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FREE BELIEVERS

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Abstract: *Is there such a thing as free belief? This paper is not about free expression of belief or free speech. It is about freedom of belief as a mental state. In the sense in which the believer would be the cause of his or her own belief, and could believe at will, it is, for well-known reasons, impossible. Some writers, however, like McDowell, have argued, in a Kantian spirit, that obeying the norms of thought and setting oneself as a member of the "space of reasons" could provide the appropriate notion of free belief. Their account is based on the idea that a reflexive believer is automatically a free believer. I argue that this is wrong. There is no appropriate notion of free belief in this sense, although this does not show that one cannot be responsible for one's belief.*

Key-words: *belief; freedom; reflection; doxastic voluntarism; responsibility.*

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INTRODUCTION

We know, or at least we suppose that we know, what freedom to act means, even when we deny that there is such a thing. But do we know what freedom of belief is, and is there any such thing? It is much less clear. In this paper, I want first to try to characterise what it means. And I want also to sketch an answer to the question whether we do enjoy such a freedom.

There is, indeed, a relatively straightforward sense of freedom of belief, which is freedom of speech and of opinion. But it is not the sense which concerns us, for freedom of opinion is the freedom to *express* one's beliefs and opinions, and not the freedom to *have* beliefs or to form them. It is a species of political freedom, and it involves the public sphere, whereas freedom of belief concerns, at least *prima facie*, the individual. Of course the two senses are not unrelated, but it is not my purpose here to say how. A free thinker, or someone who enjoys free thought, is, at least on one familiar conception of political freedom, someone who is not constrained by others to conceal his opinions, in particular in religious and political matters. Everyone is familiar with the classical enlightenment doctrine that each of us has a special responsibility for her own beliefs, and a right to maintain them against various authorities. But it's precisely because the individual is supposed to form them freely, in her own private sphere, that the question arises of the possible intrusion of others in this sphere, and hence the question of the possibility of how to express her beliefs to others, which is therefore derivative with respect to the first sense. Now in what sense do we take ourselves to have freedom of thought in this sense, and do we have a right to say so?

To be free, as I just said, seems at least to be responsible. In the sphere of action, to be responsible is to be able to control one's actions by one's will, to have free will. But beliefs are not actions that one takes, and we do not seem to have the capacity to choose to have any belief

that we please, in the sense in which we have the capacity of going out for a walk if we please. Beliefs, to take up Hume's famous phrase, seem to belong to the passive, not to the active part of the mind. This is why there is a traditional philosophical problem of freedom of the will for the philosophy of action, but there is no comparable problem of freedom of belief for epistemology. It is often said that the threat that the will might not be free is analogous to the threat of scepticism in epistemology, but the claim that we might not be free believers does no seem to pose any special threat to our concept of knowledge. So there is an important asymmetry here, one which prevents us, *prima facie*, from applying to belief the ordinary model that we have of free action. Or at least, if we do not stop here, and simply renounce the idea of bringing together the two kinds of spheres, the cognitive and the practical, we should develop a sense in which beliefs can be actions and active states of the mind, and thus subject in some sense to the will.

A second kind of thought which can suggest that belief belongs to the sphere of responsibility is this: beliefs are subject to norms. For instance someone who believes that *P*, and who believes that if *P* then *Q*, *ought* to believe that *Q*. If she recognises the force of the *modus ponens* rule (and even if she does not recognise it), and if she believes that not-*Q*, then there is something *wrong*. In general, people suppose that there are certain things that they ought to believe or that ought not to believe, and they assume that they are responsive to what they think they ought to believe, when they form such and such beliefs (Pettit & Smith (1996), p. 429). In this sense they can be subject to blame or reprobation in their beliefs, when they fail with comply to these norms. Can this give us a plausible sense of our responsibility towards our beliefs? It depends on how we understand the *ought* here and the relevant notion of norm. For if we understand it in the practical sense, as pertaining to things that we ought to *do*, then we are back to the previous model which conceives freedom of belief as a kind of action. But are the norms which are in play when we say that we ought to believe, say, the conclusion of a certain

inference when it is forced on us by the premises and a certain rule of inference, the same kind of norms as the norms (social, moral) which pertain to the practical sphere? We might instead think of them as epistemic norms. But are epistemic norms the same kind of norms as practical norms? We are back again to the previous question: is believing the same kind of thing as acting, and if it is not can we say that we are liable to responsibility in the cognitive or epistemic sphere? If the norms of epistemic reason are forced upon us, we can hardly say that we can be free believers in this sense, or we have to explore a sense in which our responsibility towards epistemic norms can be put on a par with our responsibility towards practical or ethic al norms.

