

Compatibilism and Doxastic Control

Andrei A. Buckareff

Received: 25 April 2006 / Accepted: 6 May 2006 /
Published online: 7 October 2006
© Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2006

Abstract Sharon Ryan has recently argued that if one has compatibilist intuitions about free action, then one should reject the claim that agents cannot exercise direct voluntary control over coming to believe. In this paper I argue that the differences between beliefs and actions make the expectation of direct voluntary control over coming to believe unreasonable. So Ryan's theory of doxastic agency is untenable.

Keywords doxastic voluntarism · belief · agency · action theory · epistemology

Introduction

In this paper I will examine and critique a recent proposal about the nature and scope of agency normal adult human agents can exercise with respect to acquiring doxastic attitudes like belief, disbelief, and the suspension of belief. This problem is often called the problem of 'doxastic voluntarism.' But since it is fairly uncontroversial that doxastic attitudes are susceptible to a variety of ways of being indirectly manipulated and controlled, the problem is better framed as the problem of '*direct* doxastic voluntarism.'¹ The debate over direct doxastic voluntarism focuses on whether it is possible (either conceptually or psychologically) for normal adult human agents to exercise direct voluntary control over the acquisition of at least some of their doxastic attitudes in the same way they can exercise such control over basic actions (actions which are performed without performing any instrumental actions). If they cannot exercise such control, the problem then becomes determining what kind of control agents can exercise with respect to the formation of some of their doxastic attitudes. This broader problem of determining the nature and scope of our

¹ For recent defenses of the claim that normal human agents can exercise indirect voluntary control over coming to believe and that suggest framing the debate in terms of whether strong or direct doxastic voluntarism is tenable, see Audi (2001), Buckareff (2004), Feldman (2001), and Pojman (1985).

control over our doxastic attitudes (whether it is indirect or direct) I will refer to as the problem of ‘doxastic agency.’

While the problem of doxastic agency is interesting in its own right as one aspect of the problem of human agency, one of the chief motivations for exploring this topic has come from the direction of epistemology. Sharon Ryan, among others, has taken up the task of showing how agents can exercise the control requisite to make the application of epistemic obligations to epistemic agents justified by providing an account of strong doxastic agency. Ryan like many other epistemologists who defend direct doxastic voluntarism aims at showing that premise (2) in the following argument is false.

1. If we have epistemic obligations, then doxastic attitudes are sometimes under our direct voluntary control.
2. *Doxastic attitudes are never under our direct voluntary control.*
3. Therefore, we do not have any epistemic obligations.

I am chiefly concerned in this paper with analyzing and critiquing Ryan’s attempt at falsifying premise (2) of the argument above. I will not, however, concern myself with the debate in epistemology over the nature of epistemic obligations and whether or not we can have any epistemic obligations if we do not have direct voluntary control over coming to have our doxastic attitudes.² My focus in this paper will be exclusively on discussing and critiquing Ryan’s recent defense of a theory of doxastic agency she calls ‘doxastic compatibilism.’ Neither her nor my commitments regarding the nature of epistemic obligations will be discussed in this essay. The focus will be entirely on the nature of doxastic agency. So my concerns here are with the nature of doxastic agency as a problem in philosophical psychology that has consequences for how we think about a problem in epistemology, and not so much with the problem in epistemology.

Ryan argues that if you have compatibilist intuitions about free action, then you should reject the claim that agents cannot exercise voluntary control over coming to believe. But as is clear from her discussion, not any old voluntary control will do. In her work, Ryan never disambiguates different versions of doxastic voluntarism and simply uses the language of ‘voluntary control’ with respect to doxastic attitudes without specifying how direct or indirect she takes our control to be. But it seems clear that the sort of indirect voluntary control an agent can exercise over the *outcome* of her actions cannot be what Ryan thinks is sufficient for voluntary control. The type of voluntary control she is concerned with is direct – being of the same type we have over our actions, including basic actions.³ Whether she calls the doxastic control ‘direct voluntary control’ or merely ‘voluntary control,’ or whether she calls her position merely a form of ‘doxastic voluntarism’ or ‘direct doxastic voluntarism,’ is irrelevant. But what will become apparent is that the type of doxastic control Ryan defends *is* clearly direct or basic voluntary control, so Ryan’s doxastic compatibilism is best regarded as a version of what I have referred to as ‘*direct* doxastic voluntarism’ above.

