The Possibility Conditions of an Ethics of Belief

Valentin Arts

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For Rachel

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Having taught history for almost 20 years, and having studied philosophy during that time and taught philosophy as well for about 6 years, I thought it would be a good idea to apply for a teacher promotion grant that was funded by the Dutch Ministry of Education. To get the grant, I had to come up with a topic, a plan and a promoter. After discussing a few ideas with some of my former professors at Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, they referred me to Professor René van Woudenberg at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. This turned out to be a good match. My original idea was to write about epistemological problems in a deterministic and naturalistic worldview. After some discussions with René van Woudenberg and Emmanuel Rutten, I came up with the idea of writing a dissertation about the metaethics of belief instead, because I wanted to pick up the challenge of defending the idea that we can control some of our beliefs despite much literature to the contrary.

When I received the grant, I was very excited and started full of energy, but in the second and third years of my research, I went through a long and difficult divorce which took away all the momentum from my studying. After two difficult years, I decided to take a year off because I was unable to make any progress on my dissertation. It was during this gap year that I met my new wife, Rachel, and we got married a year later. Just when I thought my life was back on track, the COVID-19 pandemic hit with several lockdowns and curfews. At first, I looked on the bright side: the lockdown would give me more time at home to work on my research. But it did not turn out that way because I still had to teach all my classes online. It took a significant amount of time and energy

to develop new skills, such as designing and delivering online lessons that would keep my students engaged, and coming up with alternative assignments in the absence of regular tests. Many of my students were struggling emotionally and were not learning much. Even when there was no lockdown, I had to do a lot of damage control with my students. Again, I lost a lot of precious time during the COVID-19 period that should have been spent on research.

By the time life got back to normal, I had already used up the grant, which allowed me two days a week off school for four years, and I was only halfway through my dissertation. Fortunately, the government extended the grant for another year because most of the teachers who had received it were also struggling to finish their dissertations. The foundation Ons Middelbaar Onderwijs (OMO), which governs my school and many other schools in the south of the Netherlands, provided a supplementary grant of half a day per week to help me finish my dissertation. This gave me some extra time, but in practice, I felt that my research and teaching responsibilities were two very separate domains. It was difficult to switch between the two tasks all the time, and it was almost impossible to get into a flow. When the time provided by the grants for writing my dissertation ran out, I had to finish it in my spare time, alongside a busy full-time job and other responsibilities. All in all, it took much longer to finish than I had expected.

There are many people I need to thank. First of all, I want to thank my promoter, René van Woudenberg, for his empathetic ear during my divorce, his encouragement, constructive advice, and trust. I want to thank my co-promoter, Rik Peels, for his astute comments on my drafts. His dissertation on "Responsible Belief" (2016), and other papers on the ethics of belief, were an important inspiration for my research. I want to thank Jeroen de Ridder, Lieke Asma, Naomi Kloosterboer, Hans van Eyghen, Emmanuel Rutten, Jan Willem Wieland, Wout Bisschop, and Chris Ranalli for the interesting peer review meetings at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Their comments on some of my early drafts were very helpful, and discussing their research papers was also

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
1. Presuppositions of an ethics of belief 1
2. Alston and his respondents 7
3. Structure of this dissertation 12
4. Relevance and methodology 16

Chapter 2: Peer Disagreement and Doxastic Voluntary Control 17
1. Introduction 17
2. Epistemic peerhood 18
3. Strict epistemic peerhood and doxastic voluntary control 22
4. Soft epistemic peerhood and doxastic voluntary control 24
5. Long-term indirect influence and peer disagreement 29
6. Conclusion 30

Chapter 3: Some Problems with Doxastic Frankfurt-style Cases 31
1. Introduction 31
2. Frankfurt-style cases and intentional control 32
3. Reasons-responsiveness and causal determinism 41
4. Some problems with doxastic Frankfurt-style thought experiments 45
5. Conclusion 54

Chapter 4: Why the Argument for Doxastic Involuntarism Fails 55
1. Introduction 55
2. A sceptical defence of doxastic voluntarism 57
3. Commitment as the object of voluntary control 62
4. Belief policies as the object of voluntary control 65
5. Propositions and doxastic webs 69
6. Conclusion 75

Chapter 5: Difficulties with the Standard Idea of Belief 77
1. Introduction 77
2. Conceptual problems with the standard idea of belief 78
3. Deontological problems with the standard idea of belief 86
4. Conclusion 88

Chapter 6: Belief as Trust 89
1. Introduction 89
2. Belief as trust 90
3. To feel trust in p and to put trust in p 97
4. Epistemic faith-beliefs 100
5. Faith-belief and voluntary control 103
6. Epistemic faith-beliefs and action 108
7. Deontic language and faith-belief 110
8. Responsible belief and faith-belief 112
9. Faith-belief and belief policies 115
10. Conclusion 117

Chapter 7: The Consequences of Wrong Beliefs 119
1. Introduction 119
2. What if I do not believe it? 120
3. An ethics of belief and action 125
4. Faith-belief and physical reality 130
5. Faith-belief and moral reality 134

6. Faith-belief and social practice 136
7. Epistemic Authority 140
8. Conclusion 144

Chapter 8: Conclusion: The Possibility Conditions of an Ethics of Belief 147
1. Introduction... 147
2. Condition One: Doxastic voluntary control.................................. 148
3. Condition Two: Epistemic rules 151
4. Condition Three: Epistemic authority.. 152
5. Condition Four: Consequences for wrong beliefs 153
6. Ethics of belief and peer disagreement 154
7. Faith-belief and scepticism 156
8. Unanswered questions and further research 158

Epilogue: Ethics of Belief and Education 161

Samenvatting in het Nederlands.. 167
Hoofdstuk 1: Inleiding 168
Hoofdstuk 2: Geloofskeuzevrijheid en epistemische gelijken 169
Hoofdstuk 3: Enkele problemen met Frankfurt-achtige gedachte-experimenten.. 170
Hoofdstuk 4: Wat er mis is met het argument tegen geloofskeuzevrijheid... 171
Hoofdstuk 5: Enkele problemen met de standaardopvatting van geloof 172
Hoofdstuk 6: Geloof als vertrouwen 173
Hoofdstuk 7: De consequenties van verkeerd geloof.......................... 174
Hoofdstuk 8: Conclusie 176

References 177

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1. Presuppositions of an ethics of belief

Are beliefs a subject for morality? Is there an obligation to believe or disbelieve certain things? Are we permitted to believe anything until it is proven untrue, or should we believe something only after having obtained sufficient evidence? The "ethics of belief" is concerned with these questions at the intersection of epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind and psychology. Epistemologists have explored the conditions under which a belief is sufficiently justified to qualify as knowledge. This has given rise to many different schools of thought in epistemology such as rationalism, empiricism, positivism, pragmatism, foundationalism, evidentialism, reliabilism, etc. These schools of thought focus on fundamental questions about the conditions under which a "belief that p" is justified. According to many modern epistemologists, to establish that S *knows* that p, it is required that S believes that p, that p is true, and that the belief that p is sufficiently justified. The idea that knowledge is true justified belief has been prevalent since Plato but was challenged by Gettier (1963). After Gettier gave examples of true justified beliefs that we would not consider knowledge, epistemologists have looked for another condition of knowledge to avoid these so-called Gettier cases.[1]

1 An example of a Gettier case is to imagine that someone, X, is standing outside a field looking at something that looks like a sheep (although in fact, it is a dog disguised as a sheep). X believes there is a sheep in the field, and in fact, X is right because there is a sheep behind the hill in the middle of the field. Hence, X has a justified true belief that there is a sheep in the field. See: Chisholm, 1966, p. 23.

Some philosophers have redirected their focus from the inquiry of whether and when a "belief that p" is justified to the question of whether and when agents themselves are justified in "believing that p". This approach places more emphasis on the believer's role as an agent than on the proposition being believed. According to this view, a person has responsibilities for their beliefs and should or should not believe certain propositions. A person might be praised or blamed for holding certain beliefs, but in other cases, they might be permitted or be blameless for having other beliefs. By focussing on the responsibility of the believer rather than merely on what is being believed, a person might be justified in believing something that is not true but for which they nevertheless have enough evidence. If we are somehow responsible for our beliefs and can either meet or fail to meet that responsibility, it seems to follow that we, as agents who believe, have certain duties or obligations. When we consider our duties or obligations regarding beliefs or knowledge we speak of *epistemic deontology*. Therefore, an ethics of belief regulates what we are permitted, obliged, or prohibited to believe.

The locus classicus of the starting point of the current discussion on ethics of belief is the seminal "Ethics of Belief" essay by Clifford (1877). In that essay, Clifford uses a thought experiment involving the owner of a ship who believed his ship was seaworthy enough to send overseas even though he had several reasons to doubt it, and without serious examination of whether it was actually so. The ship sank. According to Clifford, the owner of the ship was blameworthy for his belief because "the sincerity of his conviction can in no wise help him because he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him. He had acquired his belief not by honestly earning it in patient investigation but by stifling his doubts" (pp. 97-98). He continues to argue that even if the ship had arrived intact, the owner would remain guilty for holding a belief based on insufficient evidence. Clifford concluded: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (p. 101).

Clifford's (1877) evidentialist approach was later challenged in James's famous lecture called "The Will to Believe" (1896). He argued that Clifford's principle was far too restrictive. James argues that there are situations in which it is permissible to form a belief when we have insufficient or inconclusive evidence for it, even when we are aware of that. In numerous cases, we simply have to make decisions based on insufficient evidence, and in many of those cases, it would be a prudential, intellectual, and moral failure if we did not make any such decisions based on a lack of conclusive evidence. Although the examples used by Clifford and James are quite general, it was obvious to both philosophers that religious beliefs, in particular, were at stake in their discussion on the ethics of belief. Other notable philosophers, such as Descartes (1641, 1701) and Locke (1690b), had already explored epistemic duties to some extent before Clifford and James's essays on the matter, but the current debate and the very concept of "ethics of belief" date back to the late 19th century.

Since Clifford (1877), much has been written on epistemic norms and duties. Many concepts developed in the ethics of action have been applied to the ethics of belief. There appear to be many similarities between responsibility in action and belief. Robert Audi (1988), for example, writes,

> "Belief is profoundly analogous to action. Both are commonly grounded in reasons; both are a basis for praising or blaming the subject; both are sensitive to changes in one's environment; both can appropriately be described as objects of decision and deliberation, and beliefs can appear quite action-like when conceived as formed by assent or by acceptance". (p. 27)

For example, some have argued for a consequentialist approach, where the aim and result of our beliefs should always be the truth to be justified (Ahlstrom-Vij et al., 2018; Singer, 2023). Others have pleaded for a deontic approach where an agent has to follow certain epistemic duties, even if it might result in a belief that is not true (Conee, 2004; Feldman, 2000). Others still have argued

for a virtue ethics of belief, where an agent should develop epistemic virtues that are most likely to produce true beliefs (Fairweather et al., 2001; Sosa, 2007; Zagzebski, 1996). Nevertheless, it seems that there are some important differences between the ethics of action and the ethics of belief. For instance, it is often claimed that the ethics of action aims at the good, whereas the ethics of belief aims at the truth or knowledge (Chan, 2013; Wedgwood, 2002). Considering the right evidence and developing epistemic virtues, such as open-mindedness, rigour, thoughtfulness, and diligence, all play an important role in many theories on epistemic norms.

The discussion on normative ethics of belief, as in ethics of action, was supplemented with a metaethics of belief. The metaethics of belief deals with foundational issues that are presupposed by an ethics of belief or an epistemic deontology. This dissertation primarily addresses the metaethics of belief, focussing on the presuppositions or necessary conditions of an ethics of belief. I will examine the conditions that must be in place before we can sensibly hold a person responsible for their beliefs and expect them to fulfil epistemic duties.

Two presuppositions of an ethics of belief in particular have received much attention over the last 50 years or so. The first has to do with the concept of belief itself. If we have an epistemic duty to believe something, for example, that the atomic number of carbon is 6, then what is it precisely that is expected of us? Is it that we (1) *take it to be true,* (2) *are of the opinion,* or (3) *are persuaded* that 6 is the atomic number of carbon? Is it that (4) we can form in our minds the right *representation* of a carbon atom? Is it that (5) we have the behaviourist disposition to *act as if* the atomic number of carbon is 6? Is it that (6) we *assent to*, (7) *accept,* (8) *assume,* or (9) *trust* that the atomic number of carbon is 6? Is it that (10) we are somehow *committed* to the proposition that the atomic number of carbon is 6, or that (11) we *have faith* that it is? Is it that (12) we are *assured*, (13) *convinced*, or (14) *confident* that the atomic number of carbon is 6? Is it that (15) *we find it more likely* that 6, rather than another number, is the atomic number of carbon? Is it that (16) we simply *suppose* that

6 is the atomic number of carbon? It is quite clear from these possible interpretations that "belief" or "believing" can have many different, although sometimes similar and overlapping meanings, and that the fallacy of equivocation is lurking in any discussion on belief, let alone on the ethics of belief. The discussion on the ethics of belief is very much hindered based on a lack of a shared conceptual vocabulary, particularly when it comes to "belief". We may have epistemic duties with respect to some of these meanings of belief, but not concerning others. I will elaborate on this later.

The second presupposition of an ethics of belief that has received even more attention, and that will be discussed in the first part of this dissertation, has to do with the notion of doxastic voluntary control, or voluntary control over what we believe. For an agent to be morally responsible for their actions, they should have voluntary control over them, at least at face value. If we believe we can hold people morally responsible for things over which they have no control, it needs at least an explanation. Many philosophers still commonly accept the principle "ought implies can" and if, for any reason, we should not take it for granted as some suggest, then that should be explained.

In the metaethics of action topics such as free will, voluntary control, and determinism lie at the centre of the debate. In the metaethics of belief, this is not very different. Although many of the concepts developed in the more mature subfield of metaethics of action have been applied to metaethics of belief, I shall demonstrate that this has not always been successful. The concepts of determinism, free will, and voluntary control can have, or have been given, various meanings or interpretations both in the realm of actions and the doxastic realm. Choosing to perform a bodily action, such as raising a hand, is nothing like choosing to believe that 6 is the atomic number of carbon. While the former seems straightforward and familiar, it all depends on what we consider to be a choice and what we exactly mean by believing whether we can make sense of the latter. To most philosophers, it does not make sense at all to consider a belief

the object of a choice (Buckareff, 2006; Cohen, 1992; Hieronymi, 2009; Rosell, 2009; Van Woudenberg, 2012).

William P. Alston is one of the most important critics of the concept of doxastic voluntarism as well as epistemic deontology. In his paper "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification" (1988), he argues that we lack the necessary voluntary control over our beliefs that we need to have epistemic duties or obligations. Most, if not all of our beliefs and disbeliefs, so he argues, are determined by the evidence to which we are exposed and not by free choice. Much of the literature on doxastic voluntarism and epistemic deontology has been written as a direct or indirect reply to that influential paper. And this dissertation is no exception. The first few chapters are therefore devoted to the concept of doxastic voluntary control.

In the second part of my dissertation, Chapters 4 to 6, I shall deal more in particular with the concept of belief. I shall critique what I call "the standard idea of belief" as the proper object of an ethics of belief. The standard idea of belief is the idea that a belief is a cognitive attitude towards a proposition that is characterized by the feeling, or by the disposition to feel, that it is true. The standard idea of belief is both explicitly and implicitly endorsed by philosophers in much of the literature on the ethics of belief, including Alston (1988, 1989).

After discussing the concept of belief and proposing a more nuanced idea of belief as the object of an ethics, I shall elaborate in the last part of this dissertation on other presuppositions of an ethics of belief that have received less attention in the literature, such as epistemic rules, epistemic authority, and negative consequences for blameworthy beliefs.

To put my ideas in the context of the philosophical discussion I shall first summarize the current state of the debate on doxastic voluntarism. In the next section, I shall explain some of Alston's most important tenets, followed by a short overview of some of the most influential responses to Alston. After that, I will give a short outline of the chapters of my dissertation.

2. Alston and his respondents

Alston (1988) argues that the deontological conception of epistemic justification is viable only if beliefs are sufficiently under voluntary control. His argument against epistemic justification from doxastic involuntarism can be formulated in the following modus tollens:

> P1: If normal subjects have epistemic obligations to believe or refrain from believing then normal people must have voluntary control over their beliefs.
>
> P2: It is not the case that normal subjects have voluntary control over their beliefs.
>
> Therefore, it is not the case that normal subjects have epistemic obligations to believe or refrain from believing.

Or

> P1: The deontological conception of epistemic justification implies doxastic voluntarism.
>
> P2: Doxastic voluntarism is not true, or only in rare instances of belief.
>
> Therefore, the deontological conception of epistemic justification is unacceptable.

The "ought implies can" intuition accounts for the first premise. The second premise is a bit more complicated because Alston makes a distinction between four kinds of doxastic voluntary control. The first two of these are forms of direct control, while the other two are forms of indirect control.

1. *Basic voluntary control* is the ability to take up at will whatever propositional attitude one chooses through a basic mental act, not through doing something else.

2. *Non-basic immediate voluntary control* is the ability to bring about the fact that one believes, or does not believe, a specific proposition as a non-basic act but "in one fell swoop, i.e., during a period of activity uninterruptedly guided by the intention to produce that belief", without having to return to the attempt several times after having been occupied with other matters.
3. *Long-range voluntary control* entails interrupted activities designed to bring about belief in a specific proposition, such as selective exposure to evidence, hypnotism, or seeking the company of believers while avoiding non-believers (self-indoctrination).
4. *Indirect voluntary influence*, in which activities, such as seeking evidence to resolve a question one way or another, bring about a belief but without us intentionally bringing about that specific belief (Alston, 1988, pp. 260-269).

Concerning the first two, Alston (1988) asserts that we have no such control. Although some philosophers have claimed that basic voluntary control is even logically or conceptually impossible (Nottelmann, 2007b; Williams, 1972), according to Alston, it is simply *psychologically* impossible. We cannot directly choose our beliefs. The argument he gives for this is not a proper argument with premises but is rather a challenge or a rhetorical question: "Can you at this moment start to believe that the United States is still a colony of Great Britain, just by deciding to do so?" (Alston, 1988, p. 263)

Alston (1988) maintains, first, that we cannot choose to believe propositions that are obviously false, as he challenges us to try. Second, he states that we cannot help but believe propositions that are obviously true, for example, when we see things with our own eyes. Third, concerning propositions that are neither obviously true nor obviously false, he says that, given a set of contrary propositions, we cannot help but believe the one that seems most likely to be true. In cases where rival propositions seem equally likely and where no other rival proposition seems more likely, he affirms that we cannot believe any of the propositions. In cases in which we have to act, we might resolve to *act as if* one of the propositions were true, as would a field commander in wartime faced

with questions about the current disposition of enemy forces, where the information at his disposal does not tell him just what that disposition is. In a situation in which we are theorizing, we might *suppose* for the sake of argument that one of the propositions is true, as when a scientist adopts a working hypothesis that they subject to tests (Alston, 1988, pp. 264-268).

Alston (1988) makes it clear that to suppose, to act as if, or to assume for the sake of argument does not, according to him, count as a belief. It seems rather that "to be convinced" is the sort of belief he has in mind. He further concedes that in rare cases, we may have long-range voluntary control and that we have indirect voluntary influence on our beliefs by voluntarily exposing ourselves to information and evidence. But he maintains that this does not amount to being able to select the specific propositions we will believe. Thus, we might be able to brainwash ourselves over some time, and we can freely act to develop intellectual virtues and choose to be exposed to whatever evidence or information that will result in a belief, but we still cannot choose the resulting belief itself.

Many have found Alston's (1988) claims convincing and disturbing at the same time. It seems that he has given us a paradox. On the one hand, both premises seem plausible, at face value at least, and the argument seems valid. But on the other hand, many philosophers feel that we are somehow more directly responsible and accountable for what we believe. Feldman (2000) has identified two strategies open to those who reject Alston's view that deontological judgments cannot apply to beliefs because of a lack of doxastic voluntary control. He writes, "(i) they can argue that we do have the requisite sort of control over our beliefs," or "(ii) they can argue that deontological judgments do not have voluntarist implications" (p. 669). Apart from rejecting one or both of the premises, however, the argument could also fail because it is invalid. The argument may be guilty of the fallacy of equivocation or ambiguity, particularly when it comes to his interpretation of what constitutes a belief. Responses to Alston's argument can thus be categorized into four clusters. Some of these

responses will be discussed and evaluated at more length later but for now, I give a short overview.

The first response accepts that we have no direct voluntary control over our beliefs and that we can only influence what we believe in an indirect long-term way. While acknowledging that people cannot be responsible for their beliefs because they have chosen them, agents are nevertheless not entitled to just any belief. Because we have indirect influence over our beliefs, we still must "believe responsibly". To believe responsibly is to believe blamelessly, that is, to be the proper object of either neutral appraisal or praise for one's belief. Responsible belief excludes blameworthy belief, but one can believe responsibly even if one does not believe praiseworthily. An agent can believe responsibly by exposing themself to the right kind of evidence, by believing rationally, and by developing intellectual virtues. So, even though agents cannot choose or foresee what they will believe, they can still make good and bad choices that will result in responsible or irresponsible beliefs. If an agent makes the right choices that will result in acceptable or praiseworthy beliefs, they believe responsibly (Peels, 2016).

The second cluster of responses rejects or qualifies the first premise, namely that the deontological conception of epistemic justification implies doxastic voluntarism. Some have argued that epistemic responsibility requires no doxastic voluntary control whatsoever (Chuard & Southwood, 2009; Feldman, 2008; Forrai, 2019), but the most important and influential response to the first premise is that even though we may not have the doxastic voluntary control that Alston describes, we still have compatibilist doxastic control that is sufficient to make us responsible for our beliefs and that still allows for a deontic conception of epistemic justification (Jäger, 2004; Matthias, 2000; McCormick, 2011; McHugh, 2012; Osborne, 2021; Ryan, 2003; Steup, 2000). This is one of the cases in which philosophers have tried to apply a developed theory of the metaethics of action to the metaethics of belief. Compatibilists in the philosophy of action assert that a lack of voluntary control in a deterministic world does not

imply that we cannot be morally responsible; a lack of libertarian voluntary control and moral responsibility are therefore compatible (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998; Frankfurt, 1969). Compatibilism in the ethics of action has many adherents, so many philosophers are inclined to this approach of Alston's (1988) argument from involuntarism. The compatibilist response asserts that epistemic responsibility and duties are compatible with our lack of basic or non-basic doxastic voluntary control.

The third cluster of responses takes issue with Alston's (1988) conclusion that we lack doxastic voluntary control. Descartes (1641) believed we have direct doxastic voluntary control (see also: Schüssler, 2013). Many philosophers feel that Alston's argument is too strong and that we do at least have some doxastic obligations and responsibility. Some philosophers, though few, however, insist that we have direct intentional doxastic control (Nickel, 2010). Others argue that although we do not have direct intentional control over our beliefs, we still have indirect intentional control (Huss, 2009; Nottelmann, 2007a). These philosophers claim that although we cannot choose any particular belief instantly, we can still choose to believe something in the long run by interruptedly performing a series of actions over a considerable period of time.

The fourth cluster of responses finds fault with the argument's validity. According to Tebben (2018, 2019) the meaning of the word "belief" is equivocated in Alston's (1988) argument from involuntarism. Despite Alston's cogent examples, some meanings of belief might still allow for choice and obligation, such as to accept, to assume, to act as if, to be committed to or to trust whereas other meanings of belief do not, such as to be convinced, to be assured, or to form a representation in our mind. From our inability to choose our beliefs in one sense, Alston has presumptuously dismissed our responsibility for beliefs in another sense, in particular in the sense of being committed to the truth of a proposition. Because Alston focusses on different kinds of doxastic voluntary control, this has been taken as the central important point of his influential paper. But although the nature of (doxastic) voluntarism has been

central in most responses to Alston, according to Tebben, the tension between Alston's conclusion and examples of ordinary language that imply the involuntariness of belief has more to do with Alston's conception of belief than his conception of voluntary control.

The central claim of this dissertation is that the first response is incomplete, the second is mistaken, and that the third and fourth are the most promising. This dissertation investigates in depth what 'belief' entails. If we understand belief as placing trust in a possible truth in our practical reasoning, rather than having convictions, then we can have both doxastic voluntary control and belief-related obligations. What we believe is crucial to our actions, and therefore, the ethics of belief is deeply connected with the ethics of action.

3. Structure of this dissertation

If Alston (1988) is right, then the deontological conception of epistemic justification is wrongheaded. If Alston is wrong, however, we may still have epistemic duties and be subject to an ethics of belief in a more direct way, i.e., not only by the actions we should do to best influence our beliefs. The central question of this dissertation is: What are the possibility conditions or necessary presuppositions of an ethics of belief? To be able to answer that question I will try to answer other questions first, such as: If we need doxastic voluntary control to be responsible for our beliefs, then what kind of control must that be? What kind(s) of belief can and must we control, if any, and what kind(s) of belief can we not control and do we not have to control? Are praise and blame for someone believing something sufficient to qualify them as a responsible or irresponsible believer? And given the diversity of beliefs and opinions, whose praise and blame should that be? What explains our psychological inability to pick up any random proposition and how does that relate to the "ought-implies-can-problem" in doxastic matters that Alston discusses? Who is in authority to set up the "doxastic rules" by which we are to live in an ethics of belief? Are such rules universal or local? What are the sanctions or negative consequences for

wrong beliefs? These are the most important questions that I will try to clarify and answer. In Chapters 2 to 4, I will evaluate in more detail some of the most influential responses to Alston that I have mentioned earlier. In Chapters 5 to 7 I will put forth the conditions of an ethics of belief that have been neglected in much of the literature.

More specifically, in Chapter 2, I shall demonstrate that doxastic voluntary control is presupposed in a very topical debate in social epistemology on peer disagreement. The question of what we should believe or start to doubt, or how we should adjust our confidence in what we believe upon finding a disagreeing peer, is a question that can arise in thinking through the issue of epistemic deontology. This and other questions in social epistemology cannot be pursued without first accepting an ethics of belief, along with its presuppositions. Furthermore, the notion of peer disagreement poses a conceptual problem for those who hold that we can only be responsible believers by long-term indirect influence on our beliefs. If two epistemic peers, by virtue of their epistemic virtues, influence their beliefs by exposing themselves to the same evidence, this does not necessarily result in the same beliefs. Even if epistemic peers could both believe responsibly by having considered the right and same evidence and by applying the same intellectual virtues, while their beliefs are opposites, then the disagreement itself needs to be explained. I shall argue that a form of doxastic voluntary control is the most viable option to explain a disagreement between peers.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss some problems with the compatibilist response to Alston's argument against an epistemic deontology from involuntarism. To make the case for compatibilism in the metaethics of action, Frankfurt (1969) has come up with thought experiments (Frankfurt-style cases) that have evoked intuitions that have been very important to making the compatibilist case acceptable. Fischer and Ravizza (1998) have used these thought experiments to show that a subject can be morally responsible in a deterministic world with a very limited form of voluntary control (guidance control). A subject can then be

morally responsible if they are "reasons-responsive". I will show some problems with Frankfurt-style cases in the realm of ethics of actions that I have not found elsewhere in the literature and will subsequently show that Frankfurt-style cases *a fortiori* fail in the doxastic realm. I shall conclude that doxastic compatibilism is not a viable reply to Alston's argument against an epistemic deontology.

In Chapter 4, I will investigate Alston's (1988) presupposition that doxastic voluntary control entails the ability to choose to believe or disbelieve any random proposition at will. He supposes that we can test the existence of doxastic voluntary control by simply putting forth a proposition and asking if we can choose to believe it or disbelieve it at will. From our psychological inability to do so, he simply infers that we do not have such control. I will discuss three responses to his challenge. First, we may not believe or disbelieve anything at will, but we may always, or in many cases choose to doubt. Second, beliefs as Alston understands them, may not be subject to choice, but other forms of belief can still be, in particular commitment to a proposition and trust. Third, virtually all propositions are not believed in isolation but are embedded in doxastic webs. By challenging someone to start or stop believing one proposition at will, one has to start or stop believing many other propositions that are implied or presupposed by the change of belief. Alston's seemingly simple challenge to choose to believe p implies a challenge to change an entire doxastic web and long-standing belief policies and the fact that we will not do that may show a psychological reluctance rather than an inability to believe a random proposition.

In Chapter 5, I will point out in more detail why Alston's (1988) argument from doxastic involuntarism fails. Alston and many other philosophers use what I call "the standard idea of belief" in their arguments. The standard idea of belief is that a belief is a cognitive attitude towards a proposition that is characterized by the feeling or by the disposition to feel that it is true (Cohen,

1992). I will discuss some conceptual as well as deontological problems with this idea of belief.

In Chapter 6, I will propose another idea of belief as the primary object of a more robust ethics of belief. The sort of belief that is voluntary and can be subject to ethical rules involves trust that we can put in possible truths or sources of possible truth. Our actions manifest the trust we put in a possible truth. These faith-beliefs, as I shall call them, always have a practical component. They are manifest in action because they function as reasons to act. I shall then point out how an ethics of belief based on this take of belief differs from a traditional pragmatist approach to beliefs such as by Bain (1855) and Peirce (1940), the responsible belief approach by Peels (2016) and the belief policies approach by Helm (1994).

In Chapter 7, I will argue that an ethics of belief is not yet warranted even if we have doxastic voluntary control, although that has been the bone of contention in much of the debate on ethics of belief. An ethics of belief needs rules that designate what beliefs are acceptable and what beliefs are not. Who or what is to set these rules in a society that applauds freedom of conscience, speech, and religion? Who or what is going to enforce these doxastic rules? Any ethics void of sanctions or negative consequences for trespassing are hollow. I shall argue that the ethics of belief is upheld in different realms: physical reality, moral reality, and social practice.

In Chapter 8, I will conclude my research and summarize what I believe are the possibility conditions of a robust ethics of belief. I will also point out how my approach to the metaethics of belief can help us look differently at several other philosophical problems such as peer disagreement, radical scepticism, and inductive reasoning.

The conclusion of my research is intended to contribute to the current debate on ethics of belief in general but because the research for this dissertation was subsidized with a grant for teachers from the Dutch Minister of Education

through NWO (Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research) I will expound on what I think are some important points and implications from this research for educational practice. In the epilogue, I will suggest some practical ideas for teachers to help them enable their students to take ownership and responsibility for their learning and beliefs.

4. Relevance and methodology

One reason why so many philosophers, including me, have responded to Alston's (1988) argument against a deontological conception of epistemic justification is that, despite his argument, most of us feel and accept moral responsibility not only for what we do but also for what we believe. In this dissertation, I introduce a new approach to the discussion on the metaethics of belief by formulating new points of critique to Alston's argument as well as new criticism to some prevalent responses to Alston, in particular the compatibilist approach to metaethics. Not many philosophers on the ethics of belief defend direct doxastic voluntary control, as I do, but rather try to defend an ethics of belief without it.

It is, however, not my intent to refute or debunk everything that has been said about the involuntariness of beliefs, because many beliefs are indeed involuntary. Rather, I try to supplement the debate with a new idea of belief that is pervasive, phenomenologically familiar, and voluntary; and that has escaped our attention in the discussion of the ethics of belief or has not been properly analysed. Through a conceptual and phenomenological analysis of the concept of belief, I will argue for this different approach to belief as well as the ethics of belief, and show how it opens up the necessary conditions for a robust ethics of belief. I will also address new issues in the metaethics of belief, such as doxastic hypocrisy, doxastic webs of beliefs, doxastic rules, doxastic sanctions or negative consequences for wrong beliefs, and epistemic authority.

CHAPTER 2

PEER DISAGREEMENT AND DOXASTIC VOLUNTARY CONTROL

1. Introduction

The question of doxastic voluntary control has been very much neglected in the recent discussion on peer disagreement in social epistemology.[2] The central question in the recent discussion on peer disagreement is: What is, epistemically speaking, the rational response in light of disagreement with a perceived epistemic peer or equal (Ebeling, 2017; Pedersen, 2018)? This question is an example of normative ethics of belief. The responses to this question vary from a range of conciliatory approaches to a non-conformist or steadfast approach, all backed up by different kinds of arguments. Interestingly, apparent peers on the matter of peer disagreement seem to disagree on what the rational approach in case of peer disagreement is, which of course leads to a strange paradox for the adherents of the conciliatory approach (Elga, 2010; Christensen, 2013; Mulligan, 2015). Rather than trying to answer the question, however, I want to focus on the question itself and what it presupposes. I shall argue that the debate about what would be the rational response to peer disagreement presupposes some form of doxastic voluntary control. Put differently: If we do not presuppose doxastic voluntary control, it is difficult to explain why there is disagreement among epistemic peers.

2 For an overview of this discussion on peer disagreement, see for example: Feldman et al., 2010; Ferrari et al., 2019; Kelly, 2011; Matheson, 2015; Reisner, 2016.

I will not yet elaborate in this chapter in detail on what I think this doxastic voluntary control exactly entails, but I will do so in Chapters 6 and 8. In this chapter, I will argue that something stronger than voluntary indirect influence on our beliefs, as advocated by Alston (1988) and more recently by Peels (2016), is required for peer disagreement to exist. If we are not prepared to embrace some sort of doxastic voluntary control that is at least stronger than indirect influence on our beliefs, we must drop the question as to what the rational response is in the case of peer disagreement.

First, I shall discuss some problems with the concept of epistemic peerhood. I shall then make a distinction between strict and soft epistemic peerhood and investigate how they relate to doxastic voluntary control.

2. Epistemic peerhood

In many recent social epistemology studies, the existence of epistemic peerhood is more or less taken for granted. The question is oftentimes not so much whether it exists as how we should respond to it. Epistemic peers are usually described as:

(i) equals with respect to their familiarity with the evidence and arguments that bear on a particular question, and
(ii) equals with respect to general epistemic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, and freedom from bias. (Christensen, 2013; Kelly, 2005)

By thus describing epistemic peerhood, it is suggested that belief formation comes about through our familiarity with the evidence and our concurrent epistemic virtues. This general and seemingly loose definition of epistemic peerhood, however, is not without problems. Although not many would argue against the idea that our familiarity with the relevant evidence and our epistemic

virtues determine at least in part our beliefs, it is not obvious that they are altogether sufficient to produce a particular belief.

To qualify two people as epistemic peers it is important to make a distinction between 1) *what it is that makes them equal in epistemic respects* and 2) *what it is that produces their particular belief*. The distinction is important because if *what it is that produces a particular belief* is the very same thing as *what it is that two people (epistemic peers) have in common*, then epistemic peers will necessarily have the same belief.[3] The notion of peer disagreement, then, implies that although something (familiarity with the relevant evidence and epistemic virtues) is the same or at least very similar, by which they qualify as peers, there is yet something else that leads to a difference of opinion or disagreement. In other words, epistemic disagreement among peers presupposes that what it is that two epistemic peers have in common is *not* the same as what solely produces their particular and different beliefs. So, now the question arises, given the same familiarity with the relevant evidence and the same intellectual virtues, what is it that explains the different outcomes of beliefs? Any answer to this question, I argue, short of doxastic voluntary control, is proof that perceived epistemic peers were not peers at all.

Let me illustrate my point with an example. Suppose two well-trained and experienced detectives consider the visual evidence at a crime scene, but after thoughtful consideration, they infer and believe different "best explanations" of what has happened there.[4] Now what could explain their difference of opinion

3 What I am saying here is a priori true and must not be confused with Feldman's (2011) "uniqueness thesis". This is the idea that a body of evidence justifies at most one proposition out of a competing set of propositions and that it justifies at most one attitude toward any particular proposition. The uniqueness thesis says that, given a body of evidence, one of these attitudes is the rationally justified one. If the uniqueness thesis is correct, two people cannot have a reasonable disagreement on the basis of the same evidence. See Douven (2009) for an argument against the Uniqueness Thesis.

