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Doxastic Freedom

Many contemporary philosophers are convinced that the following thesis is true:

No Doxastic Freedom

Whereas our actions are mostly free, our doxastic attitudes – belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment – are not.¹

I disagree with these philosophers. I think the following thesis is true:

Equal Doxastic Freedom

If our actions are mostly free, then our doxastic attitudes are mostly free.

According to compatibilism, our actions are mostly free. So if the thesis of equal doxastic freedom is true, compatibilism entails that our doxastic attitudes are mostly free. Hence the thesis I will defend is:

Compatibilist Doxastic Freedom

Compatibilism entails that our actions and our doxastic attitudes are mostly free.

My argument in defense of this claim will be that the compatibility of freedom and causal determination is not obvious; it needs explanation. Various explanations can be offered. If we apply these explanations to our doxastic attitudes, we are going to see that there is little reason to think that our doxastic attitudes are less free than our actions.²

Classic Compatibilism

According to classic compatibilism, as advocated by Hobbes, Locke, Hume and Mill, freedom and causation are compatible because freedom requires no more than the absence of external constraints. One is free if and only if one can do what one wants to do: when the determinations of one's will are not blocked by external interference or circumstance.

Classic Compatibilism

S's Φ ing is free iff (i) S Φ s, and (ii) S wants to Φ .³

¹ This thesis is typically articulated in terms of voluntary control. The voluntary control issue will be addressed further below.

² The thesis of compatibilist doxastic freedom is also defended by Jäger 2004 and Ryan 2003.

³ It might be difficult to capture all varieties of classical compatibilism with one definition. In the present context, all we need is a mere gloss representing the main idea that freedom results from the absence of external constraints.

When we apply classic compatibilism to doxastic attitudes, we get the following:

Doxastic Freedom: 1st Account

S's doxastic attitude A toward p is free iff (i) S has attitude A toward p; (ii) S wants to have attitude A toward p.

For now I will not address the question of whether most of our doxastic attitudes meet condition (ii), but it will become a main focus further below.

Classic compatibilism captures what's necessary for free action but fails to capture what's sufficient. The problem is that people sometimes do what they want to do but their wanting to do it is blatantly unfree. Consider Albert, who is washing his hands for the sixtieth time today. In washing his hands, he is doing what he wants to do. The classic compatibilist would have to say that Albert is acting freely. But that's not what we are inclined to say about Albert. His washing his hands for the sixtieth time is an example of an unfree action because Albert is messed up about what he wants. The example of Albert shows that what matters for freedom is not only that we can act according to the determinations of the will, but that *the will itself be free*, in a sense that is compatible with causal determination. What stands in the way of freedom of the will are again obstacles: not external obstacles to doing what one wants to do but internal obstacles to wanting in a manner that's unconstrained by a messed-up psyche. A list of obstacles to free will include phenomena such as addiction, kleptomania, neurotic compulsion, various kinds of phobia, bouts of paranoia, hypnosis, and the like. Next, let's consider a version of compatibilism designed to address the need for free will.

Reactive Attitude Compatibilism

P.F. Strawson suggested that what's constitutive of an action's being free is its being a fit object for reactive attitudes such as blame, resentment, indignation, approval, admiration, forgiveness, and the like.⁴ To judge whether an agent's Φ ing fits such an attitude, we do not ask whether the agent's Φ ing is causally determined. Rather, we ask whether the agent Φ s intentionally, or whether the agent's Φ ing is an accident, or whether the agent Φ s because of insanity. When Albert washes his hands for the sixtieth time, what he does is not a fitting object for attitudes such as blame or disapproval, for Albert's hand

⁴ See Strawson 1962.

washing is caused by a neurotic compulsion. Hence when Albert washes his hands, he is not acting freely. But when Ben washes his hands because they are dirty, Ben's hand washing is not caused deviantly by a neurotic compulsion or some other mental disorder and thus fits the reactive attitude of, say, approval. Hence when Ben washes his hands, he is acting freely. Let's sum up this kind of compatibilism as follows:

Reactive Attitude Compatibilism

S's Φ ing is free iff (i) S Φ s; (ii) S's Φ ing is a fit object for reactive attitudes.⁵

Applying this account to doxastic attitudes, we get the following:

Doxastic Freedom: 2nd Account

S's doxastic attitude A toward p is free iff (i) S has attitude A toward p; (ii) S's attitude A toward p is a fit object for a reactive attitude.

Do our doxastic attitudes meet condition (ii)? Our ordinary epistemic practice suggests that they are. After all, we hold people responsible for their beliefs. When we encounter people who believe what we think is silly or outright irrational, we disapprove.

Confronted with people who refuse to believe what the evidence clearly supports, we respond with criticism. We think they ought to give up disbelief or suspension of judgment and instead believe in accord with the evidence. This practice appears to be well-founded. After all, we can deliberate: we can assess our evidence and adjust our doxastic attitudes to our evidence.⁶ It would seem, therefore, that it makes sense to hold people responsible for what they believe and to respond to doxastic conduct with reactive attitudes.⁷

⁵ The no-external-constraints condition appears to have dropped out. However, this condition is arguably entailed by condition (ii) of reactive attitude compatibilism. If an action does not meet the no-external-constraints condition, it is not a fit object for a reactive attitude. For example, if I can't walk because my legs are broken, I can't be blamed or criticized for not walking. Or so the argument would go. My purpose here is not to articulate an ultimately defensible version of reactive attitude compatibilism, but to see where the basic idea entails when we apply it to doxastic attitudes.

