forthcoming), 3.

chord. In contrast, one's  $\phi$ -ing is explicitly intentional "if, by way of  $\phi$ -ing, the agent carries out an antecedently formed intention to  $\phi$ ."<sup>78</sup> This is to say that the  $\phi$ -ing requires one to *consciously* form the intention beforehand. By  $\phi$ -ing one carries out an antecedent intention. As an example, if I form a prior intention to strum a Cmaj11 chord four times, and then I strum a Cmaj11 chord four times, I can be said to have had an explicit intention to strum a Cmaj11 chord four times. There may be implicit intentions in this, of course. But the intention itself is not implicit because I formed it prior to the action and then carried it out. Steup makes a further point, however. Any action that is implicitly intended is such that it *could be* explicitly intentional. Using the example above again, if hitting the third string while strumming is implicitly intentional then it could also be explicitly intentional.

With all of that said, if one's  $\phi$ -ing satisfies either implicit intentionality or explicit intentionality then the act or action is under one's direct voluntary control. Taking it for granted that this is how intention should be analyzed, does belief formation satisfy this just as act or action does? Steup maintains that it does. Commencing with explicit intentionality, Steup thinks that beliefs that are formed as a result of a conflict of situation (i.e. evidence, duties, etc.) show that belief formation is explicitly intentional. Steup provides several examples as evidence to show that our beliefs are formed in an explicitly intentional manner.<sup>79</sup> I will go over only one case of explicit intentionality that he offers. Here is a concrete example:

Suppose that, upon returning to the spot in the parking garage where Carl parked his car, it turns out it isn't there. Carl asks himself whether it has been

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

stolen. His car is a brand new BMW, and it is no longer where he parked it. That is evidence to believe it has been stolen. On the other hand, Carl might misremember where he parked it. Perhaps he is confused about which level of the parking garage he was on when he left his car. Moreover, the garage is in a suburb in which car theft is a relatively rare occurrence. Finally, there is the possibility that Carl's car was towed. Upon further reflection, Carl notices that he has a distinct and vivid memory of having parked his car on the second level, labeled Blue. And that's the level he is now on. Moreover, Carl recalls that, just last week, he read a newspaper story about how theft of fancy European cars has expanded to suburban areas. In light of these considerations, Carl decides that his car has been stolen. His attitude changes from suspension of judgment to belief. Why? It so changes *because* Carl has decided to believe that his car was stolen. He made a decision about what to believe, and his decision effected a change in what he believes.<sup>80</sup>

Note that, according to Steup, what "decide" means here is something like "do something intentionally".<sup>81</sup> According to Steup, Carl carries out a prior intention to believe that his car has been stolen because, after considering the evidence available to him, he decided that the evidence supported that belief over the others. That is, in deciding that the evidence supported that belief he formed that belief in an explicitly intentional manner. This case is no different from a case of act or action. Suppose Carl was deliberating over whether to go for a walk. While deliberating he weighs all of the practical reasons. Eventually he comes to decide that he should go for a walk, and so he goes. His going for a walk is explicitly intentional because he decided that he should. If this latter case shows that the action is explicitly intentional, then there is reason to think that the formation of that belief is explicitly intentional.

Now, one might not be convinced from this example, or any other, that the formation of belief is explicitly intentional. Even if what he says is right, the amount of

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> I take it that this is the case because he suggests that "one can  $\phi$  if one decides to  $\phi$ " can be substituted with "one can intentionally  $\phi$ ". Ibid., 3.

cases might not be that many. On account of this Steup also provides evidence to show that belief formation is often implicitly intentional. Steup thinks that nearly all of our beliefs are implicitly intentional. Building off an example Steup provides, here is an example:

During Carl's walk he spots what looks like a bench to rest on in front of him in the distance. Behind this bench is a tree. While walking toward it he deliberates over whether it is a bench. It might after all just be some wood lying around or something of the sort. After getting closer he soon decides to believe that it is a bench because the evidence now presents it as such. The formation of this belief is explicitly intentional. But, the formation of the belief that there is a tree in front of him is not. At some point he formed the belief that there is a tree in front of him. But he never explicitly intended to believe this. His focus was on whether there was a bench in front of him. The belief is implicitly intentional because, according to Steup, if Carl were to reflect on whether to retain it, it would meet his seal of approval.<sup>82</sup> The case is not any different from one involving action. When one walks one may implicitly intend to walk at a certain a pace. It manifests itself in the walking. It is not explicit, although it could be. If there is implicit intentionality in this case there is implicit intentionality in the other. A great many of the beliefs we form seem to be like this. But, as stated above, if the formation of belief is implicitly intentional then it can also be explicitly intentional. The explanation for this is that nearly all of our beliefs could be in a conflict situation. Steup writes,

Almost every belief is such that, when confronted with plausible counter evidence, we can reject it, or alternatively retain it if we deem the presented counter evidence too weak. In this way, propositional attitudes that are merely

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 12.

implicitly intentional can be replaced with attitudes that are explicitly intentional. Thus the worry that the scope of explicit intentionality, and thus voluntary control, is limited to a rather small and limited area of belief formation is unwarranted.<sup>83</sup>

If Steup is right about these examples then he has shown that the formation of belief is voluntary because it is either implicitly intentional or explicitly intentional, and any belief that is the former could be the latter.

## *(2) Volitional Control*

Though intention is important, it gives no account of what voluntary control exactly amounts to. Steup states that “a proper account of voluntary control must mention two conditions”:<sup>84</sup> (i) the condition of volitional control and (ii) the condition of executional control. The condition of volitional control states that one can decide to  $\phi$  or decide not to  $\phi$ . For example, if I can decide whether to write or not then I have volitional control. The same is true for belief formation, Steup contends. But the status of volitional control depends on whether or not our wills are free, either in the libertarian or compatibilist senses. This is why he says that if it can be shown that belief formation is intentional then the only way to argue against Direct Doxastic Voluntarism is to argue for hard determinism or indeterminism. If either libertarianism or compatibilism holds then a case can be made for Direct Doxastic Voluntarism. If either hard determinism or indeterminism hold then a case can be made against it and for Doxastic Involuntarism. As I am not concerned here with this issue in the metaphysics of the will I will not consider this issue any further.

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>84</sup> Steup (2012), 146.

### *(3) Executional Control*

The other condition required for voluntary control is executional control. The condition of executional control states that if one can decide to  $\phi$  then one can  $\phi$  and if one can decide not to  $\phi$  then one can refrain from  $\phi$ -ing. For example, if I can decide to write then I can write, and if I can decide not to write then I can not write. Steup maintains that this is true of belief formation too. For example, if I can decide to form the belief that my car was stolen then I can form the belief that my car was stolen, and if I can decide not to form the belief that my car was stolen then I can not form the belief that my car was stolen. What's more, Steup contends that executing doxastic decisions are easy, and failure is a rare phenomena.<sup>85</sup> (Though if there is a failure then one can be said not to have voluntarily controlled the formation of belief.) Connecting back to intentionality, Steup contends that the condition of intentionality is built into the condition of executional control.<sup>86</sup> The condition of executional control can be restated with the intentionality condition. This provides the following: One has executional control (and, as such, voluntary control) only if (i) one can intentionally  $\phi$ , and (ii) one can intentionally refrain from  $\phi$ -ing. Applied to belief, one has executional control (and, as such, voluntary control) over belief formation only if (i) one can form a belief intentionally, and (ii) one can intentionally refrain from forming a belief.