4 Here it can be objected that they merely "accept" other explanations, rather than "believe" them. Even if we accept the distinction between "acceptance that p" and "belief that p", as pointed out by Cohen (1992), they can, and often do, go together. So, for the purpose of the

or belief? Well, it could be some visual detail or smell at the crime scene that was noticed by the one but overlooked by the other. But if that were the case, then they would no longer be epistemic peers because they would not consider the same relevant evidence. So, suppose they see the same visual details and smell the same smell but still disagree as to what has happened at the scene. Why do they disagree? It could be that one detective has seen more similar crime scenes that were ultimately best interpreted one particular way and that this experience in combination with the present evidence at this crime scene induced his belief that "the usual thing" has happened there. If this were the case, however, his experience in the field would provide another form of relevant evidence that the other detective would lack. If the two detectives did not have the same experience in light of which they would interpret the facts at the crime scene, they would no longer be epistemic peers because they would not consider the same evidence. So, suppose they have been companions since they both started their careers as detectives and have solved all cases they ever solved together, so they share the same professional experience. Suppose they even went to school together. They still disagree. Now suppose one agent is just a little bit more creative in his inference. But then they would not have or use the same intellectual virtue of creative thinking so they would no longer be epistemic peers.

We can prolong this exercise for a long time considering their IQ, their upbringing, their worldview, their differences in personality, their alertness, their religion or lack thereof, their imagination, and so forth. If we set the standards high enough and if we take all these things and many more as possible variables that influence the production of a particular belief, then epistemic peerhood never obtains. Typically, there is always at least some epistemic advantage held by one of the parties: One of them has a little more evidence; one of them has thought about the issue a bit more; one of them is slightly more

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argument, let us suppose that they do not merely accept different inferred hypotheses, but that they are actually truly convinced that it is true what they have accepted so they would also believe it in this stronger sense.

open-minded; one of them sees things by default in conformity with his world view and religion, and so forth. Let us call peerhood in this form, where all variables that influence the production of a particular belief are the same for two or more persons, "strict peerhood."

Although it is sometimes admitted that strict peerhood never obtains, this is usually not seen as a conceptual problem (Matheson & Frances, 2018). Whether or not two individuals count as epistemic peers will depend on how liberal the standards for epistemic peerhood are within a given context, i.e., whether two individuals count as epistemic peers will depend on how much of a difference there must be between two people in order not to count as a genuine peer. It is true that given sufficiently demanding standards for epistemic peerhood, no two individuals ever qualify as epistemic peers concerning any question, just as no two individuals count as the same height given sufficiently demanding standards of measurement (say, up to 20 decimals). However, it is argued that there are real-world cases of disagreement such that while it is unlikely that the parties are exact or strict epistemic peers, it is unclear which party is in the better epistemic position. Such real-world cases of disagreement plausibly have the same epistemic significance as peer disagreement even though strictly speaking there is no strict peerhood.

While strict peerhood may never obtain, the considerations that motivated the question "What is the rational response in case of peer disagreement" appear to have similar consequences when applied to cases of widespread and persistent disagreement among the experts, even if such disagreements do not amount to strict peer disagreements (Matheson & Frances, 2018). When social epistemologists discuss peer disagreement, they typically do not have strict peerhood in mind but rather something weaker. When two people have studied virtually the same relevant evidence and are comparable in their epistemic virtues, such as intelligence, open-mindedness, imagination, and thoughtfulness, to such a degree that it is unclear for both of them who is in the better epistemic position then they can still be considered peers, even if they are not peers in the

strict sense. Let us call this weaker version of peerhood "soft peerhood." An example would be the members of the Supreme Court, who can and often disagree as to how to interpret the law.

3. Strict epistemic peerhood and doxastic voluntary control

If it is true that "what it is that two strict epistemic peers have in common" is the same as "what it is that produces a particular belief," then strict peer disagreement would be a contradiction in terms. This, after all, amounts to saying that if it is true that two people in the *exact* same circumstances will necessarily believe the same thing relating to p, then two people in the exact same circumstances can yet disagree about p. If, on the other hand, these two things are not the same, then something else that they do *not* have in common as epistemic peers but is active in producing a particular belief (say, the belief that p in one party and a belief that entails not-p in the other), must explain the disagreement. Any explanation in the form of some new variable that has not been considered but that influences the belief formation amounts to denying they were strict epistemic peers in the first place. The explanation for disagreement must in that case be offered by some form of doxastic voluntary control because that is the only variable that can be shared but can produce different outcomes, or so it seems.

So, any two people who are *strict* epistemic peers cannot disagree except if they can somehow choose to believe differently. If there is disagreement, one must simply conclude that the other person is not a strict peer or that the other person has exercised doxastic voluntary control which resulted in the production of another belief in the light of the same evidence and circumstances. If strict epistemic peers can disagree, it shows that we are not always totally at the mercy of our evidence and our epistemic virtues when it comes to belief formation. In any case, the question of what is epistemologically rational to do when strict epistemic peers disagree loses some of its interest because peerhood

has nothing to do with the disagreement. The disagreement can still be questioned and investigated, but no obligations to conciliate or withhold judgment follow in virtue of disagreement with a peer. One can conclude that someone who at first seemed to be a strict peer turned out not to be a strict peer and left it at that. There is no reason to be troubled by the fact that the seeming peer has reached another conclusion or produced another belief, for if the perceived peer knew and had seen the same evidence, had the same intellectual virtues in the same degree, and had the same intuitions and insights, they might have come to the same conclusion.

It need not be disturbing or require some kind of justification to disagree with someone who is not a strict peer, because the disagreement can always be explained by differences among the many variables that produce a particular belief. Or, if another disagreeing person is a strict peer, then one can be satisfied by the fact that the other has exercised doxastic voluntary control, which resulted in another belief. Perceived peers in non-doxastic contexts make different decisions all the time and we often accept that without questioning why we did not choose to do that ourselves. When a person does not follow her peers in ethical matters, it may be a cause for regret or praise, but we normally ascribe personal responsibility for a deviating action in virtue of a choice not to follow one's peers. If four teenagers, best friends, are considering stealing something and three do so and work together, but one withstands the "peer pressure" and backs out and refrains from stealing, then what explains the difference in their behaviour? If they had had a very similar upbringing, shared many likes and dislikes, and were about the same age, they would normally be considered peers, even though no two people are ever the same in background and personality. We would normally praise or blame a person for choosing (not) to succumb or listen to peer pressure in ethical matters. If the different outcomes of actions were explained by some other variable than choice, such as extreme fear (by one of the four friends, but not with the other three) of getting caught because one is on parole, then it would explain their perceived peerhood away.

Since strict peerhood never obtains, it may seem that this idealized hypothetical situation need not concern us. I shall now argue that real-life soft peerhood faces exactly the same problem: Any disagreement must be explained by one or more variables that prove that there is no real peerhood or that a doxastic choice was involved.

4. Soft epistemic peerhood and doxastic voluntary control

Soft epistemic peerhood should concern us more because it seems to describe the real-life situations in which we disagree. It is what social epistemologists have in mind when they talk about "epistemic peers". As said earlier, two perceived epistemic peers may fully realize that they are not strict peers in every respect but may yet hold the other person's knowledge and intellectual virtues in such high esteem that it may invoke the question of who is in the better epistemic position and therefore whether one should revise one's belief, or withhold a belief. Even if strict epistemic peerhood never obtains in any given disagreement, epistemic peerhood is sometimes described in statistical terms: Based on a fictitious track record S_1 is just as likely to get things right as S_2 on a certain topic (Oppy, 2010). In any particular case S_1 may be in a better epistemic position regarding p than S_2, and thus not be their epistemic peer in this particular disagreement, but if they do not know whether they are in the better epistemic position they might still consider S_2 as their long-term epistemic peer.

In many examples that have been given of peer disagreement, it is simply put forward that someone is first perceived as an epistemic peer, after which a subsequent disagreement is described (Ebeling, 2017; Frances, 2014). In the new situation in which the disagreement came into the open, the epistemic peerhood remains an unquestionable given, while the evidence of believer S_1 about p is supplemented with higher-order evidence against p in the form of perceived peer S_2 disagreeing. The question then posed is whether this second-order evidence is real evidence against the truth of p that should be considered

by S_1 and, if so, how it should be rationally incorporated in S_1's doxastic attitude towards p. Many of the cases so described are both idealized and rather innocuous. They deal with cases such as restaurant bills and tips, times on watches, winning horses, pitches of notes, and chess moves and we are simply informed that S_1 and S_2 are just as likely to get things right and that they know this about each other (Konigsberg, 2013).

As fallible creatures, we often have reasons to reconsider our beliefs even if another disagreeing person is not *just* as likely to get things right. This is particularly evident in many examples of peer disagreement involving perception, calculations, procedures, memories, long and complicated mathematical proofs, and so on. The explanation of the disagreement in these proposed examples can often quite easily be traced back to simple mistakes, the amount of time or attention paid to an issue, or different degrees of alertness, rigour, and concentration. Such a disagreement, whether with a soft peer or with someone we believe to be less likely to get things right, can thus often be explained by a variable that influences the production of a belief that supposed peers did not have in common or did not have or apply to the same degree. Perceived soft peers may have some variable that influences the formation of a belief, e.g., an intellectual virtue, more or less in common in the *long term* but not necessarily with every disagreement. Soft peerhood, like character but unlike strict peerhood, cannot be measured in an instant. Two people may be peers or equals when it comes to generosity, and yet never give to the same person or at the same time.

In like manner, soft peers can be equally likely to produce correct beliefs on a certain topic and yet always disagree. When soft peers are said to know about each other that they are just as likely to get things right, then that idealized statement is to be taken about the average output of beliefs, not about every belief in particular. Soft peers, so understood, are not likely to be equals in epistemic terms in any particular instant. It might not be obvious who is in the better epistemic position at any given time, but this can be true for any

disagreement even with someone who is not considered a peer. The doxastic and practical solution to disagreements about bills, racing horses, watches, pitches, etc., is simply to go through the evidence again with extra alertness to try to settle the facts. Any slightly humble person who is aware of her fallibility would be willing to reconsider the evidence, make a double check, recalculate a sum, or try to make another inference in most cases put forward as cases of peer disagreement, even if the disagreeing person was not truly considered a peer.

Soft peer disagreement becomes more interesting after the double-checking of the facts and the recalculating has been done, and when all the evidence is again laid on the table. Once we find the cause of the disagreement in rather trivial matters, such as restaurant bills, the number of a planet's moons, visual perception, etc., it can often be settled. We find out who lacked or overlooked some evidence, was too rash in their conclusions, was a bit careless in their logical or mathematical rigour, or we seek a third witness. We should be happy to adjust our beliefs accordingly. But what if the disagreement cannot be solved that way? What if the disagreement goes deeper? Is there such a thing as soft-peer *deep disagreement* (Kappel, 2018; Ranalli, 2018)? This is a question raised in effect by Van Inwagen (1996):

> How can it be that equally intelligent and well-trained philosophers can disagree about the freedom of the will or nominalism or the covering-law model of scientific explanation when each is aware of all of the arguments and distinctions and other relevant considerations that the others are aware of?
>
> How can I believe (as I do) that free will is incompatible with determinism or that unrealized possibilities are not physical objects or that human beings are not four-dimensional things extended in time as well as in space, when David Lewis—a philosopher of truly formidable intelligence and insight and ability—rejects these things I believe and is already

> aware of and understands perfectly every argument that I could produce in their defence? (p. 137)

In the literature on peer disagreement, cases of moral, political, religious, and philosophical matters are always a lot more complicated. Consider the following two possible cases of peer disagreement in "the standard form":

> Suppose S_1 and S_2 are epistemic peers when it comes to political beliefs. i.e., S_1 is just as likely to produce correct political beliefs as S_2. They disagree however about a policy concerning a proposed tax raise.
>
> Suppose S_1 and S_2 are epistemic peers when it comes to religious beliefs, i.e, S_1 is just as likely to produce correct religious beliefs as S_2. Yet they disagree about the literal interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is something very odd about these proposed cases. When it comes to political and religious beliefs, who is to say who is just as likely to produce correct ideas? When Van Inwagen (1996) questions how he can disagree with a respected colleague on certain philosophical topics, he seems to consider him as an epistemic peer in some respects, such as intelligence and familiarity with the evidence, but he certainly does not believe that his peer is just as likely to get things right. That would probably even be true if he deemed his colleague just a bit more intelligent. He is not in the least inclined to a conciliatory approach when he finds an epistemic peer disagreeing with him on philosophical matters. If that were the rational approach in a soft-peer disagreement, then we would all have to become a lot less certain about our political, moral, religious and metaphysical beliefs. Van Inwagen is happy to accept that he disagrees but asks himself how the disagreement can be explained. Certainly not because of the things they have in common. All the evidence seems to be on the table. Yet, he says:

> It must be possible for one to be justified in accepting a philosophical thesis when there are philosophers who, by all objective and external criteria, are at least equally well qualified to pronounce on that thesis and who reject it. (p. 138)

The same would be true, he suggests, for moral, religious, and political ideas. The suggestion he makes is that he must enjoy some sort of incommunicable insight that the others, for all their merits, lack. He is inclined to think that the evidence and arguments he can adduce in support of his beliefs do not constitute the totality of his justification for these beliefs. If that were the case, however, we could have some incommunicable private evidence that another person does not have. With this evidence in hand, he can dismiss his colleague as a true epistemic peer. It amounts to saying that his colleague might be a soft peer when he considers his intelligence, education, and access to the relevant evidence, but that he is definitively not a strict peer from a first-person phenomenological view of the world. On account of this, he does not have to adjust his beliefs for reasons stated earlier. This seems to be true for all soft-peer disagreements. Perceived soft peers in disagreement may always conclude that the disagreeing person is not a strict enough peer or that they have chosen somehow to believe differently.

To avoid the conclusion that peers must have doxastic voluntary control to disagree, it could be argued that the disagreement is caused by coincidence or chance, maybe by random processes in the brain, rather than choice. If that is the case, however, that would not help us in answering the question that social epistemologists have raised: Namely, what is, epistemically speaking, the rational response in light of disagreement with a perceived epistemic peer or equal? If we allow for randomness in the production of a belief, we explain rationality away. The only way to solve the paradox of peer disagreement and allow for a reasonable answer to that question is to introduce a variable that peers can share but that is also able to produce different beliefs: doxastic voluntary control.

5. Long-term indirect influence and peer disagreement

It seems, then, that a kind of doxastic voluntary control is presupposed by peer disagreement, but what kind? Alston (1988) has argued that we can only choose to influence our beliefs by exposing ourselves to the right sort of evidence, but that even then we do not choose our beliefs. So, we can choose to do research, double-check our evidence, choose to listen to different arguments on a particular matter, ponder the matter in-depth, and so forth, but we cannot choose the outcome of our beliefs. Peels (2016) has followed Alston's reasoning and has argued that by making the right kind of choices that will influence our beliefs in a good way, we can be "responsible believers" even if we do not choose our beliefs. Although I agree that we have (long-term) indirect influence on our beliefs by choices that we make, the question arises whether this weakest form of voluntary control over our beliefs is strong enough to explain the phenomenon of peer disagreement. I believe it is not.

If epistemic peers only have indirect influence on their beliefs and disagree on a given topic, what does that tell us? If they put in the right kind of effort and have the same intellectual virtues to about the same degree in order to come to their conclusions, they could both be "responsible believers" despite their disagreement. But then what explains the disagreement itself? Suppose two epistemic peers choose to consider a given amount of new information, say the evidence on a new crime scene or the symptoms of a new patient, and they choose to think about it for the same amount of time to conclude what they believe to be the circumstances of the crime or the cause of the symptoms, then they have influenced their beliefs in the same way. The different outcome of their beliefs is then proof that they were not epistemic peers, to begin with, or that they must have exercised a form of doxastic voluntary control that is stronger than indirect influence. This is not to show that we do not have indirect doxastic influence but rather that it is not enough to explain peer disagreement.

6. Conclusion

Van Inwagen's (1996) argument illustrates my point that a proposed case of soft-peer disagreement begs for an explanation of the disagreement itself, even before one looks for a rational response to it. Any proposed explanation of the disagreement points to a variable that is not shared by both peers, which makes them not strict peers. Strict peers cannot disagree unless they have doxastic voluntary control. When a disagreement among soft peers needs to be explained, it can always be argued that the perceived peerhood is too superficial and that private evidence, intuition, or some other variable that they do not share explains and justifies conflicting beliefs. Any explanation of the disagreement, short of doxastic voluntary control itself, explains the epistemic peerhood away.

To be sure, I have not argued yet that we have doxastic voluntary control, but rather that the notion of peer disagreement presupposes it. So, we can still deny that we have doxastic voluntary control, but at the cost of dropping the notion of epistemic peerhood. In that case, whatever the rational response to disagreement is, it does not depend on perceived peerhood. Or, we hold on to the notion of peer disagreement and embrace some form of doxastic voluntary control. In Chapter 8 of this dissertation, I will revisit the problem of peer disagreement in light of my findings on doxastic voluntary control and the consequences of wrong beliefs. For now, I conclude that what we ought to believe or the degree to which we ought to be certain of our beliefs upon finding a disagreeing peer seems to imply we need to be able to control our beliefs.

CHAPTER 3
SOME PROBLEMS WITH DOXASTIC FRANKFURT-STYLE CASES

1. Introduction

Probably the most prominent response to Alston's argument against epistemic deontology from involuntarism is that epistemic deontology only needs *compatibilist* doxastic control, which, it is argued, we have. Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza (1998) have famously argued that guidance control and reasons-responsiveness are sufficient to hold people responsible for their actions even if they could not have done otherwise. It seems that a doxastic version of their reasons-responsive compatibilism is a suitable reply to Alston's examples in which we cannot intentionally choose to believe otherwise than our evidence forces us to believe. These philosophers argue that, even if we cannot choose directly what we believe, we can be responsible for our doxastic attitudes because we are appropriately receptive to and reactive to reasons for our beliefs (Jäger, 2004; Steup, 2008;).

The application of the theory of reasons-responsive compatibilism, as developed by Fischer and Ravizza (1998) to the ethics of belief is a good example of how the transfer of ideas from the ethics of action to the ethics of belief is not always obvious and can go wrong. This chapter aims to show that reasons-responsive doxastic compatibilism is not the right response to Alston to account for doxastic responsibility. Reasons-responsive doxastic compatibilism cannot justify or account for doxastic responsibility because it relies on doxastic Frankfurt-style cases that are problematic.

I shall first discuss some problems with reasons-responsive compatibilism in practical ethics. Fischer and Ravizza rely on the plausibility of Frankfurt-style cases to show that guidance control is sufficient for intuitions about moral responsibility. I shall try to demonstrate that the intuitions that are invoked by Frankfurt-style examples come at the price of ultimate (intentional) causation of, or control over our actions. If this is true, then it is not enough for doxastic responsibility that we have guidance control and are reasons-responsive. Next, I shall try to show that a Frankfurt-style example from practical ethics cannot simply establish the same intuition of responsibility in doxastic matters. It would take a doxastic Frankfurt-style example. Doxastic Frankfurt-style thought experiments are rather scarce in the literature but I shall comment on those presented by Zagzebski (2001), Côté-Bouchard (2017), Peels (2016) and Nottelmann (2007a) and show that they all present problems that make the case for doxastic compatibilism weak.[5]

2. Frankfurt-style cases and intentional control

According to Peels (2016), the compatibilist position in practical ethics differs crucially from compatibilism in epistemology. Whereas practical compatibilists try to demonstrate that moral responsibility is compatible with cases in which we cannot do otherwise, doxastic compatibilists try to show that doxastic responsibility is compatible with cases in which we do not have direct doxastic voluntary control (p. 72). The sort of compatibilism in practical ethics that Peels refers to is limited to what has been called semi-compatibilism by Fischer (1997). Semi-compatibilism is the position that *moral responsibility* is compatible with causal determinism and can do without the possibility of doing otherwise, rather than the more general compatibilism which states that *free will* is compatible with causal determinism (hence the prefix "semi"). More

5 None of these authors defend reasons-responsive compatibilism but have presented their doxastic Frankfurt-style cases in other contexts to make some other point. To my knowledge, no doxastic compatibilist has come up with a doxastic Frankfurt-style case, which illustrates my point that the transfer of terminology in practical ethics to ethics of belief is often taken for granted.

importantly, if Peels is right, then the philosophical problems of these crucially different kinds of compatibilism should also crucially be treated differently. In the debate on the ethics of belief, however, the same vocabulary of practical ethics is often used freely, as if there were no crucial difference at all. This is particularly the case when intuitions of doxastic responsibility are invoked or refuted by terms such as "intentional control" or by appealing to Frankfurt-style cases or by using terms such as "reasons-responsiveness" in both practical and doxastic contexts. Before considering Frankfurt's thought experiment, as well as some problems with doxastic Frankfurt-style cases, I shall first investigate the meaning of the concept of (intentional) control since it has important implications for Frankfurt-style cases.

As mentioned earlier, Alston (1988) has given us several compelling examples to show that we cannot choose to believe a random proposition and has concluded from that, that we do not have intentional doxastic voluntary control over our beliefs. But what does it mean to have control? At what point is the intuition that we have control over our actions or beliefs sufficiently met, and when is the intuition violated? A libertarian might argue that for a person to have sufficient control over things to be (or held to be) morally responsible for them, two requirements must be met.

First, a person can only have control if they have a *real* choice in the first place. In other words, they must be able to do different things or have alternative possibilities. The future must not be fixed. This open future has been called "the garden of forking paths" (Borges, 1941). Let us call the requirement that someone must have possible alternatives to choose from to be responsible, as Frankfurt does, the "Principle of Alternative Possibilities" (PAP) (Frankfurt, 1969, p. 829). The libertarian intuition, then, says that we must be able to influence the future, which is not fixed, to be in control, or we cannot be morally responsible.

Second, the choice to act or believe must be one's own choice, and therefore not be caused by something else. The *ultimate* source of our actions and beliefs

must lie in us and not outside us in factors beyond our control such as natural laws or the state of affairs of the world before we were born. Let us call this libertarian requirement of control the "Principle of Ultimate Causation" (PUC). The reason, then, that determinism is incompatible with moral responsibility, according to libertarians, is because determinism is incompatible with our being the ultimate source of our actions. This argument based on PUC is also called source incompatibilism.[6] Thus, if causal determinism is true, then PUC must be false. Causal determinism implies a closed domain of natural causes with no interference of uncaused causes. So, both hard determinists and compatibilists must reject PUC.

Although compatibilists reject the libertarian intuition of PUC, because it is incompatible with causal determinism—some even say it is incomprehensible—they have tried to demonstrate how someone can have some kind of sufficient control over her actions when there are no different possible outcomes for the future. In other words, the compatibilist tries to demonstrate that the intuition that PAP is necessary for control is wrong or misconceived. An influential attempt to do this was by Moore (1910), who redefined PAP as: If X wanted to do something else, they would have done something else. PAP, so conceived, is, or so it seems to be, compatible with causal determinism. It says as much that if I were determined to want to do something else, I would do something else. Therefore, so the argument goes, it is possible that I would do something else. This conditional compatibilism was refuted by Van Inwagen's consequence argument: To be able to do otherwise in a world that is causally determined one must either change the past or the laws of nature, but since both are impossible, it is not true that one has different possibilities of action if PAP is only conceived conditionally.[7] The idea that control, and thus moral responsibility, can exist without PAP is not sufficiently substantiated by conditional compatibilists.

6 Some authors define source incompatibilism as the simple thesis that PUC is true, whereas others define it as the thesis that PUC is true and that PAP is false. For an overview see: Tognazzini (2011).

7 For his most refined exposition of the consequence argument, see: Van Inwagen (2000).

Frankfurt has put forward another, more influential strategy to deal with this intuition of the necessity of PAP by offering us a thought experiment.[8] Others have made variations on the same theme which go by the general name of Frankfurt-style cases. It is important to have a closer look at these cases because the plausibility of reasons-responsive compatibilism depends a great deal on their plausibility, as Fischer and Ravizza themselves agree on (1998, pp. 29-33). I will give the original thought experiment that Frankfurt himself presented in 1969 and then discuss why I believe the argument derived from it is not sound:

> Suppose someone—Black, let us say—wants Jones to perform a certain action. Black is prepared to go to considerable lengths to get his way, but he prefers to avoid showing his hand unnecessarily. So, he waits until Jones is about to make up his mind about what to do, and he does nothing unless it is clear to him (Black is an excellent judge of these things) that Jones is going to decide to do something *other* than what he wants him to do. If it does become clear that Jones is going to do something else, Black takes effective steps to ensure that Jones decides to do and that he does do, what he wants him to do. Whatever Jones's initial preferences and inclinations, then, Black will have his way...Now suppose that Black never has to show his hand because Jones, for reasons of his own, decides to perform and does perform the very action Black wants him to perform. In that case, it seems clear, that Jones will bear precisely the same moral responsibility for what he does as he would have borne if Black would not have been ready to take steps to ensure he would do it. (p. 835)

Many philosophers have accepted this thought experiment as an argument for the compatibility of moral responsibility with the absence of PAP and even with causal determinism (Widerker & McKenna 2003). There are, however

8 Locke (1690b) and Nozick (1981) had similar ideas, but Frankfurt has made the thought experiment famous.

several problems with this thought experiment. Much has already been written on this. The most common strategy to invalidate the implied intuitions of the thought experiment is to point out that Jones must have "flickers of freedom" before Black can even consider whether to intervene or not.[9] My focus, however will be on the problem that Frankfurt does not explain, namely how Black could have made things different in a causally determined world. Furthermore, Frankfurt must appeal to PUC to invoke the intuition that Jones is morally responsible. We are inclined to accept that Jones was morally responsible when we are informed that no one meddled directly with his intention or action. That is to say: Jones, and he alone, was the author of his decision and action, and because of that he was morally responsible, even though he could not have done otherwise. However, if causal determinism is true, then whatever made Jones decide to act as he did was not really up to him at all, but was long before determined by natural laws and an earlier state of affairs of the world. So, the intuition that is invoked by Frankfurt is not compatible with causal determinism and therefore the thought experiment is not an argument for the compatibility of responsibility and causal determinism. Let me explain this more fully.

What Frankfurt does not say, is that if causal determinism is true, then Jones was determined to act, say to shoot Smith, in the first place, because of natural laws and the state of the world before he was born. That in itself would cast doubt on Jones's moral responsibility, even though Black did not interfere. But on top of that it is not clear what role Black could play in this scenario. There are two possibilities. First, Black is also part of the causally determined world. In that case, Black would also be determined by natural laws and a given state of the past *not* to interfere with Jones's decisions. So, in that case, Black could not have interfered anyway because he was not determined to interfere. PAP would not be true for Black either. The decision not to interfere was ultimately not his own but the result of natural laws and a given state of the past. In that respect, Black is as powerless as Jones himself is to act otherwise than what has been determined by the causal structure of things. If, however, Black had

9 For an overview of arguments pro and contra see: Widerker & McKenna (2003).

decided, because he was determined to do so, to interfere with Jones when he saw the latter had doubts about killing Smith, that interference would not have altered the course of history. Whether or not Black is part of the causal chain leading up to Jones's committing a crime is just as relevant as some more distant fact, such as the decision of Black's great-grandparents to get married and have a child (Black's grandfather) or any other distant fact in the causal chain. The only difference is that an interference by Black would be more direct and therefore have the *appearance* of an independent cause. It was simply not up to Black himself to interfere or not, nor was it up to Jones to make an independent decision that was *ultimately* his. Black was forced or caused just as much as Jones was, ever since the Big Bang. There is nothing that Black himself could do that would alter the course of history.

If the scenario that Frankfurt (1969) gives us is compatible with a causally determined world, then both Jones and Black would not be the ultimate cause of their decisions and actions, and the intuition that Black could interfere and that Jones was morally responsible (in case Black did not interfere) will disappear with that. Van Inwagen's (2000) consequence argument and determinism would apply to *both* Jones *and* Black. It is irrelevant to know how many or which causal links led up to Jones's and Black's actions if we know they are all beyond their control. As a result, Frankfurt's appeal to our intuition that Jones is morally responsible, even if he could not have done otherwise, fails if both Jones and Black are part of the same causally determined world. Neither is morally responsible for anything.

To illustrate my argument, consider the following thought experiment:

> A Japanese factory produces killer robots (terminators) that have been programmed to search for and kill certain people. Terminator J was programmed to kill Smith. Terminator B has been programmed by the same factory to install a backup programme in Terminator J while he is recharging to make sure that it is up-to-date and would kill Smith, just in

> case J was not programmed properly in the factory in the first place. As it turned out, Terminator J was programmed properly by the factory and killed Smith without using the overriding backup programme installed by Terminator B.

In this case, as in Frankfurt's (1969) case, it was not possible that Terminator J would not have killed Smith, but the fact that Terminator J killed Smith without the active intervention of Terminator B is not sufficient to invoke the intuition that Terminator J was morally responsible. After all, it was not Terminator J's own decision to kill Smith but rather the decision of the manufacturers in the Japanese factory that made both the hardware and software of the terminators. It would not have made a difference to the question of moral responsibility if Terminator B's overriding programme had been used or not. If Terminator B had intervened, it would only have amounted to a more cumbersome procedure to have Smith killed from the manufacturer's point of view. Had Terminator B intervened, it still would not have made it guilty instead of Terminator J. The ultimate decision to have Smith killed was taken in the factory, not by the Terminators.

The second possibility is that Jones and Black are not part of a causally determined world and that they were the ultimate sources of their decisions, respectively, to commit a crime and not to interfere. Then the intuition that Jones would be morally responsible for his self-caused action succeeds and Black could have made the sort of change in the course of events that would intuitively make Black morally responsible instead of Jones. Jones would indeed in this exceptional case have no possible alternatives but to kill Smith. So, it seems that Frankfurt (1969) wants us to draw our intuitions about moral responsibility from this second scenario. But here we also encounter several problems. First, the intuition about Jones's moral responsibility thus invoked is incompatible with causal determinism because it allows for an uncaused cause in both Jones and Black. Second, it also jeopardises the very idea, proposed or rather stipulated by Frankfurt, that Black could somehow foresee or change an

uncaused cause. If Frankfurt wants Jones to own his decision, the latter must be the source of his decision, but if he is the ultimate source of his decision, then to Black there can be no more than an unwarranted hint of what Jones is going to do.[10] So really Black would never know for certain whether and when to interfere. It is simply impossible to foresee an uncaused cause with certainty. It seems Frankfurt ignores this problem altogether by simply stipulating that "Black is an excellent judge of these things" without explaining how this is even possible. In short, Frankfurt appeals to PUC to eliminate PAP.

Frankfurt-style cases, therefore, pose a dilemma. Either we accept causal determinism for *both* Jones *and* Black, but then both the intuition that Jones was in control as long as Black did not interfere, and the intuition that Black could change the course of history, are destroyed, and with that, the invoked intuition of moral responsibility would also fail. Or we reject causal determinism so we can justly ascribe ultimate control and responsibility to either Jones or Black (depending on whether or not Black interferes), but then compatibilism fails. Either causal determinism is (possibly) true, but then PUC cannot be used to eliminate PAP, or causal determinism is false, but then PAP cannot be eliminated.

It seems that Fischer (1997) has at least in part seen the problem as presented above but has failed to resolve it. When he makes the distinction between regulative control, which is some sort of control with possible alternatives, and guidance control, which is some sort of control without possible alternatives, he does not elaborate much further on what "some sort of control" really means, other than including or excluding PAP and appealing to intuitions in Frankfurt-style thought experiments. Frankfurt (1969) nor Fischer explain what role PUC or source incompatibilism plays in their thought experiments. After introducing Frankfurt-style cases, Fischer (2012) concedes:

10 This could be something as close to the actual performance as the readiness potential in Libet's experiments, but as Libet himself showed, even this is not a reliable predictor. See: Libet (1999).

> I have never suggested that the mere fact that regulative control is not required for moral responsibility would allow us to conclude straightaway that causal determinism is compatible with moral responsibility. Indeed, in "Responsibility and Control," I emphasized that causal determinism might rule out moral responsibility directly (and not in virtue of ruling out alternative possibilities). I thus identified what has come to be called "Source Incompatibilism," and I pointed out that it must be taken seriously. (p. 123)

Only half a page further, however, he dismisses the problem altogether by saying:

> Given that I do not think that causal determinism rules out moral responsibility by threatening regulative control, and I also do not think that there are other good reasons to suppose that causal determinism rules out moral responsibility, I present an account of moral responsibility that is compatible with causal determinism. More precisely, I present an account of "guidance control," the freedom-relevant condition necessary and sufficient for moral responsibility (in my view). (p. 124)

Fischer (2012) does say that Jones must be the owner of his decision and subsequent action to be responsible, but rather than relying on PUC, as he should, he suggests that the absence of Black's intervention and moderate reasons-responsiveness are both necessary and sufficient to ensure that Jones is the owner of his decisions and actions. At this point, reasons-responsiveness is introduced, without any reference to PUC, to guarantee that Jones is the source of his action because he has made up his mind and no one or nothing else for him. Says Fischer:

> Note that, in a Frankfurt-type case, the actual sequence proceeds "in the normal way" or via the "normal" process of practical reasoning. In contrast, in the alternative scenario (which never actually gets triggered

> and thus never becomes part of the actual sequence of events in our world), there is (say) direct electronic stimulation of the brain—intuitively, a different way or a different kind of mechanism. (By "mechanism" I simply mean, roughly speaking, "process"—I do not mean to reify anything.) I assume that we have intuitions at least about clear cases of "same mechanism", and "different mechanism". The actually operating mechanism (in a Frankfurt-type case)—ordinary human practical reasoning, unimpaired by direct stimulation by neurosurgeons, and so forth—is in a salient and natural sense "responsive to reasons". (p. 124)

It seems dubious that reasons-responsiveness alone, as perceived by Fischer and Ravizza (1998), can fulfil the role that PUC is supposed to play. All it takes for Jones to be responsible is that whatever takes place in his brain happens "in a normal way" i.e., without any interference by means of a "different mechanism" such as Black's outlandish device. What is "normal" and "different" seems intuitively obvious but the problem is that if guidance control is compatible with causal determinism, then the only mechanism at play would be the laws of nature and a given state of affairs in the world in the past, whether or not Black is involved. Frankfurt-style cases require different metaphysical states for Jones and Black. In a metaphysical deterministic world, there is no such thing as a "normal" and "different mechanism". Only one mechanism is always at play which also happens to govern our psychological perceptions about "normal" and "different mechanisms".

3. Reasons-responsiveness and causal determinism

At this point let us see what all this implies for doxastic reasons-responsive compatibilism. The doxastic reasons-responsive compatibilist might replace Alston's (1988) syllogism from involuntarism with a modus ponens:

(1) If we have guidance control over our doxastic attitudes, then doxastic attitudes are proper objects of deontological evaluation.

(2) We have guidance control over doxastic attitudes (which is apparent whenever we are appropriately receptive to and reactive to reasons for our doxastic attitudes by a "normal mechanism", i.e. without a counterfactual intervener).

Therefore:

(3) Doxastic attitudes are proper objects of deontological evaluation.

