

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS & CRITICISMS OF AGENTIAL BELIEF

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1 *Burge on Reason and Self-Consciousness*

Burge's Claim: 'I' plays a central and necessary role in "fully understanding" the concept of reason and reasoning

1. Reasoning requires a point of view

- The Lichtenberg Objector is unable to explain how one thought might follow from another, or why one thought might be incompatible with another.¹

2. The concept of reason (and related concepts like propositional attitude, reason, change of mind) requires the first-person concept

- (a) All reasons (i.e. rational evaluations) are also reasons-to²
- (b) So in order to have a reason to ϕ one must, in some way, be motivated to thereby ϕ ³
- (c) In order to be rationally motivated to ϕ one must be able to understand that some rational evaluation as to ϕ -ing applies in one's own case
- (d) \therefore Understanding that some rational evaluation applies to one's own case entails that one has the first-person concept

- AN OBJECTION: The argument is either unsound (because we should reject (2-b) or circular/question-begging (because a motivational reason is not necessarily a reason that motivates *me*)

2 *Boyle on Rational Activity*

Boyle's Claim: (Rational) Belief is under the direct or "intrinsic" agential control of the believer.

- Two Kinds of cognitive control:

1. *Extrinsic* control, in which the control over doxastic states is extrinsic to having those states⁴
2. *Intrinsic* control, in which control is exercised not (or not just) in the production of the belief but in the activity of holding it.⁵

¹ 'Thinking is going on', needs 'relativization'-intuitively, to a thinker or point of view. (Burge 2013, 388)

² reasons necessarily not only evaluate but have force in forming, changing, confirming attitudes in accord with the reasons (Burge 2013, 389)

³ I do not mean by 'motivational' to imply some interposition of desire or motive or volition. I mean that to understand reasons one must know how to use reasons, and indeed actually use them, to support or change one's own attitudes in one's own thinking practice. To understand the notion of reason, one must be susceptible to reasons. Reasons must have force for one, and one must be able to appreciate that force. Considerations seen as reasons must have some tendency to affect one's judgments and inferences according to the norms associated with the reasons. And one must recognize that this is so. Having reasons and having some capacity to be moved by them—to think or otherwise act on account of them—are necessarily connected. (Burge 2013, 389)

⁴ my agential control over my beliefs is extrinsic: I exercise it, not in believing itself, but in doing certain other things that affect my beliefs. (Boyle 2009, 126)

⁵ we exercise our capacity for cognitive self-determination, not primarily in doing things that affect our beliefs, but in holding whatever beliefs we hold. (Boyle 2009, 127)

2.1 *Against Extrinsic Control Theories*

- Causal variant:
 - One exercises control in believing that P only by judging that P, whose effect is (normally) the belief that P
 - BOYLE’S OBJECTION: As causes precede their effects, so judgment must precede belief, but judging P **presupposes** believing P⁶
- Non-causal variant:
 - One exercises control in believing that P by virtue of acquiring the disposition to judge that P, where disposition and occurrent judgment are “internally” related—i.e. the belief is the disposition to judge, which is its manifestation
 - This seems immune to Boyle’s objection, but still construes agency only in terms of what the agent (voluntarily) does to bring about the acquisition of the disposition, and so, *extrinsically*.

⁶ judging that P surely requires not merely affirming to myself that P (whatever that might mean) but affirming P in the conviction that it is true. My conscious act of judging P must be expressive of my having settled on a view about whether P, namely: Yes, indeed, P. But it is hard to see how this can mean anything less than: it must be expressive of my believing that P. So it is hard to see how I can judge that P unless I believe that P. (Boyle 2009, 130)

2.2 *What is the real problem with “extrinsic control”?*

1. The extrinsic relation between the belief and the judgment?
2. The position that control over doxastic states is at best indirect?
3. The construal of belief as an inactive state?

