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# Epistemic Deontology and Voluntariness

Conor McHugh

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**Abstract** We tend to prescribe and appraise doxastic states in terms that are broadly deontic. According to a simple argument, such prescriptions and appraisals are improper, because they wrongly presuppose that our doxastic states are voluntary. One strategy for resisting this argument, recently endorsed by a number of philosophers, is to claim that our doxastic states are in fact voluntary (This strategy has been pursued by Steup 2008; Weatherson 2008). In this paper I argue that this strategy is neither successful nor necessary. Our doxastic states are not voluntary in any interesting sense. But once we see why our doxastic states are not voluntary, we can also see that there is no apparent reason to think that deontic prescriptions and appraisals—epistemic ones, at any rate—presuppose doxastic voluntarism. Indeed, there is good reason to deny that they do so. Finally, I diagnose the misleading attraction of the idea that what I call ‘epistemic deontology’ presupposes doxastic voluntarism.

## 1 The Anti-Deontology Argument

In ordinary, everyday discourse we often make claims about what people should believe (or continue believing) and what they should withhold belief about (or cease believing).<sup>1</sup> We expect people to be responsive to what they should believe or

<sup>1</sup> By ‘withholding belief about *p*’ I mean withholding belief about whether *p*. That is, the propositional content with respect to which you withhold belief is the proposition *p* itself, not a content *about* that proposition as such (e.g. the content that *p* is a nice proposition).

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withhold belief about. We blame and even resent people, when, for example, they form foolish or hasty beliefs on matters of importance, and when they fail to believe what they should. In particular, we engage in these practices with reference to epistemic considerations—considerations conducive to the characteristic epistemic ends or norms of acquiring true beliefs and avoiding false ones.<sup>2</sup> For example, we often claim that people should not hold or should give up certain beliefs because they are unsupported by evidence; we blame people who hold such beliefs. I will label ‘epistemic’ those prescriptions, appraisals and reactive attitudes that are grounded entirely in epistemic considerations, and it is on these that I want to focus.

On the face of it, the practices I have described seem to presuppose a broadly deontic framework for epistemically appraising and prescribing doxastic states—a framework that can be characterised in terms of notions like obligation, permission, prohibition, responsibility, what one ought or ought not believe, praiseworthiness and blameworthiness, and the like. That is, we presuppose that at least some such deontic notions can properly be applied to doxastic states.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in our ordinary practices, we seem to presuppose the truth of the following principle:<sup>4</sup>

**Epistemic Deontology (ED):** Our doxastic states are, in central cases, properly subject to some of the following: epistemic obligation, permission, prohibition, responsibility, oughts, praise, blame, etc.

I say “in central cases” because our ordinary practices do not presuppose that *every* doxastic state is properly subject to epistemic deontology. For example, certain pathological beliefs may not be.

Being in a doxastic state is having a doxastic attitude to a propositional content. I talk of doxastic states generally, and not only of beliefs. That is because there is a

<sup>2</sup> This characterisation of the epistemic is supposed to capture a notion that is familiar in philosophy and a category that is present, implicitly or explicitly, in our ordinary discourse. It is notoriously difficult to spell out the status and content of what I call ‘the characteristic epistemic ends or norms’. I think that they are ends or norms that apply to doxastic states individually: roughly, when one has a doxastic attitude to *p*, one thereby aims or is subject to a norm to believe *p* iff it is true (but see McHugh, forthcoming a). I do not think that the epistemic domain is characterised by more general aims or norms, such as that of maximising true beliefs, or achieving a high ratio of true to false beliefs. Nothing will turn on this, however; what’s crucial is that there is a distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic considerations.

<sup>3</sup> There are important and interesting differences between members of this family of notions that I am calling ‘deontic’, but they do nonetheless constitute a family. For the purposes of this paper I will treat them as such. One could hold a view on which some but not all of these notions are applicable to doxastic states, but I will not pursue that strategy here. If my arguments succeed, then such a strategy is unnecessarily concessive.

In her discussion of the issues I will be addressing, Ryan (2003) focuses on the notions of obligation and ought. Chrisman (2008) focuses on ought. Weatherston (2008) discusses not only these notions but also praise- and blameworthiness. Anyone who is sceptical that these notions can be treated together, can take what I say to apply to obligations, and ignore the rest.

<sup>4</sup> It might be said that this presupposition claim is trivial—it is true but uninteresting that practices which include claims about what people ought and ought not believe (etc.) presuppose that doxastic states are properly subject to oughts. But my concern here is just to point out that our practices do seem to commit us to (ED). That we are so committed is, if true, not trivially so. Furthermore, I think that our practices presuppose (ED) only if they are to be taken at face value, and it is not trivial that they are to be so taken. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

doxastic attitude of withholding,<sup>5</sup> and we assess and prescribe states of withholding in deontic terms, just as we do beliefs. We say that someone should withhold belief about a proposition; we blame someone for withholding on a proposition for which they have conclusive evidence; and so on.

It might be said that withholding is not a distinct attitude, but merely consists in the absence of belief or disbelief. That seems to me to be mistaken. You do not count as withholding on a proposition when you have never considered the proposition and never formed an attitude to it. Withholding is an attitude that typically results from explicit consideration of a proposition, and that involves regarding the proposition as one that may yet turn out to be true or false—it involves regarding the question whether *p* as open. But in any case, this point is not critical; what matters for my purposes is that there are states of withholding, and these states are targeted with deontic prescription and appraisal.

One can accept (ED) without endorsing a deontological account of knowledge, warrant or justification. Philosophers who hold non-deontological views in epistemology can still accept, for example, that it is often true that a subject ought to believe something, or that a subject is blameworthy for being in a certain doxastic state. They will just deny that these kinds of appraisals and prescriptions are essential to understanding knowledge, warrant, or justification.<sup>6</sup>

There is a simple argument against (ED), which goes roughly as follows. Deontic notions are properly applicable to our doxastic states only if those states are voluntary. But doxastic states are rarely if ever voluntary. Therefore, deontic notions are not properly applicable to them.<sup>7</sup>

This argument makes a connection between (ED) and the following view:

**Doxastic Voluntarism (DV):** Our doxastic states are, in central cases, voluntary.

I say “in central cases” again because I am interested in a version of voluntarism that engages with the issue of deontology. (ED) says that our doxastic states are in central cases properly subject to deontic appraisal. If voluntariness is required for deontology, then its presence should not be limited to marginal cases.<sup>8</sup>

The argument can be set out like this:

The Anti-Deontology Argument

<sup>5</sup> As noted in Chisholm’s classic discussion (Chisholm 1977).

<sup>6</sup> Would this view entail that you could have a warranted, justified or knowledgeable belief that was in violation of epistemic deontology? Not necessarily. One might think, for example, that knowledge is available to non-human thinkers and is fundamentally a matter of reliable true belief. One might also think that human thinkers are (in addition) subject to epistemic deontology, and perhaps that violation of epistemic deontology, on the part of a thinker to whom it applies, defeats knowledge. Or one might follow Locke (1959, Book IV), who held that doxastic states are subject to deontology, but who viewed knowledge as a kind of certainty in which belief is compelled and there is seemingly no room for deontic appraisal. See Plantinga (1993, pp. 13–14) for discussion of Locke’s view.

<sup>7</sup> This influential argument has been made most famously by Alston (1988).

<sup>8</sup> Feldman (2001) and Ginet (2001) both argue that certain kinds of beliefs are voluntary. In each case the relevant kind seems too marginal to support the kind of deontology I am interested in.

(P1) **Epistemic Deontology (ED)** is true only if **Doxastic Voluntarism (DV)** is true.

(P2) **Doxastic Voluntarism (DV)** is not true.

Therefore

(C) **Epistemic Deontology (ED)** is not true.

If the anti-deontology argument is sound, then few if any attributions of epistemic obligation, permission, oughts, or the rest, with respect to doxastic states, are true. As I noted, much of our ordinary discourse about doxastic states appears to embody a commitment to the truth of such attributions. Thus, if the argument is sound, then either such discourse is mistaken, or its appearance of a commitment to (ED) is misleading.

The argument is valid. Thus, there are two strategies for resisting its conclusion: either deny (P1) or deny (P2). A number of philosophers, including Weatherson (2008) and Steup (2008), have recently pursued the second strategy. They claim that standard arguments against (DV) fail. In the next section I will present such a standard argument, and rebut the objections of Weatherson and Steup. Part of what is at issue will be how best to characterise voluntariness.

Having established (P2), I will go on in the following section to argue that (P1) should be rejected.<sup>9</sup>

## 2 Doxastic Voluntariness

In this section I argue that our doxastic states are not voluntary in any sense that could support (ED). That is (DV), when understood as it should be in the context of the anti-deontology argument, is false. (P2) of the argument is true.

### 2.1 The Anti-Voluntarism Argument

The basic argument against doxastic voluntarism appeals to the psychological fact that it is not generally the case that we can enter doxastic states which we take to be contrary to our evidence, even when offered excellent incentives to do so. This restriction on our doxastic states is incompatible with doxastic voluntariness. I will develop and extend this argument in what follows.

A classic statement of the basic argument comes from Alston:<sup>10</sup>

[W]e are not so constituted as to be able to take up propositional attitudes at will. My argument for this, if it can be called that, simply consists in asking you to consider whether you have any such powers. Can you, at this moment, start to believe that the U.S. is still a colony of Great Britain, just by deciding to do so[?] If you find it too incredible that you should be sufficiently motivated to try to believe this, suppose that someone offers you \$500,000,000

<sup>9</sup> I should note that neither Weatherson nor Steup endorse (P1).

<sup>10</sup> The same basic argument is present in Chrisman (2008).

to believe it, and you are much more interested in the money than in believing the truth. Could you do what it takes to get that reward? (Alston 1988, p. 263).

Clearly, the rhetorically implied answer is ‘no’. I take it that Alston is correct about that. You cannot form the prize-winning belief.

