Doxastic Responsibility and the Challenge of Doxastic Voluntarism
Insights from Cases of Self-Deception

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ABSTRACT   In the article, I present the debate on doxastic voluntarism and its relation to doxastic responsibility. I outline the discussion in the literature, focusing on Alston's argument against doxastic responsibility, and then present my own position in this debate. I defend a conception of doxastic freedom that remains consistent with the principle of alternative possibilities. To this end, I provide an epistemological analysis of the phenomenon I call "doxastic self-deception." I also introduce the notions of "doxastic strategy" and "alethic impurism"—a view concerning the possibility of pragmatic reasons for beliefs. I conclude that doxastic responsibility is possible because we have the ability to self-deceive, and at the same time possess metacognitive capacities that enable cognitive self-control.

KEYWORDS   alethic impurism; doxastic freedom; doxastic responsibility; doxastic strategy; self-deception

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The issues of doxastic voluntarism and responsibility emerged in contemporary analytic epistemology at the end of the twentieth century as part of the ethics of belief. Doxastic voluntarism is the view that we exercise freedom with respect to which beliefs we hold. Proponents of the opposite view—doxastic involuntarists—argue that we do not have such freedom. The debate between doxastic voluntarism and involuntarism is closely connected with the issue of doxastic responsibility since, according to a basic intuition about freedom in general, a subject can be held responsible only for something over which they had influence.

While the topic has not assumed the status of one of the central problems of epistemology, its importance for the discipline is often underestimated. If epistemology refers to the normative sphere, then a fundamental question is whether its normativity should be construed in deontological terms, as grounded in intellectual obligations. As William Alston has argued, one of the most basic concepts in epistemology—justification—already presupposes both doxastic responsibility and freedom. Any full account of the so-called third condition of knowledge must therefore engage with this issue.

This article is divided into two parts. The first has an expository character. It begins with a consideration of the philosophical significance of the issue of doxastic freedom and responsibility, before turning to the classic texts and debates that first drew epistemologists' attention to the issue. I then examine Alston's influential argument against doxastic responsibility, as well as the conceptual argument against doxastic voluntarism, which is often regarded as the strongest case against the possibility of doxastic freedom. The first part concludes with a discussion of the main strategies for rejecting Alston's argument that have been presented in the extensive debates concerning his position. Finally, I point to important issues that require further examination in order to adequately address the problem of doxastic freedom and responsibility.

The second part is a presentation of my own position on the issue. I develop this view by beginning with four very similar examples of processes of belief acquisition. Two of them are appropriate from the perspective of epistemic normativity, while the other two are inappropriate. I argue that the inappropriate cases of belief acquisition are instances of a phenomenon I call "doxastic self-deception." In presenting this concept, I make use of the notion of a "doxastic strategy," understood as the subject's balancing between two aspects of the epistemic aim. In this way, I arrive at the question of whether there can be non-epistemic reasons for belief. I introduce and defend a position on this matter that I call "alethic impurism." This is a position concerning the possibility of pragmatic, that is non-epistemic,

reasons for beliefs. It parallels, to some extent, impurism (also referred to as "pragmatic encroachment") in relation to the so-called threshold problem for fallibilism, with the key distinction that the form of impurism I defend pertains solely to standards of assertion rather than standards of knowledge. This perspective enables me to formulate a view on doxastic freedom and responsibility in which two elements play a central role: our capacity for doxastic self-deception and our metacognitive abilities.

Part I

1. The philosophical significance of the topic of doxastic voluntarism

Our ways of thinking and speaking about both our own and others' beliefs frequently betray an underlying intuition that the domain of mental representation is normative in character. We commonly employ expressions such as, "you ought not to think that," or "how could he have believed such a thing?" Such normative judgments may carry different meanings, but two are of central importance from an epistemological perspective: first, normativity as proper functioning of cognitive faculties, and second, normativity in the deontological sense, tied to the fulfillment of intellectual duties. The former notion is relatively uncontroversial—for instance, when a subject's cognitive faculties (such as vision) fail to operate properly, perhaps due to biological deterioration, the subject forms beliefs about the world that she would not have had if those faculties had been functioning properly.

The issue of whether there exist distinctly epistemic duties is considerably more complex. One may ask whether the normativity of the cognitive domain reduces *solely* to the proper functioning of cognitive mechanisms.[1] If such mechanisms are understood simply as biological functions of the organism, it becomes puzzling why we so often speak or think of someone's mental representation as subject to blame—captured, for example, in the indignant exclamation, "how could he have believed that!?" On the ordinary, intuitive conception, blame presupposes that the agent had some measure of control over that for which she is blamed. By contrast, we do not, in general, treat the biological functions of organisms as something for which a subject is (at least directly) responsible or which remains under their control.

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1. The foremost advocate of such position within analytic philosophy was Alvin Plantinga (see, e.g., Plantinga 1993). It is noteworthy that Plantinga was both intellectually influenced by, and personally close to, William Alston—whose argument against epistemic responsibility is regarded as the classic starting point of the debate on this issue.

The problem acquires particular significance once we turn to beliefs that are connected with morally relevant actions. In typical situations, individuals act in accordance with their own beliefs, and we intuitively regard this as appropriate. Taking this into account, and assuming that the domain of our beliefs is not something for which we are responsible, it becomes unclear how we can ascribe moral blame to anyone if that person does not themselves believe that they have done something wrong. Put differently, if agents act on what they take to be true, and if their beliefs are beyond the scope of responsibility, then objective moral blame collapses into merely subjective moral blame. Yet this contradicts our moral intuitions and the social practice of holding people responsible for their actions.

The problem that emerges here can be illustrated by means of the following trilemma:

1. People have no influence over their own beliefs.
2. People have the right to act according to their own beliefs.
3. Sometimes people are blameworthy for their actions that resulted from their beliefs, even though they do not assign blame to themselves.

All three of the above theses seem to align with our intuitions, and at least prima facie, there are reasons to consider them true. Nevertheless, the conjunction of any two of the above theses entails the negation of the third. If people have no influence over their own beliefs and have the right to act in accordance with them, then they are not subject to objective moral blame if they do not assign themselves subjective blame. If people are morally blameworthy for their actions and have no influence over their beliefs, then they cannot always act in accordance with what they themselves judge. Conversely, if people are sometimes subject to objective moral blame and can act in accordance with their beliefs, this means they do have influence over their own beliefs. For if they can act in accordance with their beliefs, and we assign them blame for that action, then the blame concerns the beliefs they hold. From this perspective, it becomes clear why the debate on doxastic responsibility and freedom emerged under the banner of the ethics of belief.

The problem of doxastic freedom and responsibility is not limited to matters that are explicitly moral in nature. Our actions are intimately connected to our representation of the world. The importance of this insight is not restricted to the moral domain. We are accountable for ourselves—both in our long-term and immediate decisions—and the ways in which we develop as persons depends on how we perceive reality. We identify with our beliefs, treating them as a core part of our identity. This is particularly true for

worldview beliefs, including religious,[2] moral, and political convictions. On the one hand, we regard these beliefs—especially our own—as the product of recognizing the truth about reality. On the other hand, we associate them with personal freedom and responsibility to a much greater extent than we do with other kinds of beliefs. Taken together, these observations raise the question: do we truly have grounds to ascribe responsibility and freedom to ourselves and others in the domain of our mental representation of the world?