On Ryan’s doxastic compatibilism, coming to believe is like performing any basic action. It admits of control by intentions as one would get with paradigmatic actions such as raising one’s arm or doing a math problem. The acquisition of a belief for which an agent can be held responsible (and can therefore have obligations with respect to) is the direct

² See Buckareff (2006, [forthcoming A](#)) and Feldman (2001, 2004) for defenses of the propriety of ascribing epistemic obligations to agents even if they lack direct voluntary control over coming to believe.

³ In correspondence, Sharon Ryan confirmed my impression. She takes beliefs to be under our direct voluntary control and regards believing to be an action.

causal consequence of acquiring an intention to believe. Furthermore, while Ryan focuses on cases of forming beliefs on the basis of epistemic reasons, she does not deny that beliefs can be formed on the basis of practical reasons.⁴ (For brevity's sake, I shall not consider what her account would look like with respect to forming beliefs in response to practical reasons. I will simply focus on epistemic reasons because she only considers cases of coming to believe on the basis of epistemic reasons.)

The control an agent exercises over the acquisition of a belief, according to Ryan, is like that exercised over paradigmatic free actions, where the sense of 'free' is understood in compatibilist terms – i.e., where an agent's freely *A*-ing is compatible with her *A*-ing being causally determined by previous psychological and physical events and the laws of nature. Ryan equates intentional actions with free actions (Ryan, 2003, pp. 70–71). She writes that "I think doxastic attitudes are typically freely held because I think doxastic attitudes are typically held intentionally" (Ryan, 2003, p. 70).⁵ She adds that "What really matters, if our beliefs and actions are free, is that they are intentional" (Ryan, 2003, p. 71). And earlier in the same paper she argues that all that is necessary for an action to be free is that the action be done intentionally (Ryan, 2003, p. 67). So Ryan appears to regard the actual sequence in the etiology of an action as what determines whether or not an action was free.

The theory of doxastic agency proposed by Ryan has additional features. But the foregoing are the core features. In this paper I will argue that the differences between coming to believe and performing actions make the expectation of direct voluntary control over coming to believe unreasonable. So I will defend a version of what James Montmarquet calls 'the Asymmetry Thesis': Coming to believe and action are asymmetrical with respect to direct voluntary control (Montmarquet, 1986, p. 49). Incidentally, I believe that the force of my criticisms of Ryan's theory of doxastic agency does not rest on what theory of free agency a person endorses. I will argue that doxastic compatibilism fails to be a tenable theory of direct voluntary control over the acquisition of beliefs, much less anything that a contemporary compatibilist about free agency would recognize as *free* doxastic agency.

Ryan on Control of Beliefs and Actions

The central problem with Ryan's theory of doxastic agency is that there is a disparity between how control is exercised over the acquisition of doxastic attitudes *versus* how we control uncontroversial actional behavior. Specifically, the role played by intentions in Ryan's theory of doxastic agency seems quite different from the role of intentions in cases of uncontroversial actions. So the salient question that begs for an answer is the following. What sort of control relation obtains between intentions and coming to believe *versus* intentions and uncontroversial actions? But answering this question first requires getting clear on what we are controlling when exercising doxastic control.

Ryan sometimes slips between addressing whether belief is actional or whether some associated event like acquiring or holding a belief is actional (see, e.g., Ryan, 2003, p. 70). She even writes that "When you believe a proposition, you are doing something, not just

⁴ In correspondence, on March 16, 2005, Ryan informed me that she does not deny that beliefs can be formed on the basis of practical reasons and subject to direct voluntary control in response to such reasons.