### *(4) Reason-responsiveness*

Another condition for voluntary control is that one is responsive to reasons. This is to say

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>86</sup> Steup (forthcoming), 3.



that one's  $\phi$ -ing is the causal outcome of a reason-responsive mental process.<sup>87</sup> If I intentionally write then I am responsive to a practical reason which caused me to write. Steup thinks that this holds for belief formation too. If I form the belief that jazz is a great genre of music then I am responsive to an epistemic reason which caused me to believe that.

All of these conditions taken together show how the formation of belief is voluntarily controlled. With that, if Direct Doxastic Voluntarism holds then epistemic agency follows. Since control implies agency, voluntary control over belief formation implies epistemic agency. The explanation for and location of epistemic agency then resides in the voluntary control of belief formation. I think we should deny this, however. Direct Doxastic Voluntarism cannot intelligibly explain or locate epistemic agency. This is so for two connected reasons. First, it is not intelligible to speak of belief formation as an act or action. Second, there are no public criteria to determine that the formation of belief is voluntarily controlled. Beginning with the first reason, Direct Doxastic Voluntarism, and discussion about it, is predicated on a confusion concerning the word "form". "Form" is a dynamic verb. This is because it fails the stativity test and passes the agentivity test put forward in §2.2. This is evidenced by the following sentences: "I am forming a plan", "Form the dough into cake balls!", "I carefully formed the clay.", "I deliberately formed a plan.", "What I did was form a plan.". In these cases acts and actions are described. So it is in these cases that we may (rightfully) say that there are exercises of volitional agency. When it comes to "form a belief" it is not so clear that an

---

<sup>87</sup> I am not sure this is the best way to characterize responsiveness to reasons. But, insofar as this is how Steup frames it I present it as such; Steup (2008), 381.

act or action is being described. This is because it seems to pass the stativity test and fail the agentivity test. First, “forming a belief” does not naturally occur in the progressive aspect. In response to the question, “What are you doing?” it comes across as wrong to reply, “I am forming a belief.” To form a belief is not something that is ongoing. It does not take time. Second, it also does not take on the imperative mood. One cannot make the command, “Form this belief!” and expect someone to comply. Moreover, that person could not respond, “I am busy at the moment but I’ll do it tomorrow.” Third, it does not properly occur with adverbs such as “deliberately” and “carefully”. It is not right to say, “I deliberately formed the belief.” “I carefully form the belief that P.” After all, it is, for example, no skill to form a belief. Lastly, it does not occur in “What I did was...” sentences. It is not right to say, “What I did was form the belief that *p*.” There is no sense of completion involved here. This indicates that “form a belief” is stative rather dynamic, and is also not agentive. Of course, this is not to say that there are no legitimate uses of “forming a belief”. But that does not show that “form a belief” is dynamic in a way that makes it an act or action, and therefore something agential. As a consequence, it is unintelligible to say that “form a belief” describes an act or action. In fact, it fares no better than “believe”. This leads me to suspect that “form a belief”, as used by the Direct Doxastic Voluntarist is just “believe” in disguise. This is what Robert Audi suggests as well. He says, “But if believing is neither action nor event, this description [i.e. believing that P when commanded to] does not have a clear sense. Using the phrase ‘form a belief’ may disguise this point, but we must not be misled by the phrase.”<sup>88</sup> Direct Doxastic

---

<sup>88</sup> Addition of “[i.e. believing that P when commanded to]” is my own. What precedes the quoted remark is the following: “ In other cases, there may seem to be an action of forming the belief that *p*; for just as one

Voluntarism thus appears to just be the view that believing is a species of ordinary act or action! It is therefore susceptible to the charges raised against the latter. To avoid this result Direct Doxastic Voluntarism has to distinguish itself from the latter by not treating belief formation as an act or action. There are two upshots of this. The first is that it would not be clear what Direct Doxastic Voluntarism could amount to. Putting that aside, if Direct Doxastic Voluntarism cannot treat belief formation as an act or action then it cannot treat it as an exercise of agency either. So it was wrong, for example, to say that the will is causally inefficacious when it comes to belief formation and that it is psychologically impossible to form beliefs at will, as if that is some kind of empirical matter.<sup>89</sup> What should have been said is that it is not intelligible to speak about voluntariness – and for that matter involuntariness or nonvoluntariness – where there are no acts or actions to speak of. If that is the case then one could not intelligibly speak of human agency either. This gives grounds for supposing that Direct Doxastic Voluntarism cannot explain and locate epistemic agency.

Though I think this is the right point to make, Direct Doxastic Voluntarists are unlikely to be convinced. They may suggest that “form a belief” is dynamic and this is evidenced through observation that belief formation is voluntarily controlled. But the only way that this can be determined is if there are public criteria available to make such determinations. In particular, it has to be the case that it can be established through public criteria that one can form a belief intentionally, either explicitly or implicitly. This is

---

can as it were say ‘Arm, rise!’ and raise one’s arm at will, it may seem that one can (in favorable circumstances) say to oneself – or to one’s “intellect” – ‘Believe *p*!’ and thereby believe *p* at will.” Audi (2015), 39.

<sup>89</sup> See Alston (1989).

what voluntary control demands. Recall that one exercises executional and therefore voluntary control over belief formation only if (i) one can form a belief intentionally, and (ii) one can intentionally refrain from forming a belief. I contend that there are no public criteria to establish this.<sup>90</sup> What follows from this is that there are no public criteria for executional control of belief formation and therefore no public criteria for voluntary control of belief formation.

To clarify, I do not mean to contend that there are no public criteria for belief or belief formation. There are. We can take it that someone believes something or has formed a belief by considering how she acts. For example, we might see what assertions she makes when in a discussion with others about some topic, ask her what she believes, look at how she lives given what she believes, etc. This should not be in dispute. My contention is that there are no public criteria to establish that any of the beliefs one has or could have are ones that were formed intentionally and therefore voluntarily controlled. Here, I take cue from Wittgenstein when he writes, “An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria.”<sup>91</sup> To note, I take this claim not to apply merely to tokens of the type. Rather, I take this claim to apply to the type itself. If belief formation, as a type, is an inner act or action that can be intended and therefore voluntarily controlled then it should have outward or public criteria to establish that. But what criteria could there be? Let’s go back to Steup’s example about Carl. What must be the case for one to say that Carl’s

---

<sup>90</sup> Though I will restrict focus to the former conjunct the proceeding considerations apply to the latter as well. Furthermore, so as long as one conjunct fails to be established the conjunction fails to be established.

<sup>91</sup> Wittgenstein (1953), §582.

belief formation is intentional? Steup offers an idea.<sup>92</sup> Suppose the following happens:

- (i) Wondering whether there was a theft, Carl suspends judgment about whether there was a theft.
- (ii) Carl considers his reasons for and against believing the theft occurred.
- (iii) Concluding that he has good reasons for taking it to be the case, Carl decides (i.e. intends) to believe it is the case.
- (iv) Carl's attitude of suspending judgment about whether the theft occurred is replaced by that of *believing* that the theft occurred.
- (v) Carl believes the theft occurred *because* Carl decided (i.e. intended) to believe that, and the causal relation between Carl's decision (i.e. intention) and Carl's belief is non-deviant.