2. The origin of the debate
Clifford and James

The classic texts that serve as reference points in contemporary discussions on the ethics of belief are William Clifford's essay *The Ethics of Belief* (Clifford 2002) and William James's critical response entitled *The Will to Believe* (James 2002).[3] Clifford addresses the issue of intellectual duties, and in his essay he presents the famous maxim: *It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.* This statement became the earliest formulation of a position known as evidentialism, which postulates the existence of an epistemic obligation to accept beliefs solely on the basis of sufficient evidence. The thesis has since become one of the most widely discussed topics in the ethics of belief.

Evidentialism is, above all, a position that presupposes only epistemic deontologism—namely, the view that in our intellectual life we have duties regarding what we believe (the content of these duties being specified by the thesis of evidentialism). Some epistemologists, however, extend this position to the concept of epistemic justification, arguing that the essence of justification—as the third condition of knowledge—lies in fulfilling the epistemic obligation to possess sufficient evidence for one's beliefs. Although Clifford's formulation of the evidentialist thesis remains a key point of reference for many evidentialists, its precise formulation continues to be a matter of debate (e.g., Conee & Feldman 2004; Chignell 2018).

Clifford's essay has sparked discussions concerning the relationship between epistemic and moral obligations. Clifford appears to defend the rather controversial thesis that all epistemic responsibility is, at the same

2. The significance of the problem of doxastic responsibility and freedom is particularly pronounced from the perspective of religious doctrines that foresee reward or punishment for faith. If faith consists at least in part of beliefs (e.g., regarding the existence of a Creator of the world), how could believers and non-believers be held accountable for it if they had no influence over whether they possess such beliefs?

3. For a thorough review of doxastic voluntarism in earlier philosophical periods, see: Boespflug and Jackson (2024).

time, moral responsibility. The question of the relationship between intellectual and moral duties is a complex and compelling issue at the intersection of epistemology and ethics.[4] However, most proponents of epistemic deontologism regard intellectual duties (including the maxim of evidentialism) as *sui generis* epistemic obligations. Contemporary evidentialists tend to distance themselves from Clifford's radical claim that the maxim of evidentialism is always of a moral nature.

Clifford does not formulate his accusations explicitly, but readers of his essay have little doubt that his charge of moral irresponsibility is directed primarily at religious individuals—specifically, those who rely on divine providence when making important decisions and who, according to Clifford, thereby act in violation of the evidentialist maxim. Shortly after the publication of Clifford's essay, a defense of such religious individuals was formulated by William James in his essay *The Will to Believe*. According to James, there are situations in which it is not possible to fulfil the demands of the evidentialist thesis. In such cases, it is both intellectually and morally permissible to adopt a belief despite the absence of sufficiently strong evidence. James identifies three criteria that must characterize a belief in order for it to be considered a justified exception in respect of the evidentialist demand: the living option (the subject is psychologically predisposed to accept the belief), the forced option (there is no possibility of avoiding the decision, as suspending judgment is equivalent to rejection the belief), and the momentous option (the belief is of vital importance and has significant consequences). In such cases, if the subject lacks the opportunity to obtain strong evidence in support of a particular belief, they may still adopt it without violating their intellectual or moral obligations. According to James, a paradigmatic example of such a case is religious faith.

James's classic essay is frequently cited by those who defend a more limited interpretation of the evidentialist thesis, highlighting a significant set of exceptions to the rule (e.g., Pace 2011). A common contemporary view holds that the range of exceptions to the evidentialist thesis is even broader. These exceptions concern not only religious beliefs but also other worldview-related beliefs, including those regarding morality, values, and even political preferences. Defenders of evidentialism, in turn, maintain that the thesis remains valid in its categorical form—provided that the concepts it involves (e.g., belief, evidence, sufficiency of evidence) are adequately specified (e.g., Feldman 2006).

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4. On the relationship between moral and epistemic duty, see, e.g., Haack (2001); Shaffer (2006); Bergeron (2006); Booth (2012).

Williams and Alston

The third classic text cited in discussions on doxastic voluntarism is Bernard Williams' essay *Deciding to Believe*, in which he explicitly addresses the problem of doxastic freedom. Williams argues that we lack freedom concerning the beliefs we hold. His position is aptly captured in the following passage from this essay:

> If I could acquire a belief at will, I could acquire it whether it was true or not; moreover I would know that I could acquire it whether it was true or not. If in full consciousness I could will to acquire a "belief" irrespective of its truth, it is unclear that before the event I could seriously think of it as a belief, i.e. as something purporting to represent reality. (Williams 1973)

Williams' reasoning appears to capture a fundamental intuition about our cognitive life, and as a result, it has gained many adherents and is often taken for granted. The authors note that Williams' position can be interpreted in two ways: as a logical impossibility of adopting beliefs by an act of will, or as a psychological impossibility. The most important defender of the psychological interpretation was William Alston. He argued that it is simply psychologically impossible to genuinely assert something whose truth one does not believe:

> My argument for this, if it can be called that, simply consists in asking you to consider whether you have any such powers. Can you, at this moment, start to believe that the U.S. is still a colony of Great Britain, just by deciding to do so. If you find it too incredible that you should be sufficiently motivated to try to believe this, suppose that someone offers you $500,000,000 to believe it, and you are much more interested in the money than in believing the truth. Could you do what it takes to get that reward? (Alston 1988, 263)

The logical—or conceptual—interpretation refers to the nature of belief. It holds that truth, as the constitutive aim of beliefs, makes it impossible to adopt beliefs by an act of will. Given its significance, this topic will be addressed in a dedicated section of the present article.

The fourth classic text concerning doxastic voluntarism is William Alston's article *The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification* (Alston 1988). While addressing a topic closely connected to the ethics of belief, Alston goes beyond its scope. He observes that the standard epistemological understanding of justification typically assumes a deontological framework, identifying justification with the fulfilment of epistemic

duties. Alston challenges this tradition by arguing against the very existence of epistemic duties. His line of reasoning can be presented as follows:

1. If a subject is obliged to perform an action, then she must have the ability to perform it.
2. We do not have freedom over what beliefs we have.
3. So we cannot have duties in this respect.

Alston maintains that epistemic deontologism, understood as a concept of justification, cannot be sustained in view of the two intuitively compelling premises (1) and (2). Premise (2) appears to be true primarily in light of the argument against doxastic voluntarism as presented by Williams (in two variants—psychological and conceptual). Premise (1), on the other hand, pertains to the standard understanding of duty and seems to correspond to our basic intuitions. It is known as the Kantian principle "ought implies can." Intuitively, it seems that we cannot ascribe to someone the obligation to do something over which she had no control.

Alston's article has provoked increased interest in the problem of epistemic freedom and its relation to deontological concept/conception of justification and epistemic normativity The article received numerous responses from epistemologists. Some of them (mainly those sympathetic to externalism) endorsed his conclusion regarding the necessity of rejecting deontologism, at least as a condition of justification and a source of normativity in epistemic domain. In Section 4, I will present the different strategies that have been adopted to reject Alston's argument. First, however, it is worth examining in more detail the conceptual argument against doxastic voluntarism, which offers the strongest support for premise (2) of Alston's argument.

3. Truth as the constitutive aim of belief and the problem of doxastic voluntarism

To hold a belief that p is, by definition, to regard p as true—that is, to assert its truth. A mental state of a different character is not a belief at all, but rather a desire or an imagining. This observation is largely uncontroversial. Within the epistemological debate on the aim of belief, it is widely accepted that belief is constitutively connected to truth, which functions as its goal or norm. Proponents of the conceptual argument against doxastic voluntarism rely on precisely this point. Their claim is that a subject cannot simply choose which beliefs to hold, since for a mental state to qualify as a belief, the subject must remain responsive to how reality presents itself to her, rather than to how she wishes it to be.