⁵ I am not sure I know what Ryan means by 'held' or 'holding a belief'. It could either mean what I mean by 'coming to believe' and its cognates (e.g., 'acquiring a belief' or 'forming a belief') or it could refer to some act associated with believing – e.g., holding the content of a belief to be true. In either case, Ryan's concern is clearly with one's coming to believe and even believing itself being under an agent's direct voluntary control.

having something done to you” (Ryan, 2003, p. 73). Of course, beliefs can be occurrent or dispositional. But all beliefs are mental *states*. Actions, on the other hand, are typically construed as identical with or coterminous with events or processes.⁶ In the interest of being charitable, I will assume that she is concerned with the event of acquiring or forming a belief by which one comes to believe a proposition. So I take it that what she meant in the foregoing quotation is better understood as “When you *come to believe* a proposition, you are doing something, not just having something done to you.” The question then that is worth taking up is whether any tokens of the event of coming to believe can be actions. It should be fairly uncontroversial that believing *qua* outcome (rather than as shorthand for ‘coming to believe’) can be intentional. I may want to settle on a doxastic attitude about *p* and intend to acquire the proper attitude towards *p*. As a consequence, I reason about the evidence, and I come to believe that *p*. My belief *qua* mental state was the outcome I intended (even if I did not intend to *believe* that *p*). So also, the event of coming to believe can be intentional in the same way my believing is. Minimally, as the outcome of some actions of mine, coming to believe can be intentional. But the problem remains as to whether or not *coming to believe* can itself be actional – so not just an intentional *outcome*, but an intentional *action*.

There are two ways of construing the claim that coming to believe is actional. Consider forming a belief (which should be contrasted with passively acquiring a belief). One can regard the formation of a belief to be a composite event. There are actional processes that cause one to acquire a belief and the acquisition of the belief is the non-actional but intentional outcome of the actional processes. The whole composite process is the formation of a belief. On this view, a proper part of the process of belief-formation can be actional (e.g., one’s deliberating about what to believe); but a proper part of it, the acquisition of the belief, is non-actional and is not under the *direct* voluntary control of an agent (even if acquiring a belief is the intended outcome of an agent’s actions). On the other hand, one can take the formation of a belief to be the event that the actional processes such as reasoning cause. On this view, the formation of the belief is itself a separate event that is also a momentary mental action. The latter way of construing ‘forming a belief’ where belief-formation is actional is the more controversial of the two. The former is consistent with the claim that agents can exercise indirect voluntary control over their beliefs (via such actions as deciding to bring it about that one believes and then performing a series of mental actions such as reasoning, selectively focusing on evidence, etc., that cause one to acquire a belief). The latter is the claim being defended by the direct doxastic voluntarist. Ryan endorses the latter view.⁷ For instance, she writes that “Although doxastic attitudes are formed in response to evidence, it is evidence we are actively appreciating. Our appreciation of the evidence causes us to intentionally form a particular doxastic attitude” (Ryan, 2003, p. 72). The formation of a belief is thus like any other action for her that is distinct from the processes of reasoning, etc., that precede it and is caused by an intention. *This view of actional belief formation is untenable*. Let me explain.

I take it from Ryan’s comments that she regards it as psychologically possible that the intention in a case of intentionally coming to believe is a proximal (i.e., ‘present-directed’) intention to believe (where coming to believe would be a basic action). The acquisition of a proximal intention, then, would cause the formation of a belief. This is where Ryan gets

⁶ There are some dissenters, however, from the accepted orthodoxy. See Alvarez and Hyman (1998), Bach (1980), and Ruben (1997, 2003).

⁷ In correspondence, Ryan confirmed that this is her view about belief-formation.

into trouble. There does not seem to be any good reason for affording intentions any such role in the etiology of our common everyday beliefs.

Assuming a causal role for intentions in acting, if forming a belief is an uncontroversial action, *an agent's intention must play the proper causal role through the completion of the formation of the belief*. It cannot play a merely ballistic role, as examples of primary causal deviance make evident. The intention must play the role of causally sustaining the formation of a belief in the same way an intention does with respect to uncontroversial actional behavior such as driving a car or just kicking a ball.⁸ Furthermore, it seems the agent should be in the position to be aware of her intention playing such a role in coming to believe. But it seems that we are rarely, if ever, aware of our common everyday acquisitions of beliefs having this quality.