This may all provide public criteria for establishing that Carl has formed the belief that the theft occurred. But even with this we are still left to wonder how it is established that the belief Carl formed was intentional. For, at most these are public criteria for establishing that belief formation comes about from having reflected and judged that there are good reasons to believe that a theft occurred. Or these are public criteria for establishing that belief formation occurred because Carl was convinced by the reasons or evidence. Neither of these requires or even suggests that belief formation is intentional. So, what public criteria are there to show that belief formation is intentional? We might add the following condition to remedy this:

- (vi) Carl immediately acts in a way that shows he believes the theft occurred.

Again, this may be a public criterion that shows that Carl believes or formed the belief that the theft occurred. But we are still left to wonder where the intentionality

---

<sup>92</sup> Steup (2012) 157

is. Again, in conjunction with the other criteria, nothing more is established other than reflection and judgment or being convinced by the reasons. This is still not even enough to establish that belief formation is intentional. So we might add a further condition:

(vii) Carl sincerely says, “I decide (i.e. intend) to believe the theft occurred” or “I decided (i.e. intended) to believe the theft occurred.”

Carl has first person authority, of course. This is not something we would wish to deny. But saying so does not make it so. First person authority is defeasible. This was evidenced in §2.2. Since the previous criteria did not show that the formation of belief is intentional and, moreover, “form a belief” is not to dynamic but stative, there is more reason to suppose that Carl is misusing words rather than intentionally forming beliefs when he says what he says. So rather than establishing that belief formation is intentional, saying “I decide (i.e. intend) to believe the theft occurred” or “I decided (i.e. intended) to believe the theft occurred.” establishes that Carl is misusing language.

From these considerations it looks as if there are no public criteria to determine that belief formation is intentional. There might be two objections to what has been noted so far. First, someone might argue that I have not shown that there are no public criteria but that the criteria can be used to show multiple things. This response fails. This is because it shows intentional belief formation is undetermined by the criteria. If it is undetermined it fails to show that belief formation is intentional. Second, it might be objected that this does not show that belief formation as a type of act or

action is not established by public criteria, but only that this token is not. It might be thought then that I am not doing what I intended to do and, as such, it is still open for one to claim that belief formation is established as intentional by public criteria. To be sure, although I used a token as an example to demonstrate that there are no public criteria to establish that belief formation is intentional, my considerations can be extended to the type. The result is no different when said considerations are extended to another token. For example, suppose, as a further feature of the story, Carl finds out that his friend is a suspect in the theft case. There is evidence to suggest that his friend is the one who stole the car. But, Carl has a hard time believing that his friend could be implicated in such activity because there is evidence to suggest that his friend is such a good person. He also takes it that he has a duty to support his friend whenever he is in need of support. Given the conflict, Carl decides (i.e. intends) to believe that his friend is innocent. There are certainly public criteria to establish that he believes his friend is innocent and that the evidence in favor of his friend's innocence is more convincing to him rather than the evidence against him. But there are no public criteria that establish that Carl intends to believe that his friend is innocent. At most, there are public criteria to show that the belief is formed as a result of the convincingness of the evidence rather than an intention and that if Carl thinks that the formation of the belief was intentional then he is simply mistaken about the semantics and syntax of "form a belief".

The reason that there are no public criteria to establish that belief formation is not intentional here is not because of the particularity of the case. This case is no different

from the previous one. This indicates that the reason that there are no public criteria in those cases has to do with the type they belong to. Wondering whether something is the case, considering reasons, making judgments about reasons, being convinced by evidence, acting as if something is the case, sincerely asserting “I decide (i.e. intend) to believe  $p$ ” or “I decided (i.e. intended) to believe  $p$ ” all serve as general and important public criteria that can be used to determine if one forms a belief intentionally. As the examples show, it does not seem that belief formation as a type of act or action can be intentional insofar as these criteria fail to show as much. Of course, this list does not comprehend all the public criteria that there could be. Some conditions of the stativity and agentivity test offer others (e.g. the Imperative Condition). Though I may not have considered all of the public criteria that there could be the ones I considered are important enough to give good reason to suggest that there are no public criteria to establish that belief formation as a type of act or action is intentional.

Now, it should be noted that the argument here extends to both explicit intentionality and implicit intentionality. Though the cases considered seem to show that there are no public criteria to establish explicit intentionality they also show that there are none to establish implicit intentionality as well. Insofar as it was shown that there are no public criteria to establish explicit intentionality it follows that there are no public criteria to establish implicit intentionality.

This point undermines the idea that it is intelligible to say that belief formation can be voluntarily controlled. For, if it cannot be established by public criteria that



belief formation is intentional then it cannot be established by public criteria that belief formation is executionally controlled. Given that executional control is a condition for voluntary control, if the former cannot be established by public criteria then neither can the latter. Accordingly, there are no public criteria to establish that belief formation is voluntarily controlled. This undercuts grounds for supposing that “form a belief” is dynamic. Where there is no public criteria to establish that belief formation is voluntarily controlled there is no reason to think that “form a belief” is not stative. But now it seems unintelligible to speak of belief formation being voluntary controlled. So, from the two connected points we are left to conclude that it is unintelligible to say that belief formation is something that can be voluntarily controlled. Insofar as epistemic agency is supposed to be located in the direct control of belief formation, Direct Doxastic Voluntarism therefore fails to explain and locate epistemic agency.

### **3.3 Evaluative Control**

It may not be the case that it is intelligible to speak of the voluntary control of belief formation. However, according to Pamela Hieronymi, the concept of direct control is broader than that of voluntariness. Indeed, she maintains that the direct control we have over belief formation could not be voluntary. But there are nevertheless two distinct kinds of control, and therefore agency, that we have over belief formation. They are Evaluative Control and Managerial Control. Evaluative Control is exercised when one answers the question that the belief embodies (i.e. whether  $p$ ). For example, by answering the question whether  $p$  one forms a belief that  $p$ . One exercises a kind of direct control and

therefore agency in doing so. This kind of control could not be voluntary and does not need to involve or require awareness of the belief (i.e. as an object of thought).

Hieronymi suggests that Evaluative Control is not merely a distinct kind of control and therefore agency, but the fundamental form of it. Since Evaluative Control is epistemic, and control implies agency, epistemic agency is implied. Like Boyle, Hieronymi describes an epistemic agency that is distinct from ordinary agency. Managerial Control is exercised by acting upon our beliefs in ways that are designed to affect them according to our purposes. For example, if one wants to form the belief that there is a chair in one's room when there is not, then by bringing a chair into one's room one will form the belief that there is a chair in one's room. This kind of control is not any different from the ordinary agency one exercises when one puts oneself in a position to believe something. It could be voluntary and it could involve reflexive awareness. Though distinct, these two kinds of control and agency often work together. In that way an answer is provided to the challenge concerning where epistemic agency resides when one exercises ordinary agency in a way that puts oneself in a position to believe something.

In order to elaborate upon Evaluative Control, I must explain the assumption on which it is based. Hieronymi assumes that when one settles for oneself some question then one is in a state of mind of having settled that question.<sup>93</sup> If the question one settled concerns whether *p* then that state is belief. So if one settles for oneself positively the question whether *p* then one forms the belief *p*. Moreover, one is then answerable to questions and criticisms which one must satisfy with reasons that bear positively on

---

<sup>93</sup> Though I will focus on belief exclusively, Hieronymi contends that this includes intentions and emotions; Hieronymi (2009), 138-139.

whether  $p$ . Hieronymi takes it that one's belief that  $p$  embodies a positive answer to the question of whether  $p$ .<sup>94</sup>

Hieronymi says that we are in control here because as we form our answers to questions we form our beliefs. In Hieronymi's own words, "certain attitudes embody one's answer to a question or set of questions, and that, therefore, one can exercise control or agency over such attitudes by coming to or revising one's answers to the relevant question(s)."<sup>95</sup> When you do this you "literally, in some sense, make up your mind – you create or constitute, or form your beliefs."<sup>96</sup> This is what it means to exercise Evaluative Control – in doing so one exercises agency.