Whether guidance control is indeed adequate for (doxastic) responsibility, as the first premise states, depends on the question of whether reasons-responsiveness in a "normal" cognitive mechanism is indeed sufficient proof of ownership or sourcehood. Ownership, according to Fischer and Ravizza (1998), is demonstrated whenever there is no "different mechanism" at play in forming our beliefs and whenever we are appropriately receptive to and reactive to reasons for our beliefs. After evaluating a strong and a weak version of reasons-responsiveness, which they prove to be wanting, Fischer and Ravizza propose a *moderate* reasons-responsive mechanism as a token of guidance control. Moderate reasons-responsiveness is subsequently defined as follows:

> Suppose that an agent S actually performs an action X as a result of the operation of a kind of mechanism K. K is moderately reasons-responsive if and only if there is a range of possible scenarios R in which a K-type mechanism operates such that: (i) S recognizes in R what can be seen from an appropriate third-party perspective as an understandable pattern of sufficient reasons for not doing X, and (ii) there is at least one such scenario in which S refrains from doing A for such a reason. (Fischer, 2012, p. 125)

This definition of reasons-responsiveness raises several difficult questions. First, since Fischer and Ravizza (1998) have already eliminated PAP before

they even address the problem of ownership, how are we to interpret the "range of possible scenarios R" in a causally determined world without PAP? Second, who can be "an appropriate third party" to judge whether an agent demonstrates an understandable pattern of sufficient reasons? Let me explain.

First, if we apply the definition of moderate reasons-responsiveness to a Frankfurt-style case then that would amount to the following: Jones kills Smith without the intervention of Black. Jones had sufficient reasons to kill Smith. Jones wanted to take revenge and would not kill Smith if the latter had not harmed him earlier. Now suppose Black, an educated neurosurgeon, is our third-party judge of Jones's "understandable pattern of sufficient reasons" for killing Smith. According to (ii) in the definition of moderate reasons-responsiveness there is at least one scenario in which Jones refrains from killing Smith, but in reality, no such scenario exists since Jones, as Black knows all too well, has no alternative possibility but to kill Smith. Fischer and Ravizza's (1998) definition of reasons-responsiveness is preceded by the elimination of PAP. So, first PAP is eliminated to establish that moral responsibility is compatible with guidance control, and then PAP is reintroduced to set a criterion to establish when someone has guidance control. It seems that Fischer and Ravizza take the freedom to use the idiom that their very reasoning forbids, namely "*possible* scenarios in which S refrains from doing". In every Frankfurt-style case, the person who is supposed to be morally responsible without PAP cannot at the same time have guidance control by a moderate reasons-responsive mechanism because there is no possible scenario given in which that person refrains from doing X.

Second, to establish that someone is moderately reasons-responsive (and thus has guidance control) Fischer and Ravizza (1998) introduce a third party who must be an expert in judging whether or not an agent would refrain from acting (or believing) in another scenario based on an understandable pattern. From a psychological point of view, this makes sense, but not from a metaphysically causally determined point of view. Compatibilism, however, is a metaphysical and not a psychological position.

Consider the following example:

> In a Japanese factory, Terminator J has been programmed to kill Smith. J has been equipped with a very advanced speech computer. Now suppose that J is arrested after killing Smith. After short custody, J has to appear before a robot judge that has been produced by the same Japanese robot factory and is also equipped with a very advanced speech computer. It is the robot judge's task to figure out whether Terminator J was accountable for the murder of Smith and whether it was his own decision to kill him. Terminator J explains convincingly to the robot judge that it has killed Smith because it wanted to take revenge and that it would not have killed Smith if Smith had not harmed him earlier. The robot judge takes his explanation as proof of guilt.

The problem with this thought experiment is that the judge's speech computer, which is based on an algorithm, must judge Terminator J's speech computer, which is also based on an algorithm, to make sure it is sufficiently responsive to reasons to ascribe ownership of the murder and therefore moral responsibility. The example is a scenario in which one robot must execute a test on another robot of the same makers as if ChatGPT must judge whether ChatGPT is reliable. But whether Terminator J will pass or fail is *ultimately* not up to the judgment of the robot judge but rather up to the algorithm that is programmed by the manufacturers of both robots. Ultimately, again, it is the manufacturer and/or programmer in Japan, and not the "judging computer" or any "witnessing computer", who can reliably establish whether the programme it runs is suitable to judge whether the computer in question is moderately reasons-responsive. Now we may stipulate that "the appropriate third party" in our example must be a real person and cannot be a robot or computer. But the point is that in a causally determined world, we are all likewise programmed by natural laws like a robot or computer. Natural laws in this world and an earlier state of the universe also determine the judgment of any third party in this world who is to evaluate the reasons-responsive mechanism of another agent,

and this applies to all supposed agents and their judges. So, there is never a reliable third party available in a causally determined world.

4. Some problems with doxastic Frankfurt-style thought experiments

Even if we disregard all the philosophical problems with his thought experiment and grant Frankfurt's (1969) conclusion that we do not need PAP to have certain intuitions about moral responsibility, some philosophers still too easily accept that the same intuitions can be transferred to doxastic settings. As far as Frankfurt's thought experiment deals with causal determinism and moral responsibility in general, I have tried to show that giving up PAP comes at the price of maintaining PUC or intentional causal control. Alston's (1988) finding that we cannot choose to believe that the USA is still a colony of Britain is often taken to simply mean that we cannot believe otherwise. Because Frankfurt seems to be able to invoke intuitions of responsibility without the possibility of doing otherwise, his solution *prima facie* seems to be the right solution for the issue at hand. We only need to change "the inability to do otherwise" into "the inability to believe otherwise". And if we add to that the observation that we are reasons-responsive for our beliefs in a similar manner that we are reasons-responsive for our actions, then we have a suitable equivalent in *doxastic* reasons-responsive compatibilism and we have solved the problem, or so it seems. However, here we are now facing new problems that have not received sufficient attention. How are we to picture a Frankfurt-style thought experiment in doxastic matters? There is an abundance of Frankfurt-style thought experiments in the literature on practical ethics. The great scarcity of Frankfurt-style thought experiments in doxastic settings might be a first indication that many have overlooked the complications that are involved in the transfer of our intuitions from the practical to the doxastic realm.

The doxastic version of Frankfurt's thought experiment that, in my opinion, comes closest to the original has been presented by Zagzebski (2001). It goes as follows:

> Suppose that Jones is very good at identifying vintages of Bordeaux. In particular, she has no trouble distinguishing between a '94 Chateaux Margaux from very similar wines. Black knows that Jones is going to be tasting different vintages of Margaux without knowing in advance the year of the vintage she is tasting. He has installed a device in her head that can make Jones believe that the next wine she tastes is a '94 Margaux, whether it is or not. (Never mind why Black would want to do such a thing). When Jones tastes the next wine, if she appears about to judge that it is anything else, the device will interfere with her tasting sensations and will lead her to think it is a '94 Margaux. Now suppose that she tastes a '94 anyway and believes it is a '94, and Black's device does nothing but monitor what is going on in Jones's nervous system. Jones's tasting faculties and taste memory are working fine and she comes to have a true belief in the normal way. (Fairweather & Zagzebski, p. 148)

Although the general tenor of Zagzebski's example is very similar to Frankfurt's original, there are several serious problems that this thought experiment invokes. Zagzebski (Fairweather & Zagzebski, 2001) herself introduces the thought experiment mainly as an upbeat to another thought experiment in which Black has been manipulating Jones's beliefs for some time but happens not to do so in this particular instant, where she comes to the true belief that the vintage of the wine is '94. She questions whether Jones can be properly considered an agent if manipulation is the rule rather than the exception (pp. 145-151). I wish to focus, however, on other problems that have to do with notorious philosophical issues such as qualia, privileged access to one's consciousness, and sceptical scenarios in general.

According to Zagzebski's (2001) thought experiment, Black somehow knows both which vintage Jones will taste, as well as how she normally

experiences the taste and what she will judge the vintage to be. Of course, there are no problems with Black's foreknowledge of the actual vintage of the wine Jones is tasting, but the thought experiment simply *stipulates* that Black can know and does know, simply by monitoring brain activity, what is going on in Jones's mind, what Jones is tasting—i.e., what her tasting sensations are like—and what she is thinking, remembering, and judging. It is not all clear from the thought experiment as presented by Zagzebski whether Black can manipulate Jones's actual tasting experience or only his memory of previous tasting experiences, or only the subsequent belief and judgment, or only what she will say the vintage to be according to her, or some or all of these things, but in any case, it is simply asking too much of the imagination to stipulate that someone has that kind of control in a mere thought experiment on brain manipulation to settle metaethical questions without major and very controversial qualifications.

To a certain extent, the problem of Black's knowledge of Jones's brain functioning and intentions already applies to Frankfurt's original thought experiment. Frankfurt is not clear whether Black can take complete control over Jones's deliberations, intentions, and desires with the implanted device or only over his motorial nervous system, where his muscles that perform some desired actions are controlled. The latter would be easier to conceive than the former. Although brain states appear to correlate with intentional decisions to move the limbs as well as with beliefs and with the experience of qualia, it is still very much in debate as to how that correlation must be understood or is even possible. It seems that Zagzebski's (2001) doxastic Frankfurt-style thought experiment is only viable if the identity theory is presupposed which postulates that brain states and conscious states are identical (Smart, 2017). However, the identity theory is much disputed and cannot be taken for granted in a theory about doxastic responsibility.[11] If there is no plausible explanation as to how Black could know what Jones's tasting sensations are like or how particular brainwaves translate into specific beliefs and judgments, there is no good reason to accept that such power is simply stipulated. Stipulating the premises upon

11 For a compilation of some of the problems of the identity theory, see Hofstadter et al. (1981).

which an argument rests would amount to stipulating the conclusion. But it is not up to us to stipulate reality.

There is another serious problem with Zagzebski's Frankfurt-style thought experiment, as she already points out. Even if we grant the possibility of Black having this kind of knowledge of, access to, and control over, Jones's inner experiences and beliefs, we have thereby simply created a sceptical scenario comparable to a brain in a vat (BIV), or even worse than that. In this thought experiment, Black would have even more power than the scientists who manipulate a BIV. The manipulators of a BIV can only manipulate the sensory neurons, whereupon the BIV may draw wrong conclusions about the actual world, but the independent reasoning of the BIV would still be intact. Black, on the other hand, seems to be able to have full control over Jones's mind to the point that we can seriously question whether Jones can still be an agent. To allow for a Dr Black with such powers is not merely to play with different causal scenarios but to open the door to radical scepticism. If Jones can be manipulated like that, then so can Black himself be manipulated without his knowledge, and anyone else. Black may think he is monitoring and controlling Jones's brain, but he may himself be monitored and controlled by Dr Evans, who in turn is controlled by Dr Owens, and so forth. In such a scenario no one can know anything, not even if one can be responsible for one's beliefs. All intuitions would be doubtful, for they could well be manipulated.

Zagzebski's (2001) doxastic Frankfurt-style case, then, does not solve the problem of how we can be responsible for our beliefs even if we cannot believe otherwise. By making some unwarranted presuppositions in the philosophy of mind and by opening the door to radical scepticism, the case creates even bigger problems. The idea of a neurosurgeon implanting a manipulating device in a brain is for many reasons problematic.

Here is another example of a doxastic Frankfurt-style thought experiment by Côté-Bouchard (2017):

> **Simon the neurosurgeon.** Simon is a neurosurgeon who is obsessed with epistemology and epistemic value. In particular, he is so deeply convinced of the badness of error that he invented a device that prevents his patients from believing what they do not know. Whenever there is any indication that a patient might be about to believe something she won't know, the device takes over her cognitive system and instantly causes her to suspend judgment about the matter at hand. Tanya is one of Simon's patients who has agreed to have the device implanted in her brain. After the procedure, Tanya goes out with a friend who, at some point in the night, asks her whether she thinks that the number of stars is even. Without any hesitation, Tanya replies that she has no way of knowing the answer and so suspends her judgment about that question. Because of her lack of hesitation, Simon's device did not activate and Tanya ended up suspending judgment by herself. However, if there had been the slightest indication that she might have leaned towards belief or disbelief, the device would have instantly taken over and caused her to suspend judgment. (p. 117)

This outlandish thought experiment does not invoke any intuitions in me about responsibility for belief, or suspension of belief, but it illustrates how odd things can get when Frankfurt-style cases are employed in the doxastic realm. This thought experiment suffers from all the problems of Zagzebski's (2001) thought experiment but has some additional problems as well. To make sense of this thought experiment, Simon the neurosurgeon must have solved the age-old problem and the holy grail of epistemology—what differentiates belief from knowledge. If Simon does not know what the precise difference is, he will not know when to intervene with his implanted device. Furthermore, although it is already farfetched to suppose someone can know with complete certainty when someone is about to do something, it is totally unclear to me what it even means when someone is "about to believe something" and how that would be visible in the brain. If the patients would not have any beliefs but only knowledge, after having medically surrendered to Simon's obsession about "the badness of

error", they would become suddenly paralyzed. A patient might end up only knowing that they exist because they are thinking, but suspending belief about everything else. This thought experiment takes too much for granted and has too many difficulties to be taken seriously enough to settle any questions about doxastic voluntary control and doxastic responsibility.

Fischer and Ravizza (1998) have presented "less radical" Frankfurt-style examples that seem to invoke the same intuitions about the impossibility of doing otherwise but in a more everyday life setting. For example, the driver instructor who can control the car if the driver does not steer according to their wishes. The driver then seems to be in control of the car even though they cannot take a turn against the will of the driving instructor. The question arises whether it is possible to construe a similar "real life" doxastic Frankfurt-style case without presupposing any brain surgery. I think this is very difficult but some philosophers have tried. Peels (2016) and Nottelmann (2007a) have presented doxastic Frankfurt-style cases that make no use of brain surgery. Both examples deal with an educated racist who seems blameworthy for their reprehensible beliefs. It is supposed that they ought to attend a race issues class to rid them of their prejudices or wrong beliefs. Let us first consider one of Peels's doxastic Frankfurt-style cases:

> Julia is raised in a racist family. As a result of that, she is firmly disposed to form racist beliefs. She realizes how bad it is that she has such a disposition. One day, she gets a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to freely attend a race issues class, a training that would rid her of her racist belief-forming dispositions. Julia, however, decides not to attend the meeting because she is lazy and careless. It seems that she is blameworthy for not attending the meeting and maybe also for her racist beliefs that she maintains as a result of this omission. That seems true, even if her family members, who heard of it, were waiting in the wings and would have prevented her from attending the meeting if she had intended to go (p. 151).

Even though this little story appears to be a doxastic Frankfurt-style case, it is not so because the impossibility of believing otherwise is simply stipulated. It is said that attending the race issues class *would* rid her of her racist beliefs, and refraining from doing so *would* keep her within her set beliefs, but this is not at all obvious. The mere fact that Julia would not change her beliefs, which may be true simply because it is stipulated so, does not mean that she could not change her beliefs. Imagine that Julia was raised in a racist family. As a result of that, she is strongly inclined to form racist beliefs. She realizes that most people resent her ideas about coloured people. One day, she gets a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to freely attend a race issues class training that *could* rid her of her racist belief-forming dispositions. Consider the following possible scenarios:

> **Scenario 1**: Julia decides to attend the meeting. After attending the race issues class, she believes the other people there have been fooled and told half-truths. She remains as racist as ever.
>
> **Scenario 2**: Julia decides to attend the meeting. After attending the race issues class, she realizes how she has been misguided all her life and decides to let go of her prejudices. She is not racist anymore.
>
> **Scenario 3**: Julia decides not to attend the meeting, but even if she wanted to, her parents would have prevented her from going. Sometime later, however, she happens to see a documentary on television about race issues that makes her question her own beliefs. She gradually starts to see her folly and realizes she has been misguided in her education.
>
> **Scenario 4**: Julia learns that racism is wrong and tries to overcome her racism. But it is difficult and sometimes she unwittingly falls back in her old habits. She corrects herself whenever she catches herself making a racist judgment, but sometimes she just does not realize that she is doing it.

None of these scenarios is far-fetched. The fact that others were cured of their racist beliefs by attending the race issues class does not mean that anyone

else who attends the same class will also change their beliefs. A true doxastic Frankfurt-style example must make a convincing case that it is indeed metaphysically impossible, not merely psychologically unlikely, that some doxastic state will obtain, regardless of which choice someone makes. The principle of alternative possibilities states that there must be at least one possible world in which another (doxastic) state obtains but is silent on the likelihood of that (doxastic) state. The unlikelihood that a doxastic state will obtain is not the same as the impossibility that it will obtain. The absence of alternative possibilities cannot be simply argued for by deriving from a stipulated 'would not' a metaphysical 'could not'. In other words, the proposed doxastic Frankfurt-style case begs the question of why it is impossible for Julia to change her racist beliefs if she does not attend the race issues class or why she would necessarily change her beliefs if she did attend. It seems to me that it would indeed take some brain surgery to make this inevitably rather than unlikely the case, although I already tried to show that arguing for that would lead to other difficult questions.

Nottelmann (2007a) proposes another doxastic Frankfurt-style case:

> Consider again our well-worn educated racist. Now suppose that, beside her familiar racist belief that blacks are generally inferior to whites, she also forms other beliefs on the testimony of her favourite demagogue on the occasion, on which she forms her racist belief. Among those beliefs is a belief about a crime statistic. The content of this belief happens to be true. However, the crime statistic belief is formed by exactly the same unreliable belief-forming mechanism as the racist belief, namely by the operation of her credulous cognitive disposition regarding the testimony of the demagogue, and must therefore be blameworthy (or blameless) for exactly the same reasons as her racist belief. Suppose, plausibly, that both beliefs are epistemically blameworthy.
>
> Now suppose that on the same meeting a distinguished criminologist was the speaker before the racist demagogue. In the run of his speech,

> the distinguished criminologist utters the very same statistical statement that the demagogue later utters. At the meeting the educated racist, infused with racial hatred, pays no attention at all to the criminologist. Now suppose that the following is the case: If the educated racist had not once skipped a college class on racial issues and thus violated her intellectual obligations, her cognitive dispositions would have changed, such that on the meeting she would *still* have formed a crime statistics belief with the very same content, only in this case she would have trusted the reliable criminologist rather than the unreliable demagogue on the issue. Thus, *even* if she had fulfilled her intellectual obligations, she would *still* have believed the same propositional content, only this time around her belief would not have been epistemically undesirable. (p. 162)

From this thought experiment, Nottelmann (2007a) concludes that

> if Alston's account (even in its refined version) is applied to this "Frankfurt-style" case, it yields that the educated racist is *blameless* for holding the racist belief on the demagogue's testimony, and this *only* because the racist had the incredible *stroke of luck* that accidentally the condition was *not* fulfilled that, had she fulfilled her relevant intellectual obligations, she would not have held the crime statistics belief. But, intuitively, such luck cannot matter to an agent's epistemic blameworthiness. An agent's epistemic blameworthiness must hinge on the agent's exercise of her doxastic control in past and present: It cannot be that factors entirely outside her control such as counterfactual doxastic interveners decide whether or not she is to blame epistemically for holding a particular undesirable belief. (p. 162)

It is doubtful, however, regardless of the intuitions the thought experiment might invoke or violate, whether it is a true Frankfurt-style case. The thought experiment has the same problem as the previous one. Nottelmann (2007a), as

an all-knowing spectator, simply stipulates what Julia *would* have believed after hearing the testimony of respectively the demagogue and the distinguished criminologist. There may be a common-sense predictability to this—that is why we are prone to accept it—but it is not sufficient to settle the metaethical issue of doxastic responsibility and the impossibility of believing otherwise. Common-sense predictability or simple stipulation by an all-knowing commentator as to what someone *will* or *would* believe after a certain action is doubtful to begin with and cannot establish what someone *can* or *could* believe and therefore does not represent a true doxastic Frankfurt-style case.

5. Conclusion

If Alston's (1988) argument from involuntarism is correct, then doxastic reasons-responsive compatibilism cannot establish that we can nevertheless have doxastic responsibility. Reasons-responsive compatibilism depends on the plausibility of Frankfurt-style cases, but they are problematic. I have tried to show that the elimination of PAP comes at the price of establishing the ownership or sourcehood of a doxastic state. Ownership or sourcehood, however, cannot be convincingly ascribed to a reasons-responsive mechanism that is not being meddled with by a counterfactual intervener. Although some problems I discussed are inherent to all Frankfurt-style examples, there are additional problems when we try to transfer intended Frankfurt-style case intuitions to doxastic settings. To plausibly establish that we have doxastic responsibility in virtue of compatibilist doxastic voluntary control one must be able to present an acceptable doxastic Frankfurt-style case. No convincing doxastic Frankfurt-style case has been presented, as far as I know. Either they involve controversial ideas in the philosophy of mind and open the door to radical scepticism, or they confuse the metaphysical inability to believe otherwise with the psychological improbability to believe otherwise.

CHAPTER 4

WHY THE ARGUMENT FOR DOXASTIC INVOLUNTARISM FAILS

1. Introduction

Doxastic voluntary control has often been equated with the power to have control over our beliefs by being able to choose to believe or disbelieve a random proposition at will. Alston (1988) contends that we do not have such doxastic voluntary control over our beliefs and that although we have “long range” voluntary control over our actions that may influence our beliefs, such as reading or observing, this voluntary control is not enough to account for a deontological conception of epistemic justification. His argument for denying that we have doxastic voluntary control is by simply inductively considering various scenarios where we cannot choose to believe something. He does that by challenging us to consider whether we can choose to believe something at will, such as “Can you, at this moment, start to believe that the United States is still a colony of Great Britain just by deciding to do so?” Alston does not spell out a proper argument based on premises as to why we cannot choose to believe a proposition at will. “My argument for this”, he says, “if it can be called that, simply consists in asking you to consider whether you have any such powers” (p. 263). So, he simply demonstrates his point by giving the reader a challenge to believe something at will. He thought it was sufficient to simply observe empirically with several convincing examples that in most cases, if not all, “we are not so constituted as to be able to take up propositional attitudes at will” (p. 263).

Alston's argument for doxastic involuntarism, however, can be formally represented as follows:

P1: If we have doxastic voluntary control then we must be able to voluntarily choose more or less instantly a doxastic attitude concerning a randomly proposed proposition.

P2: We cannot, at this moment, start to believe a randomly proposed proposition (e.g., the United States is still a colony of Great Britain) just by deciding to do so.

C: We do not have direct doxastic voluntary control over what we believe.

In this chapter, I will investigate this argument and our apparent "psychological inability" to choose to believe a randomly chosen proposition at will more closely because it plays a crucial role in Alston's rejection of a deontological conception of epistemic justification. Alston's (1988) argument for doxastic involuntarism has, I believe, three problems.

First, he challenges us either to believe an obvious falsehood or to disbelieve an obvious truth. Although we may not be able to do either instantly, we may still in many cases be able to exercise doxastic voluntary control to doubt or feel less certain or to suspend belief in a proposition.

Second, Alston uses a limited, though common meaning of belief as being convinced or assured that p is true. His argument may be compelling within the bounds of this meaning of belief, but maybe not for other interpretations of belief. Doxastic voluntarism with respect to other interpretations of belief, such as trust or commitment, may still allow for a qualified epistemic deontology. Rather than doxastic obligations or permissions concerning credal feelings, we might still have obligations or permissions concerning trust in or commitment to the truth of a proposition.

Third, I take issue with the suggestion that our inability to believe at will any randomly proposed proposition simply settles the matter of doxastic voluntarism. After all, propositions are hardly ever believed in isolation. A random change of belief in a single proposition can cause an enormous ripple in the doxastic web in which the proposition is embedded. As a result, the challenge Alston gives us to believe that the United States is still a colony of Britain is much greater than he insinuates. Although he offers us a sum of money to help us to be motivated to believe the offered proposition at will, the challenge may be insurmountable not because of our "psychological inability" to do so but because of our psychological reluctance to do so, given the enormous price we must pay to follow through on the newly adopted (dis) belief. Alston has overlooked that a change of doxastic attitude towards any single proposition will have many doxastic and practical implications for many other beliefs that are logically or otherwise connected to that proposition.

I shall now discuss these three problems with Alston's argument for doxastic involuntarism in more detail.

2. A sceptical defence of doxastic voluntarism

When Alston (1988) rhetorically challenges us to exercise doxastic voluntary control to show that we have it, we are asked to either believe an obvious falsehood (the USA is still a colony of Great Britain) or to disbelieve an obvious truth (the tree I see in front of me has leaves). A third doxastic attitude of suspending belief is also mentioned and treated in his paper, but interestingly we are never challenged to doubt or suspend our belief. In many cases, I think, we can choose to doubt, suspend, or lower our conviction of beliefs we already hold. In Alston's view, however, our beliefs and doubts are determined willy-nilly by evidence that presents itself to us:

- Where evidence for a proposition is decisive, we are compelled to believe the proposition.
- Where evidence against it is decisive, we cannot believe it.
- Where evidence is not decisive, we are compelled to believe the proposition that seems most likely.
- If no proposition seems more likely than all of its rivals, then we cannot believe any of them (pp. 265-268).

Alston may be correct when interpreting belief as a conviction but it begs the question: What precisely qualifies as "decisive" or "undecisive" evidence compelling us to take up a certain doxastic attitude? Alston makes "decisiveness" a property of the evidence itself, which he suggests we cannot resist. The evidence, however, does not decide for us what we will believe once we are exposed to it. In Chapter 2, I have already discussed the problem of explaining peer disagreement when two peers consider the same evidence and yet disagree. When peers disagree, it cannot be the same "decisive evidence" that forces different doxastic attitudes. If the evidence on a certain topic for disagreeing peers is the same but the decisiveness of it is not, then the decisiveness cannot be a property of the evidence itself.

To a sceptic no evidence may ever seem decisive whereas in normal dealings, when little is at stake, very little evidence may be decisive. What evidence is considered decisive can often be determined by a person in a given context: If the stakes are low, we will readily believe any proposition, but if the stakes are high, for example in a bet or scientific matters, or when lives or a lot of money are at stake, the standards of decisiveness are raised. This is, in fact, the position of the epistemic contextualist (Grindrod, 2020; Ichikawa, 2017). A gullible person may set the bar for decisiveness of evidence very low. A more critical person may raise the bar, and a sceptic will almost pathologically keep raising the bar of decisiveness so that the standard is never met. Although I believe that full-blown scepticism is self-referentially

incoherent and practically impossible, my point is that there is a wide spectrum of mindsets we can choose to adopt, from being gullible to overly critical, when it comes to considering the evidence, and that also this mindset, and not purely the evidence itself, determines what we consider as decisive and what not and thus what we will believe.

Speaking of obvious truths and falsehoods Alston (1988) says: "There is no way I can inhibit these beliefs. At least there is no way I can do it on the spot, in carrying out an uninterrupted intention to do so. How would I do so?" (p. 270) Where most philosophers have taken Alston's question as rhetorical and as a simple proof of his point, Frederick (2013) comes with a clear answer to this question. When it seems like an obvious truth that it is raining outside:

> I consider that there may be potential alternative explanations. If I have it in me, I might even come up with some potential alternative explanations. For example, I might wonder whether someone is having fun with a hosepipe or sprinkler, or whether it is not water but some chemical being sprayed from an aeroplane by a pilot who has mistakenly flown to the wrong location and thinks he is spraying crops. Or I might wonder whether it is not rain that is falling but acid rain or some compound liquid that it would take an imaginative scientist concerned with atmospheric changes to conjecture. (p. 27)

Frederick (2013) makes the point that there is no interpretation of perceptions that may not be doubted by someone serious about the pursuit of knowledge, as is demonstrated by numerous scientific discoveries. Many scientific discoveries have come about by first questioning seemingly obvious truths. A few examples illustrate his point:

> When we see the sun on the horizon, "in broad daylight with eyesight working perfectly," the sun is actually below the horizon, but it appears

> to be on the horizon because its light is refracted by the earth's atmosphere. The star we think we see is not there, because it has ceased to exist during the time it takes light to travel to us. An apparent fish is actually a mammal. The apparent movement of the sun is the motion of the earth. The apparent gold is iron pyrites. Many apparent stars are actually asteroids. The two lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion that look unequal are in fact equal. The apparent witch is just a strange (or disliked) woman. Apparent design is just an evolved product of natural selection. Things we perceive as solid objects are mostly empty space. And so on. (Frederick, 2013, p. 28)

Frederick gives many other examples where we have strong seemingly "obvious beliefs" from memory or experience that appear wrong. He sees in Alston's argument against doxastic voluntarism a great danger for scepticism because the suggestion that we are at the mercy of our evidence makes doubt in "established facts or theories" in effect impossible, whereas many of these doubts have proven to be very fruitful. Many scientific discoveries are not directly the product of new empirical evidence but are the result of first doubting or questioning established existing explanations, such as that the sun revolves around the earth or that gravitation is the result of matter pulling matter, and then offering new explanations for the same evidence. In some cases, the new explanation may even seem very counterintuitive, at least at first. According to Frederick, there are no obvious truths, though we may think that some things are obvious to the extent that we are ignorant, unimaginative, or uncritical.

Frederick (2013) points out that, because there are always potential alternative explanations, there is no such thing as decisive evidence, and no evidence can appear decisive to a thoroughly critical inquirer. Every theory is underdetermined by the empirical evidence. As a result, we are always free to withhold belief, at least as long as we retain our critical faculty. Scientists

often investigate unlikely hypotheses which they would not do if they believed that they could not be true. Furthermore, sometimes we believe one of two mutually exclusive propositions when there is no decisive empirical evidence for either but because of some unexplained preference.

When Einstein published his general theory of relativity in 1916, he was able to explain and predict empirical observations that Newton could not, such as the precession of the perihelium of Mercury, a redshift of light in the gravitation field near heavy bodies, and the bending of light near heavy bodies. In 1922 Alfred North Whitehead published *The Principle of Relativity with Applications to Physical Science* in which he not only criticized Einstein's new theory on fundamental issues, such as the principle of relativity itself but also offered an alternative theory, that was (only slightly) mathematically simpler and that could explain and predict all the empirical evidence Einstein's theory of relativity became famous for (Whitehead, 1922). The difference between their theories was conceptual. Most scientists, however, believed the theory of Einstein (Bain, 1998). It was not until 1971 that it was discovered that the two theories made different predictions. Whitehead's theory was falsified (Ariel, 1974). Until then, however, there was no "decisive evidence" of who was right or wrong, and yet most scientists believed Einstein rather than Whitehead.

Alston's (1988) argument for doxastic involuntarism may be right insofar as we cannot instantly choose to turn around our conviction that a proposition is true or false without additional evidence. But I think we can in many cases instantly voluntarily raise or lower our conviction and decide to reconsider the evidence we once deemed sufficient and decisive by simply raising or lowering the bar of the decisiveness of evidence, or by considering sceptical scenarios, or by doing a conceptual thought experiment, or by planning more research until the new standard of decisiveness is met. In doing so, we exercise doxastic voluntary control. In short, we may not be able to change our convictions to the opposite but we can temper or reduce our convictions. This

is what an open mind is all about. To develop the virtue of an open mind we must be willing to reduce our convictions and be willing to reconsider evidence that once seemed decisive and always allow for new evidence.

In this sceptic defence of doxastic voluntarism, we have used roughly the same meaning of belief as Alston (1988) does, namely as an inner conviction that a proposition is true. I concluded that we can voluntarily temper our convictions but not pick up any doxastic attitude we like. In the next section, I shall investigate two preliminary alternatives as the object of doxastic control, viz. commitments and belief policies. In Chapter 6 I will elaborate on another alternative, namely trust.

3. Commitment as the object of voluntary control

Many philosophers who have written on doxastic voluntary control have devoted most of their arguments to the nature of voluntary control rather than to the nature of belief, which is the object of doxastic voluntary control. "To believe" is often described as "to take to be true", but this definition is very broad and could mean anything from merely assuming or accepting p for the sake of argument to being utterly convinced that p is true. Cohen (1992) has therefore made an influential distinction between belief and acceptance. A belief, he argues, is *a disposition to feel* that a proposition is true, whether or not one is willing to act, speak, or reason accordingly. Acceptance, on the other hand, is treating a proposition as given or having or adopting a policy of deeming, positing, or postulating that proposition, or including that proposition or rule among one's premises for deciding what to do or think in a particular context. A belief, like other feelings, is discovered by introspection and is passive and not subject to the will. Acceptance is forming or reporting an intention to use a proposition as the foundation of your proofs, arguments, reasonings, or deliberations and is subject to the will (pp. 4-5). It seems Alston (1988) would agree with this when he says that "accepting p as a working

hypothesis" or "to act as if p is true" or "to assert that p" does not constitute belief (pp. 267-270).

If we define belief, as Cohen (1992) does, exclusively as this inner feeling of conviction that p is true then Alston has a strong case that we cannot directly control those feelings, but the problem with this limited definition is that it disregards trust, commitment, acceptance, faith, assent, assumption and additional possible synonyms of belief as other possible candidates of normativity. Unlike feelings, these other forms of belief can be subject to voluntary control. Dictionaries give many meanings of belief, including the ones mentioned above, and some thesauruses give up to fifty synonyms. Some languages, such as German and Dutch, do not have the distinction between having faith and believing. Etymologically the word "belief" is derived from bileave, geleafa, ga-laubon, meaning: "to hold dear, esteem or trust", from the root leubh which means "to care, desire, love".[12] The meaning of belief as "conviction" has evolved only in the early modern period. My point is that other meanings of belief than the one that Alston and Cohen and many others use, cannot simply be all dismissed as irrelevant with respect to the question of normativity of belief and voluntary control. Nor can they all be referred to the realm of actions, because they involve adopting *mental* attitudes towards propositions and arguably doxastic attitudes that do not necessarily comprise or lead to practical acts.

If we take beliefs as mental states, we can only perceive them in ourselves and not directly in others. These mental states are shielded by privileged access. So, if there are norms or rules for beliefs, then people can only be praised or blamed for *asserting* or *saying* what they believe. Freedom of conscience is often understood as freedom of belief and Locke (1690) already argued in his *A Letter Concerning Toleration* that normativity in the form of state religion is both futile and evil because what people assert is not

12 https://www.etymonline.com/word/belief

necessarily what they believe and is not for anyone else to decide but the person himself. Privileged access to our mental states is an important problem for epistemic deontology because it makes it impossible to prove what someone else believes. A presumed heretic may publicly denounce his heresy and be acquitted while still believing it. We will return to the topic of what I call "doxastic hypocrisy" later, but it has led Tebben (2018) to propose another possible meaning of belief that is both subject to voluntary control and places agents in a normative position. The relevant meaning of belief in deontic contexts, he argues, is a *commitment* to the truth of p rather than the *disposition to feel* that p is true. The former is subject to voluntary control, the latter is not.

To be committed to the truth of p does not mean to be somehow dedicated to its truth as we can be committed to a cause, but to place oneself in a normative position to not use not-p in our reasoning. This is different from accepting that p. Acceptance is still a psychological state that does not necessarily result in cognitive commitment. Once someone is committed to the truth of p, she still *can* but *may* not use not-p in her reasoning or deliberations. As in an engaged relationship, one still can but should not marry someone else without first breaking the previous engagement. Cohen (1989) argues that someone who accepts p *will* refrain from using not-p in her reasoning (p. 368). Tebben (2018) , however, argues that although this is usually the case, someone *can* still use not-p in her reasoning, but if someone is committed to the truth of p and reasons with not-p as a premise, she is guilty of an objectionable form of incoherence. The important difference, as Tebben describes it, between belief as *cognitive commitment* and other meanings of belief, such as acceptance or feelings of conviction, is that a cognitive commitment is not a psychological state but a normative state (pp. 1171-1173).

Tebben (2018) seems to argue that coherence is the only epistemic duty we have because we can never be committed to p and not-p at the same time.