In Alston’s example, you are being asked to believe a proposition that you have very strong evidence to think is false. But in fact the point applies to cases in which you simply have no evidence regarding the target proposition’s truth or falsity, and even to cases in which your evidence overall favours the truth of the target proposition, albeit not very strongly. Consider:

- Someone offers you \$500,000,000 to believe that it rained on Aristotle’s 30th birthday. Can you believe it in order to gain the reward?
- Someone offers you \$500,000,000 to believe that it will rain today. You have consulted reliable meteorological experts, who told you that there is only a 65% chance of rain today. You have no other evidence about today’s weather. Can you believe that it will rain today in order to gain the reward?

I take it that the answer, in each case, is ‘no’. Note that what you are being asked to do is form an *outright* belief, not merely to raise your subjective probability.<sup>11</sup>

Although the examples above use financial rewards, the point extends to other solely practical reasons for being in doxastic states. (I will call a reason “practical” when its force does not derive from its being conducive to the characteristic epistemic ends or norms of believing truly and avoiding believing falsely.) For example, you cannot form any of the beliefs described above because having the belief would make you happy, save your life, bring about world peace, or whatever.

It might be said that, in these cases, even if you can’t *directly*, straightaway, form a belief in the target proposition, nonetheless you can *indirectly* bring it about that you form the belief, by selectively attending to certain evidence, or performing certain other kinds of self-manipulation.<sup>12</sup> But this isn’t very plausible. Although we

<sup>11</sup> It might be said that, in the last case, you could (and indeed ought to) raise your subjective probability of rain to 0.65, and this would be sufficient to enable outright belief that it will rain today. The idea here would be that having an outright belief is essentially a matter of having a subjective probability that exceeds a certain threshold ( $< 0.65$ ). This seems to me to be false. Outright belief is a kind of commitment for which high subjective probability is not sufficient. It involves having a disposition or policy to use a proposition unqualified as a premise in reasoning, in a wide range of contexts. You can have a high degree of belief in a proposition, but have no such disposition. Having a subjective probability of 0.65 for the proposition that it will rain today will not amount to being disposed to take that proposition, unqualified, as a premise in reasoning, in a wide range of contexts. (You may, of course, have such a disposition with respect to the proposition that it will probably rain today.) You will not, for example, be disposed to reason: “It will rain today; therefore I ought to call off the tennis match.” For more on this difference between outright belief and high subjective probability, see Williamson (2000, pp. 98–99) and Frankish (2009); the latter also offers further arguments against the ‘threshold view’ of outright belief.

Suppose, nonetheless, that the ‘threshold view’ of outright belief is true. Then just change the example I gave, and make the reported probability of rain fall just below the threshold (whatever it is).

<sup>12</sup> I accept Alston’s (1988) characterisation of directness as involving “basic” control or “non-basic immediate” control. Basic control is the kind of control that you exercise over basic actions, and over states the changing of which is a basic action, such as limb-position states. Non-basic immediate control is the kind of control you exercise over, for example, whether the lights are on or off—the state of the

can indirectly influence our beliefs in certain ways, it is not the case that we can, with any reliability, get ourselves to form particular beliefs by such methods. You can do things to bring it about that you come to have some doxastic attitude to the proposition that it will rain today—check the weather forecast, for example—but it's hard to see what you could do to reliably bring it about that you believe that it will rain today, when the evidence plainly fails to support that belief. So this kind of indirect influence is (as a matter of psychological fact) not a means by which we can exercise a significant degree of voluntary control over which particular doxastic states we are in. Epistemic deontology applies to particular doxastic states; and if voluntary control is required for deontology, then presumably what is required is some significant degree of voluntary control, and not some mere tenuous and unreliable influence. Thus, if we want to defend a version of (DV) that engages with the anti-deontology argument, we should focus on direct voluntary control.<sup>13</sup>

The target propositions in the cases described are perfectly ordinary and banal; there is nothing special about them, besides their evidential standing, that might prevent you believing them. The cases are representative of central cases of doxastic states. The considerations adduced thus support three principles about doxastic states:

- (E1) You (typically) cannot believe a proposition for practical reasons when you take your evidence to count *against* the truth of the proposition.
- (E2) You (typically) cannot believe a proposition for practical reasons when you take yourself to have *no* evidence regarding the truth of the proposition.
- (E3) You (typically) cannot believe a proposition for practical reasons when you do not have what you take to be *sufficient* evidence for that proposition.

The 'cannot' here is one of psychological impossibility.

The principles allow for exceptions, provided such exceptions are largely limited to marginal cases. Such marginal cases may include, for example, cases in which

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Footnote 12 continued

lights is an immediate, predictable consequence of particular basic actions you can perform. Direct voluntariness may also require a certain kind of guidance in the execution of the relevant actions (see Scott-Kakures 1993). I will say more as we go on about what makes control *voluntary*.

<sup>13</sup> It might be said that the kind of voluntary control required for epistemic deontology is not voluntary control over which particular doxastic states we are in, but rather the kind of control you exercise when you do, or fail to do, things that influence your doxastic states in a more general way—such as training yourself to be more intellectually cautious, or resolving to attend to certain kinds of evidence. This would be what Alston (1988) calls 'indirect influence'. I leave this aside for three reasons. First, it seems to me that the degree of control we exercise in this way is very limited. Very many doxastic states will turn out not to be subject to this indirect influence to any significant degree. What could you have done, even at this very general level, that would have made a difference to your attitude to the proposition that it will rain today? Second, this suggestion would seem to have the consequence that epistemic deontology applies in the first place to the things we can do that influence our doxastic states, and only derivatively to doxastic states themselves. Thus, someone who believes against the evidence, despite having made all reasonable efforts to change his doxastic habits, will not be guilty of violating an epistemic obligation. That does not seem to capture the commitments of our discourse. Third, the claim that we have indirect influence over our doxastic states does not amount to doxastic voluntarism, if what I have to say in the rest of this section is right. See Alston (1988) and Chuard and Southwood (2009) for further arguments against using this notion to rescue deontology.

heavy psychological or emotional investment in a proposition leads to gross self-deception.<sup>14</sup> The option of self-deception is usually not open to us.

There is a question, regarding (E3), of what it is to take your evidence to be sufficient, in the sense required for belief. I will leave this interesting issue aside.<sup>15</sup> For present purposes the claim is merely that there is some such restriction: merely taking your evidence to favour *p* will not suffice to enable you to believe it outright.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the argument of this section does not strictly require (E3), or indeed (E2).<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, I think both are true, and worth highlighting. Previous discussions of doxastic voluntarism have tended to focus on (E1), but (E2) and (E3) give a fuller picture of the extent of the restrictions on the motivation of belief—an extent that has not always been recognised even by those opposed to doxastic voluntarism.<sup>18</sup>

Principles (E1)–(E3) do not say that practical considerations cannot somehow *cause* you to hold a belief despite the contrary, absent or insufficient evidence. What is being ruled out is the psychological possibility, in typical such cases, of some practical consideration *motivating* you, in the sense of being your motivating *reason*. I take a motivating reason to be a consideration that you are aware of, and whose putative probative force you are aware of, even if dimly or implicitly, and are responding to in doing what you do or believing what you believe. Motivating reasons can be taken up in deliberation whose outcome determines what you do or believe. A consideration may causally influence what you do or believe without being a motivating reason. For example, your beliefs about your own talents may be influenced unconsciously by considerations of what is pleasant to believe.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> No doubt we are susceptible to non-epistemic factors in forming our beliefs, and perhaps profoundly so. But, as I explain below, that does not mean that such factors are liable to play the role of reasons for which we believe, when our evidence is insufficient.

A familiar sort of case is that of the athlete who claims to believe that they will win, despite the odds against them, because this confidence will help to bring about victory. I think it is very dubious that there is a genuine belief in most such cases. To the extent that some of these cases do involve genuine belief, they are plausibly among the few successful instances of the indirect control of belief that I mentioned above. The athlete doesn't simply go ahead and form the belief that they will win, but rather engages in a certain kind of self-manipulation.

Note that the supposed cases of voluntary belief described by Feldman and Ginet (see n. 8 above) do not seem to constitute exceptions to principles (E1)–(E3). They seem to be cases in which there *is* sufficient evidence by the subject's lights for her belief.

<sup>15</sup> I offer some thoughts on it in my (McHugh 2011), and a different view in (McHugh, forthcoming a). See also Owens (2000) and Nickel (2010).

<sup>16</sup> The existence of this restriction shows, I think, that William James (1896) is mistaken to claim that each person has unrestricted choice over the relative weights she assigns to the goals of believing truths and avoiding believing falsehoods. The latter goal is always given very substantial weight.

<sup>17</sup> But see n. 11 above, and McHugh (forthcoming a).

<sup>18</sup> Given that such restrictions come in degrees, it seems that voluntariness itself might also be construed as a matter of degree. The account I offer below allows for this. This is compatible with there being states that are correctly described as not voluntary.

<sup>19</sup> Similar points are made by Owens (2000) and Shah (2003), who I think would deny the possibility I allow for in the next paragraph. It is compatible with this that you can sometimes, for practical reasons, take measures to bring yourself to believe something. This would involve a kind of indirect control of belief; as I noted above, the degree to which we enjoy such indirect control is in fact very limited.



The principles do not even rule out that practical considerations might be among the motivating reasons for *some* doxastic states. The claim is that practical considerations cannot typically motivate beliefs for which the subject takes herself to lack (sufficient) evidential support.<sup>20</sup>

(E1), (E2) and (E3) say that you cannot, in central cases, form particular beliefs for practical reasons. What does this have to do with doxastic voluntarism? Its significance, I think, is this: it shows that the will does not have the kind of executive power over doxastic states that it has over bodily movements and other paradigms of the voluntary. It is in this sense that you cannot “take up propositional attitudes at will”, as Alston puts it. Let me explain.

