

# 4 Responsibility for Doxastic Strength Grounds Responsibility for Belief

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## 1. The Problem

The question I'm interested in is:

How is it possible for deontic evaluations of beliefs such as the claim that a subject  $S$  should not have believed that  $p$  at a given time  $t$  to be appropriate?

This question arises because of the “argument from doxastic involuntarism,” which concludes that such evaluations cannot be appropriate:

1. Our beliefs can be properly subject to negative deontic evaluation iff it's within our power not to form them.
2. It's within our power not to form our beliefs iff we have voluntary control over them.
3. The fact that we cannot believe at will in the way we can act at will – in short, doxastic involuntarism – implies that we do not have voluntary control over our beliefs.
4. Therefore, beliefs cannot be properly subject to deontic evaluation; such evaluations, when it comes to beliefs, are inappropriate.

The argument from doxastic involuntarism is valid, and I will take for granted that its highly counterintuitive conclusion cannot but be false. This conclusion is, as Sharon Ryan writes, “shocking,” because it implies that “it is never accurate to say that one *should* have believed differently,” which is an expression that we use “in a literal sense, very often” (Ryan 2003: 49) – i.e. that we very often use deontically rather than for expressing the evaluative judgement that it would have been good or better or ideal that one believes differently.

To motivate this assumption, I'll simply mention the argument that if it is appropriate for one to say that  $S$  should not have  $\phi$ -ed in certain circumstances when her action of  $\phi$ -ing is enkratic – i.e. results from her

belief that it is perfectly adequate for her to  $\phi$  in these circumstances – then either of the following judgements has to be appropriate:

- a. S should not have come to that belief.
- b. S should not have acted in accordance with it.

But (b) comes down to judging that S should have exhibited the kind of irrationality in which *akrasia* consists (i.e.  $\phi$ -ing while believing one should not  $\phi$ ), which sounds particularly odd.<sup>1</sup> Judgement (a) is much more natural: S should not have come to that belief. Now, (a) implies that beliefs can be properly subject to deontic evaluations. So, if it is admitted that *enkratic* actions can be properly subject to such evaluations, the same goes with the beliefs from which these *enkratic* actions result.<sup>2</sup>

I'll assume that premise (1) is true because I'll assume that the “ought implies can” principle is true and that (1) directly derives from it. More exactly, I'll assume that this principle is true when formulated so as to escape the objection that one can have the obligation to  $\phi$  at  $t$  even when one cannot  $\phi$  at  $t$  but could have made it the case that one can  $\phi$  at  $t$ . For example, I can have the obligation to repay a debt on Monday even if on Monday I cannot honour it but could have honoured it (for example, if I had not spent all my money in bars this weekend). A formulation of the “ought implies can” principle that escapes this objection is:

If one ought to  $\phi$  at  $t$ , then one can  $\phi$  at  $t$ , or can put oneself, before  $t$ , in a position to  $\phi$  at  $t$ .

Correlatively:

If one should have  $\phi$ -ed at  $t$ , then one could  $\phi$  at  $t$  or could have put oneself, before  $t$ , in a position to  $\phi$  at  $t$ .

Premise (1) should then be restated in the following way:

- 1.\* The beliefs we form at any time  $t$  can be properly subject to deontic evaluation iff (a) it is within our power, at  $t$ , not to form them, or (b) it was within our power, before  $t$ , to do things that would have led us not to form them at  $t$ .

About premise (3) (“The fact that we cannot believe at will in the way we can act at will implies that we do not have voluntary control over our beliefs”) it could be argued that it is false because there are cases in which I clearly have voluntary control over my believing certain things even if I do not believe these things at will in the way I can act at will.

Suppose I do not believe in extraterrestrial intelligence, and suppose I know that if I take a certain pill or read a certain book, I will believe after that in extraterrestrial intelligence. Or suppose I know that I have the

following special ability: if I say “I believe in extraterrestrial intelligence” three times in a row and then add “Abracadabra!”, I will believe after that in extraterrestrial intelligence. In such cases I clearly have voluntary control over my believing in extraterrestrial intelligence even if I do not believe that at will in the way I can act at will.

