

DESIRES AS REASONS ~~AND THE~~ ASYMMETRY

~~BETWEEN BELIEF AND ACTION~~

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The main purpose of the thesis is to show that a man's beliefs must be imposed on him by the world as it is whereas his actions must in some sense stem from himself and that these features of belief and action are respectively essential to our concepts of belief and voluntary action.

The asymmetry between belief and action is located primarily in the reasons for belief and action. The constraint which is imposed on the reasons a man gives for his beliefs, if he is to count either as believing or as giving reasons for his belief, is imposed by the objective notion of good evidence whereas the constraint which is imposed on the reasons a man gives for his voluntary actions is imposed primarily and essentially by factors which stem from himself: his desires.

Since the reason which motivates a man's action is composed of a belief and a desire of his, the question of whether a man can be responsible for his beliefs or his desires has important implications for whether he can be held responsible for his actions. A man cannot be held responsible for his beliefs, or only in a very limited sense, because they must be imposed on him by the world, so if he is to be a voluntary agent and, therefore, responsible for his actions, this must be in virtue of the fact that his desires form part of the reasons for his action. The sense in which a man can be held responsible for his desires is examined and it is found that he can and must have some control over which of his desires motivate his actions, but this is based on the essential feature of a man's most basic desires that they stem from himself.

CHAPTER IThe Prima Facie Asymmetry between Desires as Reasons for
Belief and Desires as Reasons for Action

The point and purpose of drawing attention to the asymmetry between desires as reasons for action and desires as reasons for belief is that if it turns out to be a genuine one it will have important consequences for the question of whether the will can be brought to bear on beliefs, which will in turn have important consequences for the question of responsibility for beliefs. Since most of our voluntary actions are explained partly by our beliefs, it may perhaps also have an important bearing on the notion of responsibility for action. An example of the sort of problem it might help to solve is the following: a man gives a knife to a madman, who then kills somebody with it. We would be inclined to say that the sane man was responsible for the murder since he was the indirect cause of it, and we do not hold madmen responsible for their actions. But if the sane man justifies his action by saying that he believed that treating this madman like a sane man would encourage him to behave like one, might this alter our view of his responsibility for the murder? The answer to this will depend on such considerations as whether belief is to any extent voluntary, and if so, to what extent, and whether the man genuinely believed what he said he believed, or whether this was an insincere assertion of belief given merely in an attempt to justify an irrational or irresponsible action.

Reasons can be given for almost everything that happens in the world and in this loose sense of the word it just means 'what explains'. No limit is here placed on the

sort of things reasons can be given for: physical events and states, human actions, mental states and processes. But when we talk of the reasons a man gives for his own actions or mental states, the word takes on a more specialized meaning. It does not just mean 'what explains', since what explains an action or mental state, although it may be what others cite as the reasons for a man's action or mental state, often cannot be cited by the man himself as a reason for his action or mental state. This is because when a man gives reasons for his voluntary action or mental state the reasons he gives must rationalize and justify his action or state. That they fulfil this function is a necessary condition of their being his reasons. Reasons always have some explanatory function, but they do not always explain in the sense of giving necessary or sufficient conditions for an event. So the vagueness of the word 'reason' gives rise to an asymmetry of function in the reasons that can be given by somebody for an event or state which is not attached to him and the reasons that are given by somebody for his own actions or states.

But within the realm of reasons a man gives for his own actions and mental states there is a further asymmetry between the reasons a man gives to justify and rationalize his own actions and the reasons he gives to justify and rationalize his beliefs, and there is a constraint on both types of reasons. This asymmetry can be seen by considering the sort of factors which a man may cite as his reasons for action and the sort of factors he may cite as reasons for his beliefs. A man may give as his reason for doing something the fact that he just wanted to do it, (though whether this would really justify the term 'reason' is

debatable since it hardly rationalizes or justifies or even explains and it might be said that if a man performs an action intentionally he must in a trivial sense have wanted to do it. It can, however, have a useful role in that it can tell us that it was an intentional action where there may have been some doubt about this). A man may give reasons for his action by citing his intentions, his purposes, his motives, his feelings or emotions, his desires, or his beliefs, and if his reasons in terms of these factors rationalize or justify the action, then they are legitimate reasons.

But the only factor in the above list which a man could legitimately give as a reason for his belief would be another belief. To suppose that a man could give as his reasons for holding a certain belief that he believed x out of jealousy or in order to avenge himself on A, or because he felt angry, or because he wanted y and believing x was a good way to get y makes nonsense of our ordinary concept of belief. A man may only give as his reasons for believing x matters of fact. These matters of fact will sometimes be things of which it makes no sense to ask the question 'How do you know?' as in, for example, 'I believe the sky is blue because it is blue' and they will sometimes be his beliefs about matters of fact, where the belief is less surely or more indirectly gained from the world as it is. For example; 'I believe it will be fine tomorrow because I believe the saying "Red sky at night, shepherd's delight" is usually right'.

The fact that there is a constraint on the type of factors a man may legitimately cite as reasons for his belief is not just a contingent fact about reasons for

belief; it is a logical constraint which stems from the nature of belief itself. Desires cannot logically be given by a believer as reasons for his belief, and if they are, this will discount his state of mind as being one of belief. Suppose someone answers the question 'Why do you believe Tom is honest?' with 'Because I want to employ him and if he was dishonest I would not be able to' we could not say that he genuinely believed Tom was honest and nor could he. We might say that by a process of self-analysis he had come to see what the real reasons for his belief were, but if these are in terms of his desires his state cannot logically be one of belief because it is a logically necessary feature of belief that it aims at truth: when a man believes a proposition he believes it to be true (and when he believes a proposition to be false he believes it to be true that this proposition is false.) When a man gives reasons for a belief he must also believe that he is giving reasons for the truth of the proposition he believes, and desires do not, and could not logically, have any influence on the truth of propositions.

There are two criticisms that could be made of the person who gives desires as reasons for his belief: we could criticize it as a reason, without discounting his state of mind as one of belief, and ask him to provide another reason, or we could accept his reason as a reason for something but not as a reason for his belief. We would have to discount his state of mind as one of belief and accept his reason as a reason for, for example, pretending to believe.

There is also a logical constraint on what can count

as reasons for action, though perhaps not such an obvious one and the logical constraint applies to all reasons for voluntary action, whether given by the person who performs the action, or by someone else. The constraint on reasons for belief, however, does not apply equally no matter who gives the reasons. A man cannot give his desires as reasons for his own belief, but someone else may quite legitimately cite the first man's desires as the real reason for his belief. The observer is giving reasons for the first man's belief in the sense that he is explaining it, but he is hardly justifying his state of mind except in a very limited sense, since what justifies someone's state of mind as being one of belief is that he believes his reasons point to the truth of his belief.

It seems that if something is to count as a reason for a voluntary action, whether the reason is given by the person who performed the action or by someone else it must stand in some relation to the actor's desires and if it does not it ceases to be a reason. In giving a reason for a voluntary action we always imply a desire and if we do not we cease to give a reason for our action. For example, it is no good giving as a reason for doing something 'I believe it will be conducive to x' unless we can take this as implying that I want x. And by no means all beliefs can imply desires, at least not in the context of a reason for a specific action. I cannot, in answer to the question 'Why have you made a cup of tea?' say 'Because I believe the Labour Party will win the next election' though this might be a very good reason for another action. The same applies to all the types of factors which can be given as reasons for action. An intention or

purpose which I give as a reason for action will not count as a reason unless it can be taken to imply that I desire that which I intend to bring about, or something to which it is conducive. The claim that reasons for action must, to count as reasons, stand in some relation to the actor's desires will be examined more thoroughly in the second chapter.

Only one kind of criticism can be made of someone who tries to give reasons for his action which are quite unrelated to any desires of his, and this is that he has given no reason for his action. There is no room for the possibility that he may have given a reason for something else that he did, as there is in belief. The implication of this possibility in belief is that if one is giving a reason for something else (like pretending to believe) then, in virtue of this, one is not giving a reason for belief.

As the logical constraint on reasons for belief stems from the necessary feature of belief that it aims at truth, so the logical constraint on reasons for action stems from the concept of voluntary action itself. It is because the essence of voluntary action is doing something because one wants to that reasons for voluntary action must always stand in some relation to desires. That the connection between the concept of voluntary action and the constraint on reasons for action in terms of being related to a desire is a necessary one can be seen by the absurdity of giving desires as reasons for one's involuntary actions, (some philosophers would say that reasons cannot be given for involuntary actions at all since one can only give a reason for what is voluntary - at least in the realm of

human action. But this only limits the application of the word 'reason' and does not alter the essential point).

There is not only a difference in the types of factors which can count as reasons for action and those which can count as reasons for belief stemming from the nature of the concepts of voluntary action and belief themselves, but there is also a connected difference in the way in which reasons for action attain their status as reasons and the way in which reasons for belief attain their status as reasons, (that is, the way in which these reasons respectively fulfil their function of justifying and rationalizing). This difference also stems from the difference between the concepts of belief and action themselves. An intentional action cannot be identified as a case of doing such and such independently of the person who did it and his intentions, desires and beliefs and for this reason there cannot objectively be a reason for an action making no reference to the person who performed the action as there can be a reason for the truth of a proposition. Reasons for voluntary action are reasons in virtue of the relation in which they stand to a person, his actions, intentions and so on. This does not mean that there are no objective limitations on what can count as a reason for action but that the conditions which impose limitations on the reasons for an action, themselves stem from the person who performs the action: once we have identified an action as a case of doing something there is only a limited range of reasons which can be given for the action in question, but our identification of the action as a case of doing something is dependent on certain facts about the person whose action it is.

An action is tied down to a place and a time and to the person who performs it because these factors are all necessary to its identification as a particular action. Someone may look as though he is making a cup of tea, but the action is not correctly identified as the making of a cup of tea if he is in fact preparing to poison someone. A belief, however, is not tied down to any of these factors: we do not have to, and indeed cannot, take a person's intentions and situation into account when we identify his belief as a belief that such and such is the case. This is related to another apparent difference between belief and action: we can talk of two people holding literally the same belief even if they do so in different places and at different times. The object of each person's belief, a proposition, is identical. But it seems that we can never talk in this sense of two people doing literally the same thing, even if they are doing it in the same place and at the same time. Even if the same description can be correctly applied to what they are each doing we could not say that they were doing the same thing (in the sense in which we can say that two people hold the same belief). This is just because there is more than one person involved and this entails that each person could be performing the action for different reasons which in turn entails that it could be described in different ways. If two people are pushing the same stone up the same hill at the same time the fact that A is pushing the stone up the hill and Y is pushing the stone up the hill, involves the possibility that A might be trying to get the stone to the top of the hill while Y might be trying to get some physical exercise. But two people holding the same belief does not in general allow

for the possibility of such a variation in the reasons for the belief, and even if it does, even if two men hold the same belief for totally different reasons, this is never sufficient to justify us in ascribing different beliefs to them. In other words the identification of a belief as a belief that such and such is the case is not dependent on the reasons a man has for his belief, whereas in the case of action, reasons and actions are mutually dependent for the identification of each, either as a reason or as a specific action.

Reasons for belief attain their status as reasons by a strange and problematic mixture of subjective and objective factors. What is believed is the truth of a proposition, and a proposition, in virtue of its content alone, independent of whether anyone actually believes it or not, dictates reasons for its own truth or falsity. Somebody's actually believing that x is not a necessary condition of our being able to say that a , b , and c are reasons for the truth of x whereas somebody's actually doing z is a necessary condition of our being able to say that p , q and r are reasons for it. But when somebody actually does believe x the reasons he gives for his belief are dependent to some extent for their status as reasons on the state of mind of the person whose belief it is. For instance if a , b and c are reasons for the truth of x , somebody who believes x might be unaware of a and b , and give only c as his reason for believing. a and b could not, certain psycho-analytical cases apart, be his reasons for believing x if he was unaware of them. In this way the reasons a man gives for his belief are dependent on, and circumscribed by, his state of mind.