One may object that it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to discern any real difference between an agent's intention playing the proper causally sustaining role necessary for the event to be actional.⁹ The event of coming to believe is much simpler than performing a fairly uncontroversial basic action such as intentionally moving one's arm. In moving one's arm it is easier to discern how an agent's intention to move her arm plays the proper causal role in causally initiating and sustaining the action; and an agent can easily be aware of the intention in acting. But coming to believe is a much simpler event. If it occurs in response to an intention, an agent would most likely not even be aware of the event of coming to believe associated with believing. The agent would simply find herself believing. So why should we expect that we could be aware of our intention and know that it played the proper causal role in coming to believe?

This reply is challenging, but it is less of a problem than it may appear to be at first glance. Suppose an agent consciously acquires an intention to believe that *p*. If the agent suddenly found herself believing that *p*, and the agent is surprised by this, we have evidence of an instance of causal deviance where the intention does not properly cause the event of coming to believe. The event, therefore, would not be actional. Coming to believe must occur in a way that the agent would recognize as being authorized and caused by her in the same way the movement of her arm would be when she performs the action of moving her arm. The event cannot be one that simply comes over the agent or simply occurs in response to some reasons. It must occur in the right way. Whether the event is extended over time or indexed to a nanosecond, it must be properly caused. *And it seems the agent should be able to be aware of whether or not what occurs/occurred is what is/was intended*. But this is precisely the problem with most if not all instances of coming to believe being actional. We acquire evidence and form beliefs in response to the evidence we have. I know that in my own case, if I suddenly found that I do not believe what my evidence supports (particularly when it is overwhelming evidence – however implausible that may sound), I would not think that it was because I failed to believe what I intended. I would not even mention an intention (even if I speak loosely in terms of what I “meant” to believe). Compare this to a case where I am blindfolded and my arm is anaesthetized so that it cannot be moved. You ask me to move my arm. You then take off the blindfold. I would be surprised that I did not do what I intended to do. In the case of my believing contrary to my evidence, I would be surprised that I do not believe what my evidence supports. Except

⁸ See Bishop (1989, chap. 5), Brand (1984), Buckareff (2005), Buckareff (forthcoming B), Buckareff and Zhu (2004), Mele (1992, chap. 10), Mossel (2005), Searle (1983, chap. 3), and Thalberg (1984) for arguments in defense of the claim that intentions must play a causally sustaining role in the etiology of action and not merely a ballistic role.

⁹ Richard Feldman raised this objection.

in rare cases, I would not even mention an intention, much less be aware of having an intention. But Ryan seems to think that intentions play a role in coming to believe quite often and in ways not unlike what occurs when we perform various fairly uncontroversial actions.

But perhaps I am mistaken. Typical cases of coming to believe may be more like typical actions than I am admitting. Ryan considers three types of behavior she takes to be actional and says that the formation of a doxastic attitude is like such behavior. Specifically, she considers instances of one choosing what type of soup to eat, taking a long run, and laughing at a joke (Ryan, 2003, p. 73). While I am skeptical about laughing at a joke being such that all or most of its tokens are actional, I agree for the sake of argument that all three of these are tokens of what are often or always actional event-types. Ryan claims that these events are like the formation of a belief because they are caused by things about an agent that are outside of her direct voluntary control. Specifically, one's practical reasons in such cases cause the actions; but they are still actions even if caused by things outside of an agent's direct voluntary control. Similar things are true about doxastic attitudes, according to Ryan. "I can't just disbelieve or suspend judgment on the proposition that there is a car headed for me when I see one. I need some reason to doubt or disbelieve. These limitations do not show that I don't have control over what I do or what I believe" (Ryan, 2003, pp. 73–74). In the case of the uncontroversial actions, so long as she does them intentionally, Ryan claims, she does them freely; and so, I take it, we should infer that they are under her control. So, it seems that so long as they are events that are produced in the right way and done intentionally, then they are actions and subject to her control. Similar things are true about the formation of beliefs and their being free and actional. She writes regarding an instance of intentionally forming a belief:

When there's a car zooming toward me and I believe that there is, I'm believing freely because I'm believing what I mean to believe. Even if I have not spent time deliberating or consciously deciding to believe a car is headed for me, I have done what it takes to form the belief. I'm believing intentionally. The belief did not just happen to me. (Ryan, 2003, p. 74)

Contra Ryan, even if we suppose that an intention anteceded or was concurrent with the event of belief formation, it does not follow that anything was 'done' in the actional sense of there being any direct agent-control over the event. More needs to be said.