⁶ In Steup 2000, I set forth an account of compatibilist doxastic freedom that assigns a major role to deliberation. Richard Feldman and Sharon Ryan have objected to this account that prior deliberation on whether to Φ is neither necessary nor sufficient for Φ ing freely. See Feldman 2001 and Ryan 2003. I agree that deliberation is neither necessary nor sufficient for freedom, and that my earlier account placed too much of an emphasis on the role of deliberation. However, the account of compatibilist doxastic freedom I develop here certainly does not imply that deliberation is either necessary or sufficient for freedom. For another critical response to Steup 2000 that focuses on what I said about epistemic deliberation, see Buckareff forthcoming.

⁷ In response to this point, opponents of doxastic freedom have two options. First, they might offer an error theory, claiming that our practice of treating doxastic conduct as a fit object for reactive attitudes is unfounded. Second, they might argue that doxastic conduct is a fit object for reactive attitudes, not because

While it's plausible to think that unjustified doxastic attitudes are proper objects for negative reactive attitudes, it's not so clear what we should say about justified doxastic attitudes. Here are some examples: I believe the proposition that cats meow and disbelieve the proposition that cats are insects. About the proposition that the number of cats is even, I suspend judgment. Are these instances of belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment fit objects for reactive attitudes? Perhaps not for the full range of reactive attitudes, but they clearly are fit objects for some reactive attitudes: for example, that of approval. After all, there is nothing irrational about the doxastic attitudes I mentioned, as they are held in accord with my evidence.

While reactive attitude compatibilism lends itself nicely to supporting the thesis of doxastic freedom, it does not explain a lot. Suppose it's true that one's Φ ing being a fit object for a reactive attitude is compatible with its being causally determined. We still want to know *by virtue of what* one's Φ ing is a fit object for a reactive attitude and therefore free. Unless reactive attitude compatibilism is significantly amended, this question remains unanswered. Let us, therefore, consider a further version of compatibilism.

Structural Compatibilism

The basic idea of classic compatibilism is that what's necessary and sufficient for freedom is the absence of external constraints. But internal constraints – phobias, paranoia, compulsion and the like – can render unfree an action that is unimpeded by any external constraints. According to structural compatibilism, the need for the absence of internal constraints is accounted for when we think of free action as follows:

Structural Compatibilism

S's Φ ing is free iff (i) S Φ s; (ii) S wants to Φ ; (iii) S's wanting to Φ is in harmony with S's higher-order desires.⁸

Consider again Albert, the compulsive hand washer. He washes his hands for the sixtieth time because he feels an overwhelming desire to do so. However, at a higher level of

our doxastic attitudes are free, but rather because we have at our disposal indirect means of exerting control, such as developing truth-conducive habits of belief formation. I won't be able to address these points here.

⁸ See Frankfurt 1971, Watson 1975, and Wolf 1980, 1987, and 1990.

reflection, he desires not to have that kind of desire. His first-order desire to wash his hands conflicts with his second-order desires. That's why, according to structural compatibilism, Albert's will, when it comes to hand washing, is not free.

When we apply structural compatibilism to doxastic attitudes, we get the following account:

Doxastic Freedom: 3rd Account

S's doxastic attitude A toward p is free iff (i) S has attitude A toward p; (ii) S wants to have attitude A toward p; (iii) S's wanting to have attitude A toward p does not conflict with S's higher-order desires.

Discussion of whether our doxastic attitudes meet condition (ii) has been postponed. Our focus is on condition (iii). Let's consider some examples. Perhaps the following case is a doxastic analog to the Albert example. Suppose, due to a religious upbringing, Tom believes in God. Suppose further, again due to his religious upbringing, Tom desires to believe in God. Finally, suppose that after a period of having thought long and hard about the problem of evil, Tom develops the higher-order desire not to desire to believe in God. Arguably, Tom's belief in God is analogous to Albert's hand washing, and thus, according to structural compatibilism, unfree. However, typically we don't have desires about what to believe and not to believe. And to the extent we do, it looks like it doesn't happen very often that we desire, at a higher level, not to desire to believe a certain thing.

Let's construe things differently. Our desires play a less important role in belief formation than one's evidence. So let's conceive of the kind of harmony that according to structural compatibilism grounds freedom as harmony between one's belief-forming processes and one's higher-level reflective assessments of these processes. Suppose I think that the processes responsible for my doxastic attitudes are not reliable enough. I would prefer that my beliefs be caused by significantly more reliable processes. There would then be tension between my second-order assessments and preferences and what's going on at the first level. A structural compatibilist might therefore judge that my doxastic attitudes are by and large unfree. However, in the actual world, my belief-forming processes do not conflict with such higher-order assessments. To the contrary, there is harmony in this regard: By and large, I consider the reliability of my belief-producing cognitive processes quite satisfactory. I see no reason, therefore, to think that,

from the point of view of structural compatibilism, we must judge that my doxastic attitudes are not free. Nor do I see any reason to think that, in this regard, I differ from the norm. It seems to me by far most people enjoy harmony between their second-order desires and the way they form beliefs, and thus enjoy, according to structural compatibilism, doxastic freedom.

Structural compatibilism, however, is not unproblematic. It ascribes little importance to the origin of one's second-order desires. That's not a good thing if it's possible for one's second-order desires to be the result of brainwashing or life-long systematic manipulation and conditioning. Let us, therefore, move on to yet another version of compatibilism.

Reason-Responsiveness Compatibilism

According some versions of compatibilism, for an action to flow from a free will, it must be caused by a *reason-responsive* mental mechanism.⁹

Reason-Responsiveness Compatibilism

S's Φ ing is free iff (i) S Φ s; (ii) S wants to Φ ; (iii) S's Φ ing is the causal outcome of a reason-responsive mental mechanism.¹⁰

When Ben washes his hands because they are dirty, his hand washing is caused by a mechanism that's responsive to reasons. When Albert washes his hands for the sixtieth time today, Albert's hand washing is caused by a mechanism that is not responsive to reasons. Thus reasons-responsiveness compatibilism classifies Ben's hand washing as free and Albert's as unfree.