Hieronymi admits that Evaluative Control is far from our ordinary notions of control and agency because it is not voluntary and need not involve awareness. It is not voluntary because we cannot settle the question of whether  $p$  for any old reason (or for no reason at all) and then just form the belief. This makes belief formation unlike an act or action in the ordinary sense. The only way one can form beliefs is for reasons one takes to settle the question whether  $p$ . It does not involve awareness because a belief does not need to be an object of thought, as it may be when reflecting on it. We can form beliefs even when we are not aware. For good reason this may lead one to wonder why Evaluative Control should be considered any kind of control or agency. Hieronymi concedes that "one might well reserve the word 'agency' for those activities that do

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

display the familiar features of voluntariness and reflective distance.”<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, she continues,

Such usage would be unobjectionable, so long as it does not invite the thought that anything lacking the distinctive features must be a kind of passivity, or something merely acted upon. Thus, I would insist that some title should be granted to evaluative control (perhaps we could call it a kind of ‘activity’) that prevents its exercise from being grouped with those things that merely happen to one and prevents its outputs – the attitudes I claim one forms or revises by means of its exercise – from being grouped with those things that one can affect only by acting upon them.<sup>98</sup>

But why think that there is any kind of agency at all? According to Hieronymi, we should think this because it “seems we must exercise some form of agency in forming beliefs.”<sup>99</sup> If belief formation cannot be voluntary and does not need to involve awareness then that is as much of a reason to think that those features are not essential to control and agency than to think that belief formation is not in fact an exercise of control and agency.<sup>100</sup> Insofar as we form beliefs it seems we exercise control and therefore agency.

To the extent that it seems that we exercise control and therefore agency when we form beliefs, it seems we have epistemic agency. What is quite novel about Hieronymi’s account is that it attempts to explain how we exercise epistemic agency when we exercise ordinary agency without reducing the former to the latter. Returning to the example in §1.1, when one reads some research in the cognitive sciences, perhaps with the aim of learning about whether human beings have agency, one exercises ordinary agency. In doing so one reads the claim that we do not have agency because, despite appearances,

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 147

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Incidentally, Hieronymi makes no case for why we must think this when it comes to belief formation. Instead she deals only with intention. But, I grant her that I think it is easy to think why it seems that way. As I will contend shortly, this is because of grammar. Ibid., 150-151

the brain decides to do something before the experience of our deciding to do it. One might further exercise ordinary agency in thinking about this claim. These exercises involve both voluntariness and awareness. Suppose that after exercising ordinary agency, one forms the belief that we do not have agency. While this comes to pass one settles for oneself the question of whether that is the case. As such, one is in a state of belief. One believes that we do not have agency. Furthermore, if one believes that we do not have agency then one is committed to an answer to the question of whether we have agency. Thus, one's belief that we do not have agency embodies an answer to question of whether we have agency.<sup>101</sup> One's belief that we have no agency is formed because one forms an answer to the question of whether we have agency. Here it seems that we exercise control and therefore agency: "Thus it seems that these two forms of agency can display a characteristic division of labor in an exercise of managerial or manipulative control... it seems that an exercise of evaluative control can be induced or produced by an exercise of managerial control", Hieronymi concludes.<sup>102</sup>

Hieronymi's account gives grounds to suppose that we exercise epistemic agency through Evaluative Control. Because belief formation is not portrayed as voluntary the view might be thought to avoid the issue Direct Doxastic Voluntarism faced. But does it fare any better? I contend not. For it is still susceptible to the charge that "form a belief" is not an act or action. Hieronymi claims that it *seems* that one exercises agency, through the exercise of Evaluative Control, when one forms a belief. However, the extent to which this seems to be the case is merely grammatical. As noted in §3.2, "form" is a

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid 139

<sup>102</sup> She even thinks that an exercise of evaluative control can initiate an exercise of managerial control. Ibid., 154.

dynamic verb. So the reason it seems one exercises agency, through Evaluative Control, is that “form a belief” seems to describe an act or action. But as also noted “form a belief” does not do so. Despite the appearance, it does not introduce agency at all. So to want to identify it with a kind of activity seems confused and wrong.

It might be responded that this point has no purchase here. While it may be right to say that “form a belief” does not describe an act or action in the ordinary sense, it does not hold in this case. “Form a belief” is used correctly in a dynamic manner in cases like “I formed the belief that  $p$  after I answered the question of whether  $p$ ”. In this sentence an act or action, in the Evaluative sense, is properly described. While this might escape the charge that “form a belief” does not describe an act or action in the ordinary sense, the suggestion that an act or action in the Evaluative sense is described instead is problematic. First, there are no public criteria to establish that “form a belief” is an act or action in the Evaluative sense. It can be established by public criteria, through answering questions whether  $p$ , for example, that one formed the belief that  $p$ . But it is unclear how this shows that there was an act or action of belief formation that took place in the background. For this reason, treating belief formation as an act or action in the Evaluative sense is obscure. Second, it is also question begging. It cannot be said to describe an act or action, in the Evaluative sense, unless there *is* such an act or action. The sentence “I formed a belief after I answered the question of whether  $p$ ” describes an act or action in the Evaluative sense only if there are such acts or actions. Until there is reason to think that, there is no reason to think that an act or action is described by “form a belief”.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Engel takes it that the activity involved here is located in the undertaking of commitment to  $p$  when one believes that  $p$ . But Engel suggests that taking commitment to be an activity of some kind is “at best

Third, there are ways of making sense of “form a belief” without making a seeming reference to an agent who forms a belief. It makes just as much sense to say, “After I answer the question of whether  $p$ , the belief that  $p$  is formed.” There is nothing about “I form the belief that  $p$  after I answer the question of whether  $p$ ” that forces us to think that an act or action of belief formation is described or that there is an agent who acting or taking action. “After I answer the question of whether  $p$ , the belief that  $p$  is formed.” is just as meaningful. This might invite the worry that belief formation is something that merely happens to one. I think that this is confused. It is not as if belief formation is, for example, like a feeling.<sup>104</sup> It is not something that one could notice as it happens to one. You do not find that a belief has been formed or that you find yourself forming beliefs.<sup>105</sup> If there is a worry here it must be shown why it makes sense to say belief formation is something that could happen to someone. Otherwise the worry is unmotivated, if not illusory. It stems from treating “form a belief” as dynamic when it should be treated as stative. Fourth, it still seems to be “believe” in disguise. It may not be in the sense that “believe” is an ordinary act or action, but in the sense that “believe” is a rational act or action or something along those lines. If that is the case then Evaluative Control might be susceptible to (similar) criticisms raised against Boyle’s view in §2.3. In all of this, however, unless there is reason to suppose that there are acts or actions in the Evaluative sense in the first place there is no reason to think the objection is deflected. And there is

---

metaphorical”. Commitments go together with a change of mind, but they are not acts or actions themselves. I agree with Engel on this. Engel (2013) 175.