If Ryan is right, it seems that most cases of acquiring a belief would appear to be cases of actively forming a belief (I come to believe propositions all the time in the way I suspect she does when she comes to believe a car is zooming towards her). So if she is right, then one is rarely completely passive with respect to the acquisition of beliefs. This is a fairly strong claim. Many types of behavior are such that few of their tokens are actional. Consider laughing. I often find that I cannot control my laughter when I am struck by something that is very funny; and we have all had instances where we have tried to suppress laughter and failed in our attempt at suppression. If you stimulated the right spot of my left frontal lobe, you could get me to laugh. But sometimes I may let out a controlled laugh because something is humorous (perhaps it is done because I wish to express my having found pleasure in a joke). My laughter is actional in only one of those instances. The case of cortical stimulation is a clear instance of non-actional laughter. My controlled laughter is a case of actional laughter. The less an occurrence of laughing is like my controlled laughter, the less plausible is the claim that my laughter is actional. Regardless of one's theory of action, there is no agency of any sort that occurs on my part when the

laughter is not properly under my control, so it is not actional in such situations. Now, suppose the causal theory of action is true. So some behavior *A* of an agent *S* is an action only if there are some non-actional mental events or states that non-deviantly proximately causally initiate and causally sustain *S*'s *A*-ing and constitute *S*'s reasons for *A*-ing. Suppose further that you could stimulate the proper areas of my frontal cortices causing me to acquire an intention which in turn causes activity in the relevant neural networks that cause me to offer a controlled laugh. Have I acted? Perhaps I have. But if my intention did not properly causally sustain the activity of my laughter, then the activity was non-actional. So it seems that even when caused by an intention some behavior token can fail to be actional. Why should we expect something different with forming a belief?

Consider Ryan's taking a long run. Her running could fail to be actional if an evil genius is controlling all of her movements, or if all of her movements are deviantly caused. (Suppose she has a strong urge to leave West Virginia, acquires the intention to leave and is suddenly overwhelmed by their combined motivational force and, to her surprise, finds herself running in the direction of Pennsylvania.) There is no good reason to think things cannot be different with coming to believe. A good example of this is when agents find themselves believing things they would much rather not believe and are surprised to find they believe – e.g., when one acquires a racist or sexist belief about one of one's colleagues. But perceptual beliefs do not seem to be any different. One finds oneself believing things about the world based on one's experience. The world forces itself upon agents. In my own case, the acquisition of beliefs in such cases is nothing like what occurs when I perform an action. I do nothing. I am a patient with respect to the formation of most or perhaps all of my perceptual beliefs. I can consciously try to form higher-order beliefs about what I believe based on evidence that contradicts the perceptual evidence I have that my first-order belief is based on. But my first-order belief is still not at all like when I act. I am an agent with respect to what occurs when I act. I am not always an agent when I acquire a belief.

But suppose Ryan agrees that in *many* instances beliefs are merely acquired and there is no action of belief-formation that occurs. Are any actual cases of belief-formation actional? I do not think so. The easiest cases to consider are cases of consciously forming a belief. Such cases typically occur when I think hard about some problem and then acquire a belief as a consequence of my purposeful mental activity that aimed at forming a belief about what I am reasoning about. Assuming that my reasoning, etc., is distinct from the actual formation of the belief, it seems the formation of my belief is something I find happening to myself much in the same way that certain bodily functions work. Consider vomiting.¹⁰ I may feel sick and I want to feel better. I believe the only way to feel better is to vomit. I intend to vomit. I take steps to bring it about that I vomit. I finally vomit. Is my vomiting an action? It certainly is an event. I intended to vomit. I *qua* human organism can even be said to be doing something when I vomit. But my intention did not properly cause my vomiting – it does not causally sustain and guide my vomiting, but it does play the proper role in causing my behavior that causes me to vomit. My intention in this case was a proximal intention to bring it about that I vomit. It caused me to take the steps necessary to induce vomiting. But the event of vomiting was largely outside of my direct voluntary control even if it was the intentional outcome of my actions. I exercised no agency in the event of vomiting. I indirectly controlled the event. I could have refrained from performing the actions that would get me to vomit. But the vomiting was a bodily reaction to my actions performed with the intention of