Although the basic idea is reasonably clear, the details of this approach are not easy to work out. To begin with, should only good reasons count, or is responsiveness to bad reasons freedom-grounding as well? Second, there are different kinds of reasons: prudential and moral. Does freedom require responsiveness to both kinds of reasons? Third, we might wonder whether a person's responsiveness to a certain range of reasons

⁹ See Double 1991 and Fischer and Ravizza 1998.

¹⁰ The particular nature of a subject's reason-responsive processes might be due to behavioral engineering or brainwashing. It is questionable whether reason-responsiveness of this deviant kind grounds freedom. It would seem, therefore, that the account as stated here needs further refinement. However, in the present context, it is not my aim to fine-tune the reason-responsiveness approach, but rather to explore what the basic idea underlying this approach implies with regard to doxastic freedom.

can, just like harmony between a person's first and second-order desires, be the result of systematic conditioning and manipulation. If it can, then reason-responsiveness is not sufficient for freedom.

Consider Albert once again. In washing his hands for the sixtieth time, he actually does respond to a reason: a strong desire to wash his hands. Moreover, he will not invariably wash his hands. If Albert had been convinced his wife would shoot him in the head if he washed his hands once more, he would not have washed them on this occasion. If the telephone had been ringing, he would not have washed his hands just then but answered the phone first. Clearly, then, Albert's hand washing behavior is responsive to some reasons. But it is not responsive to the right kind of reasons, or responsive to reasons in the right way. So one main challenge for the reasons-responsiveness approach is to articulate in a systematic and principled way just how much and what kind of reason-responsiveness is required for free action. That's not exactly an easy project.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that reason-responsiveness matters. Let us see what the reason-responsiveness approach entails when it is applied to doxastic freedom. The doxastic analog to the account stated above goes as follows:

Doxastic Freedom: 4th Account

S's attitude A toward p is free iff (i) S has attitude A toward p, and (ii) S wants to have attitude A toward p; (iii) S's having taken attitude A toward p is the causal outcome of a reason-responsive mental process.¹¹

For now, our sole concern is whether our doxastic attitudes meet condition (iii). To examine whether they do, we must bear in mind that there are two kinds of reasons: practical and epistemic. There is an effective move to secure the outcome that our doxastic attitudes are unfree, namely to say that only practical reasons count. Below, I

¹¹ We might wonder whether condition (iii) entails condition (ii). Here's a reason for thinking it does not. We can think of cases in which one does not want to have a doxastic attitude that's the response of a reason-responsive mechanism. For example, an atheist might want to drop disbelief in the existence of God, where the attitude of disbelief results from a reason-responsive mechanism. Perhaps that would be a case of unfree disbelief. If so, condition (ii) is still necessary. A further problem for the 4th account arises from so-called *capricious* beliefs. See Winter 1979. A capricious belief is held for no reasons at all, but might nevertheless be seen as resulting of reason-responsive processes since there's no reason to suppose that, in relevant alternative situations in which the subject has evidence against it, the belief will not be dropped. It might be objected that the 4th account implies, counterintuitively, that such beliefs are not free. This is a worry a fine-tuned account of doxastic freedom must address. However, my purpose here is not to develop a fine-tuned account but rather to examine what outcome we get when we apply the basic idea of reason-responsiveness to our doxastic attitudes.

will discuss this move. For now, I merely note that I don't think it's a good one.

Epistemic reasons should count as well. Now, a person's epistemic reasons are supplied by her evidence. So when we wish to determine whether condition (iii) is met in a particular case, we must consider the question of whether the attitude in question was produced by a process that is responsive to the subject's evidence.

Clearly not all doxastic attitudes meet condition (iii). Again, consider Albert, the compulsive hand washer. He believes that there are dangerous germs on his hands even though he just washed them. Because of his neurotic compulsion, he will believe this in a wide range of alternative situations, no matter how good his evidence is for believing otherwise. Hence his belief fails to meet condition (iii). It's not an example of a free doxastic attitude.

Next, let us consider three examples where condition (iii) is met. First, consider the proposition that I have hands. It's a proposition I believe. If compatibilism is true, my belief is causally determined. Presumably, its cause consists of a mental process in which hand-like experiences figure prominently. Is this process reason-responsive? It clearly is. In relevant alternative situations in which I'm confronted with epistemic reasons to believe otherwise, I do not irrationally cling to my belief that I have hands. In such situations, I will suspend judgment about that proposition or even disbelieve it. So my belief that I have hands meets condition (iii).

Second, consider the proposition that cats are insects. It's a proposition I disbelieve. Is this attitude the result of a process that's not responsive to reasons? Do I disbelieve that cats are insects in alternative situations in which I possess excellent evidence for thinking that, surprisingly, they actually are insects? Well, I'd like to think that, in a situation like that, I cease to disbelieve that cats are insects. In general terms, in a broad range of alternative situations relevantly similar to my actual situation, my attitude toward the proposition that cats are insects will fit my evidence. So my doxastic attitude, I take it, meets condition (iii).

Third, consider the proposition that the number of cats in the world is even. About this proposition, I suspend judgment. Do I neurotically or compulsively shy away from committing myself one way or the other? Am I, because of some mental dysfunction, unable to believe or disbelieve this proposition? Hardly. In a situation in which I have

good reasons to think that only four cats are left, I will believe that the number of cats is even. In a situation in which I have good reasons to think that only five cats are left, I will disbelieve that the number of cats is even. So my attitude toward this proposition is the causal outcome of a reason-responsive mental process.