It is also possible that a man may give reasons for

his belief which have a perfectly legitimate status as reasons for his belief, but not be reasons for the truth of the proposition he believes. This possibility seems to deny the contention that reasons for belief are to some extent constrained by objective factors, that is, the fact that a proposition dictates reasons for itself, independently of anyone's actually believing that proposition. But the possibility just mentioned should not be confused with another perfectly valid possibility which is that others should be able to give reasons for someone's belief which are not reasons for the truth of the proposition believed. There is a logical constraint on the first possibility, which is very difficult to formulate, which there is not on the second possibility. For instance, one may give as reasons for someone else's beliefs his subconscious desires, or the ends he wishes to attain, or the intentions he has. But the reasons a man gives for his own beliefs are constrained by the fact that they must stand in some relation to the necessary feature of belief that what is believed is believed to be true. This leaves room for the possibility that the reasons a man gives for his belief are not reasons for the truth of the proposition he believes, (this possibility is essential to allow for false beliefs), but not for the possibility that he should not believe that the reasons he gives for his belief are not really reasons for the truth of the proposition he believes, and the status of reasons a man gives for his own belief as reasons (i.e. as justifying and rationalizing) depends on this fact. More will be said about this in Chapter IV.

Other facts point to a difference in the way in which reasons for action attain their status as reasons and the way in which reasons for belief attain their status as

reasons. For instance, the reasons a man gives for his beliefs can be challenged in a way in which the reasons a man gives for his actions cannot be - until we know his intentions or desires (until we can identify the action as a case of doing such and such) and related to this is the fact that in belief there is no sharp division (although there may on occasion be a division) between believer and observer where access to reasons is concerned because the reasons for belief are attached to the proposition believed. The ultimate justification for a belief is when it turns out to be true (though this does not entail that if a man holds a true belief he is justified in holding it). No such ultimate objective justification is possible for action. If an action is justified, it can only be justified in relation to the person who performed it.

Although, as it has been shown, there are objective limitations on the reasons that a man can give for his own beliefs, stemming from the necessary feature of belief that it aims at the truth, these objective limitations have proved difficult to formulate in a way which shows that they are objective limitations, imposed by the world as it is, on what can legitimately count as a certain state of mind. The most that it has been possible to say about these objective limitations so far is that if a man can properly be said to be giving reasons for his belief (and can therefore properly be said to believe) he must believe that he is really giving reasons for the truth of the proposition he believes. But the fact that these limitations are imposed by a further state of mind of the person who believes seems to

make nonsense of the claim that they are objective limitations imposed by the world as it is. What it does mean, for reasons already given, is that a man cannot give his desires as his reasons for believing and still count as believing. But if a man can give reasons for his belief which he only believes are reasons for the truth of the proposition, he might give reasons which really are reasons for his belief (his state of mind or attitude towards a proposition), but are not reasons for the truth of the proposition he believes (which in this case might or might not be true). The fact that they are not reasons for the truth of the proposition will not count either against the reasons he gives as reasons for his attitude towards that proposition being reasons, or against his state of mind as one of belief. This, and the consideration that an observer may give desires as reasons for someone else's belief, suggest that we have not yet altogether succeeded in ousting desires from being candidates for reasons for belief.

It seems that there is a necessary connection between the notion of voluntary action and the fact that reasons for voluntary action must stand in some relation to desires, because this fact is what makes an action voluntary. So another direction from which we could approach the question of whether desires can be reasons for belief is by asking whether beliefs are or can be, must or can't be, voluntary. Any conclusions we come to about this question will have necessary consequences for the question of whether desires can be reasons for beliefs. Voluntary action is the paradigm of the voluntary so any enquiry into the voluntariness of belief should make a comparison of believing with acting.

The absurdity of talking in exactly the same way about beliefs as we do about actions was noted at the beginning of this chapter when the difference between reasons for belief and reasons for action was considered. Not only would there be the absurdity of citing the same sorts of reasons for both belief and action, but there would also be the possibility of believing something for no reason at all, (other than that one wanted to), of believing something at will, of believing a proposition with very little evidence in support of it rather than one with much evidence in support of it, (the parallel situation in action allows for the possibility of incontinent actions), and knowing that one did so, without any contradiction. Related to this, one could hold inconsistent beliefs and know that one did, as one can perform actions which are not consistent with each other.

If belief is voluntary it does not live up to the paradigm of the voluntary exemplified in some voluntary actions. We cannot believe at will as we can do some things (like raising our arms) at will. If one could believe at will one could acquire a belief irrespective of its truth and this sort of activity could not be called believing. One could not both know that one was believing something at will and count as believing that thing, but if one could believe something at will one would have to know that one was able to acquire beliefs in this way, and one necessarily cannot know that one has acquired a particular belief in this way. (1)

Although this is one area of the voluntary which applies to some actions and cannot apply to beliefs it does not show that belief is not voluntary. There are very few actions which we can perform at will and these are for the

most part limited to bodily movements. That belief cannot be like these actions does not show that it cannot be like some actions. Moreover, we can believe something for which we have no evidence, (we have no evidence for many of our perceptual beliefs), though we could not believe it just because we wanted to in the face of a contradictory belief for which there was no evidence. People very often hold inconsistent beliefs without our discounting their state of mind as one of belief in either case, though they could not hold inconsistent beliefs just because they wanted to.

In spite of the fact that we cannot talk about beliefs in exactly the same way as we talk about actions, we do talk about beliefs in some of the same ways as we talk about actions; we talk about deciding to believe x rather than y as we talk of deciding to do one thing rather than another. We use such expressions as 'I just couldn't bring myself to believe him,' 'In the end I was willing to believe him though at first I found it very difficult,' 'It was easy to believe everything he said' and 'I expected to believe Tom's story, but I ended up believing Dick's' all of which have parallels in the language of action. All that this shows is that we cannot appeal to the common idiom by itself to solve the problem of whether beliefs are, or can be, voluntary.

What has been established is that if beliefs are voluntary they are voluntary in a narrower sense than the sense in which actions are voluntary, which does not live up to the paradigm of the voluntary set by voluntary action. A man who gives desires as reasons for his belief, because he does so, confers on his so called belief all the characteristics of voluntary action and in virtue of this what can be ascribed to the man ceases to be a belief and

becomes an action. Whether there is some limited sense in which desires can be reasons for belief which would indicate that beliefs were in some sense voluntary will depend on what significance can be attached to our common locutions which indicate that belief is in some respects like action.

Desires cannot be given by a man as reasons for his own beliefs. On the other hand, any reasons for voluntary action, whether given by the actor himself or by someone else, must, it seems, stand in some relation to the actor's desires, and it is in virtue of this that the action can be called a voluntary action. Whether this is a legitimate claim will be examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

The Sense in which Desires are Reasons for Action

I suggested in the preceding chapter that part of the prima facie asymmetry between belief and action rested on the fact that whereas a man cannot give his desires as reasons for his belief and still count as believing, if a man is to ^{be} count ^{as} giving reasons for his intentional action the factors he cites as reasons must necessarily stand in some relation to his desires, and that it was in virtue of this necessary relation to his desires that they attained their status as reasons for action, and in this chapter I propose to examine this suggestion. / ed.

Any reason given for a voluntary or intentional action must justify or rationalize that action and as I said in the first chapter, various different factors can be cited as the reasons for a man's action which fulfil this condition, such as motives, desires, beliefs, intentions and purposes. A reason must have some explanatory function but it does not always explain in the sense of giving the necessary conditions of the action. A man can have a reason for an action, but that reason need not be the reason why he performed the action: he might still have performed that action, even if he had not had that reason. But if something is to count as a reason for an action it must be the case that it could have been a necessary condition for that action and, if an action is performed intentionally, the man who performs it must have at least one reason which is the reason why he performed the action, which gives the reason without which he would not have performed the action. (In general a man has a combination of reasons for doing what he does and perhaps none of these by itself gives the reason

without which the action would not have been performed, but together they constitute the necessary condition for that action).

It is, in other words, an essential feature of a reason for a voluntary or intentional action that it must be capable of motivating that action, and it is in virtue of this that it explains that action. If it did not have this feature a reason would not be capable of explaining an action any more than any random consideration we care to name which need stand in no relation to the action in question. How else could a reason explain an action if it could not be the means of bringing it about? Not just in virtue of justifying or rationalizing it. This is not to say that every reason for an action which really is a reason for that action actually motivates that action or is the reason why a man performed that action. But if a man performs an action intentionally, then he must have a reason which actually motivated that action.

I do not wish to reiterate the arguments for and against the view that the reason or reasons which actually motivate an action (the primary reasons in Donald Davidson's terminology (1)) are the cause or causes of that action. It has, I think, been convincingly argued that they are (2). Any reason which is the reason why, or for which, somebody did something explains that action in the same way as a cause explains an event.

But in spite of the philosophical tenability of this thesis, there appear to be differences of linguistic usage or common sense between 'reason' and 'cause' which make useful distinctions and indicate that the two words are not always synonymous. In ordinary usage, the word 'cause' applied to actions does in general indicate some degree of

involuntariness, or some degree of compulsion which is not indicated by the word 'reason': a person has, in general, direct, non-inductive knowledge of his reasons but as observers only know his reasons by induction or on the evidence of his testimony whereas the causes of a person's action tend to be known in the same way by observers of that action as by the performer himself. It is true that someone's account of his reasons for action need not necessarily be taken as the correct one and he may accept correction from others on this matter, but usually a person's account of his reasons must, because he has direct access to the experiences, mental states and so on which in part constitute his reasons, override an observer's account of them.

The words 'reason' or 'cause' are often used respectively to bring out the distinction between what a man is conscious of as motivating him to act, and what he is unconscious of. We may say 'The reason he gave for doing x was y, but in fact what caused him to do it was z' where z is the sort of thing which would in general constitute a reason rather than a cause; that is, it would be the sort of thing which would feature in the explanation of a voluntary action rather than an involuntary one. But there is no hard and fast rule of general usage here. We might just as well say 'The reason he gave for doing x was y, but the real reason for his action was z' indicating in this way too that he was unaware of the motivating influence of z. In general, in ordinary usage, the word 'cause', when something is cited as the cause of an action which could feature in the explanation of a voluntary action, is used only of what the agent was not conscious of as motivating him to act, whereas the word 'reason' can be used both of what the agent was conscious of as motivating him to act and of what he was not conscious

of as motivating him to act.

There is also a difference in the grammar of 'cause' and that of 'reason' which should be noted. A man may give as his reason for going to a certain place 'AB lives there' but the fact that AB lives in this place is not the cause of his going there. We cannot say 'the cause of his going there was that AB lived there' since he might have gone even if AB did not live there and his reason for going might still have been 'AB lives there'. Though if his reason is stated in the form 'I believe AB lives there' this gives not only the reason for his action, but also the cause: 'His belief that AB lives there caused him to go there'. So although statements of motivating reasons always import statements of causality, the cause cannot always be stated in the same form as that in which the reason is stated. But this does not constitute an objection to the thesis that motivating reasons are causes of action because such reasons can always be stated in a form in which they can legitimately function as causes as well as reasons.

If the primary reason for an action is the cause of that action, it seems that an essential feature of the primary reason must be that it contains a reference to a desire, either implicit or explicit. If it did not, nothing would justify us in calling it the cause of a voluntary action. How could a matter of fact, or a man's belief in a matter of fact, by itself both cause somebody to do something and be his reason for doing that thing? A matter of fact might by itself cause somebody to do something, but it could never, by itself, be his reason for doing it as well. The only thing that enables a matter of fact to be a reason for any action as well as its cause is that it stands in some relation to my desires. And it appears

that the essential factor in the cause of a voluntary action, in virtue of which the action can have a cause but remain voluntary, must be a desire of the agent's. As I said in the first chapter, it is no good giving as a reason for doing something 'I believe it will be conducive to x' for example, unless we can take this as implying that I want x. A belief by itself, which does not imply a desire, can never be a reason for action. This might be overlooked because when beliefs are given as reasons for action they always do imply a desire, but because we do not question their status as reasons for the action in question, we do not look for the desire they imply.

There is another necessary element of the motivating reason for an action which stems from the fact that not just any desire can motivate or be a reason for just any action. An intentional action must be related to the desire which is a reason for it by a belief of the agent's. I cannot say that I intend to go to France for a holiday because I want a cup of tea unless I really do believe that going to France is the best (and perhaps the only) way of getting a cup of tea. It is a necessary condition of a desire's being a reason for action that the agent believes that the action he has performed, or is about to perform, really is conducive to the end which he desires, or is itself what he desires. But in spite of the fact that a belief of the agent's must always be implied, even if it is not cited explicitly, when he gives a reason for his action, it still seems that the element in virtue of which the primary reason for a voluntary action can be the reason for that action as well as the cause of it (thus making ^{it a} voluntary action) is the agent's desire.