It is at this point that my problem encounters the problem of mental causation. The problem of mental causation is the problem of how states or events which have a semantic content can cause states of events in the physical world. Our problem he re is how *reasons*, whether or not we understand them as based on psychological states or not, can have a causal power. In the practical domain, the question pertains to reasons to act. In the epistemic domain, which concerns us here, the problem pertains to reasons to believe. Can our reasons to believe be causal in the sense of causing us to believe in certain ways, and thus making us free ?

In the first part of this paper, I discuss the idea that we could be free believers in the sense in which we could have a voluntary control over our beliefs. The upshot is negative. So I turn, in the second part, to the idea that to be a free believer is to be someone who is responsive to certain norms, but responsive in the sense that she is aware or conscious of these norms, hence that she has a certain capacity of reflection upon her reasons to believe. In many ways, this is a Kantian proposal, one which locates freedom of belief in a certain form of autonomy, which the Kantian associates with agency and the capacity of first personal thought with respect to reasons to believe, which in this sense is parallel to the kind of autonomy that is claimed to be a condition of Kantian

freedom. But I find this model inadequate, if it implies that freedom of belief is tied to the capacity of reflecting, through second-order beliefs, upon one's first-order beliefs. Mere reflection cannot move us to believe, and cannot move us to move ourselves to believe, in the appropriate sense of power and control which seems to be required by genuine agency.

1. FREEDOM OF BELIEF AS BELIEVING AT WILL

The first sense, then, in which we could be said to be free believers is this: we enjoy freedom of belief when our beliefs are controlled by our will, just as we are free agents when our actions are controlled by our will. I shall not question, for the moment, this conception of freedom of the will, but shall simply ask whether, if true, it can be transposed to the purportedly similar phenomenon of freedom of belief.

But as I said in my introduction, the suggestion is implausible, for familiar reasons (Williams (1970))[1]. Normally our beliefs are not under the direct control of our will. Of course it is in general admitted that they can *indirectly* be under such control. Through hypnosis, auto-suggestion, the formation of habits or other stratagems, we can produce in ourselves the state of believing. But these are all forms of *mediated* belief productions. Moreover these are not cases of beliefs as actions, but of actions which have, as their effects or products, states of believing. Certainly the fact that I can perform an action, described by its product, through performing another kind of action, which leads to this product as the result of a causal process, does not prevent us from characterising the whole process as an action. For instance hitting the target is an action, which I initiate by bending the bow, and firing the arrow. In this sense, believing that I can fly, through taking a drug, can be called an

[1]The literature is large. Apart from Williams (1970), see Winters (1979), Pojman (1983), Elster (1978), Bennett (1990), Engel (1999), Noordhof (2001).

action. But if the *formation* of the belief can be in this sense voluntary, through the voluntariness of the act which initiates it (taking the drug), process and the state which is the result are not under the control of the will. It no more shows that beliefs are actions than the fact that by bending the bow and firing the arrow shows that speed of the arrow, its trajectory, or the resistance of the air are actions. The contribution of the world to the success of the action is not something which is up to me, although I take it into account. What does seem impossible is the formation of a conscious intention to believe that *p* which would result in the act of believing that *p* in the same sense as that in which a conscious intention to act directly produces the act in question. We can call this the *uncontrollability* feature of belief (Noordhof (2001)). Familiar explanations of this feature include psychological ones and constitutive or conceptual ones. A psychological explanation can appeal either to the ordinary phenomenology of belief or to the functionalist thesis that beliefs are normally caused by environment inputs and result in outputs in behaviour. If beliefs could be caused by intention and be actions, this would run counter to this normal role. A conceptual explanation consists in saying that the very nature of belief, unlike desire and other motivational states, is to "aim at truth", and to have the "mind to world" direction of fit. One can also combine the two sorts of explanations, by saying that we could not, in full consciousness, ac quire a belief irrespective of its truth *and* think of it as something purporting to represent reality, for I could not think of this belief as mine, since that would mean that I could both believe that not *p* (since I have no evidence for its truth, or disr egard this evidence) and believe that *p* (if my action of getting this belief is successful) (Williams (1970), p. 148). So here again we hit upon the fundamental categorical difference between beliefs on the one hand, and desires, intentions and motivationa l states on the other.