The three examples I described are representative of our doxastic attitudes in general. Attitudes that are the causal outcome of deviant psychological conditions such as neurotic compulsion, phobia, paranoia, and the like are rather infrequent. By far most of our doxastic attitudes meet the condition of reason-responsiveness. That gives us a reason to think that most of our doxastic attitudes enjoy freedom of the compatibilist kind. This outcome is not surprising. The need for going beyond classic compatibilism arises because we need a compatibilist account of free will: a compatibilist way of factoring in internal constraints. An unfree will results from the aforementioned deviant psychological causes: paranoia, phobias, compulsions and the like. Our doxastic attitudes are not normally caused by phenomena like these. By and large, they are caused by cognitive processes that respond to our evidence. Such processes must be classified as non-deviant or sound. It would appear, therefore, that no matter how compatibilism construes the free will condition, it will not be a condition that raises trouble for doxastic freedom.

Intentions

It is now time to focus on the no-external-constraints condition, discussion of which had been postponed. According to this condition, S's Φ ing is free only if S wants to Φ . Opponents of doxastic freedom might argue that this condition does not quite capture what's needed for an adequate account of freedom. What Φ ing freely requires, they might say, is satisfaction of a *causal* condition: one Φ s *because* one wants to Φ . So what the external constraint condition should really say is this:

S's Φ ing is free only if S Φ s *because* S wants to Φ .

When applied to doxastic attitudes, this condition reads as follows:

S's attitude A toward p is free only if S has attitude A *because* S wants to have attitude A toward p.

The thought that Φ ing freely requires causal contact between one's Φ ing and one's wanting to Φ is not implausible. However, for the present line of reasoning to have bite, opponents of doxastic freedom need to flesh out exactly how causal contact between a person's Φ ing and her wanting to Φ is established. Opponents of doxastic freedom might say that causal contact between an agent's will and her Φ ing is established through *intentionality*. When we Φ because we want to, then our Φ ing is caused by an intention to Φ . So the relevant condition is this:

S's attitude A toward p is free only if S's attitude A is caused by S's intention to have attitude A toward p.

However, our doxastic attitudes are never caused by an intention to have them. Therefore, opponents of doxastic freedom might conclude, our doxastic attitudes are never free.

In response to a previous article of mine in which I defended the thesis of compatibilist doxastic freedom,¹² Richard Feldman has articulated an argument to just that effect. According to Feldman, compatibilism does not, as I claim, entail that our doxastic attitudes are free because:

On the compatibilist view, to be a voluntary action an action must be caused by an appropriate intention to perform that action. [But:] We typically don't form intentions to form beliefs and form them as a result.¹³

A more formal account of this argument goes as follows:

The Necessity-of-Intentions Argument

- P1 If Φ ing is free, one Φ s because one has formed the intention to Φ y.
- P2 We never adopt a doxastic attitude because we have formed the intention to adopt it.
- C Our doxastic attitudes are never free.

Feldman is an evidentialist. So am I. I don't find myself frequently in disagreement with him. But on this occasion I must object. I don't think P1 is true. What raises a problem for P1 are two kinds of free actions: those performed because of habit, and those performed as automatic responses. Here is a list of examples belonging to the latter category. Intending to drive from my house to campus:

¹² See Steup 2000.

¹³ Feldman 2001, p. 85. Feldman is actually concerned with whether we have voluntary control over our beliefs, but he's argument can also be seen as an objection to the claim that our doxastic attitudes are free.

- I insert the ignition key,
- engage the clutch,
- shift into reverse, and
- step on the gas.

Here's why, given a compatibilist understanding of freedom, the examples on the list qualify as free:

- (a) They are certainly not involuntary physical behavior, such as sneezing when you have inhaled dust, kicking after a doctor hit you on the knee, or shivering when you feel really cold.
- (b) They do not illustrate the deviant kind of causation that's an obstacle to freedom: I'm not addicted to getting into my car, compulsive about stepping on the breaks or the gas, or in some way neurotic about gear shifting.
- (c) They are fit objects for reactive attitudes. At a minimum, the way I operate my car should meet with the attitude of approval. In case of a professional car racer, we might even admire her gear shifting and breaking techniques.
- (d) The way I operate my car does not give rise to any conflict with my higher-order desires.
- (e) Finally, the actions on the list result from reason-responsive mechanisms. In a situation in which I think using my wife's car is a better idea, I wouldn't have gotten into my own. In a situation in which my car's engine is running already, I won't turn the ignition key. In a situation in which I want to first move the car forward a bit, I won't shift into reverse.

So let's agree that the actions on the list are free. The question is whether they are caused by any antecedently formed intentions. I don't think they are. While doing the things mentioned on the list, I didn't form an intention to insert the ignition key, or an intention to engage the clutch, or an intention to shift into reverse, or an intention to step on the gas. I do things like that automatically, without thinking about them, and I assume you do too. But one can't form an intention to Φ without thinking about Φ ing. For example, if one forms the intention to have a cup of coffee, one has a thought like *I'm going to have a cup of coffee*. If one does something spontaneously and automatically, however, one does not form thoughts about what one is going to do. Before I inserted the ignition key, I

didn't think *Okay and now I'm going to insert the ignition key*, and before shifting into reverse I didn't have a thought like *You've got to shift into reverse now*. So the items on the list are examples of free actions that are not caused by an intention to do them. This shows that *S Φs intentionally* does not entail *S formed the intention to Φ*.