I find this approach unsatisfying and incomplete for several reasons. First, although I agree that we should be coherent in our beliefs, this approach to belief only allows for an incomplete and very limited ethics of belief: Believe all you want, that is: be committed to the truth of any proposition you like (or not), only be consistent! This deontology does not tell us what to believe but only what not to believe at the same time. Second, this interpretation of belief does not allow for different strengths or degrees of belief for the same reason one cannot be engaged with someone to a degree. Many other meanings of belief, however, allow for degrees or strengths, such as felt trust, assent, confidence, or conviction. If I have a weak belief, I might believe p to a slightly higher degree than not-p, but I still use both in my practical reasoning. I might for example believe that my visit to my neighbour will be very brief but I might still turn off the stove, just in case. I cannot do this, Tebben would argue, without being guilty of incoherence. Third, if commitment to the truth of p is not a psychological state, then what is it? If a belief is a cognitive commitment and a cognitive commitment is not a mental but a normative state then Tebben's argument seems to be circular when he tries to explain how beliefs can be subject to normativity.

4. Belief policies as the object of voluntary control

Another approach to pave the way for a doxastic deontology is not to see beliefs themselves as the object of voluntary control, but rather belief policies. This approach originates with Helm (1994). Helm investigates the role of the will in the formation of our beliefs. Although we may not be able to choose beliefs directly and intentionally, we can intentionally choose the principles, strategies, projects, or programmes for accepting, rejecting, or suspending judgment as to the truth of propositions in accordance with a set of evidential norms. Not all belief policies are the product of choice, however. A belief policy may be dispositional and tacit in our infancy and only become more explicit as we grow up and discover friction between the beliefs they render.

If we discover we have been lied to by someone, we may choose to first doubt, rather than blindly accept what that person says. If we discover scientists have got it wrong in the past, we may choose to be more critical of what we believe when something is presented as scientific. A belief policy governs our use of evidence in developing our beliefs. According to Helm, it is in adopting belief policies that the will is most present in our belief formation. Belief policies, then, rather than beliefs themselves, are the object of voluntary control in virtue of which we have epistemic duties.

Belief policies can address questions about the strength of belief, permission, obligation, verification, falsification, the degree of conservatism in maintaining or revising past beliefs, and the burden of proof. Some belief policies seek to maximize the number of true beliefs, minimize false beliefs, or find an acceptable balance between these. A belief policy may pose a hierarchy between different belief policies when they render contradictory or conflicting results. With the aid of belief policies, Helm (1994) also tries to explain self-deception and conflicts in our beliefs. As weakness of will or akrasia can prevent us from doing what we feel we should do, so can weakness of will prevent us from implementing a belief policy when we feel we should. This weakness of will, Helm (1994) argues, can explain why we can and sometimes do have conflicting beliefs. A person may know that a particular proposition ought to be believed but not be willing to do so because of an unreasoned, but wilful, retention of another belief policy. Or a person may realize that two beliefs are in conflict with each other and yet not bother to give up either of them. In short, belief policies, according to Helm, can explain what evidence we will take as decisive, as well as explain how we can be responsible for our beliefs and why we can have contradictory or conflicting beliefs.

The belief-policy approach, however, also has its critics. Peels (2013) has argued that belief policies cannot ground doxastic responsibility. Helm's (1994) theory and its derivatives, Peels argues, suppose two theses:

(T1) The adoption of belief policies is under voluntary control.

(T2) Belief policies make a significant difference to what we believe (Peels, 2013, p. 564).

He then confronts the adherents of these two theses with a dilemma: Either belief policies are beliefs or they are not. If they are, then (T1) is false; if they are not, then (T2) is false. It is apparent from the ensuing argument for the dilemma that Peels (2013) uses the same meaning for belief as Alston (1988) and Cohen (1992), namely the *disposition to feel* or have an *inner conviction* that p is true. The first alternative to the dilemma is argued for by making the point that we still cannot choose beliefs if they are belief policies. We cannot choose to feel a belief policy is true when it leads us to believe an overt falsehood. To give an example: I cannot choose to believe the belief policy to only believe those propositions that will make me rich. In that case, I could cash in the money Alston offered, to help me believe that the US is still a colony of Great Britain, simply by adopting the appropriate belief policy, but I cannot. I think Peels has a strong point here. Furthermore, if belief policies are beliefs, then why do we need them? It seems we can believe many propositions without first believing belief policies. Peels says he believes he had two slices of bread for breakfast but has not thought about whether this belief fits his evidence. I do not find this argument convincing because belief policies are not often occurrent but rather tacit. "Information from my recent memory is good evidence" could be a good tacit belief policy for all people without dementia. I agree with Peels however, that belief-policies are not beliefs, that is, they are not dispositions to feel or convictions that those belief-policies are true.

Peels (2013) argues for the second alternative, saying that if a belief policy is not a belief, then it must be something else. He can only think of two other possibilities: Belief-policies are *acceptances* or *desires*. He subsequently dismisses them both because, if they are, they cannot make a significant

difference in what we will believe. The reason for that is that we cannot choose to accept belief policies that will yield silly beliefs, and what we accept as a belief policy will therefore not make a big difference in what we will believe, nor can we in many cases choose what we desire. Hence, Peels argues, belief policies cannot ground doxastic responsibility (pp. 566-568). I do not think Peels has effectively rebutted the strategy of belief policies with this argument for two reasons.

First, if belief-policies are not beliefs (i.e., dispositions to feel something is true) Peels (2013) can only think of *acceptances* and *desires* as alternatives. That is a false dilemma. A belief policy is not a belief itself, nor an acceptance, nor a desire, but exactly what it says: a policy. A policy is a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions.[13] A belief policy, then, is a method or course in what we decide to trust or take to be true.

Second, the argument for the alternative of the dilemma, namely that if belief policies are not beliefs they will make no significant difference to what we believe, at best shows that not *all* belief policies are viable to be accepted, at all or simultaneously, but that does not mean that one cannot choose to adopt different belief-policies that will result in significantly different beliefs. Virtually all people will take information from their senses as a starter belief policy which will result in many common-sense beliefs about the world. But the belief that the tree in front of me has leaves is not the kind of belief that is interesting from a deontological point of view, whereas metaphysical, political, theoretical, scientific, religious, and moral beliefs are. The belief policies we adopt must render a belief system that has certain constraints such as coherence and sufficient compliance with reality as it seems to act upon us. Within the bounds of these constraints, the number and kinds of belief policies that we can accept are not unlimited, but they still allow for a significant difference in beliefs, opinions, and interpretations. For example, a child may

13 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/policy

have the belief policy to believe everything they see at face value, whereas an adult may have an overriding belief policy to not believe everything they see when an illusionist seems to make things disappear or break well-known physical laws. The child and adult see the same things but do not acquire the same beliefs because they use different belief policies. Or two adults may have different beliefs while considering the same evidence because they have different belief policies when it comes to accepting the authority of Scripture or journalists from a particular magazine.

In the last two sections, I have explored two alternatives for Alston's (1988) idea of beliefs as inner convictions or dispositions to feel something is true. Tebben (2013) and Helm (1994) have attempted to evade Alston's argument for doxastic involuntarism by proposing something else than credal feelings as the object of normativity. Tebben's proposal to use "cognitive commitments" as the object of voluntary control is unconvincing. Helm's proposal to use "belief-policies" as the object of voluntary control and normativity seems more promising and I will return to his argument in Chapter 6. In the next section, I will give another argument for why Alston's argument for doxastic involuntarism fails.

5. Propositions and doxastic webs

According to Alston (1988), "If we do have voluntary control over beliefs, we have the same sort of reason for supposing it to be basic control that we have for supposing ourselves to have basic control over the (typical) movements of our limbs, viz., that we are hard pressed to specify any voluntary action by doing which we get the limbs moved or the beliefs engendered" (p. 260). Alston does not properly explain why this is the case, but even if we have reason to suppose this, voluntarily moving a limb has some implications and complications that Alston has overlooked. Raising a hand above the head and waving it is not just a hand motion. The hand is connected through the

wrist with the forearm, which is connected to the upper arm with the elbow, which is connected to the torso with the shoulder. One cannot choose to *only* raise and wave a hand above the head without raising the elbow and the forearm as well. Choosing to raise one's hand above the head implies also choosing to bend or move one's elbow and forearm even if we are intentionally not aware of this. Many body parts are linked to others with joints. Once we realize that bodily movements of our limbs have physiological restraints and that these movements often imply, by physical necessity, the motion of other body parts as well, it seems that our voluntary control over our body may have more resemblance to our voluntary control over some of our beliefs than Alston wants to argue for.

If someone were to ask me to raise my hand above the head and wave it while keeping all other body parts in the same position, I simply could not do it. Likewise, if someone challenges me to believe that the US is still a colony of Great Britain, and leave all other beliefs the same, I cannot do it. How so? The change of one seemingly simple belief can imply the change of many other beliefs as well. Beliefs are linked with many other beliefs, just as some body parts are connected to other body parts. The credibility of propositions is linked to the credibility of many other propositions by logical implication and coherency, or based on the trustworthiness of the same source of information, such as the senses, memory, reason, or testimony. The challenge of choosing to move a singular body part in a certain way (say my forearm) while leaving all other body parts unmoved (e.g., my hand) may be as silly as the challenge of choosing to adopt a new propositional attitude towards a single proposition while leaving all other beliefs unchanged.

If I am challenged to choose to believe that the US is still a colony of Great Britain, I must, by implication, also believe that history books that have been written on the history of the US, as well as many other books around the world on history, are in a serious way flawed and unreliable. I must also believe that there is a worldwide conspiracy going on, trying to keep people

ignorant about major historical developments. I should give up my basic trust in scholars who interpret history, American politicians who seem to act independently from British rule, witnesses (e.g., the Founding Fathers) who wrote and signed the Declaration of Independence, media who are silent on British interference in American politics etc… Once I start doubting the basic trustworthiness of all these sources of knowledge or belief, many new doubts about scholars, media, testimony, and so on will follow.

Changing my belief that the US is still a colony of Great Britain, then, comes at the price of changing innumerable other beliefs founded on the same sort of testimony, common sense and general trust in people, as well as accepting an outlandish sceptical scenario to explain why I and the rest of the world have been deceived to believe otherwise. It is hard to grasp the enormous ripple that believing or disbelieving a single proposition can have on our worldview. It is this implication, I submit, rather than an obscure psychological constitution per se, that is the most important reason why we will not, and therefore apparently cannot in many cases, believe simply on request one particular proposition when challenged to do so, even if we are offered a large sum of money. If someone were to offer me money to jump into an abyss just to prove that I have voluntary control over my legs, I would refuse, as most people would. Anyone's reluctance to do so should not be taken as proof that we lack voluntary control over our legs.

Some beliefs, however, are more embedded in doxastic webs than others and are therefore more difficult to change. When a stranger asks me to believe he has a wallet in his pocket, I may choose to trust him on his word or doubt his testimony with little practical or intellectual consequence. Whether or not I take his testimony to be true has few consequences for other beliefs I hold. It seems to me that I can choose to trust him or not on his word and thereby choose to believe or not whether he has a wallet in his pocket. In this case, it depends on whether I have reason to doubt him as a reliable source or where I set the bar for the decisiveness of the evidence. But even if I trust or distrust

him wrongfully, which results in believing or disbelieving wrongfully, it does not affect many other doxastic attitudes I hold. It seems to me that I have control over whether to believe him or not. Likewise, when someone challenges me to choose to raise my hand, just to prove I can control my hand, I may oblige with little consequence, but not so when I am challenged to pull the trigger. Again, if someone challenges me not to believe that the tree in front of me has leaves, when I see a tree with leaves just before me in bright daylight with my eyesight working perfectly, I can only do it at the cost of disastrous epistemic and practical implications. Most people would not sell their sensory organs for a million, nor would they voluntarily embrace a belief that would in effect make their senses useless.

Changing doxastic attitudes, then, can in most cases not be limited to single propositions. That is why Alston's (1988) examples are as convincing as they are misleading. René Descartes (1641) ventures in his first meditation to choose to withhold his assent from propositions he has believed all his life. He informs us that he does not need to show that all of these individually are false because he shall perhaps never arrive at that end since it would be an endless undertaking (pp. 301-304). His methodology, however, was not just a way to save time. It was the *only* way to get around the fact that many propositions are veraciously linked to each other by logical implication, coherence, or reliability of the same source. It took Descartes only three sceptical scenarios, or the acceptance of three simple propositions, to wipe out his vast set of beliefs. Although doxastic attitudes can be individuated for every single proposition, they cannot be fully understood in isolation from other doxastic attitudes because they are embedded in doxastic webs.

In a complex doxastic web, beliefs can be linked to other beliefs through deductive reasoning. According to the closure principle, one can derive justified beliefs or knowledge from already existing justified beliefs or knowledge.

> **Closure Principle (CP)**: If S justifiably believes (or knows) that p, and knows that p entails q, then S can justifiably believe (or know) that q (Collins, 2006).

If I know that the Eiffel Tower is in Paris and that Paris is in France, then I also know that the Eiffel Tower is in France. The closure principle's formulation is based on the rule of *modus ponens*, suggesting that we can obtain further knowledge by deductive reasoning from existing knowledge. The closure principle, however, can also be derived from the *modus tollens*.

> **Closure Principle Tollens (CPT)**: If S justifiably believes (or knows) that ¬p, and knows that q entails p, then S can justifiably believe (or knows) that ¬q.

The *modus tollens* formulation of the closure principle suits me because it shows more readily how we must *cease* to believe all propositions that are implied by what we stop to believe. For example: S justifiably believes there is a tree with leaves in front of them because they see the tree in plain daylight with good sight. If, however, S would (choose to) not believe there was a tree with leaves in front of them, because of CPT, they would also justifiably believe that their vision in plain daylight is an unreliable source of knowledge. If they would justifiably believe that, they would also doubt many things they thought they knew because they have seen them, because of CP, and would have to start believing outlandish sceptical scenarios.

Coherence can also be used to link beliefs in a doxastic web, not just in a strict logical sense, but also in a looser interpretation, when some beliefs only make sense in the light of other beliefs. Ideologies, religions, scientific theories, and so forth, have many beliefs that are interconnected by inductive and abductive reasoning. If I hear the voice of my neighbour coming from his garden, I believe on abductive grounds that he is in his garden. If I choose not

to believe he is in his garden, then I must believe some sceptical scenario that explains why I hear his voice from the garden when he is not actually there. Maybe there is a pre-recorded conversation that is played in the garden on a hi-fi set with very good speakers. If I believe the Bible to be the word of God, then I will believe all sorts of things about history, the purpose of life, life after death, and so forth. If I believe DNA contains genetic code, I will believe many things about hereditary diseases, replication, genetics, mitosis, and so on. If I am a liberal, I believe many things about the responsibility and rights of the individual, the role of the government, the nature of economic progress, etc.

Beliefs can also be linked to each other because they are based on the same sort of evidence. For example, the trustworthiness of our senses, memory, witnesses, science books, newspapers, etc. Many beliefs are tied to others by virtue of the same belief policy. A person who is sceptical of revelation as a source of knowledge and has a belief policy that only allows for scientific or sensory proofs but not for supernatural claims might reject many religious beliefs that a convert might embrace. Or a religious person might lose her faith and become sceptical about the beliefs she once held dear. Doxastic webs become more inert in proportion to their complexity. The vast array of things we have seen with our eyes is such a complex web. When I see David Copperfield fly over the stage, I do not doubt my eyes or the things I learned in physics. I will look for ways to unravel the illusion. My belief that man cannot fly has not changed because I *see* him flying. I will still trust my senses and basic understanding of physics, knowing I am being fooled.

In any case, if we have control over our beliefs, it cannot be required that we be able to show this control in the adoption or rejection of a single belief. Doxastic voluntary control is more likely to be found in the change of paradigms, in religious or ideological conversions, or our trust in individuals or groups of people.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have investigated Alston's (1988) argument for doxastic involuntarism and discussed three problems with his challenge to believe a random proposition at will. First, even if we are not able to instantly change a strong conviction that p into not-p, we may still be able to lower our convictions by raising the bar for decisiveness of the evidence. Doxastic voluntary control, then, is not just the power to voluntarily believe what we want but at least partly to doubt or lower the strength of our convictions. Without this voluntary control over our beliefs, even moderate scepticism and an open mind would simply be impossible.

Second, Alston's (1988) argument for doxastic involuntarism is based on the presupposition that beliefs are dispositions to feel something is true, only to show we cannot control those feelings. It is, however, not the case that an epistemic deontology must only prescribe or prohibit these feelings or else be rejected. "Belief" can and does mean many other things besides credal feelings. We discussed cognitive commitments and belief policies as possible objects of voluntary control. Cognitive commitments were dismissed because they render at best an epistemic deontology that only requires coherence and because commitments are binary, so they do not allow for degrees in strength. Belief policies set the standards by which we evaluate the evidence.

Third, it is in most cases not possible to simply change *one* doxastic attitude without affecting many other propositional attitudes as well, but that is exactly what Alston challenges us to do. Propositions are interconnected in doxastic webs by the logical implications, coherence, and trustworthiness of the same source. What Alston has termed "a psychological inability" may boil down to a psychological reluctance to change our belief policies because they are fundamental to our daily functioning and worldview. Rather than single propositions, we can in most cases only change our beliefs in large sets of propositions that are interconnected. Even then it is hard to oversee all the

ramifications a shift in a doxastic web may incur so that these shifts tend to occur gradually rather than instantly.

Alston's (1988) argument for doxastic involuntarism and against epistemic deontology is therefore premature or limited. In the next chapter, I shall give more critique on Alston's idea of belief.

CHAPTER 5

DIFFICULTIES WITH THE STANDARD IDEA OF BELIEF

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I commented on the one-sided approach of Alston (1988) and many others who interpret beliefs as convictions or dispositions to feel that a proposition is true. Because feelings are not under direct voluntary control, Alston and others seem to have a strong case when they say that beliefs, in this sense, are not subject to an epistemic deontology. Many philosophers on the ethics of belief speak of belief as a clear enough concept that needs little explanation other than a few examples (Nottelmann & Peels, 2013), but belief is a multifaceted concept that takes on many meanings with family resemblances, as will be shown in this chapter. In the introduction, I already mentioned over fifteen meanings or synonyms of "believing" that have been put forward by dictionaries. Alston's argument against a deontological conception of epistemic justification seems valid only if we agree with his narrowed-down idea of belief. His conclusion may apply to his notion of belief, but not necessarily to other uses of the notion of belief.

In this chapter, I want to look more closely at how "belief" is usually explained in the discussion about epistemic deontology or the ethics of belief. Most of the literature on epistemic deontology takes what I shall call "the standard idea of belief" as a cognitive attitude towards a proposition that is characterized by the feeling or by the disposition to feel that it is true (Cohen, 1992). This idea of belief, however, is limited and incomplete in many cases. In

this chapter, I shall discuss some of the problems with this standard idea of belief as well as some alternatives, such as the idea that a belief is a disposition to act. In what follows, I shall draw heavily on Hacker's (1998, 2004, 2013) critique of the standard idea of belief. In the next chapter, I shall propose another idea of belief that involves trust as the proper object of an ethics of belief.

2. Conceptual problems with the standard idea of belief

The standard idea of belief, the idea that a belief is a cognitive attitude towards a proposition that is characterized by the feeling or by the disposition to feel that it is true, is problematic on several accounts: first, from a conceptual point of view, and second, from a deontological point of view. Let me begin by discussing some conceptual problems with the standard idea of belief that have been put forward by Hacker (1998, 2004, 2013). In this section I will give a summary of some of his findings concerning belief and how they affect the standard idea of belief. In the next section, I will explore how this critique of the standard idea of belief impacts Alston's (1988) argument against a deontological conception of justified belief. In order to understand how we actually use the words "belief" and "believing" in the English language, Hacker gives an interesting Wittgensteinian analysis to show that it is not easy to capture the essence of believing in a straightforward definition and that the standard idea of belief, as well as some other popular ideas about belief, are misconceived or at least not complete.

We can believe sentences, propositions, declarations, persons, our senses, what is the case and why/when/how/where something is the case, etcetera. We can also believe *in* someone, ourselves, God, Santa Claus, monsters, and our country. All these beliefs are not the same thing with regard to just any other object. Many psychological verbs that appear in the form "A V-s that p", for example "believes", "thinks", "assumes", "fears", "hopes", "suspects", "expects", yield corresponding nominals: "belief", "thought", "assumption", "fear" "hope", "suspicion", and "expectation". This can lead to confusion.

These nominals are convenient grammatical constructs but they introduce no new entities and involve no fresh ontological commitments other than those involved in a person's believing, thinking, assuming, etc., that things are so. It leads to an ambiguity between *what one V-s* when one V-s that things are so and *what one has* when one V-s that things are so (Hacker, 2013, pp. 203-204).

"Belief" can refer to both believing and what is believed. This ambiguity must be borne in mind when we distinguish modes of believing from the modes of what is believed. Someone's believing, for example, can be characterized as fanatical, passionate, wholehearted, fervent, firm, hesitant, foolish, wise, reasonable or justified, whereas the belief itself can be characterized as, for example, true, possible, probable, or wrong. So, what can be justified, wise and reasonable is the believing, not the belief. What can be true or probable or untrue is the belief, not the believing. We use the word "belief", however, for both the believing and what is believed. A philosopher who accepts the standard idea of belief might still agree on this.

Hacker (2013) furthermore argues that "believing something to be so" is not the same as "believing that a proposition is true". What one believes when one believes that things are so, is precisely that things are so. What one believes when one believes that that something is true is a proposition, assertion, statement, declaration, allegation, or announcement to the fact that things are so. Much of our belief is first and foremost directed at what is so in reality, and only secondarily at what is true. What is so is what is the case. What is true is the statement or assertion that such and such is the case. Thus, there is a distinction between "A believes that p" and "A believes that it is true that p". The latter phrase could be better restated as "A" believes that "q", where q stands for "it is true that p" (Hacker, 2013, pp. 205-206). Hacker does not expound much on the difference but appeals to our intuition. Even though "A believes that p" and "A beliefs that it is true that p" seem to imply each other, the difference is that propositions are abstract entities that have meaning and can portray or represent reality, but are not reality itself. Beliefs can be directed at reality as well as statements or announcements about reality. The idea that

beliefs are best described as propositional attitudes, therefore, is wrong or incomplete, because it does not recognize this important distinction.

Most beliefs, from a phenomenological point of view, are not directed towards propositions, or only secondarily so, but rather towards reality, that such and such is the case. When John believes his wife is at home, he believes that his wife is at home and not that "the proposition 'my wife is at home' is true". However, when he is asked whether he believes (the proposition) that his wife is at home, he might answer, "yes, I believe that". It should be noted that this observation by Hacker (2013) seems to apply only to "A" believing that p and not to "A" believing *in* p (e.g., a person). The important thing here is that if "A" believes that p, it is not always a proposition that is believed, although p can usually also be phrased as a proposition. A belief, then, is not always a propositional attitude but more often an attitude towards reality even though beliefs, for analytical purposes, can be rendered into a propositional attitude.

The concept of belief is entwined with the concepts of certainty and doubt. Many beliefs are supported by reasons and these reasons may make our believing that something is so certain or less certain. Many philosophers have argued that believing comes in degrees, from being almost certain that something is the case to having a mere inclination to believe that something might be the case (Van Woudenberg & Peels, 2018). According to Hacker (2013), however, the fact that someone is not certain does not imply that one is uncertain. To say that one believes that things are so is, among other things, to imply that not all doubt can be rationally excluded, *even though someone has no doubt*. If one has doubts as to whether things are thus, then one does not believe them to be thus, although one may be inclined to believe, suspect, or guess that they are so or believe that things are probably so (p. 209). According to Hacker, belief does not come in degrees. On the other hand, our inclination to believe, our confidence or our willingness to give up a belief may come in degrees. When someone tells us she is convinced, confident, certain or hesitant about something we learn something about her willingness to give up on a belief but that does not mean that believing itself is a gradual thing.

In the standard idea of belief, feelings about truthfulness play an important role. Hume (1739) already introduced the idea that belief is a special feeling:

> When we are convinced of any matter of fact, we do nothing but conceive it, along with a certain feeling, different from what attends the mere *reveries* of the imagination. And when we express our incredulity concerning any matter of fact, we mean that the arguments for the fact produce not that feeling (p. 624).

However, as Hume himself admits on the same page, it is not easy to characterize this feeling. James (1890), struggling with the same problem, said that "belief, the sense of reality, feels like itself—that's about as much as we can say" and, "This attitude is a state of consciousness *sui generis*, about which nothing more can be said in the way of internal analysis." (pp. 283–287).

Others have struggled to characterize this feeling as well (Ramsay, 1921, p. 144; Russell, 1921, p. 233), but most philosophers on doxastic matters take it for granted that beliefs are feelings about a proposition without specifying that feeling other than that the proposition somehow feels true. According to Hacker (2013), believing that things are so is not the same as feeling they are so. He gives several reasons.

First, when we say "we feel something to be true" when we believe it, we conflate the believing itself with modes of believing, such as passionately, confidently, or hesitantly. One cannot *feel* that 2+2=4 or that if it is raining, then the pavements are wet, but we can feel convinced or confident. Belief is also in other ways connected to feeling. It is, for example, linked to hope, fear and expectation. To hope that p is not the same as to believe that p, but one cannot hope that p without believing that it is possible that p and that p is somehow good or desirable. Expectation, hope and fear that often accompany belief can be felt, but they are not the same. Belief is also linked with surprise, disappointment, and amazement when we discover that things we once believed

turn out not to be so. But again, these emotions are not the essence of belief itself (Hacker, 2004, pp. 3-4).

Second, when we ask "why do you believe that p?", we ask for reasons or grounds for believing, whereas when we ask "why do you feel that p?" we ask what features of a situation make you feel so.

Third, when one says he believes that p, he does not say it because he has noted a special indefinable feeling that he associates with the idea that p, but rather that one's grounds for saying that p do not establish that it is certain that p, or do not exclude reasonable doubt in the matter, or that the evidence he has for p is inconclusive.

Fourth, when we show interest in the beliefs of other people, we do not, as such, show an interest in their feelings.

Fifth, there are degrees of feeling. One can feel a little suspicious or very doubtful but, as Hacker has argued earlier, there are no degrees in belief. You cannot believe p more than you do, although you may be more certain that p. You cannot believe p just a little or very much, but you can be more or less inclined to believe that p. The feelings that accompany belief have to do with the strength or firmness with which one cleaves to the belief one has. It is the difficulty of shaking the belief in question, and not the belief itself, that has degrees.

Sixth, if beliefs are (credal) feelings associated with the idea that p, it would be altogether obscure why the evidence for it being the case that p should provide good reasons for believing that p. Such feelings can have causes but not grounds or reasons. If the feeling which one's believing is alleged to be is not a mere sensation but a doxastic feeling, such as feeling that things are so—feeling convinced, certain or sure that things are so—then such feelings seem uniformly to presuppose the concept of belief and cannot be invoked to explain it. Far from such feelings being indefinable, primitive, or unanalysable, they are all explicable partly in terms of believing (Hacker, 2013, pp. 218-221).

I conclude with Hacker that beliefs cannot altogether be reduced to credal feelings associated with a proposition. Admittedly, in much of our daily language, we use the word “belief” for our convictions, doubts, expectations and so forth, but the above-mentioned objections show that how we often use the word “belief” refers to a mode of believing that indeed involves feelings but also that “belief” cannot altogether and in all contexts be reduced to these feelings. Furthermore, beliefs are not always about propositions. This is true anyway when we believe in p rather than that p, but p can also be a state of affairs or a (moral) value.

There is another difficulty that needs our attention. It is the fact that our beliefs do not disappear when we stop reflecting on them. We have many beliefs about things we do not think about. Beliefs that are not occurrent, have been called dormant, dispositional, tacit, or implicit beliefs (Audi, 2008, p. 88: Audi, 2011, p. 11, p. 69; Peels, 2016, pp. 28-43). Dormant beliefs are beliefs that we have had in the past but that are not currently in our conscience, such as that the United Kingdom is a monarchy (although by reading this, it becomes occurrent again), and tacit beliefs are beliefs that we have never had occurrent or dormant, but that we would still profess to have based on other occurrent or dormant beliefs that we have. That China is bigger than Malta might be a tacit or implicit belief you have that you have never entertained before. These subconscious beliefs are usually explained as “dispositions” (Audi, 1994; Audi, 2015; Goldman, 1986; Schwitzgebel, 2002). But defining beliefs as dispositions, according to Hacker (2013), is also problematic.

Some philosophers, notably pragmatists (Bain, 1855; Peirce, 1905), have argued that beliefs are in effect dispositions to act. Others (Cohen, 1992) have argued that beliefs are dispositions to feel, in particular that something is true, regardless of whether one is willing to act, speak or reason accordingly. Others, still (Ramsey, 2010), have suggested that believing is a disposition to bet on the truth of the proposition or that believing is a disposition to behave as if it were true that things are so.

There are several reasons why beliefs may seem like dispositions. First, dispositions are not occurrent mental states but rather a tendency to be in a certain mental state which explains why beliefs can be tacit or dormant rather than occurrent. Secondly, dispositions show recurrent behaviour and behaviour is often explained by what one believes. Many philosophers have for these reasons described a belief as being in a dispositional state. The disposition to act is usually taken as very wide. If one believes, for example, that there is milk in the fridge, one has the disposition to answer "yes" when asked whether there is milk in the fridge, or to walk to and open the fridge when one needs milk for breakfast, or to place a bet on there being milk in the fridge if someone cares enough to propose a bet on it, or to deny when someone claims there is no more milk in the fridge, and so forth. Thus, the disposition to act would be in word and deed, active and reactive. Hacker (2013) gives several reasons why the idea that beliefs are dispositions does not hold. To see whether beliefs are dispositions, we must investigate more closely what dispositions are.

According to Hacker (2013), most philosophers fail to recognize what dispositions really are and take them simply to be tendencies. There is a distinction between the dispositions of humans and inanimate objects. Inanimate objects may have a disposition to break, e.g., very thin glass, or to dissolve, e.g., salt, yet never be broken or dissolved and some objects may have a disposition for only a few moments, e.g., for an ice-cream to melt. It would make no sense, however, to speak about a human with a disposition to be generous or kind, who would nevertheless never give or be kind, or who would be generous or kind for only a few minutes. One may be disposed, i.e., inclined, to go to the theatre tonight, but not have such a disposition. Dispositions are human traits. Although there are doxastic human traits, such as gullibility, credulity, or scepticism, it is not a disposition of character, personality, or temperament to believe something in particular (p. 223).

If dispositions are taken as a tendency or a proneness to act in a certain way, rather than a trait, then it is still hard to defend that beliefs are dispositions.

Hacker (2013) gives several reasons why beliefs are not dispositions or tendencies to act in a certain way. (1) Dispositions are characterized by what they are dispositions or tendencies to do, but beliefs are rather characterized by what is believed to be so. (2) Different people may share the same belief but not share the same disposition to do anything. (3) What people are inclined to do depends on their situation, their goals and purposes, and their character and personality. (4) If we want to explain why A does something, we refer to A's belief that things are so as a rationale or reason why he does it. However, if we try to explain why A does something by reference to his disposition or tendency to act in that way, we have only explained it out of habit, although it leaves the habit unexplained. Explaining why A does something because of a belief, then, is not the same as explaining why A does it because of some disposition or tendency. A disposition to do something cannot justify the act, but a belief can justify why someone does something. (5) To establish that someone believes something does not require observation of behavioural regularities. One may know that A believes that things are so without having any idea of what, if anything, he is prone to do. A person may believe that it will rain this afternoon. So, they may stay at home or they may go for a walk, with or without an umbrella. They may take in the deck chairs or not bring them in. They may tell someone it is likely to rain or they may not tell anyone. They may answer the question of whether it will rain truthfully or tell a lie. One specifies someone's disposition by saying what they have a disposition to do, but one cannot specify a belief by reference to what someone is going to do. One specifies a belief by saying what is believed. (6) One can believe something for a short while, and then realize shortly after that it was false, or forget it. It seems strange to have a tendency or disposition to do something for only a few moments, just like it is strange to have a trait or character for a few moments. "I believe that things are so, but they are not" is a kind of contradiction, but to say "I tend to, am inclined or prone to V as if things are so, but they are not" is strange but not a contradiction. And lastly, (7) if a person believes that things are so, then that person is either right or wrong, but an ascription of a tendency to a person does not involve any such commitment (pp. 221-226).

In summary, the standard idea of belief as a cognitive attitude towards a proposition that is characterized by the feeling that it is true or by the disposition to feel that it is true or by the disposition to act in a certain way is problematic because:

- Beliefs are more often attitudes towards reality than attitudes towards propositions.
- Beliefs are not to be reduced to feelings, although feelings can and often do accompany beliefs.
- Beliefs are not always to be explained as dispositions, either traits or tendencies, to feel or to act.

3. Deontological problems with the standard idea of belief

In addition to conceptual problems, there are also difficulties from a deontological perspective with the standard idea of belief. After all, we hold each other responsible for our beliefs in many conversations and debates. Apart from the fact that feelings are not under direct voluntary control, there are also other important problems related to the standard idea of belief. In the previous chapter, I briefly mentioned one of these, although it is hardly ever recognized as a serious problem for an epistemic deontology. However, I believe that it is. It is the fact that beliefs, taken as credal feelings towards a proposition, are shielded by privileged access. Only we know what we truly believe and feel, and although we can say, write or otherwise make known what we believe, that is no guarantee for someone else that we actually believe it.

We can pretend to believe something for all sorts of reasons. A person may live in a society with a state religion or ideology and fear the inquisition or secret police. Even in a seemingly free society, a person may want to avoid peer pressure or public criticism by pretending to believe what is considered mainstream or politically correct. It may even be simply part of a culture to not

contradict or question the beliefs of a superior or older person. People might then feign to agree with their superiors. Sometimes people will pretend to believe something to secure social acceptance, career opportunities or to continue pleasant family relationships. In short, there are many reasons why people pretend to believe something they do not. Such people may be blamed or praised for what they *assert* or *pretend* to believe, regardless of what they *actually* believe. Does an ethics of belief, then, apply to the asserting of beliefs or to the holding of beliefs? If it applies to the former, then it does not truly matter what we *really* believe as long as we assert the acceptable or the praiseworthy in a given social context. In that case, there is no real need for a proper ethics of belief because asserting a belief is an action. If it applies to the latter, then we must somehow deal with the problem of "doxastic hypocrisy", namely the phenomenon that we can (easily) assert what we do not really believe, or that we can keep our silence, giving the impression that we agree or believe something, when we in fact disagree.

When Jews and Moors were expelled from the Spanish empire in 1492 by the Catholic Monarchs, following the Edict of Expulsion, many Jews left the empire for Northern Europe where circumstances in many cases were only slightly better. Some stayed in Spain, however. Most "New Christians", as these "converted" Jews and Moors were called, seemed insincere in their beliefs although they had been baptized. They were left alone if they pretended to be Roman Catholic by performing Catholic duties. In an ethics of belief based on credal feelings, doxastic hypocrites tend to be held blameless or left alone for outward appearance only, regardless of what they truly believe. This case of doxastic hypocrisy, however, brings to the forefront some other problems as well. How does ethics of belief relate to modern ideas of freedom of religion or more generally to freedom of conscience? And who has the authority to set the standard for praiseworthy or blameless beliefs? Can the Crown? A parliament? A (among themselves disagreeing) scientific community? God? A hypothetical all-knowing person? And what are appropriate measures against someone that believes blameworthily? Just blame? Isolation? Prison? Expulsion? Death?