The thesis that a primary reason motivates or causes the

voluntary action which it is a reason for in virtue of the fact that a desire of the agent must form part of it has been challenged, however, by Tom Nagel in his book 'The Possibility of Altruism'. He maintains that it is not a necessary condition of something being a reason for action that it should make some reference to a desire, and that a reason can still fulfil its function of motivating an action even if a desire does not form part of it. Since this is in direct opposition to my own contention his thesis must be examined.

Nagel's thesis about altruism is that one has a direct reason to promote the interests of others and this reason does not depend on intermediate factors such as one's own interests or feelings of sympathy and benevolence. This thesis depends on an analysis of prudential reasons in which he hopes to show "that our own future interests provide us, by themselves, with reasons for present action to secure them and that motivation of this sort cannot and need not be explained by intermediate present desires or any other intermediate motive".

The view that all reasons for action have desire at their source stems from the realization that reasons for action must be capable of motivating with the assumption, which Nagel regards as mistaken, that desires are a necessary condition of motivation. This view has the consequence that actions done in someone else's interest, or in my own future interest cannot be motivated merely by the consideration that the proposed act is in someone else's interest or in my own interest; a desire to further either of those interests must also be present in order to explain the action. In common parlance the assertion that an action is in my own future interest is perfectly acceptable

as a reason for that action, and so, too, often is the assertion that this action is in someone else's interests, though it would depend for its force as a reason on the assumption that I cared a certain amount about this person, or at least that I didn't dislike him intensely. Philosophers in general say, however, that the assertion that something is in my own future interest is universally acceptable as a reason because as a matter of fact most people care about their future interests and want to further them so a desire is really at the root of this motivation.

Nagel's first criticism of this view is that motivated and unmotivated desires are not distinguished clearly enough from one another. Some desires just come to us, and these are unmotivated, but other desires are arrived at by decision and after deliberation. Some motivated desires are motivated by unmotivated desires - as the desire to shop for groceries is motivated by an unmotivated desire for food. But, Nagel says, it is not clear that an unmotivated desire must always be at the basis of a motivated one. If the motivating reason for an action is a motivated desire, then the action and the desire which motivates it will both be explained by the same thing, and, since it is not clear that all motivated desires are motivated by unmotivated desires, it is equally not clear that a desire must come into this last explanation.

But it seems that what motivates desires can always be interpreted as other, ultimately unmotivated, desires. If I am trying to decide which of the two things I want to do more, this decision will stand in some relation to, and will be based on, the desires I already have. If I come to the conclusion that, all things considered, I want to do x rather than y, the reason for this conclusion is

that all things considered it would be best for me to do x, and this reason stems from the fact that I want to do what, all things considered, would be best for me. To take Nagel's example, a desire to shop for groceries is motivated in me by hunger (a desire for food) but there may be present in me at the same time a desire not to shop for groceries motivated by the desire not to eat motivated by the desire to lose weight. In my decision whether or not to shop for groceries I am motivated by the consideration of whether it would be better for me, all things considered, to satisfy my hunger or to remain hungry and lose weight, and my deliberations will be guided by the fact that I want what is best for me. (The fact that all things considered I want to do one thing rather than another does not mean that if I do anything I will do that thing rather than the alternative).

Nagel says that it is a trivial truth that if something motivates me to act then a desire to do that action, or for the end to which this action is a means, is present in me. That this desire is present simply follows logically from the fact that certain considerations motivate, but contrary to popular philosophical belief, the desire is not the source of, nor a necessary condition of a certain consideration's motivating me.

Nagel thinks that two possible explanations may be given of the fact that desires are not necessary conditions of motivation but that when I am motivated a desire is necessarily (but trivially) present. If considerations of matters of fact (e.g. that something is in my future interest) could motivate by themselves "then they can explain and render intelligible the desire for future happiness which

is ascribable to anyone whom they do motivate". But this does not seem to offer any explanation of why desires must necessarily be present when considerations of matters of fact motivate. If the consideration that something is in my future interest (or any other matter of fact, since Nagel wants to say that desires are not a necessary condition of any motivated action, not only ^{not} of prudential ^{not} or altruistic ones) can motivate by themselves and can explain an action by themselves, why include a desire at all? By paying lip service to the common and ineradicable notion that desires are at the root of all intentional or motivated action, and saying that desires must be present when a reason motivates, but that this necessity is logical, not causal, he appears to strengthen his case by taking account of this notion, but in fact weakens it.

The second possible explanation which he gives is that there may be another factor which would explain the fact that considerations about the future can motivate by themselves, and the motivated desire (motivated by the same considerations) which "embodies" that motivational influence. He says that it is not clear that this other factor would necessarily be a further unmotivated desire - perhaps not, but in the absence of any suggestions it is not clear what else it could be, especially if it was a factor whose job was to explain two motivations, a motivated action and a motivated desire.

Nagel backs up his view that desires do not explain a motivation or provide a reason for it, although it is true trivially that they are at the root of every motivation, by an analogy with belief. As a desire is always necessarily but trivially present when a reason motivates,

so a belief is necessarily, but also trivially, present when a reason convinces, but the belief is not the explanation of a conclusion, as a desire is not the explanation of a motivation. According to Nagel, if someone draws conclusions in accordance with a certain principle then we would be right to ascribe to him the belief that the principle is true. But the belief is not a necessary condition for his having reasons to draw those conclusions; it does not explain the fact that he has reasons to draw those conclusions. Rather, the belief in the principle and the conclusions drawn in accordance with it are explained by the perception of the reasons to draw conclusions in accordance with it. This case is analagous to the case of action, but not necessarily in the way Nagel wants it to be. If somebody does something intentionally then it is appropriate to ascribe to him the desire either to do that thing or for something to which that action is a means. Similarly, if somebody draws conclusions in accordance with a certain principle, it is appropriate to ascribe to him a belief that the principle is true (unless they are hypothetical conclusions). But is it clear that the possession of the belief is not among the conditions for having reasons to draw conclusions in accordance with it, but the belief in the principle, and the conclusions drawn are both explained by the perception of the reasons to draw conclusions in accordance with it?

Nagel's aim seems to be to do away with the partial dependence of reasons on the people who have them, to make them purely objectively valid, rather than partly subjectively valid as they have in general been considered to be - can this be done? It is perhaps easier to do in the realm of theoretical reasoning than in that of practical reasoning.

The objects of belief are propositions and they do not depend for their truth or falsity on any attitude human beings may take towards them. If they are believed or disbelieved or ignored their truth or falsity will not be altered. They have a content or a meaning and this limits what reasons there can be for drawing conclusions in accordance with them. The content of any proposition, whatever epistemological attitudes human beings take towards it, dictates the sort of reasons that can be given for its truth or falsity. In this respect conclusions which are drawn as the result of theoretical reasoning are independent of human beings and their attitudes. But at the same time it is questionable whether any meaning can be given to the notion of reason or reasoning totally independent of human beings and their attitudes. Although people cannot give just any reasons for their belief in a certain proposition, or for their conclusions in accordance with a certain principle, because the content of the propositions involved dictates what sort of reasons can be given, what reasons actually are given depends to some extent on human beings, and so does the fact that what they give in support of their conclusions actually are reasons. The possibility of hypothetical theoretical reasoning shows that there are some independent criteria for reasons dictated by the content of the propositions involved: if x is the case, then it will constitute a reason for y . But non-hypothetical theoretical reasoning shows that there are further limits put on reasons by the human beings involved and the attitudes they have - x will not constitute a reason (or not a reason he can give) for someone's coming to the conclusion that y if he is unaware that x or believes not x . Similarly if A gives a perfectly valid reason for coming to a certain

conclusion, if he hit on it by accident and had no idea that it really did show that his conclusion followed, then it could not count as a reason for his having come to the conclusion that he did. His other reasons really were his reasons but this one was not. Because he did not believe that it was true, or because he did not believe that it affected the argument in any way. Belief is an operative factor in what counts as a person's reasons for coming to certain conclusions.

Nagel's example of theoretical reasoning suffers from having been put in such a personal form. He says that the belief and the conclusions drawn in accordance with it are explained by the perception of the reasons there are to draw conclusions in accordance with it. But the activity of drawing conclusions (a human activity) cannot be made sense of (unless it is a hypothetical drawing of conclusions) unless one believes the principle in accordance with which one is drawing conclusions - what other explanation is there, or could there be, of drawing conclusions in accordance with a principle? Of course the content of the principle will dictate the sort of conclusion which can be drawn, and to this extent the reasons for that conclusion are independent of the person drawing the conclusion, but the activity of drawing conclusions must be explained by reference to belief in principles from which they are drawn.

Nagel does not seem to distinguish sufficiently between the human activity of reasoning, and the fact that the content of propositions themselves dictate what sort of things can count as reasons and these potential reasons are independent of whether human beings may actually use them as reasons.

They are only potential reasons and though a human being must limit himself to those reasons, and in this way what can count as reasons is independent of any human activity, what will finally emerge as the reason for a particular conclusion or belief, or as somebody's reasons for a particular conclusion or belief will be further limited by what men in general, or a particular man, know or believe, and what their purposes are. If what can count as reasons in theoretical reasoning is to some extent circumscribed by human beings and their attitudes, then is it not more than likely that reasons for action which is sui generis a human activity will be circumscribed by, and dictated by, human attitudes (in this case desires) as well as matters of fact?

To return to Nagel's thesis: he wants to say that a consideration of my future interest can by itself motivate my actions and that there is no necessity to postulating an intervening present desire as the motivational influence. There are two features of the traditional account which he objects to because, he says, they lead to absurd consequences. The first is that it does not allow a consideration of future interest to provide by itself a reason for acting and the second is that it does allow a present desire for a future object to provide by itself a reason for present action in pursuit of that object. He says that these two features lead to absurd consequences.

The first of these is that on the traditional view I may now desire for the future something which I do not expect to desire then and which I believe there will then be no reason to bring about - so I may have reason now to prepare to do what I knew I will have no reason to do when

the time comes. But what is it like to desire something for the future which I know I will cease to desire as the time draws near? Suppose I desire to meet the Prime Minister in a week's time. My desire is for the future simply because I know I will have the opportunity of meeting him in a week's time. But I know that when the time comes I shall have ceased to want to meet him. Can both these desires be absolutely equal in their motivational force? In the present I can only depend on my powers of prediction as to the strength of my future desire and can weigh my desires against each other only from my present point of view. According to Nagel, I may have reason now to make an appointment to see the Prime Minister when I know I will have no reason (because no desire) to see him when the time comes. But the solution in this case seems quite unproblematic and depends on how I know that I will have no reason (desire) to see the Prime Minister when the time comes. If I will have no desire because I will be overcome with fear and trepidation, then it is up to me to decide which desire is the stronger, or which desire I wish to be motivationally efficacious. If I now desire to see the Prime Minister in a week's time, but know that when the time comes I will have ceased to desire to see him because I will have the information I require from different sources, my present desire, in the light of this knowledge, is quite incomprehensible.

The second possibility, according to Nagel, on the traditional view, is that if I expect to have a desire in the future and therefore to have in the future a reason for doing what the desire indicates, but the desire is not

present now, and if no other relevant desire is present, I have no reason to prepare now for what I know I shall have reason to do in the future. But this fails to take account of the fact that there is, to a greater or lesser degree, a general desire present in most men to satisfy their predictable future desires especially if these conflict in no way with their present desires. An example of the situation Nagel envisages would be the following: I expect to be hungry by this evening, but am not hungry now, therefore now I have no reason to shop for groceries, but by this evening, when I will have reason to shop for groceries, there will be no opportunity to do so. But in spite of this, the expectation of my future desire for food provides no reason to shop for groceries now. In such a situation most people would shop for groceries when there was an opportunity in spite of the fact that they did not feel hungry at that time. Nagel's puzzle is how this action can be explained if a present relevant desire is necessary to explain any action, and if the perception that something is in one's own future interest cannot motivate by itself. The answer to this is that a relevant desire is present, which does explain the action, and this is the general desire to satisfy one's predictable future desires. This desire is as a matter of fact nearly always present, but like all desires, can be overridden. If I have a very pressing desire to do something else rather than shop for groceries, then I may decide to let this desire motivate me and face the problem of a desire for food when it comes. If, as Nagel wants to say, the perception that something is in my own future interest can motivate me by itself, how could the fact that it sometimes doesn't motivate be

adequately explained?