It is not clear, however, that these psychological or conceptual arguments for the uncontrollability of belief are satisfactory. For the

psychological argument do not rule out the psychological possibility of creatures who would, unlike us, not aim at truth nor the possibility that the normal function of belief might dysfunction. And the conceptual argument does not undermine the possibility that after our forming the conscious intention to believe *p* irrespective of its truth, there might be later evidence for its truth. There is also, of course, the possibility of *self-deception* or of wishful thinking. And there is the case of self-fulfilled beliefs such as the belief that I am courageous which makes me courageous. Can't these count against the thesis that there cannot be direct voluntary belief formation? In the case of self-deception, it's not clear that we are in presence of direct belief formation. But in these as in the other cases, such as wishful thinking, it is not clear that the beliefs are *rational.* And here, as with the conceptual argument, we hit upon an important feature of belief: that it is normally shaped by evidence for what is believed, and that a believer is rational to the extent that she is responsive to the evidential reasons for her belief. This is not to say that the concept of irrational belief – such as believing contrary to evidence – is a psychological or conceptual impossibility – on the contrary it is very common – but that irrational beliefs, or less than rational ones, do not seem to be *free.* A self-deceived person, or a wishful thinker, are rarely described as free in their beliefs. On the contrary, the very fact - if it is a fact – that they have been able to manipulate their beliefs in some way, seems to show that they are *unfree.* This why the classics described motivated belief formation as a kind of flaw in the human agent. For instance Pascal said, famously:

> Nobody ignores that there are two ways through which opinions are received in the mind, which are its two main powers, understanding and will. The most natural is that of the understanding, for one should never give one's assent but to proven truth; but the most ordinary, although it is against nature, is that of the will. For men in general are almost always led to believe not through evidence, but through pleasure. This way is low, indignant, and foreign; this is why everybody disapproves of it.

> Everyone professes that he believes, and even loves only what he knows to be worth it.[2]

Believing at will is against "nature". And nature is such that we should believe only what is worth believing. A belief which would be willed and acquired irrespective of evidence, then, would not be free: it would be under the control of the lowest part of the min d. This is in agreement with a very common intuition that we have about freedom, which is well expressed by Christine Swanton when she says: "The freedom phenomena are characterised by the absence of various flaws, breakdown and restrictions on human pra ctical activity, namely those which limit the *potential* of human beings as agents"(Swanton (1992), quoted by Peacocke (1999), p. 308).

Believing freely, then is believing for reasons which are independent of us, which are appropriate to evidence that we d o not create, nor manipulate. It is believing according to nature, nature being such that the understanding, or the cognitive part of the mind is not under the control of the will, which rules the practical part. But what kind of freedom is this? If the cl aim is that a good belief system is one which conforms to nature, which functions well, by registering evidence, then certainly someone can have a belief system in good functioning order, or the normal potential, but not be free for all that. Animals, in s o far as they have informational states which register evidence, and if we are prepared to call them beliefs, could be free in this sense. But are we prepared to take them as paradigms of free believers?

What apparently needs to be added, in order to fit our intuitions, is that the subject must be aware of her functioning well, that her being responsive to evidence must imply some consciousness of it. And this does not seem to involve the will or any sort of mental act of this kind. But before developing this suggestion, I want to discuss briefly another

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[2]Pascal, "De l'esprit géométrique et de l'art de persuader" (*Oeuvres Complètes,* II, Pléiade, ed. Le Guern, p.171).

one, which could, on the face of it be compatible with finding a place for the will in rational beliefs.