These are some of the questions that will be dealt with in Chapter 7. I treat these problems separately because they have to do with how an ethics of belief can be upheld, enforced, or maintained. For now, I want to make the point that these latter problems flow partly from reasoning with the standard idea of belief because inner feelings are private and it seems questionable that anyone can truly know of or have proper authority over my feelings but myself.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I concluded that the standard idea of belief, which has been both implicitly and explicitly very influential in the debate on the ethics of belief, does not provide a strong and accurate enough definition of belief to describe many instances of belief, or what we call belief in ordinary language, nor can it account for the fact that we hold each other responsible for our beliefs. I presented some conceptual problems with the standard idea of belief as a cognitive attitude towards a proposition that is characterized by the feeling or by the disposition to feel that it is true. Also, from a deontological point of view, it does not make sense that we hold each other responsible for what we believe if we apply the standard idea of belief in the analysis of this practice.

To explain how we can properly hold each other responsible for our beliefs, even though we have no direct doxastic voluntary control over our credal feelings, some philosophers have defended a form of doxastic compatibilism, or an ethics of action, rather than an ethics of belief proper, in terms of how we should influence, rather than control our beliefs in a responsible way. It now becomes my object to propose a more robust idea of belief that avoids the problems that have been pointed out in this chapter and that makes it possible to hold each other responsible for what we believe in a direct way, i.e., not only because of the actions we have taken to come to certain beliefs but because of beliefs we have chosen directly.

CHAPTER 6
BELIEF AS TRUST

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I shall argue that the sort of belief that is directly subject to an ethics of belief is a form of trust. Standard beliefs can also be subject to an ethics of belief but only by virtue of long-term indirect influence through actions we voluntarily take that influence our beliefs, so standard beliefs are indirectly subject to an ethics of belief. Belief as a form of trust has already been explored before, but not so much in the context of an ethics of belief (Booth, 2018). Belief as a form of trust avoids many of the problems of the standard idea of belief in a deontological context. Most importantly, trust can be subject to direct voluntary control. We can voluntarily *put* our trust in a source of truth or a possible truth even when we feel a certain level of doubt. In those cases, we can choose to believe someone or something. Because belief is a multifaceted concept, it is not my intent to do away with or replace the standard idea of belief but rather to add another perspective on belief that avoids Alston's (1988) argument for doxastic involuntarism and some other problems that will be discussed in this chapter. In exploring other meanings of belief, I shall try to demonstrate that there are conditions that allow for a more robust ethics of belief.

I will begin by outlining my perspective on belief as a form of trust. Trust, however, much like belief, is a multifaceted concept. As a result, I will show how belief as trust differs from other commonly held views on both trust and belief. I shall introduce the term epistemic faith-belief to clarify the specific

type of belief I think meets the criteria to be subject to ethics. I do not intend epistemic faith-belief to be a technical term that should be used in our daily conversation but rather a term that enables us to differentiate it from other forms of trust, faith, and belief that are frequently used. I shall demonstrate that when we hold people accountable for their beliefs, we usually blame or praise them for their epistemic faith-beliefs, less so for standard beliefs, although we commonly refer to both as beliefs.

After discussing some objections to my approach and giving some examples of deontic language to sustain my view, I will explain how an ethics of faith-belief is different from the "responsible belief" approach by Peels (2016) and the "belief-policies" approach by Helm (1994).

2. Belief as trust

As discussed in Chapter 4, the fallacy of equivocation is one of the main problems with the argument from doxastic involuntarism against an epistemic deontology. Clifford (1877) introduced this fallacy into the discussion of the ethics of belief at the very beginning. When he describes the owner of the ship called Providence as having doubts about the seaworthiness of his ship and being unhappy about the inconvenience and expense involved in overhauling his ship, he tells us that the shipowner was able to rationalize his doubts:

> *He would put his trust in Providence*, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy….
>
> What shall we say of him? Surely this, that he was verily guilty of the death of those men. It is admitted that *he did sincerely believe in the soundness of his ship*; but the sincerity of his conviction can in no wise

> help him, because he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him. He had acquired his belief not by honestly earning it in patient investigation, but by stifling his doubts. And although in the end he may have felt so sure about it that he could not think otherwise, yet inasmuch as he had knowingly and willingly worked himself into that frame of mind, he must be held responsible for it. [italics V. A.] (p. 98)

According to Clifford's narrative, the shipowner put his trust in Providence despite some doubts about the seaworthiness of the ship. His doubts did not immediately leave him, but after some time the shipowner succeeded in stifling his doubts. Ultimately, he came to be sincerely convinced that the ship was in good condition. Was the shipowner culpable for his belief that the ship was sound? Clifford says that he was and I agree. But if he was, I would ask, was it because of his *conviction* that it was sound or because of his *trust* that it was? Clifford argues for the former but I will argue for the latter. But before presenting my argument, let me give five more examples that are similar in some respects but different in others, that will help me make my point. To make it easier to refer to the several examples later on, I shall call Clifford's example *the shipowner*.

Second example, *the mountain climber*: A mountain climber has a lot of expensive climbing gear that he uses mostly in the summertime. As a true climbing expert, he trains and assists other climbers, mostly friends and family, and lends them his gear. The ropes, harnesses, carabiners, and much more have cost him a little fortune so he is very careful with his gear. Before he stores his climbing gear in the winter, he always checks it. Every summer he gets his gear down from the attic to prepare it for use again. He believes his gear is fine as he puts it in the car for the first climb in the new year, ready to drive to the Alps. While climbing in the Alps with his friends, he checks whether the harnesses are put on correctly and whether the climbers are appropriately secured, but he does not check his ropes again, because he believes they are fine. Tragically, in the Alps, one of his friends falls into a deep abyss and dies. The cause of the fall

was that one of the ropes on which his friend had been hanging broke. Upon investigation, it turned out that the rope had been damaged by gnawing mice. The climbing expert, unlike the shipowner, did not have to stifle any doubts to believe that the climbing gear, including his rope, was safe to use.

Third example, *the pilot*: A pilot regularly flies intercontinental flights from London to New York and back. Upon boarding, the pilot and their co-pilot believe that the plane is sound and has enough fuel. Before take-off, however, they go over the checklist to make sure everything is working properly and that the fuel tanks are full. After the checking procedure, they continue to believe that the plane is sound enough to fly. They take off with confidence. Nevertheless, the plane crashes in the ocean because of some mechanical defect that was not noticed by the ground crew or the pilots before take-off.

Fourth example, *the man at the roller coaster*: A man has worked in a theme park for more than 30 years. He is in charge of the biggest roller coaster in the park. Every morning before the theme park opens to the public, he runs checks on the machinery and emergency brakes to make sure the roller coaster is safe to use. Occasionally, however, the software of the computer system crashes so that it is impossible to run the safety test properly. It has only happened a couple of times in his career that the roller coaster was not safe after the check, but in those rare cases, the roller coaster was already making funny sounds. Because the check-up could not be completed, he did not believe it was safe to open up the attraction to the public, although he also believed that in reality there was nothing wrong with the machinery and emergency brakes of the roller coaster because there were no unusual noises and everything seemed to work properly.

Fifth example, *the man at the bridge*: A man walks through the mountains, and to his amazement, he sees a long suspension bridge, about 40 meters long, made of ropes and planks between two mountains. The rope is fraying and some planks are broken. In the wind, the bridge makes squeaky sounds. He does not believe the bridge is safe, so he does not cross it. Shortly after that,

several other people arrive at the suspension bridge and though they have some initial doubts, they decide the bridge is safe enough and they cross the bridge.

Sixth example*, the patient*: A patient is terminally ill and the doctors have run out of treatments. There is, however, a medicine being developed for the illness but it has not been tested sufficiently or approved yet. The medicine was tested successfully on only 19 percent of laboratory animals, but some animals became even worse because of the side effects. The patient does not really believe that the medicine is safe to use, but knowing it to be her last resort, she decides to take it anyway, because she believes it just might help. The patient dies shortly after using the unapproved medicine.

We now have six examples of beliefs, all having to do with safety, and some with fatal consequences. The question arises: Who was blameworthy for which belief? I argue that none of the six people in our examples was directly blameworthy for any of their convictions about the safety of the ship, the climbing gear, the aeroplane, the bridge, or whatever object at stake, but I would also argue that the shipowner and the mountain climber were culpable and blameworthy for placing their trust in their equipment.[14] The fact that the shipowner, after initial doubts, had to convince himself that the ship was sound, seems to me rather irrelevant with regard to the blameworthiness of his belief because, as the mountain climber case shows, even when the latter did not have to stifle any doubts, because he was sincerely and naturally convinced that the climbing rope was safe to use, they seem both culpable for what they believed, because of their negligence to check again shortly before use. With lives depending on it, the mountain climber could and should have double-checked his rope before the actual climb.

The pilot seems blameless to me for their belief that the plane was safe to fly, even though they were wrongly convinced that it was, but they did not put

14 Here it should be noted that some of these people could, arguably, be indirectly blameworthy for not influencing their standard beliefs the right way.

their trust in the airworthiness of the plane, even though they already believed that it was safe, until after doing all necessary check-ups that could be reasonably expected of them. The man at the roller coaster, I think, was also blameless for his belief because he did not *trust* that the roller coaster was safe to use even though he was *convinced* that it was. I do not think the man at the bridge was blameworthy in his belief that the bridge was not safe even though the bridge was safely crossed by other people soon after. Whether the patient was blameworthy for her belief that the experimental medicine might work and cure her I do not know, but the main point in all these examples is that there is an important distinction in what "believing" can mean, and entails. The distinction in all these examples is between what is "felt" to be true and what is practically taken to be true. The first has to do with conviction, or modes of believing, and the second with trust.

Although Clifford (1877) himself uses in his narrative both the formulation "putting his trust in Providence" and "being convinced that the Providence was safe to use", he only elaborates on the latter, putting all the blame of the shipowner on his unwarranted convictions, maybe because he supposed that trust follows naturally from conviction. And indeed, in most cases, we put our trust in what we are convinced to be the case and we withhold our trust in what we feel not to be the case. Nevertheless, the example of *the man at the roller coaster* shows that conviction and putting our trust in something do not necessarily coincide. Likewise, the example of *the patient* shows that having strong doubts about a medicine does not always prevent someone from putting their trust in that medicine. One can be convinced that p and yet not put their trust in p, and one cannot be convinced that p and yet put his or her trust in p. We see in all these examples a distinction between what is felt to be true in conviction and what is taken to be true in practice. In a scheme, it would look like this:

X believes that p	X is convinced that p	X is not convinced that p
X puts trust in p	The shipowner believes that the ship is safe (after stifling his doubts). The mountaineer believes the rope is safe. The pilot believes the aeroplane is safe.	The shipowner (dis)believes the ship is safe (initially). The patient (dis)believes the treatment is safe.
X does not put trust in p	The man at roller coaster (dis) believes the roller coaster is safe.	The man at bridge does not believe that the bridge is safe.

In the examples that I have presented, except Clifford's (1877) original example of the shipowner, I have only used the words "believe" and "belief" without making a clear distinction between "being convinced that p" and "feeling trust that p" or "putting trust in p", just to show that the meaning of belief as "trust" is quite natural and often enough interchangeable with "being convinced" while keeping the truth value of the sentence the same. For the ethical evaluation, however, it is very important to make the distinction clear between the different meanings of belief. Both the pilot and the shipowner were convinced that a vehicle was safe to use (when in fact it was not), yet the shipowner seems blameworthy and the pilot does not, not because of their convictions, but because the shipowner should not have put his trust in the safety of the ship, whereas the pilot seemed blameless when she put her trust in the safety of the aeroplane.

The big difference between the shipowner and the pilot is that the shipowner used his conviction that the ship was safe as a *reason* to have the ship set sail, whereas the pilot did not merely rely on her prior conviction that the plane was safe but ran a proper check to see if it was truly so. Likewise, the man at the roller coaster did not rely on his conviction that the roller coaster was safe to use but used other reasons to not open the attraction.

Beliefs, taken as credal feelings or convictions, are not praiseworthy or blameworthy in and of themselves in a direct way, but they can become praiseworthy or blameworthy when they are used as reasons to act. For example, when a chef believes, i.e., is convinced, that they did not yet put salt in the soup, there is nothing blameworthy or praiseworthy about that belief itself. They just happen to believe it. However, if they reliy on that belief and put more salt in the soup without tasting it first, when in fact it already has salt, then they could be blamed for believing it because they did not check first whether it had salt or not. It is their *relying on* or *trusting* their conviction that the soup did not already have salt that is blameworthy. When the soup is overly salty, they may excuse themself by simply saying, "I wrongly believed I did not yet put salt in the soup, so I ended up putting in salt twice". We might accept that excuse or say "Yes, but you should not have believed the soup did not have salt without tasting it first to be sure". It is not the credal feeling we care about, but the relying on or trusting in those feelings. Over the primary credal feeling "that she did not yet put salt in", the cook may have no control, but the cook could have chosen to not trust that feeling immediately and check first.

The examples become more interesting when more is at stake, for example when a doctor believes a patient has a relatively innocent stomach flu and wants to send the patient home with the advice to take mild painkillers and stay in bed, when in fact the appendix is about to burst or something even worse is going on inside the body; or when someone buys a lot of bitcoins because they believe the rates will go up, only to see them go down and lose a lot of money. In these cases, it is not so important what one sincerely feels to be true. Other people

may have believed that the rates for bitcoins would go up without buying them. What makes the beliefs blameworthy is what one ultimately trusts to be true in action or what beliefs are used as reasons to act.

Van Woudenberg (2009) has submitted that there are two ways in which beliefs lead to action. Motivating beliefs usually involve beliefs about values, but one also must have beliefs about how these values are to be obtained and thus about the state of affairs in the world and how our actions can change this state of affairs. Thus, Van Woudenberg makes a distinction between motivating and guiding beliefs. Although he argues that it seems apparent that we hold each other responsible for our (standard) beliefs in social practice, especially in education and the legal realm, I think the distinction is also, and even more appropriately applied to faith-beliefs. The motivation to take action with the hope and belief that I can accomplish something thus amounts to faith to act. But I have no motivation to act at all in the absence of the belief and hope that I can accomplish what I set out to do. Faith-belief thus seems to be synonymous with motivation to act based upon my beliefs about what I can do and my hope to do it. It is a practical stance in relation to action.

3. To feel trust in p and to put trust in p

By taking trust as an essential part of the kind of beliefs that are subject to an ethics, it might seem we have only substituted one multifaceted concept with another. After all, trust, like belief, is not easy to describe (Nickel, 2017; Simpson, 2012). Like belief, it can have many different meanings that often overlap, depending on the context in which it is used. Dictionaries describe "to trust" as 1) to have a firm belief in the integrity, ability, or character of a person or thing; 2) to have confidence in; 3) to rely (assuredly) on; 4) to have hope that; 5) to depend on; 6) to have a confident expectation that; 7) to accept that; 8) to believe that; 9) to have faith that, and several others.[15] From these definitions,

15 See for example: dictionary.cambridge.org, merriam-webster.com, thefreedictionary.com.

it seems that trust and belief in everyday language are synonymous in many cases. Most philosophers dealing with trust, however, are foremost concerned with trust in people in social settings. When we trust people, we rely on them to act or refrain from acting in a certain manner. We rely on someone or something to provide us with truth, to do something or to refrain from doing something. Some have investigated trust in oneself, in groups, in government, in experts, in science, or measurement instruments.[16] When we trust people, we can rely on them to do or not do something. However, we can also rely on someone without really trusting them. Some philosophers, for example Holton (1994), have therefore described trust as relying on someone in such a way that one feels betrayed if that trust is violated. We do not feel betrayed when we rely on someone that we do not trust. This sort of trust that involves the feeling of betrayal when it is violated, however, is not the sort of trust I have in mind when I suggest trust as a belief that is subject to voluntary control.

We can *put* our trust in something or someone, but we can also *have* or *feel* trust in someone or something. This kind of *felt* trust is a feeling that may have developed over time or that is simply instigated by the charisma, display of skill or expertise of a person, an earned certificate, or by a powerful testimony and is, like a conviction, not of our direct choosing. If we take trust to be those *feelings* of confidence in the integrity, ability, reliability, and character of a person or thing, it can be argued that the man at the roller coaster and the shipowner were both convinced and trusted that the roller coaster or ship, respectively, were safe to use. I agree if we take trust in that sense, but this is also not the kind of trust I have in mind for an ethics of belief. After all, despite his *feelings* of trust, which are somewhat similar to credal feelings, the man at the roller coaster did not *put* his trust in the reliability of the roller coaster. The man at the roller coaster trusted the roller coaster in one sense (to feel confidence in its reliability) but not another (to put trust in its reliability as a reason to act).

Some forms of trust can be dormant, like beliefs. We can say we trust our spouse after a long and good marriage, even though we are not always conscious

16 See for an overview of literature on these topics: SEP/trust.

of that trust. This form of dormant trust, however, is more like the *felt* trust that develops over an extended period, rather than our consciously *putting* our trust in someone or something. When we *have* trust we have feelings about the trustworthiness or reliability of a person, an institution, an object and so forth. We do not directly choose these feelings. When, for example, a second-hand car dealer assures me that a car, despite its shabby looks, is in an excellent state, I do not control my feelings about whether they are trustworthy or not and whether I feel they are speaking the truth, but I can still decide, despite any possible doubts, to *put* my trust in them. Likewise, the shipowner could and should have decided not to put his trust in the seaworthiness of *Providence*, despite his stifled beliefs that the ship was sound. In most cases, and naturally, we trust to be true what we feel to be true and we believe what we feel to be trustworthy. Because we almost invariably put our trust in persons or things that we feel to be trustworthy or true, the nuance between feeling p to be true and putting our trust in p to be true is easily lost on us. At least it was lost on Clifford (1877). The kind of belief that is subject to voluntary control, then, is not the trust we *feel* towards a person, a thing, a theory, a fact, or an outcome but rather the trust we *put* in a person, a thing, a theory, a fact, or an outcome, over and over again.

So far, I have introduced an element of voluntary trust in the sort of beliefs that can be subject to a more robust ethics of belief. Beliefs that involve trust have been called faith-beliefs by Bishop (2007) and I think it is a good name for the sort of beliefs I have in mind in a deontological context. Although “faith” has been particularly and extensively studied in religious contexts, it has a much wider application.

Some languages have a different noun for belief that involves a form of trust (e.g., English: *faith*; Spanish: *fe*; French: *foi*), while other languages do not (e.g., Dutch: *geloof*; German: *Glaube*). On the other hand, some languages have different verbs for knowing (e.g., Dutch: *weten/kennen*; Spanish: *conocer/saber*) while the English language has only one. In any discussion on

epistemology, it is important to keep these differences of language in mind, because we might get caught up in the limitations or possibilities of a particular language to express a certain meaning. For example, it may be obvious in some contexts to an English or Spanish speaker that the nouns “faith” or “fe” do not have the exact same meaning as the nouns “belief” or “creencia”, but not so to the Dutch or German speakers who use respectively the same word for both meanings. But this confusion can just as well arise for the English speaker because there is no proper verb for faith, other than “to have faith”. In many contexts, such as religious contexts, “to have faith” is usually simply rendered as “to believe”. To German or Dutch people, the perceived difference between “faith” and “belief” is no more than a nuance of the same word. Likewise, the difference between *weten* and *kennen* in Dutch or between *saber* and *conocer* in Spanish can be lost in the English translation and likewise appear to the English speaker as a mere nuance of the same word. I mention this because I am well aware that “faith-belief” is not really translatable into some languages. By using the word “faith-belief” I do not intend to introduce a new technical term that we should use but rather to explain under what conditions the words “believe” or “belief” can be voluntary and subject to an ethics.

4. Epistemic faith-beliefs

Besides being able to put trust in someone or something, regardless of our credal and trusting feelings, there are, I think, two more important features that distinguish faith-beliefs from other sorts of belief and trust. These two features involve truth and action. But before I elaborate on these additional features, let me define the beliefs I have in mind as the proper objects of an ethics of belief:

> **Epistemic faith-belief** is a belief we exercise (rather than have) when we put enough trust in a possible truth or source of possible truth (factual, moral, or valuing) to act upon it.

Let me add a few short additional comments to clarify the above definition of faith-belief. (1) I have added "epistemic" to "faith-belief" to differentiate it from the sort of faith we can have in our national team during the World Cup or in our daughter who doubts whether she will pass her exam. Some faith is more like a kind of loyalty, allegiance, or hope, but this is not what I have in mind. Epistemic faith-beliefs have to do with taking something to be the case or true rather than that something or someone will hopefully succeed or act in a certain manner. (2) Epistemic faith-belief is a subset of both trust, belief and faith because not all forms of trust, belief, or faith are voluntary, relate to truth, or lead to action. (3) A possible truth or source of possible truth, the object of a faith-belief, is very generic and can be a person, an institution, a memory, a sensical perception, God, an intuition, a proposition, a book, a website, an inference, a value, a moral theory, a testimony, an outcome, etc. (4) By including trust in *moral truths*, I commit to moral realism. I shall talk more about this in the next chapter. Generally, beliefs about moral truths and beliefs about values are beliefs about what is good, praiseworthy or desirable. (5) Epistemic faith-beliefs are usually in line with our feel-to-be-true-beliefs; that is, we usually *trust* or *take* to be true in our practical reasoning what we *feel* to be true in our theoretical reasoning. This is what Clifford (1877) took for granted when he judged the shipowner for his stifled beliefs. However, what we put our trust in, or in other words what we use as a reason to act, does not have to be the same as what we feel to be true.

Sometimes there is a dissonance between what we feel to be the case and/or desirable and what we trust to be the case and/or desirable. It is in particular in those instances, I submit, that we experience that we choose to believe, as in the case when we might put our trust in the testimony of an unscrupulous second-hand car dealer even though we feel we might be scammed. So, importantly, faith-belief can be accompanied by feelings of doubt.

Faith, like belief and trust, is a multifaceted concept. It can mean many different things in different contexts. Audi (2011) distinguishes seven meanings

of faith in a (mostly) religious context: propositional faith, attitudinal faith, credal faith, global faith, doxastic faith, acceptant faith, and allegiant faith. Some of these proposed meanings overlap earlier concepts of belief and trust that I have already evaluated and dismissed as proper objects of an ethics of belief. None of Audi's definitions of faith, however, coincides completely with my idea of an epistemic faith-belief because they all lack the pragmatic dimension. At best they generate a disposition to act in a certain way, but faith-beliefs are not dispositions.

Howard-Snyder (2013) argues that when S has propositional faith that p, then (1) S cares that p, (2) S is motivated to act on p, (3) S is disappointed if p appears untrue and (4) S is resilient to counterevidence that p. Faith, he argues, is different from belief because if you have faith that p, you are for the truth that p, but when you believe that p, you do not have to be for or against the truth of p. Furthermore, one can come to disbelieve that p without disappointment, but one cannot lose faith that p without disappointment. The only way that faith and belief are related is that faith that p is not compatible with disbelief that p. These considerations seem true for religious faith, interpreted as an allegiance or commitment to a perceived or desired truth, compared to the standard idea of belief. It is not all clear to me what he means for S to be motivated to act on p. I presume he means that to have faith that p generates a disposition to act on p. Epistemic faith-belief, as I defend it, is different from this kind of religious faith, although faith-belief of course can be religious. The main difference is that faith-belief necessarily results in action and is not a mere disposition to act in a certain way. It is *when* we act that we faith-believe things to be so. For example, when I turn on the radio, I believe that there will be sound.

Epistemic faith-belief, then, is not the same as propositional faith. Epistemic faith-beliefs have three important features that are necessary for a robust ethics of belief. 1) faith-beliefs are subject to *direct voluntary control*, 2) faith-beliefs have *a possible truth or source of possible truth* as their object and 3) faith-beliefs, unlike many credal beliefs, always have *a pragmatic dimension*, that is,

they are not merely mental states, feelings, or dispositions to act but they function as reasons to act in real time. We faith-believe when we put trust in an anticipated outcome that prompts any behaviour, based on what we take to be true or possibly true and valuable or moral about reality. I will elaborate on these three features of faith-belief in the next two sections.

5. Faith-belief and voluntary control

In the first half of this dissertation, I have spent several chapters discussing the problem of doxastic voluntary control. I take voluntary control to be a necessary condition for any ethics, even though it has been presented frequently as a serious problem in the doxastic realm. I have argued in Chapter 5 that the problem with doxastic voluntary control is not that we simply do not have it, but that it is not exercised by choosing random beliefs (credal feelings) in isolation in the same way we can choose to perform random bodily motions. I argued that we can exercise doxastic voluntary control by lowering our convictions by simply raising the sceptical bar. But we should now nuance this formulation by arguing that it is not necessarily our credal feelings themselves that we lower, but our *trust* in those feelings.

René Descartes (1641) probably never seriously doubted that he had hands when he actually needed them, but he chose temporarily not to trust that he had hands in his theoretical reasoning throughout his thought experiment because he argued that he could be deceived by his senses. Maybe, and if so, luckily for him, he finished his thought experiment before he had to walk to the toilet, but if not, he likely cheated on his “doubt”. If he walked to the toilet to empty his bladder, he must have faith-believed that he had hands and legs and a full bladder and that there was a toilet nearby, notwithstanding that he claimed to dismiss the belief entirely that he had a body and that there was an external world in his theoretical reasoning. In walking to the toilet, he did not dismiss some of his beliefs in his practical reasoning. We may not be able to choose our credal feelings in a straightforward way but we do have voluntary control over

what or whom we put trust in and what we use as reasons to act, including our own feelings.

Beliefs, according to the standard idea, are passive because in most cases we seem simply at the mercy of the evidence we encounter. Nevertheless, when we have contradictory or opposing evidence, we may either avoid taking a stance on the matter (suspend judgment) or choose which bit of evidence or which source of evidence we trust most. We frequently, but not always, trust what seems most likely true or convincing to us. However, people who buy a lottery ticket are typically not convinced or think it is likely that they will win but rather hope to win. They nevertheless put enough trust in that small chance to win in order to buy a lottery ticket anyway. We cannot choose the effect of evidence on our credal feelings once we accept it as evidence, but we can choose, at least to some extent, which evidence we allow or to what extent we give weight to certain evidence in our practical reasoning by putting or not putting trust in the evidence available to us.

A strict empiricist will profess to only allow for evidence from our senses dismissing or doubting all other evidence. A rationalist will profess to only allow axioms and the logical consequences of them. Some people put trust in dreams, horoscopes, intuitions, spiritual experiences, feelings, memories, testimonies, scientists, prophets, experts, and so forth, while others may dismiss or doubt some or all of these. It's not necessarily that they do not have the same evidence available but that they do not count it all equally as evidence. In that respect we are not simply at the mercy of the evidence available to us. That, I submit, explains at least partly why people who consider each other epistemic peers and are exposed to the same evidence can still disagree. They simply weigh the same evidence differently, which is to say that that they do not put the same amount of trust in the same evidence. In that respect, the disagreement can be explained by their use of doxastic voluntary control, but not by choosing to feel a proposition is true.

While Alston (1988) argues that we cannot doubt that there is a tree in front of us in plain daylight, that does not keep Descartes (1641) from, at least temporarily, not putting his trust in his senses. To illustrate the fact that we can choose to trust (the weight of) evidence in our practical reasoning, consider the following example:

> A friend invites me to taste a very strange looking dish, and tries to convince me that it actually tastes very good, even though the looks of it do not stir my appetite. Should I believe the friend or not? At this point, when asked, I would answer that I do not believe that the dish tastes nice at all. I have evidence against it because the dish looks rather weird and exotic, and I cannot make much of the smell, but at the same time I have testimonial evidence that it in fact tastes really good. It seems I can choose to exercise some kind of belief or trust in the friend's testimony rather than my first impression, at least enough to experiment upon her word to try for myself but I can also exclusively trust my visual perception and personal expectations when I see this strange dish with unknown ingredients. If I refuse to taste it, I will never know the taste for myself and will continue to believe it has a bad taste, because of the way it looks. If I taste it, I may be disappointed, neutral or delighted. Once I taste it, I will know what it really tastes like and then I cannot choose whether I believe I like it or not. I choose, somewhat hesitantly and full of doubt, to accept the friend's testimony and have a good bite of the dish. The dish is delicious! My friend was right. It definitely tastes a lot better than it looks. I can no longer believe it has a bad taste. If I had not believed my friend, however, I would not have tasted it and I would probably never have known how nice the dish was.

This example is worth studying in more detail. I suppose an "Alstonian" or "Peels-like" interpretation of the example would be that I cannot help my initial belief that the dish tastes bad because I cannot directly choose to not be repelled by the looks of it, nor can I later, after tasting it, continue to believe the dish

tastes horrible or choose to disbelieve that the dish in fact tastes very nice. There is simply no choice involved in these beliefs that are generated by my senses. I can, however, choose to *indirectly influence* my belief by choosing to act by tasting it, only to end up with a new belief that I did not choose, namely that the dish actually tastes very nice. I did not really *believe* my friend when she said that the dish tastes nice but I nevertheless *accepted* the challenge "to act as if" or use the proposition "the dish tastes nice" as "a working hypothesis" in my practical reasoning. "To act as if" the dish tastes nice is admittedly a voluntary act, but not a proper belief. So, I can only be responsible for how I act and thus for how my beliefs are influenced, but I cannot choose the outcome of my beliefs nor be responsible for the contents of my beliefs in a direct way.

This kind of reasoning, however, seems incomplete to me. The fact that I continue to have serious doubts about the taste of the dish, regardless of my friend's testimony, does not simply mean that I did not believe my friend. That may be true for my overall credal feelings or convictions about the taste of the dish, but this interpretation does not fully do justice to my reaction to the testimony of my friend. Did I believe the testimony of my friend or did I not? And if so, did I have a choice in this? In the Alstonian sense, I did not believe (the testimony of) my friend because I was still *convinced* that the dish did not taste nice, despite my friend's testimony, up until the point that I tasted it for myself. On the other hand, the testimony of my friend instigated me to try the dish, so in another sense I did believe her, at least enough to decide to act and try for myself. I put my trust in my friend's testimony despite my doubts. After all, I definitely would not have tasted it without their testimony. I could have rejected the friend's testimony altogether and not bothered tasting it (as many children do when they think they dislike a particular food). It seems to me that this trust was voluntary because I could have altogether rejected the testimony of my friend, but I did not.

What are we to make of this kind of belief or trust in the testimony of our friend? Belief can be both a finished and a half-finished product. By belief as a

finished product, I mean that it is the *result* of what we take as the evidence available to us. It is the kind of belief that Alston (1988), Peels (2016), and many others have in mind when they say we can only influence our beliefs by exposing ourselves to the right kind of evidence or by engaging in reasoning, but we cannot choose directly. Examples of finished beliefs are that I have a father and a mother, that the USA is a state independent of Great Britain, that 5+5=10, or that Paris is the capital of France. By belief as a finished product, I do not mean that it cannot change or that it is never again under consideration for re-evaluation, but rather that it is the result of our evidence. Although we can influence what we come to believe through our actions, those beliefs are passive and static in that we receive them or encounter them willy-nilly.

By belief as a half-finished or unfinished product, I mean the kind of commitment or trust that we give to evidence or a source of evidence that is presented to us in our practical reasoning. We faith-believe that something will be or will turn out to be the case or true. Examples of unfinished beliefs are that there is life after death, that God exists, that I will be able to do a test well if I prepare myself, that my car is safe to drive after a yearly MOT test, or that things will get better if this or that political leader comes to power. As said earlier, convictions and faith-beliefs in many cases coincide. We easily trust to be the case what we are convinced to be the case. One can both feel that it is true that there is life after death and trust that there is life after death. Standard beliefs or convictions, however, are the result of evaluating the evidence we take, while when we faith-believe, we put trust in evidence that is not decisive and put it to the test, as it were, to see how it will turn out. In that sense, faith-beliefs are unfinished and dynamic.

Bishop (2002) has described this kind of faith or belief in a religious context as a “doxastic or fiducial venture”. We trust in or commit to a piece of evidence that is not decisive, to see where it will take us. Inductive reasoning is exactly that: When we act, we trust or faith-believe to be true in the future what we believe or even know to be true in the past. Thus, faith-belief, in most cases, is

not blind but is often supported or reassured by what we already know, by earlier experiences, or by what we deem as reliable testimony, and so forth.

We faith-believe most of the time with the confidence of a standard belief. In many cases, whenever we use standard beliefs to act, finished and unfinished beliefs overlap each other so that it is not obvious that they can be phenomenologically differentiated. For example, when we go home after work, we may both faith-believe and "standard-believe" that we will find our house and family in good order or we both faith-believe and "standard-believe" that we can open the lock when we use a particular key for a particular door. Sometimes, however, we may faith-believe with hesitance or with no conviction at all. For example, when we buy something new on the internet after reading some positive and negative reviews but do not know yet if it will meet our expectations. Faith-belief may result in feelings of trust or conviction after validation or in disbelief after disappointment. Felt trust and felt conviction, however, never fully replace but rather accompany faith-belief when we use these felt beliefs as reasons to act.

6. Epistemic faith-beliefs and action

Alston (1988) dismissed "acting as if p is true" and "accepting p as a working hypothesis" as improper cases of belief (pp. 267-270). After all, we can act as if Santa brought presents through a chimney but not really believe it, or we can play devil's advocate in a debate only to arrive at an absurd conclusion to prove the opposite point we believed all along. Alston is certainly right that pretending or faking that something is true is not the same as believing that it is true. However, this argument does not establish the standard idea of belief as the only acceptable one, and neither does it entail that action has little or nothing to do with believing. That may be true for instances of the standard idea of belief because convictions may, but need not, lead to action, but it is not true for some other takes on belief.

According to pragmatist philosophers, we cannot appreciate the nature of belief without considering its practical implications. Scottish philosopher Bain (1855) defined belief as "that upon which a man is prepared to act" and declared that "belief has no meaning except in reference to actions". This account of belief heavily influenced the American pragmatists. Peirce (1931) even suggested at one point that pragmatism was "scarce more than a corollary" of it (p.12). *Prima facie* this pragmatist account of belief is very similar to my idea of epistemic faith-belief but there are some important differences.

In one important respect faith-belief indeed overlaps the pragmatic notion of belief. They both involve a preparedness to act, but the concepts are not the same. Faith-beliefs are always real-time and used or made manifest in the very act for which they are used as reasons. Pragmatist philosophers, however, also include feel-beliefs, convictions, and dormant beliefs as beliefs upon which one must be willing to act (Engel, 2005; James, 1896: Zimmerman, 2018). Pragmatist philosophers want to incorporate the standard idea of belief into their pragmatist idea of belief. In order to do so, they refer to beliefs as habits of the mind (Peirce, 1905) or dispositions to act (Capps & Capps, 2004), but I have already argued against the idea that beliefs must be understood as tendencies or dispositions to act.

Pragmatists, as well as other philosophers who, for example, defend the standard idea of belief, tend to fall prey to the proclivity of philosophers to try to describe the essence of "believing" at the expense of other possible meanings. With a particular important feature in mind (e.g., what one feels to be true or that upon one is willing to act), they subsequently try to reduce other meanings of "believing" to that supposed essence. If it appears impossible in some cases to reduce the meaning to that essence, they would rather dismiss these cases as something else than belief. My idea of belief as epistemic faith-belief does not give the essence of belief nor does it replace or rebut all other takes on belief altogether. Rather, I try to explain and specify under what meaning believing can be subject to an ethics of belief.