Tom Nagel's example of what would be possible on the traditional view presents a picture of human beings completely at the mercy of their present desires swayed this way and that, perhaps being able to choose between two desires present at a specific time, but never being able to act in accordance with an expected future desire rather than a present one, and so only fortuitously pursuing a consistent course of action, if at all, often acting against their own interests, whose expected future desires are as remote from them as other people's desires. But people are not like this, they do take account of their own future desires and interests in their present action. The fact that they are not like this does not show that the traditional analysis is wrong, but that Nagel's account of it is. People are motivated by extremely general desires as well as by specific ones and the general desires can be extended over time, because a human being is capable of predicting future situations and future desires arising out of them, and also of deciding which of two desires he wishes to be motivationally efficacious. This explains the fact that people are capable of disregarding their present desires if they conflict with their future desires, or of disregarding their future interest in favour of their present desires. This last fact cannot be explained if the mere perception that something is in one's future interest can motivate by itself. It can be explained by the fact that some people are better at controlling their present desires, partly perhaps because their powers of prediction are better, or their imagination more vivid.

There is a sense, however, in which 'It was in his own interest' does always explain an action, but not every action can be explained by saying that it was in the actor's best interests. This asymmetry exists because in general people have a desire to do what is in their own best interest but not all desires are always motivationally efficacious. If the perception that something was in somebody's own interests provided by itself a reason for his action then there would not be this asymmetry. There is another factor which should be taken into account: it is not always possible to formulate a clear cut account of a person's best interests. A person's best interests are often relative to other considerations, such as the sort of person he wants to be, and these other considerations can be formulated in terms of desires. If John wants to be a good son then it is in his best interests to do x, but if he wants to get on in the world then it is in his best interests to do y. So what is in someone's best interests depends itself on what his desires are and cannot be formulated without some very general reference to some very general desires. Desires cannot be escaped. Actions, if they are voluntary or intentional, have to be explained at some point by some reference to a desire, though the desire may be so general and so universal that it may appear that the action is being explained by reference to a matter of fact alone.

Nagel seems to want to say that reasons for action exist independently of people performing those actions and that any predicate which can be applied to a particular action constitutes a prima facie reason for it. But it is only when an action stands in some relation to a person (is contemplated by him, done by him, regretted by him) that the notion of reasons for

action has any sense. One person's reasons for an action might be quite different from another person's reasons for a similar action and they only become reasons for him and for that particular action (his action) in the light of his desires.

CHAPTER IIIThe Impossibility of Desires being Reasons for Believing

In the first chapter I suggested that the criteria for something's having the status of a reason were different in the case of a reason for a voluntary action and in the case of a reason for a belief, and the second chapter showed that if something is to count as a primary reason for an action (something which can motivate or cause that action) it must include at least an implicit reference to a desire. On the other hand, as was noted in the first chapter, if a man gives a reason for his belief, this reason, to count as a reason, must not make explicit reference to a desire. If it does it will discount the reason as a reason for that state of mind, and consequently the state of mind as one of belief. The asymmetry between the criteria of reasons for action and the criteria of reasons for belief stems from the difference between belief and action. Reasons justify, rationalize and explain something and if action and belief are in important ways very dissimilar it is to be expected that what will justify, rationalize or explain one type of thing (action) will not, (perhaps just in virtue of the fact that it justifies, rationalizes and explains that type of thing), fulfil the same function with respect to a radically different type of thing (belief).

But it is by no means obvious that the asymmetry between reasons for actions and reasons for belief which exists in one level of reasons for belief (the reasons a man gives for his own beliefs) exists in all areas of reasons for belief. In the area of the reasons a man may give for someone else's beliefs there is no asymmetry, and other

factors, mentioned in the first chapter, indicate that there might be room for desires as reasons for belief, among them, that it seems impossible to formulate the objective limitations on the reasons for belief in a way which does not make them dependent on the believer's state of mind, and so seems to divest them of their objectivity.

If desires can to some extent be reasons for belief then beliefs will to that extent be voluntary. Do we have any control over our beliefs? Can the will be brought to bear on them? Some of the ways in which we ordinarily talk about beliefs have parallels in the language of action, deciding to believe, finding something difficult or easy to believe, and so on. What, if any, significance can be attached to these common locutions?

Among historical philosophers who have been interested in this problem Descartes is usually said to have held that belief is voluntary while Spinoza and Hume say that it is involuntary. Descartes has come under much criticism, both from contemporary philosophers and from Spinoza himself, for saying that belief is voluntary. But whether what Descartes says about belief does in fact have the consequence that belief is voluntary is, I think, debatable. When setting out on his programme of systematic doubt he says: "I ought not the less carefully to withhold belief from what is not entirely certain and indubitable than from what is manifestly false" (Meditation I). He is without doubt saying that there is an element of the voluntary in belief but he is not taking account of anything more uncommon than the law takes account of when it says that somebody should be considered innocent until he is proved guilty.

He is taking account of our ability to assess evidence and to be led by it. When Descartes discards all his usual beliefs he does so for the very good reason that the evidence for them leaves some room for doubt about their truth. Indeed the very evidence which he usually takes to point to their truth, could point to their falsity. He believes that certain physical objects surround him because he has certain sensations but when he is wondering whether he is justified in believing this he realizes that the same evidence in different circumstances (when he is asleep and dreaming) does not point to the truth of his belief that there are physical objects. What he is drawing our attention to is that the evidence which we usually take to be evidence for the truth of a proposition is often not the only evidence there is. For instance, if we believe the evidence of our senses alone we will believe that the sun is a small round object, and if we believe the evidence of science we will believe that it is many times larger than the earth. What he is saying is that we have a duty to explore all the evidence; we must not be led to beliefs by inconclusive or inadequate evidence. His account of freedom to believe is not divorced from the notion of truth and so is not an illegitimate sense of freedom. He says "To the possession of freedom, it is not necessary that I be alike indifferent towards each of two contraries. The more I am inclined towards the one, whether because I clearly know that in it there is the reason of truth and goodness, or because God thus internally disposes my thought, the more freely do I choose and embrace it." (Meditation IV). Descartes attaches a special sense to freedom here in which my freedom is dependent on my ability

to believe what is true. And my ability to believe what is true is dependent on my duty to consider the evidence. In this way I can make sure that I do not believe something for which the evidence is inadequate. Admittedly Descartes says things which imply that we are free to believe what we like "If I abstain from judging a thing when I do not perceive it with sufficient clearness and distinctness I act rightly and am not deceived; but if I resolve to deny or affirm, I then do not make a right use of my free will." (Meditation IV). But in the light of the sense which he gives to "freedom" in the remark quoted above, I think this implication can be rejected. It is more likely that what he means is that if I resolve to believe something, although I know I have inadequate evidence for it, then I am using my freedom wrongly. That we do have this freedom can be seen from the fact that we often do hold beliefs based on inadequate evidence when we know that the evidence is inadequate. Indeed, if we could not do this, scientific discoveries might never be made since it is often because a belief is held very strongly on inadequate evidence, that a scientist is prompted to discover evidence that will be adequate for it.

Descartes can and should be criticized for giving too great a scope to our ability to doubt. There are some beliefs which are not based on evidence and which it does not make sense to say we can doubt, namely many of our perceptual beliefs.

Spinoza's main criticism of Descartes seems to be that he makes assent to a proposition a different thing from the perception that it is true or false thus implying that perceiving that something is true or false is not a necessary condition of assenting to it or dissenting from

it. In a way Spinoza is quite right to say that perceiving something to be true and assenting are one and the same activity; if it is plain to us that something is true then there is no room for not believing it, and seeing that it is true and believing it are one and the same thing. But there does seem to be a point to Descartes' distinction between perception and assent, which is that we can assent to (believe) a proposition without having perceived that it is true (without having adequate evidence for its truth) although we must think that we have perceived that it is true. Spinoza, by equating belief with the perception that something is true, does not allow for this possibility, although his account does allow for the possibility of suspending our judgement when we do not perceive that something is true. He says "When we say that anyone suspends his judgement we merely mean that ... he does not perceive the matter in question adequately" (Ethics. Part II Proposition XLIX).

There is another criticism that is also levelled at Descartes and others who say that one ought to believe what is true (or what the evidence points to as being true). The use of 'ought' here, it is said, implies that one can believe what one likes. Bernard Mayo, in his article "Belief and Constraint" (3) says "If ought implies both 'can' and its subcontrary 'can omit', it follows that believing is something we can do or avoid, an act we can perform or a state we can enter into, or depart from, at will". Whether Mayo is right about this will be discussed later on, but one thing which has been established (in Chapter I) is that we cannot believe at will.

Can we decide to believe? It seems that in many cases

there is a similarity between deciding to believe and deciding to act. We decide ^{to believe} x rather than y because a, b, and c point to the truth of x ~~which~~ nothing points to the truth of y, or what does point to the truth of y is much weaker evidence for it than the evidence we have for the truth of x as we often decide to do a rather than b, because there is more to be said in favour of a.

But in spite of this similarity between the two cases of deciding it appears that there are limitations on the sense of "deciding" in deciding to believe which there are not on deciding to act which stem from the difference between believing and acting: in action one can decide to do one thing rather than another, which, all things considered has less to be said in favour of it, and know this, (this accounts for the possibility of incontinent actions) but one could never decide to believe something for which there was little or no evidence rather than something for which there was a great deal of evidence, and know that one did. At least, if one did, it would have to be because one suspected that, if only it could be discovered, there would in fact be strong evidence to support one's belief. This explains the possibility of things like hunches, where we have a very strong belief unsupported by any evidence, but although no evidence may ever be discovered which justifies a hunch, having a hunch or belief which contradicts another proposition for which there is much evidence can never be called just deciding to believe one thing rather than another, as we can just decide to perform an action which has little to be said in favour of it rather than one which has much to be said in favour of it, because the ultimate justification for a hunch for which there is no evidence, is that it turns out

to be true, and as has been said already, we cannot decide what shall be true. For an incontinent action no justification is possible, but this does not prevent one from deciding to do it. But it appears that if one decides to believe something, one must be able to justify one's belief.

There are other differences between deciding to believe and deciding to act which indicate that deciding in the first context has a narrower sense than deciding in the second: the expression of a decision to act is typically the expression of the intention to act. The action is something over and above the decision. We never act merely by deciding to act (although the decision itself can be called an action) and so although we may have decided to act in a certain way, we may never in fact perform that action. But the expression of a decision to believe is typically the expression of the belief itself. When we say "I have decided to believe y" we mean in general "I now believe y" not "I have now formed the intention of believing y at all costs". But if the will can be brought to bear on beliefs it must be possible to speak of a decision to believe or an intention to believe which does not imply that one already holds that belief. It must be possible to set oneself a project of believing a certain thing as one can set oneself a project of doing something and it must be possible to fail or succeed in this.

As has been seen, the reasons for a man's actions stem partly from, and are circumscribed by, his desires as well as stemming from his beliefs about his situation, and matters of fact. If it can be shown that a man's desires are to some extent under his voluntary control, then he will, to some extent, be able to choose his own reasons for action (see Chapter V, part 2). But a man could not logically

choose his own reasons for believing and still properly be said to believe, because a proposition which is the object of belief has a content which dictates its reasons because they are reasons for its truth. And the truth of a proposition is not a relative notion - a proposition does not become true when it is believed by one person and false when it is believed by another - as a (non-morally) commendable action is commendable in relation to the person who performs it. Even if the reasons a person gives for his belief are not dictated by the proposition he believes, he must believe that they are, and this precludes the possibility of his consciously choosing his own reasons for his beliefs.