The constitutive link between belief and truth is widely regarded as the strongest basis for rejecting doxastic voluntarism, and Williams's statement

quoted in the previous paragraph is considered a classic argument of this kind. Yet Williams's wording itself has faced serious criticism. Particularly controversial is his claim that "*moreover I* would know *that I could acquire it whether it was true or not*" [emphasis mine]. Advocates of the conceptual strategy against doxastic voluntarism have accordingly proposed refinements of Alston's argument and advanced further considerations in support of the necessary tie between belief and truth—a tie that, by its very nature, precludes voluntary control over one's beliefs. The core of this conceptual approach to doxastic involuntarism is well expressed in a formulation defended by Barbara Winters: "it is impossible to believe that one believes p and that one's belief of p originated and is sustained in a way that has no connection with p's truth" (Winters 1979, 243).

Particularly noteworthy is the extended argumentation for the claim that we cannot believe at will by Pamela Hieronymi. These analyses are broadly in line with Williams' thought, but go well beyond it (see Hieronymi 2006; see also the discussion on Hieronymi's argumentation in Setiya 2008 and Hieronymi 2009). Hieronymi distinguishes two types of reasons for adopting a belief: constitutive reasons, otherwise called "content-related reasons," and extrinsic reasons, which can also be described as "attitude-related reasons":

> Of course, if you take certain reasons to show that p, you therein believe p. Thus the reasons taken to bear positively on whether p—those taken to be content-related reasons for the belief that p—are also what I will call "constitutive reasons" for the belief that p. They support the commitment constitutive of the belief. By finding such reasons convincing, you therein believe. (Hieronymi 2006, 51)

Extrinsic reasons for adopting the belief that p are, for instance, considerations such as its perceived usefulness, importance, or desirability, independently of whether p is in fact true. Yet the presence of such reasons does not suffice to make the subject affirm p as true. On this account, beliefs are not voluntary: their formation depends solely on the evidence to which the subject has access, and therefore, ultimately, on how the world actually is—rather than on how one might wish it to be, or on any other factors unrelated to the truth of p.

At this point, the close connection between conceptual doxastic involuntarism and the principle of evidentialism becomes apparent. The latter holds that one is obligated to endorse only those beliefs for which one possesses adequate evidential support. The claim that only evidence can constitute

a genuine reason for belief received a robust theoretical grounding in Nishi Shah's well-known thesis of transparency:

TrT 1   *the deliberative question* whether to believe that p *is transparent to the question* whether p (Shah & Velleman 2005, 497).

According to Shah: (1) belief differs from other cognitive propositional attitudes in that it is regulated for truth (the descriptive part of the concept of belief); (2) part of the concept of belief is also a standard of being correct if and only if it is true (the normative part of the concept) (see Shah 2003, 2006; Shah & Velleman 2005).

This position provides a clearer grasp of the basic intuition underlying the conceptual critique of doxastic voluntarism. Shah's analyses are also meant to support evidentialism and, at the same time, to undermine pragmatism, understood here as the view that reasons for belief may be of a non-epistemic kind—in other words, that they may consist in something other than evidence. Shah's account has generated extensive discussion (see, e.g., Sullivan-Bissett 2018; McHugh 2013). In the light of Shah's attempt to exclude pragmatic reasons for belief, McHugh reformulated the transparency thesis in the following way, which will play a role in the second part of this article:

TrT 2   Pragmatic considerations cannot occur to a thinker, within doxastic deliberation, as relevant to what to believe (McHugh 2013, 448).

The discussions reviewed above indicate that the problem of doxastic voluntarism is closely connected with the role of truth as the goal of belief, the validity and applicability of the evidentialist thesis, and whether there can be pragmatic (non-epistemic) reasons for belief.

4. Strategies for dealing with the problem of doxastic responsibility

Alston's argument against the existence of epistemic duties rests on two key premises: (1) If a subject is obliged to perform an action, then she must have the ability to perform it; and (2) We do not have freedom over what beliefs we have. The possible responses to Alston's argument can be divided into two groups: those that challenge the first premise, and those that challenge the second. Each of these lines of response can be developed in several distinct variants.

Undermining the first premise

A widely discussed way of defending the thesis of the existence of doxastic responsibility is to either reject premise (1) or propose a different interpretation of it. The Kantian phrase "ought implies can" refers primarily to the fact that responsibility presupposes the subject's ability to perform what is the object of responsibility. However, the question arises whether one can sensibly speak of responsibility with respect to something that the subject must do (rather than merely can). Alston assumes in his reasoning that one cannot. As he writes: "one can be obliged to do A only if one has an effective choice as to whether to do A" (Alston 1988, 259). Some authors criticize Alston's reasoning by rejecting this assumption, at least on epistemological grounds.

One way of rejecting Alston's argument by undermining premise (1) is to recognize that not all areas in which we deal with responsibilities are governed by the "ought implies can" principle invoked in premise (1). For example, Richard Feldman argues that doxastic responsibilities are a type of role responsibility. Just as a teacher should clearly explain the material to their pupils, and a parent should take good care of their child, so people as cognitive agents should adopt their beliefs in an appropriate manner. Feldman emphasizes that, in the case of role obligations, it is not required that the subject be able to perform them or that they have voluntarily undertaken the role. A poor teacher may not be able to teach well, and an incompetent parent may not be able to care adequately for a child, yet they are still burdened with the obligation to fulfill their role properly. According to Feldman, deontology on epistemic grounds does not connect with such a duty, for which it is necessary that the subject possess freedom. Therefore, in his view, Alston's argument is flawed (see Feldman 2001, 2008).[5]

A strategy that gained considerable popularity was first proposed by Matthias Steup, who applied the compatibilist position known from the free will debate to the problem of doxastic responsibility. First, Steup points out that the libertarian notion of freedom as being uncaused is inapplicable on epistemological grounds. Beliefs are always directed toward the truth and cannot be a kind of mental coin toss. In relation to our actions, however, we are also dealing with decision-making based on an examination of reasons for and against, which we regard as a kind of freedom. Steup argues that it is precisely this sort of freedom that we exercise in the process

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5. For a similar strategy to counter Alston's argument, and for a discussion of Feldman's position, see, e.g., Chuard and Southwood (2009); Altschul (2014); Chrisman (2008); McHugh (2012).

of adopting beliefs. Beliefs are completely determined by the evidence, but this does not prevent them, according to compatibilist proponents, from being considered free. According to Steup, as an effect of doxastic deliberation we make doxastic decisions and execute them by adopting beliefs, and this constitutes a kind of doxastic freedom that we possess (see Steup 2000).6 Steup's position has met with considerable criticism. Critics, among others, point out that relatively few beliefs arise as a result of doxastic deliberation, while the vast majority arise spontaneously and unreflectively, for example, as a result of simple visual perception. This latter type of beliefs does not seem to fit the picture of doxastic freedom sketched by Steup.

