

Solving the problem of doxastic responsibility.

Why non-volitionalism does not help.

Résumé long

1. Introduction

The problem of doxastic responsibility is the question of whether we can be responsible for our beliefs despite the fact that we cannot control them as we can control our bodily movements¹. According to a recent solution to this problem²—which I shall call the non-volitionalist solution—we can be responsible for our beliefs since our beliefs are attitudes for which we can appropriately be asked our reasons for having them. The intended presentation aims at showing that this answer does not work. Its plan is as follows. I begin by presenting an outline of the non-volitionalist solution to the problem of doxastic responsibility and which I

¹ I will content myself with speaking of beliefs, but what I am about to claim is, *mutatis mutandis*, true of other doxastic attitudes, such as suspensions of judgment and disbeliefs (if such doxastic attitudes exist). Also, the term “belief” is ambiguous. It refers either to the act of believing or to what is believed. In this paper, “belief” refers to the act of believing.

² See Hieronymi 2006 and 2009, McHugh 2009.

intend to criticize (section 2). This will help me to cast light on a more or less explicitly accepted theoretical requirement of the non-volitionalist solution. (section 3). The last part of the intended presentation will be devoted to showing that the non-volitionalist solution cannot satisfy this theoretical requirement (section 4).

2. The non-volitionalist solution to the problem of doxastic responsibility

The non-volitionalist solution to the problem of doxastic responsibility is captured by the following argument:

(I) A subject is responsible for her action if her action is something for which she is answerable, i.e. something for which she can appropriately be asked her reasons;

(II) Like actions, beliefs are attitudes for which we are answerable, i.e. attitudes for which we can appropriately be asked our reasons;

(III) Therefore, we can be responsible for our beliefs like we can be responsible for our actions.

I have said that my objective is to provide an objection to the non-volitionalist solution to the problem of doxastic responsibility. More specifically, my intention is not to argue against the non-volitionalist conception of responsibility (i.e. against premise I). Rather it is to show that the second move of the non-volitionalist solution, i.e. the move, which leads to the formulation of premise II, is inappropriate. Beliefs are not—in any sense, which could turn them into things for which we are responsible— things for which we can appropriately be asked our reasons.

3. Theoretical requirement

We have just seen that the non-volitionalist solution to the problem of doxastic responsibility consists in applying the non-volitionalist conception of responsibility—originally designed for actions and expressed by premise I— to beliefs.

An undeniable theoretical requirement of such “an analogy-based strategy” is the following:

What is true about a subject's reasons for performing *an action*, which is essential to the role they play in making her responsible for her

actions, has to be true about the subject's reasons for which she believes what she believes, i.e. about her epistemic reasons.

I do not have enough space to present my argument here. But what I intend to show in my oral presentation is that, in order for a subject's reasons for performing an action to be something sufficient for making her responsible for her action, her reasons for performing this action have to be *motivating* reasons. Now, given the theoretical requirement just mentioned, this has to be the case regarding the subject's epistemic reasons: the subject's reasons for believing what she believes have to be *motivating* reasons. Here is a reformulation of the argument capturing the non-volitionalist solution, which makes this very last claim explicit:

(I*) A subject is responsible for her action if her action is something for which she is answerable, i.e. something for which she can appropriately be asked her *motivating* reasons;

(II*) Like actions, beliefs are attitudes for which we are answerable, i.e. attitudes for which we can appropriately be asked our *motivating* reasons;

(III*) Therefore, we can be responsible for our beliefs like we can be responsible for our actions.

4. Epistemic reasons and motivating reasons

The last part of my presentation will be devoted to the examination of premise II*. More specifically, I will try to show that the following question cannot be answered positively:

Do our epistemic reasons qualify as motivating reasons in such a way that we could safely deduce premise II* from the undeniable claim that beliefs are attitudes for which we can be asked our reasons?

There are seemingly two conceivable ways of answering this question positively. First, by claiming that every epistemic reason is a motivating reason. That is to say, according to the first answer, our epistemic reasons constitute a subset of our motivating reasons and it is in virtue of this claim that our epistemic reasons qualify as motivating reasons. Second, by keeping the distinction between epistemic reasons and motivating reasons intact but by claiming that one and the same fact can be an epistemic and a motivating reason.

Very briefly, the first answer fails because epistemic reasons and motivating reasons differ regarding one of their essential properties. Epistemic reasons are essentially constitutive reasons while motivating reasons are essentially not constitutive reasons. As for the second answer, I'll intend show, by relying on Alvarez's recent and excellent description of motivating reasons³, that it is impossible for a single fact to play both roles: to be simultaneously my epistemic reason *and* my motivating reasons for believing one thing.

5. References

Alvarez M.

2010 *Kinds of Reasons, An Essay in the Philosophy of Action*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Hieronymi P.

2005 "The Wrong Kind of Reason", *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 102, no. 9, 437-457.

2006 "Controlling Attitudes", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 45-74.

2009 "Two Kinds of Agency", in *Mental Actions*, O'Brien L. and Soteriou M. (eds.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 138-162.

McHugh C.

2009 "Judging as a non-voluntary action", *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 152, no. 2, 245-269.

³ Alvarez 2010.