We can think of the will as the faculty or mechanism by means of which we move ourselves to act, when we act voluntarily. This is a partial characterisation of the will which I intend to be neutral between different conceptions of agency. There is a Cartesian conception of agency on which the will is a faculty that produces volitions, these being executive events, distinct from any recognition on the subject’s part of reasons to act in a certain way, that cause or constitute actions. A more Kantian conception of agency would emphasise the idea that actions are paradigmatically done for putative reasons recognised by the subject. On this Kantian conception there may be no role for volitions, but there will nevertheless be some faculty or mechanism by means of which putative reasons do their motivating work in pushing us to action.<sup>21</sup> For example, consider a voluntary action of  $\Phi$ ing performed for some reason. This involves two theoretically separable stages: the agent must *recognise* or perceive some consideration as a reason for  $\Phi$ ing, and she must *react* to that consideration by  $\Phi$ ing for that reason.<sup>22</sup> The will is exercised in the second of these stages: the will is what can translate recognition of a reason into reaction to that reason.

The executive power of the will over bodily movements and other paradigms of the voluntary has the following characteristic: *any* kind of consideration that one can recognise or perceive as a reason for acting in some way is a consideration to which one can *react*, provided the will is not impeded in some way. In a slogan: if you see a reason to act, you can (try to) act on that reason. Particular actions count as being subject to the will when they are associated with this unrestricted reactivity to perceived reasons. For example, when I typed the letter ‘r’ just now, my behaviour was open to being influenced by any kind of reason that I might have recognised or perceived as relevant to how to act: if I had seen some excellent reason to type ‘s’ instead, or to type nothing at all, then I would have reacted accordingly, barring some Frankfurtian impediment to the exercise of my will.

<sup>20</sup> The claim that practical considerations can be motivating in cases where epistemic support is present is defended by Frankish (2007), and, for the case of judgment, by McHugh (2011). For a different and intriguing treatment of cases where the subject’s evidence is ‘adequate’ but not conclusive, see Nickel (2010).

<sup>21</sup> Reasons, I take it, are considerations that purportedly count in favour of doing things (including being in certain doxastic states). A consideration that genuinely counts in favour of  $\Phi$ ing is a normative reason for  $\Phi$ ing. If you  $\Phi$  for a putative normative reason, then it is your motivating reason for  $\Phi$ ing.

<sup>22</sup> See Fischer and Ravizza (1998).

Sometimes we do not react to the reasons we recognise or perceive. You recognise excellent reason for getting out of bed, but stay under the warm blankets anyway. This is a form of weakness of will, or *akrasia*. Even in such cases, we will say that, in some important sense, you could have reacted to your reason. You can get out of bed. That is why you are blameworthy for not doing so.

The example of typing 'r' illustrates that an action can be subject to the will without being something the agent effectively decides or intends to do, or something the agent does for some consciously recognised reason. An action's being subject to the will entails a *dispositional* involvement of decisions and intentions. Decisions and intentions have as their function the selection and coordination of particular actions, in reaction to putative reasons for acting in those ways.<sup>23</sup> The carrying out of a decision or intention is the paradigmatic way in which the will exercises its executive power. In the case where I typed 'r', I could have guided my behaviour, with respect to whether I typed 'r' on that occasion, by means of deciding and/or intending whether to do so. A decision or intention would have been effective if I had deployed it (barring some impediment—I will take this qualification as read from now on). As Alston notes, we cannot typically control our doxastic states by carrying out decisions or intentions to form particular beliefs; decisions and intentions don't "hook up" with our doxastic lives as they hook up with our practical lives.<sup>24</sup> What I am suggesting is that the significance of this fact does not depend on the idea that all voluntary actions are brought about by effective decisions; rather, it indicates the limitations of the will's power over the doxastic domain.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See Pink (2009).

<sup>24</sup> Alston (1988, p. 263). Almost all subsequent authors have taken Alston to be correct that decisions and intentions have no significant role in regulating our particular doxastic states, even including Steup, a voluntarist (Steup 2008, p. 387). Ryan (2003) may be an exception.

Scott-Kakures (1993), following Williams (1972), argues that it is a conceptual truth.

I take it that Alston and many others think that the point is evident simply from introspection of our processes of forming, maintaining and revising doxastic attitudes. It might be said that there is such a thing as making up your mind what to think about something, and that the culmination of this process is a decision to believe one thing or another. But, though we do sometimes use the word 'decision' in this way, we usually use it to refer to an event of judgment, as in "I decided that it would probably rain." I don't think there is typically a genuine decision or intention in such cases. When we decide to do something, we enjoy a phenomenology of an event of deciding, that typically initiates a state of intention, and that is distinct from the performing of the action decided on (i.e. the execution of the decision). This distinction between decision and execution just doesn't show up in the doxastic case. You don't decide to believe something *and* execute that decision by forming the belief.

Furthermore, if there were such decisions and intentions, then it should be possible to fail to execute them correctly. But such failures don't seem to occur ("I intended to believe *p*, but accidentally believed *q* instead").

Furthermore, it appears to make no sense to deliberate about what to believe at some time in the future, rather than now. You can't conclude your deliberation about whether to believe *p* by deciding to believe it, but not for another hour (unless, perhaps, *p* won't be true for another hour). But one of the central roles of decisions and intentions is to fix what we will do in the future, based on our current assessment of what we (will) have reason to do then.

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Alston is clear that dispositional involvement of decisions is all that is required for voluntariness (Alston 1988, p. 262).

Couldn't there be states that were sometimes brought about by decisions and intentions, but that were nevertheless unreactive to some major class of putative reasons? Wouldn't such states count as being voluntary in some important sense?<sup>26</sup> This would be extremely odd, given that decisions and intentions function to ensure that you react to the reasons you recognise or perceive yourself as having. It would involve your decisions or intentions somehow becoming ineffective—failing to bring about their own execution—when fed with a certain central kind of putative reason. It's hard to see how the connection between decision/intention and execution could be systematically impaired in this way, specific to a certain kind of putative reason. And, if the connection somehow *were* so impaired, this systematic ineffectiveness of decisions and intentions would constitute a severe restriction of your control of the states in question. It would amount to a lack of voluntary control after all. (I will return in Sect. 2.2.4 to the objection that reactivity to non-epistemic reasons is not required for voluntary control of belief.)

Now we can say what it is for a particular instance of  $\Phi$ ing to be subject to the will, whether  $\Phi$ ing is an action or a state: it is for the instance to be reactive to any kind of consideration that the agent can recognise or perceive as counting for or against  $\Phi$ ing.<sup>27</sup> When an action or state is subject to the will in this way, it will be

<sup>26</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

<sup>27</sup> Hieronymi (2009, pp. 144–145) defends a conception of voluntariness that involves a similar notion of reactivity to any kind of reason that the subject takes as bearing on whether to  $\Phi$ , as do I in (McHugh 2011, forthcoming b).

I understand reactivity to be a *capacity* notion: you are reactive to considerations of a certain kind if you can react to those considerations (if you recognise or perceive them). Spelling this condition out counterfactually is tricky, for a couple of reasons.

First, there are Frankfurtian cases in which, in nearby possible worlds, some factor intervenes to ensure that you act as you do in the actual world, regardless of any differences in the reasons you have or perceive. The solution to this, I think, is to restrict the relevant counterfactual to worlds in which the psychological mechanism that brings about your token of  $\Phi$ ing in the actual world is operative (see Fischer and Ravizza, 1998).

Second, there is weakness of will, or akrasia. It might be that you voluntarily  $\Phi$ , and yet if you had recognised sufficient reasons not to  $\Phi$ , you would have  $\Phi$ ed anyway through akrasia. Indeed, it might be that you voluntarily  $\Phi$  even though you *do* recognise sufficient reasons not to  $\Phi$ . Intuitively, akrasia (or its being a nearby possibility) is compatible with your having the capacity to react to the reasons you fail to react to—your having this capacity is part of what makes the episode, actual or counterfactual, one of akrasia. The relevant notion of reactivity to reasons of a certain kind must thus allow for cases in which, in the nearest world in which you recognise or perceive a reason of that kind, you fail to react to it; and for cases in which, in the actual world, you fail to react to a recognised or perceived reason of that kind. I suggest that what is required for reactivity to reasons of a certain kind is that, in some *sufficient and appropriate range* of the worlds in which you recognise or perceive reasons of that kind, you react to those reasons (given the 'actual mechanism' proviso noted above). (Thus, I think it is not sufficient that there be *at least one* world in which you so react. Nor do I agree with Fischer and Ravizza (*ibid.*) that there being one world in which you react to a reason not to  $\Phi$  shows that the will has the 'executive power' to react to *any* reason not to  $\Phi$ . The case of doxastic states shows why Fischer and Ravizza are mistaken here. There might be a world in which you react to an epistemic reason to believe  $p$  by so believing, but that does not show that your will has executive power over your beliefs, given that there is a major class of reasons to which your doxastic attitude to  $p$  systematically fails to react across counterfactual scenarios.)

This characterisation allows that reactivity may come in degrees, as, accordingly, may voluntary control (see n. 18 above).

I refer to "any kind of consideration that the agent can recognise". What does the 'can' here mean? I mean it only to express the antecedent of the counterfactual conditional—'for any kind  $K$ , were the agent

such that it could be, or could have been, made the object of an effective intention or decision.

Thus:

**At-will voluntariness:** A token of  $\Phi$ ing is at-will voluntary iff the subject comes to  $\Phi$ , or continues  $\Phi$ ing, in such a way that any kind of consideration that she recognised or perceived as favouring (or disfavouring)  $\Phi$ ing could have motivated her to  $\Phi$  (or not  $\Phi$ ) or continue  $\Phi$ ing (or stop  $\Phi$ ing), barring impediments to the exercise of her will.

Here, 'motivating the agent to  $\Phi$ ' means being a motivating reason (albeit perhaps not the only one) for which the agent  $\Phi$ s. To be motivated by a consideration is to react to it, in the sense distinguished above.

Doxastic states are typically not at-will voluntary. Principles (E1)–(E3) set out severe restrictions, in a wide and central range of cases, on the reactivity of doxastic states to certain putative reasons. You can recognise or perceive the prospect of a financial reward as strongly favouring having a particular belief, but you cannot normally react to that consideration by forming that belief.<sup>28</sup> In fact, (E1) alone is sufficient to show that doxastic states are not at-will voluntary.

It might be claimed that practical reasons are never genuine (normative) reasons for belief. Even if that is so, we can surely *perceive* or *take* a practical consideration to count in favour of having a belief.

