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Can You Believe It?
A Case for Meaningful Control of Belief

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In this dissertation, I argue that we can exercise meaningful control of belief. I describe this control as “meaningful” for two reasons. First, I want to make clear that my interests (and what I maintain should inform the interests of the doxastic control debate generally) go beyond mere demonstration of control. Second, I am claiming not only that a certain kind of control of belief is possible, but also that the available form of control is valuable.

Though I make several claims and respond to numerous potential objections throughout the dissertation, I face two primary challenges, both of which involve taking minority positions in long-standing and ongoing debates. First, I argue that we can exert doxastic control. Second, and in support of the former, I argue against the claim that alternate possibilities are required for voluntary control.

I develop a sense of at-will control that not only aligns with our intuitions about voluntary and non-voluntary actions, but also does justice to the fact that belief is not an action. My account builds on a conception of at-will (considered and discarded by Pamela
Hieronymi) similar to the one used in the phrase “fire at will.” When soldiers fire at-will, they fire (or don’t) based on what they judge called for given any commands, instructions or information they have received, the objective pursued and the context in which they find themselves. Similarly, when one believes at-will in this judged called for (JFC) sense, one forms a belief based on what one judges called for given one’s background information, the objective pursued and the context in which one finds oneself.

However, during my development and defense of the JCF conception, an asymmetry emerges between JCF in the context of action and belief. This asymmetry raises concerns about one’s ability to do otherwise (or in this case believe otherwise), which is often considered a requirement of voluntary action. To address this concern, I utilize John Martin Fischer’s work in the area of free will, particularly his distinction between regulative and guidance control.
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Edward pulls the most recent installment of his favorite magazine from the mailbox and sees the above warning printed prominently on the cover. For years he has thoroughly read each issue and has never before worried that he might not have control over the beliefs prompted by its content. Confronted with this warning, he wonders if he unknowingly has been indoctrinated with beliefs that are not his own—that is, not chosen or endorsed by him. Many of his priorities, passions, values, and commitments have been shaped by what he has read (and believed) here and in other sources. If the beliefs are not his, in what sense are these priorities, passions, etc.? Of course, he tells himself that it is his agreement with the views of the magazine that leads him to share so many of the same beliefs. But now he is not certain whether he agrees because his beliefs line up with those expressed in the magazine or because its opinions have significantly (unduly) shaped his. “Wait a minute,” he says. “This is absurd. A magazine, however accurate, thorough or persuasive, cannot control my beliefs. I may be sympathetic to the arguments presented, but I control whether or not I believe what I have read.”

The dominant philosophical view regarding control of belief—doxastic involuntarism—does not support Edward’s assumptions.\(^1\) Involuntary accounts claim that we lack voluntary control over our beliefs and would maintain that Edward’s beliefs are not primarily up to him. The opposing viewpoint—doxastic voluntarism—maintains that belief can be up to us or at least responsive to our control.\(^2\) Within the debate, however, it is often

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1 See Williams (1976); Alston (1988); Feldman (1988); Owens (2000); Adler (2002); Hieronymi (2006); McHugh (2011)

2 See Bennett (1990); Velleman (2000); Yee (2002); Shah (2003); Frankish (2007); Steup (2011)
unclear or underexplored whether, and if so why, doxastic control is important or valuable. Being the control-hungry beings that we are, talk of lack of control naturally raises interest, but what specifically (if anything) rests on the outcome of the debate is rarely discussed. The one exception to this, and by no means an insignificant one, is how doxastic control is thought to impact epistemic responsibility. Nonetheless, most discussions of doxastic control make no reference to responsibility or any other reason doxastic control is something about which to be concerned. Of course, the importance or insignificance of doxastic control is irrelevant to the question of whether or not we have it. However, if possessing such control is important, which I maintain that it is, then it seems fruitful to specify why it is important and then frame the debate around the question of whether we possess the type of control necessary to secure that which we value. In fact, I will employ just such an approach as I argue that we can exercise what I call meaningful control of belief.

I describe the form of control for which I argue as “meaningful” for two reasons. First, I want to make clear that my interests (and what I maintain should inform the interests of the doxastic control debate generally) go beyond mere demonstration of control. Once the question of whether it matters if we can control belief is explored and a positive answer is obtained, it becomes clear that not just any form of doxastic control is of interest; rather, only control with the characteristics needed to secure that which is valuable in having doxastic control is of interest. Second, when I claim that we can exercise meaningful control of belief, I am claiming not only that a certain kind of control of belief is possible, but also that the form of control available is valuable.

Currently, however, a particular form of at-will control, which I maintain is neither possible nor important, dominates the debate. In the context of belief, this kind of at-will
control is typically characterized as the ability to believe something in the absence of, without reference to, or despite relevant evidence. For instance, someone (with normal color perception) who can decide to believe and directly begin to so believe that the sky is yellow exhibits at-will control of this kind. Likewise, someone who can decide to believe and directly begin to believe that the number of stars is even exhibits such control. The standard non-belief example of at-will control used within the debate is raising one’s arm. Given the importance of this form of control in the realm of action, it is not surprising that it figures prominently within the debate over doxastic control. What is surprising, however, is the way in which refutation of this kind of control is taken as proof of the impossibility of any form of control of belief.

**Why We Supposedly Lack Doxastic Control**

In chapter three, I consider specific arguments against doxastic control, but for now I want to provide a general sense of the ways in which opponents argue against doxastic control and, in particular, how the debate is most commonly framed. While the central question at issue ultimately revolves around whether we can control what we believe, this question is asked in a variety of ways. The following questions are the most common ways the debate is framed:

1. Can one *believe at-will*?
2. Can one *decide* what to believe?
3. Is belief *voluntary*?
4. Can one *control* (directly) what to believe?

The general gist of each question is similar, yet it is far from obvious whether these formulations of the issue are comparable, much less interchangeable. For instance, though affirmative answers to either (1) or (2) would satisfactorily answer (3) and (4), negative answers to the former are inconclusive for (3) and (4). Likewise, an affirmative answer to (4)
is inconclusive for (2) and (3). However, this issue is somewhat sidestepped within the debate due to the way the various concepts present in these questions have become conflated. In fact, within the debate, (2), (3), and (4) essentially are treated as nothing more than different ways to ask (1), which also is the question around which the debate is most frequently framed.

To see how this conflation occurs, let’s consider each separately starting with (4) and working toward (1). Given that the debate is about control, framing the debate around (4) seems quite logical. Unfortunately, this logic breaks down when the relevant type of control is limited to at-will control, a typical move in these debates. Voluntarists do often attempt to defend claims of control other than at-will control, but even when successful, these attempts are viewed by involuntarists as insignificant compared to the holy grail of at-will control. A similar thing happens regarding (3) in that at-will control is used as the standard for one’s doxastic control being voluntary. In other words, the voluntariness demonstrated by acting at-will is the standard required to secure doxastic voluntariness. In one sense treating voluntariness in this way makes sense; after all we often think something is not voluntary if it is done against one’s will. Notice, however, the difference between asking whether one has at-will control and asking whether something was in accord with one’s will. The former is limited to situations in which one performs some type of direct action. The latter can encompass direct action as well as include instances in which a person allows, does not hinder, or consents to something that impacts them. Though the distinction is rough at this point, I will return to the conflation of at-will and voluntary when I present my positive account of meaningful control in chapter four. For now, let’s continue with our examination of the questions around which the debate over doxastic control is most often framed.

We have seen that both (4) and (3) typically are taken to be just another way of asking
whether we have at-will control of belief. Now I will show that (2) suffers the same fate. While there does seem to be a sense in which we do decide what to believe, this is not something done directly. I can decide what to believe by adjusting that to which I choose to attend. I might never find myself in a state of believing that I like the taste of snails simply because I decide never to taste snails. Or I might never find myself in a state of believing that in the average lifetime a person will walk the equivalent of five times around the equator (or any number of other random facts) merely by deciding not to attend to such information—such as websites listing random trivia. However, this is not what is intended by “deciding what to believe.” Instead, within this debate, being able to decide what to believe involves being able, right now, to decide to believe that the earth is flat or that grass is neon pink.

No matter which of the above four question is posed, the issue under debate is at-will control of belief, which involves being able to believe something in the absence of, without reference to, or despite relevant evidence. Of course, when the question is framed this way, one can better understand the force of the involuntarist position and why the burden of proof rests on the voluntarist. Consider it for yourself. Can you choose to believe that the sky is green or that you are eight feet tall? Can you choose to believe that there are only two continents or that Richard Nixon was the first U.S. president? Though everyday experience seems to speak in favor of us having some kind of control over our beliefs, upon reflection the difficulty of having at-will control is seen.

Interestingly, however, why we would want this kind of at-will control over our beliefs is rarely even considered. I enjoy being able to exert at-will control over my body and many of my daily actions, but I am not at all sure I would want at-will control of my beliefs, even if it was possible. I do not deny that there are situations in which the ability to believe at-will
could be of beneficial, but it would also be helpful, prudentially speaking, to possess the ability to fly or make gold out of dirt; not to mention the millions that could be made if at-will control over one’s states of hunger could be taught. The fact that there are situations in which at-will control of belief would be prudentially beneficial does not demonstrate that that form of control should be the standard in the debate over doxastic control. Likewise, acknowledging the fact that we do not possess such control over belief does not demonstrate that we lack all control over belief.

The Importance of Doxastic Control

When you first considered the claim that you lack control of your beliefs, what, if anything, was your primary concern? I submit that most people, when faced with this claim, are not concerned (if they are concerned at all) with their inability to decide to believe whatever they want regardless of its truth. That is, they are not troubled by the fact that they lack particular forms of at-will control. Rather, they primarily are concerned with one question: If I do not control my beliefs, who or what does? Suddenly one’s own beliefs seem suspect or dangerous, not merely because we don’t control them, but also because they—our beliefs—control so much of what we do and who we think we are. We are not sure which is less comforting: that someone or something actively controls them or that nothing is at the helm and they just happen. Of course, after a bit of thought we realize that lacking control need not involve being controlled; in fact, doxastic involuntarists intend nothing of the sort. Instead, it seems as if we must now regard believing in the same way we regard other features of ourselves over which we lack direct voluntary control: hunger, circulation, blushing, body temperature, and the like. Though we lack direct voluntary control over these functions, they are not haphazard—quite the contrary. When functioning properly, they respond to various stimuli
and other bodily systems in an ordered and systematic fashion. If we consider our lack of voluntary doxastic control along these lines, our concerns might dissipate. After all, we hardly get up in arms about not having control over our circulatory system. But that's just it. Even when we recognize that the lack of voluntary control does not entail external control and is something with which we are familiar in other regards, we continue to view the lack of doxastic control differently than the absence of other instances of voluntary control. Why is this?

I contend that our supposed lack of voluntary control of belief is especially troubling because of the intimate and influential role our beliefs play in shaping who we are and what we do. On the one hand, there are the countless beliefs we form each day that influence our actions concerning things such as getting from point A to point B and choosing between product C and product D. On the other hand, there are the beliefs that seem both influential to and expressive of who we are and what we value, such as beliefs about ourselves, about others, about what is important (and why), and about how to spend our money and our time. Lack of doxastic control, then, brings with it (at least) three important consequences. First, it diminishes the sense in which my beliefs are mine; I am left with mere possession of my beliefs, without influence or input. Second, depending on the extent to which belief informs action, lack of doxastic control diminishes the sense in which my actions are mine. Of course, whatever is the case regarding doxastic control, the beliefs I hold and the actions I perform are mine in the sense of mere possession or performance. However, if my beliefs are formed or adopted either beyond or against my control, then the deeper sense in which these beliefs (and the actions they prompt) are mine (that is, stemming from and/or expressive of my ideas, values, opinions, and commitments) is lost. This, then, leads to the third consequence.

3 I will neither employ nor defend a particular action theory. My only commitment is that belief can and does influence action to a non-trivial extent.
Without a connection between my beliefs and my ideas, values, opinions and commitments, then in as much as these not only prompt my actions, but also give purpose or meaning to them, this purpose and meaning is illusory. For example, suppose that I give both my time and money to a local homeless shelter because I believe that caring for the poor is important. My volunteering and donations, then, not only reveal my values and priorities, but also are a means of demonstrating the value of those I seek to help. However, if the belief that it is important to help the poor just appeared within me without my control, then the sense in which I value helping the poor is severely diminished. If my only role in the formation of the belief that helping the poor is important was that of recipient, then in what sense does this belief connect with what I find valuable and vice versa? Further, if this belief does not connect with what I find valuable, how can my acting on it express anything about what I value or convey value on those for whom I act?

While I am glad that blood circulates through my veins without requiring my attention, viewing belief as just another human function that carries on without my direction is not such a welcome idea. In fact, it seems downright important that I participate in shaping and cultivating my beliefs—whether profound or mundane. Without voluntary control, the most that can be said about our beliefs being ours is that they are things we espouse and/or act upon, but how and why they form or dissipate is beyond our control. So while we don't care whether we can believe the impossible (that the Cubs will win the World Series) or the clearly false (the odds of winning the lottery is quite high), we do care whether belief is just another thing that happens to us.

This week the Nobel Prize winners were announced. They were honored for their outstanding accomplishments in their respective fields, including books and papers written,
experiments performed, discoveries made and treatments developed. Without a doubt, Nobel Prize winners have done a great deal to earn the prestigious award. Nonetheless, at the core of each discovery, treatment, novel, experiment, and theory are the ideas that prompted them, and these ideas consist, at least in part, of beliefs. Certainly, one might merely assume for the sake of argument or for the purpose of testing a theory, but the level of commitment necessary to produce work worthy of Nobel consideration, much less the actual prize, cannot be sustained on assumption alone. The fuel of such commitment is belief that their data is correct, that their unusual approach to a problem will bear fruit, that the themes that infuse their writing are compelling, that they are on to something. In other words, Nobel Prizes are awarded as much for the winners’ ideas as they are for their actions. Of course, results or a product is required, for that is what is judged. But the results or product itself is a result of actions produced by assumptions, predictions, hard work, luck, knowledge and belief.

To bring the point closer to home, consider the last paper you wrote or conference presentation you gave. For some, this might bring to mind work that was purely academic in the colloquial sense. You were neither invested in the issue, nor in the particular position you advanced; rather, your work was the result of intellectual curiosity or problem solving. For others, however, this brings to mind work over which you have labored for some time. This work springs from assumptions, judgments, knowledge, but also belief. You believe that your analysis is more reasoned, clearer or captures an underappreciated element. You believe that Hume was correct and Kant was mistaken (or vice versa). You believe that asking the questions you raise will yield important progress or that the answers you provide are worthy of consideration and acceptance, perhaps even belief. Now consider the supposed fact that you lack control over those and all other beliefs. On the one hand, this might be a relief since it
seems to get you off the hook if your ideas and claims are badly mistaken. Yet on the other hand, it also means that whatever merit your ideas and claims do have, there is no reason to think it reflects upon you any more than you would think that the outputs of a computer program reflect on the caliber of the computer, except of course in that it functions correctly and perhaps faster than others. Further, while it might have felt as if your work was propelled forward by the beliefs you formed and the conclusions you drew, in fact those beliefs and conclusions happened to you and your work was propelled forward by your response to them.

Before I continue, let me clarify a few things. First, even if we lack doxastic control, we could (and likely would) continue to consider what one produces to be a reflection of one’s reasoning skills, ingenuity, intellect, creativity and ability. Second, there would remain a sense in which doing so would be correct. Though doxastic involuntarism entails that our beliefs happen to us rather than being formed by us, it remains the case that attention to detail, ability to appreciate logical connections, commitment to sound reasoning, etc., improve the likelihood that the belief that occurs is correct (i.e. true). However, these are skills any well-programmed computer would have and in both the case of the Nobel Prize winners and excellent philosophical work, we typically think that the product is more than the result of attention to evidence and sound reasoning. Stating clearly what this difference entails is difficult, but it is something along the lines of the difference between painting the Mona Lisa by numbers and having painted the real thing, or between following a recipe and creating a recipe. We praise Nobel Prize winners and excellent philosophers not only because we take them to have created something of value, but also because they have done so as a result of the ideas (i.e. beliefs) they formed.

One might point to the seemingly uncontroversial fact that our experiences can shape
our beliefs and actions to an extent beyond our control to challenge the characterization and concerns I just presented. I do not deny that a person’s experiences greatly impact what she does or does not believe. This is true both in a trivial and a deeper sense. Trivially speaking, there are a multitude of beliefs I will never have simply because I avoid, ignore, or am oblivious to the situations (experiences) in which such beliefs would be considered. On a deeper level, there also are beliefs that form (or are blocked from forming) as a result of my “history.” I grew up in a particular place at a particular time with parents who already had a set of beliefs from which they acted. The beliefs I acquired through this exposure alone are enormous both in number and in impact on how my life has gone. It might likely be true that some of my beliefs are the result of assumptions and biases I take for granted (or don’t even see). In as much as these assumptions and biases control me, they also control the beliefs I form based on them. However, the fact that beliefs can be formed without our control is quite different from the total lack of control over belief argued for by doxastic involuntarism.

In the scenario that started this chapter, Edward is not primarily worried that he has been duped or manipulated, and he is not concerned with whether he can believe at-will. Rather, he is concerned with whether his beliefs are his. He wants to know whether his agreements (and disagreements) with the magazine’s content come from him instead of happen to him. He wants to know this because if his beliefs happen to him, then so do the ideas, priorities, passions, values, and commitments prompted by them. And if this is true, then any sense of purpose he gains from acting in accordance with his priorities is shown to be illusory, as is any sense of value thought to be imparted to those people or things for which he acts.

Therefore, I maintain that what Edward and we need is not at-will control, but meaningful control—a level of control that allows for actual engagement with and influence
on the formation, actualization and dissipation of our beliefs. By this I mean a level of control allowing beliefs to be sufficiently ours such that they are not merely something we possess, but are something we produce. Meaningful control would allow the ideas our beliefs inform and the actions they prompt to express and convey the meaning that is crucial to the importance of those ideas and actions being ours. Meaningful control makes sense of thinking that my believing something to be valuable and acting accordingly can actually impart value on that thing. Meaningful control makes sense of recognizing Nobel Prize winners not only for the utility of their work, but also for their role in creating it. And, yes, meaningful control makes sense of thinking that epistemic agents are responsible for their beliefs. The primary aim of my dissertation will be to demonstrate that we have meaningful control of belief.

**Meaningful Control Defined**

What, then, is necessary for meaningful control of belief? First, there has to be at least some instances of non-trivial belief that allow for our positive influence, rather than mere interference. For instance, while my circulatory system (thankfully) goes about its business without me lifting a finger or offering direction, I can interrupt its regular functioning in any number of ways (i.e. severe a vein or artery or eat only fatty foods causing buildup or blockage). Meaningful control, however, requires more than mere interference; there must be instances in which we can positively inform how our beliefs come about and/or turn out. Second, it seems vital that this control is sufficient to allow a person to own his beliefs, such that upon reflection (even full awareness of how beliefs actually are formed) he not only could recognize a belief as his, but also recognize himself in the belief. Even without doxastic control a person can recognize certain beliefs as his by the mere fact that he holds, espouses and/or acts on them. Additionally, mere identification is fully compatible with beliefs that have been
implanted or manipulated. Therefore, meaningful control requires more. In addition to identifying a belief as his own, it must also be the case that he owns the belief in the sense of having played some part in it becoming his. To better see what I have in mind, consider the difference between buying a painting and creating one. In both situations, the painting can be identified as yours, but only in the latter is it the case that you influenced the painting itself. Or consider actions over which you lack voluntary control, such as sleepwalking. If you watched a video of yourself sleepwalking, you would readily admit that whatever you did while sleepwalking could rightly be identified as an action of yours. Nonetheless, you would not take ownership of those actions. In fact, you likely would resist claims that you were the author of those actions. Third, and finally, for control to be meaningful, it must be consistent. It cannot be the case that our control comes and goes in such a way as to leave us either waiting for its return or surprised when it occurs. If the control we have is to be meaningful, it cannot be haphazard.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

The chapters that follow build toward and support my claim that we can (and often do) exert meaningful control of our beliefs and that this form of control secures for us something of value—a connection between ourselves and our beliefs deeper than mere possession. Before diving in, it will be helpful to explore an overview of each chapter.

*Chapter Two*

Before tackling the question of doxastic control, we need a consistent and well-reasoned account of belief. Of course, this is no small task. Consider a few of the many questions exploration of belief would likely raise. What is this thing over which our control is
debated? Does our supposed lack of control stem from features of it and, if so, what are they? What is it to believe that the sun will come up tomorrow, that one should not lie, that global warming is (or is not) a real threat, or that we should (or should not) send troops into Syria? An entire dissertation could be written on the subject of belief; nonetheless, we must get a handle on belief if we hope to determine whether we have control of it. This task is taken up in chapter two.

After arguing that belief is not an action, I jumpstart the exploration of what it is by turning to an account of belief offered by Nishi Shah and David Velleman. I chose their account for two main reasons. First, their account of belief emphasizes aspects of belief that not only are important within the doxastic control debate, but also are often cited as contributing to our lack of doxastic control. Employing an account of belief that did not include these supposedly control debilitating features would leave me open to claims that I set the bar low to increase my chances of clearing it. The second reason I chose to use Shah and Velleman’s account as a jumping off point is the clarity with which they capture key aspects of belief. This is not to say, however, that I fully agree with them—I do not. In fact, I argue that their explanation of and justification for certain of these characteristics is confused. In the end, I endorse the same central features of belief, but I offer a different explanation for them, as well as how they interact.

Understanding the core features of belief is an important first step, but in order to determine whether we have control of belief, we must also understand what it is for one to believe that \( p \). Given the conception of belief developed, I maintain that one believes that \( p \) iff one is satisfied that \( p \). The sense of “satisfied” I intend is not what might first come to mind—

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that of being content, happy or satiated. Rather, I have in mind the sense in which standards or conditions are met. In this context, the standards I have in mind are those of an epistemic agent regarding whether $p$ is true. These standards will likely differ from agent to agent. One person’s standard of credulity regarding the truth of $p$ might be very high compared to that of another’s. Additionally, the same person’s standard of credulity might vary across different contexts/situations. Nonetheless, I maintain that one believes that $p$ iff one’s standard of credulity regarding $p$ is satisfied.