Admittedly, I can act at will in a certain way so that, as a result, I believe a certain thing. But being able to do certain things T at will does not consist in being able to do some *other* things T\* at will with the result that T obtains. For one to be able to do certain things at will, one has to be able to do these things without having to do some other things. This means that the things one can do at will are those actions that are often characterised in the literature as *basic* actions. So, in the case just indicated, I do not believe in extraterrestrial intelligence at will in the way I can act at will, but it clearly seems correct to say that I have voluntary control over my believing in extraterrestrial intelligence (in particular in the variant in which I have the Abracadabra ability). And this directly speaks against premise (3).

Since what can be done at will are *basic* actions, it can then be argued that being able to do a certain thing at will is having *basic voluntary control* over the doing of that thing.

Premise (3) should then be restated as follows:

- 3.\* The fact that we cannot believe at will in the way we can act at will implies that we do not have *basic* voluntary control over the formation of our beliefs.

After having restated premises (1) and (3) as I just did, premise (2) should then be modified as follows:

- 1.\* The beliefs we form at any time *t* can be properly subject to deontic evaluation iff (a) it is within our power, at *t*, not to form them, or (b) it was within our power, before *t*, to do things that would have led us not to form them at *t*.
- 2\*a. It is within our power, at *t*, not to form the beliefs we form at *t* iff we have basic voluntary control over our beliefs.
- 2\*b. It was within our power, before *t*, to do things that would have led us not to form these beliefs at *t* iff we have basic voluntary control over doing these things.
- 3.\* The fact that we cannot believe at will in the way we can act at will implies that we do not have basic voluntary control over the formation of our beliefs.

But from these premises, it is obviously invalid to conclude:

4. Therefore, beliefs cannot be properly subject to deontic evaluation; such evaluations, when it comes to beliefs, are inappropriate.

Indeed, from premises (1\*) and (2\*b), it follows that if we have basic voluntary control over doing, before  $t$ , things that would have led us not to form the beliefs we form at  $t$ , then these beliefs can be properly subject to deontic evaluation. And it follows from (3) that we can have basic voluntary control over our actions. So, it seems that even if it is not within our power, at  $t$ , not to form the beliefs we form at  $t$  because we do not have basic voluntary control over our beliefs, they can be properly subject to deontic evaluation because, before  $t$ , we can have basic voluntary control over actions that, if done, would have led us not to form these beliefs at  $t$ . In short, it seems that beliefs can be properly subject to deontic evaluation because we can have indirect control over them in virtue of the basic voluntary control we have over our actions.<sup>3</sup>

However, I'll argue that this claim – let's call it *Indirect Voluntary Control* – should be rejected and that it is *another kind of indirect control* that makes our beliefs properly subject to deontic evaluation.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Why We Should Reject *Indirect Voluntary Control*

Let's admit that the judgement that S should not have believed that  $p$  at  $t$  is grounded on the judgement that S should have done things before  $t$  that would have led her, at  $t$ , not to form the belief that  $p$  – for instance, attentively reading easily accessible documents related to the issue of whether  $p$  rather than just taking a quick look at one and then leaving the library and going to the beach all day long.

Let's also admit that S has basic voluntary control over these actions that would have led her not to form certain beliefs at  $t$  (her way of inquiring and of examining the evidence, in the main).

Suppose now that these *actions* are enkratic: they result from S's belief that there's no need for her to inquire further and to examine the evidence with more attention. Then for these actions to be properly subject to deontic evaluation it is necessary that this belief from which they result can itself be properly subject to deontic evaluation. Now, arguing that this belief can itself be properly subject to deontic evaluation on the condition that it results from actions from S over which she has basic voluntary control would obviously lead to an infinite regress. Therefore, it seems that, at some point, our deontic evaluations of beliefs must *not* be grounded on deontic evaluations of actions based on beliefs from which they enkratically follow.

This argument appears in the literature in a more particular form in the context of discussions addressing the question of when one can be blamed for (all-things-considered) wrong actions the wrongness of which one is ignorant. In these discussions devoted to articulating the “epistemic condition for moral responsibility,” one argument from Gideon Rosen (2004) and Michael Zimmerman (1997) has received much attention. It can be reconstructed as follows:

Saying that

5. When S is ignorant that her action (or omission) A is wrong or falsely believes that A is not wrong, S is blameworthy for A iff S is blameworthy for this ignorance I or this belief B,

and

6. S is blameworthy for I or B iff they result from a blameworthy action (or omission) A'

and

7. S is blameworthy for A' iff S is blameworthy for her false belief B' that A' is not wrong, or for her ignorance I' that A' is wrong

leads to an infinite regress because, following this line of thought, one will have to say that