The examples I have listed can be multiplied *ad nauseam*. As soon as we get out of bed in the morning and brush our teeth, we embark upon performing a long series of intentional actions that do not involve the forming of any intentions. Just one more example: I'd like to see the person who, just before brushing her teeth, forms the intention to unscrew the cap of the toothpaste tube. But surely unscrewing the cap of one's toothpaste is not an unfree action.

My rejection of P1 invites the following response: True, I don't form an intention to insert the ignition key, an intention to engage the clutch, or an intention to step on the gas. However, I did form the intention to drive to campus. This over-arching intention plays a causal role in the performance of each of the actions on my list. It's by virtue of this over-arching intention that, say, my engaging the clutch qualifies as an intentional action. Likewise, before I unscrew the toothpaste cap, I formed the intention to brush my teeth. When I automatically, without giving any thought to it, remove the cap from the toothpaste, what I do qualifies as intentional because part of what causes it is the intention to brush my teeth. So habitual and automatic actions are the causal result of antecedently formed intentions after all. Doxastic attitudes never are. Therefore, intentionally Φing is a necessary condition of Φing freely that actions meet and doxastic attitudes fail to meet.¹⁴

I don't find this objection convincing. It rests on the dubious assumption that for all habitual and automatic actions, we can find an over-arching intention that's plays a role in the causes of these actions. But why believe that, when I brush my teeth in the morning, I do so because I antecedently formed the intention to brush my teeth? My tooth brushing is itself the kind of habitual action that is intentional without resulting from an antecedently formed intention. That strikes me as a realistic possibility. But if my tooth brushing is itself habitual, then we don't find an over-arching intention playing a causal role in my removal of the toothpaste cap. Likewise, why assume that someone with

¹⁴ This objection was suggested to me by Nikolaj Nottelmann.

regular working hours does not *habitually* drive to work each morning? If driving to work can be habitual – an intentional action that’s not caused by an antecedently formed intention – then we don’t get an over-arching intention being a partial cause of the automatically performed actions while backing out of one’s garage.

It’s not clear, then, that there always is an over-arching intention that’s going to play a role in the performance of automatic actions. Moreover, there’s a second problem. In the-backing-out-of-my-garage example I described, I did have the intention to drive to campus. But why assume that this intention is causally active when I engage the clutch and step on the gas? I see no reason to assume that it must be. Actions such as engaging the clutch and stepping on the gas can be formed without being caused by any prior intention precisely because they are automatic and thus require no thought or attention at all.¹⁵

I conclude that P1 is false. The necessity-of-intentions argument fails.

Weak Intentionality

The argument we just considered can be modified so as to avoid vulnerability to the counterexamples I listed. It might be argued that what Φ ing freely requires is not Φ ing as a result of having formed the intention to Φ . Rather, it requires something weaker: Φ ing intentionally, where Φ ing intentionally need not involve having an explicit intention to Φ . Let’s restate the argument accordingly:

The Necessity-of-Intentionality Argument

P1 Necessarily, if one Φ s freely, one’s Φ ing is intentional.

P2 Our doxastic attitudes are never intentional.

C Our doxastic attitudes are never free.¹⁶

The car-operating examples from the previous section are examples of Φ ing intentionally even though they are not examples of Φ ing as a result of having formed a prior intention. But what does it mean to say that I insert the ignition key, engage the clutch, shift into reverse, and step on the gas *intentionally*? Let us identify a negative and a positive aspect:

¹⁵ For further discussion of habitual actions, see Pollard 2006. Pollard holds, as I do, that habitual actions can be free and need not be caused by any intentions.

¹⁶ Perhaps it’s this argument that Feldman has in mind in Conee and Feldman 2004, p. 172.

- (NA) Intentional Φ ing involves *non-accidentality*. I don't step on the clutch because I have a sudden cramp in my leg. I don't shift into reverse because the gear shift mechanism is malfunctioning.
- (PA) Intentional Φ ing involves some kind of *pro-attitude*. Even though I did not form an explicit intention to do any of these things, I have some kind of *pro-attitude* toward engaging the clutch and shifting into reverse. This pro-attitude comes to light when, in retrospect I would say that I meant to engage the clutch and shift into reverse.

Let us refer to these two conditions as the 'NAPA' conditions. Making use of the NAPA conditions, we can define weak intentionality as follows:

Weak Intentionality

S's Φ ing is weakly intentional iff S Φ s in a way that satisfies the NAPA conditions: it is non-accidental and S has a pro-attitude towards her Φ ing.¹⁷

We are now in a position to assess the necessity-of-intentionality argument. If we understand intentionality in terms of the NAPA conditions, then P1 strikes me as true. What, however, about P2? To assess whether our doxastic attitudes exhibit weak intentionality, let's consider two pairs illustrating the presence and absence of weak intentionality:

- 1a. I step on the clutch in the NAPA way.
- 1b. I step on the clutch because I have a cramp in my leg.
- 2a. I shift into reverse in the NAPA way.
- 2b. I shift into reverse because the gear-shift mechanism is malfunctioning.

Consider once again my belief that I have hands. Clearly my belief meets the NAPA conditions. My belief is not akin to examples 1b and 2b: I don't believe I have hands due to cognitive dysfunction. So my belief is not accidental. Moreover, my belief is accompanied by a pro-attitude. I'm comfortable with it; I endorse it; I don't feel bad about it in any way. Analogous points apply to my doxastic attitude toward the proposition that cats are insects, and to my doxastic attitude toward the proposition that the number of cats is even. These three examples are representative of our doxastic

¹⁷ Weak intentionality, thus defined, allows for one's Φ ing to be both weakly and strongly intentional. Suppose my Φ ing satisfies the NAPA conditions and in addition is caused by my intention to Φ . If so, my Φ ing is both weakly and strongly intentional.

attitudes in general. By far most of them satisfy the NAPA conditions and thus exhibit weak intentionality. So P2 is false.