In the remainder of chapter two, I address three potential objections to my account of what it is to believe that $p$ and I discuss what I take to count as evidence. The first two objections involve concerns that talk of being satisfied that $p$ indicates a level of awareness and certainty (respectively) not typical of or necessary for belief. The third objection involves the worry some might have that if the standard of correctness for belief is truth, then any belief that is not true is unreasonable. I offer arguments either refuting or diffusing each concern. Finally, I turn to evidence. Since my account of belief relies heavily on whether or not one perceives $p$ to be true, then my account also relies heavily on factors that speak for or against $p$’s truth—that is, evidence. In particular, I differentiate between factors that actually indicate the truth of $p$ and factors that one might take to indicate the truth of $p$. For instance, an epistemic agent might think that $E$ counts in favor of the truth of $p$ and, thus, be satisfied that $p$ even if $E$ has no bearing on the truth of $p$ or actually speaks against the truth of $p$. In other words, whether $E$ supports the truth of $p$ and is, in this sense, evidence that $p$ is an entirely different question from whether $S$ takes $E$ to support the truth of $p$ and is, in this sense, evidence for $S$. Since I am mostly interested in what it is for $S$ to belief that $p$, I am mostly concerned with this second sense of evidence.
Chapter Three

Doxastic control is most frequently denied because we lack the ability to believe at-will. Chapter three serves not only to highlight the error of this approach to the debate, but also to demonstrate that doxastic control is possible even within the framework of at-will control. I begin with something central to both—differentiating between two conceptions of at-will control. On the first conception, if one acts at-will, then the action performed is immediate in the sense of having no intermediate steps. Examples of this sense of at-will control include voluntarily coughing, winking or smiling. On the second conception, if one acts at will, then one’s decision to act was sensitive to practical reasons. For instance, I act at-will in this sense when I wink, make dinner or buy a gift either because I want to make someone else happy or because a practical reason such as this could have served as a reason to do so. Therefore, belief falls short of the at-will standard in the first sense because belief cannot voluntarily and directly be brought about without intermediate steps. In the second sense, belief falls short of at-will control because the decision whether to believe that p is not responsive to practical reasons.

Next, I examine influential arguments against at-will doxastic control offered by Bernard Williams⁵ and Pamela Hieronymi⁶. Williams employs the immediate/basic conception of at-will and attempts to demonstrate that believing at-will is conceptually impossible. With the help of work done by Nishi Shah,⁷ I illuminate errors in Williams’ argument. Hieronymi, however, is not trying to prove that at-will belief is impossible; rather,

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⁷ “Clearing Space for Doxastic Voluntarism,” The Monist 85, no. 3 (July 1, 2002): 436–45.
she seeks to *explain why* it is impossible. She rejects the basic action/immediate conception of at-will because of the counter-intuitive implications that result. On such an account, voluntary and at-will are so closely linked that if an action is not basic, then it is not voluntary. However, this undermines the voluntariness of actions such as cooking dinner, painting a wall or making a cake since they necessarily involve intermediate steps. Therefore, Hieronymi seeks to uncover a sense of at-will that does justice to our intuitions regarding the voluntariness of non-basic actions, but remains incompatible with belief. Ultimately, Hieronymi argues that one acts at-will when one acts intentionally, which entails choosing to act based on practical reasons.\(^8\) Therefore, one cannot believe at will, on her account, because belief is immune to practical reasons. That is, practical reasons are impotent when it comes to motivating voluntary belief.

I suggest three possible responses to Hieronymi’s account. First, I could argue that since belief is not an action, she begs the question concerning at-will control of belief by making intentional action the standard for at-will control. Second, I could accede to her account of at-will and the impossibility it creates for such control of belief, yet deny the assumption that at-will control is necessary for voluntary control. Finally (and the course I ultimately pursue), I could argue for a conception of at-will different from both Williams’ and Hieronymi’s. In fact, my account of at-will builds on one of the candidate conceptions Hieronymi considers and discards, namely a sense of at-will similar to the one used in the phrase “fire at will.” When soldiers fire at-will, they fire (or don’t) based on what they judge called for given any commands, instructions or information they have received, the objective pursued and the context in which they find themselves. Similarly, when one believes at will

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\(^8\) According to Hieronymi, one need not actually act based on such reasons, but it must be possible for one to have done so.
in this (the judged called for) sense, one forms a belief based on what one judges called for given one’s background information, the objective pursued and the context in which one finds oneself.

Interestingly, while she discards the other candidate conceptions because they do not align with typical intuitions regarding what actions are voluntary, Hieronymi casts this candidate aside solely because it would not rule out the possibility of at-will control of belief. Given that she aims at explaining why (instead of proving that) at-will control of belief is impossible, her decision to reject the fire-at-will conception makes sense. However, in the context of the doxastic control debate, such a reason is highly question-begging.

This does not mean, however, that the judged called for conception (JCF) is without potential objections. During my development and defense of this conception, a difference emerges between this sense of at-will in the context of action and belief. Put most simply, while one can judge an action called for and refrain from so acting, one cannot judge it called for to believe that \( p \) and refrain from so believing. This is because on my account of belief, one believes that \( p \) when one is satisfied that \( p \), and if one judges it called for to believe that \( p \), then one is satisfied that \( p \) and, thereby, believes that \( p \). This asymmetry between the contexts of action and belief raises concerns about one’s ability to do otherwise (or in this case believe otherwise), which is often considered a requirement of voluntary action. While I do not subscribe to the alternate possibilities account of free action, I recognize both that many do and that responding to their potential objection is important. I utilize John Martin Fischer’s work in the area of free will to shape my response.\(^9\) Fischer distinguishes between what he calls regulative control and guidance control. Regulative control requires that one be able to

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do otherwise; guidance control does not. I argue that JCF control of belief is an instance of guidance control. Further, while Fischer maintains that guidance control is sufficient for moral responsibility, I maintain that guidance control is sufficient for meaningful control.

Chapter Four

Here I will present my case for the possibility of meaningful doxastic control. At the end of chapter three, I demonstrated that we can exert what I called judged called for (JCF) control of belief. The question remains, however, whether JCF control is sufficient for meaningful control. I will argue that it is, but before beginning down that road, I pause briefly to bring to mind once again the importance of having meaningful doxastic control and what such control requires. What we believe plays an intimate role in shaping who we are (e.g. our values or commitments) and what we do (e.g. our actions). Without meaningful doxastic control, our connection to our beliefs is one of mere possession. If, as the involuntarists claim, this is the case, then in as much as our beliefs shape our values, commitments or actions, they do so without any input from us. In other words, our beliefs shape our values, commitments and actions, but we played no role in shaping them. We are left with beliefs, values and commitments on which we act, but over which have no control—a rather sobering reality. Our means of escaping this bleak epistemic fate is being able to exert meaning doxastic control, which requires the following three things. First, there must be instances in which one not merely interferes with how one's beliefs come about, but actually exerts shaping influence over them. Second, the level of control must be sufficient to allow a person to own his beliefs, such that upon reflection (even full awareness of how beliefs actually are formed) he not only recognizes that the belief is his, but he also recognizes himself in the belief. Finally, the control exerted in (1) and (2) must be sufficiently consistent such that one is neither left waiting for it
to return nor surprised when it occurs.

Up to this point, chapter four serves to refresh the reader regarding key elements of my overall account. Next, however, I will consider whether the JCF conception of at will control developed previously can successfully meet the three criteria of meaningful control outlined above. In order to do this, I focus on a particular form of JCF control—doxastic deliberation. Perhaps the archetype of what it is to judge something called for, deliberation provides an explicit example of one judging whether something (in this case belief) is called for. Unfortunately, many maintain that the control exerted via doxastic deliberation does not carry over to the belief that results. In fact, they claim that one is compelled to believe the deliberative conclusion and, therefore, lacks control over the belief formed. I must first respond to these claims before I can make my case that JCF control in the form of doxastic deliberation is a means of exerting meaningful doxastic control. I will do this by responding to four questions. For each I will use a thought experiment involving Mary who has chosen today to decide whether to believe that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone when assassinating President Kennedy.

First, I will consider whether it is the case that one’s doxastic control ends when deliberation ends. Since one must believe the conclusion reached once deliberation is completed, it would seem control does end just short of the belief formed. For example, suppose Mary spends the day considering evidence for and against the various theories regarding Oswald’s involvement in the assassination and comes to view the theory that he did work alone as the one most supported by the evidence. At this point, she believes that Oswald worked alone and could not at this moment believe otherwise. Since not being able to do otherwise is typically cited as a key indicator of lack of control, it is not surprising that many
claim that control ends with deliberation. However, I will argue that when we look more closely at the deliberative process and recall the conception of belief developed in chapter two, we will see that our inability to believe contrary to our deliberative conclusion does not indicate a lack of doxastic control.

Since my answer to the first question depends greatly not only on my conception of belief as being satisfied that \( p \), but also on the claim that we control whether we are satisfied that \( p \), the second question I consider is whether, in fact, we have such control.\(^{10}\) For instance, even if one agrees with me that deliberative control does extend to the belief formed, one might still question whether Mary controls when or if she is satisfied. In fact, I will consider five ways in which one lacks or appears to lack control over whether one is satisfied. The first concerns the way it sometimes seems as if beliefs just materialize within us. The second involves the familiar mistake of thinking that just because a person does not have at-will control over something she has no control over it. The third deals with the fact that the process of deliberation can be interrupted leaving one neither satisfied nor dissatisfied about whether \( p \). The fourth is similar to the first, but looks more specifically at occasions when the truth of \( p \) is blatantly apparent, as is often the case with our visual beliefs. The fifth and final way it can seem as if we lack control over whether we are satisfied involves instances in which one claims to believe \( p \), but acts in a way contrary to so believing. For each of the five, I either show that the supposed lack of control is a matter of mere appearance or that the actual lack of control is unproblematic for my account.

At this point in chapter four, I will transition from responding to arguments contrary to

\(^{10}\) Recall that the sense of satisfied relevant here concerns whether one’s standard of credulity regarding the truth of \( p \) is met.
my account\textsuperscript{11} to consideration of an important way in which we do exercise control via doxastic deliberation. In doxastic deliberation we weigh evidence in order to determine how we should respond to the question whether $p$. Though we do not typically have much control over the amount and kinds of evidence available to us, we nonetheless exert a great deal of control over other aspects of deliberation. First of all, we control what we view or accept as evidence. We might be presented with a variety of information, but it is our estimation of what is trustworthy, accurate and relevant that determines which pieces of information factor into our deliberation. For instance, one person might put great stock in a particular magazine article, while another person might think that the magazine or the particular author is unduly biased toward one side of the issue and, therefore, not include the article in the evidence he considers. Similarly, once a person identifies the body of evidence to be considered, it is his standards of credulity that determine both what evidence is given greater weight and whether the evidence speaks for or against the truth of $p$. Put most simply, when we deliberate we believe that which we judge called for in light of what we deem to be the relevant evidence.

The next question I will explore in chapter four returns to the claim that deliberative doxastic control does not extend to the belief formed. Though I previously argued that deliberative control does extend to the belief formed, I return to this issue for two reasons. First, since I admit that there is a sense in which we cannot do otherwise than believe the conclusion reached via deliberation, I recognize that some will take this as proof that we do not, in fact, exert doxastic control via deliberation. In light of this, I will revisit material in chapter three in which I argue—with the help of John M. Fischer’s account of guidance control—that the inability to do otherwise does not necessarily undermine one’s doxastic

\textsuperscript{11} Namely, arguments denying that deliberative control extends to the belief formed and that we control whether we are satisfied that $p$. 
control. A key item, here, will be demonstrating that the control exerted via deliberation is an instance of guidance control. Second, I want to illuminate the way in which many of the constraints we encounter during doxastic deliberation are either intrinsic to the process, which we voluntarily enter into, or are self-imposed. The purpose of doxastic deliberation is to decide what to believe by means of weighing reasons for and against two or more options. For instance, Mary deliberates in order to determine the most well-supported belief about whether or not Oswald worked alone. Given this, it would not only be odd, but also illogical for her to believe other than what she judges to be the account most supported by the evidence. Therefore, both the aim of doxastic deliberation and her desire to believe that which, at the end of the day, she judges to be best supported given her evidence are the reasons that she cannot believe otherwise. However, if she voluntarily entered into deliberation and she voluntarily set the parameters of that deliberation (e.g. one day, available evidence, best-supported theory), then it is difficult to see how the fact that she could not believe otherwise undermines her doxastic control.

If the arguments outlined here are correct, then the final step of chapter four will be to demonstrate that the JCF control we exert via doxastic deliberation is sufficient for meaningful control. To do this, I will consider whether doxastic deliberation meets the three conditions necessary to count as meaningful doxastic control. Ultimately, I will argue that doxastic deliberation provides consistent shaping influence over one’s beliefs and that this control sufficiently enables one not only to identify with one’s beliefs, but also own them. In other words, I will argue that JCF control in the form of doxastic deliberation is a means of exerting meaningful control of our beliefs.

The course set out here is by no means an easy one, but even if I am successful in all
that I have set out to prove, more questions and challenges await around the corner. Therefore, I will draw both chapter four and the dissertation to an end by considering the ramifications of meaningful doxastic control and the next steps this research might take. For instance, it is typically thought that one is only responsible for that which one can control. It is unsurprising, then, that a major obstacle for accounts of epistemic responsibility is our supposed lack of doxastic control. However, the possibility of meaningful doxastic control overcomes this obstacle and opens new avenues for accounts of epistemic responsibility.
2. BELIEF--WHAT IS IT?

In this chapter, I articulate a clear, concise, and well-supported conception of belief that will be used throughout the remainder of the dissertation. My aim in doing this is twofold. First, I seek to avoid terminological confusion by employing a straightforward understanding of this important concept. Second, I want to defend a particular conception of belief. The first step toward this two-fold aim involves demonstrating that belief is not an \textit{action}, but, instead, is an \textit{attitude} one has toward certain propositions.\footnote{In the next chapter, we will see that Pamela Hieronymi agrees that belief is not an action. However, since her argument for this rests heavily on her conception of voluntary, with which I do not entirely agree, I want to offer my own reasons for why belief is not an action.} This distinction is important because our control of belief is often deemed lacking when compared to the control we can exert over our actions. However, if belief is not an action, then we should not necessarily judge it according to the same standard. Next, I consider a conception of belief developed by Nishi Shah and David Velleman in their article “Doxastic Deliberation.”\footnote{Shah and Velleman, “Doxastic Deliberation.” This and other of their works have been influential in the doxastic control debate. See: Nishi Shah, “A New Argument for Evidentialism,” \textit{The Philosophical Quarterly} 56, no. 225 (October 1, 2006): 481–98; Nishi Shah, “How Truth Governs Belief,” \textit{The Philosophical Review} 112, no. 4 (October 1, 2003): 447–82; Shah, “Clearing Space for Doxastic Voluntarism”; David Velleman, “On the Aim of Belief,” in \textit{The Possibility of Practical Reason}, ed. David Velleman (Oxford University Press, 2000), 244–81.} I single out their account because they adeptly identify and illuminate the core features of belief, the understanding of which is integral to articulating a clear conception of belief. Additionally, their account emphasizes the tight connection between truth and belief; a connection that is often seen as a primary obstacle to the possibility of doxastic control.\footnote{When one considers whether to believe that \(p\), one immediately recognizes that the truth of \(p\) is the primary, if not the only, consideration. In fact, whereas in the realm of action one might choose to \(x\) for any number and kind of reasons, in the realm of belief, only epistemic reasons (i.e. those pertaining to or thought to pertain to the truth of \(p\)) are relevant to and efficacious for forming a belief. Therefore, in addition to being the conception of belief I think best captures what it is for one to believe, it also is a conception of belief that sets a high bar for demonstrating the possibility of doxastic control.}

They begin their analysis of belief with the observation that, unlike other cognitive
attitudes, belief is regulated for truth. However, they further claim that this truth-regulation is insufficient to account for two other features of belief—transparency and the influence of non-evidential factors. Transparency refers to the way in which in doxastic deliberation the question of whether to believe that \( p \) inevitably gives way to the factual question whether \( p \). In other words, in order to answer the question whether to believe that \( p \) one must, first, answer the question whether \( p \). The influence of non-evidential factors concerns the way in which factors irrelevant to the truth of \( p \) can, at times, influence whether one believes that \( p \). Since Shah and Velleman claim that belief’s truth-regulation cannot, on its own, account for these two features of belief, they further posit that belief has a standard of correctness, such that a belief that \( p \) is correct iff \( p \). Though I agree with the four primary features of belief that Shah and Velleman identify, I disagree with how they account for them and with the conception of belief that results.

In the process of critiquing Shah and Velleman’s account of belief, I layout my own, arguing that one believes that \( p \) when one is satisfied that \( p \). I, then, go on to defend this conception of belief against three objections. Two of these objections are unique to my account and involve the compatibility of being “satisfied” that \( p \) with the non-evaluative quality of many beliefs and common assumptions regarding degrees of belief, respectively. The third objection involves David Owen’s claim\(^{15} \) that any adequate account of belief must explain not only the transparency of the question of whether to believe that \( p \) to the question whether \( p \), but also the way in which non-evidentiary factors at times influence whether one believes that \( p \). In the final section of this chapter, I explicitly acknowledge the important role evidence plays in my account of belief and discuss what I take to count as evidence.

Belief is an Attitude Not an Action

How should we characterize belief for the purposes of the doxastic control debate? Is or isn’t it an action? The consistent critique of our control of belief in light of our control of action speaks in favor of belief being an action, after all one should compare apples to apples. On first glance, grammar appears to bolsters this conclusion. “Believe” is a verb, which typically indicates an action, but closer inspection reveals that there are exceptions to this rule. Grammar, then, can only take us so far. Correctly assessing this aspect of belief requires careful examination of two forms of belief--dispositional and occurrent.

Dispositional beliefs consist of the multitude of beliefs that one carries around, but to which one is not currently attending or, perhaps, of which one is not even aware. For instance, a person can be said to believe that \( p \) even if she currently is not thinking that \( p \) or temporarily forgets that \( p \). It seems difficult to characterize instances of belief such as these as actions. Of course, someone might argue that one need not be aware of an action to be performing it; one might be tapping one’s foot (surely an action) but need not be aware of it. While that might be true, when one believes something in the dispositional sense, lack of awareness or involvement is not the issue; rather, it is the fact that there is no “believing” activity about which to be aware or with which to be involved.

Perhaps, however, occurrent beliefs qualify as actions. Unlike dispositional beliefs, occurrent beliefs are those beliefs about which one is currently thinking or aware. For instance, you might be discussing where to go to dinner with some friends when one of them suggests a restaurant you do not like. Though you have not thought of the restaurant in months, your belief that it does not have good food comes to the forefront of your mind. While you are attentive to this belief, is it an action? I think not. Certainly, we might say that recalling that
restaurant does not have good food is an action, but there is no believing activity involved here. Therefore, your believing that proposition (that the restaurant does not have good food) is not an action for the same reason dispositional believing is not an action. Rather, your belief is merely an attitude you have toward the proposition, namely that the proposition is true.

What about when you first formed the belief that the restaurant does not have good food? Was that an action? Yes. Belief formation via deliberation is a mental action. Nonetheless, neither the occurrent belief that results, nor the persisting dispositional belief is an action. Instead, when we say, “Oliver believes that access to healthcare is a basic human right,” we are not attributing to Oliver any action. Rather, the sentence indicates an attitude Oliver holds relative to the proposition ‘that access to healthcare is a basic human right,’ namely, that he regards this proposition as true. There are two forms of propositional attitudes, conative and cognitive. Conative attitudes regard their objects as to be made true or satisfied (e.g. hoping or desiring that \( p \)). Cognitive attitudes regard their objects as true or satisfied (e.g. assuming, supposing or imagining that \( p \)). Belief falls into this latter category, but since belief is not the only cognitive attitude, we need to identify what distinguishes belief from the others.

Before we do that, however, it is important to note that we are concerned with whether belief is an action because it impacts our evaluation of our control of belief. Therefore, even in instances in which belief formation is deemed an action, concerns about whose action it is and whether it was voluntary will take the fore.

How Belief Differs From Other Cognitive Attitudes

Nishi Shah and David Velleman have argued that what differentiates belief from other cognitive attitudes is that the concept of belief entails both that it is regulated for truth and that
it has a standard of correctness.\footnote{Shah and Velleman, “Doxastic Deliberation”; Shah, “A New Argument for Evidentialism.”} I agree with Shah and Velleman that the concept of belief entails both being regulated for truth and a standard of correctness and that these features differentiate belief from other cognitive attitudes; however, I disagree with how they reach this conclusion. Since my disagreement with Shah and Velleman is not primarily about the concepts they employ, but rather about how they explain and utilize them, it will be helpful to clearly layout the main features of their account before moving forward.

\textit{Regulated for Truth:} Belief formation and retention are responsive to evidence and reasoning in ways that are designed to be truth-conducive. Therefore, belief is regulated for truth in a way that other cognitive attitudes are not.

\textit{Standard of Correctness:} A belief that $p$ is correct iff $p$.

\textit{Transparency:} Refers to the way in which in doxastic deliberation the question of \textit{whether to believe that} $p$ inevitably gives way to the factual question \textit{whether} $p$. In other words, in order to answer the question \textit{whether to believe that} $p$ one must, first, answer the question \textit{whether} $p$.

\textit{Influence of evidentially insensitive processes:} The fact that non-evidentiary factors, such as wishful thinking, at times influence one’s beliefs.

Shah and Velleman consider each of the above to be necessary features of belief and attempt to use the first two to explain the latter two.