But although a man cannot say 'I believe x because y' where y expresses a desire of some kind, someone else can say 'He believes x because y', where y is a desire, without discounting his state of mind as one of belief. And although belief has a necessary connection with truth manifested in first person assertions of belief so that we cannot say 'I believe p, but p is false' this connection does not have to be manifested in third person assertions of belief so that we can say 'He believes that p, but p is false'. So we can hold beliefs on the basis of desires, and we can (obviously) hold false beliefs. This is important since if some of our beliefs are held on the basis of our desires, it is to be expected that they will only have a fortuitous connection with truth. Although this is so, it does not imply that anybody ever decides to believe something in the wider sense of 'decide' which is applicable to action. People may believe something because they want to, or because of some other desire they have, without ever having decided to believe it.

Can belief be voluntary to any extent? Is a conscious project of deciding to believe possible? Could one ever have a moral obligation to believe something?

In Hume's account of belief there is no room for any voluntary control over our beliefs at all. He asks "Wherein consists the difference between incredulity and belief? since in both cases the conception of the idea is equally possible and requisite" and comes to the conclusion that "belief must lie in the manner of conceiving ideas" "a belief is nothing but an idea that is different from a fiction, not in the nature or order of its parts, but in the manner of its being conceived." (Treatise, Book I, Section VII). Nor does his account of the way in which we come to have beliefs allow for any voluntary control over them. He says "a present impression related to an idea either by resemblance, contiguity or causation, causes belief in that idea" and "A present impression is absolutely requisite to believing. Thus all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation" (Treatise, Book I Section VIII). A necessary consequence of this account of belief is that it is no more voluntary than sensation. In the Appendix to the Treatise Hume says "belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles of which we are not masters".

But Hume's account of belief has the involuntariness of belief as its consequence because it is much too limited and takes into consideration only one way in which we arrive at beliefs. Some beliefs are arrived at immediately or automatically on the basis of a present impression and it would make no sense to say we could have any voluntary control over these: if I hold some wax over a fire, I

cannot help believing that it will melt. When we believe something immediately or automatically like this, it is similar to the cases of belief in which we come to believe something because it is so. This is a central notion in belief, but Hume's account suffers from failing to take into consideration beliefs which are not arrived at automatically or directly, and are not related to a present impression, (although in the chapter on Miracles in the Inquiry he does say "A wise man ... proportions his belief to the evidence"). Very many of our beliefs are arrived at after a long process of weighing up the evidence, and it is in this area of belief that believing becomes a useful thing to be able to do, since if we can have beliefs of this kind very many more actions are open to us as sensible ones to perform, than if we had to rely only on our automatic or immediate beliefs when we are deliberating about what to do. Because Hume only takes account of such a limited range of beliefs, no significance can be attached to the necessary consequence of his account that beliefs are involuntary though his account does serve to point out one area of beliefs in which they are involuntary.

H. H. Price, in his article 'Belief and Will' (4) considers the question of whether we can have any voluntary control over our beliefs and locates an area of the voluntary in the evidence for our beliefs. Although one cannot make oneself believe something just by an effort of will "directly here and now," he says, "indirectly and over a period of time, one can up to a point voluntarily control one's beliefs. Beliefs can be gradually cultivated and they can also be preserved when one is in danger of losing them. We have it in our power to weaken our doubts little by little". There are two methods by which one may set

about believing or disbelieving something. As the direction of our attention is to some extent in our own power, we can get to the stage, by a judicial direction of attention, where the only evidence of which we are aware points to the truth of the proposition we wish to believe. The other method is just to fix one's attention on the proposition one wishes to believe and on what things would be like if it were true and we may even act as if it were true, though beliefs arrived at by this method would not be reasonable beliefs because they would be quite independent of any evidence there might be for or against them. But neither of these methods could count as a case of deciding to believe unless the direction of attention either to the evidence which favoured the proposition, or to the proposition itself was a conscious direction of attention; but if it was a completely conscious direction of attention it would seem that a man would have to be able to say, in these cases, that he believed something because he wanted to and as we have seen a man cannot say that he believes something simply because he wants to, or because of some other desire he has, without discounting his state of mind as one of belief. As an account in psychological terms about the way in which, as a matter of fact, we acquire many of our beliefs, Price's account seems to be a correct one. But although a man may know subconsciously that he has acquired a belief in this way, this knowledge cannot be conscious to the extent that he gives reasons for his belief in terms of his desires.

In general we can give reasons for our beliefs whether they are acquired by the methods outlined above or by more reputable methods. It is not a necessary condition of believing something that we can give reasons for it as we

may have hunches for which we have no reasons, but even in this type of belief, we are not only convinced of the truth of the proposition we believe, but we are also convinced that there must be very good reasons for the truth of our belief, if only we could discover them. A man who exercises voluntary control over his beliefs by directing his attention, or by concentrating on a proposition must in general be able to give reasons for his belief, and these reasons must be reasons which he really believes point to the truth of the proposition and are not grounded in his personal desires. A man who knew that he had acquired a belief because he wanted to would not, if this knowledge was conscious, be able to give as reasons for his belief, only things which he genuinely believed were reasons for the truth of the proposition.

The project of trying to believe what is false should be distinguished from another project, which is a necessary prerequisite of the first, and this is the project of trying to forget what is true. The latter is both easier and less irrational than the former. It is easier because forgetting, unlike believing, is not a positive state of mind dependent on certain necessary conditions such as believing that what we believe is true. The only necessary condition for forgetting something is that we should not remember it (or not at the point at which we are said to have forgotten it). We do not need to have evidence for the falsity of something in order to forget that it is true, and we do not need to believe that it is false in order to forget that it is true. Trying to forget what is true is less irrational than trying to believe what is false because it is not the case that every truth ought to be something I believe whereas it is the case that everything I believe

ought to be true.

Another objection to a conscious project of deciding to believe is that a man who had decided to believe something that turned out to be false would be constantly confronted with evidence which conflicted with his belief and which he would somehow have to discount, and it is not clear where this process would come to an end. Price suggests that this problem could be overcome by directing one's attention only to favourable evidence, but it is likely that if one did this conscientiously one would have to discard very many of one's ordinarily held beliefs.

Another problem attached to directing one's attention only to evidence favourable to the proposition one wishes to believe, is that if a man avoids unfavourable evidence, he must really know what is true or he would not know what to direct his attention away from, and if he really knows what is true, does he also believe what he really knows to be true? What is certain in this case is that if the man can really be said to believe what he sets out to believe, his knowledge of what is true must be subconscious and whether one necessarily believes what one knows only subconsciously, or not, if one does then one must necessarily believe it subconsciously.

It seems that many beliefs are held on the basis of desires and this fact does not discount them as being cases of belief, but the question of whether a conscious project of deciding to believe is logically incompatible with a state's being one of belief has not yet been answered. What has been established is that some degree of self-deception is vital when one believes something basically because one wants to; the degree of self-deception which enables one to

give the right sort of reasons for one's belief, and to believe that they really are one's reasons. Some degree of self-deception is vital and it is difficult to tell to what extent a conscious project of deciding to believe is compatible with the degree of self-deception necessary. But it appears that if one needs to be deceived about the reasons for one's belief this is not compatible with a conscious project of deciding to believe because "deciding" in this sense (the sense in which it is usually used of deciding to act) means that one can decide to do something because one wants to, and know that this is the basis of one's decision.

I conclude that believing cannot be voluntary, and that, therefore, desires cannot be reasons for them. But, it will be objected, I have several times said that desires can be reasons for action in the sense that we can say "He believes x because he wants y". But here it is useful to appeal to the common distinction between reasons and causes mentioned in chapter II in which, in general, the cause of someone's action or state is something of which he is not conscious and over which he therefore has no control. Desires may be causes of beliefs, they may explain why someone holds the belief he does, but they are not reasons in the sense that a man who believes x because he wants y cannot be aware of y as the cause of his belief and must think that other, legitimate, factors are the cause of his belief or are reasons for his belief.

There is, however, an area of the voluntary which is connected with belief and in which one can decide in the wider sense of "decide" and this is the expression or assertion of a belief. The decision to assert one's belief or to conceal it, or to assert it sincerely or

insincerely is in every respect like the decision to act, but this is because assertion is itself an action.

I have already touched (page 37) on a criticism made by Bernard Mayo of Descartes and others who say that we ought to believe what is true. He objects to this on the grounds that it entails that we can believe what is true or what is false as we like. It should be borne in mind that "We ought to believe what is true" is merely a loose way of saying that everything we believe ought to be true and does not mean that we ought to believe everything that is true which is obviously an unreasonable demand. Does saying that everything we believe ought to be true entail that we can believe something that is true or something that is false as we like? That we cannot believe anything we like, and that when we believe something we believe it to be true, has already been shown. So saying that what we believe ought to be true is either illegitimate, or it does not entail that we can believe what we like regardless of its truth or falsity. There is a sense in which the use of "ought" here does imply "can" and that it does is vital to the concept of belief, but it does not imply "can" in the way in which Mayo says it does. It does not imply "can" in the sense that we can believe whatever we like, but it does imply "can" in the sense that what we believe (and therefore believe to be true) can be false. This is the nub of the distinction between belief and knowledge. That our beliefs can be false is what makes them beliefs rather than knowledge. But this does not entail that the activity or state of believing is in any degree voluntary. "Ought" may always imply "can", but it does not (and cannot when applied to inanimate objects and such things as truth)

always imply voluntariness.

The fact that desires cannot be reasons for belief and that we have a very strong objection to the conscious project of deciding to believe stem from the feature of belief that it aims at truth, and indicate that this feature is in some sense criterial to the concept of belief. To believe *p* is to believe that *p* is true and the reasons for one's belief are dictated by this. But this obviously does not mean that when one gives reasons for a belief one must be giving reasons for the truth of the proposition one believes, because it is not a necessary condition of belief that it should be true, unlike knowledge. But the essential notion of aiming at the truth does entail the following: when one is giving reasons for a belief one is doing two things with one set of reasons. One is (a) giving reasons for one's state of mind (belief) and (b) giving reasons which the believer supposes or believes are reasons pointing to the truth of the proposition believed. These two functions are interdependent. The first function is dependent on the second function and the fulfilment of the second function is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the fulfilment of the first function. What makes belief such a difficult concept to pin down is the strange way in which even the second function is circumscribed by a state of mind whereas the necessary feature of belief that it aims at truth, demands some objective constraint on the reasons that may legitimately be given for a belief. There is also the difficulty of giving an objective sense to the notion of aiming at truth which at the same time does not make it a necessary condition of beliefs that they should be true. These difficulties will be examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IVCriterial Questions about Belief

When we ask for the criteria of a concept we are asking what justifies us in using or applying this concept, what are the conditions or rules according to which we apply this concept, or what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for the application of this concept.

In the realm of what might be called observational concepts the request for criteria which justify us in applying them is unproblematic. If we want to know the criteria according to which we call something a tree, or a house for instance, we want to know the necessary and sufficient conditions of something's being a tree or a house, and we depend for our knowledge of these necessary and sufficient conditions on our powers of observation. They are logically necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept, but they can only be established in one way, namely, by observation.

But a request for the criteria of a concept like belief which is not applicable to 'things in the world' (as we normally think of them) but to something rather abstract, like 'states of mind' gives rise to a divergence in the sort of things which are said to constitute criteria for the application of the concept. This divergence stems from a difference in emphasis on either logical or epistemological considerations. Criteria which emphasize one or other of these considerations both answer the question 'What justifies us in saying that such and such is a case of belief?' but they do so by appealing to different sorts of factors. The request for criteria which emphasize logical considerations

typically asks what is essential to a certain concept we have without which it would cease to be that concept. That is, it is in virtue of certain essential features that we say that such and such is a case of, for example, belief.

The request for criteria which emphasize epistemological considerations also asks what features are essential to a concept, but these features are essential in that without them we could not have or use the concept in question. Without these essential features something would cease to be a case of belief because we could not know that it was a case of belief.

Mental concepts give rise to this sort of divergence in the criteria given for their application because of the difficulty of explaining how we come to have these concepts, and the related difficulty of applying them once we have them. If 'belief', for example, is the name of a state of mind to which the person who is in that state of mind has privileged access, and of which he has incorrigible knowledge, then only he can say whether he believes or not, and this gives rise to the problem of how 'belief' can be a concept in the public language if there are no public criteria for its application.

Some philosophers have hoped to solve the problem by giving criteria for a 'state of mind' concept in terms of external factors observable by everybody alike. The ways in which we can tell that something is a case of, for example, belief then become the necessary and sufficient conditions of the application of that concept because they are also the necessary and sufficient conditions of our having that concept at all.