The concept of doxastic compatibilism has received considerable attention, although different authors emphasize different aspects of our epistemic situation as sources of doxastic responsibility, despite the determination of beliefs by evidence. For instance, Sharon Ryan highlights the intentionality of beliefs (see Ryan 2003; also Steup 2012, 2017). According to her, beliefs are not analogous to actions that are clearly involuntary, such as pathological compulsive behavior or blushing in an embarrassing situation. In such cases, it is more accurate to say that something happens to the subject rather than that the subject performs these actions. Ryan points out that, as with the acquisition of beliefs, our free actions are sometimes performed unconsciously and automatically—for example, pressing particular keyboard keys while typing on a computer.[7]

Williams, and with him many other authors, is guided by the intuition that truth as the aim of belief is incompatible with acquiring beliefs at will. Authors such as Shah and Montmarquet argue that Williams' intuition wrongly presupposes that an action with a goal cannot be performed freely because it cannot be carried out independently of that goal. Shah reduces Williams' argument to absurdity by formulating an analogous argument for the thesis that one cannot lie freely, since in order to lie it is necessary to pursue the goal of deceiving someone (see Shah 2002). As Montmarquet points out, an action is not rendered involuntary by the controlling influence of reason. In the same way, in his view, the adoption of beliefs should not be considered deprived of freedom merely on the basis that, having its

6. In the following years, Steup developed his concept of doxastic compatibilism; see Steup (2008, 2012, 2017).

7. For criticism of Ryan's position, see Buckareff (2006a). See also other criticisms of doxastic compatibilism: Booth (2009, 2014); Buckareff (2006b); Schmitt (2015); Tebben (2014); Bayer (2015); Peels (2014); Wagner (2017).

purpose—truth—it is directed by evidence (see Montmarquet 1986).[8] Many authors, especially those advocating doxastic compatibilism, present such reasons for the lack of conflict between freedom of belief and the evidence in favor of those beliefs.

Undermining the second premise

The second line of defense of epistemic deontologism is to reject premise (2), which holds that we lack freedom over what beliefs we hold. One option here is to identify those instances of belief for which we do in fact have freedom. Authors try to point to examples where the voluntary adoption of a belief is tied to a change in the world that makes the belief true. These are cases in which, on the one hand, the belief is adopted voluntarily in the strongest sense of the term, and on the other, the belief still stands in the right relation to truth as its aim. For instance, Feldman (2001) argues that I can bring about my belief that the light is on simply by switching on the light. Such examples, however, merely weaken Alston's argument or show the need for certain qualifications. Since they are rare and highly specific, a conception of doxastic voluntarism resting solely on them would be of little interest for the issue of doxastic responsibility. Ginet, by contrast, draws attention to situations in which a subject has some, though not conclusive, evidence for a belief (e.g., that he locked the door before leaving) but, due to the undesirable consequences of doubt (e.g., having to return home to check), chooses to adopt the belief (see Ginet 2001). However, it is doubtful whether in this case one should really speak of belief, and not merely of making a decision to act as if a certain state of affairs were true (see also Cohen 1992).

Another way to reject premise (2) is to point out that, although we cannot adopt beliefs through a direct act of will, we have several means available to indirectly influence our beliefs (see, e.g., Nottelmann 2007; Peels 2017b, 2017a). This position is called "indirect belief voluntarism." For example, we can acquire additional evidence on a given topic, exercise our cognitive competence, or become aware of and avoid common reasoning errors. According to some authors, the possibility of engaging in such activities is sufficient to make us responsible for our beliefs, providing an adequate basis for epistemic deontology. This approach is particularly popular among proponents of virtue epistemology (see, e.g., Audi 2008;

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8. This issue has developed into extensive discussions about the analogy—or lack of it—between actions and reasons for actions, and beliefs and reasons for them. On this issue see, e.g., Buckareff (2006a, 2008); Cohen (2016); Roeber (2016).

Kruse 2017; Montmarquet 1993, 2008a, 2008b). According to this approach in epistemology, doxastic responsibility is tied to the subject's proper epistemic virtue—a stance or attitude that ensures she appropriately engages in the pursuit of truth.

Importantly, advocates of indirect doxastic voluntarism share with involuntarists the view that a subject must ultimately remain committed to the evidence available to them when forming beliefs. Indirect doxastic voluntarism is thus a position that, on the one hand, defends doxastic responsibility, but on the other hand acknowledges the central insight of the argument against the possibility of doxastic freedom. On the third hand, proponents of this position do not reject the principle of alternative possibilities, as doxastic compatibilists do. Their strategy for addressing the doxastic responsibility problem consists in relocating the locus of freedom—the subject's capacity to influence—from the moment of assertion itself to the preceding activities aimed at it: namely, the gathering and evaluation of evidence.

Another strategy for rejecting Alston's argument can be understood as a reformulation of premise (2). According to several authors, epistemic deontologism should not be defined by the very vague notion of belief. In their view, we have duties with respect to more subtle epistemic attitudes, which they define as commitment, or—especially in recent years—credence. These attitudes fall within the scope of our influence, and therefore, when deontologism is understood in this way, the problem identified by Alston does not arise (see, e.g., Tebben 2018). Credence is the subjective assessment of probability that a subject assigns to a given proposition. It could be argued that although we have no control over our outright beliefs, we do have some influence over our degrees of confidence (see Jackson 2019a; Gaultier 2020).[9]

5. Important issues to be addressed

Debates over the compatibilist approach highlight a deeper issue in the epistemology of belief that needs to be clearly articulated and thoroughly examined in order to adequately address the problem of doxastic freedom and responsibility. Our notion of freedom refers mainly to action, while beliefs are treated by epistemologists (e.g., when analyzing the notion of knowledge) as states. Consequently, some authors believe that only indirect doxastic voluntarism is possible, because only with respect to such types of actions as seeking new evidence can we speak of freedom (see, e.g., Audi

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9. On the relationship between belief and credence, see Jackson (2020).

2001; Buckareff 2006a, 2006b). Others distinguish the moment of acceptance of a belief as appropriate for the attribution (or denial) of freedom. For example, Shah and Velleman distinguish belief as a doxastic attitude and judgment as a cognitive mental act of affirming a proposition (see Shah & Velleman 2005; also McHugh 2011). On the other hand, Sosa, in his extended epistemological approach, formulates a position on epistemic normativity in which the comparison of beliefs to actions (such as the archer's arrow) plays a key role, and he treats normativity in epistemology as a kind of performance normativity (see Sosa 2009, 2015).[10]

In recent years, there have been voices in the literature arguing that responsibility for beliefs should be modeled not on responsibility for actions, but on the subject's responsibility for her states, such as emotional ones (see Schmidt 2020). There are also voices suggesting that the problem of doxastic voluntarism should be considered in terms of the subject's freedom of intention (see, e.g., McHugh 2014, 2017; Flowerree 2017; for critical discussion see also Shepherd 2018).

Another key issue within the epistemology of belief, and one that plays a decisive role in addressing the problem of doxastic responsibility, concerns the question of what type of belief should be regarded as exemplary. Some defenders of doxastic voluntarism treat doxastic freedom as if the typical case of belief acquisition were the situation of weighing evidence for and against, with other cases being merely more automatic and less conscious variants of this process (e.g., Steup 2000). Other authors strongly object, arguing that conscious evaluation of evidence applies only to an extremely narrow range of beliefs and cannot be treated as the paradigmatic case—or even as a significant type of belief acquisition at all. According to them, what is most typical is the spontaneous, unreflective emergence of new beliefs in our minds (e.g., Plantinga 1993). It is likely that doxastic freedom and responsibility must be theoretically conceived differently in the case of reflective beliefs and in the case of spontaneous ones, and that any attempt to develop a single theory encompassing all types of beliefs we hold is destined to fail due to its incompleteness.

Part II
1. Towards a conception of doxastic voluntarism
As noted in the first part of the article, some authors argue that, just as the presence of reasons for action does not deprive those actions of freedom, beliefs should not be considered unfree merely because they are supported

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10. On the criticism of Sosa's position, see, e.g., Chrisman (2020).

by evidence. This line of thought is developed in particular by advocates
of a compatibilist approach to doxastic responsibility. On this view, the
principle "ought implies can" requires only that the subject be capable
of performing the action in question. The necessity of performing that
action, they contend, does not undermine responsibility. Note, however, that
even if there are extremely strong reasons for a certain action, the subject
is still responsible for taking it because she may act otherwise. Even if it
would be an extremely irrational choice, its realization remains possible for
the subject. Meanwhile, the core of the intuition about the lack of doxastic
freedom lies in the fact that the subject is incapable of consciously adopting
beliefs against the reasons she perceives. Thus, there is a highly significant
disanalogy between actions and the reasons for them, on the one hand, and
beliefs and the evidence supporting them, on the other.