¹⁰ I apologize if this example is disgusting. But I have found that it does help illustrate my point better than other examples I have thought of in the past (many of which, I am afraid, are no less disturbing).

causing an event to occur. My actions were intentional, and we can even say that my vomiting was intentional. It was the intentional outcome of my actions. But my vomiting was not an action.¹¹

Something similar appears to be the case with belief. An agent's intention to believe that *p* causes actions that contribute to bringing it about that an agent believes that *p*. The agent may just reason about her evidence, or selectively focus on evidence, or perform a complex of actions to bring it about that she forms the belief that *p*. But the event of forming the belief in response to such actions seems just like the case of my vomiting. The intention to believe sustains the actions that bring it about that the belief is formed, but the formation of the belief is itself not causally sustained by the intention. It is an automatic reaction to the evidence that causes the formation of the belief. If we posit yet another intention (a proximal intention to form a belief), it seems we needlessly overpopulate the mental. Furthermore, it seems that if there is a proximal intention to form a belief, we should be capable of at least sometimes introspecting and recognizing such an intention immediately antecedent and causally sustaining the formation of a belief in the same way we can with respect to something as simple as intentionally moving a finger or a composite action like climbing a tree. At least in my own case, I am never aware of such an intention.

Agential Authority and the Phenomenology of Agency

All of this raises the problem of agential authority for Ryan's putative actional belief-formation. Michael Bratman states the problem as follows. "In some cases we suppose... that the *agent* is the source of, determines, directs, governs the action and is not merely the locus of a series of happenings, of causal pushes and pulls" (Bratman, 2001, p. 311). There is something it is like to act and be aware of our actions as springing from ourselves in a way it does not when merely behaving. It seems we can understand autonomous agency in a way that is consistent with a picture of ourselves as exercising agency within what Bratman describes as "some, perhaps complex, causal structure involving events, states, and processes of a sort we might appeal to within a broadly naturalistic psychology" (Bratman, 2001, p. 312). What a developed account of such full-blooded agency will look like, particularly with respect to our beliefs, is beyond the scope of this essay. But in the case of uncontroversial actions we suppose that at times we can at least be capable of exercising some self-conscious control over our actions. If we cannot do this with respect to the formation of our beliefs, where the formation of our beliefs is an event that is distinct from the activity that causes the acquisition of a belief, then it hardly seems that we can be agents at all with respect to belief-formation in the manner Ryan claims. That is, it seems unreasonable to claim that normal adult human agents can exercise direct voluntary control over their beliefs in the same way they can exercise control over tokens of uncontroversial types of basic actions. Just emphasizing their causal history and ignoring the place for

¹¹ If we consider the complex event of bringing it about that I vomit, under one description it may be an intentional action. However, vomiting, along with some of the other components of the complex action, is itself a non-actional proper part of the complex action. This would be like what happens when someone who is a poor basketball player (such as myself) makes a basket. Making the basket may be the intentional outcome of my shooting the ball. And under a description the complex event is an intentional action. However, the event of the ball making it into the basket was not under my control in the way necessary for it to be actional. It is a non-actional proper part of the complex action just as my vomiting was. (I suppose that some ancient Romans, given their dietary practices, may have been able to induce vomiting and the vomiting would have been actional in the same way Larry Byrd's making a basket is actional.)

agential-authority and related problems strikes me as the fatal flaw in Ryan's doxastic compatibilist theory of doxastic agency.