Two main types of answer have been given to the question 'What is a belief?' or 'What is it to have a belief?' and the difference between these two answers stems from the two

different ways in which the function of criteria have been interpreted, in which, as I have said, one interpretation lays emphasis on logical considerations, the essential features of a concept without which it would not be the concept it is, and the other lays emphasis on the question of how it is possible for us to have and use this concept, and what the necessary and sufficient conditions for this are.

The first main type of answer, which is in general called the 'occurrence' analysis of belief, analyses belief as a mental event or occurrence which can be described as assenting to a proposition in one's mind. Hume analyses belief as a mental occurrence, though a totally involuntary one, and for this reason does not call it 'assent' to a proposition, since assent is in general voluntary. Belief, he says, is "something felt by the mind which distinguishes the ideas of the judgement from the fictions of the imagination" (Treatise Book I Section VII) and again, in the Appendix to the Treatise "Belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment" Hume gives the conditions for the mental occurrence which is belief, by giving the causes of it, but by restricting the cause of belief in an idea to "a present impression related to an idea either by resemblance, contiguity or causation" (Treatise Book I Section VIII) makes the concept of belief much too narrow, and allows no room for beliefs which are not related to a present impression, and beliefs which are arrived at after weighing up evidence, as I said in the third chapter.

Locke, too, analyses belief as a mental occurrence, but he differs from Hume in that he calls this mental occurrence assent to a proposition. In the 'Essay

concerning Human Understanding' he recommends a policy for rational belief (Book IV, Section 2, Chapter 15) "The mind, if it will proceed rationally, ought to examine all the grounds of probability, and see how they make more or less for or against any proposition, before it assents to or dissents from it; and upon a due balancing of the whole reject or receive it with a more or less firm assent, proportionably to the preponderancy of the greater grounds of probability on one side or the other". Locke's account has the advantage over Hume's that it allows for beliefs which are based on evidence, and gives an accurate account of the processes we go through when we weigh up the evidence for or against the truth of a proposition. But it is ambiguous as to whether he thinks the mental assent given to a proposition is voluntary or not. Does he think that although our assent ought to be determined by the evidence, it need not be? That he does is indicated partly by his use of the word 'assent' and partly by the fact that he thinks there is an 'Ethics of Belief'. His use of 'ought' here seems to be a moral ought, and so there is room for us to believe or assent in a morally reprehensible way, that is, by not proportioning the degree of our assent to the strength of the evidence. This includes the possibility of assenting to a proposition without taking any notice of the evidence, either for or against it. Locke characterizes belief as assent to a proposition, and although he gives the conditions for justified assent, he does not give conditions for assent as such and so implies (as the word itself does) that assent is voluntary and that there are no conditions necessary for it. But belief, as we have seen, cannot be voluntary.

The analysis of belief as a mental occurrence which is

an act of assent in general, has various faults: before we can assent to a proposition we must entertain it, without either believing it or disbelieving it. But there are some propositions which we cannot entertain without assenting to them or dissenting from them, because their truth or falsity is so manifest. How could we, for instance, entertain the proposition "I am here" without at the same time believing it? Hume makes the mistake of saying that these are the only sort of beliefs we can have, but the analysis of belief as mental assent makes the mistake of not allowing for these propositions.

Neither Hume's analysis, nor the analysis of belief as mental assent, allows for the possibility of unconsciously held beliefs. Both these analyses make it a necessary condition of believing something, that one knows one believes it. This criticism is related to another, which is that one can have beliefs in a non-occurrent sense. We may hold beliefs over a period of time, and at any point in this period of time it would be true to say of us that we hold this particular belief. We cannot only be said to have this belief when we have a certain feeling, or when we assent in our minds to a proposition. We may hold the belief without either of these mental events ever having taken place. This does not mean that the belief is an unconscious one; if asked whether we believed so and so, we would say that we did, and then possibly the mental event would take place. But the fact remains that people can properly be said to hold beliefs although the appropriate mental event may never have occurred, and although it may have occurred it does not have to occur every time we say of someone 'He believes x' in order to justify us in attributing this belief to someone. It is possible,

however, that we cannot say 'I believe x' without the occurrence of a mental event when we say it, which justifies us in saying it. But it seems that even this is not the case. When I say 'I believe x' I may say it on the basis of a certain mental occurrence of assent, a feeling towards a proposition, as when somebody has finally convinced me of the truth of something, or I may just be telling someone some facts about myself, comparable to telling them I have blue eyes. In the latter case of saying 'I believe x' it is by no means clear that there must be a mental occurrence of believing every time I say this.

The third criticism of the occurrence analysis of belief is made by philosophers (notably Ryle (5)) who think that no concept can play a significant part in a language unless the conditions for its application can be given in publicly observable terms. The occurrence analysis of belief has the consequence that, if belief is assent to a proposition characterized by a certain feeling, my knowledge of my beliefs, and my knowledge that certain of my mental states are states of believing, is incorrigible and first person assertions of beliefs, both of a mental state's being one of belief and of the content of the belief (or proposition believed) will always override third person assertions of belief. But, it is said, if this is the case, how can we even talk of someone's being justified in applying the concept "belief"? If there were no public criteria for the application of the concept, people would just be able to call any mental state they liked "belief" and the word would have no fixed meaning at all.

This criticism gives rise to the dispositional analysis which anchors the criteria for belief in the publicly

observable world. This analysis says that to have a belief is to be disposed to act in certain ways, and it is the fact that someone acts in these ways which justifies us in saying that he holds a certain belief, or believes a certain proposition. This analysis does not deny that belief is a state of mind, but says that being in this state of mind (or in any state of mind) means that certain things can be truly said of the person who is in that state of mind, and it does deny that this person can have any direct or incorrigible knowledge of his own state of mind. If he behaves in a certain way then he can truly be said to believe x, and if he does not, or behaves in a different way, then he cannot be said to believe x and nothing he says about his state of mind will alter our opinion.

On the dispositional analysis "A believes p" is equivalent to "A is disposed to act as if p were true" which is in turn equivalent to a conjunction of conditional or hypothetical statements: "if A was acting in circumstances to which p was relevant he would act as if p were true". The analysis of belief as a disposition has the consequences that all statements of the form "A believes p" are inductive and that "A acts as if p were true" (or "A would act as if p were true in the appropriate circumstances") is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the truth of "A believes p".

The dispositional analysis of belief has various advantages, as well as rather more disadvantages. It takes account of the intimate relation between many beliefs and action, in fact this relation is the basis of this analysis of belief. It also takes into account, and allows for, the non-occurrent sense of belief in which, in the

absence of any mental event, or internal or external assertion of belief, what a man does will be just what is meant when we say that he has a certain belief. But at the same time this would mean that if at any point a man denied that he held the belief that we had attributed to him on the basis of his behaviour, and denied that he had ever held it, we would have to ignore his denial and continue to say that he held the belief for as long as he behaved in the same way.

The dispositional analysis, unlike the occurrence analysis, does allow for unconscious beliefs, simply because in the case of such beliefs there is no possibility of a man asserting or denying that he has such a belief, either to himself or to anyone else. This analysis has another strength, which is that as a matter of fact we sometimes do take a man's actions as evidence that, for example, he does not believe what he says he believes.

But although the dispositional analysis allows for the possibility of unconscious beliefs, there is a danger that by analysing belief in this way, we might attribute far too many unconscious beliefs to someone, and this is because not every case of a person's acting as if *p* were true implies that he believes *p*. There are many situations in which a person may act as if *p* were true, when it would not be right to say that he believed *p*, and there are cases in which a man might act as if *p* were not true, although he does in fact believe *p*. For instance, a man might believe *p*, and be unaware that it was practically relevant to his action, and so act as if he did not believe *p*, or believed not *p*. To give another example of the way in which a man's behaviour may not indicate what his beliefs are: a man may act as though *p* were false, but we cannot necessarily infer from

this that he does not believe *p*, because his purpose or intentions may have been other than we supposed them to be. A man may even, in certain circumstances, forget that he holds a certain belief, and so act as though he does not hold it.

But a more important criticism of the dispositional analysis of belief is that it does not take any account of the possibility of intentional concealment of belief, or insincere assertion of belief, which is certainly a genuine possibility. We can conceal our beliefs or make people think we believe things which we don't believe, and vice versa, not only by our assertions, but also in our behaviour. Even if belief is construed as a disposition to assert, this does not solve the problem since the possibility of concealment by no assertion, or insincere assertion, must be allowed for, and this would divest the dispositional analysis of its advantages, while retaining its disadvantages.

Another disadvantage of the dispositional analysis is that it does not take account of theoretical beliefs which are not, and in most cases could not, be connected with action, such as beliefs about the remote past or future.

A more important criticism which can be levelled at the dispositional analysis is that, however it is formulated, it cannot avoid circularity since the formulation always makes some implicit reference to beliefs or to some non-observational factors such as motives or intentions. This is true even if the conditional assertion is formulated in the simplest way possible: 'A believes *p* if he acts as if *p* were true in circumstances to which *p* is relevant'. But what would justify us in making the inference from 'A acts as if *p* were true' to 'A believes *p*' (if we could be

justified in making this inference at all) is not that A is acting in circumstances to which p is relevant, but that he believes p is relevant to the circumstances in which he is acting. If he did not believe this, or believed that p was not relevant to the circumstances in which he was acting we would not be justified in making the inference from his acting as if p were true to his believing that p because he might have been acting as if p were true by accident in which case his action would only have a fortuitous connection with the circumstances in which he acted.

There is also a circularity involved in the notion of "acting as if" which is shown in the possibility of a man's acting as if p were true by mistake or unintentionally. What would justify us in making an inference from a man's actions to his beliefs is not that he in fact acted as if p were true, but that he believed that he did, and although we can often infer what a man believes he is doing if we know his motives or intentions this does not fulfil the requirement of the dispositional analysis that belief should be analysed in terms of action alone.

Not only is the notion of 'acting as if' dependent on internal states, but a man who believes p may not act as if p were true even in circumstances to which he believes p is relevant because his motives or intentions in acting may be such that it is to his advantage to act as if he did not believe p and so we would not be justified in inferring from his acting as if not p to his believing that not p in this case either.

We might attempt to overcome the necessity of appealing to a man's motives or intentions in order to identify his belief by postulating conditions for sincere belief such

that we can predict what a man will do no matter what his motives or intentions are. But this would have the unrealistic consequence that a man could only be said sincerely to believe necessary propositions. Circumstances can always be imagined in which however sincerely a man believed something it would be to his advantage to act as though he didn't, or to say that he didn't if it was a contingent proposition. The majority of men, if faced with the alternative of death or concealing belief, would choose the latter, especially if the belief was of a fairly trivial nature and the fact that they did choose the latter alternative (even if the consequences of not choosing it were not as dire as death) would hardly justify us in saying that they did not sincerely hold that belief.

Even if such an account of belief did not have this absurd consequence it would still be guilty of the circularity involved in the notion of 'acting as if' mentioned above. The operative factor is that a man should believe that he is acting as if *p* were true and if we cannot appeal to his motives or intentions to help us decide whether he believes he is acting in a certain way then ultimately we have to fall back on his own testimony and so admit that belief is a mental state to which he has privileged access.

This account is also guilty of the circularity involved in the notion of the circumstances in which a man acts. It obviously cannot be made a necessary condition of sincere belief that a man will act in a certain way no matter what his motives or intentions and no matter what the circumstances. If this was so, he would have to spend his whole life acting in this way in order to qualify as sincerely believing it.

But if the rider is added, as it must be, that a man sincerely believes p if he acts as if p were true in circumstances to which p is relevant, we again have to fall back on the notion of belief: the essential factor is that the man must believe that p is relevant to the circumstances in which he is acting.

According to Ryle motives as well as beliefs must ^{be} analysed as dispositions to act but this merely worsens the circularity involved in the attempt to do away with mental states. We cannot infer a man's motives from his action unless we know what he believed he was doing, and we cannot infer what he believed he was doing from his action unless we know what his motives were, (because we cannot identify the action as a case of doing such and such unless we know at least one of these factors). We inevitably have to refer to a man's knowledge of at least some of his mental states.