When seeking to differentiate belief from other cognitive attitudes, Shah and Velleman begin with the observation that belief is regulated for truth in a way the others are not. Believing, assuming and imagining can all correctly be described as \textit{regarding as true} some proposition $p$, but each attitude regards $p$ as true differently. When one assumes that $p$ or imagines that $p$, one does regard it as true, but in the sense of “lending” to $p$ the property of truth. However, when one believes that $p$, one regards it as true in the sense that one takes $p$ to have the property of truth. Of course, this need not involve a particular conception of truth.
One “lends” or “attributes” truth to a proposition in whatever sense of truth is supported by the operative theory of truth. In order to better see the difference between these two ways of regarding as true, let \( p \) stand for the proposition there is snow on the mountains. If James assumes that \( p \), he regards \( p \) as true in the sense that he allows himself to treat \( p \) as true for some further purpose, perhaps because he is planning a trip to Glacier National Park and wants to be prepared in case there is snow on the mountains, but is not in a position to know whether there will be snow. Similarly, if James imagines that \( p \), he regards \( p \) as true in the sense that he envisions a scenario in which there is snow on the mountains, perhaps because he very much hopes there will be snow on the mountains and wants to picture himself swooshing down the slopes on his new skis. Whatever the case, the truth of \( p \) in no way impacts James’ decision whether to assume or imagine that \( p \). However, if James believes that \( p \), he regards \( p \) as a true in the sense that there actually is snow on the mountains, and James would do so only when he thinks that there is snow on the mountains. Put another way, assuming or imagining that \( p \) is an attitude James has toward \( p \) due to factors about himself or his circumstances, namely whether or not he wants/needs to assume or imagine that \( p \). However, correctly believing that \( p \) is an attitude James has towards \( p \) due to a factor about \( p \), namely whether it is true. Of course, factors about you or your circumstances will influence whether or not you take \( p \) to be true, that is, whether or not \( p \) appears/seems true to you. For instance, you might be a highly skeptical person or you might not be wearing your contacts, both of which might impact whether you judge \( p \) to be true and thus believe that \( p \). Nonetheless, whether you believe that \( p \) involves consideration of factors beyond oneself, namely the truth of \( p \).

However, Shah and Velleman maintain that truth regulation alone cannot explain two features of belief to which they are committed--transparency and the influence of evidentially
insensitive processes such as wishful thinking. As they explain,

> [i]nterpreting the concept of belief as requiring evidence-responsiveness strong enough to account for transparency would therefore entail denying that it leaves room for other influences, whereas acknowledging that belief’s responsiveness to evidence leaves room for other influences entails accepting that it is not strong enough to account for transparency.\(^\text{17}\)

Shah and Velleman choose the latter option, claiming that in addition to belief being regulated for truth, it also has a standard of correctness, which can explain transparency. In fact, its ability to provide a way through the horns of the above dilemma is the only reason they provide in support of belief having a standard of correctness.

This explanation goes roughly as follows. When one deliberates whether to have an attitude conceived as a belief that \(p\), one deliberates about an attitude to which one already applies the standard of being correct if and only if \(p\) is true, and so one is already committed to consider it with an eye exclusively to whether \(p\). When one deliberates whether to have an attitude conceived as an assumption or fantasy, one does not yet apply any particular standard to it, and so one does not yet have any commitment as to how one will go about considering it.

This explanation of transparency leaves room for the possibility that beliefs can be influenced by non-evidential considerations, because it entails that one is forced to apply the standard of correctness only in situations in which one exercises the concept of belief. Not all belief-forming processes require the subject to deploy the concept, and the norm of truth that controls doxastic deliberation needn’t control other processes. Our explanation of transparency thus allows for the fact that passions can influence belief.\(^\text{18}\)

Shah and Velleman argue that it is only in situations in which the concept of belief is exercised that the standard of correctness comes into play and since deliberation is just one means of belief formation, there remains room for the influence of non-evidential factors via the other means by which beliefs can be formed. This move is problematic for two reasons.

First, it entails that it can never be the case that non-evidential factors influence beliefs

\(^{17}\) Shah and Velleman, “Doxastic Deliberation,” 501.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
formed via deliberation. According to Shah and Velleman, deliberating about whether to believe that $p$ necessarily invokes the concept of belief, which includes a standard of correctness such that a belief is correct iff $p$. Therefore, according to them, one “is already committed to consider it with an eye exclusively to whether $p$,”\textsuperscript{19} which explains the transparency of the question whether to believe that $p$ to the question whether $p$ in doxastic deliberation. However, they previously claimed that “interpreting the concept of belief as requiring evidence-responsiveness strong enough to account for transparency would therefore entail denying that it leaves room for other influences.”\textsuperscript{20} Putting these two claims together results in the following. Doxastic deliberation necessarily invokes the concept of belief and its standard of correctness such that the deliberator is committed to deciding whether to believe that $p$ solely by considering the question whether $p$, that is, solely based on the evidence. Therefore, due to belief’s standard of correctness, beliefs formed via doxastic deliberation are evidence-responsive enough to account for transparency and, therefore, are unable to be influenced by non-evidential factors. I see no reason, however, to assume that non-evidential factors never influence one’s deliberative beliefs.

Second, as we saw above, belief like other cognitive attitudes involves regarding or accepting as true some proposition. However, unlike other cognitive attitudes, belief is an attitude one has toward $p$ not because of some feature of oneself, but because of a feature of $p$, namely that one takes it to be the case that it actually obtains--is actually true. Even in instances of non-deliberative belief formation in which the concept of belief is not consciously invoked, it remains the case that the (perceived) truth of $p$ (whether it actually obtains) is the only

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
relevant factor when forming a belief. Returning to the previous example of James deciding whether to believe that snow is on the mountains, even if there was no deliberation involved in his belief formation (say he is looking at the mountains from his hotel window) it would still be the case that he would form the belief that there is snow on the mountains based solely on whether or not it seems to him that there actually is snow on the mountains. Even if he so badly wants there to be snow on the mountains that he hallucinates that there is snow on the mountains, he still believes that there is snow on the mountains because he thinks that he is seeing actual snow on the mountains. Therefore, the distinction between when the concept of belief is and is not consciously invoked cannot supply the necessary room to allow for the influence of non-evidential factors.

In light of these considerations, I choose the opposite horn of the above dilemma, which maintains that belief’s evidence-responsiveness is strong enough to explain transparency. Of course, since I do not deny the possible influence of non-evidential factors on belief-formation, I must explain how such influence is possible given the strength of evidence-responsiveness necessary to explain transparency. Just because these non-truth-indicative considerations are not actually relevant to the question of whether \( p \) does not mean that they cannot influence how one answers the question of whether to believe that \( p \). I maintain that non-truth-indicative considerations can influence whether one believes that \( p \) in the same way that truth-indicative concerns do. When non-truth-indicative considerations impact whether to believe that \( p \), they do so because they are mistakenly taken to provide evidential support or they inappropriately impact one’s assessment and/or awareness of the actual evidence. For instance, James’ strong desire for snow and his resulting hallucination impact his belief that there is snow on the mountains by providing him false evidence that there is snow on the mountains.
Or consider this more detailed example, suppose an unhappy husband, Ralph, wants to believe that his wife is not having an affair. Unfortunately for Ralph, he begins to notice things that appear to indicate that his wife, Shirley, is having an affair. There are a number of charges on their joint credit card for expensive restaurants at which he has never eaten and at times when his wife was supposedly at work. There are also charges from a fancy lingerie store, but Shirley has not worn any new garments to bed recently. Additionally, several times in recent months Ralph has called Shirley at work when she said she would be there only to be told that she left hours ago. Then, when she comes home, she complains at how unreasonable her boss is for keeping her so late. Of course, Ralph doesn’t question Shirley about any of these things because he desperately doesn’t want to believe that is wife is cheating on him. In fact, his wishful thinking impacts both what he takes to be evidence and how he evaluates it regarding whether his wife is cheating on him. As a result, Ralph creates an alternate explanation for these facts. Instead of his wife having an affair, the credit card charges and lies about being at work really indicate that his wife is planning a big surprise party for his upcoming 40th birthday. Knowing how much he loves fine dining, she has been trying out new places in order to find the perfect venue for the party. The lingerie is for their private celebration after the party. Her not being at work when she said she would be is easily explained by the fact that she has been using that time to plan the party, but didn’t want him to find out. So instead of believing that his wife is cheating on him, Ralph believes that she is planning his 40th birthday party.

At issue here is not whether it is possible that Shirley is, in fact, planning a birthday party rather than having an affair, but whether Ralph’s wishful thinking impacts his belief in an evidentiary or non-evidentiary manner. Ralph greatly desires not only that his wife not be
cheating on him, but also that he believe that she is not cheating on him even if she is. Until recently, his aversion to believing anything contrary to his wife’s fidelity has successfully insulated him from any factors that might have led a more suspicious person to suspect an affair. However, now that he is aware of the unexplained charges and lies mentioned above and realizes their possible import, he can no longer ignore the possibility, and merely wishing it weren’t so will not make these things go away. But if he can provide an alternate explanation for the charges and lies, then he can avoid having to believe that Shirley is being unfaithful. Though non-evidentiary factors led Ralph to seek an alternate explanation for the evidence and then wrongly assess the likelihood of each explanation, it remains the case that the evidence is what supports his belief that Shirley is not cheating on him. Put more generally, non-evidentiary factors such as wishful thinking do not influence whether one believes that $p$ apart from evidential considerations; rather, such factors influence what one believes by influencing what one takes to be evidence and/or how one weighs or explains the evidence. Understood in this way, my conception of belief can explain both why truth is the sole focus in doxastic deliberation (that is, transparency) and, also, how non-evidential factors can influence belief.

Given this understanding of how belief differs from other cognitive attitudes, where does this leave us regarding what Shah and Velleman take to be the core elements of an account of belief: truth regulation, standard of correctness, transparency, and the influence of evidentially insensitive processes? When compared to the other cognitive attitudes, it becomes clear that belief is regulated for truth in a way that other cognitive attitudes are not. I disagree with Shah and Velleman, however, on the strength of this truth-regulation. They endorse weak truth-regulation such that consideration of the truth of $p$ is necessary when forming the belief that $p$, but can be overridden by other considerations, such as non-evidential factors. Endorsing
weak over strong truth-regulation allows them to explain how non-evidential factors can influence belief, but requires them to look elsewhere for an explanation for transparency. In order to account for transparency, they propose that belief also has a standard of correctness such that a belief that $p$ is correct iff $p$. Therefore, when one deliberates about whether to believe that $p$, one necessarily invokes the concept of belief and, thus, is conscious of its standard of correctness. According to Shah and Velleman, this awareness explains the transparency of the question of whether to believe that $p$ to the question whether $p$ in doxastic deliberation.

Conversely, I endorse strong truth-regulation such that consideration of the truth of $p$ is the only factor relevant to forming the belief that $p$. Endorsing strong over weak truth-regulation allows me to explain transparency, but appears to negate the possible influence of non-evidential factors. However, as I have shown above, since non-evidential factors influence belief-formation by influencing both what one takes to be evidence and how one evaluates and/or weighs evidence for $p$, the truth of $p$ remains the only factor relevant in belief formation. Further, strong truth-regulation entails the standard of correctness that a belief is correct iff $p$.

Though both accounts of belief incorporate the above four features, I argue that my account has the following strengths over Shah and Velleman’s. First, while Shah and Velleman must use inference to the best explanation to account for belief’s standard of correctness, on my account the standard follows from the strong truth-regulation I endorse. Second, the way in which Shah and Velleman use belief’s standard of correctness to explain transparency seems to negate the possibility of non-evidential considerations impacting beliefs formed via deliberation, yet this seems highly unlikely. They claim that when one deliberates about whether to believe that $p$, one necessarily invokes the concept of belief and is, therefore, aware
of its standard of correctness. This awareness is what explains why in deliberation one answers the question of whether to believe that \( p \) by answering the question whether \( p \). Yet, they claim, in all non-deliberative belief formation the concept is not necessarily invoked and, thus, non-evidential factors can influence belief. Indicating that non-evidential factors can influence beliefs in which the standard of correctness is not consciously invoked seems to imply that such factors cannot influence deliberative beliefs in which the standard is invoked. Finally, both my account of belief and my account of how non-evidential factors influence belief support the distinction previously made concerning how belief differs from the other cognitive attitudes. Unlike other cognitive attitudes, which one might have toward \( p \) due to factors about oneself or one’s needs/desires, one believes that \( p \) based solely on factors about \( p \), namely whether it is true, obtains. By endorsing strong truth-regulation, my account upholds this distinction by claiming that only truth-indicative factors (actual or perceived) influence whether one believes that \( p \). However, my account of how non-evidential factors influence belief explains how even given the fact that the truth of \( p \) is the sole focus when one believes that \( p \), it remains possible for non-evidential factors to influence belief—deliberative and otherwise.

Most basically, belief is a cognitive attitude that, roughly speaking, one has toward propositions one regards as true. However, since other cognitive attitudes share this rough description, that is they, too, involve regarding propositions as true, it is necessary to refine this conception of belief in order to distinguish it from these other attitudes.

As we saw above, the difference between belief and other cognitive attitudes lies in the way in which each attitude “regards as true.” When a person assumes, supposes, or imagines that \( p \), he regards \( p \) as true in the sense of “lending” to \( p \) the property of truth, and he does so
primarily due to factors about himself or his circumstances. For instance, I might imagine that I am on a beautiful beach in Hawaii for any number of reasons, all of which would stem from something about myself (e.g. my goals, desires, lack of concentration, etc.). What these reasons never would include is evidence available to me indicating that I am, in fact, on a beautiful beach in Hawaii. Awareness of such evidence would negate the need or impulse to so imagine. Depending on the strength of the evidence, I might believe that I am on said beach, or it might prompt me merely to consider whether I am there. On the other hand, when a person believes that \( p \), he regards \( p \) as true in the sense of “attributing” truth to \( p \) or “recognizing” the truth of \( p \), and he does so due to factors about \( p \) that indicates \( p \)’s truth. He might very well be mistaken about the truth of \( p \), but it remains the case that he believes that \( p \) due to considerations about \( p \) that appear to indicate that \( p \) is true. At the minimum, then, believing that \( p \) requires consideration of/interaction with factors that support (or appear to support) the truth of \( p \).

Of course, mere consideration/apprehension of factors indicative of \( p \)’s truth does not sufficiently capture what it is to believe that \( p \). Unlike when imagining, truth-indicative features of \( p \) can influence other cognitive attitudes, such as assuming and supposing. The board game, Clue, a childhood favorite of mine, provides a nice example of assuming that \( p \) due to factors indicative of \( p \)’s truth. Based on what you know of the cards in your opponents’ and your hands combined with what you know as a result of several rounds of players making suggestions as to the who, how and where of the murder, you apprehend several factors indicating that Miss Scarlet killed Mr. Body. For instance, say that you have definitively narrowed down the murder to either Miss Scarlet or Professor Plum; that is, you believe that it is one of these two people. However, there are a few truth-indicative factors that incline you
to assume that Miss Scarlet did the deed. These might include the fact that, despite several suggestions naming her as the murderer, no one has revealed to you that they hold the Miss Scarlet card. Added to this might be the fact that though another player has consistently named Professor Plum as the murder on her turn, after being shown a card on her last turn, she begins suggesting Miss Scarlett on her next turn. You do not believe that Miss Scarlet is the killer, but you do decide to assume that she is due to these truth-indicative factors and you turn your focus, instead, to discerning the weapon used. Therefore, mere consideration/influence of truth-indicative features of $p$ cannot adequately capture what is unique (among cognitive attitudes) about believing that $p$.

In order to identify the distinction between belief and other cognitive attitudes that regard $p$ as true, we must look beyond influences to impetuses. Recall that earlier in this chapter, I argue that one believes that $p$ based (primarily) on factors about $p$, while one assumes, imagines, supposes, etc. that $p$ based (primarily) on factors about oneself. Someone might question this distinction in light of the Clue example (and what it broadly demonstrates) since one might think that it shows that one can assume that $p$ due not to factors about oneself, but, rather, factors about $p$. After all, your decision to assume that Miss Scarlet committed the murder stemmed from factors indicating the truth of her guilt. Upon closer examination, however, no conflict exists. Even though your decision to assume that $p$ (Miss Scarlet committed the murder) is influenced by truth-indicative factors about $p$, your decision ultimately stems from factors about you, namely the combination of (1) your desire to win the game and (2) your judgment that assuming that $p$ (Miss Scarlet is guilty) is a good (perhaps the best) way to accomplish (1). However, should you come to believe that Miss Scarlett committed the murder, your belief ultimately would stem from factors that indicate that she
did, indeed, kill Mr. Body. In the case of belief, one believes that $p$ primarily/ultimately due to truth-indicative factors of $p$; whereas in the case of other cognitive attitudes, the ultimate impetus stems from factors about the epistemic agent. Therefore, the distinction made earlier in this chapter between belief and other cognitive attitudes remains.

**Belief Is Being Satisfied That $p$**

Thus far, we have established and clarified the distinction between belief and other cognitive attitudes that regard $p$ as true. With regard to articulating a full account of belief, however, a final step remains. While it is true that the impetus for belief that $p$ rests in the recognition of truth-indicative factors of $p$, why one person might believe that $p$ based on a particular set of truth-indicative factors of $p$, while another person would not, given those same factors, requires explanation. For instance, two people (Jack and Jill) might apprehend and understand the same truth-indicative features of $p$ and yet only Jack comes to believe that $p$ due to these features. While both were aware of factors that spoke in favor of the truth of $p$, only Jack took $p$ to be true as a result of these features. What, then, explains the difference? I contend that the difference is that only Jack was satisfied that $p$ as a result of the available truth-indicative factors. That is, only he found the evidence available to both him and Jill to sufficiently support the truth of $p$.

Before I continue, let me make clear what I mean by “satisfied” and “sufficiently.” Most commonly, if one is satisfied, one is contented or satiated. This is *not* the meaning I have in mind. Rather, the sense of satisfied I have in mind concerns conditions being fulfilled, standards being met, etc. For instance, if you hire someone to paint your living room, after the

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21 They might also apprehend and understand the same features of $p$ indicating $p$’s falsity.
job is complete you, likely, will feel either satisfied or dissatisfied with the outcome. Your determination will be based, at least in part, on whether the painters met your expectations—that is, your standard for what constitutes a good paint job. Similarly, Jack and Jill had access to the same reasons/evidence supporting the truth of p, yet only Jack was satisfied by this evidence concerning the truth of p. Put another way, the available evidence was sufficient to meet Jack’s standards for the demonstration of truth, but insufficient to meet Jill’s standards. Additionally, when I say that the available evidence was sufficient to meet Jack’s standards, I mean only that said evidence, at the least, met the minimum of Jack’s requirements for the establishment of truth of p. It is possible that Jack would have believed that p based on less evidence or that he would be more confident in his belief if there were more or different evidence available. Nonetheless, the evidence that is available met or exceeded his standards for the demonstration of truth, but did not meet those of Jill. In other words, the evidence was sufficient for belief for Jack, but not for Jill.

It is also important to note that the stringency of one’s standards for the demonstration of truth might vary depending on context, importance, interest, attentiveness, etc. In order to better understand what I have in mind, let us, first consider a non-belief example of shifting standards and, then, return to Jack and Jill. Suppose you need your living room painted, but you are on a tight budget and have to hire less expensive, less experienced painters. When you evaluate the end product, you are satisfied with the paint job given the amount you paid for the work. Had more expensive, more experienced painters done the work, you would not have been satisfied with the end product. Perhaps you would have expected the work done more quickly and the detail work to be more precise. The end product remains the same, it is only your evaluation that changes based on which painters did the work. Similarly, returning to
Jack and Jill, suppose that Jack believes that it will not rain tomorrow based on the weather report saying that there is only a 10% chance of rain. Jane, however, does not share Jack’s belief; rather, she withholds belief (and disbelief) about whether it will rain. Suppose, now, that Jack needs to transport a delicate and expensive antique tomorrow and even the slightest exposure of the piece to rain would prove destructive. Under these circumstances, Jack might not be satisfied that it will not rain tomorrow, but, instead, he might seek out more evidence or withhold judgment like Jill. Though the evidence available to Jack did not change, his standards for the demonstration of truth became more stringent due to the potentially bad consequences that might result should it rain. It is also possible that Jack continues to believe that it will not rain, but his confidence in this belief is not strong enough to risk moving the painting tomorrow.

Belief, then, just is being satisfied that \( p \), and, importantly, there is no further step between the two; once you are satisfied that \( p \), you believe that \( p \). Of course, what satisfies one person regarding whether \( p \) might do little to satisfy someone else, but it remains the case that once one is satisfied concerning \( p \) one believes that \( p \).

Potential Objections

It is, now, time to address three potential objections to the account of belief I have presented above. The first two objections involve my claim that belief just is being satisfied that \( p \). On the one hand, some might question the compatibility of this conception of belief with the fact that many of one’s beliefs do not appear to involve any type of evaluation or assessment regarding whether \( p \). On the other hand, one might worry that if one must be satisfied that \( p \) in order to believe that \( p \), then belief cannot come in degrees since “being
satisfied” seems to indicate a high degree of certainty about whether $p$. The third objection addresses concerns raised by David Owens about a claim made by Shah and Velleman (and with which I agree) to the effect that a satisfactory account of belief must explain not only why the truth of $p$ is the sole focus when trying to decide whether to believe that $p$, but also how non-evidentiary factors (i.e. those not actually relevant to the question whether $p$) can sometimes influence whether one believes that $p$. I will address each of these objections in turn.

**Too Demanding**

Some might worry that talk of “being satisfied” that $p$ implies a level of awareness and evaluation not characteristic of most instances of belief. For example, when I look out the window and see a squirrel, I immediately seem to believe that there is a squirrel in the yard. No process of evaluation of the truth of the proposition is apparent. Even non-perceptual beliefs often appear to lack any sense of evaluation. I now am satisfied that my cat is at home in my apartment (likely asleep) and, therefore, on my account, I believe that my cat is at home in my apartment. The worry here, however, stems from wrongly assuming that being satisfied that $p$ must be more robust than it actually often is.