8. S is blameworthy for B' or I' iff they result from a blameworthy action (or omission) A''

and

9. S is blameworthy for A'' iff S is blameworthy for her false belief B'' that A'' is not wrong, or for her ignorance I'' that A'' is wrong

*and so on, ad infinitum.*

Therefore, according to Rosen, we should rather say that

- 5.\* When S is ignorant that her action (or omission) A is wrong or falsely believes that A is not wrong, S is blameworthy for A iff S is blameworthy for her false belief B that A is not wrong, or for her ignorance I that A is wrong,

and

- 6.\* S is blameworthy for B or I iff they result, at some point, from a blameworthy action (or omission) A' which is so because S does A' while believing that A' is wrong – i.e. that she should not do A'.

In other words, for Rosen, “the only possible locus of original responsibility is an akratic act” (Rosen 2004: 307) for which the agent is directly culpable; “every blameworthy action must be either itself an akratic action or the causal upshot of one” (Rudy-Hiller 2017). In short, “blameworthiness requires akrasia” (Wieland 2017: 13). And because for Rosen, due to “opacity of mind,” “we are never warranted in confident attributions

of clear-eyed akrasia [. . .] we are not warranted in confident attributions of responsibility or blame for bad actions” (FitzPatrick 2008: 593). As a consequence, “few, if any, of our judgements of culpability are justified” (Rudy-Hiller 201). The “*question about akrasia*,” as Matthew Talbert calls it, then is “whether a person might be blameworthy for her wrongdoing even if, in the etiology of her action, she never acted wrongly by her own lights” (Talbert 2017: 47).

Rosen’s conclusion has often been resisted by rejecting (5). Because we are not interested here in deciding when a subject is blameworthy for a wrong action (or omission) of hers, but in deciding when a subject is responsible for her beliefs, many of the solutions that have been advanced in the literature to refute Rosen’s conclusion do not apply to our regress that concerns our *responsibility* for our *beliefs in general*. This regress can be formulated in the following way.

Saying that

10. S is responsible for her (true or false) belief B iff it enkratically results from an action (or omission) A’ for which S is responsible

and

11. S is responsible for A’ iff S is responsible for the (true or false) belief B’ from which A’ enkratically results

leads to an infinite regress.

Let’s try to apply to this latter regress Rosen’s answer to the former:

12. S is responsible for her (true or false) belief B iff it results, at some point, from an action (or omission) A’ for which S is responsible because S does A’ while believing that A’ is wrong, i.e. that she should not do **A**.

Rosen’s claim – and its consequences – that every blameworthy action must be either itself an akratic action or the causal upshot of one have often been judged to be too revisionary to be plausible. But things are even worse when it comes to (12): saying that a subject is *responsible* for her beliefs when they are the causal upshot of an akratic action – and hence that a belief that does not result from an akratic action cannot be deontically evaluated – does not have any plausibility.<sup>5</sup>

How then to escape the regress? A natural thought is that it is possible to escape it by introducing moral and intellectual vices (or virtues) or morally and intellectually vicious (or virtuous) tendencies into the picture (Montmarquet 1993; FitzPatrick 2008, 2017).

The idea, to put it in a nutshell, is to say that for any proposition *p*, a subject is responsible for her belief that *p* because she is responsible for the way in which she inquired into *p* from which this belief results – how

much evidence she collected, how much time she spent (re)examining it, and how much attention she devoted to it, etc. – *and this depends on her moral and intellectual character.*

There are, however, at least two problems with this proposal. First, it is not obvious that we are responsible for our moral and intellectual character – even if it results from previous voluntary actions from us; indeed, they themselves result from the intellectual and moral standpoint we occupy at a certain moment, and it is not obvious that we are responsible for our occupying this standpoint at that moment. Second, supposing we can be held responsible for our moral and intellectual character, what about the beliefs that result from those actions that do not flow from or are not manifestations of it? (For instance, when an open-minded person demonstrates dogmatism on a certain issue on a certain occasion, leading her to examine very superficially the new evidence at her disposal on this issue at that time; or when a generally akratic person occasionally stops inquiring into whether *p* while judging that she should do the contrary.) Should we say that, *ipso facto*, we are not responsible for them, so that an open-minded person cannot be held responsible, and so cannot be blamed, for the beliefs she sometimes forms and holds out of dogmatism? That would be strongly counterintuitive.