In defending the compatibilist conception of doxastic freedom, the afore-
mentioned Steup contrasts compatibilism with libertarianism, according
to which free choice means a completely arbitrary choice, unguided by
anything. He then rightly rejects freedom so understood as the basis for
formulating a conception of doxastic voluntarism (see Steup 2000). How-
ever, this is not the only available alternative. Incompatibilism can also
mean that the subject has the ability to go against even strong reasons
available to her—that is, she has the ability to act irrationally. Doxastic
incompatibilism, understood in this way, may imply that it is possible for
a subject to accept a belief in spite of, or independently from, the available
evidence. However, the core problem with doxastic freedom arises from
the fact that, due to the constitutive character of truth as the aim of belief,
this is not possible.[11] This suggests, I think, that doxastic freedom should
be sought in the phenomenon I call "doxastic self-deception."

The idea of truth as the aim of belief, which also grounds the transpar-
ency thesis, suggests that, prima facie, if S states that a proposition p is true,

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11. Freedom of action arises in situations of dilemma: i.e. when a subject has very strong
reasons both for and against taking a given action and must decide which reasons to follow.
It seems that in such cases rationality permits different choices on the part of the subject.
The question, then, is whether we encounter analogous situations in epistemology. Defenders
of the position known as permissivism argue that there are circumstances in which rationality
allows for different doxastic attitudes, such as accepting the belief that p or suspending judg-
ment about p. The problem of doxastic voluntarism appears to have significant implications
for the debate on the plausibility of the permissivist thesis. One possible form of doxastic
freedom could consist in the subject's capacity to choose among doxastic attitudes when faced
with a similar body of evidence—for example, between accepting a belief and suspending
judgment. On the relation between permissivism and the problem of doxastic voluntarism,
see, e.g., Nickel (2010); Roeber (2019, 2020).

then *S* is not in a position not to believe it, and if *S* does not state that a proposition *p* is true, then *S* is not in a position to believe it. When the subject acts epistemically appropriately, it appears that she ultimately has no control over whether she adopts a particular belief, since her assertions must faithfully reflect the evidence she possesses. From this perspective, if doxastic freedom exists, it might manifest as a form of self-deception: the subject has evidence in favor of *p*, yet in accepting ~*p* or suspending judgment regarding *p*, she fails to recognize—or refuses to acknowledge—that she possesses such evidence. Following this reasoning, I begin my inquiry with an analysis of doxastic self-deception, a phenomenon that provides a crucial point of reference for the conception of doxastic voluntarism I defend.

2. Examples of doxastic self-deception

I will now present four examples of belief formation. Two of them illustrate epistemically proper belief acquisition, while the other two are analogous cases of doxastic self-deception, in which—as I will argue—doxastic freedom becomes apparent. Comparing these examples will enable us to draw conclusions, in particular concerning doxastic voluntarism.

Christopher and the Unhealthy Chickens (Low-Stakes Example)
Several leading media outlets have reported that chicken meat available in stores poses health risks—particularly for young children—due to a new strain of virus affecting poultry in the country. Christopher, the father of a small child who regularly eats chicken, responds to this news by saying to his wife: "The media have reported that chicken meat is harmful to children, so we should not give it to our child." Christopher generally accepts media reports as reliable sources of information, although he is aware that sometimes the media are focused on sensationalism rather than providing accurate knowledge.

Andrew and the Unhealthy Chickens (High-Stakes Example)
Several leading media outlets have reported that chicken meat available in stores poses health risks—particularly for young children—due to a new strain of virus affecting poultry in the country. Andrew is the father of a small child with severe autism, which manifests, among other things, in extreme food selectivity. Andrew's child eats only pasta with chicken. Andrew is aware that if he removes chicken from his child's diet, the child will not receive adequate nutrition. Andrew says to his wife: "The media have reported that chicken meat is harmful to children. We need to check

this information in serious sources." In other matters, Andrew generally accepts media reports as reliable sources of information.

> *Thomas and the Unhealthy Chickens (Example of Self-Deception Similar to Low Stakes)*

Several leading media outlets have reported that chicken meat available in stores poses health risks—particularly for young children—due to a new strain of virus affecting poultry in the country. Thomas and his wife are vegetarians, but they must prepare chicken for dinner relatively often because their child insists on eating it. The parents are not happy with this situation. Thomas says to his wife: "The media have reported that chicken meat is harmful to children, so we should not give it to our child." Thomas generally accepts media reports as reliable sources of information, although he is aware that sometimes the media are focused on sensationalism rather than providing accurate knowledge.

> *Gregory and the Unhealthy Chickens (Example of Self-Deception Similar to High Stakes)*

Several leading media outlets have reported that chicken meat available in stores poses health risks—particularly for young children—due to a new strain of virus affecting poultry in the country. Gregory and his wife dislike cooking and do not want to devote time to it. They have learned to prepare a quick chicken dish that their child enjoys and which they usually serve. Gregory is unwilling to remove chicken from his child's diet, since changing meals would require him to spend time on an activity he dislikes. Gregory says to his wife: "The media have reported that chicken meat is harmful to children. That is probably nonsense. Let's wait until we see serious scientific evidence." In other matters, Gregory generally accepts media reports as reliable sources of information.

3. Doxastic strategy

The cases outlined above are worth analyzing in terms of two dimensions of the epistemic goal. It is widely acknowledged that the epistemic goal—truth—can be realized in two ways: by acquiring true beliefs and by avoiding false ones. An exclusive emphasis on either dimension inevitably distorts our doxastic practices. One who aims only at maximizing the acquisition of true beliefs risks accepting an excess of falsehoods, whereas one who concentrates solely on avoiding error is led into skepticism. The proper pursuit of the epistemic goal therefore requires that the subject strike a balance between these two aspects in her cognitive life.

Christopher and Andrew possess the same evidence. Christopher is in a low-stakes situation. The evidence he has—namely, the media reports—he regards as sufficient to adopt the belief that chicken meat should be withdrawn, although in some situations his attitude toward the reliability of media reports is more cautious. Christopher is guided by the first aspect of the epistemic goal, namely the acquisition of true beliefs. Andrew, by contrast, is in a high-stakes situation. For him, it is very important not to accept a falsehood concerning the presence of chicken meat in his child's diet; therefore, he requires stronger evidence and, in the meantime, suspends judgment.

There are no strict epistemic rules determining how strong one's evidence must be in order to be justified in making an assertion. How many instances must I observe before I am entitled to generalize? How many hypotheses, and with what degree of scrutiny, must I consider before I can conclude which is the most plausible? How vivid must a memory be before it can ground a belief? How much, and what kind, of testimonial evidence is required for me to adopt a belief on its basis? The thesis of evidentialism contains the key characterization of evidence as "sufficient," but it does not specify what this precisely means. In each case, it is the subject who must determine whether the available evidence meets this standard. This gives rise to the threshold problem for beliefs. While analogous to the threshold problem for knowledge, the focus here is not on the standards for knowledge, but rather on the standards governing assertion.[12]

In determining how strong the evidence must be in a given case, the subject must be guided by the two aspects of the epistemic goal mentioned above. The balance between acquiring true beliefs and avoiding false ones is achieved by weighing satisfaction with the available evidence against exercising greater caution and demanding stronger evidence. In this way, in each instance of doxastic deliberation, the subject determines what counts as sufficient evidence. I refer to this as a "doxastic strategy."[13]

A doxastic strategy can be understood as an attitude of the subject that, under particular circumstances, guides them either to accept the available evidence as sufficient or to exercise greater caution and require stronger

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12. Assuming the Knowledge Norm of Assertion (KNA), which states that one should only assert a proposition p if one knows that p is true (Williamson 2000), the standards governing assertion are subordinate to the standards governing knowledge. However, in my position I focus exclusively on the doxastic responsibility of the subject: that is, I am only concerned with how the situation appears from the subject's perspective. I do not address the question of whether the external conditions for knowledge are satisfied.