When I look at the squirrel, I immediately seem to acquire the belief that there actually is a squirrel in the yard, which on my analysis must have involved being satisfied that there is a squirrel in the yard. But there is nothing mysterious about this. Long experience of my perceptual capacities has demonstrated that what I see is a highly reliable indicator of what is true. Of course, I recognize that my perceptual capacities are fallible, but under normal circumstances and in the absence of other reasons to discount my perceptions, it just is the case
that I am satisfied that what I see is true, and thus (seemingly immediately) believe what I see. The question of whether $p$, which in this case is whether there is a squirrel in the yard, just is decided by the fact that I see it. As for my belief that my cat is at home in my apartment, I need not deliberate as to the veracity of the proposition to be satisfied of its truth. Since she has always been at home when I return and I have no reason to suspect a change in this pattern, I take for granted that she is at home and, thus, am satisfied that my cat is at home in my apartment. In fact, intentional deliberation is often prompted precisely when one is not satisfied by what is in front of them, so to speak. Should the image of the squirrel that appears before me flicker, the mere sensory input might not be enough to satisfy me that there is a squirrel in front of me and, thus, might prompt me to consider the question more thoroughly. Likewise, it is often the case that we believe what others tell us. When I ask someone on the bus what time it is, I believe what she tells me because I am satisfied of the truth of her statement merely by her looking at her watch and relating to me the time. However, if what she tells me regarding the time seems incongruous with other factors, such as the position of the sun or the number of people on the bus during what is supposed to rush hour, I might doubt what she has reported and seek further information regarding the time. Similarly, suppose that all visible indicators seem consistent with what she tells me concerning the time, but a fellow passenger whispers to me that this woman always reports the same time when asked. I am, now, no longer satisfied that it is the time she told me and decide to pull my phone out of my backpack to check, something I was trying to avoid doing on the crowded bus.

*Must One Be Certain To Be Satisfied?*

Even if “being satisfied that $p$” need not involve robust deliberation or evaluation, one
still might worry that it requires a rather high degree of certainty, which does not seem characteristic of many beliefs. Additionally, one might worry that this conception of belief is incompatible with there being degrees of belief. However, a high degree of certainty about whether \( p \) is not necessary in order to be satisfied that \( p \) and, therefore, believe that \( p \). As we saw with Jack’s assessment of whether it will rain, above, it is often the case that the level of certainty required to be satisfied that \( p \) is directly proportional to the perceived importance of being correct about whether \( p \). Under most circumstances, I am satisfied that there is a squirrel in the yard even though I would say that I am only moderately certain (given my philosophical worries about brains in vats and the like) that there is a squirrel in the yard. Of course, in these situations there isn’t much riding on being correct. If my life or even a large sum of money was riding on being correct, then I would require a much higher degree of certainty in order for me to be satisfied that there is a squirrel in the yard. There are also contexts in which one must balance the level of certainty one ideally would like to have against the time or other resources one is willing/able to spend investigating whether \( p \). However, this really just boils down to ranking the overall importance of being correct about whether \( p \) in light of other things of importance that require your time, energy, attention, etc.

For example, on its own, I would desire a fairly high degree of certainty about whether the car I am about to buy is the best choice for me. After all, it is an expensive purchase and one I will have for long time. However, given that I am under a tight deadline at work and also need to help a friend plan her wedding, both of which I also think important, I realize that I will have to decide whether the car I am about to buy is the best choice for me based on less research (evidence) than I ideally would require. In other words, given the fact that I only have so much time to devote to these three projects, whether I am satisfied that \( p \) (that the car I am
about to buy either is the one best suited to me) must be determined with less consideration than I would ideally prefer. Therefore, should I become satisfied that \( p \), I might only be moderately certain whether \( p \). In situations such as these, we might say that I am all things considered satisfied; given the time and energy available to deliberate about whether \( p \), I am satisfied. Of course, it certainly might be the case that given my constraints I must purchase the car without actually being satisfied--without believing that it is the best car for me. It is often the case that one must act even when one is still undecided (has not come to a belief) about the best course of action, but this reality does not conflict with my account of belief. I am claiming that when someone does believe that \( p \), he might be strongly, mostly, or even cautiously satisfied of the truth of \( p \).\(^{22}\) One’s level of certainty is typically impacted by the amount and quality of evidence available/considered, the importance of answering correctly whether \( p \), and internal and external constraints on one’s deliberation. In the end, if one is willing/able to choose between the various options--say \( p \) or \( q \), or \( p \) or \( \sim p \)--then one is satisfied (to a degree strong enough to yield a decision) whether \( p \). Put another way, once one is willing to answer the question whether \( p \), then one either believes or not that \( p \). It does not matter whether one was willing to answer whether \( p \) based on complete or minimal certainty. I have already made clear that one’s willingness to answer whether \( p \) might vary based on one’s standards of truth-indication and/or across circumstances, which is just another way of saying that one might believe that \( p \) with varying degrees of certainty. In the end, in as much as one

\(^{22}\) This could easily be translated into degrees of belief language. However, I intentionally do no use that wording because it is often unclear to me whether “degrees of belief” is meant to indicate differing levels of confidence about the correctness of a belief or different levels or types of belief. I have no problem with the former, but disagree with latter. I see no reason to think in terms of one person having a 0.40 belief that \( p \) and another person having a 0.70 belief that \( p \). Since I take belief to be a doxastic state, then one is either in that state or not. One’s confidence about whether one is correct to be in the doxastic state of believing that \( p \), however, might vary greatly among people. Nonetheless, they all believe that \( p \).
is satisfied that $p$, one believes that $p$.

However, once I admit that pragmatic factors impact the amount of time, energy or resources one can/wants to devote to deciding whether to believe that $p$ and thereby to the question whether $p$, one might argue that I have allowed non-truth-indicative factors to partially determine one’s answer to whether $p$. This is an important point and I want to be clear about it. While it is true that both my busy schedule and relative lack of interest are reasons why I only devote a limited amount of time to deciding whether to believe that mangoes are more nutritious than apples, it remains the case that neither factor impacts what I decide. In other words, pragmatic or prudential concerns might impact how I go about deciding whether to believe that $p$ and, thus, whether $p$, but neither impacts what I decide. The only factors relevant to whether to believe that $p$ are those relevant to whether $p$, and those only include factors relevant to (or believed to be relevant to) the truth of $p$. Of course, it should be noted that one might hold an incorrect belief and still be justified in doing so since one might have good reasons for judging that $p$ even if $\neg p$ is the case.

**Must a Belief Be Correct To Be Reasonable?**

In fact, the third objection I want to address utilizes this distinction between correct and justified belief to argue for the relevance of factors beyond the truth of $p$ to the question whether to believe that $p$. David Owens argues that “[j]ust because a state or an activity is governed by a standard of correctness it does not follow that we can explain what makes it reasonable to be in that state or to engage in that activity by reference to this standard of correctness.”\(^{23}\) He uses the example of assertion to make his point. Assertion, too, has a

\(^{23}\) Owens, “Does Belief Have an Aim?” 285.
standard of correctness such that an assertion that $p$ is correct iff $p$. However, the question whether to assert that $p$ is not transparent to the question whether $p$. In fact, though we would judge an assertion made by a liar as incorrect, we would not typically judge it to be unreasonable or irrational. Why, then, must the truth of whether $p$ be the solely relevant factor in deciding whether to believe that $p$? For instance, consider again Ralph, the unhappy husband who wants to believe that his wife is faithful even though evidence strongly indicates that she is not. Why cannot the fact that he would be happier believing that his wife is faithful be a justificatory reason for believing that she isn’t cheating on him? After all, the man’s happiness does seem like a justificatory reason for one to falsely assert to him that his wife isn’t cheating on him.

Owens is correct that belief’s standard of correctness, alone, is insufficient to explain what makes a belief reasonable or unreasonable. Nonetheless, unlike assertion, non-truth-indicative factors cannot impact the reasonableness of belief. Both false assertion and false belief involve deception. In the case of assertion, the liar seeks to further some plan or purpose through deceiving his listeners by asserting something false. He is fully aware that his assertion is incorrect, but in order for his deception to work, his listeners must be unaware of this fact. However, in the case of the unhappy husband, the person who must be deceived is himself. Even if he was able to achieve this self-deception, it would still be the case that what he must deceive himself about is the answer to the question whether $p$, that is whether his wife is cheating on him. Neither his happiness nor any other non-truth-indicative fact or consideration is relevant to or persuasive in answering that question. In a way, assertion, though not a propositional attitude, serves as a nice intermediary between belief and other cognitive attitudes such as assuming and imagining. While adopting the latter attitudes toward a
proposition involves only one’s wants or needs and the adopting the former involves only the truth of \( p \), assertion involves both. In deciding whether to assert that \( p \), one must consider whether \( p \) (even in order to successfully lie, falsely assert), but the truth of \( p \) is not the only relevant factor as to whether one asserts that \( p \). Even if \( p \), one might not assert that \( p \) due to timidity, selfishness, suspense, etc. And as we saw above, even if \( \sim p \), one might assert \( p \) in order to deceive. In the case of belief, however, one is essentially adopting the attitude of “actually true” toward a proposition. Thus, the only relevant consideration is whether \( p \) is actually true. Of course, in deciding whether to decide whether to believe that \( p \), one’s desires and purposes have utmost prominence and authority, but once one decides to engage the question whether to believe that \( p \), the truth of whether \( p \) is sovereign.

Before moving on, I want to consider a third option available to the unhappy husband. As we saw above, if the unhappy husband were to base his belief solely on the overwhelming evidence of his wife cheating on him, it would be incorrect for him to believe that she is not cheating (\( \sim p \)). Further, even if he allowed considerations of his own happiness to impact his belief concerning his wife’s fidelity, such non-truth-indicative factors would not justify him in believing that \( \sim p \). We did not consider, however, whether he would be correct and/or justified in not believing that \( p \). Doing so does not require him to believe the opposite, that \( \sim p \). Rather, he could decide merely not to judge one way or the other, perhaps claiming that he will only believe when the evidence is conclusive, such as catching her in bed with someone else. Should he choose the course of not deciding between \( p \) and \( \sim p \), there would be no belief about which to ask if he is justified or correct. Of course there are other epistemic evaluations that could be made concerning his estimation of the evidence already before him or his requirement of certainty before forming a belief (and whether he conforms to this standard in other epistemic
situations), but I must acknowledge that one cannot condemn his decision to postpone deciding what to believe merely because it is influenced by non-epistemic factors. People make such decisions everyday if for no other reason than the scarcity of time. However, none of this impacts the force or accuracy of what I argued previously. One might postpone (perhaps indefinitely) his decision concerning whether to believe $p$ or $\neg p$ and, thus, choose not to believe either, but once one decides to believe $p$ or $\neg p$, then evaluations of the belief’s correctness and justification are appropriate and considerations of non-epistemic reasons are irrelevant.

**What Counts As Evidence**

Given the importance of evidence in my account of belief, it is important that I specify what I mean by “evidence.” However, broaching the subject of evidence potentially opens up a number of complex issues with which I wish not to become entangled. Let me quickly note these, explain why I will not address them, and then set them aside. First is the issue of justification. On many accounts of belief, evidence serves an important, if not primary, role in determining whether one’s belief is justified. Since my project deals with matters prior to considerations of justification, namely belief formation, I will not engage debates over justification. A second issue related to evidence concerns what kinds of things can serve as evidence for belief. Candidates for the role of evidence include: sensory input, knowledge, beliefs, propositions about which one is certain, etc. My account of belief does not claim that believers always and only base their beliefs on what actually is evidence, but rather on what they take to be evidence. Therefore, I remain neutral with regard to debates over what counts as evidence.

What I will discuss in this section is the role evidence plays in my account of belief. I
have argued above that belief is being satisfied that \( p \) and that one comes to be satisfied (or not) that \( p \) based on evidence, or at least what one takes to be evidence. For me, then, evidence that \( p \) is that which counts in favor of the truth of \( p \). Though, above, I set aside issues surrounding justification, I do want to make some distinction between what one might take to be evidence and what actually is evidence. Evidence that \( p \) might come in the form of sensory input, knowledge, other beliefs, testimony, but whatever is the case it must have a relation to \( p \) such that it not only is consistent with \( p \) being true, but also, and more importantly, lends support to the claim that \( p \) is true. For instance, the fact that it is a sunny day is consistent with the belief that Joe will get a sunburn today, but on its own it in no way lends support for the belief. If we added to the fact that it is a sunny day the further facts that Joe forgot to apply sunscreen, that he will be swimming outdoors for more than three hours, and that he has a fair complexion that burns easily, then together these facts are not only consistent with the belief that Joe will get a sunburn today, but also lend support to this being true. In other words, taken together these facts are evidence for the truth of \( p \) where \( p \) is the proposition that Joe will get a sunburn today. The fact that it is a sunny day, on its own, is not evidence for the proposition, but, of course, someone might mistakenly think that it is and form the belief that Joe will get a sunburn today.

Additionally, something might count in favor of \( p \) being true even when \( p \) is not true. Consider, for example, how people used to believe that the earth was flat. At that time, people believed they had evidence for the earth being flat, so they believed that it was flat. As it turns out, however, the earth is not flat. Nonetheless, it remains the case that they had evidence for their belief; that is, they had sensory input, other beliefs, testimony and the like that supported the claim that the earth was flat. Likewise, in the above sunburn scenario, it might end up that
Joe does not get a sunburn after all. It remains the case that there was evidence that he would. When considering evidence in relation to belief it is important to remember that one might be mistaken about what one considers evidence and that evidence in support of the truth of a belief is not infallible.

**Conclusion**

Having a clear conception of belief is crucial for any discussion of doxastic control. The views one holds concerning belief (both what belief is and what it is to hold a belief) strongly influence not only whether control of belief is possible, but also whether such control is deemed important. In this chapter, we explored aspects of belief ranging from its status as a cognitive attitude to the role truth plays at the conceptual level. In particular, we saw that even though belief is not the only cognitive attitude for which consideration of the truth of $p$ is operative, it is the only cognitive attitude for which consideration of the truth of $p$ is necessary. As we saw, this necessity stems from a feature of belief called transparency, which refers to the fact that the question of whether to believe that $p$ invariably gives way to the question whether $p$. Because of this, one believes that $p$ (or not) based solely on the evidence—that which one thinks indicates the truth or falsity of $p$. Ideally, what one considers evidence for or against $p$ would line up with that which actually does indicate the truth or falsity of $p$, but this frequently is not the case. Nonetheless, the tight connection between belief that $p$ and the (perceived) truth of $p$ makes it such that one believes that $p$ iff one is satisfied that $p$. In other words, since one’s answer to the question whether to believe that $p$ is determined by how one answers the question whether $p$, then one can only believe that $p$ if one thinks that $p$ is true.

Of course, the account of belief I present in this chapter will likely encounter its fair
share of objections, several of which I attempt to anticipate and address above. Though I will not rehash my responses to these objections, I would like to reiterate what I mean by “being satisfied that p.” Though we might more commonly think of “satisfied” in the sense of one being contented or satiated, the connotation I have in mind concerns conditions being fulfilled or standards being met. Therefore, on my view, one believes that $p$ when (and only when) one deems the truth condition of belief (that $p$ actually obtains) is met. Of course, one might mistakenly judge that this truth condition has been met when, in fact, it has not or even could not be met. This is where the sense of standards being met comes into play. Though the question of whether $p$ is true is not subject to individual standards, what one considers relevant to and satisfactory for answering that question is. Therefore, one will only believe that $p$ once one is satisfied that one’s evidential standards—however stringent or loose—have been met.

Keeping this conception of belief before us, we are now ready to examine key arguments against the possibility of doxastic control. In chapter three, I highlight involuntarist accounts offered by Bernard Williams and Pamela Hieronymi and argue that both fail to prove that we cannot exert doxastic control. Additionally, I borrow an alternate conception of at-will control from Hieronymi and argue not only that it translate well from the realm of action to that of belief, but also that is more accurately captures the valuable aspects of doxastic control.
3. THE INVOLUNTARINESS OF BELIEF CONSIDERED

Doxastic control is most frequently denied because we lack the ability to believe at-will. In this chapter, I not only consider two arguments against at-will doxastic control, but also differentiate between two conceptual accounts of such control. In doing so, I aim to (1) provide understanding of involuntarist arguments influential within the doxastic control debate; and (2) argue that the first account of at-will poses no difficulty for the possibility of doxastic control and that the second account only does so when question-begging assumptions are made. In the final section of the chapter, I consider a suggestion made by Pamela Hieronymi in which we look to the phrase “fire at will” for insight into what it is to act at-will. Though Hieronymi quickly sets aside this conceptualization, I contend that it shows great promise not only in the case of action, but also in the case of belief. In doing so, the question of whether control requires alternate possibilities arises. With the help of John Martin Fischer’s distinction between regulative and guidance control, I argue against the necessity of alternate possibilities.

At-will control may be conceptualized in two different ways. First, there is the sense of at-will that entails that any action performed at will is a voluntary and basic action. A basic action is one performed without performing intermediate steps. Examples include, raising one’s arm, shouting, winking, etc. Such actions are in contrast to non-basic actions, which require intermediate steps, such as making dinner, painting a wall, buying a present, etc. Second, at-will control may be conceptualized as requiring responsive to practical reasons. Here, whether one’s control of the action is direct or immediate does not matter. For example,

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on this conceptualization, raising one’s arm and making dinner can be equally at-will. What matters is whether the decision to raise one’s arm or make dinner is responsive to practical reasons.

On the first account, belief falls short of the at-will standard because it cannot be voluntarily and directly brought about without intermediate steps. On the second account, belief falls short of at-will control because the decision whether to believe that $p$ is not responsive to practical reasons. Rather, when answering the question whether $p$, the will is only moved by epistemic reasons. One can consider and, at times, see the draw of practical reasons to believe that $p$, but no such reasons are efficacious when answering the question whether $p$.

**Alston on Doxastic Control**

William Alston provides an example illustrating the impossibility of at-will control of belief in both senses of at-will discussed above.

My argument for this, if it can be called that, simply consists in asking you to consider whether you have any such power. Can you, at this moment, start to believe that the Roman Empire is still in control of western Europe, just by deciding to do so? If you find it incredible that you should be sufficiently motivated to even try to believe this, suppose that someone offers you $500 million to believe it, and that you are much more interested in the money than the truth. Could you do what it takes to get that reward?²⁵

First, Alston poses a question intended to demonstrate the impossibility of voluntary, basic at-will control. One cannot start to believe “at this moment” that the Roman Empire is still in control of Western Europe by merely deciding to do so. He, then, poses a question exploring

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whether adequate practical incentive can motivate one to form the same belief. Yet, even in the face of a $500 million reward, it seems impossible for one to form such a belief based solely on the financial incentive. It is important to note, however, that Alston’s second question involving practical incentive continues to rely on the immediacy of the previous conception of at-will, for if the immediacy factor was relaxed, then it seems likely that one could “do what it takes to get that reward,” perhaps via hypnosis. Later, I will consider arguments against at-will control of belief that do not rely on the immediacy criterion. Instead, this argument against the possibility of at-will control of belief relies on the fact that the will is immune to practical reasons when directly deciding what to believe.

The Impossibility of At-Will Control of Belief According to Williams

The popularity of employing the at-will standard for voluntary belief originated with an argument presented by Bernard Williams in “Deciding to Believe.” Williams argues that given belief’s tight connection with truth, it is not possible to believe at-will. Instead, he says that beliefs seem more like “things that we, as it were, found we had (to put it crudely)…” Though not explicitly stated, Williams seems to assume that since we cannot believe at-will, we lack control over belief. However, as we shall see, Williams does not appear to appreciate the implications of his argument for many actions. His argument runs as follows:

If I could acquire a belief at-will, I could acquire it whether it was true or not; moreover I would know that I could acquire it whether it was true or not. If in full consciousness I could will to acquire a ‘belief’ irrespective of its truth, it is unclear that before the event I can seriously think of it as a belief, i.e. as something purporting to represent reality.

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26 Williams, “Deciding to Believe.”
27 Ibid. 147.
28 Ibid. 148.
Williams holds that since one could not in full consciousness acquire a belief regardless of its truth, one cannot acquire a belief at-will, that is, simply because one wants to. Though I concede the impossibility of this form of at-will belief, I take issue with Williams’ contention that the impossibility of at-will belief entails the impossibility of voluntary belief— that is, belief over which we can exert some other form of control.

Nishi Shah voices similar misgivings about Williams’ argument in his article, “Clearing Space for Doxastic Voluntarism.” Shah argues that “the interpretation [of at-will] that is relevant to the thesis of doxastic voluntarism requires interpreting ‘at-will’ in such a way that an inability to do something at-will entails an inability to do it voluntarily.” Though he acknowledges that there might be some interpretation of at-will where it is synonymous with voluntary, this is not necessarily, or even often, the case. Shah is making clear that even if we grant the impossibility of at-will control of belief this only negates the possibility of doxastic control if at-will control is synonymous with or necessary for voluntary control, and there is no obvious reason for thinking either is the case. In fact, if at-will control (of the variety being discussed here) was synonymous with or necessary for voluntary control, then it could never be the case that one voluntarily makes dinner, rides a bike or any number of other actions that require intermediate steps and, therefore, cannot be done at-will. At-will control is a kind of voluntary control, but it is not the only kind. However, just what kind of link does exist between at-will and voluntary is an important question and one that is central to Pamela Hieronymi’s argument against at-will control of belief in “Believing at Will,” to which we will turn shortly. For now, however, let us continue our consideration of Shah’s response to Williams’ argument.

Shah attempts to expose the flaw in Williams’ argument by constructing a parallel argument using a clearly voluntary activity in place of belief. Williams’ argument trades on belief’s tight connection with truth, which is sometimes characterized as belief aiming at truth. Shah, therefore, decides to use lying in his parallel example because it is both voluntary and has an aim—deception. Unfortunately, Shah fails to create a truly parallel example. His argument is as follows:

If I could lie at-will, then I could lie whether or not I deceived anyone; moreover I would know that I could lie whether or not I deceived anyone. If in full consciousness I could will to lie irrespective of deceiving anyone, it is unclear that before the event I can seriously think of it as a lie, i.e., something purporting to deceive. 30

Notice that while Williams’ argument shows an impossibility, Shah’s does not. Shah’s equates lying at-will with lying whether or not anyone is deceived, but people frequently lie without actually deceiving anyone. Just think of the number of teenagers who compound their trouble by unsuccessfully lying to their parents in an attempt to explain why they broke curfew. However, one could not be said to lie at-will if one does not aim at deceiving someone. Therefore the parallel impossibility in the case of lying would be telling a lie whether or not it was deceptive. Of course just as in the case of belief, where a person might get the truth-value of a proposition wrong, so might a person be mistaken about a proposition’s ability to deceive even when aiming at deception. Unlike Shah’s example, one need not actually accomplish the deception, but one must intend to deceive to count as lying. After making the necessary changes, the argument now reads:

If I could tell a lie at-will, then I could tell a lie whether or not it was deceptive; moreover I would know that I could tell a lie whether or not it was deceptive. If in full consciousness I could will to tell a lie irrespective of its ability to deceive, it is unclear that before the event I can seriously think of it as a lie, i.e.,

30 Ibid., 438.
something purporting to deceive.

Williams attempts to show the involuntariness of belief by demonstrating that believing at-will is not possible because it requires believing without regard to the conceptual constraints of belief. However, this example shows that Williams’ line of argument would also negate the voluntariness of any activity with similar conceptual constraints (such as lying), a conclusion that is clearly false. The conceptual constraints of lying require that if I want to lie, then I must aim to deceive. I might decide to lie to avoid punishment, to trick someone or because I am bored, but in order to lie, I must aim to deceive. Likewise, I might decide to believe (that is, deliberate about whether \( p \)) to be better informed, to do well on an exam or because I am bored, but to count as believing that \( p \), what I take to be the answer to the question whether \( p \) must decide the matter. In both situations, I am constrained by the requirements inherent to the respective conceptions, but this constraint does not negate the voluntariness of my lying or believing. Rather, abiding by these constraints just is what it is to lie or believe.