Not only do we inevitably have to refer to a man's knowledge of at least some of his mental states, but we also at some point have to refer to a man's knowledge of his beliefs. Our knowledge of a man's action and his motives are not always sufficient to identify his beliefs. Part of the reason for this is that, as I have already said, there are some beliefs which could not have anything to do with actions (purely theoretical beliefs and beliefs about the remote past or future for example). The other part of the reason for this is that motives and intentions are not always, and could not always be, relevant to the identification of beliefs which are related to action (for example, a man's belief about the circumstances in

which he is acting). Although knowledge of a man's motives may enable us to infer what he believes he is doing, it cannot always enable us to infer what he believes the circumstances to be in which he is doing it because an action of a certain kind is not always performed in only one set of circumstances. It may be the case that a man would not have performed a certain action if he had not held a certain belief about the circumstances in which he acted but unless we know this to be the case from the man's own testimony we cannot infer his beliefs about the circumstances in which he is acting from our knowledge of his belief about the nature of his action.

So even if the dispositional analysis did not aim to do away with reference to all 'occult' mental states, and allowed belief to be analysed in terms of other mental factors (motives and intentions) as well as action, it has been shown that this cannot be done. We inevitably have to refer to a man's knowledge, not only of some of his mental states, but also of his beliefs.

These are two purposes which the analysis of belief as a disposition might have, and what it is said to be a disposition to, and the meaning of 'disposition' itself, alters according to which of these purposes the analysis has. As we have seen, Ryle's purpose in analysing a belief as a disposition is to do away with occult mental states or events; to explain how we come to have the mental concepts we have, how they can be used in a public language. He aims to give the necessary and sufficient conditions of a mental concept in observational terms. For Ryle's purpose, therefore, belief must be a disposition to do something which can be observed, and which can be identified without reference to occult mental states. It must

therefore be a disposition to act, (a disposition to assert would add problems and solve none). Since he is also aiming to give the necessary and sufficient conditions of a mental concept in observational terms (i.e. those conditions which allow it to become a concept in the public language and thus the conditions which justify us in applying it) a 'disposition' itself must be analysed as a conjunction of if ... then ... statements in observational terms. In other words a 'disposition' here seems to leave no room for the possibility that one may have a disposition to do something in a certain circumstances, and not do it when those circumstances arise. For Ryle's purposes a disposition must have a status of a predictive law, otherwise he would have to recourse to mental concepts. If saying that someone believed something meant that he was disposed to act in a certain way in certain circumstances allowed for the possibility of his believing it but not acting in that way in those circumstances, Ryle would be back where he started and would have to ask the person whether he believed the proposition.

I do not want to embark on an analysis of dispositions but just want to point out that there seem to be two distinct senses which the word 'disposition' can have. It can have the status of a predictive law, where, in the correct circumstances, there is no room for the non-performance of the action appropriate to the disposition. This sense seems to accord with the scientific use of the word: saying that something is soluble does not seem to mean that it is just quite likely or very likely that it will dissolve in certain circumstances, but that it will dissolve in those

circumstances.

There is, however, another sense of the word which seems to accord more with our ordinary use of it, which allows for the possibility of something's not doing that which it has a disposition to do, even in the correct circumstances. If I am disposed to go for walks on fine days, this only means that more often than not I will go for walks on fine days. The disposition is attributed to me on a less than law-like basis. Someone who attributes this disposition to me will only be slightly surprised if I do not go for a walk on a particular fine day. This sense of disposition is in some ways like symptoms of diseases. By themselves, they do not identify the disease, since we may have the disease without these particular symptoms, and we may have the symptoms without having the disease, though having these symptoms may well contribute towards the identification of a disease, as this particular disease. The concept of a particular disease is a very vague one and necessary and sufficient conditions can hardly ever be given for the identification of a disease as a particular disease. Ryle wants to identify beliefs, not just by things which may or may not occur when we have a belief, but by things which must occur in the appropriate circumstances in order to justify us in attributing a belief to someone. These are more than mere symptoms which may or may not contribute towards our identification of something as a case of belief.

Perhaps, as a matter of fact, dispositions in the second sense of the word could, if we had the necessary knowledge, always have the status of predictive laws. Perhaps if I have a disposition to go for a walk on a fine

fine days this could be analysed as "if it is fine, and I have nothing else to do, and I am not feeling ill, and I am in the country etc. etc., I will go for a walk." It might just then be that 'disposition' appeared to have this second vaguer sense to people who were not in possession of all the relevant information which makes it into a predictive law. It might just be a useful way of saying that we feel there must be conditions which would make it into a law-like statement if only we knew what they were. Thus, someone who did know everything which was implied by attributing a disposition to me to go for walks on fine days would not be at all surprised to find that I did not go for a walk when I was feeling ill.

This does not mean that 'disposition' does not have the second sense which I have attributed to it, but only that it is not intrinsically different from the first sense. It is often very useful to attribute dispositions to things when this attribution does not have the status of a law-like statement simply because we are not in possession of all the relevant information. This sort of attribution of a disposition does perforce have the sense that something which has a disposition to do something in certain circumstances, which we in our ignorance consider to be the only relevant circumstances, may not do that thing in those circumstances.

In the analysis of belief as a disposition in the first sense, 'belief' is equated with the ways in which we can tell that something is a case of belief. In this case the ways in which we can tell that something is a case of belief

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constitute the criteria of the concept. In the analysis of belief as a disposition in the second sense of 'disposition' 'belief' is not equated with the ways in which we can tell that something is a case of belief. The ways in which we can tell that something is a case of belief are signs or symptoms of it and so the analysis of belief as a disposition in this sense implies that belief is something else (e.g. an inner state) and the ways in which we can tell that something is a case of belief do not constitute the criteria of the concept.

H. H. Price, in his book "Belief", while conceding that 'belief' cannot be analysed as a disposition in Ryle's sense, thinks that it can be analysed as what he calls a 'multiform' disposition. Not having Ryle's problem of how a mental concept can play any part in our public language if it is not analysed as a series of publicly observational statements, he says that it is a disposition not only to external activities, but also to internal states and events. Some of the manifestations of belief are inward and private. For instance, belief can be manifested in inaction as well as in action and in such things as hope, fear, surprise, doubt, a feeling of confidence and a tendency to draw inferences from those propositions which we believe.

It is true that all these sorts of occurrences or states or feelings often back up the claim that someone believes something and if one or some of them are missing in certain circumstances we might be reluctant to say that someone believes something. For instance, if a person is surprised when a proposition is falsified, this is very good evidence that he believed the proposition, and if he is not surprised

this is good evidence that he did not believe the proposition.

Analysing belief as a disposition ^h in any sense ^h is (())
 giving ways in which we can tell that something is a case
 of belief. Ryle wants these ways to be given solely in
 terms of things which we can observe and he also wants them
 to constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions for
 the application of the concept (since they are the necessary
 and sufficient conditions of our having this concept at all).
 Price does not think that the ways in which we can tell that
 something is a case of belief can be given in purely
 observational terms. But there is something very odd about
 admitting that belief is an introspectible state which
 cannot be analysed purely in terms of observational
 statements and at the same time giving some conditions for
 the application of the concept (which are incidentally not
 necessary or sufficient conditions ^h as belief is an intro- ()
 spectible state and it follows from this that a man's own
 assertion of belief must override any symptoms or signs of
 not believing which he may show) in terms of introspectible
 and inward occurrences or states, since this implies that a
 man who himself holds a belief, can tell that he, in fact,
 does so from such considerations as his feeling surprise
 when the proposition is falsified. But if a man knows
 when he believes, and this knowledge is not inductive, there
 is no point in giving him ways in which to tell that he
 believes, such as looking out for a feeling of confidence,
 or a lack of surprise. The notion of "ways in which we can
 tell" this something is, for example, a case of belief only
 has application (if it is admitted that belief is primarily
 a state of mind known directly by the person whose state of
 mind it is) when we, the observers, are trying to establish

whether someone else believes something and so there is no point in giving us things to look out for, like someone else's feeling of confidence or lack of surprise, which are things we could not logically look out for.

Price is using 'disposition' in the second sense outlined above in which certain manifestations of belief are to belief as symptoms are to diseases. They are ways of telling whether something is a case of belief, and as I have just said, the only things which can sensibly be given as ways of telling, are externally observable things. Because he is using 'disposition' in this sense he is not giving the criteria of belief, he is not giving the essential features of belief, since something may be a case of belief without manifesting itself in any externally observable ways at all. As something may be a case of 'flu without manifesting any of the usual externally observable symptoms of 'flu. (There is not a complete parallel here since the contrast between internal and external is not the same in the case of diseases as it is in the case of mental states and the person who has 'flu himself usually needs ways of telling that he does. But the parallel is close enough to illustrate the point.)

On the other hand, the analysis of belief as a disposition is only possible on the second sense of the word 'disposition' as we have seen that belief cannot be analysed as a conjunction of if ... then ... statements which are made up of either observational or non-observational terms. If they were made up of observational terms they would not give an accurate analysis of belief; they would not give the necessary and sufficient conditions of belief. If they were made up of non-observational terms what point

would there be in calling them dispositions if they were necessary and sufficient conditions for belief. If belief just is, for instance, a feeling of confidence or a lack of surprise, then what point or sense could there be in saying that belief is a disposition to have these feelings, unless we wanted to imply that belief was something else and that these feelings were signs or symptoms of it which usually but not necessarily occur. Belief as a disposition in Ryle's sense retains neither of these features. That is, neither the implication that belief is something else, something other than the actions which it is a disposition to perform, nor the other, which is that these actions which belief is a disposition to perform are actions which usually, but not necessarily, are performed.

Since belief can only be analysed as a disposition in the second sense of 'disposition', ^{an} analysis of belief as a disposition cannot give the criteria of belief.

The main defect of both the occurrence analysis of belief and the dispositional analysis of belief is that they give no account of the essential feature of belief that it aims at truth, that it purports to represent reality and that when a man believes a proposition he believes it to be true. Nor do they take any account of the related fact that the sort of reasons a man gives for his beliefs dictate to some extent whether his state of mind is actually one of belief or not.

It might be objected that Ryle takes account of the rôle of truth in beliefs when he says that believing p is a disposition to act as if p were true in the appropriate circumstances. But he is not taking account of truth in the right way, as essential to the concept of belief rather

than any other state of mind, since all states of mind may be analysed as dispositions in the same way. For instance, a man might be said to be frightened of lions if he acts as though it were true that lions are fierce animals. Ryle does not give the notion of truth any special rôle in the concept of belief.

What makes belief such a problematic concept is that, in a way, 'belief' is the name of a state of mind, like 'fear' perhaps, of which one can have direct and incorrigible knowledge, but which is distinguished from other states of mind by the fact that it purports to represent reality. No other state of mind has this function of aiming to say something true about the world, except in so far as it subjectively affects the people who are, as a result, in a particular state of mind. This function imposes a logical constraint on belief from without, as it were. This is not the same sort of logical constraint which Behaviourists impose on mental states from without: these are just ways of telling that someone is in a certain mental state which, since they are the only ways of telling, are criterial. The logical constraint which is imposed on belief has nothing to do with a way of telling that a state is one of belief, except in so far as it is a necessary condition for it, but it is criterial: a belief is not a belief unless it aims at the truth and if certain factors were allowable as reasons for it (desires) then it would no longer fulfil the necessary condition of aiming at the truth.

The problem is to find a way of formulating 'aiming at the truth' which gives a more accurate statement of the criteria of belief. One logically necessary condition of fulfilling the function of aiming at the truth has been found in the sphere of the reasons that can legitimately be given by a man for his belief. But no formulation of the

logical constraint on the reasons a man gives for his belief has been found which does not itself include reference to belief. (A man can be said to believe p if he believes that the reasons he gives for p are reasons pointing to the truth of p).

The fault of both the occurrence analysis and the dispositional analysis is that they analyse belief as a state of mind upon which no necessary constraint is placed by things as they are. Hume and Locke get nearer to the truth: Hume by saying that belief is involuntary and is imposed on us by the world as it is (but he does not say that it is necessarily involuntary), and Locke by noting the important place of evidence in the formation of our beliefs. But he too leaves open the possibility that there need be no logical constraint imposed by the world on our beliefs: the degree of our assent ought to be apportioned to the strength of the evidence, but we would only be irresponsible if it had nothing to do with evidence.

