

# DOXASTIC AGENCY & RATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

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## 1 Background to the Debate About Doxastic Agency

*Event:* A type of occurrence or “happening”; events are particulars (either simple or complex) and have temporal parts

*State:* A state obtains but does not “happen”, i.e. it lacks temporal parts and is present at every time in which it exists

*Belief:* a *state* of the mind whose “constitutive aim” is truth

*Judgment:* an event in the mind through/in which some proposition is affirmed

## 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 states<sup>1</sup>
  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.<sup>2</sup>

### 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 P<sup>3</sup>
- 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*.

<sup>1</sup> 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)

<sup>2</sup> 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)

<sup>3</sup> 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<sup>4</sup>

*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 attitudes<sup>5</sup>

- 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. 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 The Transformative Theory of Rationality (TR)

### 4.1 Species and Genus

- A species is distinguished from others of its genus by means of an essential and specific difference<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 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)

<sup>5</sup> 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)

<sup>6</sup> [I]t is necessary that things that are other in species be in the same genus. For I call ‘genus’ such a thing, i.e. the one and same thing which both [species] are said to be and which has a difference not incidentally, be it as matter or in another way. For not only must what is common belong <to both of them> (for instance, they are both animals), but this very thing—the animal—must also be other for each of them...For this reason they are this common thing, other in species than each other. ... Therefore, it is necessary that the difference be this otherness of the genus. For I call ‘difference of the genus’ an otherness which makes this same genus other. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics Iota 8*, 1057b35–1058a7)

- If human beings are different from other animals by virtue of the specific difference of *rationality*, then the difference that rationality makes is not merely ‘incidental’ to the human animal, but rather is a difference of *form*<sup>7</sup>
- Proponents of TR include Herder and Hegel<sup>8,9</sup>

#### 4.2 Commitments of TR:

1. **No Addition:** Rational capacities are not added to an otherwise independently identifiable stock of “irrational” or “arational” capacities
2. **Individuation:** If an animal is rational then all of its essential animal capacities (e.g. sense, desire) are either themselves rational or are dependent on the presence of rational capacities for their individuation (i.e. they are not “self-standing” capacities)
3. **Actualization:** Possession of the capacities constitutive of rationality affects one’s other faculties/capacities (e.g. sense, desire) at least in terms of (a) their conditions of actualization; (b) the content of such acts

#### 4.3 Additive Theories of Rationality (AR)

- The alternative to TR is an “additive” conception of rationality (AR)<sup>10,11</sup>
- The distinction between TR and supposed to be exhaustive and exclusive such that the rejection of TR entails acceptance of AR and *vice versa*
- It is not obvious that all additive theories must take the same form. But all additive theories reject, at the least, commitments (1)-(2) of TR

QUESTION: Does Kant endorse an additive theory of some kind, or does he endorse TR?

### 5 Kant & TR

#### 5.1 Specific Difference

- Kant’s commitment to a specific difference between rational and other animals does not entail that he accepts TR because commitment to a specific difference does not obviously entail commitment to *all* of one’s essential capacities being different
- Acknowledging a specific difference seems, at least, to require that the otherwise generically shared capacities of the specific kind of being are specifically different in their conditions of actualization and/or content of acts (i.e. TR’s commitment (3))

#### 5.2 Animal Representation

- Kant, when discussing representation in animals, never mentions that their sensible representations are different *in kind*, only that they are less sophisticated or not fit/eligible for certain kinds of epistemic status<sup>12,13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> “rational” specifies the sort of frame that undergirds any concrete description of what it is to be a human being. For it does not specify a particular characteristic that we exhibit but our distinctive manner of having characteristics. This, I believe, is the significance of saying that “rational” characterizes the *form* of human being. (Boyle 2012, 410; original emphasis)

<sup>8</sup> The difference [rationality makes] is not in levels or the addition of forces, but in a *quite different sort of orientation and unfolding of all forces* (Herder 1772/2002, 83)

<sup>9</sup> Religion, right, and ethical life belong to man alone, and that only because he is a thinking essence. For that reason, *thinking* in its broad sense has not been inactive in these spheres, even at the level of feeling and belief, or of representation; the activity and productions of thinking are *present* in them and are *included* in them. ... feelings and representations ... are *determined and permeated* by thinking (E §2, Z)

<sup>10</sup> *Additive theories of rationality*...are theories that hold that an account of our capacity to reflect on perceptually-given reasons for belief and desire-based reasons for action can begin with an account of what it is to perceive and desire, in terms that do not presuppose any connection to the capacity to reflect on reasons, and then can add an account of the capacity for rational reflection, conceived as an independent capacity to ‘monitor’ and ‘regulate’ our believing-on-the-basis-of-perception and our acting-on-the-basis-of-desire (Boyle 2016, 527)

<sup>11</sup> The additive interpretation assumes that the presence of reason in humans leaves the character of their sensibility untouched. Reason, on this interpretation, is something that is “added on” to a capacity that is in all relevant respects the same as in non-rational animals. (Land 2018, 1276)

<sup>12</sup> With intuition the representation of a thing is always particular; an animal can also have intuition, but the animal is not capable of having general concepts, which requires the capacity [*Vermögen*] to think. (*Menschenkunde* 206 (1781/2))

<sup>13</sup> Animals cannot make concepts, there are sheer [*lauter*] intuitions with them (*Metaphysik L<sub>2</sub>* 28:594 (1790/91); see also *Logik Dohna-Wundlacken* 24:702 (1792); OP 21:82)

- Kant describes the various levels or degrees of cognition in a way that allows animals to enjoy a degree of (non-equivocal) cognition, but not as sophisticated/advanced as one as rational beings enjoy<sup>14,15</sup>

QUESTION: If Kant accepts TR why would he not indicate that mere animal representation was different in kind in his various discussions of it, and why would he present animal cognition as stage in human (rational cognition)?