Therefore, Williams’ argument proves nothing more than the obvious fact that “if one does not see the relevance of a move with respect to the objective of a constitutively aim-governed activity, one does not count as engaging in the activity; at most one is pretending to engage in the activity.”\(^{31}\) One cannot legitimately claim to believe a proposition (take it to be true) if one adopts the belief contrary to or without regard to the truth-status of the proposition. Likewise, one cannot legitimately claim to have lied (aimed at deception) if one communicates an untruth without attempting to deceive. Therefore, those who employ Williams’ argument to demonstrate the involuntariness of belief can do so only at the cost of the voluntariness of lying and other aim-constituted actions.

\[^{31}\text{Ibid., 439.}\]
The Impossibility of At-Will Control of Belief According to Hieronymi

Pamela Hieronymi uses the second conception of “at-will” discussed above to offer a different argument for why one cannot believe at-will.\textsuperscript{32} Recall that on this conception one can act at-will only if the decision to perform the action is responsive to practical reasons. Hieronymi begins with Bernard Williams’ argument discussed above and, then, points to a counter-example created by Jonathan Bennett in his article “Why Is Belief Involuntary?”\textsuperscript{33} Bennett creates a scenario in which an alien race can believe at-will in the way Williams denies. In the same article, Bennett intended to counter his own counter-example, thus further illustrating the conceptual impossibility of believing at-will. However, at the beginning of the article, Bennett admits that he was unable to refute his own counter-example (the alien scenario) and, therefore, is unable to demonstrate the impossibility of at-will belief as he originally intended. Hieronymi seeks to pick up where Bennett faltered and successfully demonstrate why at-will belief is conceptually, not merely psychologically, impossible.

Hieronymi begins by examining the tight connection between at-will and voluntary control typically assumed within the doxastic control debate. Similar to Shah’s concerns above, she draws attention to the counter-intuitive result the tight connection between at-will a voluntary creates. As has been noted, raising one’s arm is the classic example of at-will control used throughout the debate. This is likely because raising one’s arm vividly captures the immediacy typically considered either necessary for or evidence of at-will control. More generally, raising one’s arm is an example of a basic action—an action performed without

\textsuperscript{32} Hieronymi, “Believing at Will.”
performing any preliminary or intermediate actions. Within the context of belief, the emphasis
on immediacy is intended to rule out possible instances of at-will control in which someone
takes a pill or uses hypnosis in order to believe. Hieronymi points out that if at-will control
can only be exerted over basic (immediate) actions and at-will control is necessary for
voluntary control, then only basic actions can be voluntary. However, if this was true, then the
same thing that disqualifies less immediate means of forming beliefs as examples of at-will
control would also disqualify less immediate forms of action as counting as at-will and, thus,
voluntary.

But note how odd it would be to use this sense of immediacy to distinguish what
ordinary humans do, in bringing themselves to believe through some process, from believing at-will – believing as an ordinary action. It would suggest that
bringing yourself to believe by the execution of some clunky, multi-step process
does not qualify as believing voluntarily simply because of the clunky process. But surely whatever sense of “voluntary” divides believing from raising one’s
right hand also divides believing from preparing dinner. The fact that I cannot
prepare dinner without chopping the vegetables, turning on the burner, and
heating the oil does not render my action any less “voluntary,” in the relevant
sense. It simply renders it non-basic. Likewise, if I were somehow so divinely
constituted as to be able to make it the case that dinner is prepared simply by
deciding that it be so, my action would be no more voluntary, in the relevant
sense. It would simply be much easier.

Therefore, if one wants to deny the possibility of voluntary control of belief by denying the
possibility of at-will control of belief, then a sense of at-will that implies more than mere
immediacy is required. Hieronymi sets for herself the task of identifying a sense of at-will that
can be used to undermine the voluntariness of belief without, also, running afoul of our
intuitions concerning the voluntariness of non-basic actions. Hieronymi considers several
possible conceptions of at-will that she ultimately discards for various reasons. I will return to

34 Say, taking a pill or reciting to yourself evidence supporting the desired belief.
one of these discarded suggestions later, but for now I move directly to the account of at-will she endorses.

Hieronymi argues that to believe voluntarily or at-will “would be to believe in the way we ordinarily act--for believing not to be the product of an action of belief-making, but rather to be an intentional action in its own right.”36 On her account, then, beliefs formed as a result of deliberation, hypnosis, pill-taking, etc. cannot exhibit voluntary or at-will control because such beliefs would be mere products of “an action of belief-making.” She further argues that it is not possible for belief to be an intentional action in its own right because “nothing could qualify as both an intentional action and a belief,”37 that is, nothing could qualify both as something responsive to practical reasons and a belief. Her argument for this claim centers on the kind of commitment you make when you intend and the kind of reasons that are relevant to whether one intends.

According to Hieronymi, “in believing p, one is committed to a positive answer to the question of whether p, while, in either x-ing intentionally or intending to x, one is committed to a positive answer to the question of whether to x.”38 In order for something to count as a belief and as an intentional action, one would be committed to giving a positive answer \textit{both} to the question whether p and to the question whether to believe that p. In answering whether p, that is whether p is true, one typically considers the epistemic reasons counting for or against p’s truth. However, in answering whether to believe that p (or whether believing that p would be worth doing, as Hieronymi describes it), one considers the pragmatic reasons counting for or against it being worthwhile to believe that p. Further, she argues that at-will control of belief

\begin{footnotesize}
36 Ibid., 157.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 160.
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requires more than simultaneous judgment both that $p$ and that believing that $p$ is worth doing; rather, one must judge both that $p$ and that believing that $p$ is worth doing because one decides to believe that $p$ in the same way one decides to act. In other words, one must positively answer both questions (whether $p$ is true and whether believing $p$ is worth doing) in light of practical reasons alone. This is because practical reasons are the only reasons one considers when one acts at-will and, according to Hieronymi, believing at-will just is believing in the same way one normally (intentionally) acts. However, as Alston demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter, practical reasons, even a $500$ million reward, cannot motivate one to give a positive answer to the question whether $p$ without evidential support. Therefore, on Hieronymi’s account, it is impossible for us to believe at-will.

There seem to be three ways I could respond to Hieronymi. First, I could challenge her account of at-will control on the grounds that by making intentional action the standard, she begs the question regarding at-will control of belief, particularly given that belief is not an action--intentional or otherwise. Second, I could grant the impossibility of believing at-will, yet challenge the assumption that at-will and voluntary are either equivalent or necessarily related. Third, I could argue for a different conception of at-will; one that would allow for the voluntariness of belief. Let us consider each of these responses in turn.

Hieronymi argues that one exhibits at-will control, say over $x$, when one can $x$ in the same way one (intentionally) acts, that is, when one can decide to $x$ for solely pragmatic reasons. She, then, argues that belief cannot meet this standard because it is not possible to believe that $p$ (that is, positively answer the question whether $p$) for solely practical reasons. However, on closer examination, problems arise. By making intentional action the standard for at-will control, the question of whether one has at-will control of belief essentially becomes
a question of whether belief is, or can be, an intentional action. Though an interesting question in its own right (and one I think Hieronymi answers correctly in the negative), this cannot be the question at the heart of the doxastic control debate. We know that we can exert at-will control over at least some of our actions. What we want to know and what is debated is whether we can exert such control over our beliefs. Even if it turns out that we can only exert at-will control over actions, this should not be because we have chosen to define at-will control as the type of control we exert over action. Additionally, these concerns are only further compounded when at-will and voluntary are treated as equivalent or necessarily connected, for the question of whether belief is voluntary is also now reduced to the question of whether belief is an action. And, again, though it might turn out that only (a certain subset of) actions are voluntary, this cannot be proven by, first, stipulating that something is voluntary when it is done at-will and, then, stipulating that intentional action is the standard for at-will control.

Hieronymi does not argue that at-will belief is impossible; she considers it already adequately demonstrated. What she finds less than adequate are the explanations offered of this impossibility. Therefore, she is not concerned with whether at-will belief is impossible; rather, she wants to make clear why at-will belief is impossible. In doing so she, also, seeks to identify a sense of “voluntary” that captures standard intuitions concerning what actions count as voluntary, yet negates the possibility of voluntary belief. In other words, she takes at-will and voluntary to be equivalent or in some way necessarily connected, though she does not argue for this (and, given her project, she need not do so). The supposed connection between at-will and voluntary is frequently taken for granted, which is particularly troubling and unhelpful when the conception of “at-will” in use is the basic action/immediacy conception active in Williams’ and other accounts. Hieronymi does an excellent job of demonstrating the
error of that conception, but nonetheless continues to assume that at-will and voluntary go hand in hand. As I discussed in chapter one and Nishi Shah pointed out in “Doxastic Deliberation” quoted earlier in this chapter, there is no obvious reason why such a strong connection between the two must obtain. Merely arguing against the possibility of believing at-will is insufficient to undermine the voluntariness of belief. If doxastic involuntarists want to point to the impossibility of at-will belief as proof of the impossibility of voluntary belief, they need to demonstrate that the latter requires the former. Therefore, I could grant the impossibility of at-will belief and not undermine my claim that we can exert voluntary control of belief. However, Hieronymi herself provides a promising possible conception of at-will such that acquiescence concerning the impossibility of at-will control of belief might not be necessary.

**Fire At-Will Control**

After rejecting the basic action/immediacy conception of at-will control, Hieronymi considers and rejects several other potential candidates. I want to return to one of those rejects. Hieronymi suggests that the phrase “fire at will,” which is said to soldiers in battle, might be instructive in determining the kind of voluntariness present in at-will control. Further, she takes the phrase to mean “something like, ‘fire when you see fit,’ or ‘fire when you judge it called for.’” 39 Interestingly, she admits that “of course, in this sense, we can and do believe at will.” 40 However, she rejects this conception, which I call the “judge called for” (JCF) conception, but not for the same reason she rejects the other conceptions of at will she considers. Up to this point, Hieronymi rejected potential conceptions because they would

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39 Ibid., 152.
40 Ibid.
require re-categorizing as involuntary non-basic actions that we typically (and uncontroversially) deem voluntary. In the case of the JCF conception, however, she rejects it precisely because it does not rule out the possibility of at-will belief. Given her goal of providing a satisfactory explanation of the impossibility of at-will belief, which she takes already to be sufficiently demonstrated, it is neither problematic nor surprising that she discards the JCF conception of at will. However, when the possibility of at-will control of belief is the question at hand, and not a working assumption, the JCF conception of at-will cannot be set aside simply because it is prima facie compatible with at-will belief.

Of course, the fact that Hieronymi did not offer an adequate argument against employing the JCF conception of at will does not mean that there is no such argument. Therefore, let us take a more thorough look at this conception of at will.

When a commanding officer tells his troops to "fire at will," he is telling them (1) not to wait for his command to fire and (2) (as Hieronymi pointed out), to fire when one judges it called for. The commander is not telling them to fire wildly or at random, nor is he saying that one should fire merely because one wants to. Rather, he is telling them to use their best judgment as to when and at what it is best to fire. In making this decision, soldiers likely must consider a number of factors. These factors might include whether one has a clear shot, how much ammunition one has left, whether a fellow soldier needs cover fire, and the overall aim of the mission. Further, if one were, later, to evaluate the soldiers' decisions to fire, one's determination would almost certainly depend on the particular situations of each soldier. A soldier who is pinned down with only 25 rounds of ammunition would likely forgo some shots.

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41 I am not, here, suggesting that soldiers make a mental checklist of these or other factors. Not only would the realities of combat make such an exercise impossible, doing so would likely have worse results than merely firing at random. Nonetheless, with training and experience, such considerations could become second nature.
that another soldier with good cover and ample ammunition would not. Likewise, the
information that a soldier has (or doesn't have) would impact his decisions about when to fire.
If the pinned down soldier knew that six of his buddies were coming to provide cover fire so
he could move to a more secure position, he might be less conservative in the shots he decides
to take. Therefore, to do something at-will in the fire at will sense seems to involve the
following general characteristics. First, one does not wait to be told to do x, rather one does x
when one judges it called for. Second, one does not do x for just any reason, but only for
reasons relevant to the activity at hand. Third, the context and circumstances in which one
finds oneself will influence when or if doing x is called for. Finally, the background
information one has also will influence when or if one judges doing x called for.

*Fire At-Will Control: From the Battlefield to Belief*

Now we must consider how this understanding of firing at will and the resulting JCF
conception of at will might work in the context of belief. Though it is unlikely that anyone ever
receives the command to "believe at will," the situation is not completely dissimilar. As we
grow up, we depend less and less on being told what we should believe and begin judging for
ourselves what to believe. This is not to say that we make up our minds about what to believe
completely apart from the testimony of others, but there is a big difference between taking
what our parents and teachers say as gospel truth (as we frequently do when we are younger)
and taking what our parents, teachers and others say into consideration when forming our
beliefs. When we conceive of believing at-will in terms of believing when one judges it called
for, there is a very real sense in which most people are operating under the order to believe at
will. Of course, this does not mean that we should or can believe merely because we want to.
Just as was the case in the fire at will example, one’s judgment of whether believing that \( p \) is called for will be influenced by one's context, circumstances, and background information. Given that you are completely lost and need to find the office building quickly so as not to miss your interview, you will likely judge it called for to believe the directions that the policewoman gives you when you ask. Likewise, when you are chatting with others at a cocktail party, you will likely judge it called for to believe the stories they tell you about themselves. However, suppose you are attending the same party, but instead of being just another guest looking for a pleasant evening, you are undercover trying to discover the identity of an art thief you have good reason is in attendance. Now you would likely not judge it called for to believe everyone's stories. Instead, you would likely judge that skepticism combined with probing, but discreet, questions are called for. Further, if you knew that the art thief was a woman, you would direct your skepticism and questions mostly (if not entirely) at the female attendees. In other words, your context, goals and background information influence whether and when you judge belief \( \text{that } p \) called for.

*Potential Objections to the JCF Conception of At-Will*

The JCF conception of at will translates nicely from the combat setting (and more generally the realm of action) to that of belief. However, we must return to a concern raised by Hieronymi, as well as Shah and Velleman, in order to further test the suitability of this account of at will. Recall that a primary argument against the immediacy conception of at will used by Williams and others is that it not only ruled out the possibility of voluntary belief, but also undermined the voluntariness of any non-basic actions. I could side-step this issue by once again emphasizing that at will and voluntary need not have such a close connection such as to
create a problem. Nonetheless, it seems best to tackle this issue head on and, thus, demonstrate, that the JCF conception of at will creates no counter-intuitive results concerning actions we typically consider voluntary.

In order to test how well the JCF conception of at will coincides with our intuitions, we should consider voluntary and non-voluntary actions, as well as actions that can be done immediately and those that involve intermediate steps (i.e. basic and non-basic). Our list of voluntary items will consist of: raising one's arm, cooking dinner, and lying. Our list of non-voluntary items will consist of: digestion, blushing, and sneezing. Borrowing the form of the test from Williams, we will see that the JCF conception of at will yields the correct results regarding the voluntary status of these actions.

If I could raise my arm at will, then I could raise my arm when I judge it called for to raise my arm. Since I can raise my arm when I judge it called for, then I can raise my arm at will.

If I could cook dinner at will, then I could cook dinner when I judge it called for to cook dinner. Since I can cook dinner when I judge it called for, then I can cook dinner at will.

If I could lie at will, then I could lie when I judge it called for to lie. Since I can lie when I judge it called for, then I can lie at will.

If I could digest at will, then I could digest when I judge it called for to digest. Since I cannot digest when I judge it called for to digest, then I cannot digest at will.

If I could blush at will, then I could blush when I judge it called for to blush. Since I cannot blush when I judge it called for to blush, I cannot blush at will.

If I could sneeze at will, I could sneeze when I judge it called for to sneeze. Since I cannot sneeze when I judge it called for to sneeze, I cannot sneeze at will.

42 The point of this exercise is to test whether the judged called for conception of at will aligns with what we typically would judge to be voluntary and non-voluntary actions. I consider the lists of actions that follow to be uncontroversial examples of voluntary and non-voluntary actions under normal circumstances.
Apart from concerns about correctly parsing voluntary and non-voluntary actions, some might worry that the inclusion of “judging” in the conception of at will requires a more cerebral conception than is necessary or desirable. This worry is similar to one I addressed in chapter two regarding my claim that one believes that \( p \) when one is satisfied that \( p \). Not surprisingly, my response here is much the same as the one offered there. One might judge it called for in a careful and methodical sense to raise one’s arm, cook dinner or lie. Conversely, one might also judge it called for in a quick or even subconscious manner to raise one’s arm, cook dinner, or lie. There is no reason to assume that in judging some action called for one must engage in time-consuming, deliberate, or any evaluation.

However, the variety of ways in which one might judge it called for to \( x \) hints at an asymmetry between action and belief that complicates any attempt to translate a notion of at will from action to belief. This asymmetry manifests in two ways, both of which seem to reveal a limitation in the case of belief that is not present in the case of action. In the first case, one might act at will for any number of reasons, including merely because one wants to so act, but in the case of belief, one can believe only if one is satisfied that \( p \). As Hieronymi correctly demonstrated, practical reasons such as desire, financial reward, expedience, etc., are ineffective in the case of belief. However, as I have already argued when considering Hieronymi’s account, the fact that belief operates within a narrower scope of relevant reasons does not, in itself, impinge upon the possibility of belief being either at-will or voluntary. The second difficulty concerns the way in which in the case of action one might judge it called for to \( x \) and yet still not \( x \). The same is not possible with belief. Belief that \( p \) is only called for if one is satisfied that \( p \), but once one is satisfied that \( p \), one believes that \( p \). In other words, one cannot judge it called for to believe that \( p \) and still not believe that \( p \). Due to the concerns this
fact raises about the voluntariness of JCF belief, a more detailed response is required. Below, I offer two responses, the first being relatively brief and the second requiring a detour into matters of free will.

Suppose I judge it called for to exercise three times a week, yet still choose not to exercise three times (or any times) a week. There are two ways in which we might characterize my “judging” here. First, I could be judging in the normative sense of what’s best for me from a health standpoint. Second, my judging might amount to nothing more than whatever it is that I decide to do. The first (normative) sense is not terribly problematic. One might judge any number of things called for from a health, etiquette, or moral perspective and yet still choose not perform that action. This does not reveal a special or enhanced kind of control one has over one’s actions. Rather, it merely demonstrates our ability to differentiate between what we ought to do and want we want to do.

Of course, it could be the case that I am not merely hypothetically considering what is best (all things considered) for me, but that I do judge it best for me to exercise three times a week and yet I still do not do so. Here we appear to encounter the problem of akrasia, weakness of will. However, far from being an example of control available over action, but not over belief, akrasia is a seeming lack of control. In such instances, I am unable to carry out the very action that I have judged called for not due to external impediment or unexpected illness or disability, but due to an internal disconnect between what I have willed to do and what I actually do. The fact that such weakness of will appears unavailable in the case of belief surely should not count against our control of belief. Of course, some might argue that instances of apparent akrasia are better explained by the fact that we, in fact, have altered what we judge called for. For instance, in the exercise case above, some would argue that the reason I do not
exercise three times a week is because I actually end up judging it called for not to so exercise. Perhaps, I still acknowledge that from a health perspective exercising three times a week is best for me, but because I value my current pleasure of sleeping in more than I value the potential long-term health benefits, I, in fact, judge it called for not to exercise. Whatever is the case regarding the reality of akrasia, neither alternative creates a problem for the possibility of doxastic control. If akrasia is real, then it appears that belief is immune to a weakness of the will to which action is not. If akrasia is not real, then one does, in fact, act as one judges called for, just as is possible in the case of belief.

There remains another issue, however, that is not so easily answered. At the heart of the second asymmetry lies concerns about the necessity of alternate possibilities. Most basically, the worry is that one cannot be said to act (or believe) freely and/or exhibit control unless at least one alternate possibility is available. Even if the option one actually chooses (or for our purposes, judges called for) is available, some argue that the action is not truly free unless still another option is available to the agent so that they could have chosen otherwise. The worry lurking here is that even if one can believe at will in the JCF sense, one still lacks genuine control of one’s belief because once one judges belief that \( p \) called for, one will believe that \( p \) and, therefore, lacks any alternative possibilities other than believing that \( p \). Though I remain unpersuaded that the principle of alternate possibilities should be a standard for free action (or belief), I recognize that many do find such a stance compelling. Therefore, it is important that I address the concern (as it relates to doxastic control) directly.

In doing so, I find John Martin Fischer's work within the free will debate salient. In

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particular, his distinction between regulative control and guidance control of action demonstrates that one can exhibit control of one’s actions even if alternative possibilities are unavailable. Of course, since Fischer is concerned with action and I am concerned with belief, which I argue is not an action, translation between the two realms will be necessary. In addition, I will make alterations to Fischer’s account that aim generally at improvement and consistency. Ultimately, I seek to start with excellent work done by Fischer and, then, craft an account of guidance control that is not only well-suited to belief, but also well-supported.

However, before I begin altering Fischer’s account, let’s take a look at it in its original form.