Bodily actions, and the like, typically are at-will voluntary. In the domain of such action we find no restrictions on reactivity to reasons, analogous to those we find in the doxastic domain. You can directly move your limbs in reaction to any kind of consideration that you recognise as favouring bringing about particular limb-position states.

I noted that, in the case of ordinary voluntary action, you do not always react to the reasons you recognise yourself as having. One might think that the failure of doxastic states to react to practical reasons is comparable to such akrasia. But this would be a mistake. In forming, revising and retaining doxastic states, you *cannot*

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Footnote 27 continued

to recognise a consideration of kind  $K$ , ...'—whose consequent I have been trying to clarify in the last couple of paragraphs. Again, we are considering only 'actual mechanism' worlds, so considerations of a kind that the agent could not recognise, given the operation of the actual mechanism, are irrelevant.

Again, what is crucial for my purposes is that there are severe, systematic restrictions on the reactivity of our doxastic states to a major class of reasons—restrictions that simply have no parallel in the case of bodily action.

<sup>28</sup> I noted previously that the principles (E1)–(E3) do not rule out that practical considerations might sometimes be among the motivating reasons for beliefs, when there is also, by the subject's lights, sufficient evidence for those beliefs. Suppose that beliefs can indeed be motivated in part by practical considerations like this. Does this not mean that doxastic states are at-will voluntary after all? No: this only means that practical considerations could perhaps have been among the motivating reasons for a belief, provided there were, in addition, sufficient evidence (by the subject's lights) for that belief. But, given that there was *not* sufficient evidence for a belief, practical considerations could not have motivated it, no matter how powerful those considerations. As noted above (n. 27), reactivity to considerations of a certain kind requires that you react to considerations of that kind *in a sufficient and appropriate range of worlds*. This is the respect in which the will has executive power over actions, but lacks such power over doxastic states.

react to practical reasons. This is not, like *akrasia*, a failure of the will to govern its domain as it could and as the agent recognises it should. Rather, it reflects the fact that doxastic states are not properly within the domain of the will at all.

That completes my initial presentation of the anti-voluntarism argument. Before going on to discuss objections, let me make a few final points about the argument. The argument made no appeal to the claim that you cannot just adopt a particular belief *arbitrarily*, for *no* reason, or to the claim that you cannot adopt a particular belief just because you *want* to.<sup>29</sup> Nor did it appeal to the claim that many beliefs are unavoidable—for example, that you can't help believing what you see plainly in front of you.<sup>30</sup> What the argument appealed to was the impossibility, in a wide range of cases (i.e. normal cases in which the evidence is, by the subject's lights, insufficient), of beliefs' being motivated by practical reasons. Nor, finally, did the argument claim that voluntary beliefs are conceptually impossible.<sup>31</sup> It makes a claim about psychological impossibility. Psychological impossibility of voluntariness in central cases is enough to rule out (DV).

## 2.2 Objections to the Anti-Voluntarism Argument

Now I want to consider some objections to the argument I just presented. I think that seeing why these objections fail helps us gain further insights into the issue of doxastic voluntariness.

Brian Weatherson (2008) has recently presented three objections against Alston's argument; these should apply equally well to my own version of the argument. I will take them in reverse order, before considering an objection from Steup (2008).

### 2.2.1 *Voluntary v Volitional*

The first objection I want to consider is that the argument "relies on too narrow a conception of what is voluntary" (Weatherson, *ibid.*, p. 544). Weatherson says:

Alston really only ever compares belief formation to volitional action. If this does not exhaust the range of voluntary action, then belief formation might be properly analogous to some other voluntary action. (*ibid.*, p. 547.)

An action is volitional, I take it, only if it is caused by a volition to perform that action. Presumably, Weatherson's idea is that forming a belief in order to win a reward, in the way Alston suggests is impossible, would be analogous to volitional action. Weatherson goes on to argue that there are voluntary actions that are not volitional. His central example is of a certain kind of failure to exercise self-control. Murray swears when he breaks a glass, despite having made a prior resolution to stop swearing in front of his son (*ibid.*, p. 548). He could have stopped himself swearing, but did not do so. His swearing is voluntary but not volitional (*ibid.*,

<sup>29</sup> Feldman (2001) appeals to this.

<sup>30</sup> Alston (1988) and Plantinga (1993, p. 24) appeal to this.

<sup>31</sup> Williams (1972) and Scott-Kakures (1993) have argued for this conceptual impossibility claim.

p. 552, 554).<sup>32</sup> This is contrasted with a case in which Murray puts his hand on a hot plate, and, due to the searing pain, is unable to stop himself swearing. In this latter case, Murray's self-control is *undermined*, rather than merely not exercised, and he does not act voluntarily but compulsively.

I think this objection fails, because the anti-voluntarism argument does not involve the assumption that all voluntary action is volitional. As I pointed out, a certain *dispositional* involvement of certain kinds of volitional events (decisions) is symptomatic of at-will voluntariness. But an action can be at-will voluntary without being volitional. My action of typing the letter 'r' is one example. Murray's swearing when he breaks a glass is another. Roughly: Murray acts voluntarily because he comes to swear in such a way that (a) he could have been motivated to swear by any kind of consideration he recognised as favouring swearing, and (b) he could have been motivated not to swear by any kind of consideration he recognised as counting against it. There was no principled restriction on the kinds of reasons to which Murray could have reacted. It is because Murray had the capacity to react to his reasons that his behaviour is a *failure*: he failed to be motivated by considerations of a kind that he could and should have reacted to (i.e. the presence of his son and his having made a resolution). This is the basis of the difference between the glass-breaking and hand-burning cases: in the latter, Murray is *unable* to react to reasons against swearing, and his behaviour is thus not voluntary but compulsive.

Thus, I think the first objection misconstrues the anti-voluntarism argument.

### 2.2.2 Can Not v Will Not

The second objection I want to consider is this:

The argument seems to rely on inferring from the fact that we do not do something (in particular, believe something that we have excellent evidence is false) to the conclusion that we cannot do it. ... [T]his little argument overlooks the possibility that we will not do it. (*ibid.*, p. 544.)

Weatherson's claim is that the kinds of thought experiments I have relied on show only that we *will* not believe the target propositions, not that we *cannot*. We will not do so because forming false beliefs would constitute a form of "self-harm" (*ibid.*, p. 547).

The obvious response to this objection is that, even if forming false beliefs would constitute a form of self-harm, the degree of harm would in many cases be massively outweighed by the practical reward. The harm of mistakenly believing that the US is still a colony of Great Britain would surely be worth \$500,000,000. So it is very implausible to claim that we would not form a belief against the evidence in order to win a reward, even if we could do so. It is even less plausible to claim

<sup>32</sup> Weatherson does not quite explicitly say that the act of swearing is voluntary, but it is strongly implied on p. 554, when he says that it is hard for those who hold that only volitional acts are voluntary "to say intuitive things" about the case. The role of the example in the dialectic of the paper also suggests that he takes the act to be voluntary: it occurs in a section that is introduced (p. 547) as being part of the attempt to show that beliefs are analogous to voluntary actions that are not volitional.

that we would not form a belief for which we had some weak evidence, such as the belief that it will rain today, since in this case it is more likely than not that the harm won't occur.

Weatherson anticipates this response. He says that, in fact, one could not be motivated to believe that the US is still a colony of Great Britain, because in order to do so one would have to become sceptical of so many other things one had learned over the years, that one would end up also being sceptical of the claim that one would receive \$500,000,000 for having the belief in question (*ibid.*). Whether or not this is correct, I think it is clear that it relies on inessential features of the particular example. We can simply use an example in which the target proposition is very unimportant and inferentially isolated. We could use the proposition that there are exactly 267 leaves on that tree in front of you, that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday, or whatever. To form these beliefs would not require major changes in your overall belief-system. Thus, we can construct examples in which you are offered an arbitrarily large reward to believe a completely unimportant and isolated proposition, believing which would require few if any other changes in your system of beliefs, and would not undermine the belief that you will indeed receive the reward. Still, it seems that you would not form the belief. And surely this reflects the fact that you *could* not do so. So the second objection seems to fail.

### 2.2.3 *Being in a State v Entering a State*

The third objection is that the anti-voluntarism argument shows nothing about whether *believing*—*being in* a certain kind of doxastic state—is voluntary, because it focuses on the distinct question of whether *forming* beliefs—*entering* a certain kind of doxastic state—is voluntary (*ibid.*, pp. 544–545). Weatherson's idea is that you can be in a state voluntarily without having entered that state voluntarily. He supports this with the analogy of being in a political state. Shane was born in the state of Victoria and remained there all his life. He has the capacity to leave Victoria, but has no interest in doing so and chooses not to. Shane is voluntarily in Victoria, even though his coming to be in Victoria was not voluntary. This yields a proposed sufficient condition for being in a state of belief voluntarily:

[W]e are voluntarily in a belief state if we have the capacity to leave it, but choose not to exercise this capacity. (*ibid.*, p. 545.)

Clearly, this condition can also apply to doxastic states of withholding judgment. Here, then, we have a conception of a way for a doxastic state, or any other kind of state, to be voluntary. Let me call this conception, which is distinct from at-will voluntariness, 'power-of-veto voluntariness':

**Power-of-veto voluntariness:** A token of  $\Phi$ ing is power-of-veto voluntary iff the subject has a capacity to refrain from or stop  $\Phi$ ing and chooses not to exercise that capacity.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> This is not offered by Weatherson as a necessary condition for a state to be voluntary. So, even if, as I will argue, many doxastic states fail this condition, it does not follow that doxastic states are not voluntary by virtue of satisfying some other condition. But, equally, we will then have no reason to think that they *are* voluntary by any reasonable conception, and plenty of reason (according to me) to think that they are not.

Here, ' $\Phi$ ' might range over both actions and states; to refrain from or stop  $\Phi$ ing can be to leave a state.

The idea, then, is that one is in a state voluntarily if one's being in that state is power-of-veto voluntary, and that doxastic states are, in central cases, power-of-veto voluntary.<sup>34</sup>

A preliminary point in response to this objection is that the notion of at-will voluntariness, as I formulated it, applies just as well to being in a state as to entering a state. A state of  $\Phi$ ing can be at-will voluntary even if it was not entered at-will-voluntarily. At-will voluntariness incorporates not just your coming to  $\Phi$ , but your continuing to  $\Phi$ .