<sup>104</sup> Hacker (2013) 220-221.

<sup>105</sup> Hunter (1980) 246.

no reason to think that “form a belief” is dynamic and therefore describes an act or action. Thus, Evaluative Control fails to locate and explain epistemic agency.

Before moving on to conclude the chapter, I will make a brief remark on part of the problem with this view (and, for that matter, Direct Doxastic Voluntarism). The view confuses what the formation of belief is under the control of.<sup>106</sup> There are two senses of “under control”. First, there is being under control of the agent. Second, there is being under the control of the reasons or evidence. Belief formation is properly under the control of the reasons or evidence, rather than the agent. When considering the question whether  $p$ , what determines that one forms the belief that  $p$  is not some act or action that one performs but the reasons or evidence for the belief that are available to one. In other words, one does not form a belief because of an exercise of agency. One forms a belief because the reasons or evidence call for it. One does not settle for oneself the question whether  $p$ . Rather, the reasons or evidence settle for one the question whether  $p$ . That explains the formation of belief. Importantly, this explanation does not require an exercise of agency. Belief formation is therefore explained without agency.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In this section I considered two further ways to explain and locate epistemic agency. One way suggested that belief formation is voluntarily controlled. There were two problems with this view. First, by considering the semantics and syntax of “form a belief” it was found that “form a belief” is stative and does not introduce agency. Second, there are no public criteria to establish that belief formation is voluntarily controlled. Both of these

---

<sup>106</sup> I again express gratitude to David Bakhurst for this consideration.



reasons suggest it is unintelligible to speak of the voluntary control of belief formation. This means that it is unintelligible to speak of direct control of belief formation. On this ground Direct Doxastic Voluntarism fails to offer an intelligible explanation and location for epistemic agency. Another, more promising way suggested that belief formation is evaluatively controlled. This way fared no better insofar as it too was susceptible to the objection that “form a belief” does not describe an act or action. This means that it is unintelligible to speak of direct control of belief formation in terms of evaluative control. It does not offer an intelligible explanation and location for epistemic agency either. Since these views exhaust what it means to directly control belief formation, epistemic agency cannot be intelligibly explained by and located in it. Again, we must look elsewhere.

## Chapter 4

### Reflection and Judgment

*In this chapter I will consider another way to explain and locate epistemic agency, the Reflection and Judgment view, and contend that it does not provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency. The division of this section is threefold. In §4.1 I will provide a brief explanation of Reflection and Judgment and show how it might explain and locate epistemic agency. In §4.2 I will explain Reflection and Judgment in further depth and then I will contend that it does not offer the right explanation and location for epistemic agency. In §4.3 I will conclude the chapter.*

#### 4.1 Introduction

According to the Reflection and Judgment view we exercise epistemic agency when we reflect upon and make judgments about what to believe. These are two *acts or actions* that work in tandem to determine what one should believe. In this way one can be thought to exercise epistemic agency. For, in determining for ourselves what to believe through reflection and judgment agency is exercised. Since the aim of this exercise of agency is to determine what to believe it is epistemic. This means that one exercises epistemic agency through reflection and judgment. I do not think that this is the case however. Unlike the views addressed in the previous chapters, this is not for the reason that the Reflection and Judgment view cannot intelligibly explain and locate epistemic agency. Rather, it does not offer the right explanation and location for it.

#### 4.2 Reflection and Judgment

It is uncontroversial that we reflect upon and make judgments about what to believe. In doing so we determine for ourselves what to believe. This is a claim that does not need

motivation.<sup>107</sup> And as Kornblith notes, “it is in situations such as this that we may be tempted to talk of *epistemic agency*”.<sup>108</sup> So how do reflection and judgment work? Though there are differences between reflection (i.e. deliberating, considering, etc.) and judgment (i.e. taking a stand),<sup>109</sup> the two are tied together when it comes to determining what to believe. For this reason, I will treat them together. I begin with judgment. Judgment consists in taking a stand. We can take judgment to be, as Peacocke writes, “a conscious rational activity, done for reasons.”<sup>110</sup> So when one makes a judgment one can be said to have performed an act or action.<sup>111</sup> This is important because a characterization of reflection is incomplete without it. Now, reflection. With reflection, the agency that is exercised when one reflects seems to satisfy the features of ordinary agency. Indeed, as Hieronymi writes, reflection “seems to preserve the paradigmatic features of ordinary agency.”<sup>112</sup> It can be voluntary and involve awareness. However, the term “reflection” is ambiguous. There are various ways to explain what it amounts. We may distinguish between first-order reflection and second-order reflection.<sup>113</sup> First-order reflection is “a process of looking for new evidence, sifting and weighing it, and generally seeking out grounds for belief in a certain proposition.”<sup>114</sup> One certainly determines for oneself what to believe here. For example, one might consider whether it is the case that there are

---

<sup>107</sup> Although as Kornblith (2012) reminds us, this claim should not be exaggerated.

<sup>108</sup> Kornblith (2012), 87. This is very common. However since, as Boyle notes, the discussions tend to be brief, I will not focus on a single author here, but simply note that those who suggest we have epistemic agency in this way include Burge (1998), Korsgaard (1996), Moran (2000), Scanlon (1998), Shah and Velleman (2005), Crane (2001), Peacocke (1998), and Sosa (2015).

<sup>109</sup> Hacker (2013), 363.

<sup>110</sup> Indeed for Peacocke it is the fundamental way to form a belief. Peacocke (1998), 88. For reasons against this see Cassam (2010).

<sup>111</sup> Whether or not it is intentional is an open question. Setiya (2013), 184.

<sup>112</sup> Hieronymi (2008), 155.

<sup>113</sup> Sosa (2014), 157.

<sup>114</sup> Owens (2001), 19-20.

aliens. In doing so one might reflect on the evidence available. After reflection one will make a judgment about what to believe. This will lead one to believe whatever one believes. In this way reflection determines what to believe in a first-order sense. Second-order reflection is different though. Through second-order reflection we can determine for ourselves what to believe by forming second-order judgments about what belief we ought to believe.<sup>115</sup> For example, suppose one believes that aliens exist. After watching *The X-Files* one's belief that aliens exist is brought to mind. This motivates one to reflect on whether one ought to believe what one believes. While reflecting on the reasons for and against one's belief one finds that the belief is justified. One will make the second-order judgment that the belief that aliens exist ought to be believed. The effect will be that one will still believe what one believed. In this way, reflection determines what to believe in the second-order sense. Second-order reflection is typically taken to be what epistemic agency consists in. This is because it seems to have a rational authority that first-order reflection does not. As Owens explains, by engaging in second-order reflection, you "attempt to get yourself to be reasonable by explicitly acknowledging (by means of higher order judgment) the normative force of those reasons you already have."<sup>116</sup> One does not attempt to do this with first-order reflection. For my purposes this difference not matter however.

---

<sup>115</sup> "For our capacity to turn our attention on to our own mental activities is also a capacity to distance ourselves from them, and to call them into question. I perceive, and I find myself with a powerful impulse to believe. But I back up and bring that impulse into view and then I have a certain distance. Now the impulse doesn't dominate me and now I have a problem. Shall I believe? Is this perception really a *reason* to believe?" Korsgaard (1996), 93.

<sup>116</sup> Owens (2001) 19.

