

# **Doxastic Deontology without Doxastic Voluntarism**

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## **Long Abstract**

It is commonplace for epistemologists to reject doxastic voluntarism. To the philosophically uninitiated, though, this rejection can sound preposterous. Epistemologists who reject doxastic voluntarism sound as if they reject a person's very ability to control her beliefs, reject epistemic agency *tout court*. And such wholesale rejection of agency is certainly unintuitive. We generally believe that persons, unless specially constrained in some way, are free thinking as well as free acting.

This view of persons as free thinkers shows up in our language and actions, in our treatment of and comportment toward one another. It is part of our self-image. Peter Strawson made evident the depth and significance of the so-called reactive attitudes in our interpersonal economy. Strawson emphasized that the reactive stance we most often take towards one another, in engagement with each other, was illustrative of the agency we implicitly attribute to one another. Though Strawson discussed action and not belief, we can extrapolate from his observations to the epistemic realm. We do in fact exhibit reactions akin to gratitude and resentment in regard to belief. Beliefs can be met with judgments of outrage or commendation and their authors blamed or praised accordingly. We judge our own and others' beliefs all the time. And we hold each other responsible for the beliefs we espouse. We say that Colin Powell ought not to have believed apocryphal CIA reports on Iraq. Arlen Specter ought to have believed Anita Hill's testimony. The fictional jurors of *To Kill a Mockingbird* ought to have believed Tom Robinson.

So what sense do those who would reject doxastic voluntarism make of this sort of behavior? How do the involuntarists explain deontological, or at least faux-deontological, claims about belief? One option is an error theory. All such deontological judgments (like the claim that Colin Powell ought not to have believed CIA reports) are simply false. False because they attribute an agency not in fact possessed by their subjects. Another option is to maintain that such statements can in fact be true and that doxastic involuntarism is compatible with doxastic deontology. It is this latter option that I intend to explore: how can doxastic involuntarism be compatible with doxastic deontology?

Taking this tack, at least one further choice manifests. The aim is to maintain that deontological claims are (at least sometimes) true while doxastic voluntarism is false. Here we can

assuage the seeming tension either by mitigating the apparent demandingness of the deontology or by shoring up agency in the face of the erosion involuntarism appears to present. I want to examine each of these options in turn, whilst looking at a particular set of examples, in order to see which alternative can better handle the particular cases.

Richard Feldman pursues the first of these two strategies. His arguments support what I would call a faux-deontology; he says that epistemic ought-statements like “Colin Powell ought not to have believed apocryphal CIA reports on Iraq,” are sometimes true, but elaborates that such judgments should be analyzed in a way that does not require the subject have epistemic control. Feldman: “Even in cases in which a believer has no control at all, it makes sense to speak of what he ought to believe and ought not to believe.” According to Feldman, such epistemic ought-claims express what he calls ‘role oughts’. They express the right way to be a believer, a ruling ideal applicable to all, regardless of any particular subject’s ability to conform to it.

The reason why the expression of a ‘role-ought’ amounts only to what I’ve called ‘faux-deontology’ is that it has no clear place in the economy of Strawsonian reactive attitudes. Articulating a doxastic ideal is a different kettle of fish from either praising or taking someone to task for her epistemic performance. Doing the latter more explicitly holds the subject to the standard, holds her accountable to it, holds her responsible for succeeding or failing to meet it. And it is not yet clear that Feldman is entitled to an interpretation of ‘role-oughts’ that are thus robustly deontological. He denies that voluntarism is true in any significant sense. It remains to make sense of the duty applicable to agents who so lack voluntary control over belief. I draw out this difficulty for Feldman’s (and similar) accounts via several particular examples.

Pamela Hieronymi, in a series of recent papers, pursues our second strategy. She elaborates on the sort of control we enjoy as epistemic agents. In the remainder of the paper, I plumb Hieronymi’s account of epistemic agency in order to make sense of the thought that deontological claims can be true while voluntarism false. I explore what Hieronymi calls ‘managerial’ and ‘evaluative’ control by discussing several examples, most notably by looking at an interesting class of examples—those where evaluative judgment is faulty by our lights, perhaps in a way that could only have been remedied by superior ‘managerial’ intervention. Some such cases are those Miranda Fricker classes as ‘epistemic injustice’. I discuss the cases of Anita Hill and Tom Robinson using the mechanics of Hieronymi’s view. I ultimately argue that while Hieronymi’s account faces several difficulties, it is the more promising route to making sense of epistemic deontology without doxastic voluntarism.