It is often said that even if beliefs are not under the direct control of the will, there are certain epistemic activities which help the formation of our beliefs. I can be more or less attentive to evidence, desire more or less to investigate the matter at hand, form various hypotheses, accept them or not, and take them more less seriously [3]. I can make judgements, or suspend them. All these expressions betray certain kinds of actions or decisions. Judgement, or acceptance, in this sense if often said to be under the control of the will, and this gives plausibility to Descartes' doctrine that judgement is voluntary, and that it is the source of error. In this sense, cognition is under the control or practical activities, and hence under the control of free will. But this proposal pertains obviously to indirect voluntarism about belief, not to direct voluntarism. And although these activities of belief formation can be more or less rational, they do not for that reason make the beliefs which are the products of these activities rational. Whether or not the activities which help to fix belief are amenable to practical norms, and in this sense rational, it does not follow that the beliefs that they produce are rational. For the norms of rationality to which belief obeys are epistemic norms (evidence, coherence, truth): the fact that I can arrive, by more or less rational means at a belief does not make the belief more or less rational in the epistemic sense (Owens (2000), pp. 85-87).

The failure of our attempts to base freedom of belief on the will and on other motivational states thus shows two things. First it shows that we cannot hope to base epistemic freedom upon freedom of the will. For whether the will is free or not is irrelevant to whether we are free in our beliefs. For beliefs and other cognitive attitudes are not actions. So we cannot found freedom of belief on freedom to act. Second, and by implication, it shows that our intuition (which I drew

[3]On acceptance, see for instance Cohen (1992), Engel (1998), Engel (2000).

attention to earlier), that we incur certain epistemic obligations, and that belief is subject to *oughts*, should not be cashed out in aligning this kind if *ought* with the practical ought. If there is an "ought to believe", it is not of the same kind as the "ought to do". If there is a normative requirement here, it is not a practical, but an epistemic one. This means that the kind of agency and responsibility that we hoped to find in the cognitive realm is not the kind of agency and responsibility that we can find in the realm of action.

We could stop here, and simply conclude that the hope of defining a clear concept of freedom of belief is a non -starter. But we can try also to redefine it. For there is an important feature of the activities, such as accepting, hypothesising, or judging which are said to help the fixation of belief: in so far as these are actions, they are conscious, and they imply that the subject is aware of his beliefs, able to stand up behind them. This suggests that our responsibility towards our beliefs emerges from our awareness or them. So we might try to locate freedom of belief in this very feature.

2. FREEDOM OF BELIEF AND THE POWER OF REFLECTION

I have said that the reason why we are reluctant to locate freedom of belief in the presence of motivated mental states and in acts of the will or intentions is that we feel that such a mode of belief formation is irrational. If the subject were really rational, in the epistemic sense, it seems that she should be aware of her beliefs. The awareness, in cases of irrationality, such as self-deception, that she is intentionally forming beliefs which are contrary to those that she already has, is also the awareness of this irrationality. But to be aware of one's beliefs, that is having second-order beliefs about one's first-order beliefs, seems precisely to be what we mean by "being responsive to the reasons" of our beliefs. So we can suggest that this is the proper source of our feeling of responsibility towards our beliefs. But this responsibility does not lie

in our having *first-order* beliefs – for instance, and paradigmatically, perceptual ones – but in our being capable of being conscious of t hem, and to reflect upon them, hence of forming second -order beliefs.

So the suggestion is that the proper source of our responsibility towards our beliefs, hence our freedom of belief, lies in our power of reflection. This view has been espoused by many recent writers. For instance McDowell writes:

> Judging, making up one's mind what to think, is something for which we are, in principle, responsible – something we freely do, as opposed to something that merely happens in our lives. Of course a belief is not always, or even typically, the result of our exercising this freedom to do what we think. But even if a belief is not freely adopted, it is an actualisation of capacities of a kind, the conceptual, whose paradigmatic mode of actualisation is in the exe rcise of freedom that judging is. This freedom, exemplified in responsible acts of judging, is essentially a matter of being answerable to criticism in the light of rationally relevant considerations. So the realm of freedom, at least the realm of freedom of judging, can be identified with the space of reasons. (McDowell (1998a), p. 434, quoted in Owens (2000), p. 1).