Though the agency one exercises here is not agency in believing or in the direct control of belief formation, it still might be thought that epistemic agency can be straightforwardly located in reflection and judgment. This is because by engaging in reflection and making judgments about what to believe one thereby affects what to believe. This suggests that we have control over what to believe. But, to be sure, the control here is not direct. This is because we do not control our believing or belief formation itself. Nevertheless, we might admit there is still control here, even though indirect. Control, even if indirect, implies agency, and control over belief, even if indirect, implies epistemic agency. In that way it can be said that we exercise epistemic agency when we reflect and make judgments about what to believe. I grant that we exercise agency when we engage in reflection and make judgments. I do not grant that epistemic agency follows from this. This is because despite the appearance it does not offer the right explanation and location for it.

Before defending this contention, I would like to offer a brief comment on the appeal to reflection and judgment as a location of epistemic agency. Though the question of whether we have epistemic agency is conceptual and logico-grammatical, the question of how we come to believe what we believe is empirical. A great many of our beliefs do not arise from reflection and judgment. Hacker rightly states,

Much of our noetic or doxastic framework is picked up as part of the general human, or local cultural, inheritance transmitted to us as the unquestioned presuppositions or assumptions of our thought and talk. Much of what we know or believe, we have acquired through hearsay and education.<sup>117</sup>

Those beliefs are not any less rational for that reason. So the scope of beliefs that we

---

<sup>117</sup> Hacker (2007), 200.

believe as a result of reflection and judgment is rather limited by comparison. Of course, this does not show that we do not exercise epistemic agency when engaging in reflection and making judgments about what to believe. In fact, it might be said that we have the ability to exercise agency over those great many beliefs that we have unreflectively formed. This includes perceptual beliefs because we can still reflect upon and evaluate them. That remains an open question. Nevertheless, I think this overstates the role of reflection and judgment and neglects the importance of beliefs not formed by such means. This might not show that there is no epistemic agency, but it does count against aggrandizing reflection and judgment.

That aside, I contend that the more pressing trouble here is that it seems no more able to explain and locate epistemic agency than other exercises of ordinary agency that put one in a position to believe something. If the latter does not provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency then neither does the former. This is because when one engages in reflection and makes judgments about what to believe one puts oneself in a position to believe something – just as one does with other exercises of ordinary agency. For example, in order to put oneself in a position to believe that there are some true contradictions (aside from reading stuff by Graham Priest) one might engage in reflection on the matter. In doing so one will consider the reasons for and against the view, and even the reasons for whether one ought to believe or not. They will then make a judgment about what to believe. But in doing this one merely puts oneself in a position to believe. Reflection and judgment determine what to believe only to the extent that they determine where the reasons for belief lie. This might bring about that

one believes or forms a belief, if all goes well. But one does not do so oneself. That is, believing and belief formation are not acts or actions one performs or takes after having reflected upon and made a judgment about the reasons for belief. What determines what one believes or the belief that is formed are the reasons or evidence. That is not something that one has agency over, even though one can actively (put oneself in a position to) find reasons or evidence. In an important respect this is no different from bringing it about that one believes something by reading. If one were to read a Graham Priest book one would put oneself in a position to believe that there are true contradictions. The book may offer a plurality of epistemic reasons – especially *In Contradiction*. So reading the book might bring it about that one forms a belief, if all goes well. But there is no act or action of believing or belief formation. What determines what one believes are the reasons or evidence that the book provides. There is only agency here to the extent that one can read the book (and perhaps reflect upon and make judgments about its content and whether one should believe it). It does not extend to believing and belief formation.

Now, if reading cannot provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency then neither can reflection and judgment. This is because neither of them provide a distinct agency that can be directly exercised over belief. We should not be misled in thinking that there is a non sequitur in the conditional because reflection and judgment are *mental acts or actions*, whereas acts or actions like reading are not. This obscures more than it clarifies. First, as shown, they both put one in a position to believe something. Second, they are both responsive to reasons. On top of that, insofar as they

are responsive to reasons they are capable of being rational. So it is not as if reducing reflection and judgment to the level of mere ordinary agency makes it any less responsive to reasons and rationality. As John McDowell and David Bakhurst emphasize, “reflection is not a supplement to our responsiveness to reasons, so much as a component of it”.<sup>118</sup>

As noted in §1.1, we could of course call exercises of reflection and judgment “exercises of epistemic agency”, just as we could do so for other acts or actions that put one in a position to believe something. This is no concession that there is epistemic agency in any substantive sense. The use of the term could be permitted. But this is only so long as it does not mislead one into thinking a distinct agency that can be directly exercised over belief is being referred to. For it fails to provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency, just as exercises of ordinary agency like reading do.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter I considered one more way to explain and locate epistemic agency.

This way explains and locates epistemic agency in reflection and judgment about what to believe. The trouble with this view is not that it is unintelligible. Rather, it fails to offer the right explanation and location for epistemic agency. This is insofar as it just amounts to putting one in a position to believe something. This leaves unexplained a distinct agency that can be directly exercised over belief. To that end, if there is an explanation and location for epistemic agency it will have to be found elsewhere – and there is only one more possible explanation and location left.

---

<sup>118</sup> Bakhurst (2011), 80.





## Chapter 5

### Reason Responsiveness

*In this chapter I will consider the final way to explain and locate epistemic agency by focusing on the Reason Responsiveness view, and contend that it does not provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency. The division of this section is threefold. In §5.1 I will introduce the Reason Responsiveness view and show how it aspires to explain and locate epistemic agency. In §5.2 I will explain the Reason Responsiveness view in further depth and then contend that it does not provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency. In §5.3 I will conclude the chapter.*

#### 5.1 Introduction

My attack on epistemic agency thus far leaves its prospects pretty bleak. Yet there may still be hope insofar as there is one more way to explain and locate epistemic agency.

This is in responsiveness to reasons. According to Reason Responsiveness views we exercise epistemic agency because we are responsive to reasons. The role of reasons has played an important role in the background of all the accounts so far. As a last attempt to locate epistemic agency it might be suggested that it resides in this common feature in all the accounts we have considered. This is because responsiveness to reasons is something that is active rather than passive. So epistemic agency is to be located in reason responsiveness. I grant that responsiveness to reasons is important. Nevertheless, I contend that it cannot provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency.

#### 5.2 Reason Responsiveness

Undoubtedly, reasons are important to belief. They are also important to acts and actions. They in part explain why our acts and actions remain on the active side of our lives rather than the passive side. By way of analogy it might be thought that reasons show that

beliefs are on the active side of our lives rather than passive side too. In that way some legitimacy is given to the idea that we exercise epistemic agency. To explain this we will turn to Joseph Raz, who defends the Reason Responsiveness view.<sup>119</sup> Raz agrees that believing is not a species of act or action, that belief formation is not voluntary, and that we do not form beliefs (for reasons) only as a result of deliberation (i.e. reflection). What sentences such as “I will believe that.”, “I decided what to believe.”, and so on, suggest are none of those. According to Raz, what they show is, “that belief has many conceptual connections with the active. They show that normally beliefs belong to the active rather than to the passive side of our life.”<sup>120</sup> Raz thinks this for the reason that they are not just things that happen to us. We form beliefs and we arrive at beliefs. This suggests activity because when we believe we are properly responsive to reasons (as we see them). To be properly responsive to reasons is to be responsive to the right kinds of reasons (as one sees them). The reasons in particular are epistemic reasons, which are reasons that count in favor of the truth of some proposition.<sup>121</sup> This suggests that the distinction between the active and passive is wider than voluntary actions and involuntary happenings.