Let us, then, articulate the no-external-constraints condition of classic compatibilism in terms of weak intentionality. Combining this condition with the reason-responsiveness condition, we get the following account:

Doxastic Freedom: 5th Account

S's attitude A toward p is free iff (i) S has attitude A toward p, and (ii) S's attitude A is weakly intentional; (iii) S's having taken attitude A toward p is the causal outcome of a reason-responsive mental process.¹⁸

Conditions (ii) and (iii) pose no problem for doxastic freedom. Our doxastic attitudes meet them easily. So if compatibilism is true and our fifth account of doxastic freedom accurately represents compatibilist thinking, then we get the outcome that our doxastic attitudes are mostly free.

Volitional Causation

Opponents of doxastic freedom might argue that the fifth account does not accurately represent compatibilist thinking. Φing freely, they might say, requires *volitional causation*. One type of volitional causation consists of an action's being caused by an intention to perform it. Call this 'strong volitional causation'. Since habitual and automatic actions can be free without exemplifying strong volitional causation, causation of that kind is not a necessary condition of free action. However, there is also weak volitional causation, which consists of an action's being caused by a pro-attitude. Accordingly, opponents of doxastic freedom might argue that, whenever I engage the clutch freely, I engage the clutch non-accidentally, and whenever I engage the clutch non-accidentally, my engaging the clutch is a causal effect of my pro-attitude towards engaging the clutch. In general terms, the objection can be stated as follows: Freedom requires non-accidentality, and non-accidentality requires weak volitional causation. But our doxastic attitudes are never the result of weak volitional causation. The pro-attitudes

¹⁸ Like the 4th account, the 5th account is confronted with problems that call for fine-tuning but must in the present context be set aside. See note 11.

we might have toward our doxastic attitudes never play a causal role in their formation. Therefore, they are never free.

But why should we be so sure that, say, my engaging the clutch is in part caused by my pro-attitude toward this action? To begin with, perhaps my pro-attitude does not physically manifest itself prior to or simultaneously to my engaging the clutch. Perhaps my pro-attitude is formed only once I ask myself afterwards whether engaging the clutch was something I meant to do. Second, let's assume prior to or at least simultaneously to my engaging the clutch, there already is a mental state of mine present that qualifies as a pro-attitude toward engaging the clutch. Why think this pro-attitude plays a causal role? Perhaps it does; perhaps it does not. I see no reason to think that, since engaging the clutch is such an automatic element of what one does while operating a car, the pro-attitude is needed for a causal explanation of why I engaged the clutch.

Advocates of a volitional causation condition, then, need to come to terms with habitual and automatic actions. It's implausible to assume that all free actions of the habitual and automatic kind exemplify volitional causation. Because of the habitual or automatic nature of such actions, it might very well be the case that sometimes, if not frequently, they are caused by neither a pro-attitude nor an antecedently formed intention. Volitional causation, therefore, does not appear to be a necessary condition of Φ ing freely. We should conclude, therefore, that the absence of volitional causation is not an obstacle to either practical or doxastic freedom.

Doxastic Involuntarism

According to the thesis of doxastic voluntarism, we cannot exert voluntary control over our doxastic attitudes. This thesis is frequently endorsed in contemporary philosophy.¹⁹ Appealing to doxastic involuntarism as a premise, it's possible to articulate an argument against doxastic freedom that's based on the following claim:

VC If S can Φ freely, then S has voluntary control over whether to Φ or not.
Combined with the premise of doxastic involuntarism, VC yields the conclusion that our doxastic attitudes can't be free. To assess the strength of the argument from doxastic involuntarism, we need to know how to understand the concept of voluntary control.

¹⁹ See, for example, essays 4 and 5 in Alston 1989.

What is it for Φ ing to be under one's voluntary control? One way to answer this question is to equate the concept of voluntary control with that of volitional causation:

VC* If S can Φ freely, then it is possible for S's Φ ing can be caused by S's intention to Φ .

Using a doxastic analog to VC*, we can now state the following argument against doxastic freedom:

The Argument from Doxastic Involuntarism

P1 If our doxastic attitudes are free, then it's possible for our doxastic attitudes to be caused by an intention to adopt them.

P2 It is not possible for our doxastic attitudes to be caused by an intention to adopt them.

C Our doxastic attitudes are never free.

P1 is not vulnerable to counterexamples involving habitual and automatic actions. After all, even if *typically* my engaging the clutch and stepping on the gas are not caused by an intention, surely it must be admitted that these actions *can* be caused by an intention to perform them. However, P1 is not obviously true. Actions and doxastic attitudes differ with regard to what causes them. Actions are typically caused by intentions and desires. Doxastic attitudes are typically caused differently: by cognitive processes that respond to our evidence. We should question, therefore, whether the possibility of being caused by an intention is a necessary condition of both freedom for actions and doxastic attitudes.

Noting that doxastic attitudes cannot be caused by an intention to have them, we can respond in two different ways. First, we might say that, since doxastic attitudes cannot be caused by an intention to have them, they cannot be free. Second, we might argue that, since there are good independent reasons to consider our doxastic attitudes free, we should conclude that the possibility of volitional causation is not a necessary condition of freedom when it comes to doxastic attitudes. The first of these responses remains unmotivated unless opponents of doxastic freedom offer a supplementary argument in defense of P1. Why should we think that P1 is true? Until such a supplementary argument is offered, P1 remains unmotivated.