3 *Hieronymi On Reflection*

3.1 *Paradigmatic Features of Imputable Agency/Control*⁷

Awareness: We have in mind what we intend to do

Discretion: We can decide to do whatever we think worth doing

3.2 *Reflection & The Problem with Reflective Accounts of Control*

The Reflective Model: reflection is a form of awareness and exercise of discretion regarding one’s attitudes⁸

- THE PROBLEM:

I believe this reflective strategy is mistaken. My basic reason for thinking so is rather simple. The strategy appeals to reflection as a way of securing control over ourselves. [1] But merely being able to reflect upon a thing does not provide one with control over that thing. (Think of Kant’s creature from part 1 of the Groundwork, endowed with only theoretical reason, able only to contemplate its happy state while instinct controls its movements.) If one is to control something of which one is aware, one must also be able to change that thing—in particular, to bring it to accord with one’s thoughts about how it should be. [2] However, insofar as the reflective strategy secures our control over ourselves by appealing to the fact that we can reflect upon and change ourselves, it has, it seems, secured our control over ourselves by appeal to a self-directed action. But this will not do.

⁷ We are, it seems, responsible for our intentional actions, if we are responsible for anything. Intentional action provides a kind of paradigm case of responsible activity. Intentional action also seems to involve, at least in its paradigm instances, a certain sort of “having in mind.” In the paradigm cases, we act intentionally by first deciding what to do and then doing what we decided. (Hieronymi 2014, 4)

⁸ By appealing to reflection, or hierarchy, we seem to re-create the sense of control—the awareness and the discretion—of intentional action. The one who reflects is aware of and exercises discretion with respect to that upon which she reflects. Thus, it seems, if we can reflect upon and change ourselves, we enjoy a kind of control over ourselves similar to the control exercised in intentional action. Less sophisticated creatures cannot gain this kind of reflective distance, and therefore they are not responsible for their thoughts or their actions in the way we are. (Hieronymi 2014, 7)

If there was a question or problem about how or why we are responsible for our intentional actions, we cannot answer it by appeal to a self-directed intentional action. (Hieronymi 2014, 8)

- There are two distinct (and independent) objections here:
 1. The activity of reflection does not entail (causal) control/efficacy and vice versa, so why do we need reflection for responsibility?
 2. The appeal to reflection as a form of control is **circular**, since it is supposed to be both that through which the responsibility of intentional action is explained and is itself explained by intentional action

4 Setiya's Deflationary Doxastic Agency

- Static or dynamic belief?⁹
 - Belief is static not dynamic¹⁰
- Q: What does “belief is active” mean?
 - It cannot mean “belief is dynamic”
 - It cannot be due to features of “taking” in “dynamic inference”
 - * The “taking condition” on inference is false¹¹
 - * Regress objection¹²
 - So what does it mean?¹³

The deflationary reading: Believing (both the forming and revising of) is done for reasons

⁹ the distinction between verbs that take perfective aspect and ones that do not has metaphysical import. Some of the things we predicate of objects can be instantiated “perfectively” and in that sense done, while others cannot. Unfortunately, there is no ideal terminology for the contrast between the two. ... I will instead use the adjectives “static” and “dynamic.” Shaking, buying, and starting are dynamic; being red, owning something, and knowing that p are static. (Setiya 2013, 180-1)

¹⁰ [b]elieving is static. To say that someone believed that p is not to report a completed act or event of believing, but a standing condition (Setiya 2013, 181)

¹¹ The problem is that the Taking Condition is false. An immediate source of doubt is the potential conflation of dynamic inference with believing for a reason. It is incoherent to say “I believe that it will rain because the clouds are grey—that is my reason for believing it—though the fact that they are grey is not evidence that it will rain.” When you believe that p on the ground that q, you believe that p because you take the fact that q to support your belief. Hence the incoherence. It does not follow from this, at least not directly, that one's belief cannot be justified by evidence one fails to recognize as such. (More on this below.) Nor does it follow that inference in the dynamic sense is subject to the Taking Condition. (Setiya 2013, 186)

¹² In order to infer that p from the premise that q, you must take the fact that q as evidence that p. In order to do so rationally, you must infer this epistemic proposition from a further premise. In order to make that inference, you need another belief, about the evidence for the epistemic proposition. ... In order to be rational, this too must be the product of dynamic inference. And so it goes. At every stage, you need a prior inference, and the process can never begin. (Setiya 2013, 186)

¹³ We are looking for accounts of epistemic agency on which it goes beyond the fact that we believe things for reasons, and the fact that we form and revise beliefs, but does not involve intentional belief-formation. What else could it be? (Setiya 2013, 184)

References & Further Reading

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