So for Raz, “we are active when our mental life displays sensitivity to reasons, and we are passive when such mental events occur in a way which is not sensitive to reasons.”<sup>122</sup> It is therefore a spurious reason to deny that beliefs can be active because

---

<sup>119</sup> It is important to note that Raz never explicitly says that we are epistemic agents because of this. But this is implicit in *From Normativity to Responsibility*, where he refers to subjects who respond to reasons as agents at various points. See Raz (2011). For another example of someone who defends the reason-responsiveness view, see McHugh (2011). McDowell (1998) seems important here as well.

<sup>120</sup> Raz (2000), 10.

<sup>121</sup> Raz (2011).

<sup>122</sup> Raz (2000), 11.

they are not like voluntary actions.<sup>123</sup> Aside from the fact that Direct Doxastic Voluntarism is unintelligible, this is because, as we noted in the previous chapter, many of our beliefs do not come about through reflection and judgment. In cases where one forms a belief as a result of testimony it would appear that one is merely receptive. One does not think about what to believe but merely takes in what someone else has told one. But Raz states that one is still active because one is still responsive to reasons (as one sees them). Were one to be asked, “Why do you believe?” one could provide an answer to that question with a reason (as one sees them). This would explain one’s belief and therefore show that it is active. With all of that said, this seems to lead to the suggestion that we exercise epistemic agency. Where there is activity there is also agency. If beliefs are on the active side of our life then beliefs are things we have agency over. In other words, there is agency when we believe. This means that epistemic agency is explained by and located in our responsiveness to reasons.

There is certainly something right about this picture. For a great many of our beliefs are responsive to reasons. It is agreeable that belief is on the active side of our lives rather than the passive. Yet, there is quite the leap from here to the view that we exercise epistemic agency when we believe for reasons. It is misleading to say that the former implies the latter. This gives grounds to suppose that being responsive to reasons does not provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency. Now, it is misleading to suggest that epistemic agency is implied by reason responsiveness. When one asks for reasons for belief or one when gives reasons for belief or when one actively

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

searches for reasons for belief or when reflects on reasons for belief there is certainly activity. This activity implies agency. This is because the acts or actions involved are, say, speaking, researching, and reflecting. Of course, sometimes one does not always do these things, and one is still responsive to reasons. Here it might make sense to speak of dispositions. While belief itself may not be a disposition, there might be dispositions to give reasons for belief, ask for reasons for belief, reflect on reasons for belief, and so on. But, as Kornblith points out, “it is one thing to say that people are capable of being moved by reason or that they are responsive to reason; it is quite another to insist that they are genuine epistemic agents.”<sup>124</sup> It does not follow from the fact that belief is responsive to reason that believing itself or belief formation is an activity. Such an inference is fallacious. There is a difference between claiming that there are activities involved when one believes or forms beliefs, and claiming that believing itself or belief formation is the activity one brings about and engages in. Giving reasons and thinking about reasons are activities one engages in when one believes something. But that does not make believing itself or belief formation the activity one brings about and engages in. That one believes for a reason does not make believing or belief formation any more of an activity than believing or forming a reason without one. So Setiya is right when he says, “if the claim that belief is active implies that believing is dynamic, that claim is simply false.”<sup>125</sup> That one’s belief is responsive to reasons does not therefore suggest that believing itself or belief formation are activities. So we are left to ask, “Where is the epistemic agency here?” What distinct and direct agency over belief is implied by

---

<sup>124</sup> Kornblith (2012) 95-96.

<sup>125</sup> Setiya (2013) 182.

responsiveness to reasons? We certainly exercise agency when we ask for, give, and think about reasons. But this is not a distinct kind of agency even if it concerns belief. It is for this reason that reason responsiveness does not provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter I considered the last way to explain and locate epistemic agency. This is in responsiveness to reasons. Despite the fact that being responsive to reasons makes belief fall on the active side of our lives rather than the passive side it does not show that we have epistemic agency. It is quite misleading to think that epistemic agency is implied. For, it does not show that believing itself or belief formation are activities themselves. But to warrant talk about epistemic agency this is what the Reason Responsiveness view would have to do. Thus, reason responsiveness cannot provide the right explanation and location for epistemic agency.

## Chapter 6

### **Conclusion: Why Epistemic Agency is Unintelligible**

The preceding chapters should lead us to doubt the intelligibility of the very idea of epistemic agency. To recap, there are four ways to explain and locate epistemic agency. They are: (1) Doxastic Act/Action views; (2) Direct Doxastic Control views; (3) the Reflection and Judgment view; and (4) the Reason Responsiveness view. The trouble with Doxastic Act/Action views, as shown in the second chapter, was that it is unintelligible to speak of believing as an act or action in the ordinary sense or in the rational sense. This meant that they could not intelligibly locate and explain epistemic agency. The trouble with Direct Doxastic Control views is similar. As shown in the third chapter, it is unintelligible to speak of the direct control of belief formation. As such, they could not intelligibly explain and locate epistemic agency either. The trouble with the Reflection and Judgment view, as shown in the fourth chapter, is that, although it is not unintelligible, it failed to rightly explain and locate epistemic agency. This is because reflection and judgment only puts one in a position to believe something. It is no different from something like reading. If the latter does not explain and locate epistemic agency, as was argued in the first chapter, then neither do reflection and judgment. Lastly, the trouble with the Reason Responsiveness view, as shown in the fifth chapter, is that it too does not rightly explain and locate epistemic agency. This is because it is misleading to think that believing or belief formation are acts or actions because they fall on the active side of our lives. Now, this generates the following disjunction: either the views do not intelligibly explain and locate epistemic agency or the views do not rightly explain and

locate epistemic agency. It follows from this that there is no intelligible explanation and location for epistemic agency or epistemic agency cannot be rightly explained and located. Consequently, the very idea of epistemic agency is not intelligible.

In making this conclusion it will surely raise the worries that I am threatening the justification, responsibility, and rationality for and of our beliefs. This could not be further from the truth. First, I think the mistake here is that some think that in order for those to hold for belief they must hold as they do for action. I agree with Setiya when he writes that this is based on a prejudice, “which is prevalent in philosophy, that we should give parallel treatment to reasons for action and belief.”<sup>126</sup> He continues, “This prejudice is one source of the conviction that there must be *something* to epistemic agency, something that illuminates the nature of belief.”<sup>127</sup> Second, I think this thought is based on a conviction that we must think about rather than look at how we hold beliefs that are justified, how we are responsible for holding beliefs, and how we are rational in doing so. By looking we can see that it is (in part) by being responsive to reasons that makes us justified in, responsible for, and rational for believing many of the things that we believe. We ask, “Why do you believe *p*?” in order to get one’s justification for *p*. We hold one responsible for one’s beliefs insofar as one is open to criticism for them.<sup>128</sup> We are rational for holding beliefs insofar as we have the faculty of reason.<sup>129</sup> So, we do not need to make the suggestion that we exercise epistemic agency for those to hold for. To conclude, in all of this, I do not mean to suggest that there is no use for “epistemic

---

<sup>126</sup> Setiya (2013), 194.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Hacker (2013), 217. McDowell and Bakhurst suggest this as well. Bakhurst (2011) 79-80.

<sup>129</sup> Hacker (2007), 199.



agency”. We may very well wish to continue using the term “epistemic agency”. We should just be careful not to be misled by it.