Consider Shane in Victoria. He did not come to be in that state at will. But his now being in Victoria (his continuing to be in it) is such that any kind of consideration he recognised or perceived as favouring (disfavouring) being there, or that caused him to want (want not) to be there, could have been a motivating reason for his being (not being) in Victoria. Shane's being in Victoria is at-will voluntary because of how his being in Victoria is sustained, regardless of how he entered it.

Doxastic states fail to react not only to practical reasons for coming to believe, but also to practical reasons for continuing to believe. (The formulations (E1), (E2) and (E3) apply to both kinds of reasons.) An example will make this clear:

- At  $t_1$  you come to believe that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday, because you have discovered what you take to be excellent documentary evidence for that proposition. At  $t_2$ , someone offers to pay you a generous sum every day, as long as you believe that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday. You still believe it, so you start collecting the money. At  $t_3$ , you discover that your supposed evidence was in fact fabricated. You have no evidence for the proposition that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday. Can you, nevertheless, continue to believe that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday, albeit because it is a good earner rather than because of evidence that it rained on Aristotle's 30th birthday?

Again, the answer is 'no'.

So, *pace* Weatherson, the conception of voluntariness at work in the anti-voluntarism argument—at-will voluntariness—does apply to being in doxastic states, and doxastic states fail to satisfy the criterion it offers.

Nonetheless, Weatherson has offered an alternative conception of voluntariness. Can't the voluntarist therefore claim that doxastic states are power-of-veto voluntary, and that this is all that's required to resist the anti-deontology argument?

Unfortunately not, and this is my main point in response to the present objection. To rescue epistemic deontology by appeal to voluntariness, we would need voluntariness across the range of doxastic states to which epistemic deontology is supposed to apply. The problem with using power-of-veto voluntariness to rescue epistemic deontology is that our doxastic states are *not* power-of-veto voluntary across the range of cases to which epistemic deontology is supposed to apply. In particular, there are very many withholdings of belief that are not power-of-veto

<sup>34</sup> Weatherson (2008, p. 545–546) claims this of certain types of beliefs.



voluntary. And this is established by the considerations appealed to in the anti-voluntarism argument.<sup>35</sup>

Consider the kind of case in which you withhold belief about a proposition, because you lack sufficient evidence. Your evidence is merely that there is a greater than even chance of rain, so you do not form the outright belief that it will rain. This is a central and very common sort of case. We very often withhold belief about matters into which we have set out to inquire, at least until more evidence becomes available. It is crucial to our doxastic endeavours that we be able to do this.

If deontic notions are applicable to beliefs, they seem also to be applicable to such withholdings.<sup>36</sup> If there are any true deontic claims about doxastic states, then some of the following are surely among them: you ought to withhold belief in the proposition that it will rain today, when your evidence is weak; you are meeting an epistemic obligation by doing so; you would be violating it if you rashly jumped to the conclusion that it will rain; you are praiseworthy or blameworthy, depending what doxastic state you are in with respect to the proposition that it will rain. This is reflected in our practices. We will say that you should withhold belief, that in withholding you are doing as you ought. If I ask you whether it will rain, I will think well of you for not believing that it will. There will also, perhaps, be cases in which we will criticise neither belief in *p* nor withholding, allowing that both are permissible. On the other hand, we sometimes criticise, blame and resent people for being *too* cautious—for continuing to withhold belief when their evidence is in fact very strong.

Are withholdings power-of-veto voluntary? It seems that they are by-and-large not. When you recognise that your evidence for rain is weak, you *cannot* form the belief that it will rain. You have no such capacity. This is what we saw earlier, with principles (E2) and (E3). Very many of the withholdings for which we seem to be deontically assessable are of this sort. It is precisely because you lack strong evidence for a proposition that your withholding on it is not power-of-veto voluntary.

One might think that these withholding cases should be unproblematic. The subject withholds, thereby doing the *right* thing. Why should deontic appraisal require that she had a capacity to stop withholding—to do the *wrong* thing? I agree, but this is no help to the defender of power-of-veto voluntariness. For my point is precisely that, if we are ever deontically assessable for being in a state, then we are often so assessable even when we lack a capacity to leave that state.

One might try to avoid this conclusion by saying more about what it is to have a capacity to leave a state. Some of Weatherson's remarks (*ibid.*, pp. 545–546) seem to suggest that having a capacity to leave a state is simply a matter of being such that one would leave it if one had reasons to do so. Voluntariness could thus be construed as being “responsive to reasons” (*ibid.*, p. 546). Thus, this wouldn't

<sup>35</sup> Can't Weatherson just say that deontology applies to those states that *are* power-of-veto voluntary, and not to others? This is, in effect, his view. But I will argue below that this is very problematic as a strategy for rescuing epistemic deontology.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Ryan's characterisation of epistemic obligations (2003, p. 47). Alston (1988, p. 261) also emphasises this point; indeed, he claims that voluntary control over beliefs stands or falls with voluntary control over withholdings.

require that one could stop withholding on the proposition that it will rain in the absence of reasons to do so, but only that one could stop withholding on it if one had sufficient reasons to do so (further evidence, for example).

I find this move difficult to reconcile with Weatherston's emphasis on *choosing* not to exercise the capacity to leave a state (*ibid.*, p. 545): choice surely has no role if, given your evidence, you *cannot* leave the state you are in. But in any case, this construal of what it is to have the capacity to leave a state seems to obliterate the distinction between power-of-veto voluntariness and at-will voluntariness: having a power-of-veto over one's state is now construed simply as one's state being responsive to reasons. And, as we saw, doxastic states are *not* responsive to reasons in the same way that ordinary voluntary actions are. You would not leave the doxastic state of withholding belief in the proposition that it will rain, even if offered \$500,000,000 to do so.

Perhaps the relevant kind of reasons-responsiveness need not include responsiveness to practical reasons: doxastic states are voluntary just because they are responsive to epistemic reasons. This is, in effect, the fourth objection I want to consider; I put it aside until the next subsection.

I have argued that the notion of power-of-veto voluntariness does not after all give us a defensible version of (DV) that could be employed to resist the anti-deontology argument. If power-of-veto voluntariness is required for epistemic deontology, then many of our deontic appraisals are in error: for a wide and central range of doxastic states to which deontology should apply if it applies at all, power-of-veto voluntariness is not present.

One response to this argument would be to restrict the scope of epistemic deontology.<sup>37</sup> One could maintain that power-of-veto voluntariness is required for deontology, and that many doxastic states of withholding are therefore not properly subject to deontic appraisal. But this would be a concession of such magnitude as to put in question the value of trying to rescue epistemic deontology. On this suggestion, it will not be the case, when your evidence is plainly inconclusive, that you ought (deontically) to withhold belief about the proposition that it will rain today. If we were trying to defend a version of deontology that gives legitimacy to our ordinary epistemic appraisals, prescriptions and reactive attitudes, then this won't do the job. For our ordinary practice consists in substantial part of appraisals and prescriptions of, and attitudes to, withholdings. What's more, this response is implausible and *ad hoc*, in so far as it attempts to save a theoretical commitment by positing a difference between deontic appraisals and prescriptions applied to beliefs, and those applied to withholdings, where on the face of it no relevant difference appears to exist.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, Weatherston (2008) holds that certain beliefs based directly on perception and testimony are not (as I put it) power-of-veto voluntary. He holds that those beliefs are not deontically assessable in the same way that other beliefs are. My claim is that many, many more doxastic states are not power-of-veto voluntary.

<sup>38</sup> This is not to deny that there are interesting differences between beliefs and withholdings—the point is rather that epistemic deontology appears all of a piece. For example, if you ought not believe *p*, and you ought not believe not *p*, then you ought (in the very same sense) withhold belief about *p*.

Another response would be to multiply the grounds of epistemic deontology. That is, one could claim that in *some* cases the applicability of deontology depends on power-of-veto voluntariness, while in others it depends on some other ground. This would allow one to maintain that epistemic deontology applies to (many) doxastic states that fail the power-of-veto condition. This response is lame until an account is offered of the ‘other’ ground of deontology. In any case, it is theoretically unattractive, since it posits two quite different grounds for a phenomenon that appears unified. And, like the previous response, it is *ad hoc*.

I conclude that this third objection fails.

#### 2.2.4 Practical Reasons Chauvinism

According to the anti-voluntarism argument that I have been defending, doxastic states are not in general at-will voluntary because they fail to react to practical reasons. One might think that I am thereby guilty of what Matthias Steup (2008) has called “practical reasons chauvinism” (p. 387). For present purposes, this is the view that: “Voluntary control consists (exclusively) of responsiveness to practical reasons” (*ibid.*, p. 388), and responsiveness to epistemic reasons is irrelevant.<sup>39</sup> Steup claims that such chauvinism is “unmotivated and *ad hoc*” (p. 388). He claims that, if voluntariness is conceived in terms of reasons-responsiveness, then there is no reason to deny that responsiveness to epistemic reasons is sufficient for doxastic states to be voluntary. Here, then, we have a fourth objection to the anti-voluntarism argument: it chauvinistically assumes that responsiveness to practical reasons is required for voluntariness.

I think this objection is mistaken.

The anti-voluntarism argument does not chauvinistically privilege practical reasons over epistemic reasons. On the contrary: it treats all reasons as equal. The idea is not that responsiveness to practical reasons is *exclusively* relevant to voluntariness. Rather, it is that responsiveness to practical reasons is *necessary* for voluntariness. That’s because an act or state is at-will voluntary only if it is associated with reactivity to *any* kind of reason—prudential, moral, epistemic, or whatever—that the subject can recognise or perceive as favouring or disfavouring

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Footnote 38 continued

Compare Alston’s (1988) claim that voluntariness of beliefs and of withholdings goes together—see n. 36 above.