13. A similar idea can be found in Helm (1994).

evidence. While this process is most apparent during doxastic delibera-
tion, I contend that it often operates in a more automatic and unconscious
manner, even when the subject is not consciously attending to the strength
of the evidence. An doxastic strategy is primarily a dispositional stance
or an attitude of the subject that may, but does not necessarily, involve
deliberate reflection on the evidence.

It can be said that our epistemic circumstances often force us to adopt
a doxastic strategy that takes into account the subject's non-epistemic
context, because, as I noted earlier: 1) the epistemic goal has two aspects
that can pull the subject in opposite directions; 2) the subject must address
both aspects, since focusing on only one leads to a distortion of cognition; 3)
the evidentialist thesis does not specify precisely how strong the evidence
needs to be to count as sufficient. A fourth reason can also be added: as
skeptics have observed and, rightly, fallibilists take into account, the vast
majority of our beliefs can never be completely infallible—that is, they may
turn out to be false despite our best efforts.

4. Doxastic self-deception

Christopher finds himself in unremarkable circumstances, where little
depends on whether he adopts a particular belief. He is likewise not in any
particularly epistemically sensitive situation. He does not perceive either
his own subject-related conditions or the surrounding environment as
especially error-prone. Accordingly, he is content to rely on the available,
generally reliable evidence. His epistemic stance prioritizes acquiring beliefs
over avoiding falsehood. By contrast, Andrew faces high-stakes practical
circumstances. Given that much depends on the adoption of his belief, he
takes a very cautious epistemic stance, suspending judgment until stronger
evidence becomes available. Due to his practical situation, his epistemic
orientation leans more toward avoiding error than toward broadening his
set of beliefs. In both cases, the doxastic strategies adopted by the men are
oriented toward achieving the epistemic goal of truth, while also taking
practical considerations into account. Neither Christopher's nor Andrew's
epistemic attitudes raise concerns. Comparing their situations illustrates
that epistemic normativity permits the influence of non-epistemic factors
on a subject's evidential expectations, and thus on their doxastic strategy.

Gregory's case bears some resemblance to Andrew's high-stakes situa-
tion, as both are oriented toward the second aspect of the epistemic aim.
Yet, unlike Andrew, Gregory's stance stems from an unwillingness to accept
a particular belief rather than from a heightened concern for truth. Thom-
as's case, in turn, appears analogous to Christopher's. However, his reliance

on the first aspect of the epistemic aim is motivated by a desire to embrace the belief that chicken meat is unhealthy for non-epistemic reasons. These instances illustrate cases in which the influence of non-epistemic factors is inappropriate from the standpoint of epistemic normativity.

What distinguishes the cases of Thomas and Gregory from those of Christopher and Andrew? Intuitively, we evaluate the epistemic stance of Thomas and Gregory as improper. As in the other two cases, non-epistemic factors shape the doxastic strategies they adopt. The crucial difference, however, is that Thomas and Gregory select a strategy motivated by the desire to accept—or to avoid accepting—*a particular belief*, rather than by a genuine concern for truth in the matter at hand. Their stance, therefore, can aptly be characterized as a form of doxastic self-deception.

Building on the foregoing analyses, I propose to characterize epistemic self-deception as follows:[14]

SD Low: S desires to hold the belief that p, and thus settles for relatively weak evidence in its favor, adopting an doxastic strategy oriented toward the first aspect of the epistemic aim (acquiring true beliefs); or

SD High: S does not wish to hold the belief that p, and thus requires stronger evidence for it, adopting an doxastic strategy oriented toward the second aspect of the epistemic aim (avoiding errors).

In doxastic self-deception, then, the choice of doxastic strategy is guided by the subject's preferences concerning a particular belief, rather than by the pursuit of the epistemic aim of standing in the appropriate relation to the truth of that belief.

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14. The literature contains a considerable number of philosophical treatments of self-deception, most of which aim to explicate the structure of the phenomenon and to resolve the paradoxes it generates. These discussions typically revolve around questions such as: Is self-deception an intentional act on the part of the subject, or rather a delusion driven by her desires? Does self-deception yield a genuine belief? Does the self-deceiver simultaneously entertain two contradictory beliefs? The most influential accounts have been developed by A. Mele and E. Funkhouser (see, e.g., Funkhouser 2019; Mele 2001; see also Baghramian & Nicholson 2013). I do not aim to enter these debates in detail, for my research has a different focus. I intentionally employ the term *doxastic self-deception* rather than simply *self-deception*, as I am not concerned with the phenomenon in its everyday, colloquial sense. Instead, the notion I advance is broader, encompassing all situations in which a subject, in a biased manner, influences how she evaluates the evidence available to her in support of a given belief.

   I term such situations "doxastic self-deception" because the subject, on the one hand, has preferences regarding the assertion (or suspension of judgment) of a particular belief, but in order for the belief to qualify as a mental state of an actual belief—rather than, for example, a desire—the subject must, in a sense, pretend to themselves that they are faithful to the evidence. Since the constitutive aim of beliefs is truth, the subject should adopt only those beliefs for which she has sufficient evidence. Yet our epistemic circumstances not only permit, but often require, the subject to adopt a doxastic strategy that takes into account both epistemic and practical factors. By manipulating the strategy according to personal bias, the subject can shape their beliefs in an intellectually dishonest manner. Given the nature of belief, this influence must occur through a form of self-deception.

5. Alethic impurism regarding beliefs

The cases of Christopher and Andrew demonstrate that assessing the required strength of evidence can legitimately involve considering the subject's practical circumstances. Here, the issue of pragmatic reasons for belief comes into play: can non-epistemic factors influence whether a belief is adopted, or do only epistemic factors matter?[15] Comparing the four examples discussed above leads to the following conclusion:

AII^1 Pragmatic reasons may influence the doxastic strategy adopted by the subject—whether the subject expects stronger evidence or is satisfied with the available evidence—as long as the subject remains in an alethic stance, that is, cares about knowing the truth regarding the matter.

This thesis constitutes the central claim of the position I call "alethic impurism."

   The alethic impurism I aim to defend corresponds, to some extent, to impurism regarding the conditions of knowledge. A notable account of such impurism has been developed by Fantl and McGrath, who operate within an evidentialist framework—a framework that resonates with the present line of inquiry. Drawing on their analyses, I propose the following definition of evidentialist impurism:

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   15. Pragmatists about beliefs argue that there can be genuine practical reasons for beliefs, while opponents of this position argue that reasons for beliefs should always be of an exclusively evidential character (see, e.g., Reisner 2018; Rinard 2019; Sharadin 2018; Bondy 2019; Schmidt 2022).

EvI^K How high the probability of p given S's evidence e must be in order
              for S to know p may vary with S's practical circumstances.[16]

Alethic impurism, however, is a position solely regarding the standards
of assertion, not of knowledge.[17] Therefore, the thesis should properly be
reformulated in the following form:

EvI^B How high the probability of p given S's evidence e must be in order
              for S to *believe p* may vary with S's practical circumstances.