Practical Reasons Chauvinism

In the previous section, we conceived of voluntary control in terms of volitional causation. According to an alternative understanding of voluntary control, we should conceive of it as responsiveness to *practical* reasons. Consider the following passage by Jonathan Bennett:

In company with Locke, Leibniz, Hume and many others, I understand voluntariness as responsiveness to practical reasons. I take Φ ing to be voluntary if one's Φ ing depends upon inducements, that is, if one can Φ or not depending on whether one thinks one has practical reasons to Φ . Actions are voluntary in that sense, and beliefs seem not to be.²⁰

Let's refer to Bennett's view as:

Chauvinism

Whereas responsiveness to practical reasons grounds freedom, responsiveness to epistemic reasons does not.

An opponent of doxastic freedom might embrace chauvinism and argue as follows:

The Chauvinistic Argument

- P1 Freedom requires voluntary control.
- P2 Voluntary control consists (exclusively) of responsiveness to practical reasons.
- P3 Actions exhibit such responsiveness; doxastic attitudes do not.
- C1 We don't have voluntary control over our doxastic attitudes.
- C2 Our doxastic attitudes are not free.

Chauvinism is opposed by:

Egalitarianism

Responsiveness to practical reasons and responsiveness to epistemic reasons equally ground freedom.

What should egalitarians say in response to the chauvinistic argument? Accepting P1, egalitarians should argue that P2 remains doubtful unless it is supported by a further argument. If we conceive of voluntary control in terms of reason responsiveness, we can

²⁰ Bennett 1990, p. 90. Note that Bennett makes *thinking* one has a practical reason a necessary condition of voluntary control. That's too demanding. Surely, even if one were sympathetic to Bennett's view, one should impose a weaker necessary condition, namely the mere *having* of a practical reason.

say that whether or not I take a walk is under my voluntary control because my taking or not taking a walk is a response to my practical reasons. An analogous point holds for our doxastic attitudes. Whether or not I believe that cats are mammals is a response to my epistemic reasons. So there is reason-responsiveness in either case. Thus there is a strong *prima facie* case for thinking there is voluntary control in either case. If opponents of doxastic freedom wish to resist this line of reasoning, they need to justify the chauvinistic premise that responsiveness to epistemic reasons does not count as a freedom-grounding kind of responsiveness. Until friends of compatibilist doxastic freedom are supplied with an argument in defense of such chauvinism, they should reject P2 as unmotivated and *ad hoc*.

Choice

Let us consider what in discussion with colleagues I have experienced to be the most frequently employed argument against the claim that our doxastic attitudes are free. This argument can be stated as follows: There are two relevant data. One is that, when it comes to actions, we experience choice. I can choose whether to raise my arm or not, whether to have a cup of coffee or not, or whether to go on a walk or not. The other datum is that, when we consider specific examples of doxastic attitudes we have actually taken, choice seems to be completely absent. My doxastic attitudes toward the three propositions

Cats are mammals

Cats are insects

The number of cats is even

are not up to me. I cannot choose to disbelieve that cats are mammals, to believe that cats are insect, or to believe that the number of cats is even.²¹ In light of these data, we should conclude that, unlike actions, our doxastic attitudes cannot be free. Let's use my having a cup of coffee and my believing that cats are mammals as representatives of typical actions and doxastic attitudes and let's restate the argument more formally as follows:

²¹ See Alston 1989, p. 129. He writes: "When I look out my window and see rain falling, water dripping off the leaves of trees . . . I form the belief that rain is falling willy-nilly. There is no way I can inhibit this belief."

The Argument from Choice

- P1 One's Φ ing is free iff one could have chosen not to Φ .
- P2 I could have chosen not to have a cup of coffee.
- P3 I could not have chosen not to believe that cats are mammals.
- C Whereas my having a cup of coffee is free my believing that cats are mammals is not.

This argument employs the concept of choice. If we assume a compatibilist understanding of this concept, it is difficult to see how the argument from examples could succeed. Suppose we interpret P1 as:

- P1* One's Φ ing in circumstances C is free iff in circumstances C one could have chosen not to Φ .

Since compatibilists accept determinism, they must reject P1* as false, for the very point of determinism is that under the very same circumstances one could not have done otherwise. So we need a specifically compatibilist understanding of 'one could have chosen not to Φ '. Let's review three options:

- C1 I Φ d but could have chosen not to Φ iff I Φ d but had I had a reason not to Φ I would not have Φ d.

If we choose C1 to pin down what we mean by 'choice', P3 is false. Had I had a reason not to believe that cats are mammals, I would not have believed it. Given C1, the general problem for the argument from examples is that doxastic attitudes are no less reason responsive than our actions. To avoid this problem, opponents could restrict the range of relevant reasons to practical reasons only. However, such chauvinism remains dubious until it is supported by further argument.

- C2 I Φ d but could have chosen not to Φ iff I Φ d but had I intended not to Φ I would not have Φ d.

Now the opponents of doxastic freedom face a problem we already discussed. Our doxastic attitudes do not respond to intentions. So doxastic attitudes never meet the condition C2 states. From this, we might conclude that they are not free. But alternatively, we might conclude that freedom does not require responsiveness to intentions. Assessing the freedom of actions calls for one yardstick, assessing the freedom of doxastic attitudes for another. It's a mistake to think that the freedom of

actions and the freedom of doxastic attitudes can be gauged using one single yardstick. As long as no good reason is supplied to think that either actual or at least possible responsiveness to intentions (volitional causation) is a necessary condition of freedom for actions and doxastic attitudes alike, P1 – when understood as suggested by C2 – remains a dubious premise that advocates of compatibilist doxastic freedom need not and should not accept.