Finally, a point that is related to the problem of agential authority has to do with the phenomenology of agency. When we self-consciously perform an action, we are aware of, to use Carl Ginet's term (Ginet, 1990, p. 13), an 'actish phenomenal quality.' There is some effort involved when one acts (where by 'effort' I do not mean some sort of struggle or any difficulty in doing something, but an expenditure of purposeful energy – be it mental and/or muscular). But in all fairness to Ryan, she does claim that in some cases coming to believe requires some effort. "Believing often requires attention, concentration, and at least minimal effort on the part of the believer" (Ryan, 2003, p. 73). These phenomenal features of what occurs when forming beliefs are indicators of agency. But is the effort in believing/coming to believe or is it in the activity leading up to the formation of the belief? It seems in my own case that the difficulties I have when it comes to believing something are related to my activity involved in getting myself to come to believe or when I am trying to resolve some uncertainty. Coming to believe may be the intentional outcome of my efforts, but it does not involve any effort. I think that the phenomenon Ryan is describing is what it is like when attempting to bring it about that one forms a belief, or when one is trying to retain a belief. But it has nothing to do with the state of believing or the event of coming to believe. Coming to believe (or losing a belief) is the consequence of one's successful attempt at bringing it about that one comes to believe or maintains a belief. Placing the effort in the event of coming to believe or the state of believing itself seems misplaced. None of the agency is in the believing or coming to believe – even if significant and robust agency is exercised with a particular doxastic goal in mind.

Conclusion

In light of the foregoing difficulties with her theory of doxastic agency, I think it is safe to conclude that Ryan has failed to show that any tokens of the event type of coming to believe are actional. Her proposal is quite clever and is challenging, but it finally fails to deliver what it promises.

Acknowledgments I wish to thank Earl Conee, Richard Feldman, and Sharon Ryan for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. None of them is responsible for any mistakes lurking in this paper.

References

- Alvarez, M., & Hyman, J. (1998). Agents and their actions. *Philosophy*, 73, 219–245.
- Audi, R. (2001). Doxastic voluntarism and the ethics of belief. In M. Steup (Ed.), *Knowledge, truth, and duty* (pp. 93–111). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bach, K. (1980). Actions are not events. *Mind*, 89, 114–120.
- Bishop, J. (1989). *Natural agency: An essay on the causal theory of action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Brand, M. (1984). *Intending and acting*. Cambridge: MIT.
- Bratman, M. (2001). Two problems about human agency. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 101, 309–326.
- Buckareff, A. (2004). Acceptance and deciding to believe. *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 29, 173–190.
- Buckareff, A. (2005). How (not) to think about mental action. *Philosophical Explorations*, 8, 83–89.
- Buckareff, A. (2006). Doxastic decisions and controlling belief. *Acta Analytica*, 21, 102–114.
- Buckareff, A. (forthcoming A). Hobartian voluntarism and epistemic deontology. *Disputatio*.

- Buckareff, A. (forthcoming B). Mental overpopulation and mental action: Protecting intentions from mental birth control. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*.
- Buckareff, A., & Zhu, J. (2004). Causalisms reconsidered. *Dialogue*, 43, 147–155.
- Feldman, R. (2001). Voluntary belief and epistemic evaluation. In M. Steup (Ed.), *Knowledge, truth, and duty* (pp. 77–92). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Feldman, R. (2004). The ethics of belief. In E. Conee & R. Feldman (Eds.), *Evidentialism: Essays in epistemology* (pp. 166–95). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ginet, C. (1990). *On action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mele, A. (1992). *Springs of action: Understanding intentional behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Montmarquet, J. (1986). The voluntariness of belief. *Analysis*, 46, 49–53.
- Mossel, B. (2005). Action, control and sensations of acting. *Philosophical Studies*, 124, 129–180.
- Pojman, L. (1985). Believing and willing. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 15, 37–55.
- Ruben, D.-H. (1997). Doing without happenings: Three theories of action. In G. Holmstrom-Hintikka & R. Tuomela (Eds.), *Contemporary action theory, vol. I* (pp. 267–286). Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Ruben, D.-H. (2003). *Action and its explanation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ryan, S. (2003). Doxastic compatibilism and the ethics of belief. *Philosophical Studies*, 114, 47–79.
- Searle, J. (1983). *Intentionality: An essay in the philosophy of mind*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thalberg, I. (1984). Do our intentions cause our intentional actions? *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 21, 249–260.