Comparing the cases of Christopher and Andrew with those of Thomas and
Gregory reveals the need to add to the above formulation a qualification
concerning the subject's proper epistemic stance. With this modification,
we can articulate a second formulation of the alethic impurism thesis:

AlI^2 How high the probability of p given S's evidence e must be in order
              for S to believe p may vary with S's practical circumstances, inso-
              far as the subject remains in an alethic stance.

According to the alethic impurist view, non-epistemic factors may influ-
ence the formation of beliefs, but only under specific conditions: (1) exclu-
sively by shaping the doxastic strategy the subject adopts—namely, the
required strength of evidence she demands; and (2) only so long as the
subject remain in an alethic stance. Thus, according to alethic impurism,
Thomas and Gregory fail to act in an epistemically proper manner, for
in choosing their doxastic strategies they do not remain oriented toward
truth. Ultimately, only evidence can serve as a reason for belief, though
non-epistemic factors may affect how strong the evidence must be, pro-
vided the subject's aim remains the pursuit of truth in the matter at hand.[18]
   The two conditions that must be met for non-epistemic circumstances
to legitimately influence the subject's assertion make alethic impurism
compatible with the transparency thesis—for, within this framework, *the
deliberative question whether to believe that* p *is transparent to the question*

16. See Fantl and McGrath (2009).
   17. I agree with Jennifer Nagel that the arguments advanced by impurists pertain to the
standards of assertion rather than to those of knowledge. See Nagel (2008).
   18. The analyses of alethic impurism presented here can be used to defend the position
of permissivism: i.e. the claim that the same set of evidence can justify more than one epis-
temic attitude.

whether p. As cited above, McHugh reformulates the transparency thesis in the following way:

TrT[2]   Pragmatic considerations cannot occur to a thinker, within doxas-
            tic deliberation, as relevant to *what* to believe (McHugh 2013, 448;
            my emphasis).

Alethic impurism aligns with this thesis, yet it is also compatible with:

AlI[3]   Pragmatic considerations can occur to a thinker, within doxastic
            deliberation, as relevant to *whether* to believe.

Pragmatic factors can affect whether a subject will adopt a belief. For example, in a high-risk situation a subject might withhold belief because their doxastic strategy prioritizes avoiding errors. Pragmatic considerations, however, cannot serve as a reason to adopt a strategy that inherently favors a specific belief. In other words, the subject must remain unbiased. The alethic attitude I describe[19] can also be understood simply as intellectual honesty.[20]

6. Doxastic freedom as doxastic self-control
Alethic impurism yields significant insights regarding doxastic responsibility. First, our epistemic conditions make us not function purely as

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19. As one of the reviewers has noted, an interesting comparison can be made between my position and the distinction proposed by Williamson in "Justifications, Excuses, and Sceptical Scenarios" (forthcoming). Williamson introduces three interdependent norms: "Let J be a truth-related norm of belief. Then DJ is the norm of being the sort of person who complies with J, and ODJ is the norm of doing in the given situation what the sort of person who complies with J would do." (p. 12) There are two important truth-related norms for belief that I consider in this article. The first is the evidentialist norm of adjusting one's beliefs to one's evidence. As I argue, when analyzing the cases of doxastic self-deception, compliance with this norm is not sufficient for an agent to be a doxastically responsible. Alethic impurism also requires that the agent be in the alethic stance. The requirement concerns a disposition of the subject and, following Williamson, is thus a secondary norm, DJ. This suggests that there is some truth-related norm J, of which DJ is derivative, that is more fundamental than the evidentialist norm, and my examples of epistemic self-deception provide some support for this claim. One plausible candidate for that norm is to believe only what one knows. It should be emphasized, however, that my considerations concern doxastic responsibility rather than the epistemic justification, so they are related to Williamson's analysis, but Williamson goes beyond the scope of my reflection when he examines the epistemic status of beliefs in the brain-in-a-vat scenario.

20. For interesting reflections on intellectual humility related to the issues addressed in the article, see Carter and Gordon (2020); Tanesini (2020).

mechanisms in the epistemic domain. Rather, we act like agents—at least to a certain extent, autonomously setting our goals (whether to adopt beliefs or avoid error) and determining how to achieve them (by specifying the required strength of evidence). Situations in which this is clearly apparent also demonstrate that, in the epistemic realm, we are subject—at least in part—to normative evaluation appropriate for rational, free agents. Second, we are capable of doxastic self-deception, which consists in the subject acting much as she would in proper belief formation, and yet—so to speak—deceiving herself by concealing from herself the true motives driving her actions. This suggests that in the epistemic sphere, under certain circumstances, one can speak of the subject's "doxastic blame." Third, properly fulfilling one's epistemic duties crucially depends on the subject's alethic attitude, which I have also referred to as "intellectual honesty." This is a subjective factor in the sense that it cannot be pinned down by strict, intersubjectively measurable conditions, such as the strength of evidence. Furthermore, it is theoretically possible that the assessment of doxastic responsibility for subjects in two situations could differ radically, even if in both cases externally observable conditions were identical, provided that the subjects exhibited different epistemic attitudes.[21]

The cases of Thomas and Gregory show that, depending on one's preferences, a subject can influence which beliefs she adopts. If, for some reason, a particular belief does not suit her, she can continually disregard the evidence and expect an ever stronger evidence for the relevant belief, whereas if the belief particularly satisfies her, she can quickly settle for the available evidence. In this way, the subject can, to some extent, manipulate her beliefs while still grounding them in evidence, which is a condition for belief as such. But can the ability to self-deceive be considered an instance of doxastic freedom?

The notion of freedom involves two fundamental intuitions: conscious control and the ability to act otherwise. In the case of doxastic self-deception,

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21. The position presented here provides the tools for an interesting interpretation of a classic text by William James, entitled "The Will to Believe." This article is often interpreted as contradicting the evidentialist thesis and doxastic responsibility, or denying that truth is the aim of belief. Alethic impurism provides a way of interpreting James' position in such a way as to resist these objections. The believer and non-believer could adopt different strategies concerning religious beliefs. One could be more focused on increasing the chance of having true beliefs, and the other could find it more important to protect himself from errors. Following our "passions," which James writes about, can be understood as taking up one of these two strategies, depending on the non-epistemic factors the subject is placed in. For this way of interpreting James' position, see Odoj (2014), and for a similar interpretation of James' position, see also Pace (2011).

the condition of consciously undertaking an action and controlling it cannot be fulfilled. The subject, in a sense, must conceal from herself that she is influencing her own belief-formation process. She is at once both the deceiver and the deceived. From this perspective, understanding doxastic voluntarism through the lens of doxastic self-deception appears irreconcilable with this intuition. Second, in line with the principle "ought implies can," a free action is one that the subject could have performed differently, though she was not determined to do so. Put differently, a free action is one that could have been otherwise. As repeatedly noted above, this intuition appears at odds with the notion of doxastic freedom itself. I think, however, that a closer analysis reveals how both intuitions can be reconciled with the conception of doxastic freedom I defend.

The cases of Thomas and Gregory could have turned out differently if they had reflected on their own motives and the circumstances they found themselves in, leading them, contrary to their initial impulse, to adjust their stance. In doing so, they would have employed their capacity for metacognition—simplified, the ability to think about one's own thinking. Metacognition is a higher-order cognitive ability that develops in humans (and, to some extent, in certain animals). Joëlle Proust defines it as follows: "Metacognition is the set of capacities through which an operating cognitive subsystem is evaluated or represented by another subsystem in a context-sensitive way" (Proust 2013, 4).