### 5.3 *Animality vs. Humanity*

- In a wide variety of Kant's published writings and lectures, he emphasizes the tension and conflict between the 'animality' (*Thierheit*) and the 'humanity' (*Menschheit*) of human beings<sup>16,17,18</sup>
  - *Animality* is specifically connected to our sensible faculties, and especially our basic 'predispositions' or instinctual desires, such as the desire to reproduce
  - *Humanity* indicates the presence of rational capacities and (insofar as this is separate) the capacity for freedom
- Kant also conceives of error in reasoning/judgment in terms of the interaction of sensibility on the intellect<sup>19</sup>

QUESTION: If Kant accepts TR, why would animality be a source of *conflict* with reason or a means of *error* if rationality were *itself* inflected in the nature of one's animal faculties?

### 5.4 *Receptivity & Spontaneity*

- Kant considers receptivity and spontaneity as fundamental and opposed capacities or powers of substances to bear properties<sup>20</sup>
  - Why "fundamental"?
    - \* Kant understands all the other capacities of a being in terms of their manifesting either a receptive or spontaneous power
  - Why "opposed"?
    - \* Kant canonically characterizes them as opposed<sup>21</sup>
    - \* The determining ground of the actualization of a receptive capacity is independent of the capacity itself while the determining ground of an (absolutely) spontaneous capacity is *not* independent of the capacity itself

<sup>14</sup> To cognize, *percipere*, is to represent something in comparison with others and to have insight into its identity or diversity from them. ... animals also cognize their master, but they are not conscious of this. (*Wiener Logic* 24:845-6 (1780-1))

<sup>15</sup> The fourth: to be acquainted with something with consciousness, i.e. to cognize it (*cognoscere*) [*mit Bewußtsein etwas kennen, d.h. erkennen*]. Animals are acquainted with objects too, but they do not cognize them (JL 9:64; see also DWL 24:730-1; Notes on Logic 16:342-4 (mid/late 1760s))

<sup>16</sup> The predisposition to animality in the human being may be brought under the general title of physical or merely mechanical self-love, i.e. a love for which reason is not required. It is threefold: first, for self-preservation; second, for the propagation of the species...third, for community with other human beings, i.e. the social drive. (Rel 6:26-27)

<sup>17</sup> when reason began its business and, weak as it is, got into a scuffle with animality in its whole strength, then there had to arise ills and, what is worse, with more cultivated reason, vices, which were entirely alien to the condition of ignorance and hence of innocence. (CBHH 8:115)

<sup>18</sup> The inner perfection of the human being consists in having in his control [*Gewalt*] the use of all of his faculties, in order to subjugate [*zu unterwerfen*] them to his free choice [*freien Willkür*] (An 7:144; see also *Anthropologie Friedländer* 25:485 (1775/6)).

<sup>19</sup> Error is neither in the understanding alone, then, nor in the senses alone; instead, it always lies in the influence of the senses on the understanding, when we do not distinguish well the influence of sensibility on the understanding. (VL 24:825 (1780/81); cf. A294/B350; JL 9:53-4; R2142 16:250 (1776-1781))

<sup>20</sup> Acting and effecting can be assigned only to substances. Action is the determination of the power of a substance as a cause of a certain accident <accidentis>. Causality <causalitas> is the property of a substance insofar as it is considered as a cause of an accident <accidentis> (*Metaphysik Pölitz* 28:564-5 (1790/1); see also A204/B250; R5289-90 18:144 (1776-78?); R5650 18:298-302 (1785-88))

<sup>21</sup> If we will call the receptivity of our mind to receive representations insofar as it is affected in some way sensibility, then opposed to it [*so ist dagegen*] is the faculty for bringing forth representations itself, or the spontaneity of cognition, the understanding. (A51/B75)

## AGAINST A RATIONAL RECEPTIVITY:

1. The determining ground of the actualization of a receptive capacity is independent of the capacity itself
  2. The determining ground of an (absolutely) spontaneous capacity is *not* independent of the capacity itself
  3. All rational capacities are spontaneous
  4. All sensible capacities are receptive
  5. According to TR the exercise of a sensory capacity is itself the exercise of a rational capacity, and thus *both* receptive *and* spontaneous
  6. ∴ If TR is true the actualization of a sensory capacity is both determined and not determined by an independent ground
  7. The actualization of a capacity *cannot* be both determined and not determined by an independent ground
  8. ∴ TR is false (Modus Tollens, 6, 7)
- Perhaps the proponent of TR will argue (against 7) that the very same capacity can be receptive in one respect and spontaneous in another, but then
    - i. why would Kant individuate faculties by virtue of their being either receptive or spontaneous, and characterize these as “opposed” or “contrary”?
    - ii. What would unify these different aspects as aspects of *one and the same faculty/capacity*?

*References & Further Reading*

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