In similar fashion, Christine Korsgaard identifies the capacity to think *about* our beliefs, which only humans can have, with the capacity o f having reasons, which is the proper domain of the normative (Korsgaard (1996), pp. 92-93). Tyler Burge ((1996), (1997)) tells us that to be intellectually responsible requires the capacity to understand the way norms govern our thinking, and that this ca pacity requires our acknowledging this responsibility. This, he argues, requires in turn having the concept of the first person, of a person who he able to endorse his own beliefs and to stand behind them as commitments. In turn again this intellectual res ponsibility requires "conceptualised self -consciousness (see also Larmore (2001), unpublished). Robert Brandom also has defended such a view. This account can be called Kantian, for the reason that Brandom indicates:

> Kant's reconciliation of us as free in virtue of being rational, with us as bound by norms in virtue of being rational – and so of freedom as constraint by a special kind of norm, the norms of rationality – accordingly involves treating the normative status of moral obligation as instituted by normative attitudes. (Brandom (1994), p. 51)

This is the familiar Kantian concept of freedom as autonomy. But the point made by these writers is that freedom as autonomy does not pertain only to the practical sphere, but also to the theoretical one: being a free believer, and being intellectually responsible, involves being responsive to the norms of theoretical reason. If, however, we appreciate that the locus of responsibility is not in the will as such, but in the rational will, as it exercised in judgement, we can reconcile the demands of practical and theoretical rationality. What they have in common is that in both freedom is tied to our reflective awareness of norms. In their paper "Freedom in belief and desire" Philip Pettit and Michael Smith apply this model both to belief and to desire. They call it the ideal of "orthonomy"((1996), p. 442):

> Responsible believers and desirers are orthonomous subjects, in the sense that their recognise certain yardsticks of right belief and right desire and can respond to the demands of the right in their own case.

The principle which underlies these analyses can be formulated as a principle:

(PR) An agent is a free believer, when
  (i) she is rational or responsive to reason and to the norms of belief
  (ii) she is responsive to reason when she is able to reflect on her own reasons for believing

Two things at least speak in favour of such an account. First the fact, already noted that it gives pride of place to our consciousness of our

own beliefs, which seems essentially for rationality. For instance in his book *The Moral Problem*, Michael Smith proposes the following principle for rational belief (which has a parallel for rational desire):

> C2 If an agent believes that she has (most) reason to believe that *p* then she rationally should believe that *p*

Smith cashes out the reflectivity requirement thus:

> Suppose an agent believes that she would believe that *p* if she were fully rational and yet fails to believe that *p*. Is she irrational? She certainly is. And by her own lights! For she fails to believe something she believes she has most reason to believe. Indeed this must surely be a paradigmatic case of irrationality. Moreover, note that we can also explain why someone who believes that *p* is most credible, but who also finds herself believing that not *p*, rationally should get rid of her belief that not *p* and acquire the belief that *p* instead. (Smith (1994), p. 178)

Second the location of intellectual responsibility in second-order judgements seems to agree well with another familiar concept of freedom in the practical sphere, namely Frankfurt's (1971) concept of freedom as based on second-order motivational attitudes. As well known, Frankfurt ties freedom of the will to the capacity to have second-order desires about our first order desires. A free agent is one who has the will that he wants to have. We could try to model our definition of freedom of belief after this by saying: a free believer is one who has the beliefs that he thinks he should have. But this wouldn't do, for this definition might fit an individual who is self-deceived or a wishful thinker. What has to be added is that the beliefs that a believer should have are those which are required by the norms of belief. It does not matter what they are for the account to be plausible, but we can think of such norms as truth (believe that *p* iff *p*), of evidence (believe that *p* iff the evidence points to *p*) and coherence (believe that *p* iff *p* is coherent with your other beliefs, or entailed by them). But, as Pettit and Smith

remark, such norms are not like conventional norms of behaviour, or like rules of etiquette: they are not up for choice, but "inescapable" (Pettit & Smith (1996), pp. 433-434). In this sense, freedom of belief cannot be like what free will is said to imply: the capacity of the agent to do otherwise. These norms are constraining. But awareness of them is supposed to make us free believers.

Still this account leaves something unclear. If to be a free believer is to be a rational agent, the agent must in some sense have control over her beliefs. This does not mean, as we saw, that she must be free to adopt any belief that she pleases, but at least that she must be able to accept those beliefs that she finds rational, and reject those which she doesn't find rational. So in this sense the agent must be able to be *moved* to believe certain things, and not moved to believe others. She must be in some sense the *cause* of her beliefs, and their source must be in her, and not in some other person or in some part of her mind to which she does not have access. But the neo-Kantian account is either silent upon this, or unable to explain this feature.

There are in fact two versions of the neo-Kantian account as an answer to this question, a weak one and a strong one:

(a) *Weak version of PR:* reflection is a *precondition* for the rational control of beliefs
(b) *Strong version of PR:* reflection is *constitutive* of rational control.