It follows from the foregoing that there does not seem to be much hope in grounding our responsibility for our beliefs only on actions over which we have voluntary control. Rik Peels follows another path (although this might not be immediately obvious): “whether or not one believes responsibly depends on whether one has acted in accordance or contrary to one’s beliefs about one’s intellectual obligations” (Peels 2017: 198). This means that one can be blamed for one’s beliefs not only if they result from actions or omissions one occurrently believes to be wrong given one’s intellectual obligations, but also from actions one non-occurrently or tacitly believes to be wrong given these obligations (which makes, in the latter case, these actions non-akratic *stricto sensu*, one might want to argue). Similarly, Philip Robichaud (2014) argues that one’s beliefs are also blameworthy when they result from a way of inquiring that one takes to have sufficient, though not decisive, reasons to be wrong (which also makes these actions non-akratic, strictly speaking).<sup>6</sup> This may be correct, but it does not tell us *why* or *in virtue of what* we can be held responsible for these actions and the beliefs resulting from them. A fortiori, it does not tell us *why* or *in virtue of what* we can be held responsible for beliefs *not* resulting from such akratic or quasi-akratic (as we might call them) actions. The same goes for William FitzPatrick’s claim that our beliefs are blameworthy when they result from actions that result themselves from “indulging vicious tendencies” (FitzPatrick 2017: 42).

That said, these views suggest nonetheless an important point: our responsibility for our beliefs has to do with things – being (quasi-)akratic or not, indulging vicious tendencies or not – over which we do *not* have

basic voluntary control, that we do not do *at will*. It's time at present to explore this path.

### 3. Another Kind of Indirect Control

Let's start with an idea that Philippe Chuard/Nicholas Southwood (2009) have emphasised: for a subject *S* to have, at *t*, the *ability* (and opportunity) to  $\varphi$ , *S* does not have to have the ability to  $\varphi$  *voluntarily*; so, "ought implies can" does not mean "S ought to  $\varphi$  only if S has voluntary control over  $\varphi$ -ing" (Chuard/Southwood 2009: 620).

Could then *S* have at a certain time *t* the ability and opportunity not to form the belief she formed at that time *t* while not having basic voluntary control over the formation of this belief?

A natural way of understanding the negative deontic evaluation that *S* should not have believed that *p* at *t* is that *S*'s doxastic performance in forming the belief that *p* at *t* was *inferior* to what it could have been given *S*'s cognitive or intellectual abilities at *t*. *S* had the ability (and opportunity), at *t*, to do *better* than she did by forming the belief that *p*, and this makes it possible for one to blame *S* for having formed it.

Let us for instance consider two subjects who both form the same belief on the basis of the same fallacious reasoning, but whose intellectual abilities differ in the way Jessica Brown imagines:

One of the subjects has the intellectual ability to see for herself that the reasoning is fallacious and moreover has been trained to avoid it. By contrast, the other subject does not have the intellectual ability to see for herself that the relevant fallacy is a fallacy, and has not been taught that the reasoning is fallacious.

Brown 2018: 6

As she remarks, "It would be inappropriate and unfair to rebuke and be angry with the second low-ability subject who cannot see for herself that it is fallacious reasoning, and has not been taught any different" (ibid.). Our different reaction to the low and high-ability subjects indicates that for us "differences in a subject's ability to X makes a difference to the degree of their responsibility and blameworthiness" (ibid.), which makes it "preferable to adopt an account of blameworthy belief on which the degree of blame can be affected by one's abilities" (ibid.: 17).

Let us make more explicit the sense in which the doxastic performance of the high-ability subject could have been better: her cognitive or intellectual abilities enabled her to better process the evidence she had at her disposal – which would have led her not to respond doxastically to it by forming the belief in question. In other words, by processing her evidence in the way she did, which led her to form this belief, the subject was below the level of doxastic performance that her cognitive or



intellectual capacities enabled her to reach then. She, in this sense, could have believed better than she did.