Doxastic freedom is possible because we are capable of doxastic self-deception: that is, of acting in ways that are epistemically improper, even culpable.[22] Metacognition equips us with a capacity for self-control that, to some extent and within the limits of its development, allows the subject to act otherwise—to correct her stance and proceed in an epistemically appropriate way. Doxastic freedom, then, does not lie in choosing whichever beliefs one prefers, but in the ability to regulate the processes responsible for belief formation so that they accord with the norms of assertion. It arises because, while we are prone to doxastic self-deception, we are also able to monitor and control ourselves through metacognition. To that extent, which beliefs we hold does depend on us, and the conception of doxastic freedom defended here remains consistent with the principle that "ought implies can." While the subject's influence on her beliefs through doxastic self-deception cannot occur consciously, the capacity for regulating her own

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22. A similar intuition to the effect that what I call 'doxastic self-deception' is an example of doxastic freedom can be found in Booth (2007) and in Funkhouser (2003); see also Adler (2002) and McCormick (2015).

cognitive processes can indeed be exercised in a deliberate and controlled way. Metacognition to a certain extent enables the subject to recognize her own biases. The conception of doxastic freedom I have defended is thus consistent with the two general intuitions about freedom discussed above. This, in turn, provides grounds for speaking of doxastic responsibility in the sense that Alston criticizes.

If responsibility requires the possibility of influence, then, on the present account, the scope of doxastic responsibility is defined by the extent of a subject's metacognitive development. Thus, the doxastic responsibility of a young child or of a person with significant cognitive impairments is diminished—or perhaps absent altogether—in comparison with that of a mature adult with well-developed metacognitive abilities. Furthermore, doxastic responsibility, so understood, varies in accordance with individual cognitive differences among persons.[23]

7. Objections

Serious objections can be raised against the conception advanced here. One might contend, for example, that there is no substantive difference between unmotivated delusion or cognitive bias and motivated irrationality, i.e. self-deception.[24] Likewise, it could be argued that invoking the phenomenon of self-deception (or, more broadly, motivated irrationality) allows, at most, for the isolation of a limited class of beliefs that remain resistant to Alston's objection. After all, not all of our beliefs can plausibly be construed as potential objects of self-deception. Perceptual beliefs, for instance, seem to arise in a way that precludes such influence on the part of the subject.

In the position I defend, however, the crucial element is the component of doxastic self-control through metacognitive abilities. Even if, in a given case, it is difficult to unambiguously identify the subject's bias, for doxastic responsibility it suffices to point to the subject's capacity for exercising self-control over her own cognitive processes. If such capacities are present, they provide the subject with the possibility of influence, whether the source of error lies in an improper epistemic attitude—on which the preceding analyses have focused—or in an innocent mistake, such as an error made

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23. The phenomenon of doxastic self-deception might also be analyzed in terms of subjective probability and the propositional attitude called 'credence.' For interesting remarks on how the notion of degrees of belief affects the arguments against the evidentialism thesis formulated by proponents of pragmatic encroachment, see Ganson (2008); Jackson (2019b).

24. On the relationship between delusions, biased beliefs and self-deception, see Bayne and Fernandez (2010).

in overly hasty calculation. Cases in which a subject's bias is clearly visible serve as useful illustrations of a phenomenon that, within the complexities of life for beings such as ourselves, may manifest with varying degrees of clarity. For that reason, such cases are valuable in offering epistemological insight into important questions of doxastic freedom and responsibility. This does not mean, however, that doxastic responsibility applies only to cases as clear-cut as those exemplifying doxastic self-deception.[25]

The conception of doxastic responsibility developed in this article seems to presuppose a relatively robust understanding of doxastic blame. One potential objection is that we frequently engage in self-deception when it serves to achieve a positive outcome, such as personal well-being or growth. A typical example is self-deception regarding one's state of health: a person might believe they are healthier than they actually are, which can help them cope with the challenges of daily life. In response, it should be emphasized that the analyses presented here concern solely epistemic duties—also referred to as "intellectual duties"—which represent only one set of the many responsibilities associated with human life. Duties often conflict with one another. Even if self-deception about one's health could be construed as blameworthy in relation to a person's epistemic duties, it is evident that, all things considered, the individual should not be blamed, as she is fulfilling other, arguably more pressing personal duties, such as maintaining her well-being.

One might raise a doubt as to whether, in the examples of doxastic self-deception described, the men in fact hold an outright belief—assert something—rather than being in some other attitude such as, for instance, acceptance or merely a disposition to act (as in a situation in which I do not remember whether I locked the door, but in order not to waste time going back I assume that I did and simply drive on).[26] For my argument, the cases of Thomas and Gregory are particularly important, although this issue may concern all four men. I think that, from a psychological point of view, every option is possible in each of the four types of case and to varying degrees: a person's attitude may range from full assertion, through partial

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credence combined with a certain disposition to act, all the way to a mere disposition to act *as if* a given proposition were true, without asserting that it is in fact true. For my purposes, it is sufficient that cases of outright belief in two types of self-deception situation are psychologically plausible. From the perspective of the alethic impurism I defend, it is in fact desirable that the subject adopts only a certain disposition to act, rather than an outright belief. If this is so, then either they spontaneously display the appropriate alethic attitude, or they have managed to adopt this attitude by mastering their competing tendencies, thanks to their metacognitive capacities.

One might also object that my position does not differ from indirect doxastic voluntarism.[27] I do not dispute that exercising indirect control over our beliefs constitutes an important aspect of doxastic responsibility. Nevertheless, I contend that if epistemic responsibility were reduced solely to indirect doxastic voluntarism, a significant problem would emerge. As fallibilists rightly emphasize, almost none of our beliefs can be regarded as absolutely indubitable. There is always—even if only to the slightest degree—the possibility that new evidence will arise, or that the evidence we currently possess is flawed. Thus, if we were to assume that there is a duty to examine the available evidence and seek new evidence until absolute certainty is achieved, we would inevitably lapse into skepticism. Proponents of indirect doxastic voluntarism are thus obliged to clarify under what conditions a subject bears a duty of deeper inquiry. This raises the further question of what it means for evidence to be sufficient. When is it appropriate to trust evidence, and when must it be verified? This question marks the starting point of my investigation: I aim to show that the problem of doxastic responsibility ultimately depends on a more fundamental factor—the subject's alethic stance. This stance cannot be reduced to additional acts, such as the verification of evidence or seeking for new evidence. Rather, the appropriate execution of such supplementary acts depends precisely on the underlying alethic attitude of the subject.

Summary

This paper has proposed an approach to understanding doxastic voluntarism. The position can be characterized as strong, in the sense that the concept of doxastic freedom I defend is compatible with Kant's principle of "ought implies can," understood in an incompatibilist manner. To the extent that the nature of the cognitive domain allows, I have sought to preserve the intuition that the concept of freedom entails the principle

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27. I am grateful to a second anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this point.

of alternative possibilities. In this way, my account offers a defense of epistemic deontologism against the objection raised by Alston. Furthermore, it is sufficiently robust to support the attribution of doxastic responsibility, and even doxastic blame.

In developing this conception, I seek to reconcile both the intuition underlying the conceptual argument against doxastic voluntarism—with its strong emphasis on the constitutive role of truth as the aim of belief—and the intuitions supporting the existence of pragmatic reasons for belief. This is possible because I use the phenomenon of doxastic self-deception, with its paradoxical structure, as a foundation for articulating the concept of doxastic freedom. At the same time, I indicate that the sources of doxastic responsibility should be sought in the subject's metacognitive abilities, which enable self-control of one's own cognitive processes.

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