<sup>39</sup> Steup (2008, p. 388) first characterises practical reasons chauvinism as a view about freedom, but then makes clear that what would motivate such chauvinism is practical reasons chauvinism about voluntariness, combined with the thesis that voluntary control is required for freedom. Steup rejects practical reasons chauvinism about voluntariness and rejects the claim that doxastic states are not voluntary. I also reject practical reasons chauvinism about voluntariness, but I endorse the claim that doxastic states are not voluntary. In my view, doxastic states are *free* but not *voluntary*. Now, Steup himself, in the paper I am citing, is ultimately concerned with freedom, not voluntariness; as far as I can tell he is neutral on whether freedom requires voluntary control. He offers other arguments for doxastic freedom, which need a separate treatment. In (McHugh, forthcoming b) I argue that Steup’s defence of doxastic freedom fails, and I offer a rather different defence of it. For now, voluntariness is what is at issue.

that act or state.<sup>40</sup> Ordinary voluntary actions meet this condition. Doxastic states, by contrast, do not.

There is a question whether we can perceive epistemic reasons as favouring bodily actions.<sup>41</sup> But I think it is clear that, if we *can* so perceive them, then we can also react to them. For example, if you can see evidence for *p* as favouring acting in a certain way, then you can typically react accordingly by acting that way. On the other hand, if we *can't* perceive epistemic reasons as favouring bodily actions, then any failure of bodily actions to react to epistemic reasons will be compatible with their being at-will voluntary.

Now, Steup might insist (notwithstanding his formulation quoted above) that the issue is not whether responsiveness to practical reasons is exclusively relevant to voluntary control (which, in any case, I have not claimed), but whether it is relevant at all. He might insist that what is required for voluntariness, in the case of doxastic states, is only responsiveness to epistemic reasons. But when we bear in mind the points of the previous paragraphs, we can see that responsiveness to epistemic reasons just doesn't amount to voluntariness in any natural or ordinary sense. For the natural and ordinary sense of "voluntariness" is that in which it applies to ordinary voluntary actions. And if we are understanding voluntariness in terms of responsiveness to reasons, then ordinary voluntary actions are voluntary because there are *no* restrictions on the reasons that can motivate us to perform them—because they are performed at will, in the sense I have outlined. Doxastic states fail this condition.

Steup might respond that there is a principled basis on which practical reasons should be ruled out as irrelevant to the control of belief, namely that reacting to practical reasons for evidentially unsupported beliefs would be *irrational*. This claim, in turn, might be grounded on the well-known distinction between object-given and state-given reasons for belief. Practical reasons for belief are state-given reasons, and therefore, it might be said, irrelevant to the rationality of belief.<sup>42</sup>

It is controversial, to say the least, that reacting to state-directed reasons for belief, if we could do so, would be all-things-considered irrational, as opposed to merely epistemically irrational. But in any case, as I noted in Sect. 2.1, the point is that we can *perceive* or *take* state-directed reasons to genuinely favour certain doxastic states. Yet we are systematically unable to react to such considerations. This is a severe limitation on the executive power of the will with respect to doxastic states. Compare the practical domain. We are often mistaken about our reasons for action, perceiving something as a reason to  $\Phi$  when it is in fact not. (Perhaps this is true of whole classes of reasons. For example, perhaps the error theory of ethics is correct, and there are no moral reasons.) Nonetheless, we can react to such putative reasons by doing what we mistakenly take them to recommend. In doing so we will often act irrationally. But this kind of action is as

<sup>40</sup> Or, at any rate, only if it is not systematically unreactive to a major, salient class of such reasons. As noted above (n. 18, n. 27), voluntary control may come in degrees.

<sup>41</sup> Booth (2006) argues that there can be epistemic reasons for action. Kearns and Star (2009) argue that all reasons for action are epistemic: reasons for action are evidence that one ought to act in a certain way.

<sup>42</sup> This response was suggested by an anonymous referee. For the distinction between object-directed and state-directed reasons, see, for example, Hieronymi (2005).

much an exercise of voluntary control—of the executive power of the will—as is rational action performed for good reasons.

Steup might dig in, insisting that, notwithstanding the differences between our control of our actions and our control of our doxastic states, there is a notion of voluntary control that applies to doxastic states, and that requires reactivity to epistemic reasons only. But now the ‘voluntariness’ of doxastic states starts to look like something very different from the voluntariness of ordinary voluntary actions,<sup>43</sup> and the relevance of Steup’s thesis for our purposes would become very unclear. The idea behind (P1) is that deontology requires voluntary control of the familiar sort we have over our bodily actions (we have no other clear, natural notion of voluntary control); thus, it will not do to defend (P2) by claiming that doxastic states are voluntary in some very different sense.<sup>44</sup>

### 2.3 Conclusion of the Section

I conclude that the anti-voluntarism argument succeeds in establishing (P2) of the anti-deontology argument. It shows that doxastic states are not, in central cases, at-will voluntary; it also shows, when we consider it carefully, that doxastic states are not, in central cases, power-of-veto voluntary. I found the alternative conception of voluntariness offered by Steup inadequate. Perhaps there is some other conception of voluntariness under which (DV) is true, but the burden is on the voluntarist to supply that conception and to show that it is the conception employed in (P1) of the anti-deontology argument.

## 3 Voluntariness and Epistemic Deontology

In the last section I argued that **Doxastic Voluntarism (DV)** is false, and thus (P2) of the anti-deontology argument is true. In this section I turn to (P1), the premise that **Epistemic Deontology (ED)** is true only if **Doxastic Voluntarism (DV)** is true. First I will argue that, now that we have a more precise understanding of what the truth of (DV) would amount to, we can see that the standard lines of argument for (P1) fail. Then I will offer some positive reasons to deny (P1), and a diagnosis of its misleading allure.

<sup>43</sup> On pp. 389–390 he claims that freedom of doxastic states and freedom of action take different forms. See Booth (2009) for critical discussion of this move. I am in agreement with Steup on this claim, but for different reasons; and I think that it cannot be used in defence of doxastic voluntarism (McHugh, forthcoming b).

<sup>44</sup> Space prevents me from discussing in detail another recent objection to the anti-voluntarism argument, due to Ryan (2003). Ryan claims that the argument fails to rule out that we hold beliefs “intentionally”, where this is a matter of “believing what I mean to believe” (p. 74). Unfortunately it’s not clear what Ryan means by this. If it means control of beliefs by the will, then the argument does rule this out, as I have shown. If it means that we have a power of veto over our beliefs (as suggested by the example of laughter: *ibid.*) then the argument also rules this out. If it means only that our beliefs are not like compulsions that overcome us, or like things that merely happen to us, then I think this is true and important, but it does not amount to voluntary control. See also Nottelmann (2006) for discussion.

The idea behind (P1) is that deontic notions cannot apply to doxastic states unless those states are under voluntary control. I find in the literature two kinds of argument for this idea.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.1 The Inductive Argument for (P1)

The first kind of argument goes as follows: when we consider paradigmatic instances of non-voluntary phenomena, we find that they are not properly subject to deontology, so if doxastic states are not voluntary then they are not properly subject to deontology either.<sup>46</sup> For example, sneezing and digestion are non-voluntary. They are not subject to deontic appraisal or prescription. (Although there is a sense in which you ought to digest your food properly, this is not a deontic 'ought'. You are not violating some obligation when you have indigestion; you are not responsible or blameworthy for it.) The same seems to go for other non-voluntary phenomena, such as reflexive reactions and headaches: we do not apply deontology to them. It seems that if doxastic states are non-voluntary, then by analogy they cannot be subject to deontology either.

This argument has force only in so far as the following assumption is correct: if doxastic states are not voluntary, then they are relevantly analogous to phenomena such as digestion, sneezing and headaches (DSH). Suppose that doxastic states are indeed not voluntary, as I have argued. If there are nevertheless important disanalogies between doxastic states and DSH, then we cannot infer, from the inapplicability of deontology to the latter, that it is also inapplicable to the former.

DSH are attributable to persons—you digest, sneeze or have a headache—but they are goings-on in which you *qua* person or agent have little role. They merely occur, or obtain. They are not responsive to reasons for or against digesting, sneezing or having a headache. Doxastic states are rather different. They often constitute the subject's responses to reasons, albeit reasons within a restricted range. They are often seen as defensible by the subject in the light of those reasons. Even in those cases where a doxastic state is not consciously formed or maintained for a reason, it will be dispositionally responsive to such reasons. Doxastic states typically change as the subject's take on her reasons changes. In this way, the subject seems to have a kind of role, in the forming, maintaining and revising of her doxastic states, that she does not have with respect to DSH.<sup>47</sup>

Now, we found that doxastic states, unlike ordinary voluntary actions, fail to respond to *certain kinds* of reasons. But this does not entail that doxastic states are analogous to DSH; it is quite compatible with the existence of the disanalogies just

<sup>45</sup> There is surprisingly little defence of (P1) in the literature, despite the widespread influence of a thesis along these lines. Besides the two kinds of argument considered here, some other possible defences are considered and rejected by Chuard and Southwood (2009).

<sup>46</sup> This kind of argument is considered, though not ultimately endorsed, by Weatherston (2008). The example of digestion comes from him.

<sup>47</sup> This has been emphasised by, for example, Moran (2001) and Hieronymi (2009).

described. It seems, then, that doxastic states fall into a category very different from *either* ordinary voluntary actions *or* involuntary occurrences like DSH.<sup>48</sup>

Not all differences *make* a difference to the force of an analogy. But the differences I have highlighted do seem to make such a difference, when it comes to the argument by analogy for (P1). They are potentially relevant to the applicability of deontology. It is a familiar thought that what is important for being subject to normative demands is, precisely, being responsive to the reasons that generate those demands. I will develop this idea further below; in the meantime we can say that, absent an argument to the contrary, the existence of these differences seriously undermines the first line of support for (P1).

### 3.2 The 'Ought Implies Can' Argument for (P1)

The second kind of argument for (P1)—the premise that **Epistemic Deontology (ED)** is true only if **Doxastic Voluntarism (DV)** is true—appeals to some version of the 'ought implies can' principle.<sup>49</sup> The idea is that if you ought to  $\Phi$  (or you are obliged to  $\Phi$ , or are blameworthy for not  $\Phi$ ing etc.) then you can  $\Phi$  or could have  $\Phi$ ed, and so  $\Phi$ ing is something under your voluntary control. Thus, if there are oughts (etc.) governing doxastic states, then we have voluntary control over our doxastic states.