However, for it to be appropriate to say, in cases of doxastic underperformance, that the subject *should* have believed better than she did, and for it to be appropriate to blame her for such underperformances, it is necessary that she can be held responsible for the intervening factor that explains them. What then could be this factor (a) that can make a subject's doxastic performance at *t* inferior to the level of doxastic performance her cognitive or intellectual abilities enable her to reach at *t*, and (b) for which she can be held responsible?<sup>7</sup>

As a matter of fact, we take certain cases of belief formation to be instances of *culpable doxastic weakness*, as we might call them: when what we want, or do not want, to be the case interferes in our processing of the evidence in such a way that what we then believe to be the case culpably differs from what we would otherwise have believed on the basis of this evidence. In such cases, the subject processes the evidence at her disposal in such a way that this results in her forming a belief (a) that, given her intellectual abilities, she would not have formed if she had not demonstrated such a weakness, and (b) that is less likely to be true than the belief she would otherwise have formed.

To put it more precisely: when a subject's conative attitudes – her wishes, desires, hopes, preferences, etc. – interfere in her processing of the evidence and we take the resulting beliefs to be beliefs that, given her cognitive abilities, she would not have formed had these conative attitudes not interfered, our reactive attitude in such situations turns out to be the following: we judge that it was within her power to demonstrate *doxastic strength*, as we might call it, rather than, as we say, *letting* her hopes and desires corrupt her judgement and determine her beliefs. We do not judge it to be always easy to demonstrate doxastic strength, but it seems that we never judge this to be something that the subject involved *could not* have demonstrated. And when a subject demonstrates *doxastic weakness*, the resulting beliefs are less likely to be true than those she would have formed if this had not happened, because conative attitudes do not aim at tracking the way the world is but have, on the contrary, a world-to-mind direction of fit.

Not all cases of doxastic weakness make the subject involved blameable and the beliefs concerned beliefs she should not have formed though. In other words, not all cases of doxastic weakness are in themselves cases of *culpable* doxastic weakness. But they make the subject concerned *open to blame* in the sense that if someone (herself included)

- (a) takes it to be a moral or epistemic wrong to demonstrate doxastic weakness (e.g. on the ground that this is to *self-undermine one's own judgement*),

or

(b) deplores the consequences of this or that instance of doxastic weakness,

the fact that we take it to be always within one's power – whatever one's intellectual character traits and however difficult that may be in certain circumstances – to demonstrate doxastic strength always *leaves room for* holding the subject concerned responsible for this wrong or these consequences.

In order to evidence this fact and illustrate its consequence, let's consider a case put forward by Béla Szabados (with the aim of showing that not all instances of self-deception are (morally) wrong), and let's (rather) ask this question about this case: does it show that there are instances of doxastic weakness that are not open to blame?

Suppose a woman's son has apparently been killed in an accident. It is not absolutely certain that he has been killed, but there is good evidence that he has. Now it would be quite natural for such a woman to deceive herself into thinking that her son is alive. In fact, we would be surprised if she did not cling to such a belief until the evidence is *conclusively* against it. [. . .] It is her love and hope for her son that makes her cling to her belief so desperately. [. . .] It is by no means clear that the moral qualities that she exhibits in deceiving herself are not admirable. [. . .] The woman might be said to have failed in her regard and respect for the truth; or she might be said to have failed because she, by deceiving herself, betrayed herself as a rational agent. [. . .] [But] no morally sensitive person can possibly accept such a perspective without ceasing to be a morally sensitive person. [. . .] Respect for rationality and truth are important moral considerations – but they are not all-important! Morality cannot be reduced merely to respect for rationality and truth.

Szabados 1974: 29

This case does not show that there are instances of doxastic weakness that are not open to blame. Suppose this woman's belief – formed out of doxastic weakness – that her son is still alive leads her other son to regain hope while he was trying to get used to the idea that his brother has been killed in an accident. Suppose this regain of hope leads him to be so shocked when he learns, two days after, that his brother is well and truly dead that he commits suicide. And suppose her mother knows that without this regain of hope due to her belief formed out of doxastic weakness he would not have committed suicide.