There is no such thing as suspension of belief when it comes to faith-belief. If we have no clear credal feelings about the truth of p, we may remain "neutral" with regard to the truth of p in our theoretical reasoning, but we can never be neutral in our practical reasoning. We may be full of doubt when we act but we always commit to a (possible) truth when we act. It is *in the act* of tasting a horrible-looking dish that I put trust in my friend's testimony. It is in the act of taking the left turn that I faith-believe I will reach my destiny. It is in the act of flipping the light switch that I faith-believe the light will go on. It is in the act of drinking water that I faith-believe that my thirst will be quenched. It is in the act of getting out my bank card that I faith-believe that I can pay, and so forth. True, we may trust and believe these things to be so or true without acting upon them but then it is felt trust and felt belief, not faith-belief. When it comes to faith-belief, you either jump or you do not. Or as the apostle James said: Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:17).

This is where radical scepticism goes wrong. It seems that radical sceptics have taken up the belief policy to doubt or to suspend belief wherever possible, but this does not and cannot apply to their faith-beliefs. Again, there is no such thing as suspension of faith-belief. Even supposed radical sceptics must act in order to survive and in their actions, like eating and drinking and stopping for a fast-moving car, they simply demonstrate what they faith-believe or trust to be the case. Notwithstanding our professed or real doubts, we are all, in the end, backed up to the wall of faith-belief and must choose to act. We always have reasons to act one way or another, but in order to have reasons we must faith-believe things to be so, true or worthwhile.

7. Deontic language and faith-belief

One could ask the question: How is faith-belief different from assumptions in practical reasoning? After all, we can assume p to be true and act upon it, but not believe it. Is the kind of belief I defend as the object of the ethics of belief not rather an ethics of assumptions in practical reasoning? The problem with

this question is that it presupposes that the standard idea of belief is always the default interpretation that must be used consistently whenever we talk about belief while we could and should use other words for other interpretations of belief, such as assumption, commitment, or trust. But although we often use the standard idea of belief, especially philosophers in epistemology, that is not how it is used in much of our conversation, especially in a deontological context. We might as well ask the question of how "belief", as used by other philosophers, is any different from "conviction" and demand that they use that word when they talk about belief while "belief" should be reserved for contexts where we mean trust. The words "belief" and "believing", can have both these meanings, as well as other meanings depending on the context. To understand why we use deontic language in matters of belief, even if we cannot choose specific beliefs, it can be helpful to look at how it is being used, rather than stipulate it. To illustrate, let me give just a few examples of deontic language about beliefs:

(1) "You shouldn't have believed that you locked the door without checking."
(2) "You must believe me when I say I am innocent."
(3) "Don't believe her. She's trying to scam you."

If we interpret these sayings only in light of the standard idea of belief, something very important gets lost in what is being said. All these sayings make a lot more sense when we take faith-belief as the primary meaning of belief in these contexts. It seems in (1) that someone left a door unlocked that should have been locked. The untrue conviction that the door was locked is not accepted as an excuse for the negligence to leave the door unlocked because one should not have put trust in these credal feelings without checking first. If there had been a robbery, one would not care as much about what someone felt to be true as about what someone trusted to be true when leaving the house. The real issue here is that someone left the door unlocked, not so much that someone was convinced that the door was locked. In (2) the accused may be seeming to urge

his friend to be convinced of his innocence, but it is more likely that despite appearances, he begs his friend to trust him to be innocent, notwithstanding appearances and possible doubts, and to treat him as if he is innocent and still his friend. Example (2) is primarily a call on his friend to act upon trust rather than to have certain credal feelings or an instant conviction. In (3) someone is being warned to not to put trust in a person who might take advantage of that trust, rather than to simply dismiss a wrong conviction.

In these and many more deontological epistemic contexts, only the interpretation of faith-belief makes sense or it makes more sense than when we interpret belief as the standard idea of belief. These examples show why Alston's (1988) conclusion is so disturbing because, despite his argument against it, we use deontic language quite often when we talk about beliefs.

8. Responsible belief and faith-belief

In this section I want to explain some of the differences between "an ethics of faith-belief" that I defend and the "responsible belief" approach as put forward by Peels (2016). After accepting that beliefs are inner convictions that a proposition is true and that they are not under direct voluntary control, Peels has tried to do justice to our moral and epistemic intuitions when we encounter people with horrible or dubious beliefs. He is not so much interested in what we come to believe per se, but rather in how we come to believe it. Blameworthy belief and responsible belief, then, cannot be understood in terms of failure or success in living up to obligations to be convinced of certain things. Peels defends the idea that doxastic responsibility is to be understood in terms of our capacity and corresponding intellectual obligations to influence our beliefs through voluntary control over doxastic mechanisms, such as taking note of evidence that is or could be available to us, and intellectual virtues such as rigor, open-mindedness, and curiosity.

When applied to some of the earlier mentioned examples, it means that the shipowner violated his intellectual obligations because he did not care sufficiently to find out whether the ship in fact was seaworthy, nor did he expose himself to physical or reliable testimonial evidence to substantiate his belief but rather stifled his initial belief until he convinced himself of the desired belief that the ship was sound, regardless of whether it was true or not. The shipowner, therefore, held a blameworthy belief. The pilot, on the other hand, did comply with all epistemic duties by checking all relevant indicators in the cockpit together with the co-pilot. The pilot, therefore, believed responsibly or at least blamelessly that the plane was safe to fly, even though it was a wrong belief.

So far, so good. But how about *the man at the roller coaster*? Was the employee praiseworthy or blameworthy in his belief that the roller coaster was safe to use? I would argue that he held a responsible belief qua conviction that it was safe to use but that he would be blameworthy if he had faith-believed or trusted that it was safe. The man at the roller coaster had done everything that was reasonable and within his power to do, to find out whether the roller coaster was safe to use and it led him to the belief that it was safe. One might argue that he was not justified in believing (being convinced) that it was safe because there was no recent successful test to confirm that it was. Instead, he should suspend his belief that it was safe. However, this reasoning does not take into account that he already had much inductive evidence that the roller coaster was fine despite the fact that the safety test could not be completed. After all, the roller coaster made no funny noises, nor was there any other indication that it was not safe, and in the past in more than 99.7 percent of the cases in which the roller coaster was again tested after an annoying computer crash, it turned out to be fine. I do not think anyone would blame him for his conviction, based on more than 30 years of experience, that the roller coaster was safe to use and nobody would normally urge him to suspend his belief. After all, 99,7 percent is good inductive evidence. However, not his conviction but his trust is at stake here.

A defender of the standard idea of belief might argue that it is not true that the man at the roller coaster held a praiseworthy or blameless belief when he was convinced that it was safe. The context might determine the threshold of what counts as a responsible or irresponsible belief. Although 99,7 percent statistical evidence might be impressive in many other contexts, given the responsibility of the man it was not enough because lives and great liability depended upon it. A contextualistic approach to responsible belief, however, does not really help us to settle the matter with the standard idea of belief. If responsible belief must be understood in terms of properly using our capacity and corresponding intellectual obligations to influence our beliefs through voluntary control, then what could the man at the roller coaster have done more or otherwise to come to a responsible conviction with regard to the safety of the roller coaster? I would argue: Nothing. He did what he could do and should have done, namely try to run a test every day and take into account his 30 years long experience. He used his voluntary control in such a way as to best influence his beliefs and given that he could not help his conviction, as anti-doxastic-voluntarists are eager to point out. And yet, if he had opened the attraction because he believed it was safe and there had been an accident, he would be blamed for what seems to me to be a blameworthy "responsible belief". That is: blameworthy qua trust, but responsible qua conviction.

The "responsible belief" approach by Peels (2016), then, gives us two answers to the question about whether it was responsible or praiseworthy for the employee to believe that the roller coaster was safe to use. Qua *conviction* it was a responsible belief that it was safe on impressive inductive grounds, but qua *trust* or *faith-belief* it would be irresponsible to believe it was safe after a failure to run a successful test. If the employee had used his strong *conviction* as a reason to open the roller coaster and there had been an accident, I suspect many would argue, albeit with hindsight, that he held an irresponsible belief that the roller coaster was safe, because there had been no recent successful test. This is in effect what Clifford (1877) does when he blames the shipowner and anyone else who believes something on insufficient grounds. But what may

be sufficient evidence for simply being convinced that p, may not be sufficient evidence for faith-believing that p, if stakes are high. The man at the roller coaster is an example of this. On the other hand, in some cases there may be enough evidence to trust that p while there is not sufficient evidence to be convinced that p. The terminally ill patient taking an unapproved medicine is an example of this as well as my trusting the testimony of a friend who says a dish tastes nice while looks attests to the contrary, or any person who buys a lottery ticket.

Maybe the most important difference between "the responsible belief" approach and the "ethics of faith-belief" approach is the difference in focus. After all, actions may lead to beliefs but beliefs may also lead to actions. In explaining how we can be responsible for our beliefs, Peels focuses on how actions may influence our beliefs and that we must therefore be careful and responsible in how we acquire our beliefs through our actions, while we cannot choose our beliefs in a direct way. On the other hand, I focus on how our beliefs prompt actions and that we should therefore be careful and responsible for what we take to be true and desirable in our practical reasoning. The two approaches are in that respect complementary and can co-exist, but only if we allow for different conceptions of belief. Although Peels explains how we can be responsible for our (standard) beliefs, the ethics he defends is in the last resort an ethics of actions or behaviour resulting in acceptable or responsible beliefs. The approach I defend is an ethics of belief proper (with direct doxastic voluntary control) resulting in acceptable or responsible actions.

9. Faith-belief and belief policies

As I pointed out in Chapter 4, Helm (1994) argued that doxastic voluntary control is best exemplified in choosing our belief policies: we can intentionally choose the principles, strategies, projects, or programmes for accepting, rejecting, or suspending judgment as to the truth of propositions in accordance with a set of evidential norms. We use belief policies as a hierarchy for weighing

the evidence available to us or of the sort of evidence we seek. Examples of belief policies are: Believe your senses above all; doubt the testimony of a politician, especially when they belong to a party you do not vote for; readily believe the testimony of a scientist, unless it is contradicted by another scientist; believe what you see, unless it contradicts mainstream scientific explanation; do not believe in miracles, and so forth. Belief policies are not propositions we feel to be true, so they are not beliefs in the standard form, but rather *patterns* of what we trust to be true. A lot of these patterns are used unconsciously and are unquestioned until existing belief policies render contradictory outcomes, for example when a long-trusted friend is accused of something you find hard to believe although there are several testimonies to attest that they are guilty. When the friend says, “You must believe that I am innocent”, he is not asking you to feel some way or other but to trust them on their word.

Belief policies, as defended by Helm (1994), overlap with the idea of faith-beliefs. Both have to do with choosing to trust and prioritizing the evidence available to us and are in principle under direct voluntary control. There are some differences too. Where faith-beliefs are unique and can be different for every situation, belief policies are rather patterns of faith-beliefs that may render standard beliefs. However, a pattern can always be broken or allow for exceptions. Although I may have accepted a belief policy to not trust/believe homeless drug addicts when they say they need money for food, I can still make an exception and put trust in the request of a particular stranger. Another difference is that belief policies can apply to both faith-beliefs and standard beliefs. Belief policies can render standard beliefs that do not lead to action, whereas faith-beliefs always do.

Once we have chosen to trust a source of truth and have not felt deceived afterwards but rather were validated in our trust, the trust gradually becomes a *felt* trust rather than a conscious *putting* our trust in something or someone. That does not mean that we altogether stop putting trust in something or someone, but rather that it does no longer require a repeated conscious decision

of the person. Belief policies, then, rely for a great part on felt trust in sources of possible truth, and no longer feel like choices anymore as they did when we adopted such a policy. Evidence from tested and thus trusted sources is readily accepted without questioning until a particular source lets us down, for example, when we realize that we are or have been or could be hallucinating, when our memory collides with someone else's, when we discover we are lied to, etc. In those instances, we can choose to either revise a whole belief policy or just to change a single faith-belief.

It should not come as a surprise to us that most faith-beliefs are exercised quite automatically without feeling the experience of choosing them. After all, that is also the case for most actions we do voluntarily. We do not consciously choose to take the next footstep even though we walk voluntarily. We choose to go somewhere and the footsteps follow naturally. Putting trust in p, especially when it is accompanied with felt trust in p and the conviction that p, comes quite naturally. But that does not mean one cannot stop putting trust in p like one can stop walking.

10. Conclusion

The term "belief", as we use it in natural language, has multiple meanings. Belief is a rich, complex, and multifaceted matter that denotes various phenomenologically distinct states or attitudes. An ethics of belief is for that reason also difficult and complicated. That is where a lot of the debate on the ethics of belief goes wrong. The standard idea of belief is oftentimes presented with a few compelling examples and from there it is argued that we cannot choose to believe and that therefore an ethics of belief based on direct voluntary doxastic control is flawed and that an ethics of belief is incoherent or can only be maintained under compatibilistic terms or by merely influencing our beliefs rather than controlling them. The problem is not just that we seem to lack doxastic voluntary control over credal feelings, but also that those beliefs or

convictions are ultimately private and can easily be faked or pretended in order to escape judgement (doxastic hypocrisy).

I proposed epistemic faith-beliefs as the proper object of an ethics of belief. Epistemic faith-belief is the sort of belief we exercise (rather than have) when we put enough trust in a possible truth or source of possible truth (factual or moral) to use it as a reason to act. Faith-belief is a form of trust that is under direct voluntary control. It is not the kind of trust that we feel but the kind of trust that we put in something or someone, although we often put trust in what we feel to be trustworthy. Faith-belief is epistemic in that it has a possible truth or a source of truth as object. Because faith-beliefs are used as reasons to act they always have a pragmatic dimension. Faith-beliefs can be accompanied with feelings of doubt but are of themselves not gradual. You either jump or you do not.

I compared my approach of an ethics of faith-belief with the responsible belief approach of Peels (2016) and argued that the latter allows for blameworthy yet responsible beliefs when one meets all intellectual obligations in gathering and processing the right kind of evidence and thus comes to a responsible conviction that nevertheless should not be trusted or faith-believed. Furthermore, the responsible belief approach focusses on how actions influence belief whereas my approach focusses on how beliefs influence action. I also compared my approach of an ethics of faith-beliefs with Helm's (1994) approach of belief policies. I concluded that belief policies can in some cases be understood as patterns of faith beliefs.

In the next chapter I will elaborate on questions I raised earlier in this chapter about other conditions for an ethics of belief such as: Who has the authority to set the standard for praiseworthy or blameless faith-beliefs? And what are the negative consequences or appropriate measures against someone that faith-believes blameworthily?

CHAPTER 7
THE CONSEQUENCES OF WRONG BELIEFS

1. Introduction

In this chapter I will focus on two other important possibility conditions of an ethics of belief. First, an ethics of belief requires a law, rules, norms or moral principles that prescribe what or whom to faith-believe or not. One cannot do or believe wrongly if there is no rule that prescribes what we should do or whom or what we should believe. Second, a normative rule with no negative consequences for breaking it, is powerless. If there are epistemic principles, they must be upheld by negative consequences when they are broken. If there is no moral principle that forbids murder, then it is not wrong to commit murder, but even if there is a moral principle that forbids murder, if there are no negative consequences or sanctions to enforce it, then that principle is hollow and still without effect. If something is forbidden, but it does not matter if you do it anyway, then it is by all accounts allowed. Charles Côté-Bouchard (2017) uses the apparent lack of a normative epistemic authority or epistemic force as an argument against epistemic normativity. According to him there is not automatically a normative reason to conform to epistemic norms (p. 2).

In this chapter I will explore in more detail the need for "principles or rules for what to believe" and "appropriate sanctions or consequences" for those who violate those principles or rules. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate in much detail what these rules are, but I will offer some possible examples.

Working out the specifics of doxastic rules is for a study on the ethics of belief proper, not for this study of the possibility conditions of an ethics of belief. My focus will be on how these doxastic rules, whatever they are, are upheld and enforced. I will first examine the terms "blame", "praise" and "permission or blamelessness," that are ubiquitous in much of the literature on the ethics of belief and show why they are problematic, especially when applied to the standard definition of belief. I shall then explain the need for a more robust doxastic law or set of rules and a system of sanctions or negative consequences to be applied to the ethics of faith-belief. I will discuss three realms in which doxastic rules for faith-beliefs can be applied and enforced: physical reality, moral reality and social practice.

2. What if I do not believe it?

Much of the literature on the ethics of belief talks about "blameworthy", "praiseworthy", "permissible" or "blameless" belief (Brown, 2020; Jackson, 2014; Koscholke, 2019; Millar, 2019; Peels, 2017), without ever mentioning, (1) whose blame or praise is intended; (2) how that praise or blame is being expressed, if at all; and (3) how that blame or praise affects (rewards or punishes) the believing agent. Let me briefly explain why these three qualifications on blame and praise are important. In what follows I shall use the standard idea of belief, just to show once more that it is problematic for an ethics of belief.

First, a climate change sceptic can be blamed and ridiculed by the majority of climate scientists for a supposedly foolish and unscientific belief but at the same time be praised or held blameless by fellow sceptics for the same belief. The same could be said of anti-vaxxers. Evolutionists blame creationists for believing in an invisible creator while creationists blame evolutionists for believing in a universe without purpose or design. Many religious people believe that their own religion is the only true religion and that people of other faiths have been deceived to some extent. Atheists believe that all religions are wrong. Any adherent of any ideology will praise other people for believing in

the same ideology while blaming people who hold beliefs that do not agree with their own. It is clear from all this that in defending an ethics of belief it will not do to simply talk of blame, blamelessness, and praise without ever explaining whose blame and praise we are talking about.

Not qualifying whose blame and praise are intended in an ethics of belief leaves the door wide open to relativism, which is a great enemy of any ethics. Which beliefs are blameworthy or praiseworthy would then simply depend on who is asked if they are. Usually, the blame or praise of an ideal-typical (and maybe omniscient) rational person is implied, but real people would still disagree about what an ideal-typical person would judge. Both scientists, sceptics, atheists, evolutionists, socialists and many other -ists would happily claim that this ideal-typical judge of beliefs is on their side. The question then is, who is authorized or entitled to determine what the doxastic rules are, or in other words, what or whom should we believe, and who or what is entitled to uphold the doxastic standard? I will deal with this question later in this chapter.

Second, when we disagree with someone who we think should know better, we might blame them (often mildly and respectfully) in our minds for what we think are wrong, misinformed, misguided or gullible beliefs without ever telling them or showing them that we do. We disagree with other people all the time without getting into an argument. Blame and praise for someone's beliefs are often tacit. Taboos are often taboos precisely because we do not want to make people uncomfortable by blaming and praising them in certain settings for their political or religious beliefs. So, if blame and praise for someone's beliefs are often not expressed, then an ethics of belief that is based on blame and praise is at best a very permissive or condoning one.

An ethics that is based on the blame and praise of an ideal typical all-knowing person who, because they are ideal, never *really* comments on our beliefs, or on the blame of an actual fallible and probably biased person, who most of the time, if ever, still does not bother to express their emotions about our beliefs, would be like a country with many different and sometimes

conflicting traffic rules, made by disagreeing persons or parties, and with no police. Some people say that the law says you cannot run a red light, but who cares? That is just what some people say. People can shout and blame each other for breaking traffic rules, but nothing they say really matters if we just do not care for their opinion. People can easily "get away" with the most absurd beliefs because they are very often only tacitly blamed or praised but openly left alone or ignored.

Third, even if we qualify whose blame and praise for beliefs are relevant, let us say for the sake of argument the blame and praise of scientists, and make sure that this blame and praise is somehow communicated, then what? If climate change sceptics are openly blamed and ridiculed by a scientific and political majority for not feeling an urgency to save the planet, then those sceptics can easily ignore that blame altogether. Blame in itself is hardly an adequate sanction for a misbelief because not only is it quite often not expressed, but even if it is, it can in many cases easily be brushed aside. Climate change sceptics may be forced by a political majority to pay a "climate tax" but that in itself does not change or affect their beliefs. Admittedly, the desire to conform to the demands of political correctness or mainstream thought can make some people feel awkward when they are blamed for their beliefs and this may lead to a conversion to new beliefs (or to doxastic hypocrisy), but "mere blame" by a dissenting person will in many cases not change someone's mind and cannot enforce or uphold "the doxastic law or rules" of an ethics of belief, any more than that a mere accusation and expression of resentment against a murderer or thief can uphold the law in a land.

These relevant qualifying omissions about punishment or negative consequences for blameworthy beliefs are, I think, to an extent due to Strawson's paper *Freedom and Resentment* (1962), which has had great influence on metaethics. In this paper Strawson investigates what the implications of determinism are for ethics. Strawson concludes that although there is no definitive proof against determinism, so we have to consider that it may be true,

we will still hold each other responsible. This is so because we just cannot help feeling resentment towards people who want to hurt us. This is particularly true for the non-detached attitudes and reactions of people directly involved in transactions with each other; of the attitudes and reactions of offended parties and beneficiaries of such things as gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, love, and hurt feelings (p. 191).

Strawson (1962) introduces the term "reactive attitudes" to explain that we simply cannot help feeling resentment, admiration, or gratitude for what others do (to us) unless we can objectify these reactive attitudes by recognizing that these otherwise repugnant or admirable acts were not so intended, or were due to ignorance, a disturbed mental state, or some other extenuating circumstance. What we cannot do, Strawson argues, is objectify these reactive attitudes simply because we believe determinism to be true. Reactive attitudes, therefore, will continue to be part of human practice regardless of whether determinism is true or not, or even believed to be true. And because reactive attitudes will continue to exist regardless of whether determinism is true, it does not actually eliminate ethics as some pessimists believe. We find the term "reactive attitudes" everywhere in the literature on ethics of belief, and blame and praise are among these attitudes (Adler, 1997; Hurley & Macnamara, 2010).

It seems obvious why this reasoning goes well with compatibilism and I think that it is an important reason why it has received such a welcome, but it has two major flaws. First of all, it is at best a descriptive fact that we will continue to hold each other responsible in virtue of our feelings of resentment but that fact can only give us a descriptive ethics about what we, *in fact*, do and feel is wrong and not a normative ethics about what we *ought* to feel is wrong or what we *ought* to do. The mere *fact* that we cannot help but feel resentment does not warrant that we *should* feel resentment. It seems that Strawson (1962) is trying to avoid the naturalistic fallacy and accommodate determinism, by reducing ethics to simple matters of fact (what we do) rather than matters of ought (what we ought to do).

But secondly, and more importantly for my argument for the necessity of sanctions or negative consequences for beliefs in a proper ethics of belief, feelings of resentment, whether for actions or beliefs, in and of themselves do not warrant an ethics at all. Strawson's (1962) conclusion that even in a determined world we cannot help but feel resentment for what people do (and perhaps also believe), does not explain why we should care if someone feels resentment for our actions or beliefs. Reactive attitudes of resentment for someone's belief by a disagreeing person are in many cases not enough to settle the question of who is truly guilty of having beliefs that are insufficiently grounded. Disagreement about scientific, religious, political, ethical and philosophical questions is pervasive in this world, and mutual resentment (or mere blame) is not sufficient for upholding an acceptable and impartial standard for praiseworthy, blameworthy or permissible beliefs.

Another reason for using the weaker concepts of "praise" and "blame" rather than the stronger concepts of "reward" and "punishment" as sanctions or consequences for beliefs, is the problem that any sort of punishment for a personal belief or conviction beyond blame and resentment would amount to a violation of our freedom of conscience. Furthermore, even if we grant freedom of conscience and punish only when people actually *express* their beliefs, this would still be a violation of our right to freedom of speech or religion. If an ethics of belief requires a doxastic law, or in other words, rules or principles that prescribe, permit, or forbid certain beliefs, then it also requires negative consequences or sanctions for people who disobey that doxastic law. However, this goes against constitutional rights which state that governments cannot make rules or laws that prescribe or prohibit certain beliefs, religious or otherwise.

To sum up, on the one hand blame, if it is ever expressed, is too weak a punishment for a blameworthy belief to uphold doxastic rules, because it seems to depend on the controversial question of whose blame we should try to avoid, and because mere blame can easily be ignored. On the other hand, any

punishment that goes beyond mere blame seems to be a violation of our freedom of conscience and speech. In addition to the problems of doxastic voluntary control and doxastic hypocrisy, we now have two more problems to solve in order to establish a robust ethics of belief. The first problem is the question of who or what has the doxastic authority to prescribe what we should faith-believe and the second problem is how and by whom or what that doxastic law is upheld. The answer to the first problem should save us from relativism in the ethics of belief, and the answer to the second problem should save us from mere emotivism in an otherwise forceless ethics.

In the rest of this chapter, I shall explore the need for a more robust system of doxastic rules and accompanying sanctions or negative consequences that go beyond the forceless emotivist reactive attitudes of an ideal typical all-knowing person who really never speaks out.

3. An ethics of belief and action

In the introduction to his book *Blameworthy Belief, a Study in Epistemic Deontologism*, Nottelmann (2007a) gives us a disturbing case to illustrate the need for a theory on the ethics of belief. Because the example suits my purpose of working towards a more robust ethics of belief, and because it is not just a theoretical case but a real-life one, and because it elicits strong intuitions because of its horrible nature, I shall borrow the example:

> In 1975 the rape case Director of Public Persecutions v. Morgan made major headlines in Great Britain and Australia. According to the testimony presented in court, roughly the following incidents gave rise to the trial: Mr. Morgan, a senior officer in the Royal Air Force, was out drinking with three male junior colleagues. In the run of the evening, he invited the three men to come home with him and have intercourse with his wife. According to the colleagues, Morgan informed them that his wife was "kinky" and would appreciate having intercourse with them,

however she would probably feign resistance and dissent as part of the sexual game. He claimed that he had brought home colleagues for similar purposes in the past, and that his wife had enjoyed it. Upon arriving at the Morgan household, the four men dragged Mrs. Morgan from a room in which she was sleeping to another room and placed her on a double bed. The four men took turns in having intercourse with her, while the others forcibly restrained her. Mrs. Morgan resisted persistently and screamed to her children to call the police. After the men had left, Mrs. Morgan drove to a hospital and reported a rape. Medical evidence supported her report.

What happened that night in the Morgan household constituted the actus reus of a rape by any standard: The four men submitted Mrs. Morgan to unwanted, non- consensual sex by the use of massive physical force. However, after some initial confusion, the three colleagues all pleaded not guilty of rape on the defence that, at the time of intercourse, they all believed that Mrs. Morgan consented to the grisly proceedings. In holding the belief that she consented on the basis of Mr. Morgan's explanations, so they claimed, they had simply made an honest mistake and could not be guilty of rape.

Mr. Morgan could not be convicted of rape, as at that time, according to British legislation, by definition a man could not rape his wife (he was later convicted of assisting a rape, though). However, all three colleagues were convicted of rape. If this had been the end of the matter, the public's interest in the case would probably have quickly faded. However, the case went to The Court of Appeal, which confirmed the convictions. Still, it had some doubts about the soundness of the instructions given to the jury deciding the original case. The judge had instructed the jury that the "honest mistake" defence would not acquit the three men unless their belief that Mrs. Morgan consented was both "honestly held" and "a reasonable belief; such a belief as a reasonable man would entertain if he applied his mind and thought about the matter." The Court of Appeal

> therefore asked the highest instance in the British juridical system, The House of Lords, to consider the question: Can you properly convict someone of rape if he honestly but unreasonably believed, at the time of the alleged rape, that the woman was consenting?
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> By three votes against two the five Law Lords answered this question in the negative and thereby installed the so-called "Morgan rule": An offender is not guilty of rape if he honestly believed at the time of intercourse that his victim consented, irrespective of the reasonableness of this belief. Still, the Law Lords dismissed the appeal on the grounds that the jury, even if properly instructed, would not have accepted the defence's claim that the three men believed that Mrs. Morgan consented. However, only a week after this ruling an alleged rapist in a very similar case, Regina v. Cogan, was acquitted because he was found to have honestly but unreasonably believed that his victim, although sobbing, consented to have intercourse with him. (Nottelmann, 2007a, p. 3)

Before I use this example to address the issue of doxastic rules and sanctions for breaking them, I want to use it to illustrate again two important points that I made earlier. First, the notion of "honestly held belief" plays a crucial role in both the Morgan case and the Morgan rule, and should play an important role in any ethics of belief, but whether a (standard) belief is in fact honest can never be proved. Indeed, it is even, in principle, impossible to catch a person red-handed on a particular (standard) belief. After all, anyone can lie about their *honest* beliefs (convictions), and all the jury, or anyone else, can do to know about someone's honest beliefs, is to look that person into the eye and either faith-believe their testimony or not, that is: to *put trust* in someone or their word. Especially when the stakes are high, such as in this court case, doxastic hypocrisy is always lurking and since honestly held beliefs are shielded by privileged access there is no sure way to find out what a suspect was actually believing at the time of a crime.

Second, even if the suspects were in fact honestly convinced that Mrs. Morgan was consenting, and even if it would therefore be alright to have intercourse with her, and even if these beliefs could somehow be proven to be highly probable, unlike the jury, I do not think this would exculpate them. The real question from a doxastic deontological point of view, I argue, should not be whether they were honestly convinced that the victim was consenting, and that consent was sufficient to have intercourse with another man's wife, but rather whether they were justified in *putting their trust* in the fact that she was consenting and, if so, whether they were justified to have intercourse with another man's wife. Were they justified in putting their trust in the words of the husband rather than the screaming resistance of the victim?

The suspects could have chosen not to faith-believe the husband even if they felt or hoped that he was telling the truth when he asserted that his wife was kinky. Like the man at the roller coaster, or the shipowner, they could and should not have put their trust in something that was definitely out of the ordinary or high risk. If the man at the roller coaster did not open the attraction to the public after an incomplete test, even though he had a sincere and well-founded belief that it was nevertheless safe to do so, then surely the suspects of the rape should not have trusted or faith-believed the perverse husband's word, even if they honestly felt that what he said was true. This is another example of how a felt belief (conviction), or perhaps more accurately in this case a wish-belief, does not have to align with a faith-belief (trust) and that one can be blamed for the latter in a direct way because unlike the former, it is under direct voluntary control. However, Nottelmann (2007a) analyses this incident and many other examples in his book purely in light of the standard idea of belief, supposing that standard beliefs, rather than faith-beliefs, can explain actions sufficiently.

Many philosophers, such as Nottelmann (2007a), have tried to defend an ethics of belief that is more or less independent of action. Standard beliefs can, of course, lead to action but they can also exist quite independently. Convictions

may or may not have consequences. Standard beliefs can simply exist in our minds without ever being used in practical or even in theoretical reasoning. For this reason, action is usually not taken as a necessary part of the analysis of an ethics of belief. The Morgan case, however, is a good example of how an ethics of belief is inextricably intertwined with an ethics of action, and why a robust ethics of belief cannot exist fully independently from an ethics of action. If the husband had told his friends in the pub about his wife's alleged sexual fantasies and they had simply believed him on his word in the absence of any contradiction and left it at that, then they might be blameworthy for their credulity, although no one but they themselves would even know they had these beliefs and no one would ever blame them for having them. But when those wrong beliefs were trusted to be true to the point that they were used as reasons for acting in a certain way, the real harm was done.

Faith-beliefs always result in action, and action has consequences, so faith-beliefs have consequences. Standard beliefs can and often do lead to faith-beliefs and thus also to actions, but not necessarily so. Because faith-beliefs escape, as it were, the mental realm and always have effects in the physical world through our actions, they become manifest and can be either harmful, neutral or beneficial. The fact that beliefs are subject to an ethics because of their practical consequences does not mean that an ethics of faith-belief is necessarily consequentialist, but rather that beliefs are only subject to an ethics in a direct way insofar as they affect the external world through our actions.[17] Speech, to be sure, can also count as an act in the external world. What we say or do not say is often motivated by reasons for what we believe we should or are permitted to say and by what we take to be true, funny, or interesting.

My suggestion that faith-beliefs are subject to an ethics of belief by virtue of the fact that they lead to action is not to say that an ethics of belief simply

17 Epistemic consequentialism is usually understood as a normative ethics for standard beliefs based on the epistemic rather than practical consequences of our beliefs. See: Ahlstrom-Vij & Dunn (2018).

boils down to an ethics of action. Beliefs that lead to action can be praiseworthy or blameless even when the act itself is not and the other way around. For example, if a medical doctor in an emergency room wants to save the life of an unconscious patient by performing various medical procedures that are based on mistaken beliefs about the patient's exact medical condition, then the medical procedure may have bad consequences or fail to be effective, but that does not necessarily make the doctor's faith-beliefs blameworthy and deserving of punishment. It may depend on the circumstances and prescribed medical procedures whether the doctor's faith-beliefs led to a medical blunder or a heroic attempt to try to save someone's life.

On the other hand, even after correctly diagnosing a patient and determining the necessary treatment, a doctor may inadvertently make an error during surgery. The mistake could then be considered as a medical mistake even though there was nothing wrong with their beliefs. Insurance may cover such unintentional errors. However, if there would be something wrong with their beliefs that led to an incorrect medical procedure, then the doctor might have to face a disciplinary committee. I will expound on this in section 6 of this chapter.

The conclusion of this section is that the ethics of belief is not independent from the ethics of action but that they are intertwined. In the following sections I will examine how doxastic rules are prescribed, upheld and enforced by physical reality, moral reality and social practice.

4. Faith-belief and physical reality

Earlier in this chapter I asked the question: What if I do not believe it? I argued that what we choose to believe should not be motivated by just avoiding blame or receiving praise for our beliefs but rather to avoid the negative consequences of our actions based on false beliefs or to receive the benefits of our actions based on true beliefs. When it comes to beliefs about facts in the external physical world, these consequences are simply forced upon us by

physical reality or the laws of nature. If I believe that a stool is strong enough to support my weight if I stand on it, this belief may be right or wrong, but a mere inner conviction can be neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy until I act upon it. It is because of my trust that the stool will hold me that I am responsible for a failure, not because I feel it to be true that the stool will hold me. If the stool holds me, I am vindicated in my "unfinished" belief that the stool will hold my weight and I may stand on the stool again in the future without hesitation. If the stool begins to crack or breaks completely, however, physical reality will show that my faith-belief was wrong. I may be injured and the stool may break. It is important to note that it is only after we *do* something (which also can be saying something) that we are confronted not only by physical reality but sometimes also with the reactive attitudes of other agents. Only after the stool breaks and I fall to the floor someone may say accusingly, "What were you thinking!". But no one will praise or blame me if I am still deliberating or if I have already made up my mind whether I believe the stool will hold my weight or not, while not acting upon it.

However, the consequences of our faith-beliefs and subsequent actions are not always obvious and immediate. For example, we may take a medicine that we believe will cure us or relieve us from a disease, which it may do, only to find out later that its side effects have made us even more ill or addicted. We may believe that something is impossible and not try it, only to find out later that someone else could do it. We may believe that certain choices, such as eating fast food, do not affect our health too much, when in the long run they do. Someone may believe that a bridge is safe to cross after having crossed it many times, when in fact it is not because of concrete rot. A pilot, after going through all the procedures, may believe that an aeroplane is safe to fly when it has a hidden defect. The lack of immediate physical consequences can give us the false impression that our faith-beliefs are vindicated when, in fact, they are not.

Physical reality imposes itself on us regardless of our beliefs. If we believe that inanimate physical reality should or will behave differently than it does, then we will be proven wrong about physical reality. This can be quite small and innocent, such as believing it is not going to rain and therefore not taking our jacket or umbrella and getting really wet, or it can be bigger, such as believing that a mushroom is safe to eat when it will kill us. Nature dictates what we should faith-believe to be true in virtue of the natural consequences. Many of these consequences are learnt through trial and error. Children take all kinds of risks to learn about gravity and their own physical capabilities, despite their parents' warnings. Teenagers may want to experiment with drugs, faith-believing they are less harmful than portrayed, or that they are more "in control" than others. We may try new flavours that we do or do not like, or we may try a shortcut that deviates from our destiny.