Let us examine first the strong version. It seems to be the one which is held, for instance, by Burge. In "Reason and the first person" (1997) he tells us that "having reasons and having some capacity to be moved by them are necessarily connected" and that one must be "immediately moved by reasons":

> One must be susceptible to the force and implement normative evaluations in guiding thought and other acts that fall under such those evaluation and (to understand reasoning), one must regard reasons as

> effective in one's judgements. Doing so amounts to acknowledgement of one agency. ... in recognizing the effect of reasons on one's judgements and inference, one cannot think of oneself as powerless.[4]

The same view is expressed by Bill Brewer about our beliefs reached by logical inference:

> There is more to grasping the laws of logic or mathematical argument than simply being disposed to have one's beliefs mirror the moves they prescribe. Epistemologically productive reasoning is not a merely mechanical manipulation of belief, but a compulsion in thought *by reason*, and as such involves conscious understanding of why one is right in one's conclusion. (Brewer (1995), p. 242)

Brewer talks here of a special form of causation, "causation by reason". But how is this kind of causation supposed to operate? How can the mere fact that I am aware of my rational reasons for believing have a direct influence on my beliefs? I see snow falling, and I thus come to believe that it is snowing. I reflect on my belief and say to myself: "I believe that it is snowing". On the reflection model, my attending to my reasons (I perceive that it snows) and my attending to my belief is supposed to show that I am responsible for this belief. But why is this power of reflection supposed to show that I am in control over this belief? Could it be because I attend to the norms of belief, and reflect that the norm "believe what you take to be true according to the evidence at hand" forces me to entertain the belief? But being aware of the norm does nothing to move me to belief. Remember here the famous case of Achilles and the tortoise. The tortoise agrees that the *modus ponens* is a valid rule of logic. She agrees that if one believes that *P*

[4]See also Larmore ((2001) "Attending to Reasons", ms p. 29): "How can reasons operate as causes, as they certainly must do, if their existence is to explain our coming to grasp them?", "The snag is conceiving how reasons as such are able to move us".

and that if one believes that if P then Q, one ought to believe Q. But she does not believe Q.

Certainly the tortoise is irrational, just as Smith's person who fails to believe what she has most reason to believe. But the point is that her awareness of what reason demands does nothing to force her to believe otherwise, if she does believes otherwise. She could be epistemically akratic, and there is nothing impossible in this.[5]

A more plausible description of the situation is this. We have first-order beliefs, which are rational or not. We do not have any control over them. They are just forced upon us. Neither do we have control over the norms of rationality. We do not become rational just by being aware our of beliefs and of the norms which govern them. Certainly if a conflict arises between her first-order beliefs and what she believes that she ought to believe, then she should try to change her beliefs. But she does not do that because she is aware of these norms and of her beliefs. She does it because she has to comply with these norms, and is forced to do that.

The neo-Kantian account, then, misdescribes the situation when it says that awareness of the norms involves a sort of power of the agent, or a "causation by reason". But this causation, of compulsion by reason can hardly justify the claim, made by McDowell, that we exercise here "the freedom of judging".

The weaker version of PR, however, seems to be much more plausible. It says that awareness of our own beliefs and of the norms of reasons is a precondition of rational control, and that *if* we have this awareness, then we can be in position to accept certain beliefs and reject others. But it does not say that control is effected *by* this very awareness. It says that it is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition. Certainly to be able to maintain a certain belief, to stick to it, or to reject it, I must be conscious of it. And to assess it, it seems that I must be aware of the

[5]For a defense of the possibility of epistemic akrasia, see Hookway (2001).

norms which govern it. This is just what is required by the activities which help to fix belief, and which I have earlier described as a kind of indirect voluntary control.

3. RESPONSIBLE BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE

Still, it is not clear what *rational control* of belief means. Is the principle of reflectivity even a necessary condition for rationality?

The neo-Kantian claim implies than we have a strong authority over what we believe, whether it is a precondition of rationality or constitutive of it. But do we have this authority?

Belief involves a claim to knowledge. When I say "I believe that *P*", I claim to know that *P*. This does not mean, of course, that belief *is* knowledge, but, as Williamson (2000) says, to believe that *P* is to have an attitude towards *P*, which for all one knows, is knowledge. "Belief is botched knowledge."