C3 I Φ d but could have chosen not to Φ iff I Φ d but had I decided not to Φ I would not have Φ d.

Here the chief question is how we are to understand the notion of ‘deciding not to Φ ’. If opponents of doxastic freedom equate decision making with practical deliberation, they are guilty of practical-reasons-only chauvinism – a view that, in the absence of a good defense, remains dubious. Alternatively, the foes of doxastic freedom might conceive of decision making broadly as encompassing both practical and epistemic deliberation. Weighing my practical reasons, I might decide not to perform a certain action. Likewise, weighing my epistemic reasons, I might decide not to adopt a certain doxastic attitude. If ‘deciding not to Φ ’ is thus understood broadly, P3 is false. For had I decided, in response to suitable evidence, not to believe that cats are mammals, I would not have believed it.²²

For the argument from choice to succeed, the opponents of doxastic freedom must find a construal of ‘choice’ that renders all three of the argument’s premises true. It is not easy to see how such a construal of ‘choice’ might go. It seems that, no matter how that concept is construed, advocates of compatibilist freedom will have good reason to reject one of the argument’s premises.

The Case for Compatibilist Doxastic Freedom

There are four good reasons for thinking that, if compatibilism is true, our doxastic attitudes are free:

1. Our doxastic attitudes are fit objects for reactive attitudes.
2. Typically, there is no conflict between our belief-producing processes and our higher-level assessments of them.
3. Typically, our doxastic attitudes are weakly intentional.

²² For a detailed discussion of this point, see Steup 2000.

4. By and large, they are caused by reason-responsive processes.

These reasons constitute a strong case in support of compatibilist doxastic freedom. The question is whether their combined weight is undercut or defeated by any contrary reasons. Let's review what contrary reasons we have encountered.

1. Our doxastic attitudes are never caused by any intentions or pro-attitudes.

This reason is defeated. Habitual and automatic actions can be free without being caused by an intention or a pro-attitude. Therefore, being caused by an intention or pro-attitude is not a necessary condition of freedom.

2. Whereas it's possible for habitual and automatic actions to be caused by an intention, it is not possible for a doxastic attitude to be caused by an intention.

It is not, however, obvious why for a doxastic attitude to be free, it must be such that it is possible for it to be caused by an intention. If this reason is to tip the scale in favor of judging that our doxastic attitudes are unfree, it must be supported by further argument.

3. Freedom requires responsiveness to practical reasons. But the processes that cause our doxastic attitudes respond only to epistemic reasons, not to practical reasons.

It is hard to see why such practical-reasons-only chauvinism should tip the scale in favor of denying doxastic freedom. Unless supported by further argument, practical-reasons chauvinism remains unmotivated and *ad hoc*.

4. We can perform actions as a result of choice, but we cannot adopt doxastic attitude as a result of choice.

For this reason to have sufficient weight to offset the four reasons in support of compatibilist doxastic freedom, we need to be told how we are to understand the concept of choice. As we have seen above, there is no readily available construal of choice that will be of use to the opponent of doxastic freedom.

It would appear, then, that there is no sufficiently strong reason to undermine the case for compatibilist doxastic freedom. We should conclude that the thesis of compatibilist doxastic freedom is well supported.

Doxastic Freedom: Do We Actually Have It?

If compatibilism is true, both our actions and our doxastic attitudes are mostly free. But compatibilism might be false. It's not so easy to convince oneself that one really enjoys freedom if one's beliefs and doxastic attitudes are the inevitable outcome of the laws of nature and the conditions the world was in at the time of the dinosaurs.²³ If compatibilism is false, the reality of doxastic freedom requires that libertarianism be true. If libertarianism is true, free actions flow from either uncaused mental events or the agent herself as an uncaused first mover. Both possibilities are deeply mysterious.²⁴ Let's suppose the mystery of libertarian free action can be resolved. Might it be that while our actions are free in the libertarian sense of 'free', our doxastic attitudes are not? In my view, what holds for compatibilism applies to libertarianism as well. To defend libertarianism, an explanation must be offered of how an uncaused mental event, or the agent as a first mover, can cause a free action. I see no reason to suppose that, when the needed explanation is applied to our doxastic attitudes, we get the result that, unlike actions, doxastic attitudes cannot be free.²⁵ So I'm inclined to say that, if either compatibilism or libertarianism is true, then we enjoy doxastic freedom. Unfortunately, there is still the disconcerting possibility of hard determinism. If hard determinism is true, both freedom of action and doxastic freedom are an illusion. Since neither compatibilism nor libertarianism are obviously true, we can't assert with any degree of certainty that we actually enjoy doxastic freedom. But I think we can say that, all things considered, it appears to be more likely true than not that that our doxastic attitudes are in fact free.²⁶

²³ See Kane 2005, chapter 3 and Van Inwagen 1993 chapter 11.

²⁴ The mystery of free action is explained nicely in Taylor 1992, chapter five, and Van Inwagen 1993, chapter 11. Taylor (p. 48) puts the key point this way: If we think of an agent's actions as being uncaused, "the conception that now emerges is not that of a free person, but of an erratic and jerking phantom, without any rhyme or reason at all."

²⁵ Alston claims that our doxastic attitudes are unfree even if libertarianism is true. See Alston in his 1989, p. 121. His point is that, since we lack voluntary control over our doxastic attitudes, they are not free in the libertarian sense. For my response to that, see Steup 2000, pp. 45-51.

²⁶ I wish to thank Mylan Engel, Eugene Mills, Alastair Norcross, Nikolaj Nottelmann, Bruce Russell, Elliot Sober, and John Turri for helpful comments and discussion.

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