Physical reality thus sets epistemic rules, as it were, for what we should believe to be safe, comfortable, and healthy. Physical reality also upholds, maintains and enforces those rules on animals and people alike. Sometimes, mistakes based on false beliefs can make for good entertainment, as funny home videos attest. If I do not believe that there is a tree in front of me in plain daylight, I will get hurt if I try to walk through the tree. If I faith-believe the Eiffel Tower is in London and travel there to see it, I will not see it. I may not pay much attention to the blame or ridicule of others for such foolish beliefs, but I cannot ignore the bump on my head or the fact that my travels to London to see the Eiffel Tower were in vain.

Nature does not only enforce the ethics of belief in a negative way but also in many positive ways. It is through faith-beliefs that aeroplanes were developed, that men went to the moon, that America was discovered, and that things that have been invented were invented. When we learn by trial and error, we faith-believe nature will behave in a certain way and we act upon it to find out if it does. If nature behaves as we want it to behave when we act upon it, we are rewarded for our faith-beliefs, which can develop into felt beliefs and even

knowledge. As mentioned earlier, faith-beliefs are never replaced by standard beliefs; they are only supplemented. After sufficient proof that the world appears to be and behaves as we trust it to be, we believe confidently instead of hesitantly or merely hopefully. Faith-belief can thus lead to conviction and, arguably, to knowledge. Faith-belief is not just a religious thing. It plays an important role in science and in everyday life. We do things all the time, or try new things, because we trust things to be so, even when we sometimes faith-believe things to be so, or worthwhile, simply because we desire or hope them to be. Faith-beliefs develop so naturally and sometimes so quickly into standard beliefs that we almost forget that we first put trust in things to be so before we acquired a conviction that they are so.

Rather than a "punishment" inflicted by a person in the form of mere blame, the sanction for false beliefs, or the absence of true beliefs, about physical reality is physical harm, danger, or a lack of physical comfort. If I believe the left road will take me to my destination when it is the wrong road, I will arrive later at my destination or not at all. If I do not believe that I can make fire, I will remain cold. If I do not believe that aeroplanes are safe, intercontinental travel will be impossible or very difficult. If I do not believe that chemical elements exist, I cannot design and make new pharmaceutical chemicals, and so on. Science is based on faith-belief in facts about reality. Progress in science, with all its inventions and applications, is the reward of our acting on faith-beliefs. Faith-belief in the uniformity of nature is an example of a much-rewarded faith-belief. We should believe facts about physical reality not because scientists or teachers might blame us if we do not, but because if we do, we can reap the benefits of medicine, household appliances, travel, communication, navigation and so on. If we do not believe facts about physical reality we may get hurt, poisoned, eaten, addicted, sick, lost, cold, hungry, drowned, killed and so on. Physical reality may be mild to standard beliefs about the physical world but it will ruthlessly sanction the faith-beliefs of even the most radical and persistent sceptic.

5. Faith-belief and moral reality

As agents in this world, we must have beliefs about the physical reality in which we act and in which we maintain our physical bodies, but additionally, I take it, about moral reality. We must make moral choices and in order to do so we must also have beliefs about morality and values. If an agent wants to do the right thing, then they have to faith-believe that certain goals and actions leading to those goals are good and praiseworthy. From infancy we first develop beliefs about physical reality, but at some point, we also develop beliefs about morality. Even if someone denies that there is a moral reality in their theoretical reasoning, it seems impossible to me that someone would have no moral beliefs or beliefs about values whatsoever in their practical reasoning. Moral beliefs, ideas, or theories about what is good and valuable or worthwhile, do not always have to be explicit, coherent, or philosophically thought through. When we do something because we think it is right or harmless in a particular case, we first faith-believe it to be so. This is also true of the moral sceptic, even when he defends his case. When a sceptic argues against moral truth or value, they expose in their very argument their faith-belief about the value of making an argument against goodness and values. Faith-beliefs, both about physical reality and moral reality, are often implicit in our actions, including in what we say.

Just as radical scepticism about the external world cannot withstand the laws of physical reality in practice, so moral scepticism cannot withstand the laws of moral reality in practice. Physical reality affects our biology and causes physical comfort, health or discomfort, pain and death, either immediately or in the long run. Moral reality affects our mind or spirit and causes mental or spiritual pain in the form of remorse or feelings of guilt. As with physical laws, the negative consequences of breaking moral rules can in many cases be postponed, giving the false impression that our faith-beliefs about morality were vindicated. We can faith-believe that a short-term physical reward is worth minor feelings of guilt. We can also faith-believe that we will not get caught and that there will be few, or no, feelings of guilt for what we do because others,

who have done the same thing, do not seem to have these feelings of guilt, or are not bothered by them.

In moral matters, as in physical matters, our faith-beliefs do not have to align with our standard beliefs or convictions about what is good and worthwhile, although they usually do. Sometimes we may not be fully convinced that something is the right or worthwhile thing to do, but we can still trust or faith-believe that it is. For example, we can faith-believe we should keep on looking for a missing person even though we have already given up hope that we will ever find that person. On the other hand, we may believe something is wrong to do, and yet trust that it is not so bad that we should not do it. For example, a surgeon performing a risky operation on a patient may believe a certain unorthodox procedure is too risky. The surgery might carry certain risks and could be considered ethically questionable due to its complexity or potential for adverse outcomes. However, despite these concerns, the surgeon and the medical team might faith-believe that the benefits outweigh the risks and that the procedure offers the best chance for the patient's recovery or improved quality of life. Or, a simpler example: We may believe it is wrong to lie and yet tell a lie.

The big question is, what moral ideas, or which moral theory should we trust to be true? This question, of course, will not be answered in this study. The argument I want to make here is that in order to have a robust ethics of belief there must be a moral reality as well as a physical reality about which we can have true and false beliefs. If ideas about morality and value are purely a matter of opinion or social constructs then we can never be truly wrong or right about what is good or evil and therefore never be appropriately blamed for those beliefs. Our faith-beliefs in moral truths are rewarded in the long run by happiness, peace of mind, or the absence of guilt. For some, that future in which they faith-believe extends beyond death. True moral faith-beliefs inspire and motivate us to do good. False moral faith-beliefs inspire and motivate us to do

wrong, or evil, or withhold us from doing good. Faith-beliefs in moral falsehoods are ultimately sanctioned by remorse and disappointment.

6. Faith-belief and social practice

Although physical reality and moral reality prescribe and uphold what we should believe in order to live safely, healthy and morally, when we talk about the ethics of belief, we are usually primarily concerned with the ways in which we hold each other accountable for our beliefs in social practice. When we debate on an issue, for example politics, we may try to convince our opponents to believe what we think is the best principle or policy that they should also believe. In doing so, we may blame or even accuse our opponents of not acknowledging the right kind of evidence or of offering unreliable, incomplete or biased evidence in favour of their own beliefs, or of using invalid reasoning. All this blaming and disapproving may, in some cases, persuade people to change their minds, but in many cases, we may simply have to agree to disagree because, as I argued earlier, in most cases there are no adequate punishments or negative consequences to uphold epistemic rules when different parties stick to their beliefs. The core of the problem is often that there is an unbridgeable disagreement about the epistemic rules and what they prescribe, as well as the absence of a recognized epistemic authority who can enforce those epistemic rules. In a democracy and an open society there is always room for many conflicting beliefs about politics, metaphysics, religion, ethics, and so on, including many wrong ones.

And yet there are also many instances where "agree to disagree" is not an option and where negative consequences are actually imposed or lifted because of respectively unacceptable or acceptable beliefs. Let me give a few examples. In education students are graded on their beliefs by their teachers (Van Woudenberg, 2009). That is to say, they get marks for what they faith-believe the teacher considers a right answer. In courts of law people are convicted for their beliefs that led to a crime, for example in instances of discrimination or

racist acts, or when people believe they are somehow justified in doing something, such as in the Morgan case, or by fundamentalist terrorists. On the other hand, suspects may be acquitted if the beliefs that led to a criminal act were sincere and seemed justified and a suspect seemed to act “in good faith”.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 50 doctors in the Netherlands received a “corrective letter” for spreading misinformation about the coronavirus. The reprimanded doctors allegedly actively advised people against getting vaccinated and recommended medicines that “deviated from professional standards”. The doctors in question were also charged with challenging generally accepted scientific information. The inspectorate said that it respects freedom of expression of every doctor and healthcare provider and encourages discussion and reflection but at the same time expects them to adhere to “generally accepted standards and views of their profession”.[18] In one case, the inspectorate fined a doctor €3,000 for prescribing a medicine that was not meant to treat COVID-19.

There are many examples of measures taken against people’s beliefs in medical, legal, military, academic, aviation, government, corporate and other contexts. A judge should not say during a trial that they believe the suspect is guilty before all the evidence has been presented. An officer should not believe that a particular mission they assign their soldiers on is pointless and tantamount to suicide. An academic historian should not believe that the Holocaust did not happened. A pilot should not believe that they will not be able to land the plane. A minister should not believe their government policy is bad and harmful. An employee should not believe that they can steal without damaging the company. Although we usually cannot help what we feel-believe to be true, and although we have a constitutional right to freedom of speech, that does not mean that we can simply say or act upon whatever we happen to sincerely feel-believe, without risking facing consequences by (epistemic) authorities.

18 See: https://www.igj.nl/actueel/nieuws/2021/08/31/inspectie-in-actie-tegen-onjuiste-informatie-over-corona-door-artsen

At the beginning of this chapter, I noted that most of the time we do not actually blame people for beliefs we disagree with. And when we do, one of the parties usually gives in to the other's argument or we simply end up agreeing to disagree. People are not usually inclined to change beliefs that are deeply embedded in doxastic webs. There are, however, real cases where people are blamed and rebuked for expressing their beliefs and where they suffer consequences in the form of low marks, official warnings, dismissals, fines, recantations, convictions, or other disciplinary measures. When we examine these real cases where people get blamed for their beliefs, we find that the ethics of belief in social settings has certain characteristics.

First, when people are blamed and receive disciplinary measures for their beliefs, it is always in connection with actions that were prompted by these beliefs. Beliefs are typically sanctioned insofar as they are reasons for saying, writing, or doing something that should not have been said, written, or done. A member of a jury is of course entitled to, and probably has credal feelings about the suspect's guilt, which may change during the course of the trial, but that should not lead them to say, write or do anything on the basis of those beliefs until all the evidence is on the table. The same is true for the man at the roller coaster. He did have an informed standard belief about the safety of the roller coaster, but if he had used those credal feelings as a reason to open the attraction to the public, then he would be blameworthy and possibly subject to disciplinary action. The ship owner, in Clifford's (1877) example, was blamed for not properly maintaining the ship. His belief that the ship was seaworthy, stifled or not, would not exculpate him from his duty to maintain the ship, regardless of whether the ship sank or not. It is the combination of a faith-belief and a subsequent action, or in other words what we trust to be true when we act, that is usually sanctioned in real life social settings, and not simply standard beliefs. It might seem superficially that standard beliefs are the object of disciplinary judgement, but this is only because our faith-beliefs usually follow naturally from our standard beliefs. In social practice, then, the ethics of faith-belief may seem like an ethics of standard belief, when in fact it is more like an ethics of

action because the ethics of faith-belief is intertwined with the ethics of action. We should not have believed something because we should not have said or done something.

Second, what we should do and should not do, and what we should say and what we should not say, is often prescribed by institutions, societies or communities. Schools, universities, churches, states, sports clubs, political parties, the military, hospitals, businesses, and so on, have rules of behaviour and accepted truths and values that we should abide by when we are members of these institutions or communities. Breaking their rules makes us either heretical, unprofessional, criminal, liable, or traitors to these institutions. Some of these institutions or communities we join voluntarily. For example, we choose to work for a company or to work or study at a university, or to be a member of a church. Sometimes we do not choose to be part of an institution or community. For example, we do not usually choose to be part of a family or a state. Individuals in a personal capacity cannot formally sanction a wrong belief, but they can ridicule someone or withdraw their association, or try to destroy someone's reputation.

Third, although we may not care what other people think about our beliefs, institutions, and communities have epistemic authority and means of power to enforce and uphold those prescribed beliefs and practices to some extent. Many communities, associations, or institutions have a boss or a disciplinary council of some sort to discipline members who do not abide by accepted truths and values. Only a state has courts, which are the highest authority in society we can appeal to, both in practical and doxastic matters.

Fourth, sanctions for beliefs are limited to the jurisdiction and legal powers of the institution or community that wants to uphold doxastic rules. A doctor may lose his license to practice medicine for having unacceptable beliefs about treating certain diseases, but a hospital cannot stop him from spreading his beliefs once he has lost his license or his job. A church may forbid a member to share unorthodox ideas about the Bible if they want to remain in good standing,

but after they have been excommunicated, they can share their unorthodox ideas as they please. A professor may not get tenure and eventually lose their job for believing that climate change is a hoax, but this cannot stop them from publishing their opinions once they have lost their job. A teacher may lose their job for racist beliefs, but a school cannot forbid that teacher to share their beliefs once they have been sacked, and so on. A state has no right to prescribe opinions but can sanction faith-beliefs and acts that infringe on someone else's rights. In a state, too, there are accepted truths and values that are written in the law. Most institutions can ultimately only sanction or punish certain beliefs by excommunication or by withdrawing their fellowship, but states have the authority to even fine and imprison people who believe they can or should violate the law.

In summary, an ethics of belief must be upheld by sanctions or negative consequences, or remain powerless. Proper sanctions on beliefs by other people apply only to the extent to which such beliefs prompt actions. An ethics of belief is enforced in social settings by institutions that have epistemic authority to some degree. Most institutions prescribe certain beliefs and behaviours of their members based on accepted truths and values. The sanctions that institutions can impose on beliefs are limited and can ultimately only result in dismissal, excommunication, or taking away a person's good standing. A state has the ultimate authority to impose sanctions on beliefs insofar as they instigate illegal acts, but a state has to respect constitutional rights that allow every man to express his opinion. Freedom of conscience is the freedom to entertain standard beliefs, but not to exercise any faith-belief at will.

7. Epistemic Authority

For blame and appropriate sanctions in social contexts on false beliefs to be meaningful, rather than mere disagreements that can be ignored, there must be acknowledged epistemic authorities who have the knowledge, expertise, and wisdom to tell us what we should believe and who can impose proper sanctions

when we do not. As noted above, much of the literature on the ethics of belief implicitly leaves the blame and praise for beliefs to an ideal-typical all-knowing person who does not really speak out. We believe a lot on authority. There is only so much we can come to believe and know from our own experience. Most of what we believe comes from books, teachers, parents, newspapers, the internet, doctors, warning signs, dashboards, hearsay, and so on. What then is the proper role of a perceived epistemic authority in an ethics of belief?

Zagzebski (2012), among others, has investigated the phenomenon of epistemic authority in depth and whether it is rational to trust or believe what epistemic authorities tell us to believe. She makes the argument that it is rational to trust others as sources of knowledge. Believing an epistemic authority is a form of social trust, where individuals rely on the expertise and reliability of others to acquire knowledge. This trust is based on the virtues of an epistemic authority, such as competence, intelligence, honesty, and benevolence. She argues, first, that epistemic self-trust is both rational and inescapable; second, that self-trust commits us to trust in others; third, that among those we are committed to trust are some we ought to treat as epistemic authorities; and fourth, that some of these authorities can be in the moral and religious domains.

Zagzebski (2012) suggests that an epistemic authority can have "all of the essential features of practical authority even though a political authority is justified apart from the perspective of the individual subject " (p. 139). In other words, we can choose and justify to ourselves who we want to accept or trust as an epistemic authority, but not necessarily who we accept as a political authority. She continues:

> But since there are no epistemic courts, or epistemic punishments, other than the punishment of failing to have a harmonious self, there are few practical consequences of failing to take beliefs on authority on grounds we do not recognize. (p. 139).

In the previous section, I argued for the contrary. To understand why we seem to disagree it is important, first, to realize that throughout her book, Zagzebski (2012) is foremost concerned with the normative ethics of belief or trust, in other words, whether and to what extent we are permitted or should believe others, and not so much with the metaethics or presuppositions of an ethics of belief. Second, she speaks both of trust and belief without ever explaining in detail what she means by those terms. It seems that throughout her book she takes both trust and belief in the standard form. That is, trust is relying on someone to tell the truth, and belief is to have credal feelings that something or some proposition is true. With these presuppositions, there are indeed no epistemic courts or punishments beyond mere disagreement. Like most philosophers, Zagzebski does not include the element of action, or how faith-belief leads to action, in her analysis.

Zagzebski (2012) elaborates on epistemic authority in communities where group members accept beliefs from an epistemic authority. We can choose to adhere to the teachings of an epistemic authority and thus become part of an epistemic community or school of thought. An epistemic community can be a small group within an institution, for example, a team that follows a chief detective in a homicide investigation, as well as an entire institution, for example, a church, a monastic order, or a political party. Zagzebski, however, does not elaborate on institutional authority when it comes to beliefs, apart from the state. It seems she takes for granted that we can freely join or leave an epistemic community when we have doubts about what is being said or taught. Not so in a state. If a state, a political authority, is also an epistemic authority then this may lead to epistemic tyranny or oppression, as in some totalitarian societies. Because no one can make us believe things against our judgment, she argues, a state that wants to enforce beliefs has to make it seem we form our beliefs through a rational process by indoctrinating us. Epistemic oppression is when a believer does not conscientiously judge that the belief comes from an epistemic authority (pp. 142-143).

Zagzebski (2012) distinguishes between two types of epistemic authority: basic and acquired. Basic epistemic authority is inherent in certain roles or positions, such as those of parents, teachers, or experts in a particular field. Acquired epistemic authority, on the other hand, is earned through the demonstration of expertise and trustworthiness over time. When she discusses the role of epistemic authority in the ethics of belief, she is foremost interested in the conditions under which we can be rational in trusting the expertise and knowledge of another person or persons.

My approach to epistemic authority differs from Zagzebski's (2012) in several ways. I agree with much of what she says, given her presuppositions and approach. However, from a metaethical point of view, and when applied to faith-beliefs rather than standard beliefs, an epistemic authority fulfils a different role. To understand that role I would rather distinguish between informal and formal epistemic authorities. The examples that Zabzebski herself gives in her book are mostly informal epistemic authorities.

Informal epistemic authorities are people or groups of people who we trust or believe to be experts on subjects where it would take too long for us, or be too difficult or even impossible for us, to find out whether what they say is true. We trust or believe what we read in a high-quality newspaper, accepting the reporter as an epistemic authority. We may believe a doctor, a professor, a priest, a witness, a politician, a teacher, a parent, a scientist, and so on, as epistemic authorities, but we may also disbelieve them and refuse to give them our trust or withdraw the trust that we once gave them. As Zagzebski (2012) notes, there are no epistemic courts for not believing a teacher, a preacher, or a scientist. In that respect she is right. However, if we fail to faith-believe and act on what a reliable epistemic authority tells us, then there may still be an epistemic sanction by physical or moral reality, as I have argued above. Sanctions for wrong beliefs about physical and moral reality may be "informal", i.e., not pronounced in a court of law or disciplinary council, but no less real. Not trusting a doctor to undergo a medical procedure or take a medicine may result in extended pain

and possibly death. Not trusting a politician may result in a deteriorating economy. Not trusting a professor may result in an exploding space shuttle. As for informal epistemic authorities, they do not enforce beliefs or punish disbelief and can easily be ignored, but you might still regret later that you did not believe them because of harmful consequences or missing out on something. In short, informal epistemic authorities prescribe beliefs but do not enforce them. The future will tell whether they were right or wrong.

Formal epistemic authorities, however, have disciplinary authority in the institutions or communities they represent. They are the authorities who ensure that every member of their institution or community adheres to the accepted truths and procedures of those associations. Formal epistemic authorities not only prescribe beliefs but also preside in “epistemic courts” in the form of disciplinary councils or by being summoned by a superior. A doctor who thinks that vaccinations against CORONA-19 are nonsense and says that we should rely on our natural immune system, may be an informal epistemic authority to a patient who, for that reason, refuses to be vaccinated. In such a case the patient will have to deal with the (possible long-term) consequences of their choice not to be vaccinated, based on that belief. However, that same doctor who warns against vaccinations for CORONA-19 may have a formal epistemic authority that can censure them for believing things that go against mainstream medical practice. That formal epistemic authority can force them to appear before a medical disciplinary committee. If the doctor is an unlicensed independent practitioner, then they do not have to fear such a formal epistemic authority, unless they are sued by someone and have to appear in court. So, there actually are epistemic courts where beliefs, and the actions they instigate, are enforced.

8. Conclusion

Apart from the fact that many philosophers insist that we do not have doxastic voluntary control, an ethics of belief is also hindered by the fact that the prescription of certain beliefs is problematic. After all, people can always

pretend to believe what is prescribed without really believing it (doxastic hypocrisy) and it seems to violate constitutional rights, such as freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion, to prescribe and enforce any beliefs. I have argued that this seems to be one reason why most philosophers on the ethics of belief have steered away from clear rules about what we should believe and from proper sanctions for false beliefs. Instead, they focus on epistemic virtues and the responsibility to consult the right kind of information and evidence to arrive at reliable beliefs by influencing them. To nevertheless suggest some enforcement against false beliefs, many have sought refuge in less oppressive sanctions or consequences such as "reactive attitudes", like blame and praise.

In this chapter, however, I have argued that blame and praise, as reactive attitudes towards belief, cannot sufficiently uphold and enforce an ethics of belief. This is because, first, it is not clear whose reactive attitudes should be important to us, since opinions about the truth differ, especially in political, religious, metaphysical, and even scientific matters. Second, reactive attitudes such as blame and praise are often kept silent. We disagree with other people all the time without engaging in an argument or making accusations. And third, even if someone is openly blamed for a belief, in most cases that blame can be easily dismissed as a mere difference of opinion.

I have argued that faith-beliefs are subject to an ethics because they instigate action and that an ethics of belief is inextricably intertwined with an ethics of action. An ethics of belief is upheld and enforced, first, by physical reality. If we believe reality to be different than it is, we may get injured or killed. On the other hand, if we trust reality to be as it is, we can make scientific progress and create for ourselves many opportunities to benefit ourselves with discoveries and inventions. Second, an ethics of belief is upheld by a moral reality. Wrong beliefs about morality can lead us to feel remorse or to miss out on the joy that good acts could bring to us. Third, an ethics of belief is upheld by social practice. We expect people to behave according to accepted truths and values in a

community. We expect people to faith-believe that they should follow certain procedures or that they faith-believe perceived truths in what they say and do, which have been established by epistemic authorities. In institutional social settings, sanctions can range from low marks, disciplinary action, excommunication, and social alienation, to fines. Only sovereign institutions, such as states, can sanction with imprisonment or even capital punishment. Sanctions against false beliefs are typically not imposed on standard beliefs but on faith-beliefs in relation to the actions that have been prompted by them. A particular faith-belief may be an aggravating or mitigating circumstance for a punishment for what we have done or said.

Epistemic authorities are presupposed by an ethics of belief. Epistemic authorities are experts in a particular field and prescribe what we should believe. What informal epistemic authorities teach is validated or debunked by physical and moral experience in the long run. Formal epistemic authorities can also summon and discipline dissenters in the context of the institutions they represent.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: THE POSSIBILITY CONDITIONS OF AN ETHICS OF BELIEF

1. Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I will summarize some of the main conclusions of this study and mention the possibility conditions I think need to be in place for a robust ethics of belief. I call it "robust" for several reasons. First, because the ethics of belief I defend is concerned with how we should control our beliefs themselves, rather than our actions that influence our beliefs. Second, it presupposes a form of direct doxastic voluntary control whereas many other philosophers either reject the idea that we have such control and/or suppose that we do not need it to have epistemic obligations. Third, it is not upheld and enforced by mere (possible) blame and praise from some unidentified person but by actual physical, emotional, disciplinary, or legal consequences. And fourth, because the ethics of belief I defend has less trouble with doxastic hypocrisy, which is the case when people simply pretend to believe what is acceptable or praiseworthy while not really believing it.

After going over the conditions of an ethics of belief, I will briefly mention a few areas in philosophy that I think are affected by the results of this study, namely peer disagreement, scepticism, and inductive reasoning. I shall finish this chapter by mentioning a few unanswered questions that could be explored in more detail in further research.

2. Condition One: Doxastic voluntary control

A robust ethics of belief requires that we have control over our beliefs and that we can choose to believe otherwise. “Ought implies can”, I take it, is still a requirement for any ethics. Because this requirement seems not to be met for most of our beliefs, it has been argued by Alston (1988) and others that an ethics of belief based on direct doxastic voluntary control is not possible for beliefs that are not subject to choice. Interestingly, most philosophers who seem to agree with Alston that we cannot straightforwardly control our beliefs do not want to leave it at that. The fact that we both feel and take responsibility for what we believe and the fact that we hold each other accountable for our beliefs in many social settings, seems to be at odds with this conclusion. Many philosophers who agree with Alston that we lack direct doxastic voluntary control have therefore tried to explain and justify how we can still be somehow responsible and accountable for our beliefs.

Two strategies have been particularly influential. The first strategy is to drop the “ought implies can” adage, and explain doxastic responsibility in compatibilist terms. This strategy has been introduced into the ethics of action by Frankfurt (1969), Fischer and Ravizza (1998), among others, to accommodate morality in a (possibly) determined world. If we can be responsible for what we do, even if we cannot choose to do otherwise, then surely, or so it is argued by Jäger (2004), McCormick (2011), Mchugh (2011), Osborne (2021), Ryan (2003), and others, we can be responsible for what we believe, even if we cannot believe otherwise. In Chapter 3 I examined this strategy and rejected it for two main reasons.

First, the intuition that we can be morally responsible in a deterministic world depends on intuitions invoked by so-called Frankfurt-style thought experiments. These thought experiments suggest that we still have our usual intuitions about moral responsibility even when we know that someone is not able to act otherwise. I have argued, however, that Frankfurt-style thought experiments can only reject the principle of alternative possibilities at the cost

of allowing the principle of ultimate causation and that therefore the intuitions about moral responsibility they invoke are not really compatible with determinism.

Second, even if we grant these intuitions in a physically determined world, they disappear when we try to apply them to beliefs rather than actions in so-called doxastic Frankfurt-style thought experiments. Although only a few of these thought experiments have been offered, and usually not by philosophers who endorse a compatibilist ethics of belief, they invariably stipulate that a third person can simply read and manipulate our thoughts and beliefs, including our first-person experiences, with an implanted device in the brain. Such an assumption is too outlandish in modern philosophy of mind to be acceptable as evidence for an ethics of belief without voluntary control, and opens the door to radical scepticism, and is therefore not convincing.

The second strategy is to accept that we have only indirect doxastic voluntary control and to be satisfied with that. This means that we can only be responsible for our beliefs in an indirect way, by influencing our beliefs, developing epistemic virtues, and exposing ourselves to reliable information. Thus, we can be responsible believers by exposing ourselves to the right kind of evidence even though we do not get to choose any particular belief. I think this responsible belief strategy is not so much wrong as it is incomplete. This approach is suitable for standard beliefs and suggests that we have indirect voluntary control over what we come to believe by direct voluntary control over what we do. This approach, however, does not explain how our faith-beliefs are subject to normativity and takes for granted that what we do, for example, what we choose to read, causes what we come to believe, but neglects the fact that what we believe, for example, that a book is worth reading, causes or instigates what we do. A problem with the responsible belief approach by Peels (2016) is that it cannot answer the question regarding how I am to influence my (standard) beliefs by exposing myself to the right kind of evidence without first putting trust in what that right kind of evidence would be. If I want to believe responsibly,

should I pray to God? Should I read? What books? Should I trust experts? Which ones, especially if they contradict? Should I trust naturalism? Should I trust proofs for the existence of God? Should I only put trust in personal empirical information? Should I trust common sense? When it comes to the "right kind of evidence" the responsible belief approach begs the question about what I should trust to be the right kind of evidence, especially in political, philosophical, religious, and ethical matters. There is a circularity between what we do and come to believe and what we believe and come to do. For this reason, an ethics of belief that is completely isolated from an ethics of action is doomed to failure.

In this study, I have shifted the focus from what we come to believe when we act, to what we come to act when we believe. The first kind of beliefs I have called finished beliefs or standard beliefs because most philosophers take these beliefs as the focus of their studies. The second kind of beliefs I have called unfinished beliefs, doxastic ventures, or faith-beliefs. Alston's (1988) argument from doxastic involuntarism against an epistemic deontology is only concerned with the first kind of beliefs. The conclusion of his argument against an epistemic deontology is, therefore, bigger than his premises warrant if we take other kinds of beliefs seriously. These other kinds of beliefs, however, are all too often simply and unjustly dismissed as not really beliefs.

We faith-believe when we put enough trust in a possible truth or source of possible truth (factual, moral, or valuing) to act upon it. When we faith-believe we trust or take something to be true in our practical reasoning. Faith-beliefs are under direct doxastic voluntary control. We can choose to put trust in something to be true when we act upon it. Although faith-belief usually follows naturally from standard belief, as we often take to be true what we feel to be true, many philosophers, starting with Clifford (1877), have mixed them up. James (1896) used examples of faith-belief to rebut Clifford without, however, making a clear distinction between different types of belief. I have shown with

examples that we can trust things to be true without feeling that they are true, and we can feel things to be true, without putting trust in them.

I do not argue that all belief is trust, that all trust is belief, or that the proper definition of belief is faith-belief. There are different meanings for the word "belief". What I do argue is that some forms of belief are forms of trust, or that some forms of trust can be called belief. In our search for the possibility conditions of an ethics of belief, there must be a form of belief that is both under direct voluntary control and subject to normativity. The standard idea of belief, or credal feelings that a proposition is true, does not meet these criteria, but faith-belief does. We can choose to put trust in something that is possibly true and act upon it, while we should not.

3. Condition Two: Epistemic rules

Relativism is the enemy of all ethics. If what is true or false is only a matter of opinion, and depends on whom we ask, then there is no clear standard of belief to which we must adhere. Moreover, if there are no epistemic rules, then there is nothing we should believe. Many philosophers have tried to formulate epistemic rules in terms of what or how we should believe. However, epistemic rules do not prescribe what we should feel to be true, but they rather stipulate what we should trust to be true in order to speak and act wisely and morally.

As in practical ethics, epistemic rules can be articulated at different levels. Natural law, in practical ethics, is perceived as prescribing universal rules that are independent of opinion, whereas rules that originate from positive law can, at least to some extent, be explained as man-made, local, and cultural. Natural law is constant and immutable whereas positive law is changeable over time and space. Ideally, positive law reflects the natural law.

We can make a similar distinction in the epistemic rules of an ethics of belief. Physical reality and moral reality are universal and independent of our

beliefs. We should believe them to be as they are when we act. Reality is not an individual or social construct. If we faith-believe them to be different from what they are, we do so at our own physical and emotional peril. Natural and moral consequences follow from acting on our beliefs. Physical and moral truths are immutable. Truths and values that have been adopted by institutions or communities, to which members are expected to adhere, are like positive law. They are local, man-made, and cultural. Ideally, the truths and values prescribed by institutions reflect the truths of physical and moral reality.

Institutions such as states, churches, businesses, hospitals, and so on, have prescribed procedures, rituals, and expectations, based on truths accepted by epistemic authorities. A theme park may have a rule that no attraction is to be opened to the public without first passing a safety check, because safety is an accepted value of the institution, and employees are expected to trust in and abide by this rule, regardless of any personal feel-beliefs they may have about the safety of the attraction. A church may have the doctrine that you have to be baptized to be saved and become a member. People who want to become members are expected to trust and abide by this doctrine. A hospital may have a rule that hands must be washed and disinfected before touching another patient. Rules that prescribe actions implicitly prescribe that we should trust these required actions to be good or worthwhile. Epistemic rules, then, do not merely prescribe what we should feel to be true, but rather what we should trust to be true, in order to behave or act safely, morally, and wisely. Implicit in the examples above are beliefs about safety, conditions for salvation, and hygiene.

4. Condition Three: Epistemic authority

From a metaethical perspective, an epistemic authority is not just someone who we may have good reasons to trust or believe in our theoretical reasoning, but rather someone who, because of his or her knowledge, expertise, experience, or wisdom in a particular field, can prescribe what we should take to be true, worthwhile, safe or good in our practical reasoning, such as a teacher, a priest,

a doctor, a policeman, a lawyer, a parent, a therapist, a dietitian, a chef, a military officer, a pilot, an admiral, and so on. More abstractly, epistemic authority could also be attributed to manuals, official websites, books, scientific publications, reference material, legislation, measuring instruments, and so on, but ultimately this kind of authority is still derived from experts in their field who write and update publications or produce reliable instruments, albeit sometimes in a more anonymous way.

Epistemic authorities do not only prescribe what we should take to be true or good in our practical reasoning but, in some cases, they can also uphold, enforce, or maintain these epistemic rules in the social context of a business, laboratory, church, state, university, medical practice, and so on. These epistemic authorities have the power to grade, demote, reprimand, dismiss, excommunicate, fine, or suspend people for wrong beliefs that have led to unacceptable behaviour or speech according to their community. They also have the power to promote, recognize, employ, or reward someone for praiseworthy beliefs that have led to praiseworthy behaviour and speech.

5. Condition Four: Consequences for wrong beliefs

What we believe makes a difference. If it did not make a difference, it would not matter what we believed. Beliefs make a difference when they are reasons for acting and speaking. Standard beliefs can be, and often are reasons for action, but they need not be. They can just be entertained by our theoretical reasoning. Faith-beliefs, on the other hand, are exercised when we act and therefore have consequences for the way we act. Most standard beliefs lead to faith-beliefs. Many have therefore taken it for granted that what we feel to be true in our theoretical reasoning is what we take to be true in our practical reasoning. This is an important reason why the distinction between standard belief and faith-belief is hardly ever acknowledged in the literature on the ethics of belief and where Alston's (1988) argument against an epistemic deontology

goes wrong. Beliefs are subject to normativity by virtue of the acts and speech, or lack thereof, that they instigate.

The sanctions or negative consequences for our wrong beliefs, then, are generally not different from the sanctions and negative consequences for what we do or say. I say "generally" because sometimes we do wrong things, even though our beliefs are justified, and sometimes our actions are justified, even though our beliefs are wrong. For example, someone may leave home late and miss a plane because they believed they had enough time to get there on time when someone tampered with the clock, which influenced them to trust they had sufficient time. Or, a football player may faith-believe that wearing a lucky charm will make him play better, and then score a hat-trick. When it comes to consequences on beliefs that are imposed or enforced by physical or moral reality, it is not always clear in what timeframe those beliefs will be sufficiently validated or debunked. Whether and when we should be resilient or give up on some of our faith-beliefs is not a matter for this study, but is part of the normative ethics of belief.

The sanctions on beliefs with which we are most familiar in a social context are imposed by epistemic authorities. A boss, a disciplinary council, a teacher, a religious leader, an accountant, a judge, and so on, may speak to someone about their beliefs, usually in connection to an action that was instigated by their beliefs. They have the authority to not merely disagree but to fine, reprimand, disfellowship, excommunicate, condemn, or imprison people with beliefs that do not align with the accepted beliefs of their organisation or community.

6. Ethics of belief and peer disagreement

We began this study by exploring the presuppositions of peer disagreement. I argued in Chapter 2 that peer disagreement presupposes some kind of doxastic voluntary control, which we can now specify as a form of trust that we put in

different pieces of evidence that are available to us. Peers may be peers in the sense that they have similar qualifications, experience, intelligence, and intellectual virtues and are exposed to the same evidence in a particular case, but they are in many cases still free to put more or less trust in what the evidence seems to imply and in what they take to be true in their practical reasoning. In that respect, our beliefs, in many cases, are not purely passive and simply forced upon us by the weight of evidence but are also the result of agency.