It is not possible here to argue for this view, which reverses the traditional account of knowledge in terms of true belief plus something, justification or warrant, and which takes the notion of knowledge as a primitive mental state. It has two important features. First if knowledge is primitive, it does not imply belief. Second, it does not imply what Williamson calls "transparency" or "luminosity", that is the claim that in order to know that *P*, one must know that one knows that *P* (the "*KK* thesis" in epistemic logic). So if knowledge is rational belief, rational belief does not imply that one is aware of one's rational belief. Williamson's argument for this claim is extremely sophisticated, and I can only indicate its upshot here. It relies on the fact that our powers of discrimination are limited. If we are in case A, and if a case A' is close enough to A, then, for all we know, we are in A'. To take a classical example, sensations, such as pain of feeling cold or hot, are typically "luminous" in the sense that if one feels cold, then one knows that one feels cold. Now suppose a situation where you feel chilly in the morning,

and the weather very slowly warms up, until you feel hot by noon. Since the change is gradual and extremely slow, our feelings of heat change but we are not aware of any change over one millisecond. Suppose that our sensation is reliable (reliability being th e condition for knowing something through sensation), and that one knows that this sensation is reliable. But by a familiar kind of Sorites argument we can show that although we can be in position to know that we feel cold in situation A, and to know that we feel cold in an imperceptibly gradually distinct situation A', we may end up knowing that we feel cold in a situation A_n where A_n is a case where it is hot. Hence when we feel cold, and know that we feel cold, we can end up in a situation where it is not cold, but hot, hence where we do not know that we know that it is cold (Williamson (2000), pp. 93-113). Hence, if one generalises, knowledge is not knowledge that one knows; these imperceptible differences can happen all the way through our knowledge.

The upshot is that we can know something without being in a position to know that we know. If we transfer this to rational belief, and take belief as a claim to knowledge, this will apply to rational belief. There is an important asymmetry here between the case of belief and the case of desire, between the conditions for free action and the conditions for purported free belief, which is well noted by Pettit and Smith: failures to exercise free will are matters of everyday experience, but failures to exercise free thought are elusive. ((1996), p. 449). In the practical sphere, we cannot say: "I am willing to ϕ but I ought not to". My reasons not to ϕ do not lose their probative force because I have decided to ϕ. But in theoretical sphere, there is nothing par adoxical in "I believe that P, but I ought not to".

As Pettit and Smith say, you may be denied any experience of evaluating contrary to reasons, but you are by no means denied the experience of evaluating contrary to evaluation. So I do not understand why they still insist, in their 1996 paper, on saying that there is a strict parallel between freedom of desire and freedom of belief.

I think that the reason why they defend the parallel is that they adhere to the neo-Kantian account. But if the objections that I have addressed to this kind of account are correct, there is not reason to maintain the parallel.

CONCLUSION

Where are we left, then? If we cannot have a reflective awareness of our own reasons, can we still maintain that there is such a thing as freedom of belief? There is a parallel issue in the case of knowledge, and it should not be surprising if we accept the close relationship between belief and knowledge. There is a certain account of justification according to which a justified belief is kn owledge if the agent obeys certain epistemic obligations that he acknowledge. This is known as the deontological account of justification. But it presupposes, in some versions, voluntarism about belief, and at least something like the principle of reflectivity. Opposed to it is the reliabilist account of justification, according to we have knowledge only if we are reliable. But the reliabilist view seems to sever the link between knowledge and our claim to know that we know. We are not free believers at all .

To restore this link, and to allow space for our responsibility towards our beliefs, we should adopt, I think, another alternative, which I can only suggest here. To be responsive to reasons means adjusting one's beliefs in the right way. But this kind o f adjustment is not to be conceived as complying with a rational "ought". It means taking the appropriate attitudes, the appropriate habits of thought. To say such things involves adopting a form of what is called "virtue epistemology". It ties epistemic responsibility to the having of certain epistemic virtues, which call for merit, and to some epistemic vices, which call for epistemic blame. There are more or less reliabilist views of it. But if one accepts the idea, which I have expressed earlier, that t here are certain activities which help fixing belief, without belief itself being voluntary,

then I think we can understand our responsibility for belief without endorsing the claim of autonomy that the neo-Kantian view presupposes.

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