To those telling her that, contrary to what she says, it is not her fault that he did this, we can expect her to object that she could have not formed this belief and hence that she is, at least partly, responsible for his suicide. Obviously, in such a context it would be extremely harsh from

anyone (herself included) to blame her for having formed this belief. But its being formed out of doxastic weakness does leave room for holding her (self) responsible for her son's suicide, and so for her rejecting as untrue the comforting and well-intentioned words that she cannot be held responsible for it. She could then argue that the fact that her belief that her son is alive resulted from a lack of doxastic strength does make her open to blame, and that while those who would blame her for that (even only inwardly) would be morally guilty of harshness, insensitivity, and lack of compassion,<sup>8</sup> there is no moral wrong in blaming *herself* for her lack of doxastic strength that resulted in her second son's suicide.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, it could be argued that this woman would have been even more admirable if, in addition to her love for her son that led her to believe that he is still alive (because this is something that, due to her love, she strongly desires), she had demonstrated doxastic strength – i.e. if her judgment had been insensitive to such a strong desire. Szabados is inclined to hold the opposite because he seems to think that forming in these circumstances the belief that her son is probably dead either means: (a) that she does not strongly desire that he is alive, or (b) that she has a desire for truth that surpasses her desire that he is alive – which, arguably, would be morally wrong, and so would make the belief that her son is probably dead morally wrong. But there is a third option: she strongly desires that her son is alive, and more than she desires truth; but because of her doxastic strength, her judgment is insensitive to this desire, so that she forms the belief that he is probably dead. This belief would not be open to blame, contrary to her belief that he is alive, formed out of doxastic weakness.

This apparent reactive attitude of ours – taking it to be always within our power to demonstrate doxastic strength rather than letting ourselves go to doxastic weakness (even if, in certain circumstances, this would be extremely difficult) – is not more incongruous and demanding than our reactive attitude vis-à-vis weakness of will: just as with doxastic strength, we do not judge it to be always easy to demonstrate strength of will, but it also seems that we never judge this to be something it was *impossible* for the subject involved to demonstrate.<sup>10</sup> And in the same way that we take our actions to be open to blame when they result from having demonstrated weakness of will even though, on any account of weakness of will,<sup>11</sup> demonstrating weakness or strength of will does not consist in (or reduce to) basic voluntary actions from us, we take our beliefs to be open to blame when they result from having demonstrated doxastic weakness even though demonstrating doxastic weakness or strength does not consist in (or reduce to) basic voluntary actions from us.

That such beliefs are open to blame is not more mysterious than for such actions to be so. In neither case does the kind of control we have consist in doing something *at will* in the sense in which I can generally raise my hand at will, but this does not prevent this control to be real.

It consists, when we display doxastic strength or strength of will, in succeeding in resisting the influence of some of our conative attitudes – which is not something we do at will, but in which our agency is involved. According to Michael Brent (2014), it seems that for Richard Holton (2003) it is only when we display strength of will and so succeed in resisting the force of certain desires that a distinctive causal role of *us* as agents in the performance of our actions can be observed – while, when we do not do that, our desires, beliefs and intentions and other motivational factors suffice to explain this performance. But it could be argued that this rather applies to the formation of our beliefs: it is only when we display doxastic strength – or, on the contrary, fail to do so – that a distinctive causal role of *us* as agents in the formation of our beliefs can be observed, making us responsible for them. While our control over our actions can *also* consist in having basic voluntary control over them, things are different when it comes to our beliefs: we do not have over them another form of control.

Even though this control is indirect because it consists in controlling our beliefs *by doing something else than forming them* – i.e. by resisting the influence of some of our desires (which, once again, involves our agency but does not consist in belief-based actions from us, with the consequence that the regress problem mentioned before no longer arises) – it does not precede their formation: demonstrating doxastic weakness or strength is not something that takes place before the formation of the concerned beliefs, just as demonstrating weakness or strength of will is not something that takes place before the doing of the concerned actions. Therefore, beliefs formed out of doxastic weakness are beliefs it was within our power not to form at the moment we formed them, just as actions done out of weakness of will are actions it was within our power not to do at the moment we did them, even though this does consist in having basic voluntary control over these beliefs or these actions. This is why beliefs are open to blame and hence can be properly subject to deontic evaluation. And it is also why blaming our beliefs is not always a misleading way of blaming preceding actions of us from which they result.<sup>12</sup>

## Notes

1. When “should” is taken in its ordinary deontic sense. In the evaluative – arguably much less ordinary – sense of “should,” there clearly seem to be situations where people should have been akratic. When “should” is taken in its evaluative sense, it’s not odd to say that tyrants, genocidal maniacs, serial killer, terrorists, and the like should not have acted enkratically – i.e. in accordance with their belief that it was perfectly adequate for them to kill, harm, terrorize, etc. – and should have been akratic.
2. On this line of reasoning, see also (Littlejohn 2013, Rosen 2003).
3. On such views, see Meylan (2017).
4. *Indirect Voluntary Control* seems to be accepted by almost all the authors discussing the question of whether we can be held responsible for our beliefs.