We can now, however, say a few other things on the social epistemic question of peer disagreement as well. When we ask, "What is, epistemically speaking, the rational response in light of disagreement with a perceived epistemic peer or equal?", this ethical question presupposes doxastic voluntary control, but proposes the absence of an epistemic authority, at least among the peers themselves. If the epistemic peers acknowledge an even higher epistemic authority, and if they cannot agree on the matter among themselves after re-evaluating the arguments for their beliefs, they could refer the matter to this higher authority. Many examples that have been put forward in the literature to illustrate peer disagreement fall in this category, such as peer disagreement on restaurant bills (the cash register would be the higher authority), or peer disagreement on the number of moons of a planet (a reference book on astronomy would be the higher authority), or a disagreement on the absolute pitch of a note (an electronic tuner would be the higher authority) or the best move in a chess game (a chess computer or a higher ranking grandmaster would be the higher authority) and so on. If both perceived epistemic peers accept no higher informal epistemic authority than themselves, then there is simply no acknowledged authority that can prescribe what they should believe. They can agree to disagree.

If the belief in question is a standard belief, then it does not matter, in many cases, what one believes, unless they choose to value the blame or praise of a peer over their own conviction of the truth. In most of the literature on the question of the rational response to peer disagreement, however, the standard

idea of belief is presupposed. Not only is that problematic owing to the fact that the standard idea of belief and direct doxastic voluntary control do not go together, but also because in many cases it does not matter what someone's convictions are until they are used as reasons to act or speak or refrain from acting or speaking. In the absence of an epistemic authority higher than the perceived epistemic peers, no one can prescribe with more epistemic authority than the other what the epistemic rule is in a particular case.

When it comes to politics, ethics, metaphysics, and religion, there are in many cases no obvious epistemic authorities or epistemic peers. Particularly in those fields of inquiry we choose what we take to be true in our theoretical and practical reasoning. Physical and moral reality will judge who was right or wrong in the end.

7. Faith-belief and scepticism

Scepticism is one of the oldest problems in philosophy. Without getting overloaded with the subtleties of different kinds of scepticism, let me just touch briefly on some kinds of scepticism in the light of the ethics of belief that I defend. A common sceptical idea is that we cannot know the future and that we must therefore suspend judgment about beliefs regarding the future. This is simply impossible with faith-beliefs. We believe that the ground *will* support us when we walk. We believe that the food we eat *will* nourish us and *will* take away our sense of hunger. We believe our desired destination *will* be there when we set out to travel. We believe a listener *will* understand us when we talk to them. We believe that we *will* find things where we left them and that the light *will* work when we turn the light switch on, and so forth. We act, so to speak, "into the future" and we therefore need to have beliefs about the future to act intelligently, rationally, and morally.

Many of these beliefs about the future seem so trivial that we just take them for granted and would not even consider them as such, but they are beliefs

about the future all the same, and it would be very foolish not to believe them. If we did not believe these things, we would continually lose them, we would hesitate to walk and speak, and we would be hungry and left in the dark, and so forth. So, there are indeed penalties or at least negative consequences for foolish beliefs or for suspending beliefs about the future, whether you are an avowed sceptic or not. Epoché, suspending judgment on the truth of a proposition, is a luxury that can only be afforded in the realm of standard beliefs.

What about beliefs about the more distant future, that are not so seemingly trivial? Upright sceptics about the future would still never have a reason to invest in anything. They would have no reason to build a house or a business. They would have no reason to vote, to travel, to buy something, or to start an education. They would have no reason to fear the Last Judgement, but neither would they have any reason to live. Any reason to act "into the future" would count as a faith-belief. Professed sceptics about the future are therefore doxastic hypocrites when they go about their lives pretending to suspend judgment on beliefs when they do not. What they trust to be true or not is exposed by their actions.

So, there are two kinds of doxastic hypocrisy. The first kind pertains to standard beliefs and happens when, for example, someone is accused of heresy and recants their beliefs because they fear the death penalty while continuing to believe "the heresy". In this kind of doxastic hypocrisy, people pretend not to be convinced of something while in reality they are, or the other way around: They believe something but assert that they do not believe it. The second kind of doxastic hypocrisy pertains to faith-beliefs and happens when people pretend to not faith-believe something or to suspend judgment on believing something when in reality they show they faith-believe it the moment they use it as a reason to act upon it. For example, a sceptic who claims to suspend judgement on whether the table in front of them exists, but nevertheless put their glass of water on it.

Another sceptic might argue that we cannot know things through inductive reasoning. This may be true in theory, but suspending judgment in practice because of this philosophy is untenable. We believe that food will nourish us, that things will be where we left them and that the light will turn on when we flick a switch, all by means of inductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning may not be logically valid and therefore may not provide us with indubitable theoretical knowledge, but in many cases, the ethics of belief will still dictate that we had better believe that there are universal laws at play in reality, if we are to act wisely, rationally, prudently and morally. If a formal epistemic authority does not eventually summon the sceptic about inductive reasoning, physical or moral reality will. A sceptic may not recognize an epistemic authority in their theoretical reasoning, but must nevertheless acknowledge epistemic authority in their practical reasoning. After all, also their choices have consequences for the world and themself. A sceptic may burn their hand three times, but if they still suspends judgment on believing that the fire will also burn their hand the next time, they are a foolish believer. A sceptic too is subject to natural laws, institutional rules, physical reality, and moral reality, regardless of their doubts. A sceptic will feel pain, cold, hunger, loneliness, guilt, and remorse, just like the rest of us, as a consequence of their faith-beliefs and actions.

8. Unanswered questions and further research

In this study, I have introduced epistemic faith-belief as the proper object of an ethics of belief. Because what we involuntarily feel to be true almost invariably coincides with what we voluntarily trust or take to be true in our practical reasoning, the nuanced difference is easily lost on us. Faith-beliefs, like standard beliefs, are generally based on evidence. When I am about to turn the light switch on, I faith-believe, on inductive evidence, that the light will come on. I faith-believe on testimonial evidence that I need to go to a particular

address to visit a restaurant that I have found on a website. In both of these examples, I trust to be true what I feel to be true, based on evidence.

Faith-beliefs, however, can also be based on desire, hope, fear, love, despair, curiosity, superstition, and so on. For example, if people cannot be cured by regular professional medical treatment, they are more likely to trust or believe that they might benefit from alternative treatments or unlicensed medicines, even if there is little evidence for that. When a friend asks to be believed or trusted to be innocent, despite incriminating evidence, it may not be just the readily available evidence that makes one decide to put trust in someone's innocence, but also loyalty, friendship or felt trust over a longer period. An interesting question that needs to be explored in more detail in the normative ethics of faith-belief is: What factors, other than evidence, should or should not play a role in our putting our trust in something to be true or worthwhile in our practical reasoning? Because faith-belief is unfinished belief and often pertains to what *will* or *might* be the case, rather than what *is* or *has been* the case, faith-belief is always underdetermined by the evidence. It seems to me, for that reason, that the ethics of faith-belief cannot be purely evidentialist. Taking a doxastic venture can be both a good and a bad thing if there is little evidence as yet. It seems to me that the ethics of faith-belief is probably best understood as a virtue ethics where risk-taking that something turns out to be false is allowed to some degree. This, however, is an issue for the normative ethics of faith-belief and not for the metaethics of faith-belief.

More is to be said, also, about the circular relationship between faith-belief, action and standard belief. Faith-beliefs influence our actions, actions influence our standard beliefs, and standard beliefs influence our faith-beliefs. Consider this example: I faith-believe the indicated direction on the navigation system in my car that I should turn right at crossing X to get to B. This faith-belief is a reason for me to turn right at crossing X. If the right turn indeed takes me to B, I develop a standard belief that a right turn at crossing X will indeed lead me to B. That acquired standard belief may influence me to always take the right turn

at crossing X to get to B from now on. But at any point I can also choose to faith-believe, or take a doxastic venture to go straight ahead at crossing X, instead of turning right, to get to B. The new route may be a bit longer, but I may also avoid a couple of traffic lights. If going straight on takes me longer to get to B, I am vindicated in my original standard belief that I should turn right at crossing X, but if it turns out that going straight on at crossing X is faster, I develop a new standard belief about what is the fastest route to take. In this example there is a connection between what I faith-believe, what I do and what I come to (standard) believe if I do it. Faith-belief can be healthy and fruitful in some cases to develop new beliefs about the truth by way of trial and error and to maintain an open mind but in other cases, it can be downright foolish, for example, to faith-believe I should turn back at crossing X to get to B. So, an interesting question would be: When should we faith-believe our standard beliefs and when are we permitted to, or should we not put trust in a standard belief? How much risk is allowed when we take a doxastic venture? This, also, is a matter for normative ethics on belief.

We can faith-believe something to be true despite feelings of doubt or even conflicting standard beliefs. However, it seems to me, as it did to James (1896), that faith-beliefs are still to some extent constrained. Although James never analysed different meanings of belief, most of the examples he gave to refute Clifford (1877), would count as faith-beliefs. According to James, the beliefs we can choose to adopt are limited to "live choices". He defines a live choice as opposed to a dead choice. A live choice is a choice that is enticing or has some appeal. Some other questions to explore would be: What makes a faith-belief enticing or appealing and how are faith-beliefs constrained by doxastic webs of standard beliefs?

EPILOGUE
ETHICS OF BELIEF AND EDUCATION

Since the Dutch Ministry of Education funded this research intending to improve education in the Netherlands, I would like to add a few comments on the role of ethics of belief in education and how the principles that I have discussed, viz. 1) doxastic voluntary control, 2) epistemic rules, 3) doxastic authority, and 4) consequences of beliefs, can be applied. My remarks will be essayistic and rather short because education is a very broad subject, covering many different subjects, levels, and teaching methods, that defy a single approach. I shall concentrate on secondary education, because I am most familiar with this type of education, but in most cases, I think the principles I defend are more universal.

The primary goal of most formal education is to transfer theoretical knowledge and practical skills, to expose students to new ideas and concepts, ideologies, art, places, and social situations, to help students gain understanding and insight, and to help them develop intellectual and moral virtues, such as critical thinking and diligence. In most educational settings, a teacher plays a role with epistemic authority, for example, as a provider of new information, as a (maieutic) coach, or as someone who grades or evaluates performance. The teacher's knowledge and skills, often together with the knowledge that is contained in prescribed textbooks, manuals, articles or curricula, are transmitted to the students by some didactic method. Students are then usually tested in all sorts of examinations, tasks, and assignments to ensure that they have sufficiently internalized the knowledge that they should have acquired, that they can

demonstrate their insight and understanding, and that they have mastered some required skills to an acceptable degree.

In the responsible belief approach to education, a student must make choices to best influence his or her beliefs. These may include attending lessons, paying attention to what is being taught, doing homework, completing assignments and revising for exams. The teacher has to create an environment in which the student can concentrate and is exposed to the kind of information that will instil the right kind of beliefs in the student. This can be done by lecturing, explaining, demonstrating, asking questions and so on. The student is evaluated by the teacher through being given grades, or by some other kind of assessment of being able or unable to sufficiently reproduce the knowledge or beliefs that the teacher would like to hear. Of course, this is a very simplified version of what goes on in formal education, but it is still very recognisable.

According to Van Woudenberg (2009), grades are both an evaluative and a moral verdict on a student's performance in which they show their belief, knowledge, ignorance, or forgetfulness (Van Woudenberg, 2009, p. 65-66). He concludes that there is a discrepancy between the practice of holding students (and suspects, in legal cases) responsible for their beliefs and the argument against epistemic duties or obligations because we lack direct doxastic voluntary control. After all, how can students be responsible for what they believe if they cannot choose what they believe? This discrepancy can be resolved from the responsible belief approach by arguing that students are only indirectly responsible for their beliefs and ignorance, through their belief-influencing behaviour, and that they, therefore, can still be rightly blamed or praised. They should have studied or practised more or should have put more energy into their learning process. Grades, so interpreted, are evidence of praiseworthy or blameworthy beliefs by an epistemic authority: the teacher.

However, it is doubtful in many cases, whether the answers that a student gives in an exam or test really reflect what the student believes. Often enough, students try to give answers that they think or hope their teacher wants to hear,

and they would be happy to guess or bluff for a chance to gain marks, without (necessarily) believing it. Even when asked in some subjects to give an opinion supported by arguments, a student may not give their own true opinion because they have none, or because the opinion itself is not worth marks anyway, whereas the argument is. In such a case, it may be safer to borrow the argument of someone with whom they do not necessarily agree, just to score marks, rather than to try to argue for their own intuitions. Thus, doxastic hypocrisy is to some extent also an issue in formal education.

In the responsible belief approach of an ethics of belief, a student has voluntary control over their efforts to expose themself to new information, engage in reasoning, make assignments, do homework, and so forth. The teacher, or a higher institution such as a Ministry of Education, or a supervising organisation, has the epistemic authority to prescribe curricula and final objectives of different subjects and thus, in a sense, set the epistemic rules. The teacher or examinator has epistemic authority to evaluate and assess the performance of a student in expressing their (standard) beliefs so that they will move on to the next year or receive a diploma.

From an ethics of faith-belief approach to education, the roles of the teacher and student are slightly different. Rather than exercising voluntary control over activities that will influence what they come to believe, students in this approach should faith-believe or put trust in a teacher, the information presented, or the truthfulness of valuing and moral statements, and act upon them. This is most evident when students have to learn practical skills or carry out experiments. When students are learning a new practical skill or working on a scientific experiment, they are engaging with physical reality to learn how reality behaves. Faith-beliefs (doxastic ventures) and experimentation go together. While engaging with physical reality, students are expected to believe and respect the safety rules and proper procedures to execute these experiments or practical skills. Take, for example, a cooking lesson. If a student believes they can make spaghetti by putting the raw pasta in cold water and bringing it to the boil,

physical reality will prove them wrong if they act upon it. This is a small example of physical reality showing the negative consequences of wrong beliefs. From a social context point of view, the student will get a low mark from the teacher for her sticky and starchy dish because they should not have believed that putting pasta first in cold water is the right way to cook it.

A teacher, however, does not only have a didactic and epistemic role to be a trustworthy and reliable supplier of information and proper procedures but also a pedagogical role. School life takes place in a social context. Social behaviour based on respect, tolerance, honesty, charity, diligence, inclusiveness, and so forth, is also instigated by faith-beliefs that these values are good and desirable. Many schools have adopted these core values as true and expect all participants, both students and teachers, to believe them and live by them. Instead of assessing what a student should or should not feel to be true, from the ethics of faith-belief approach, a teacher evaluates what a student should or should not have trusted to be true or moral.

Both in epistemic and moral issues, a teacher is counted as an epistemic authority and a role model. This is particularly true for the subject or subjects the teacher is trained in. The role of a teacher as an informal epistemic authority, or as one who prescribes epistemic rules without enforcing them (in a test), I think, is even more important than the formal one. When we think back to our best teachers, we usually do not appreciate them for their fair grading or supplying reliable information, but for inspiring us and making us passionate about a certain topic or subject or influencing our worldview. Maybe it was the personal interest that a teacher took in us as an individual. Or maybe it was their sense of humour or personality. A teacher may transfer a lot of knowledge and instil beliefs, but more important, I think, is to share passions, values, and morals by example because, in the end, they instil beliefs that change behaviour.

Although I think we have doxastic voluntary control over what we trust to be true in our actions, we are sometimes also very limited in our choices because of our education. Sometimes ideas are presented by teachers as basic truths or

facts because they are part of a doxastic web that has been adopted by an epistemic authority or an educational institution. Such a doxastic web can be naturalism, Islam, Communism, Conservatism, atheism, liberalism, Catholicism, nationalism, socialism, and so forth. Ideas that conflict with the beliefs of those epistemic authorities and that belong to another doxastic web can be vilified as primitive, unscientific, heathen, antisocial, corrupt, ignorant, and so on. Good education, I believe, challenges students to explore different doxastic webs of propositions without becoming too dogmatic. This can be difficult, especially if an epistemic authority, the teacher, is themself entrenched in a doxastic web. Every doxastic web has loose ends and anomalies and can give rise to cognitive dissonance. This realization can help students to become more aware of their role as epistemic agents, rather than receptacles of predigested knowledge or personal convictions of the teacher. This, of course, is not always possible, but I think there is still much room to compare and dissect different doxastic webs and their implications, especially in the realm of philosophy, politics, religion, and ideologies.

In order to improve education, one-sided emphasis is usually placed on the quality of the teacher. A good teacher, it is often assumed, can motivate any learner and explain difficult issues well. What is underemphasized is the personal responsibility of the learner, as an epistemic agent, to learn and assess arguments. All too often, students see themselves as reproduction machines of knowledge, but they lack critical and responsible minds. The subject philosophy is an eye-opener for many students because it calls on their ability to make choices between arguments that they trust to be true, such as arguments for and against the existence of God, free will, supernatural phenomena, absolute values, and so on. They also learn to be accountable for it, to themselves and the class. At first, students prefer simply to be told what to learn for the test, but only when they find that they have to make their own choices in what they accept as truth does philosophy become fun and fruitful. It is good to make students aware that there are epistemic choices and that science is not just based on consensus but rather on discussion and doxastic ventures. Education becomes

better when students are made aware of their personal responsibility to believe or reject certain things only after careful consideration and when their freedom of choice and responsibility in doing so are emphasized. Accountability for what one believes is an important feature of a critical attitude.

One last comment on doxastic hypocrisy in education: I have asked my students many times whether they have ever changed their empirical data in a physics, biology or chemistry lab report to make the results more compliant with the desirable results. After pressing a little, and doing a confession myself, they almost all admit that they have done this. I ask this question to address the issue of academic integrity and to ask the follow-up question what reason we have to think that this meddling with the data only happens in secondary school? But another lesson to learn from this is that the epistemic authority of the anticipated formula in the textbook, the desired graph or drawing by the teacher, is often deemed higher than what is actually measured or observed in experience. One can wonder what is the true value of some of these experiments if the expected results are already prescribed from a social context, rather than by physical reality.

SAMENVATTING IN HET NEDERLANDS

Hoofdstuk 1: Inleiding

Dit proefschrift gaat over de vraag of wij een morele verantwoordelijkheid hebben voor wat wij geloven en hoe dit mogelijk is. In de handelingsethiek wordt beschreven wat we wel of niet zouden moeten doen (bijv. niet stelen), terwijl de geloofsethiek voorschrijft wat we wel of niet zouden moeten geloven (bijv. dat de aarde niet plat is). Dit lijkt op het eerste gezicht simpel, maar het roept complicaties op. Als wij moreel verantwoordelijk zijn voor onze daden, moeten wij ook in staat zijn om te kiezen wat we doen. Wij voelen ons immers niet moreel verantwoordelijk voor dingen waarover wij geen controle hebben. Alston (1988) stelde echter, dat mensen geen directe vrijwillige controle hebben over wat zij geloven. Volgens hem hebben wij dan ook geen plichten om bepaalde dingen wel of niet te geloven. Zijn redenering gaat als volgt:

1. Om plichten te hebben ten aanzien van wat we geloven, moeten we geloofskeuzevrijheid hebben.
2. We hebben geen keuzevrijheid in wat we wel of niet geloven (Bijv. probeer te geloven dat de VS nog steeds een kolonie is van het VK)
3. Dus: We hebben geen plichten ten aanzien van wat we geloven.

Veel filosofen vinden echter dat we verantwoordelijk zijn voor wat we geloven en hebben daarom gereageerd op Alston’s argument. Deze reacties kunnen grofweg in vier groepen worden onderverdeeld Een eerste groep filosofen stelt dat we niet rechtstreeks kunnen kiezen wat we geloven maar dat we desondanks morele verantwoordelijkheid hebben om onze overtuigingen zo

goed mogelijk te beïnvloeden zodat we “verantwoorde overtuigingen” hebben, bijvoorbeeld door goede en betrouwbare bronnen te raadplegen en kritisch te zijn. We zijn dus verantwoordelijk voor wat we geloven door indirecte keuzevrijheid. Een tweede groep filosofen spreekt de eerste premisse tegen en zegt dat het niet nodig is om keuzevrijheid te hebben om verantwoordelijk te zijn voor onze overtuigingen, net zoals we moreel verantwoordelijk kunnen zijn voor onze handelingen, zelfs als de wereld gedetermineerd is. Deze opvatting heet compatibilisme, omdat determinisme en morele verantwoordelijkheid volgens dit standpunt compatibel zijn. Een derde, maar erg kleine groep filosofen, spreekt de tweede premisse tegen en houdt vol dat we in sommige gevallen wel degelijk kunnen kiezen wat we geloven. Een vierde groep filosofen stelt dat de redenering van Alston ongeldig is omdat het woord “geloven” in verschillende betekenissen kan worden gebruikt. Of we wel of geen geloofskeuzevrijheid hebben hangt af van de definitie van “geloof” die we hanteren.

Dit proefschrift stelt dat de eerste reactie onvolledig is, dat de tweede reactie onjuist is en dat de derde en vierde reacties het meest belovend zijn als we nader onderzoeken welke betekenissen het woord “geloof” heeft. In dit proefschrift worden dus de mogelijkheidsvoorwaarden van een geloofsethiek onderzocht.

Hoofdstuk 2:
Geloofskeuzevrijheid en epistemische gelijken

Het is opvallend dat, ondanks dat veel filosofen betwijfelen of we kunnen kiezen wat we geloven, er toch vragen worden gesteld over wat we moeten doen met onze overtuigingen als we ontdekken dat iemand die net zo intelligent en geïnformeerd is als wij (onze epistemische gelijke) iets anders gelooft. Dit roept de vraag op of we keuzevrijheid hebben in wat we geloven. Het roept ook de vraag op hoe het kan dat epistemische gelijken überhaupt van mening kunnen verschillen. Ik betoog dat we óf geen epistemische gelijken hebben, omdat er

altijd kleine verschillen bestaan tussen mensen, óf, als epistemische gelijken wel bestaan, dat we enige keuzevrijheid hebben in onze overtuigingen. Deze geloofskeuzevrijheid moet sterker zijn dan "het beïnvloeden van wat wij geloven door wat wij doen" omdat "epistemische gelijken" die hun geloof op dezelfde manier beïnvloeden nog steeds van mening kunnen verschillen.

Hoofdstuk 3: Enkele problemen met Frankfurt-achtige gedachte-experimenten

De compatibilistische reactie op Alstons argument is zeer invloedrijk. Veel wetenschappers zijn naturalisten, en een libertarische vrije wil lijkt onverenigbaar met het naturalisme. Om te laten zien dat morele verantwoordelijkheid en determinisme compatibel zijn, zijn verschillende gedachte-experimenten bedacht, zoals die van Frankfurt (1969). Deze gedachte-experimenten suggereren dat we moreel verantwoordelijk kunnen zijn, zelfs als we geen andere keuze hebben. Deze gedachte-experimenten zijn echter problematisch.

Determinisme impliceert niet alleen het ontbreken van alternatieve mogelijkheden, maar stelt ook dat keuzes volledig bepaald worden door de natuurwetten en de stand van zaken bij het ontstaan van het heelal. Frankfurt-achtige experimenten kunnen weliswaar het principe van alternatieve mogelijkheden in twijfel trekken, maar slagen er niet in ons tevens te overtuigen dat we tegelijkertijd niet zelf de oorsprong van onze keuzes zijn. Morele verantwoordelijkheid is dan niet compatibel met determinisme

Deze gedachte-experimenten worden nog problematischer in de context van geloofsethiek. Om een scenario te schetsen waarin iemand geen andere geloofsopties heeft, moeten we een extreem sceptisch scenario aannemen, waarbij alle intuïties —inclusief de beoogde intuïtie dat we moreel verantwoordelijk kunnen zijn voor onze overtuigingen, ook als we geen andere mogelijkheid hebben om iets anders te geloven— twijfelachtig worden.

Wanneer wij echter in plaats van een radicaal scenario een meer alledaags scenario gebruiken, is het niet meer evident waarom iemand niet iets anders zou kunnen geloven.

Het hoofdstuk concludeert dat pogingen om verantwoordelijkheid voor overtuigingen te rechtvaardigen via compatibilistische geloofskeuzevrijheid tekortschieten. Er bestaat geen overtuigend Frankfurt-achtig scenario in de context van geloof dat dergelijke verantwoordelijkheid rechtvaardigt. Om morele verantwoordelijkheid voor wat we geloven te onderbouwen, is een sterkere vorm van geloofskeuzevrijheid vereist.

Hoofdstuk 4:
Wat er mis is met het argument tegen geloofskeuzevrijheid

Geloofskeuzevrijheid wordt vaak gelijkgesteld met de mogelijkheid om naar believen een overtuiging aan te nemen of te verwerpen. Alston (1988) stelt dat we geen directe geloofskeuzevrijheid hebben over onze overtuigingen, door ons bijvoorbeeld de vraag te stellen om te geloven dat de VS nog steeds een kolonie van het VK is. Dat lukt ons simpelweg niet. Dit argument tegen geloofskeuzevrijheid heeft echter drie problemen.

Ten eerste kunnen sceptici aanvoeren dat Alston ons uitdaagt om een overduidelijke onwaarheid te geloven of een duidelijke waarheid te verwerpen. Hoewel we dit niet altijd direct kunnen doen, kunnen we wel onze overtuiging matigen, twijfelen of opschorten. Dit impliceert ten minste enige mate van geloofskeuzevrijheid

Ten tweede definieert Alston geloof als een overtuiging of sterke zekerheid dat iets waar is. Dit is een beperkte visie op wat geloof inhoudt. Andere vormen van geloof, zoals vertrouwen of een toezegging aan iets dat waar lijkt, kunnen nog steeds normatieve verantwoordelijkheid rechtvaardigen, zelfs als we geen

directe controle hebben over onze sterkste overtuigingen. Hoofdstuk 6 gaat hier verder op in.

Ten derde zijn overtuigingen vaak verweven met andere overtuigingen. Als we één overtuiging willen veranderen, moeten we vaak ook gerelateerde overtuigingen veranderen. Dit maakt de uitdaging die Alston schetst —om zomaar een overtuiging te veranderen— veel ingewikkelder dan hij suggereert. Het is niet zozeer psychologisch onmogelijk, maar eerder een kwestie van psychologische terughoudendheid om overtuigingen zomaar te wijzigen, omdat dit doorgaans ingrijpende gevolgen heeft voor ons bredere overtuigingssysteem.

Alston's argument tegen geloofskeuzevrijheid is te beperkt en gaat voorbij aan de complexiteit van ons overtuigingssysteem. Geloofskeuzevrijheid kan bestaan in de vorm van het veranderen van onze bredere geloofssystemen, bijvoorbeeld een verandering in politieke voorkeur of een religieuze bekering, in plaats van het direct aannemen van een enkele overtuiging op verzoek.

Hoofdstuk 5:
Enkele problemen met de standaardopvatting van geloof

Dit hoofdstuk onderzoekt de beperkingen van het standaardidee van geloof, namelijk de opvatting dat geloof een overtuiging is, ofwel een cognitieve houding is ten opzichte van een bepaalde bewering, gekenmerkt door het gevoel of de neiging te voelen dat deze waar is.

Deze standardopvatting van geloof leidt tot conceptuele problemen: De filosofische analyse van Hacker (2013) toont aan dat overtuigingen niet altijd beweringen betreffen. Veel overtuigingen gaan direct over de werkelijkheid, en niet over de waarheid van een bewering. Bovendien kunnen overtuigingen niet worden gereduceerd tot gevoelens of neigingen, hoewel deze vaak met overtuigingen gepaard gaan. Hacker benadrukt dat overtuigingen geen gradaties

kennen (je gelooft iets wel of niet), maar dat gevoelens of mate van zekerheid wel variabel kunnen zijn.

Ook is het problematisch om overtuigingen te definiëren als disposities (neigingen om op een bepaalde manier te handelen). Overtuigingen kunnen ons gedrag beïnvloeden, maar zijn niet zomaar neigingen om iets te doen. Hacker wijst erop dat verschillende mensen dezelfde overtuiging kunnen hebben, maar heel verschillend kunnen handelen afhankelijk van hun doelen en situatie.

De gangbare opvatting van geloof veroorzaakt ook problemen voor de geloofsethiek. Wanneer we uitgaan van deze standaardopvatting, hebben we inderdaad geen verplichtingen om bepaalde dingen te geloven, omdat dit type geloof niet direct onder onze bewuste keuze valt. Bovendien speelt het probleem van "geprivilegieerde toegang" een rol: alleen wijzelf weten wat we werkelijk geloven, terwijl anderen alleen onze woorden of ons gedrag kunnen waarnemen. Dit kan leiden tot "geloofshypocrisie," waarbij iemand iets beweert dat niet overeenkomt met zijn werkelijke overtuiging. De standaardopvatting van geloof roept dus vragen op over de verantwoordelijkheid voor onze overtuigingen en over hoe een geloofsethiek in de praktijk gehandhaafd kan worden. Daarom is er behoefte aan een robuustere opvatting van geloof, die rekening houdt met de problemen die in dit hoofdstuk zijn besproken.

Hoofdstuk 6: Geloof als vertrouwen

De vorm van geloof die onderworpen is aan een geloofsethiek, kan het beste worden opgevat als een vorm van vertrouwen. Geloof als vertrouwen vermijdt veel problemen die optreden bij het standaardidee van geloof in een geloofsethiek. Vertrouwen is niet alleen een gevoel, maar kan ook een bewuste keuze zijn, waarbij iemand besluit om te vertrouwen op een mogelijke waarheid of bron van waarheid. Dit soort geloof, dat kan worden omschreven als

epistemisch vertrouwensgeloof, is het soort geloof dat ons gedrag beïnvloedt, zelfs wanneer we twijfels hebben.

In dit hoofdstuk worden zes voorbeelden besproken waarin geloof als vertrouwen in de waarheid van iets wordt onderscheiden van geloof als overtuiging, of het gevoel dat iets waar is. We kunnen vertrouwen dat iets waar is zonder te voelen of overtuigd te zijn dat het waar is en omgekeerd. Vertrouwensgeloof is vrijwillig — we kunnen er namelijk voor kiezen ons vertrouwen ergens in te stellen — en heeft betrekking op feitelijke of morele waarheden, die ons bewegen tot handelen.

Een geloofsethiek gebaseerd op vertrouwensgeloof verschilt op belangrijke wijze van een benadering die is gebaseerd op overtuigingsgeloof. Bij de laatste benadering wordt aangenomen dat onze handelingen bepalen wat we zullen geloven, en dat we dus die handelingen moeten kiezen die leiden tot de beste overtuigingen, terwijl de eerste benadering uitgaat van het idee dat wat we vertrouwen waar te zijn, ons handelen beïnvloedt, en dat we dus moeten vertrouwen op die dingen die resulteren in het beste handelen. Enerzijds bepaalt wat we kiezen te vertrouwen wat we doen. Anderzijds bepaalt wat we kiezen te doen onze overtuigingen. Er is dus een wisselwerking. Deze twee benaderingen sluiten elkaar niet uit, maar vullen elkaar juist aan.

Hoofdstuk 7:
De consequenties van verkeerd geloof

Dit hoofdstuk beschrijft twee andere fundamentele voorwaarden voor een geloofsethiek. Ten eerste moet er een set regels of normen zijn die voorschrijven wat of wie men moet geloven. Zonder dergelijke regels kan er geen geloofsethiek zijn en kan men niet “verkeerd” of “foutief” geloven. Ten tweede moet een geloofsethiek worden gehandhaafd. Zonder sancties of negatieve gevolgen zouden de regels namelijk geen kracht hebben. Literatuur over de geloofsethiek spreekt echter niet graag over het handhaven van een geloofsethiek maar spreekt

liever van “prijzenswaardig” of “verwerpelijk” geloof, maar geeft vervolgens zelden aan wie dan bepaalt welk geloof prijzenswaardig of verwerpelijk is. Dit kan leiden tot relativisme.

Vertrouwensgeloof leidt tot handelingen, of het ontbreken van bepaalde handelingen, en de geloofsethiek is daarmee direct verbonden aan de handelingsethiek. Vertrouwensgeloof is verwerpelijk als het ons beweegt tot verkeerd handelen, of het nalaten van goed handelen. Verkeerd vertrouwensgeloof over de fysieke werkelijkheid wordt door diezelfde werkelijkheid afgestraft door fysieke schade, zoals verwonding of verlies. De fysieke werkelijkheid zelf dicteert, als het ware, wat men zou moeten geloven. De morele werkelijkheid speelt ook een rol. Mensen stellen vertrouwen in wat juist of de moeite waard is, en morele fouten leiden vaak tot gevoelens van schuld. De negatieve gevolgen van vertrouwensgeloof in morele waarheden zijn soms minder direct zichtbaar, maar manifesteren zich wel na verloop van tijd. In sociale contexten wordt vertrouwensgeloof beoordeeld op basis van de handelingen die ze voortbrengen. Onderwijsinstellingen, rechtbanken en andere autoriteiten hebben een rol in het handhaven van sociale normen omtrent wat wij behoren te geloven. Geloofsovertuigingen die schadelijke acties of onacceptabele uitingen veroorzaken, kunnen leiden tot disciplinaire maatregelen.

Een geloofsethiek in sociale context moet worden gehandhaafd door epistemische autoriteiten. Deze autoriteiten moeten bepalen welk vertrouwensgeloof juist is en sancties opleggen bij overtredingen. Het onderscheid tussen informele en formele epistemische autoriteiten wordt uitgelegd, waarbij informele autoriteiten (bijvoorbeeld journalisten of experts) overtuigingen voorschrijven zonder sancties op te leggen. Formele autoriteiten, zoals rechtbanken of disciplinaire commissies, kunnen echter daadwerkelijk sancties opleggen.

Hoofdstuk 8:
Conclusie

Een geloofsethiek moet voldoen aan tenminste vier voorwaarden: Ten eerste moeten we geloofskeuzevrijheid hebben. Hoewel we niet onze overtuigingen direct kunnen kiezen, kunnen we wel kiezen wat we vertrouwen waar te zijn in ons handelen. Ten tweede moeten er regels zijn die voorschrijven wat wij moeten geloven. Deze regels zijn gebaseerd op zowel fysieke als morele realiteiten die onafhankelijk van onze overtuigingen bestaan. We zouden moeten geloven in deze realiteiten om op een veilige en morele manier te handelen. Institutionele regels moeten idealiter deze universele waarheden weerspiegelen. Geloofsregels schrijven voor wat we zouden moeten vertrouwen, niet wat we per se zouden moeten voelen. Ten derde moeten er epistemische autoriteiten zijn die de geloofsethiek handhaven in specifieke contexten (bijvoorbeeld: ziekenhuizen, universiteiten, kerken, enz.) Deze autoriteiten hebben binnen de context van een institutie de macht om sancties op te leggen voor verkeerd vertrouwensgeloof, zoals degradatie, ontslag of excommunicatie. Buiten de context van instituties bepalen de fysieke en morele werkelijkheid de gevolgen van ons keuzes. Ten vierde moet wat wij geloven een verschil maken. Dat verschil bestaat in wat wij wel en niet doen in ons handelen op grond van wat wij geloven. Hoewel sommige verkeerde overtuigingen geen directe negatieve gevolgen hebben, zullen ze uiteindelijk gevolgen hebben in de fysieke of morele werkelijkheid. Sanctionering van verkeerde overtuigingen komt vaak van epistemische autoriteiten in sociale contexten zoals onderwijs, religie en recht.

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