Fischer argues that the inability to do otherwise does not necessarily indicate a total lack of control, nor does it remove the possibility of moral responsibility for one's action. In making his argument, Fischer draws a distinction between two forms of agential—regulative and guidance. Regulative control includes the ability both to choose and do otherwise (i.e. alternate possibilities). Guidance control does not include those abilities, but nonetheless, allows for free action according to Fischer. He argues that "the two kinds of control can be pried apart analytically through the use of certain thought-experiments."44 These thought-experiments consist of Frankfurt-style examples. Before getting to one such example, Fischer first considers a regular case of driving his car. In this example, he has the reader suppose that he (Fischer) is driving his well-functioning car and he wishes to make a right turn. As a result of his intention to turn right, he signals and guides the car to the right. He further stipulates that he was able to form the intention not to turn the car to the right, but to guide it to the left instead.

I control the car, and I also have a certain sort of control over the car’s

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44 Fischer, Deep Control, 2013, 6.
movements. Insofar as I actually guide the car in a certain way, I shall say that I have "guidance control." Further, insofar as I have the power to guide the car in a different way, I shall say that I have "regulative control." 45

Next, Fischer has the reader consider a second case—a Frankfurt-style case. In this thought-experiment, Fischer guides his car to the right as he did in the previous scenario. However, unknown to him the car's steering apparatus works properly only when he steers the car to the right. In fact, the steering apparatus is broken in such a way that were he to turn the car in any other direction, the car would turn to the right in just the same way that it does when he turns it to the right. Of course, since he turns the car to the right, the steering functions normally and the car goes to the right in the same way that it would have had there been nothing wrong with the steering apparatus.

Here, as in the first case, it appears that I control the movement of the car in the sense of guiding it in a certain way to the right. I do not simply cause it to go to the right (say, as a result of sneezing or having an epileptic seizure or involuntary spasm). Thus, I exhibit guidance control of the car. (I control the car and I have control of the car, but I do not have control over the car's movements; the different prepositions typically indicate the different levels of control.) Generally, we assume that guidance control and regulative control go together. But this case (which has some of the salient structural features of a Frankfurt-type case) helps to show that they can at least in principle pull apart: one can have guidance control without regulative control. 46

Fischer goes on to compare this case to John Locke's example of a man in a room who does not know that the door is locked. The man considers whether to leave the room, but decides to stay. Even though it was not possible for the man to leave, Locke argues that he stays in the room voluntarily because the door being locked in no way influenced his decision to stay. Similarly, Fischer argues that even though he could not have guided the car to the left, he exhibits guidance control of the car when steering it to the right.

45 Ibid., emphasis author's.
46 Ibid., 7.
Before I more fully explain what must obtain for one to exhibit guidance control, I want to make clear how Fischer's aims differ from my own. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that his work focuses on control (freedom) of action, while I am concerned with control of belief. Further, though Fischer wants to make a case for the practical possibility of the separation of regulative and guidance control (and, thus, the possibility of exerting the latter on its own), his ultimate goal is to demonstrate the possibility of moral responsibility for one's actions even when one could not have done otherwise. In other words, he argues that one could be held morally responsible for actions over which one could only exert guidance control. I am certainly not opposed to this claim with regard to actions, nor with regard to belief (though that is not to say that I agree entirely with Fischer's account). Nonetheless, my project aims neither directly to discuss nor settle questions concerning epistemic or moral responsibility for belief. This is not to say, however, that I do not see the direct relevance between control of and responsibility for belief. In fact, I see exploration of responsibility for belief as a logical and attractive next step in the progression of this work. For now, however, my aim is two-fold: (1) to argue that the doxastic control debate should shift its focus from the typical forms of at-will control that currently dominate the debate; (2) to demonstrate that we can exert control over our beliefs—what I call meaningful control.

**Moderate Reasons-Responsiveness (MRR)**

The kind of control one exerts in guidance control is not characterized in terms of alternate possibilities or the ability to do otherwise—that is the kind of control Fisher calls regulative control. Guidance control consists of being able to do what one wants to do. In the above example, Fischer wanted to steer the car to the right and he was able to do so. In other words, he was able to accomplish what he set out to do. The fact that he could not turn the car
in any other direction (even if he had wanted to) does not, according to Fischer, impinge on his guidance control. What is relevant to the presence or absence of guidance control is whether the agent suitably responds to reasons. Fischer distinguishes between "reasons-recognition (the ability to recognize the reasons that exist) and reasons-reactivity (choice in accordance with reasons that are recognized as good and sufficient)..."\(^47\) Fischer argues that moderate reasons-reactiveness is the level of responsiveness necessary for guidance control. One must not struggle to recognize and respond to relevant reasons, but neither must one be able to recognize and respond to every relevant reason.

Fischer argues that two things must obtain in order for one to exhibit moderate reasons-reactiveness. First, the agent's responsibility-relevant mechanism\(^48\) must regularly be receptive to reasons, some of which are moral; this requires (a) that holding fixed the operation of a the mechanism, the agent would recognize reasons in such a way as to give rise to an understandable pattern from the viewpoint of a third party who understands the agent's values and beliefs; and (b) that some of the reasons mentioned in (a) are moral reasons. Second, the agent's responsibility-relevant mechanism is at least weakly reactive to reasons; this requires that the agent would react to at least one sufficient reason to do otherwise (in some possible scenario), although it does not follow that the agent could have responded differently to the actual reasons.

**Mechanism Ownership**

Fischer is quick to point out, however, that moderate reasons-reactiveness is

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{48}\) As Fischer explains, “[b]y ‘mechanism’ I simply mean, roughly speaking, ‘way’—I do not mean to reify anything” (2012, 186). For instance, one such “mechanism” might be “ordinary human practical reasoning, unimpaired by direct stimulation by neurosurgeons…” (Ibid., 187).
insufficient to secure guidance control. Therefore, he decides to include a second criteria: mechanism ownership.

[O]ne could exhibit the right sort of reasons-responsiveness as a result (say) of clandestine, unconsented-to electronic stimulation of the brain (or hypnosis, brainwashing, etc.)... I contend that there are two elements of guidance control: reasons-sensitivity of the appropriate sort and mechanism-ownership. That is, the mechanism that issues in the behavior must (in the appropriate sense) be the agent's own mechanism. (When one is secretly manipulated through clandestine mind control as in The Manchurian Candidate, one's practical reasoning is not one's own.)

Fischer articulates three criteria necessary for mechanism ownership. First, he claims that one must see oneself as the source of one’s behavior. For instance, imagine watching a video of yourself sleepwalking. You would likely readily admit that it is you performing the actions, but still deny that you were the source of the behavior. Similarly, Fischer maintains that it is not enough that one acts in a certain way; rather, the way in which one acts must stem from oneself. Second, Fischer argues that in order to own the relevant mechanism, one must accept that one is a fair target of reactive attitudes and that one is a target because of how one exercises one’s agency in certain contexts. This aspect of Fischer’s account concerns the issue of moral responsibility. Since he argues that one becomes responsible when one takes responsibility, it is important to his account that one can only be held morally responsible for one’s action if one sees oneself as subject to moral evaluation. Third, and finally, Fischer maintains that one’s view of oneself concerning the first two criteria must be based in an appropriate way on the evidence. That is, one must have good reason to see oneself both as the source of one’s behavior and as a fair target of the reactive attitudes.

Thus far, I have attempted to briefly, but accurately present Fischer’s account of guidance control and how even in the absence of alternate possibilities one can exert control.

49 Ibid., 11, emphasis author’s.
Now I will begin my critique/alteration of his view in order to both strengthen it and translate it into the realm of belief. Let me begin by considering mechanism ownership. Though I agree with Fischer regarding the need for mechanism ownership in addition to moderate reasons-responsiveness, I do not fully agree with the criteria he sets out for such ownership. One of my concerns is Fischer’s second requirement: that one must accept that one is a fair target of reactive attitudes concerning one’s actions. My other concern is the entirely subjective nature of his criteria for mechanism ownership.

I reject Fischer’s second criteria for mechanism ownership for three reasons. First, even within Fischer’s own project, I see no reason to bring recognition of the appropriateness of moral appraisal of one’s action into the account of mechanism ownership. Fischer includes mechanism ownership as a means of insuring that the reasons on which an agent acts are actually his own and not the result of manipulation of some kind. Whether or not one sees oneself (or one’s actions) as an appropriate target of moral appraisal in no way impacts whether or not the reasons on which one acts are one’s own. Further, if Fischer merely wants to ensure that the agent is (or at least could be) sensitive to the relevance of moral reasons to her actions, he has already ensured this in his requirements for MRR discussed above. Recall that he stipulates that among the reasons to which an agent is sensitive, some must be moral. A second reason to eliminate the second of Fischer’s criteria is the fact that Fischer, himself, suggests jettisoning it in response to an objection raised by Alfred Mele.50 Finally, since moral

50 Ibid., 191. Mele’s objection involves a though experiment in which Phil, who under the influence of Ted Honderich and Galen Strawson is converted from being a compatibilist regarding moral responsibility to that of a hard determinist. In light of this conversion, he no longer views himself or anyone else as fair targets of reactive attitudes and, thus, fails to meet the second requirement for mechanism ownership. However, given the way the Phil is described in the thought experiment, we would intuitively take him to be a morally responsible agent. See Fischer, Deep Control, 2013, 187-191. This objection was presented by Mele in “Fischer and Ravizza on Moral Responsibility,” The Journal of Ethics 10 (2006): 283–94. See also, Alfred R. Mele, “Reactive Attitudes,
responsibility (or responsibility of any kind) is beyond the scope of my current project, there is no reason to require recognition of responsibility as a requirement for mechanism ownership, which in this case concerns the mechanism from which belief issues. One might question, however, why I do not similarly reject the inclusion of receptivity to (at least some) moral reasons as a criterion of moderate reasons-responsiveness. Unless one denies the existence of moral reasons, inclusion of this type of reason merely ensures that one considered moderately reasons-responsive is receptive to the spectrum of possible reasons. It neither requires that special attention or weight be given to moral reasons, nor that moral reasons definitely are relevant to the question whether \( p \). Rather, it merely requires that one cannot be considered moderately reasons-responsive if one is not sensitive to the breadth of reasons, including moral reasons.

The subjective nature of Fischer’s criteria for mechanism ownership also raises concerns. Of course, the criteria are meant to ensure that the reasons-responsive mechanism from which an agent acts is actually her own mechanism, not one thrust upon her via mind control (direct brain manipulation, brainwashing, hypnosis, etc.) Therefore, that some of the requirements for ownership are subjective seems more than reasonable. Nonetheless, it seems equally reasonable to assume that many (if not most) instances of mind control would prove immune to self-diagnosis. In such situations, an agent would likely view herself as the source of her actions and even consider herself to have good evidence for this view, yet the actual source of her action would be the reasons-responsive mind-control mechanism. Admittedly, definitively demonstrating that one’s actions are not the result of mind control seems as likely

as me now offering definitive proof that I am not a brain in a vat. I would, however, like to add the following criteria to Fischer’s requirements for mechanism ownership: 3. Full knowledge of the source of one’s action would not alter viewing oneself as the source of the action. By this I mean that if an agent, after gaining full knowledge of the mechanism via which she acted, would no longer view herself as the source of her action, then she cannot be said to own that mechanism and, therefore, did not have guidance control of that action.

There remains one last alteration I need to make to Fischer’s requirements for guidance control. While Fischer’s focus is control of and responsibility for actions, my focus is control of belief. In order to utilize Fischer’s account of guidance control within my project, I must translate his requirements for guidance control into epistemic language. In the epistemic case, as was true in the case of action, one exerts guidance control of one’s beliefs when one is moderately reasons-responsive and owns the mechanism from which the beliefs result. However, the particulars of MRR and mechanism ownership differ somewhat.

Moderate Reason-Responsiveness

1. Her belief-formation mechanism is receptive to reasons, which requires that holding fixed the operation of the mechanism, the agent would recognize reasons in such a way as to give rise to an understandable pattern from the viewpoint of a third party who understands the agent’s values and other beliefs.

2. The agent's belief-formation mechanism is at least weakly reactive to reasons, which requires that the agent would react to at least one sufficient reason to do otherwise (in some possible scenario), although it does not follow that the agent could have responded differently to the actual reasons.

Mechanism Ownership

1. The agent sees herself as the source of the belief, in that she sees that her choices or deliberations are efficacious in belief formation.

2. Her view of herself in (1) is based in an appropriate way on the evidence.

3. Full knowledge of the source of one’s belief would not alter one’s view of
being the source of the belief.

**Conclusion**

We have covered much ground in this chapter. We began by looking at two conceptions of at-will and how these are used to show that we cannot have such control over our beliefs. The first conception emphasizes immediacy and, therefore, is limited to the control of basic actions—those not requiring intermediate actions. This was the conception of at-will used by Bernard Williams in his argument against at-will control of belief. Remember, however, that the emphasis on immediacy creates some counter-intuitive results concerning the voluntariness of both aim-constitutive and non-basic actions. Pamela Hieronymi hoped to find a sense of at-will that avoided the issues raised by the first conception, but that still made it the case that one could not believe at-will. After consider several options, she decided on a conception of at will that required that one’s decision to act must be sensitive to practical reasons. In the case of belief, however, she correctly showed that one is not—cannot be—sensitive to practical reasons and, therefore, cannot believe at-will in the sense she advocates. I responded by questioning the legitimacy of defining at-will as doing something in the same way one acts intentionally given that belief is not an action. Additionally, though I understand why Hieronymi, given her aims and assumptions, rejects the “fire at will” conception of at-will, the conception shows great promise when the inability of at-will belief is not assumed. For that reason, we moved to an exploration of the “fire at will” conception—what I am calling the JCF conception—of at-will. This exploration showed that the JCF conception not only is compatible with our intuitions about the voluntariness of various actions, it also opens room for the possibility of at-will control of belief. Nonetheless, some potential concerns were noted and addressed, the biggest being the seeming lack of alternate possibilities once one is satisfied
that \( p \). In order to address this concern, I turned to the work of John Martin Fischer and his distinction between regulative control and guidance control. Though we cannot believe at-will in the regulative sense, I argue that we can believe at-will in the JCF sense and that the lack of alternate possibilities does not impinge upon our freedom or control so long as it remains the case that we exercise guidance control over the formation of our belief.

So where do we go from here? My ultimate goal is to demonstrate that we can have meaningful control of our beliefs. Therefore, the next steps are to make clear just what meaningful control requires and, then, consider whether we have such control. In doing so, I will utilize the work done in this chapter, namely the guidance control available via the JCF conception of at-will control.
4. MEANINGFUL CONTROL THROUGH DOXASTIC DELIBERATION

Doxastic control, like skepticism, becomes a concern only once one enters a philosophy classroom. The majority of non-philosophers go about their daily lives undisturbed by worries of being brains in vats or not having control of their beliefs. In both cases, this is because the opposite seems so obviously true from the point of view of how we experience life. Of course, what seems true and what can be proved true are two very different things. In the case of doxastic control, much of the difficulty stems from the narrow focus within the debate on forms of control I contend are neither important nor possible. The kind of control of belief we care about having is neither the immediate at-will conception utilized by Williams, nor the pragmatic at-will conception advanced by Hieronymi. Rather, if a lack of doxastic control concerns us at all, it does so primarily because of the disconnect this lack of control creates between our beliefs and ourselves. At-will control of the kinds previously discussed might (if possible) be able to restore this connection, but neither is necessary to do so. What is necessary is meaningful control, and it is in this chapter that I will demonstrate that we have it.

Before we jump in, however, allow me to outline briefly the path this demonstration will take. First, I will review what is valuable about doxastic control and, then, specify more clearly what it entails. Next, I will look to the judged called for (JCF) conception of at will developed in the previous chapter for a potential means of exerting meaningful control. In particular, I will consider the control exerted via doxastic deliberation. However, it is often assumed that the control exhibited through doxastic deliberation does not carry over to the belief that results. So while one controls things such as how long to deliberate, what evidence to consider and how to weigh that evidence, many maintain that this control does not extend
to what or whether one believes. Of course, even if I successfully show that deliberative control extends to the belief formed, whether such control meets the requirements of meaningful control remains to be seen. Therefore, in the final act of my demonstration, I will argue that meaningful control of belief is possible via doxastic deliberation.

Accomplishing all of this will be no easy task. Nonetheless, even if successful, in many ways this is merely a beginning. I will conclude chapter four and the dissertation by exploring the implications of meaningful control and next steps this research might take. For instance, though, here, I only demonstrate that deliberation is a means of exerting meaningful control of belief, this does not mean that it is the only means. I suspect there are other means and future work will be necessary to confirm or deny my suspicions. Likewise, our supposed lack of control of belief has greatly shaped philosophical views concerning responsibility for belief. If we can, in fact, exert doxastic control, the implications for epistemic responsibility will likely be great. Taking a moment to consider issues and implications such as these seems an appropriate way to draw this work to a close…for now.

**Meaningful Control Defined**

In chapter one, I argued that we find our supposed lack of voluntary control of belief especially troubling because of the intimate and influential role our beliefs play in shaping who we are and what we do. Further, the absence of doxastic control leaves us with three unsettling realities. First, it diminishes the sense in which our beliefs are ours; we are left with mere possession of our beliefs, without influence or input. Second, depending on the extent to which belief informs action, lack of doxastic control diminishes the sense in which our actions are ours. If our beliefs are formed or adopted either beyond or against our control, then any sense
of them stemming from and/or expressing ones ideas, values, opinions, and commitments is lost. And, finally, without a connection between one’s beliefs and one’s ideas, values, opinions and commitments, then in as much as these not only prompt my actions, but also give purpose or meaning to them, this purpose and meaning is illusory.

Meaningful control, then, just is a form of doxastic control that sufficiently connects us to our beliefs such that we can shape our beliefs and they can convey purpose and meaning on and through our actions. What must be true of meaningful control, then, for it to so connect ourselves and our beliefs? First, there must be instances in which one not merely interferes with how one's beliefs come about, but actually exerts shaping influence over them. Second, the level of control must be sufficient to allow a person to own his beliefs, such that upon reflection (even full awareness of how beliefs actually are formed) he not only recognizes that the belief is his, but he also recognizes himself in the belief. Finally, the control exerted in (1) and (2) must be sufficiently consistent such that one is neither left waiting for it to return nor surprised when it occurs.

**Deliberative Belief Formation**

In the previous chapter, we looked at the JCF conception of at-will, which was suggested and, then, cast aside by Pamela Hieronymi during her search for an account of at-will that would rule out doxastic control, yet remain true to our intuitions about voluntary and non-voluntary actions. Under this conception of at-will, which formed through consideration of the phrase “fire at will,” one acts at-will if and only if one judges it called for to so act. The items one might consider when judging what is called for include one’s circumstances, aims or goals, as well as one’s background knowledge. However, as was addressed in chapter three, the judgment involved in the JCF conception need not be time-consuming or complex. For
instance, suppose Jane comes home from work and ponders whether to make dinner or eat out. In judging whether it is called for to make dinner, she likely would consider how hungry she is, what ingredients she has, how long it would take to cook, and her schedule for the evening. In doing this, it need not be the case that she engage in extensive evaluation. In fact, depending on how familiar she is with the contents of her fridge and cupboards, she likely will decide rather quickly not to make dinner given that she is already quite hungry, has gotten home late, has very little in her fridge, and must meet her friend for a movie in 45 minutes. Instead, she remembers there is a diner across the street from the theater and, therefore, judges it called for to eat a quick dinner at the diner before meeting her friend. Of course, it could also be the case that the evaluation involved in JCF control is extensive and time-consuming, as might be the case when judging whether it is called for to change careers, have children or buy a house. In fact, the importance of an action or its consequences and the complexity of the situation and options are all potential reasons for more extensive judgment.

Moving from the realm of action to that of belief, most of the features of JCF control remain the same, with one notable exception. In the case of action, one might judge it called for to x for any number of diverse reasons. However, in the case of belief, one judges it called for to believe that \( p \) based solely on the answer to the question whether \( p \). Of course, this difference is easily explained by a key difference between action and belief. When judging whether to act, one judges whether to add something to what is already the case, namely the action one will take. However, when judging whether to believe that \( p \), one judges whether something already is the case, namely \( p \). Therefore, it is not surprising that any number of reasons might prompt one to judge it called for to x, while only one reason—that one takes it to be the case that \( p \) obtains—prompts one to judge it called for to believe that \( p \). This does not
mean, however, that the truth of \( p \) is the only thing one considers when judging whether to believe that \( p \). For instance, when considering whether it is called for to believe that \( p \), one also considers factors about one’s situation and goals that might influence whether and, if so, how long to spend considering whether \( p \). And just as in the case of action, the process of determining whether belief that \( p \) is called for might be laborious or seemingly instantaneous.

In order to further investigate JCF control of belief and its potential as a source of meaningful control of belief, it would be helpful to focus on a particular form of this control. Despite my emphasis on the fact that the cognitive effort involved in JCF control need not be extensive or complex, doxastic deliberation does seem the best place to start. Not only is doxastic deliberation the seeming archetypal means of judging belief that \( p \) called for, it also allows us to examine more explicitly the process of judging and the various instances of control therein. For instance, when forming a belief via deliberation, one exerts control when searching for, selecting, and evaluating sources of evidence, as well as when determining how long to deliberate. Additionally, doxastic deliberation seems likely to allow for positive influence, produce both identity with and ownership of the resulting beliefs, and is readily available to us—the three criteria for meaningful control outlined above. Unfortunately, doxastic involuntarists maintain that the control exhibited in deliberation does not extend to the belief that results. While deliberation is within one’s control, they claim that the fruit of deliberation is not—one must believe whatever the deliberative conclusion entails. Put another way, “beliefs seem most often to come to us, unsought and unbidden, on the heels of thought and investigation.”\(^51\)

In the next section, I want to press on this assumption and I will do so by exploring four questions:

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1. Is it the case that control ends with deliberation?
2. Do we control whether we are satisfied that \( p \)?
3. When forming a belief through deliberation, how is control exerted?
4. If control does end and beliefs “come to us, unsought and unbidden,” does this negate the control that was exerted?

To help us answer these questions, let’s consider the following scenario.

Mary decides that today is the day she will finally decide whether to believe that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in assassinating President Kennedy. She has the day off from work, has access to an outstanding library and a high-speed internet connection, and is a speed-reader. We could even assume that she personally knows the foremost expert on this matter and performs a lengthy phone interview with her, gaining answers to many questions not covered in other available resources. After weeding through various forms of evidence and determining what is relevant and reliable, she considers the plausible theories. After much deliberation, she determines that one theory stands far above the rest in terms of both the evidence and its ability to comprehensively explain the events surrounding the assassination. In light of this evidence, she concludes that Lee Harvey Oswald did, indeed, work alone. As she lies in bed that night thinking about the day, she is pleased to have a settled and (in her opinion) well-supported belief about Lee Harvey Oswald’s part in the Kennedy assassination.