But some of them hold that we have, in addition, a direct but non-voluntary control over our beliefs, or want to account for the responsibility we have over them in terms of reasons-responsiveness. I won't discuss these views here. Whatever their merits, it seems to me that there is something deeply unsatisfactory with them: according to these views, we can be held responsible for our beliefs in virtue of the way in which they are formed, either given the very nature of belief, or given some properties of the mechanisms at play in the formation of our beliefs. In both cases, whether or not we can be held responsible for this or that belief of ours is not grounded on something that depends on *us*, on *our agency*. And I would argue that if our agency is not involved, it is problematic to hold us responsible for our beliefs. To the objection that our agency is well and truly involved because epistemic agency should not be conceived in the way in which we conceive practical agency, that these two forms of agency radically differ, I would simply respond as follows: our intuition that our agency has to play a role is the intuition that something like our ordinary practical agency has to play a role, so that it is not following this intuition to say that a totally different form of agency is involved in the formation of our beliefs.

5. Contrary, for instance, to the claim a subject is *blameworthy* for her beliefs iff they are the causal upshot of an akratic action – which, while highly implausible, does not seem not to make any sense, contrary to (12).
6. See also, on this issue, Levy (2009).
7. George Sher holds that an agent, let us call him Paul, is responsible for “an act of whose wrongness or foolishness he is unaware [when] his failure to recognize the act as wrong or foolish falls short of satisfying some applicable standard” that is “set precisely by that agent’s current cognitive capacities” (Sher 2009: 21, 110). Since this standard is so set, Paul’s failure to satisfy it has to be explained, for him to be responsible for the failure, by a factor that is external to his current cognitive capacities. This factor is, according to Sher, “the interaction of some combination of his constitutive attitudes, dispositions, and traits” that “make him the person that he is” (*ibid.*: 88). For Sher, “[t]hese attitudes, traits, and dispositions include [. . .] the underlying mechanisms, both physical and nonphysical, that shape his emotional reactions and the speed and accuracy of his inferences and decision-making” (*ibid.*: 86). But it could be argued that such things contribute to determining Paul’s current cognitive capacities and hence the standard below which he is responsible for his failure to recognize the act concerned as wrong or foolish. As a consequence, these things cannot make him responsible for this failure.
8. Which means that it is perfectly possible that a subject is blameworthy for something and, at the same time, that blaming her for the thing in question is morally wrong.
9. Let’s note in passing that it may happen that a subject’s evaluation of the evidence is very careful and that she enkratically doxastically responds to this evaluation by forming and holding a belief whose content and degree are in line with this evaluation, but that she nonetheless is open to blame for her belief because it is formed and held out of doxastic weakness. It may happen for instance that I strongly desire that my good old colleague Martin’s friendship is sincere, that whether this is true or not is so important to me that I spend hours and hours considering the question, anxiously reviewing all the evidence I have and devoting all my attention to it, and that my conclusion that his friendship is sincere is formed out of doxastic weakness: without this strong desire, I would have immediately realised that the evidence clearly indicated the opposite. This means that when a belief is formed and held in an epistemically responsible way (as we might call it), this does not guarantee

that it is not formed and held out of doxastic weakness, and so does not guarantee that it is not open to blame.

10. In line with this claim, Alfred Mele writes that he “would not be surprised if many, and even most, lay respondents to a story in which it is made clear that an agent is moved by an irresistible desire would, if asked, say that he displays some weakness of will [. . .] and [. . .] think that if the agent’s will were not weak, he would be able to resist the desire and that the desire’s being irresistible by him entails some weakness of will” (Mele 2010: 403). So, when James Beebe (2013) reports that experimental subjects are happy to attribute “weakness of will to agents whose actions stem from compulsion” even when it is described as “uncontrollable” and “overwhelming,” this does not necessarily imply that they take these actions to be absolutely compelled or irresistible.
11. Whether in terms of beliefs and desires only, in terms of beliefs, desires and intentions, or in terms of such factors plus will-power. See e.g. Holton (2003) for an overview of these different accounts and a defence of the latter.
12. This paper has decisively improved after crucial suggestions and criticisms from Anne Meylan. As a result, the amount of contestable inferences it contains should have fallen significantly. I want to thank her warmly for that. Thanks also to Sebastian Schmidt for his very useful comments.

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