This argument involves a crucial move: from 'ought implies can', it is inferred that 'ought implies voluntary control'—that any domain in which there are oughts (permissions, responsibility, etc.) is a domain in which voluntary control can be exercised. (P1) then follows as an instance of this latter principle. This move seems natural, and a number of philosophers writing on the present topic have made it,<sup>50</sup> while many others have left it unquestioned. On closer examination, however, it is highly questionable. Such closer examination was carried out for the first time, to my knowledge, in a recent paper by Chuard and Southwood (2009); many of the following points are also made by them.<sup>51</sup>

The move goes from this principle:

(OC) If S ought to  $\Phi$  then S can  $\Phi$ .

to:

(OV) If S ought to  $\Phi$  then S has voluntary control over whether she  $\Phi$ s.

<sup>48</sup> I defend such a thesis for the case of judgment in (McHugh 2011).

<sup>49</sup> This is the strategy of Alston (1988). This strategy for defending (P1) is discussed and rejected by Ryan (2003). Ryan rejects the 'ought implies can' principle; I will suggest below that we can accept the principle but still reject (P1).

<sup>50</sup> Alston (1988, p. 259) takes it to be obvious. So too does Ryan (2003, p. 49), who then goes on to argue that various versions of the 'ought implies can' principle are false. Chrisman (2008) seems to accept the move when the 'ought' is an 'ought-to-do'; he tries to rescue doxastic oughts by construing them as something other than oughts-to-do.

<sup>51</sup> The Chuard and Southwood paper, which covers this ground in much more detail, came to my attention after I had already drafted this material. I made use of it in revisions; specific debts are noted in what follows.

This move has not been defended in the literature. But on the face of it, it is a *non sequitur*. It requires a linking premise. For example:

(CV) If S can  $\Phi$ , then S has voluntary control over whether she  $\Phi$ s.

But (CV) is surely false. You can fall asleep, but falling asleep isn't something you typically do voluntarily.

Falling asleep is, perhaps, not something you typically ought to do, in the relevant sense; insomnia is not blameworthy. This might suggest replacing (CV) with:

(CV\*) If S ought to  $\Phi$  and S can  $\Phi$ , then S has voluntary control over whether she  $\Phi$ s.

However, there appear to be counterexamples to (CV\*). These are also apparent counterexamples to (OV). Consider: You ought to feel remorse when you act wrongly. You ought to feel grateful when another person sacrifices something significant in order to help you. Statements like these are often true. You can feel these emotions. But they are not under voluntary control.<sup>52</sup>

The defender of (OV) is likely to deny that emotions such as remorse and gratitude are subject to genuine deontic oughts. They might claim that the sense in which you ought to feel remorse for your immoral action is merely that a good or virtuous person would feel such remorse—not that there is some obligation you are violating when you fail to feel remorse.

This claim seems false to the phenomenon. For example, suppose we are friends and you betray me, and then feel no apparent remorse, even though you are perfectly capable of remorse. I will, quite appropriately, blame and resent you not only for the betrayal, but also for your callous lack of remorse. I will consider it as violating an obligation of friendship, on top of the obligation you violated by betraying me. Absence of remorse for some wrongful act can often be far more hurtful, and wounding of friendship, than the act itself.

By contrast, consider a psychopath who is incapable of remorse. If such a psychopath wrongs me and feels no remorse, I may blame and resent him for his actions, but it would not be appropriate to *further* blame and resent him for his lack of remorse. In so far as he lacks remorse he is to be evaluated negatively as a person. But he is not violating an obligation—an obligation that makes a genuine demand on him. For he cannot feel remorse. The difference between you and the psychopath seems to be, precisely, that you are violating an obligation and he is not. Here, then, we seem to have a case where 'ought' in the deontic sense goes with 'can', but there is no requirement of voluntary control.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Chuard and Southwood (*ibid.*). Adams (1985) famously argues that you can be responsible for emotions that are not voluntary.

<sup>53</sup> As an anonymous referee pointed out, the fact that the psychopath is not blameworthy for his lack of remorse does not obviously entail that it is not the case that the psychopath ought to feel remorse. Perhaps it is not ought, but rather blameworthiness, that implies can.

If there are problems for (OC), then so much the worse for the anti-deontology argument that I am rejecting in this paper. My agenda in this section is not to defend (OC), but rather to show that one can hold on to (OC) and yet reject (OV). I do think, however, that when we keep in mind that the 'ought' in



The defender of (OV) may insist that, despite appearances, the 'ought' in these cases is not deontic; perhaps he can find some other way to treat such cases. But even if he can make this move plausible, he will still, if pursuing this line of defence, owe us some independent argument to back up the move from (OC) to (OV)—for example, an independent argument for (CV\*). Since 'can' does not, in its normal sense, entail voluntary control, any such argument will have to turn in large part on the interpretation of 'can' in (OC). The problem with this is that the correct interpretation of 'can' in the 'ought implies can' principle is a matter of controversy, and the defender of (OV) will therefore have to provide an argument for an interpretation that entails voluntary control, without simply presupposing (OV). It is far from clear how this is to be done. The denier of (OV) is hardly likely to accept such an interpretation.<sup>54</sup>

So there seems to be little prospect of deriving (OV) from (OC) in a non-question-begging way.

It might be said that there is no *need* to derive (OV) from (OC), because (OV) itself is intuitively compelling. The idea here is that the intuition underlying the attraction of the 'ought implies can' principle is really an intuition that ought implies voluntary control.<sup>55</sup> Thus, it is misguided and unnecessary to try to derive (OV) from (OC) in a non-question-begging way.

I agree that (OV) itself looks plausible at first glance, although I am doubtful that this is a matter of intuition, if 'intuition' means something unsupported by further reasons. I take myself to be removing (OV)'s appearance of plausibility, by showing that the reasons for it are spurious. Nonetheless, perhaps people have a genuine intuition that (OV) is true; if so, then that provides some reason to accept it. In the next subsection I will provide further arguments against (OV) and a diagnosis of its apparent plausibility, according to which (OV) seems plausible because of a certain overgeneralisation from the case of bodily action. I will thus provide both outweighing and undermining considerations which I take to carry the day against any putative intuition.

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Footnote 53 continued

question is a deontic ought (not a merely evaluative ought, as in "the world ought to contain fewer psychopaths"), it becomes rather unintuitive to say that the psychopath ought to feel remorse. After all, the psychopath's conduct cannot be guided by this ought. By contrast, our doxastic conduct can perfectly well be guided by epistemic oughts, even if that guidance does not go via mechanisms of voluntary control. For more on the notion of epistemic guidance of doxastic conduct, see Chuard and Southwood (*ibid.*), and Steglich-Petersen (2010).

If we did wish to reject (OC), and replace it with a 'blameworthiness implies can' principle, the arguments of this paper could be recast as a defence of epistemic blameworthiness in the absence of doxastic voluntarism. See also n. 3 above. For more on blameworthiness, ought and can in this context see Chuard and Southwood (*ibid.*).

<sup>54</sup> Chuard and Southwood (*ibid.*) argue that no such interpretation is available. My claim here is more modest: even if some such interpretation is available, a further and non-question-begging argument will be required to establish that this is the correct interpretation.

<sup>55</sup> Thanks to Tony Booth for suggesting this to me.

I have been discussing the ‘ought implies can’ principle. It is important to distinguish this from a distinct ‘ought implies can-not’ principle.<sup>56</sup> This is the idea that, if you ought to  $\Phi$  (or are obliged to  $\Phi$ , etc.), then you are able to *not*  $\Phi$ . That is, if you cannot but  $\Phi$ , then you are not subject to an ought to  $\Phi$ . If this principle were correct, then epistemic deontology might seem to be in trouble, for, in those cases where you cannot but withhold belief, it would not be the case that you ought to do so.

The ‘ought implies can-not’ principle does not follow from the ‘ought implies can’ principle, and is far less intuitively compelling than the latter. As mentioned in Sect. 2.2.3 above, it’s far from clear that deontic appraisal for doing the right thing should require the ability to do the wrong thing in the circumstances.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps Wittgenstein (1958) showed that norms apply only when there is some *general* possibility of violation. We can and do violate the norms of epistemic deontology. It doesn’t follow that, in every particular instance of an ought, obligation, or whatever, it must be psychologically possible for the subject to go wrong even while recognising the reasons she has.

I conclude that the standard arguments for (P1) carry little force. The only potential reason we have found to accept (P1) is a supposed intuition that (OV) is true. The considerations of the next subsection will be enough to defeat the force of any such intuition.

### 3.3 The Falsity of (P1)

Having cast doubt on the support for (P1), I now want to offer more in the way of a positive argument against (P1) and a diagnosis of its deceptive appearance of truth.

Recall that the oughts, obligations, responsibilities, praise- and blameworthiness, etc., that I am concerned with are epistemic. Epistemic deontology is a species of deontology distinguished not only by its characteristic domain of application—doxastic states, and the processes by which we form, retain, revise and extinguish them—but also by the kinds of considerations that generate its demands—considerations conducive to the ends or norms of believing truly and avoiding believing falsely. Most commonly these are considerations of *evidence*. We epistemically assess and prescribe doxastic states against the subject’s evidence. If you believe what your horoscope says then typically you are doing what you ought not, and you are epistemically blameworthy, even if believing it does no practical harm. By contrast, if you fail to form a belief that would earn you a reward, you do not thereby violate an epistemic ought, and you are not epistemically blameworthy.

<sup>56</sup> Alston (1988) seems to understand ‘ought implies can’ as incorporating ‘ought implies can-not’. This might explain why he finds the inference from ‘ought implies can’ to (P1) obvious.

<sup>57</sup> This point is made by Pettit and Smith (1996). An analogous point is made in the context of the free will debate by Wolf (1990).