Does Control End When Deliberation Ends?

Does Mary’s control end when she finishes her deliberation or does it extend, in some way, to her belief that Oswald worked alone? Typically, the fact that one must believe whatever deliberative conclusion is reached is cited as evidence that control ends with deliberation. This is not an unusual claim considering that not being able to do otherwise is a classic example of lacking control. However, once we better understand the deliberative process and bring in the conception of belief developed in chapter two, I contend that even though one cannot do otherwise than believe the result of one’s deliberation, this does not demonstrate a lack of control.

First, let us consider the accepted view concerning the relationship between
deliberation and belief formation. Given transparency, deliberating about whether to believe that $p$ necessarily involves deciding (or moving closer to deciding) whether $p$. If, as many claim, (including Shah and Velleman) one, first, decides whether $p$ and, then, decides whether to believe that $p$ based on the answer to the first question, then it would look as if the deliberator (in as much as she appreciates the connection between the questions whether $p$ and whether to believe that $p$) is forced to believe the deliberative results. One considers the question whether $p$ and before one knows it a belief concerning that $p$ has formed. What I find curious, however, is that though many proponents of this account of deliberative belief formation contend that one lacks control over whether to believe that $p$, they maintain that, in addition to answering the question whether $p$, one must further decide whether to believe that $p$ as if one had a choice in the matter (that is, control). To be fair, it need not be the case (and perhaps often is not) that either question (whether $p$ or whether to believe that $p$) is answered in the conscious manner of checking off items on a to-do list. Nonetheless, in order to maintain the distinction between the completion of voluntary deliberation and the beginning of non-voluntary belief, some intermediate step between the two is necessary. On this account that step is deciding whether to believe that $p$ based on, in fact, compelled by, one’s previous answer to whether $p$.

On my account of belief, however, no intermediate step exists. Remember, I argue that belief just is being satisfied that $p$; that is, once someone answers the question whether $p$, then he either believes or disbelieves that $p$.\footnote{Of course, it is perfectly correct to answer the question whether $p$ by responding, “I don’t know.” In cases such as these where deliberation either is postponed or stopped without reaching a conclusion, the deliberator neither believes nor disbelieves that $p$. However, in spite of the colloquial correctness of answering, “I don’t know,” this is not truly an instance in which the deliberator has answered the question whether $p$.} Put another way, if one wants to decide whether to believe that $p$, then one must answer the question whether $p$ for oneself, and once that question is answered, one not only knows whether to believe that $p$, but also either does or does not
already so believe. Therefore, since it is widely acknowledged that one has control over deliberation, including one’s answer to whether \( p \), then, on my account of belief, one is not compelled to believe the result of one’s deliberation. Rather, deliberation begins with the question whether \( p \) and ends when an answer to that question has been reached. If one has control over how one answers whether \( p \), which many agree is the case, then one has control over whether one is satisfied that \( p \). Such control also ensures control over whether one believes that \( p \).

Let’s look at this in terms of the above scenario. On my account of belief, Mary believes that Oswald worked alone just in case she is satisfied that he worked alone. When viewed in this way, there is no distance between Mary being satisfied that Oswald worked alone and her believing that he worked alone. In other words, she does not first answer the question whether \( p \) (thus ending her deliberation) and then make the further decision of whether to believe that \( p \). During the day, Mary weighed the evidence for and against the claim that Oswald worked alone. At some point she becomes satisfied that he did work alone. Once satisfied, Mary both begins believing that Oswald worked alone and ends her deliberation. She is not first satisfied and then decides based on being satisfied both to end her deliberation and believe. Once she is satisfied that Oswald worked alone, there simply isn’t anything left about which to deliberate. She doesn’t need to decide to stop deliberating, rather her deliberation ended the moment she became satisfied because the reason she started deliberating in the first place—to decide whether Oswald worked alone—disappeared. In light of these considerations, it is difficult to make sense of the claim that the belief the subject holds is not voluntary. If the formation process in which Mary engaged (deliberation) was under her control (voluntary) and her being satisfied was under her control (voluntary), then there seems no reason to deny that her belief
was under her control (voluntary).

*Do We Truly Control Whether We Are Satisfied?*

However, one might agree with my claim that deliberation ends when Mary is satisfied regarding whether \( p \) and, therefore, believes that \( p \), but still question my claim that whether Mary is satisfied that \( p \) is under Mary’s control. After all, one might argue that Mary might know *when* she is satisfied, but she cannot control *when or if* she will be satisfied. I admit that this seems correct, at least in part. Here I will consider five ways in which Mary either lacks or appears to lack control over the deliberative process and, thereby, whether she is satisfied concerning whether \( p \). The first concerns the way it sometimes seems as if beliefs just materialize within us. The second returns to the issue of at-will control. The third concerns the fact that progress toward being satisfied can be interrupted by any number of things. The fourth looks at instances when the truth of \( p \) is so apparent, as is often the case with our visual beliefs. The fifth and final way it can seem as if we lack control over whether we are satisfied concerns instances in which one self-reports to believe \( p \), but then acts in ways contrary to so believing. Let’s consider each in turn.

Explicitly or implicitly, most involuntarists view belief as something that happens to us, rather than something we do and/or control. As Williams said, beliefs seem more like things we discover we have. There is a sense in which this seems true, but only because of what it is to believe. As we saw in chapter two, belief that \( p \) just is being satisfied that \( p \); you consider evidence regarding whether \( p \) and if satisfied of \( p \), you believe that \( p \). However, various factors can impact whether the fact that you are satisfied and/or how you got there are apparent at the time of deliberation or only upon reflection. For instance, you might consider
the evidence regarding whether the red light cameras should be turned off in Houston. Over the course of a couple weeks you consider arguments presented in print, on television and by people with whom you discuss the matter. At some point during your consideration (i.e. deliberation) you become satisfied that the red lights should be kept on and, thus, you begin to believe that they should be kept on. However, you might not be aware of the exact point at which you became satisfied. In fact, you might not even be aware that you have become satisfied.

Therefore, it is not surprising that a few days later, when discussing the issues with co-workers, you “discover” that you believe that the red light cameras should be kept on. However, you do not “discover” a belief that just happened to form within you, rather you “discover” that you are satisfied that the red light cameras should be kept on and, thereby, believe the same. This discovery that you are satisfied is not like finding a wallet that isn’t yours, but is more like realizing that, while talking to a friend on the phone, you have finished washing the dishes. The fact that your progress in washing the dishes went unnoticed due to your focus on the conversation does not negate the fact that you washed the dishes and that you did so voluntarily. Likewise, the belief that the red light cameras should remain on occurred when (and only when), given your evidence, you were satisfied that the red light cameras should stay on even though at the time you likely did not think to yourself, “I am satisfied that the red light cameras should remain on.” Rather, it is only upon reflection or when in a situation that calls forth your belief—such as a discussion with your co-workers—that you “discover” that you believe. Your lack of awareness of this belief in no way negates the fact that you (your credulity, your assessment of the evidence, etc.) voluntarily controlled whether you were satisfied.
Perhaps this can be seen more clearly if we contrast belief with a familiar state in which we do just find ourselves and over which we have no voluntary control—hunger. Though our choices regarding whether, what and how much to eat can impact whether we are hungry, this does not demonstrate control over hunger. Instead, it merely demonstrates our ability to anticipate, respond to, or ignore the demands of hunger and so produce the desired effect. Whether we will still be hungry after two servings of dinner or will not be hungry after skipping breakfast is not under our control. Whether or not I am hungry ultimately depends on facts about my body’s management, use of, and need for nourishment—factors I do not control. Belief, however, is a different story. True, we might manipulate our (or others’) beliefs in ways similar to how we manage our hunger, but actual control is available to us as well. Whether or not I believe that $p$ ultimately depends on whether or not I am satisfied that $p$ and I do control whether or not I am so satisfied. I decide what evidence to consider, I weigh the evidence and I set the burden of proof required to satisfy me. The fact that the demands of life can delay my explicit review of the implications of the evidence and, therefore, sometimes result in what seems to be the discovery of a new belief does not demonstrate that I do not control whether I am satisfied, it merely demonstrates that life is more than doxastic deliberation.

The second way Mary appears to lack control is that just as Mary cannot decide to believe at-will in either the Williams or Hieronymi sense, she also cannot decide to be satisfied at-will in either sense. Of course, since I have already rejected both of these forms of at-will control, this fact does not damage my account. In fact, at-will control (of either kind) over the results of deliberation makes little sense. If one can decide at-will either to believe that $p$ or be satisfied that $p$ (which on my account are synonymous), what would be the point of deliberating? Of course, if one had such control, one might deliberate about whether to
deliberate—that is, whether to merely decide whether \( p \) instead of considering the truth of \( p \) (or even the evidence indicating the truth of \( p \)).

In addition to the above reasons against the necessity of at-will control of whether we are satisfied, it is important to make clear how those who insist on this form of control misunderstand what it is to be satisfied and, thereby, what it is to believe. To see why this is, consider the following dialog between an objector and me concerning my inability to be satisfied right now that grass is purple.

Me: There is a sense in which I could be satisfied right now that grass is purple. If there was sufficient evidence available to meet or exceed the threshold I deem necessary to be satisfied that grass is purple, I would be satisfied that grass is purple and, thus, believe that grass is purple.

Objector: That isn’t what I had in mind. Instead, in order to demonstrate control over whether you are satisfied, you must be able to become satisfied that grass is purple (that is, that it is true that grass is purple) and, thus, believe.

Me: But I never claimed we have such control, nor is it necessary that I do so. Let me explain. Essentially, you are requiring that I be able to become satisfied that something is true even when there are no reasons to be so satisfied. In the case before us, this would mean becoming satisfied that it is true that grass is purple without being able to present to myself any reasons to be so satisfied.

Objector: Oh, but you do have a reason to be so satisfied. If you could become satisfied that grass is purple, then you could prove that you can control whether or not you are satisfied that grass is purple, and that is something you want to do. Isn’t it?

Me: I do want to prove that I can control whether I am satisfied that grass is purple, but it is not the case that the reason you just presented is a reason I can use to convince myself that grass is purple. I could use it to convince myself that it would be helpful if I could convince myself that grass is purple. But whether convincing myself that grass is purple would be helpful or not has no relevance to the question of whether it is true that grass is purple and, therefore, provides no reason for me to be satisfied (or dissatisfied) that grass is purple. Therefore, it is still the case that I have no reason to be satisfied that grass is purple and without any reasons it is not possible, rational or prudent for me to be so satisfied. Nonetheless, should reasons actually relevant to the question of whether grass is purple become available, it would be up to me whether or not
I am satisfied by those reasons.\textsuperscript{53}

The third way in which it might seem that Mary lacks control over whether she is satisfied is that any number of things might delay, temporarily or indefinitely, her from reaching the point of being satisfied: lack of (definitive) evidence, limited attention span, intrusion of more pressing matters, biases and prejudices, and lack of comprehension just to name a few. However, it is not clear how any of these factors undermine one’s control over whether one is satisfied. Our mental and physical capabilities, along with external demands and constraints, limit both the type and quality of information we can process and, therefore, what and how much we can deliberate about, but similar limitations also impact our actions, over which it is thought that we typically have control. If I decide to go to the movies, but get a flat tire on the way that prevents me from getting to the movies, we would not say that I lack control over my actions or even my particular going-to-the-movies actions. Rather, we realize that our control over our actions is not absolute; it cannot conquer all obstacles. Therefore, pointing to the fact that we do not have absolute control over whether we are satisfied (and, thereby, whether we believe) does not demonstrate that we have no control.

There are two further instances in which it might feel as if one does not control whether one is satisfied. The first occurs when the truth of $p$ is so apparent that it seems as though one has no choice but to be satisfied. However, this occurs not because the truth of $p$ overwhelms one, but rather because one’s standard of credulity is so abundantly met and exceeded. The only limitation on the efficacy of one’s standard of credulity regarding whether one is satisfied that $p$ is the already discussed circumstance when there are no reasons relevant to the question.

\textsuperscript{53} The response offered here draws heavily from Pamela Hieronymi’s explanation of why we cannot believe at will, in which she distinguishes between what she calls intrinsic and extrinsic reasons to believe (2009, 161-163).
whether $p$, but this is only due to the fact that in such a situation there is nothing with which one’s standard of credulity to interact. The second instance occurs when people act in ways contrary to what they would likely self-report they believe. Consider the following scenario offered by Tamar Szabó Gendler to see what I have in mind. Gendler takes these examples from studies done by psychologist Paul Rozin over the course of several decades.

So, for example, subjects are reluctant to drink from a glass of juice in which a completely sterilized dead cockroach has been stirred, hesitant to wear a laundered shirt that has been previously worn by someone they dislike, and loath to eat soup from a brand-new bed-pan. They are disinclined to put their mouths on a piece of newly purchased vomit-shaped rubber (though perfectly willing to do so with sink stopper of similar size and material), averse to eating fudge that has been formed into the shape of dog feces, and far less accurate in throwing darts at pictures of faces of people they like than at neutral faces.

How should we describe the cognitive state of those who hesitate to eat the feces-shaped fudge or wear their adversary’s shirt? Surely they believe that the fudge has not changed its chemical composition, and that the shirt does not bear cooties—just as they believe that that the newly purchased bedpan is sterile and that the fake vomit is actually made of rubber: asked directly, subjects show no hesitation in endorsing such claims. But alongside these beliefs there is something else going on. Although they believe that the items in question are harmless, they also believe something very different. The belief has roughly the following content: “Filthy object! Contaminated! Stay away!”

Clearly something is amiss in such situations. If asked before the experiments, likely all of the participants would have said that they believe that the juice was safe to drink, the fudge and the soup were safe to eat and the shirt safe to wear. Yet when faced with these situations, they could not bring themselves to act in accord with their beliefs. Gendler considers several possible explanations for the mismatch between their beliefs and their actions, including deception, self-deception, uncertainty and forgetfulness, but argues that none provide an adequate explanation. Instead, she suggests that their behavior results from a

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conflict between the intentions invoked by their beliefs and certain associations and motor routines set in motion by the input to their visual systems from the cockroach, feces, vomit, bed pan, etc.

The activation of these response patterns constitutes the rendering occurrent of what I hereby dub a belief-discordant alief. … The visual appearance of the feces-shaped fudge renders occurrent a belief-discordant alief with the content: “dog-feces, disgusting, refuse-to-eat”—an alief that runs counter to the subject’s explicit belief that the object before her is composed of a substance that she considers delicious and appealing. The visual-motor input associated with throwing a dart at a representation of a loved one renders occurrent a belief-discordant alief with the content: “harmful action directed at beloved, dangerous and ill-advised, don’t throw”—an alief that runs counter to the subject’s explicit belief that damaging a representation has no effects on the entity represented.55

Gendler goes on to explain and defend in greater detail the concept of alief, arguing that aliefs are a type of state also present in non-human animals and are a developmental precondition to cognitive attitudes such as belief, desire, etc. I do not intend to elaborate on Gendler’s theory at this time; rather I merely want to point to her unique and compelling explanation of situations like those mentioned above in which it might appear that one has conflicting beliefs. Such a possibility would cast doubt on my claim that we can control whether we are satisfied. Fortunately, Gendler’s introduction and explanation of alief does an excellent job both of explaining the actions of the participants and doing justice to the very reasonable assumption that these people don’t actually believe, among other things, that throwing darts at a picture of a loved one (or an enemy for that matter) can do actual harm to the person. Therefore, though other factors interfered with the participants’ ability to act on their beliefs, it remains the case that they controlled whether they were satisfied (believed) that the various actions were harmless.

55 Ibid., 641.
Thus far in this chapter, I have made three controversial claims. First, I argued against those, such as Shah and Velleman, who maintain that the control exhibited in deliberation does not extend to the belief that results. Second, and in support of the previous argument, I claimed that there is no intermediate step between the completion of deliberation concerning whether $p$ and the beginning of the belief that $p$ (assuming an affirmative answer to whether $p$). Third, I argued that whether we are satisfied that $p$ is within our control and responded to various ways in which it might appear that we lack such control. The task to which I now turn is examining just what kind of control is active in doxastic deliberation. Later in the chapter we will consider whether this form of control of belief is a form of meaningful control.

*What Kind of Control Is Exerted in Deliberation?*

Previously, we considered the scenario in which Mary sets aside one day to deliberate about and, then, decide whether Lee Harvey Oswald worked alone in assassinating President Kennedy. Until now, I have primarily responded to arguments seeking to refute two aspects of the control I maintain she exercises via deliberation: that such control extends to the belief formed and that she controls whether she is satisfied concerning whether Oswald worked alone. Now, I want to move beyond refutation of views contrary to my own and, instead, consider the many ways in which Mary does control whether she is satisfied and what kind of control she exhibits.

Though Mary cannot decide to be satisfied or control what (if any) evidence is available to her, it is her assessment of the evidence in conjunction with the practical concerns surrounding her deliberation that ultimately determines when or if she is satisfied. Likewise, Mary cannot be satisfied of the truth of $p$ without reasons that speak in favor of $p$, or at least
that she takes to speak in favor of \( p \), but when such reasons are available, Mary does control whether she becomes satisfied that \( p \). She decides which of the reasons presented she will consider when determining whether \( p \). She might reject the testimony of someone who swears that \( p \) because she has reason to distrust his judgment on this matter. Or she might reject or diminish the importance of his testimony because she doesn’t like him or because she wants to exclude him. Similarly, Mary might give more credence to firsthand accounts of the assassination and, among those, give highest credence to those documented closer to the date of the assassination. Once Mary decides the evidence she will consider and any difference in weight she might assign, it is her threshold of credulity, whether scrupulous or scandalously promiscuous, that is the measure for whether she is satisfied that \( p \). Mary might be naive or gullible and, thus, be easily satisfied by evidence that a hardened skeptic would deem sorely inadequate. Or, perhaps, she is pragmatic about the amount of time she can allot to her deliberation and decides that so long as the evidence provides a reasonable basis for one claim over another, she will, at the end of the allotted time, believe—that is, be satisfied—one way rather than another. In other words, Mary believes that which she judges called for in light of her deliberation.

*Deliberation is Like Hiking*

Consider this from another angle. The process of doxastic deliberation is much like following a hiking trail. Typically, we stand at one end of the trail and desire to get to the other end. If we have not taken the trail before, then we do not know where the journey will lead, but we do know that we must follow the appropriate trail markers if we wish to reach the intended destination. How strong our desire is either to reach that destination or simply not to
get hopelessly lost will determine how closely we attend to the trail markers. At the start we likely have an understanding of the possible place(s) we might end up, but we will not know which of the possibilities will be realized until we reach the last marker. Halfway along the trail, we may get very hungry or thirsty and decide to either delay or end the hike. But should we attentively follow the appropriate markers, we will eventually arrive at the end of the trail—say, a spectacular waterfall.

I think it uncontroversial to claim both in this situation and in belief-formation that we voluntarily choose to follow the appropriate markers. When hiking the destination is a place, when deliberating the destination is a belief. However, a not so uncontroversial claim is that in both belief-formation and hiking, we voluntarily arrive at the end of the trail, so to speak. Yet, that is precisely what I intend to demonstrate.

Let us begin by considering more closely the hiking example. Suppose that before we chose a trail to hike, we knew the length and exertion level of each trail available to us, but only had general information regarding where or to what kind of setting each trail would lead. For instance, we knew that two trails led to picnic areas, two others to campgrounds, and three to scenic lookouts of some kind. Given these circumstances, it seems fair to say that though we did decide to go to a scenic overlook, we did not decide to go to a waterfall—the particular destination of our chosen trail. Likewise, it is fair to say that we did not carefully attend to the trail markers in order to reach the waterfall. Whether and/or why we attentively followed the trail markers resulted from a mixture of intentions, desires, and external constraints. In other words, we judged it called for to attentively follow the trail markers not only because we wanted to safely complete the hike, but also because we needed to get back to the lodge in time for dinner with friends. In particular, avoiding getting lost was a high priority, since it would
likely interfere with the goal of safely finishing the hike in time for dinner. Nonetheless, even though no aspect of the destination (the waterfall) informed our motives, choices, or attentiveness, it seems clearly wrong to say that we arrived at the waterfall either involuntarily or non-voluntarily. The case for the fact that we voluntarily arrived at the waterfall is further supported by the fact that our movement toward the waterfall would have ended the moment we so chose to end/shorten the hike. So while we did not choose to go to the waterfall, we had control of whether or not we ended up there. Likewise, though we did not control what would be at the end of the hike, we did decide whether we ended up there. I am not claiming that we, the hikers, had complete control over whether we ended up at the end of the trail. Clearly many factors could have prevented us from reaching the trail’s end: injury, impassable terrain, exhaustion, lack of time, etc. However, I am claiming that had we not wanted to end up at the trail’s end, we would not have ended up there.

Likewise, there are many situations in which we need or want to decide whether to believe that $p$, and since the only way to answer that question is by answering whether $p$, we set off on a journey of deliberation attending to various evidential “markers,” all the while keeping in mind the internal and external constraints on our deliberation. Therefore, both our concentration on and interpretation of these markers is affected by various practical concerns and biases, each of which influences where we end up—that is, how we answer whether $p$. This journey will continue until one of three things happens. First, a prior appointment, the needs of another project, or a loss of interest might prompt us to temporarily or indefinitely halt our deliberation. Second, having exhausted the evidence available to us without becoming satisfied one way or the other, we might withhold judgment regarding whether $p$. Finally, our journey of deliberation might end due to the fact that we have reached our destination—belief.
That is, we have become satisfied concerning whether \( p \) and have, thereby, come to believe (or not) that \( p \). In all three cases, we are guided by what we judge called for given our aims, desires and circumstances.

Mary deliberated about Lee Harvey Oswald, Americans are deliberating about the best course of action regarding Syria, and as you read this dissertation you hopefully are deliberating whether belief is voluntary. These deliberations lead us toward a particular conclusion, much like a hiking trail leads you to a particular destination. If we would not say that the result of a hike is an involuntary or non-voluntary arrival at a destination, why should we say that the result of doxastic deliberation is the involuntary or non-voluntary arrival at a belief?