## Bibliography

- Alston, W.P. 1989, *Epistemic Justification. Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*. London: Cornell University Press.
- Audi, R. (2015). *Rational Belief: Structure, Grounds, and Intellectual Virtue*. New York: Oxford.
- Bain, A. (1865). *The Emotions and the Will*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.
- Bakhurst, D. (2011). *The Formation of Reason*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bennett, M.R. and P.M.S. Hacker. (2003). *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Bennett, M.R., Daniel Dennett, Peter Hacker, and Daniel Robinson. *Neuroscience and Philosophy: Brain, Mind, and Language*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Buller, T. (2006). "Brains, Lies, and Psychological Explanations." In *Neuroethics: Defining the Issues in Theory, Practice, and Policy*. ed. J. Illes. 51-60. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burge, T. 1995. "Reason and the First Person", In *Knowing One's Own Mind*. ed. B. Smith, and C. Wright. 243–270. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cassam, Quassim. "Judging, Believing, and Thinking." *Philosophical Issues*. 20 (1): 80-95.
- Chisholm, R. (1977). *Theory of Knowledge*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Connors, M.H., & P.W. Halligan, (2015). "A Cognitive Account of Belief: A Tentative Roadmap." *Frontiers in Psychology* 5: 1-14.
- Connaughton, E. and R. Langdon. (2013). "The Neuropsychology of Belief Formation." In *The Neural Basis of Human Belief Systems*, ed. F. Krueger and J. Grafman. 19-42. Hove: Psychology Press.
- Crane, T. (2001), *Elements of Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, P.S. (2013). "Skepticism Concerning Human Agency: Sciences of the Self Versus "Voluntariness" in the Law." in *Neuroscience and Legal Responsibility*. ed. N.A. Vincent. 113-134. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Descartes, R. (1996). *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Dowty, D.R. (1979). *Word Meaning and Montague Grammar: The Semantics of Verbs and Times in Generative Semantics and in Montague's PTQ*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Engel, P. (2013). "Is Epistemic Agency Possible?" *Philosophical Issues* 23 (1): 158-178.
- Feldman, R. (2001). "Voluntary Belief and Epistemic Evaluation." In *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty: Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility, and Virtue*. ed. M. Steup. 77–92. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Filip, H. (2012). "Lexical Aspect." in *The Oxford Handbook of Tense and Aspect*. ed. R.I. Binnick. 721-751.
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ginet, C. (2001). "Deciding to Believe." In *Knowledge, Truth and Duty: Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility, and Virtue* ed. M. Steup. 63–76. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Givón, T. (2001). *Syntax: An Introduction, Vol. 1*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Goldman, A. (2002). *Pathways to Knowledge: Private and Public*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hacker, P.M.S. (2004). "On the Ontology of Belief" In *Semantik Und Ontologie*. ed. M. Siebel and M. Textor. Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag.
- Hacker, P.M.S. (2007). *Human Nature: The Categorical Framework*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Hacker, P.M.S. (2013). *The Intellectual Powers: A Study of Human Nature*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Haggard, P. (2005). "Conscious intention and motor cognition." *Trends in Cognitive Science* 9 (6): 290-5.
- Heller, M. 2001, "Hobartian Voluntarism: Grounding a Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (2): 130–141.
- Hieronymi, P. (2009). "Two Kinds of Agency." In *Mental Actions*, ed. L. O'Brien and M. Soteriou, 138-162. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hornsby, J. (2004). "Agency and Actions." In *Agency and Action*, ed. J. Hyman and H. Steward. 1-23. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Hunter, J.F.M. (1977). "Some Grammatical States." *Philosophy*. 50 (200): 155-166.
- Hunter, J.F.M. (1980). "Believing." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1): 239:260.
- Jackendoff, R. S. (1983). *Semantics and Cognition*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- James, W. (1981). *The Principles of Psychology*, in *The Works of William James*, Vol. 8–9, ed. H.B. Frederick. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kornblith, H. (2012). *On Reflection*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Korsgaard, C. (1996). *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mele, A. (2006). *Free Will and Luck*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McDowell, J. (1994). *Mind and World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- McDowell, J. 1998. "Having the World in View: Sellars, Kant, and Intentionality." *Journal of Philosophy* 95 (9): 431–50.
- McHugh, C. "Exercising Doxastic Freedom." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1): 1-37.
- Moran, R. (2001). *Authority and Estrangement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Newman, J.H. (1982) *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Nettleman, N. (2006). "The Analogy Argument for Doxastic Voluntarism." *Philosophical Studies* 131 (3): 559–582
- Nettleman, N. (2007). *Blameworthy Belief: A Study in Epistemic Deontology*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Owens, D. (2000). *Reason without Freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Peacocke, C. (1998). "Conscious Attitudes, Attention, and Self-Knowledge." In *Knowing Our Own Minds*. ed. C. Wright, B.C. Smith, and S. Macdonald, 63-98. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Raz, J. (2000). *Engaging Reason: On The Theory of Value and Action*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Raz, J. (2011). *From Normativity to Responsibility*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ryan, S. 2003: "Doxastic Compatibilism and the Ethics of Belief," *Philosophical Studies* 114 (1-2): 47–79.
- Scanlon, T. 1998. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Schmitt, M. (2015). "Freedom and (Theoretical) Reason." *Synthese* 192 (1): 25–41.
- Searle, J. (1983). *Intentionality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Setiya, K. (2013). "Epistemic Agency: Some Doubts" *Philosophical Issues* 23 (1): 179-198.
- Shah, N. and David Velleman, J. (2005). "Doxastic Deliberation" *Philosophical Review* 114 (4): 497-534.
- Soon, C.S., M. Brass, H.J. Heinze, and J.D. Haynes. (2008). "Unconscious Determinants of Free Decisions in the Human Brain." *Nature Neuroscience* 11: 543 - 545.
- Sosa, Ernest. (2015). *Judgment and Agency*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sousa, R. B. De (1971). "How to Give a Piece of Your Mind: Or, the Logic of Belief and Assent." *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1): 52-79.
- Steup, M. (2000). "Doxastic Voluntarism and Epistemic Deontology." *Acta Analytica* 15 (1): 25–56.
- Steup, M. (2008). "Doxastic Freedom." *Synthese* 161 (3): 375-392.
- Steup, M. (2012). "Belief Control and Intentionality." *Synthese* 188 (2): 145-163.
- Steup, M. (forthcoming). "Believing Intentionally." *Synthese*: 1-22.
- Steward, H. (2000). *The Ontology of Mind: Events, Processes, and States*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sugiura, M., R. Seitz, and H. Angel. (2015). "Models and Neural Bases of the Believing Process." *Journal of Behavioral and Brain Science* 5: 12-23.
- Tse, P. (2013). *The Neural Basis of Free Will*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Valin Jr., R.D. van. (2004). *An Introduction to Syntax*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Velleman, J. David. (1992). "What Happens when Someone Acts?" *Mind* 101(403): 461-481.
- Weatherson, B. (2008). Deontology and Descartes's Demon. *Journal of Philosophy* 105 (9): 540-569.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Zagzebski, L. (2001). "Must Knowers Be Agents?" In *Virtue Epistemology: Essays on Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*. ed. A. Fairweather and L. Zagzebski. 142-57. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ziegler, D. (2006). *Interfaces with English Aspect: Diachronic and Empirical Studies*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.