Practical reasons do not ground oughts within epistemic deontology.<sup>58</sup> Thus, doing as you ought within epistemic deontology won't require reactivity to practical reasons. Reactivity to practical reasons, as we have seen, is necessary for at-will voluntariness. Thus, doing as you ought within epistemic deontology won't require at-will voluntariness.

If you are subject to deontology of some kind, then you are answerable to the considerations—the reasons—that generate the oughts of that deontology. What is plausibly required for being answerable to reasons in this way is that you are capable of reacting to those reasons, by doing what they recommend. This seems to me to capture much of what is compelling about the 'ought implies can' principle:

(OR) If S ought to  $\Phi$  in virtue of reason R, then S is capable of reacting to R by  $\Phi$ ing.<sup>59</sup>

So, epistemic deontology plausibly requires reactivity to evidence.

What is implausible is that being answerable to *one* kind of reason in this way requires that you be capable of reacting to some *other* kind of reason. Any such requirement would be utterly arbitrary. The requirements of applicability of deontology cannot be utterly arbitrary.

When we apply these points to epistemic deontology, we see that it does not require at-will voluntariness. At-will voluntariness involves reactivity to practical reasons. Such reasons do not generate oughts within epistemic deontology. Being subject to epistemic deontology therefore cannot require reactivity to such reasons. It cannot require at-will voluntariness. A requirement of at-will voluntariness would be arbitrary in a way that such requirements cannot be.

What about power-of-veto voluntariness? Recall that doxastic states are not power-of-veto voluntary because you cannot but withhold belief when you consider a proposition and you take yourself to lack sufficient evidence for it (Sect. 2.2). In these cases, to do other than withholding would be either to react to some practical reason for believing in spite of your lack of sufficient evidence, or to form a belief arbitrarily, for no reason at all and in spite of your lack of sufficient evidence. Thus, power-of-veto voluntariness would require the capacity to do one of these two things. But surely epistemic deontology requires no such capacity. We have already seen that reactivity to practical reasons is not required for epistemic deontology. It is equally implausible that the capacity to form beliefs arbitrarily, for no reason at all

<sup>58</sup> That is not to say that non-evidential considerations do not ground oughts within epistemic deontology. Perhaps considerations of theoretical unity or simplicity can generate epistemic oughts. I think that, if they do so, that is because they are conducive to truth and the avoidance of falsity. An alternative view would be that unity and simplicity are themselves epistemic aims or norms, independent of truth. If that's right then my characterisation of the epistemic must be loosened somewhat, and my characterisation of the practical correspondingly tightened. The points I wish to make would go through anyway. Thanks to Matthew Chrisman for discussion here.

<sup>59</sup> Here, 'ought' has scope only over 'to  $\Phi$ '. That is, 'in virtue of' expresses a relation between the reason R and the obligation expressed by 'S ought to  $\Phi$ '—it is in virtue of R that S ought to  $\Phi$ . I leave open exactly what is the nature of this relation.

and in spite of your lack of sufficient evidence, is required for epistemic deontology. Such a requirement would itself be arbitrary.<sup>60</sup>

So it seems that, whether we understand voluntariness in the ‘at-will’ sense or the ‘power-of-veto’ sense, (P1) is false.<sup>61</sup>

Sometimes you are wrong about your evidence. Suppose you mistakenly take your evidence for *p* to be quite weak, when in fact it constitutes a simple proof of *p*. Surely, in this case, you ought to believe *p*, rather than withhold judgment. After all, you have a simple proof of it! Yet (E3) seems to tell us that you will be unable to believe *p*.

On the face of it, this might seem like a problem for epistemic deontology, since it appears that we have found a violation of (OC), and indeed of (OR), after all. But in fact the considerations already canvassed make clear that epistemic deontology does *not* require that you could simply go ahead and believe *p*, in such a case. To do so would be to believe *p* on the basis of what is, by your lights, insufficient evidence.

I think the correct way to understand such cases is as follows. What you *cannot* do is change your doxastic state with respect to *p* *without first* changing your take on the evidence for *p*. That is, you cannot believe *p* without first *recognising* your evidence for *p* as a (sufficiently strong) reason to believe *p*. But neither deontology nor (OC) nor (OR) plausibly requires you to be able to believe *p* without recognising what you take to be sufficient evidence for *p*. To do so would be to believe for some practical reason, or to believe arbitrarily, and, as we saw, these are not requirements for epistemic deontology.

Presumably, what’s required is that you be capable of reacting to those ought-generating reasons that you *do* recognise, and that you be capable of recognising those reasons in the first place. For example, in the case described above, you ought to believe the *p* for which you have a simple proof, provided you are capable of recognising the proof as such. Provided that we are capable of recognising our reasons—of being right about what our evidence supports—cases in which we go wrong will not yield a problem for epistemic deontology. There will be no violation of (OC) or of (OR) here.

There may be cases where a subject is *not* capable of being right about what her evidence supports. For example, you might have what is in fact a proof of *p*, but which is so complicated that recognising it as a proof is impossible for you. Perhaps

<sup>60</sup> It might be said that there are cases where your evidence for a proposition is so strong that you cannot but believe it. Parallel points would apply to such cases: to extinguish such a belief would be to react to some practical reason, or to behave arbitrarily.

<sup>61</sup> The view that responsibility for belief is grounded not in voluntary control but in some form of reasons-responsiveness is endorsed by Adler (2002, Chap. 2), and perhaps by McDowell (1998); see also McHugh (forthcoming b). Many other philosophers have said things that are congenial to such a view. However, surprisingly few philosophers have directly addressed the supposed connection between epistemic deontology and doxastic voluntarism (see n. 45 above). To my knowledge, none of them have satisfactorily diagnosed the misleading plausibility of this supposed connection (Chuard and Southwood come closest—see below). It seems to me that that is because none have untangled the relations between epistemic deontology, voluntarism, and reasons-responsiveness.

in such a case it is not the case that you ought to believe *p*. The fact remains that in central cases we are capable of being right about what our evidence supports.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.4 Diagnosing the Allure of (P1)

I have argued that (P1) is false. But (P1) has certainly appeared plausible to many philosophers. In closing, let me show how my argument offers a plausible diagnosis of the initial attraction of (P1). I think the attraction of (P1) is based in turn on the attraction of (OV), of which it is an instance. The attraction of (OV) has a twofold basis. First, when we think of the non-voluntary, we think of paradigmatic non-voluntary phenomena like DSH. These phenomena are indeed not subject to deontology. On this basis we overgeneralise to the conclusion (OV). That is straightforward. Second, deontology *does* require at-will voluntariness in the case of bodily action. Taking bodily action and practical forms of deontology as the paradigm, we again overgeneralise to the mistaken conclusion, (OV).

Why does deontology require at-will voluntariness in the case of bodily action? Because nothing plays the exclusive role, in generating oughts governing bodily actions, that is played by the ends or norms characteristic of epistemic deontology (truth and the avoidance of falsity) in generating epistemic oughts. There are many practical ends and norms. Accordingly, no kind of reason has a role comparable to the privileged role of epistemic reasons in epistemic deontology. *Any* kind of consideration, or almost any, can be the ground of an ought governing bodily action. As we saw earlier with (OR), the applicability of deontology does require reactivity to the reasons that generate oughts within that deontology. Thus, deontology

<sup>62</sup> Reisner (2009) considers a case in which cult member Jim is brainwashed so that he becomes incapable of evaluating evidence in a certain domain. Reisner argues that this is a problem for an 'ought implies can' principle applied to belief, where the 'can' is understood psychologically (as I propose to understand it). After all, surely Jim ought to believe propositions in the domain for which he has overwhelming evidence.

Reisner's argument provides an alternative route to one of my main claims in this paper: the rejection of (OV). As his paper suggests (although this is not its focus), if the 'can' in 'ought implies can' is interpreted as expressing merely physical possibility, then (OV) does not follow. The argument is thus of no use to an anti-deontologist. On the other hand, Reisner's argument cannot be directed against an anti-deontologist, since it assumes that we can truly say that Jim ought to believe such-and-such—precisely what the anti-deontologist denies.

In any case, I think the argument is too quick, and we can retain a version of (OC) in which the 'can' is understood psychologically. First, note that it would take an extraordinarily profound intervention in Jim's psychology to render him genuinely *incapable* of evaluating evidence in a certain domain—as opposed to, say, merely inculcating in him some very well entrenched general beliefs about the domain that skew his evaluation of the evidence. Second, to the extent that Jim really *is* incapable of recognising and reacting to his evidence in the domain, it is not at all obvious that Jim nevertheless ought—where this is a *deontic* ought—believe what that evidence recommends. Indeed, it would be odd to say that he ought, in this deontic sense, believe it. We might say that Jim "ought" to hold those beliefs, where this is an evaluative "ought" expressing the idea that a good epistemic agent would hold those beliefs. But this is not a deontic ought. We would not blame Jim, or hold him responsible, for his failure to believe (see n. 53 above). Furthermore, all of this is quite compatible with saying that Jim has propositional *justification* for the beliefs he refuses to form, that he is *irrational*, and various other things.

governing bodily actions requires reactivity to any kind of reason. That is, it requires at-will voluntariness.<sup>63</sup>

#### 4 Conclusion

Epistemic deontology appears to be deeply embedded in our practices and discourse. According to the anti-deontology argument, epistemic deontology presupposes that our doxastic states are voluntary, and should thus be rejected. One response to this argument is to defend doxastic voluntarism. I have argued that no version of doxastic voluntarism that merits the name is true. However, when we see this we can also see that there is little reason to accept, and good reason to reject, the thesis that epistemic deontology presupposes doxastic voluntarism.

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<sup>63</sup> Compare Chuard and Southwood's diagnosis of the attraction of the inference from (OC) to (OV) (2009, p. 619). They appeal to a correlation of 'can' and 'voluntary control' in the case of actions, but suggest that this correlation is merely due to the fact that actions happen to be the sort of thing that is under voluntary control. My diagnosis goes deeper, since it uncovers a principled connection between deontology and voluntary control in the case of actions, while explaining why the connection breaks down in the case of doxastic states. In McHugh (forthcoming b) I provide further material for this diagnosis, by linking it to a confusion between voluntariness and freedom.

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