*If Control Ends, Is Belief Compelled Against One’s Will?*

Since I have argued that control does not end when deliberation does, it may seem unnecessary to answer the third question: If control does end and belief is compelled, does this necessarily occur against one’s will? However, if I can demonstrate that under certain conditions belief can still be voluntary even if compelled, then my account is protected from those who persist in the claim that control ends with deliberation. In answering this question, I once again will use Mary’s deliberation concerning Oswald’s role in the Kennedy assassination.

It likely seems oxymoronic of me to attempt to show that something can be voluntary even if compelled. The key, however, is looking at the source of the compulsion. Undoubtedly, had Mary’s deliberation been externally manipulated or coerced, such compulsion would be incompatible with her belief being voluntary. However, if Mary’s belief
that Oswald worked alone was compelled solely as a result of her own choices and standards, then it is difficult to see how this would undermine the voluntariness of her belief. For instance, we must recognize that Mary entered into the deliberative process with the intention of forming a belief about Oswald’s role in the assassination. This intentionality about coming to a decision is not unique to Mary, but is a general feature of doxastic deliberation. One might wonder about whether \( p \) or even discuss it in a casual way, but when one deliberates about whether \( p \), one aims at deciding whether \( p \). Not all deliberation exhibits the level of intentionality, urgency, and energy that Mary demonstrates, but it would not count as doxastic deliberation if it were not aiming at deciding whether \( p \). Next, we must acknowledge that Mary voluntarily chose to have today be the day she would settle what to believe regarding Oswald’s role in the Kennedy assassination, and she voluntarily decided that the she should believe that which the preponderance of the evidence indicated to be the case. So while some might still claim that, given her evidence, she was compelled to believe that Oswald acted alone, the force of this compulsion resides in the desires, decisions and standards she voluntarily formed or endorsed. Therefore, even if we concede that Mary was compelled, there is no reason to claim that her belief lacks control.

Of course, some will likely object that the real test of Mary’s control of her belief is whether she could have believed otherwise? We discussed this concern in chapter three and I will not completely rehash that material here. However, given the prominence of the view that control requires the ability to do otherwise, I do want to take a moment to apply my general answer there to the particular example of Mary’s deliberation about Oswald. Given Mary’s intention to believe what the evidence most strongly indicated to be the case, choosing to believe a less substantiated account of Oswald’s involvement would be incompatible with her
aims, not to mention the fact that it seems unlikely that she would be satisfied with (that is, believe) the less substantiated account. Put another way, given Mary’s aims, standards and evidence, it seems unlikely that she would have judged any other belief called for. Therefore, allow me to stipulate that in this sense Mary could not have believed otherwise. However, if we apply John Martin Fischer’s account of guidance control regarding action to that of belief, then her inability to do otherwise does not necessarily undermine her control of her belief.

Before we explore why this is, let me make clear that in what follows I will use the account of guidance control I revised in chapter three. Though inspired by Fischer’s account and, I maintain, consistent with it, what follows differs from his account in that it has been tailored to the specific case of belief formation and I have removed Fischer’s criteria that the agent see herself as an appropriate target of moral appraisal. What remains the same, however, is that in order to exhibit guidance control, the mechanism\(^{56}\) (i.e. process) by which one forms one’s beliefs must be at least moderately reasons-responsive and one must exhibit ownership of that mechanism.

**Moderate Reasons-Responsiveness**

1. Her belief-formation mechanism is receptive to reasons, which requires that holding fixed the operation of the mechanism, the agent would recognize reasons in such a way as to give rise to an understandable pattern from the viewpoint of a third party who understands the agent’s values and other beliefs.

2. The agent's belief-formation mechanism is at least weakly reactive to reasons, which requires that the agent would react to at least one sufficient reason to do otherwise (in some possible scenario), although it does not follow that the agent could have responded differently to the actual reasons.

**Mechanism Ownership**

1. The agent sees herself as the source of the belief, in that she sees that

\(^{56}\) See footnote 44 for more on what Fischer means by “mechanism.”
her choices or deliberations are efficacious in belief formation.

2. Her view of herself in (1) is based in an appropriate way on the evidence.

3. Full knowledge of the source of one’s belief would not alter one’s view of being the source of the belief.

Does Mary exhibit guidance control of her belief that Oswald worked alone in assassinating President Kennedy? In order to answer this question, we must consider the criteria listed above, beginning with whether Mary’s belief-formation mechanism—in this case, deliberation—is appropriately receptive and reactive to reasons. Mary decided to set aside one day during which to deliberate about whether Oswald worked alone. The content of her deliberation was material she deemed relevant to this issue: first-hand accounts, diagrams, congressional testimony, police reports, film footage, ballistics reports, etc. In other words, evidence. In evaluating this evidence, Mary was able to recognize reasons relevant to the question of whether Oswald worked alone. Additionally, I contend that a third party who understood her values and other beliefs would be able to identify an understandable pattern to the reasons she identified. Mary, also, reacts to these reasons such that she believes that which she determines she has most reason to believe. Should Mary have been given other or additional evidence such that the balance of reasons tipped in the direction of Oswald not working alone, then Mary would have believed that instead. Therefore, since Mary’s belief-formation mechanism—deliberation—is both reasons-receptive and reasons-reactive, it meets the standard of moderately reasons-responsive required for guidance control.

However, this, alone, is insufficient to demonstrate that Mary exerted guidance control of her belief that Oswald worked alone. In addition, it must be the case that Mary appropriately owns the deliberative process in which she engaged. As Fischer notes, without this further criterion, it could still be the case that Mary lacked control of her belief. For instance, suppose
that, unknown to Mary, a friend (Richard) who knows how long Mary has wondered about the Kennedy assassination decides to use his new mind-control invention to guide her deliberation so as to ensure that she believes one way or another by the end of the day. Though Richard does not dictate what Mary will end up believing, he does guide her deliberation according to his values, credibility standards and biases concerning governmental testimony and investigations. All of this could be consistent with the judgment made above concerning the belief-forming mechanism being moderately reasons-responsive, but it would not be the case that Mary could own this belief-forming mechanism. To be clear, if Mary does come to believe that Oswald worked alone via Richard’s mind-control induced deliberative process, she would hold this belief and, in that sense, it would be her belief. However, she would not have exhibited guidance control of this belief and, were she to become aware of the mind-control, she would not own either the process that resulted in the belief or the belief itself.

Therefore, merely evaluating the process by which a belief is formed is insufficient to determine whether the believer had control of the belief. Instead, as indicated in the above criteria, we must consider whether Mary sees herself as the source of the belief, whether that view of herself is appropriately based on evidence and whether obtaining full knowledge of the source of her belief would alter whether she sees herself as the source.

It seems likely that Mary would see herself as the source of her belief. She decided when and for how long to deliberate about whether Oswald worked alone. She not only decides which sources to consult, but also weighs the evidence according to her standards of relevance and reliability. She considers a number of possible theories/scenarios and, in the end, judges one to be superior due to its supporting evidence and ability to explain the events surrounding the assassination (again her own standard). Given the intentionality exhibited through the
deliberation, it also seems likely that Mary would think that her view of herself as the source of her belief is appropriately based on the evidence. Finally, by hypothesis, no form of mind control influenced Mary’s deliberation. Therefore, full knowledge of the process by which her belief was formed would in no way alter her view of herself as the source of her belief.

Given both that the process by which Mary formed her belief that Oswald worked alone was moderately reasons-responsive and that she takes ownership of that process, Mary had (guidance) control of her belief. Though Mary could not (and, in fact, would not) have done otherwise, she did do precisely as she wanted; she formed a belief about Oswald’s role that was best supported by the evidence available to her. Additionally, had she encountered evidence that more strongly supported a scenario in which Oswald did not work alone, she would have formed that belief. The guidance control Mary exerts is sufficient to allow her to believe that which she judges called for. The fact that she cannot believe other than that which she judges called for in no way contradicts or negates her control.

Is Deliberative Control Meaningful Control?

I maintain that doxastic deliberation, which is a form of JCF control, is a means by which we can exert voluntary control over belief. However, we must now determine whether such control is sufficient for meaningful control. To do this, we must see if it meets the previously set out requirements for meaningful control. Recall that these requirements are:

1. There are instances in which one not merely interferes with how one’s beliefs come about, but actually exerts shaping influence over them.
2. The level of control must be sufficient such that one (upon reflection) not only identifies with one’s beliefs but also takes ownership of them.
3. The control exerted in (1) and (2) must be sufficiently consistent such that one is neither left waiting for it to return nor surprised when it occurs.
Considering each requirement in turn seems the best way to proceed.

Does the JCF control exhibited in deliberation allow for positive influence of belief-formation or does it merely allow one to interfere with it? When deliberating whether to believe that Oswald worked alone, Mary does more than merely interfere with her belief-formation. She identifies and collects evidence, judges both its credibility and its import regarding Oswald’s role, and she sets the burden of proof that must be met in order for her to be satisfied one way or the other. Of course, this burden of proof is likely not precisely set or even consciously considered as in a checklist, but it nonetheless is set by the questions she poses and the quantity and quality of answers she deems necessary to sufficiently answer those questions. Whether Mary’s deliberation leads to a belief and, if so, what that belief will be depends entirely on whether and about what she is satisfied. While it is in the evidence that Mary finds the answers to her deliberative inquiries, her input into and control over the deliberative process exhibits positive control over what evidence she considers and how she evaluates it.

But is the shaping influence available via deliberation sufficient to allow Mary not only to identify the belief that Oswald worked alone as hers, but also to take ownership of that belief? Remember, at issue here is not merely being able to recognize a belief as one you hold, but also embracing it as one which you played a role in shaping. Given that we have already seen that Mary would take ownership of the mechanism by which the belief was formed, there is no reason to doubt that she would, also, take ownership of the belief itself. Even though the belief “just appeared” the moment she was satisfied that Oswald worked alone, Mary’s participation in and control of the deliberative process allows her to take ownership of the belief. The belief that Oswald worked alone is not merely a belief that Mary holds, though it
is that, too. Rather, she holds this belief as a result of a process (deliberation) guided by her selection and assessment of evidence relevant to the question at hand.

Finally, in order to determine whether the JCF control exhibited via doxastic deliberation is sufficient for meaningful control, we must consider whether it is consistently available. Remember this is important because one forms, revises, and rejects numerous beliefs every day. If JCF control is intermittent or haphazard, then it becomes difficult to think of it as meaningful control. Though deliberation is neither necessary nor operative in every instance of belief formation, it is consistently available to the epistemic agent. Even in instances of primarily perceptually based beliefs, deliberation remains available should there be reason to doubt what one perceives. If part of Mary’s evidence supporting the belief that Oswald acted alone was a video of the shooting, and she worried that perhaps the video had been doctored, she has the ability to set aside the judgment of her eyes and ears and deliberate regarding its authenticity. This ability to deliberate is even available to me in the case of me seeing the squirrel in the yard. It’s just that, typically, I have no reason to doubt what I see.

The doxastic control exhibited through deliberation clearly meets the requirements of meaningful control. It is important to note, however, that the fact that such control is available to us in no way implies that it is used well. Many people knowingly (due to laziness) or unknowingly (due to ignorance) have such a low threshold of credulity that their control over when and how to deliberate often leads them into error or worse. However, meaningful control is meaningful not because it guarantees correct, accurate, or even sensible belief, but rather because whether a person’s beliefs are ridiculous or insightful, it allows her beliefs to be hers in a way deeper than mere possession.

Meaningful control allows her to not merely hold beliefs, but also to shape them, which
in turn allows the priorities, commitments, passions, and actions influenced by her beliefs to be hers in this deeper sense as well. Without such control, our beliefs are merely cognitive attitudes we just happen to have toward various propositions, and from which we form priorities, commitments, and passions from which we act. All of these would remain ours, but only in the sense that they result from a process that began with a propositional attitude that happens to reside in us and, therefore, with which we identify, but over which we take no ownership. Such a diminished sense in which my beliefs, passions, priorities, commitments, and actions are mine destroys their individual meaningfulness, as well as the meaningfulness of them being mine.

**Implications and Next Steps**

In all that has come before, my aim has been to demonstrate not only that we can control our beliefs, but also that such control is necessary to connect us to our beliefs and allow them to be ours in a deeper sense than mere possession. Having, I contend, accomplished that goal, I want to end by exploring two items: the broader implications of meaningful doxastic control and possible next steps for the project.

**Implications**

Practically speaking, the possibility of meaningful doxastic control portends few alterations to daily doxastic business as usual. Our experience of belief-formation reinforces the idea that we have control of our beliefs. This is not to say that ordinary doxastic experience reinforces the idea that we have at-will control of belief of either the Williams or Hieronymi variety. I contend that it is only extraordinary experiences, if ever, that a person finds herself
looking for, yet failing to find doxastic control of either sort. In fact, I would go further and argue that even though people might wish they could believe at-will in that way when faced with extraordinary experiences, they do not view their inability to do so as a lack of control. Rather, they view it much the same way they view a wish to fly, make money grow on trees, or become invisible. That is, they can see, perhaps painfully so, the benefit such abilities would provide, yet they do not view their absence as a limitation of their control. True, the man with the adulterous wife cannot escape the pain of her betrayal by deciding to believe that she is not cheating on him. Nonetheless, this fact is no more an indictment of his doxastic control than the fact that he cannot travel back to a time when he was blissfully unaware of her affair is an indictment of his agential control.

Of course, just because nothing much will change in everyday epistemic life, this does not mean that nothing of practical import has been accomplished. In fact, one of the key implications of meaningful doxastic control is its ability to justify two things that most non-philosophers take for granted every day: (1) our beliefs are not mere epistemic possessions foisted upon us without our input or control; (2) our beliefs both express and inform our values, passions, and commitments; all of which prompt us to act. Just as we continue to live our lives unconcerned that we might be brains in vats, without meaningful doxastic control we likely would continue to act as if the above were true. Nonetheless, in our reflective philosophical moments, it is better to be able to demonstrate that that they are true.

Meaningful doxastic control also portends interesting things for several theoretical epistemic issues. Since it is typically assumed that a person can only properly be held responsible for that which he can do, our supposed lack of doxastic control has been a stumbling block for those who argue that we are responsible for our beliefs. However, if we
can exert meaningful doxastic control, then articulating and defending an account of epistemic responsibility becomes a bit easier. The specifics of such an account remain open, but meaningful doxastic control creates new possibilities by providing a previously unavailable, yet needed justification.

In addition to the impact on theories of epistemic responsibility, the possibility of meaningful doxastic control indicates the need to reevaluate and even jettison some long-held views regarding our relationship to and control of our beliefs. First, the doxastic control debate needs to move away from the entrenched focus on at-will control of the kinds advocated by Williams and Hieronymi. In particular, I suggest more attention be paid to the JCF conception of at-will control developed here. In fact, I contend that the JCF conception better captures the features of at-will control so appealing to the doxastic control debate. For instance, consider the classic example of raising one’s arm. Williams and others’ emphasis on the immediacy of the action likely stems from the seemingly instantaneous actualization of an agent’s wishes—a compelling combination of ease and mastery. However, the constellation of similarly at-will actions is minimal in both number and relative importance. This is not to say that my ability to raise my arm, kick a ball, or shout for my favorite team is unimportant to me. However, the importance of being able to control such actions typically pales in comparison with the multitude of other non-basic actions I perform. Nonetheless, at the core of raising one’s arm, kicking a ball, making dinner, skiing, feeding the poor, writing one’s treatise, or climbing Everest runs a common thread—being able to do what I want to do, what I judge called for. Actualizing my wants is typically more complex and time-consuming than when raising my

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57 Such as interacting with friends and family, reading, grocery shopping, cycling, and writing this dissertation.
arm simply because I want to, but in every instance the significance of control rests in being able to accomplish that which one wants.

However, it is often the case that our beliefs strongly influence what it is that we want. Without meaningful doxastic control, when our beliefs decide or strongly influence our wants, then the voluntariness of our actions is diminished, if not utterly undermined. The voluntary ability to raise your hand because you want to—in the sense of just because you can—is lovely, but the voluntary ability to raise your hand in order to answer a question, volunteer for a job, or vote for something, is the kind of control we most want because not only are we able to raise our hand when we want to, but we also are able to judge it called for to do so. That is, we are able voluntarily to decide whether we want to answer the question, volunteer, or vote. The real beauty and value of control is not merely that it enables us to actualize our wants, but that our control allows us to judge what it is that one wants and whether one should actualize it. Of course, the former—mere actualization of wants—is necessary for the latter—actualization of that which we want (i.e. judge called for). However, the former without the latter would be a paltry form of control. In fact, acting on desires or beliefs that are not our own (i.e. raising your hand to vote for Brown because an evil genius prompts the desire in you via mental manipulation) is a classic example of non-voluntary action.

In light of this, a second area in need of refocus within the doxastic control debate is the relationship between the believer and her beliefs. In a way, the debate as it currently stands does give this aspect a good deal of attention. Unfortunately, this attention typically is limited to the binary question of whether the doxastic agent’s relationship to her beliefs is absolute such that she can choose to believe whatever she would like. Instead, the debate should move away from the all or nothing approach toward exploration of what is necessary for one to shape
one’s beliefs. A strength of my account of doxastic control is its focus on the connection between the believer and the belief. By discarding the idea that total control is necessary for any doxastic control, I honor the voluntarists’ intuition that one need not be able to decide directly (i.e. without considering relevant evidence) what to believe in order to shape what one believes. However, my insistence that meaningful doxastic control requires ownership of, and not mere identity with, one’s beliefs honors the involuntarists’ intuition that having control of one’s beliefs is different than merely agreeing with them.

Next Steps

While a good deal of ground has been covered thus far, more philosophical ground remains. As this project continues, I anticipate three paths for development and improvement. First, there is the sometimes uncomfortable, but always important path of refinement and revision made possible by insightful comment and critique. Refinement and revision has been vital to the development of what appears here and it will continue to be so for all that comes after. While I have confidence in the arguments offered here, only a fool would think her work beyond reproach or improvement. An aspect of this next step will include continued attention to the abundant literature being produced concerning belief, doxastic control, and epistemic responsibility. Of course, I will also seek out direct comment on and critique of the work as presented here.

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Second, I want to consider whether there are means of meaningful doxastic control beyond deliberation. I suspect that there are non-deliberative means of JCF doxastic control. That is, I suspect that one need not deliberate in order voluntarily to judge a belief that \( p \) called for and, thereby, have meaningful control of one’s belief. For instance, recall earlier discussions of the squirrel sitting outside my window.\(^{59}\) On the surface, it seems that my belief that there is a squirrel outside my window just forms within me in response to the visual input. However, it is the strength of my confidence that what I see is actually there that allows for the seemingly instantaneous appearance of the belief that there is a squirrel outside my window. Moreover, should something incompatible with veridical visual input occur (say, blinking in and out of view, having a holographic appearance, etc.), then I would not believe that there is a squirrel outside my window, at least not without further consideration. Of course, there is a sense in which deliberation does still play a part in the story here. While I do not deliberate prior to believing that there is a squirrel outside my window, the fact that deliberation is available to me should something visually unusual occur seems to underlie the claim that visual beliefs are not automatic (i.e. that they do not form without my control).

Finally, I want to take my account of meaningful doxastic control and put it to work in the realm of epistemic responsibility. As was discussed above, our supposed lack of doxastic control frequently is thought to undermine claims of epistemic responsibility. However, my account removes that obstacle by demonstrating that can have control of our beliefs. It is also important to note that epistemic responsibility concerns more than evaluation of and accountability for one’s beliefs; it is also a matter of right practice (i.e. believing responsibly). The former concerns mostly third-person evaluation of the doxastic practice of others. Here,

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\(^{59}\) See chapter two (43-45).
elements such as what evidence was considered, whether it was adequately vetted, and who or what you consulted would be typical items of focus. Right practice, however, concerns the first-person consideration and use of correct epistemic procedures and practices. This aspect of epistemic responsibility might also be articulated in terms of virtues and vices that epistemic agents should, respectively, develop or curve. My account provides first-person reasons why responsible epistemic behavior is desirable. The fact that our beliefs can so greatly influence who we are and what we do should provide motivation to form correct, or at least justified, beliefs. Additionally, issues of right practice concern both believers and informers—those who provide information (solicited or otherwise) used by others when forming beliefs. While we exert a good deal of control over our evaluation of the evidence available to us, we have very little to no control over what that evidence will be. This is true both because it is often the case that there is evidence that we cannot access and because for even the evidence we can access, we must rely on the trustworthiness and accuracy of those who have provided it. For instance, as you read this, you must rely on me to accurately report the views of other philosophers, among other things.

This project will likely lead in numerous other directions as it continues, but the three items discussed briefly here are that which I see clearly on the horizon. For now, however, I am pleased with where it currently stands. Illuminating not only the value of meaningful doxastic control, but also its possibility opens new doors within the doxastic control debate by challenging the status quo of some long-held views concerning the relationship between a believer and her beliefs.

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60 I find the articulation of both aspects of epistemic responsibility (evaluation and right practice) in terms of virtue and vice compelling and plan to pursue such an approach in the development of this project.
Before I end, let’s take a moment to return to Edward, the magazine reading fellow we met way back at the beginning. Recall that Edward pulls the most recent issue of his favorite magazine off the shelf only to see the following warning printed on the cover.

\textit{Warning:}
\textit{Reading this magazine might result in the formation of beliefs over which you lack control. Read at your own risk.}

Having read this magazine for years, this warning makes him worry that he has been indoctrinated with beliefs that are not his own. In the end, however, he tells himself that it is absurd to think that a magazine can cause him to have beliefs without his control.

Previously, Edward would have been hard-pressed to philosophically defend his view about the magazine’s warning. However, the account of meaningful doxastic control presented here changes that. At first glance, my emphasis on the influential role beliefs play in shaping our values, priorities, commitments, and actions might increase his concern about the magazine’s warning. Nonetheless, once Edward recognizes the control available to him via doxastic deliberation, his worries would dissipate. Of course, this does not mean that Edward need not take care as he reads the magazine. After all, having meaningful doxastic control does not guarantee that he will always judge correctly concerning what beliefs are called for; rather, it guarantees that whatever belief he judges called for, it will be truly \textit{his}. 
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