At the end of the third chapter I said that when one is giving reasons for one's belief one is doing two things with one set of reasons: one is giving reasons for one's state of mind's being one of belief, and one is giving reasons which one supposes or believes are reasons pointing to the truth of the proposition one believes, and the fulfilment of the first function is dependent on the fulfilment of the second function. The relation between these two functions is causal. It is because the reasons fulfil the second function, and in virtue of this, that they fulfil the first function, i.e. give reasons for my belief (my state of mind). I am giving reasons for my state of mind because I believe I am giving reasons for the truth of the proposition which I believe. But this causal relation

must be formulated without reference to believing if it is to avoid circularity.

Leaving aside this question for the moment, perhaps a more satisfactory formulation can be found for the necessary feature of belief than 'aiming at the truth'. If belief aims at the truth, then it tries to ^hknowledge, which necessarily achieves truth and perhaps some clarification of the notion of aiming at the truth will be gained by comparing belief with knowledge and seeing in what respects it falls short of knowledge. Knowledge can be defined as belief upon which certain necessary conditions are imposed, among them the necessary condition that what is believed is true. But knowledge cannot be defined as justified true belief. A belief may be justified and it may also be true, but it does not, in virtue of these two facts alone, constitute knowledge, since what justifies someone in believing that something is true may not in fact be what accounts for its truth. *become?*

This problem can perhaps be solved by locating the criteria for belief which constitutes knowledge in the relation of the reasons for a state of mind, to the reasons for the truth of a proposition. A may believe p because he believes q, where q may be very good evidence for the truth of p, and p may be true, but A cannot be said to know p, because q was not what accounted for the truth of p. In order for A's belief that p to count as knowledge, what justifies him in believing p must be one and the same thing which accounts for the truth of p. This entails that if A is to count as knowing that p we must be able to argue from this belief that p to the truth of p and what will enable us to argue in this way is that the way in which A comes to

believe that p, is also the way in which p comes to be true, i.e. both the statements 'A believes p' and 'p is true' are true in virtue of their necessary relation with q. In the case of the statement 'A believes that p' this necessary relation must be a causal one. It is only if A believes that p because he believes that q that we can (if p because q) argue from A's belief that p to the truth of p. And we can argue from A's belief that p to the truth of p (in an inductive and indirectly causal way) because A is caused to believe p by his belief that q, and q is what accounts for the truth of p. So for belief to count as knowledge it must be an effect and it must be an effect of rational considerations. In the case of belief which constitutes knowledge it cannot help being an effect of rational considerations, since it is in virtue of the fact that it is an effect of rational considerations that we can argue from a belief which is an effect of rational considerations to the truth of a proposition. It is because both 'p because q' and 'A believes p because he believes q' are true that we can argue from A's belief that p to the truth of p.

But in the case of beliefs that do not constitute knowledge, though they must always be effects, they are not always effects of rational considerations, and when they are effects of rational considerations they do not always constitute knowledge (as in the case of the man who believes p because he believes q where q is good evidence for p, but not what accounts for the truth of p). But this indicates that rational considerations could be criterial in belief without assimilating belief to knowledge.

Before attempting to formulate criteria for belief, the ways in which beliefs can fall short of knowledge should

be noted. As we have seen, justified true belief can fall short of knowledge: a man may be justified in believing p , by the fact that he believes p because he believes q and q is very good evidence for the truth of p , but he cannot be said to know that p because q does not account for the truth of p . A man can also have a justified but false belief. In such a case a man might believe p because he believes q and q might be very good evidence for p , but p is not true. He may also have both a false and unjustified belief, when he believes p because he believes q but q is not good evidence for p and p is false. In such a case his belief that q may both cause his belief and be the reason he gives for his belief, or it may just cause his belief. He may give other reasons for his belief, or he may give no reasons for his belief, but if he gives q as the reason for his belief he must believe that q is good evidence for p and this must be true of any reasons he gives for his belief that p . A man may also have an unjustified but true belief: he may believe that p is true because he believes that q , where q is not good evidence for p but p is true. In this case too, if he gives q as a reason for believing p , his belief that q he must believe that q is good evidence for p .

The common factor in all these cases of belief, and, it appears, the factor which is essential to them as cases of belief, is that if a man has reasons for his belief, these reasons are causally operative on him, and produce that belief, in virtue of the fact that he regards them as good evidence for the truth of the proposition he believes. There are two distinguishable kinds of causal connection in beliefs, one of which is dependent on the other: when I have a belief for which I can give reasons in terms of other beliefs

my state of mind (or attitude towards a proposition) is caused by those other beliefs. I believe p because I believe q and if I ceased to believe q I would no longer believe p. The connection between p and q may be rational or irrational, but the causal efficacy of my belief that q on my belief that p (if I give q as my reason for believing p) is dependent on a further causal connection which is that I am caused to have a certain attitude towards p (belief) by my belief that the reasons I give (my belief that q) point to the truth of p. The dependence of the first kind of causal connection on the second kind of causal connection is what it means to say that the reasons a man gives for his belief are causally operative on him in virtue of the fact that he regards them as good evidence for the truth of p.

But it may be objected that a man can give reasons for his belief which are not causally operative on him and do not produce that belief: the belief is produced by something other than the reasons he gives. This would be so in the case where a man, in giving reasons for his belief, is merely rationalizing his own prejudice. But there is also a constraint on the attitude a man may have towards his reasons for his belief in this case, if they are to count as reasons for his belief (if this constraint was not satisfied we would not necessarily discount him as believing what he says he believes, but only as being able to give reasons for his belief). The constraint which must obtain in his attitude towards his reasons, if they are to count as his reasons, is that he must believe that the reasons he gives are causally operative and produce his belief, and they can only be regarded by him to be causally operative if they are also regarded by him to be good grounds for the truth of the proposition he believes.

We are left with three ways in which a belief which is based on evidence can fulfil the necessary conditions of being a belief: some beliefs are caused by rational considerations (these need not constitute knowledge since they need not always be true, and we have seen that even if they are true, unless they are based on the right rational considerations, they will not constitute knowledge) some beliefs are caused by what are considered by the believer to be rational considerations and some beliefs are merely considered by the believer to be caused by rational considerations: the notion of rational considerations appears to be criterial to the concept of belief. The necessary connection between a man's belief and what he considers to be good evidence for it can be formulated without reference to 'what he considers' or 'what he believes' to be good evidence, thus avoiding circularity in the following manner: when A gives as a reason for his belief that p, his belief that q, he must also be able to say 'p because q'. This holds even for cases of belief where the reason given for a belief is not also the cause of that belief. The man who says he believes p because he believes q, whatever the real cause of his belief that p, must also be able to say 'p because q'.

This formulation, it may be objected, assimilates belief to knowledge and allows no room for the possibility of false or irrational beliefs: if a man believes p because he believes q and p because q, then the man knows p. If this was the correct formulation then it would indeed assimilate belief to knowledge, but the correct formulation is that the man who believes p because he believes q must be able to say 'p because q' and there is a world of difference between

'p because q' and saying 'p because q' since one may say p because q without being justified in one's assertion and when in fact 'p because q' does not hold.

But without assimilating belief to knowledge this formulation does give the concept^{of} belief the amount of anchorage in objectivity which it requires in order to fulfil the necessary condition of 'aiming at the truth' since, although there is room for a man to be wrong when he says 'p because q' there is a limit on the sort of values he can attach to p and q. This is another way of saying that there is an objective notion of good evidence: not just anything can count as good evidence for anything else, and what a man believes to be good evidence must be circumscribed by the sorts of things which logically can be good evidence for other sorts of things. A man cannot give his desires as reasons for his beliefs because he cannot logically say 'my wanting p is good evidence for the truth of p'. It is because beliefs are attached in this way to the objective notion of good evidence that we are justified in basing our actions on many of them. If there are limits to what a man can consider to be good evidence, imposed by the state of affairs in the world, then not all our beliefs can be wrong and a great many of them (from among those which are based on rational considerations) will be right.

It may be objected at this point that the criteria I have given for belief, by allowing for the possibility of some beliefs being false, do allow for the possibility of all our beliefs being false: even if there are limits to what a man can logically consider to be good evidence he may stay within these limits without ever arriving at a true belief.

But although it is not a necessary condition of something's being a belief that it should be based on rational considerations, the fact that there are some beliefs which are based on rational considerations is a necessary condition of there being beliefs at all, because it is in virtue of the fact that all beliefs are to some extent rational that they are beliefs. I have already said to what extent beliefs must be rational if they are to count as beliefs. That there are beliefs which are caused by other beliefs where there is a rational connection~~z~~ between the proposition of the first belief and the proposition of the second belief is a necessary condition of there being beliefs at all, and not all beliefs which are rationally connected with other beliefs can be wrong or we would have no objective notion of good evidence.

This answers another objection which might be raised which is that I have not shown that beliefs must be effects. There are two areas of belief in which it must be conceded that beliefs are effects. Our perceptual beliefs must be effects; and when we hold one belief because we hold another belief where there is no rational connection between the content of the first belief and that of the second, but it is just a psychological fact that we hold the second belief because we hold the first one, the first belief is the cause of the second belief. What other account could be given of the "because" in 'He believes because he believes q' when there is no rational connection between p and q? If it is conceded that these sorts of beliefs must be effects, it would seem at least inconsistent to deny that beliefs which were the result of rational considerations were the

effects of those rational considerations (or the beliefs in which the rational considerations were manifested).

It should not be forgotten that belief is primarily a state of mind of which, it seems, a man who believes has incorrigible knowledge. This is shown by the fact that it is possible to conceal one's beliefs, or to assert them insincerely. In this respect it differs from knowledge whose criteria are grounded in the objective world. A man can think he knows something and be mistaken. In some ways belief seems to be exactly like other states of mind (like, for example, fearing and wanting): it seems as odd that someone might sincerely say he believes something and be mistaken as it does that someone might sincerely say he wants something and be mistaken. But as we have seen there is a logical constraint (located in the reasons he gives for his belief) on what a man may be said to believe or whether he may be said to believe. There is logical constraint imposed by the world (the notion of good evidence) on the application of the word 'belief' as the name of a state of mind, both to others and to ourselves, which there is not on the application of the names of other states of minds like wanting and fearing to others and ourselves. (Although there is a limit in general on the sort of things a man can sensibly be said to want or fear this limit is never logical. It can never be contradictory to want anything however generally undesirable, or to fear something however unfearsome).

So although as a matter of fact a man may never be mistaken in the application of the word 'belief' to himself this is because he can logically only apply the word when certain objective conditions obtain. If he applies it when these conditions do not obtain he divests it of its meaning.

CHAPTER VThe Implications of the Asymmetry between Desires as Reasons
for Beliefs and Desires as reasons for Actions for:1. Responsibility for beliefs

It has been seen in the foregoing chapters that the reason a man gives for his beliefs must be what he believes is good evidence for the truth of the proposition because of the necessary feature of belief that it aims at the truth, and, therefore, that a man cannot give his desires as reasons for his belief. From this it follows that believing is not voluntary in the sense that intentional action is voluntary, that a conscious project of deciding to believe is not compatible with belief since the degree of self-deception necessary for a decision to believe is not compatible with that decision's being a conscious one. It would seem to follow from this that, since beliefs are always effects, we can never be held responsible for them. The notion of responsibility is attached to that of voluntariness, and since our beliefs are not voluntary (at least not in the same sense as our intentional actions are voluntary) we cannot be responsible for them. (It should be noted that the fact that beliefs are effects does not by itself account for the fact that they are involuntary. As was argued in the second chapter, actions are the effects of the primary reasons for them, but this does not make them involuntary. What makes belief involuntary is that we cannot choose or decide what our beliefs shall be caused by, or shall be the effects of).

But although we are not responsible for our beliefs in the sense that we cannot decide or choose what to believe as we

can decide or choose what to do it seems that on occasion we might want to attribute responsibility to someone for having held a false belief if, for example this belief was not justified by the evidence on which it was based, and the man who held the belief could reasonably be expected, in his capacity as a sane and rational man, to know that the evidence was insufficient to justify the belief. This does not mean that the man does in fact know this, (if he does then this would weaken his claim to believe) but only that he can be expected as a rational man to know it. Applying this to the example given in the first chapter of the man who said that he believed that treating the madman like a sane man (which involved giving him a knife) would encourage him to behave like a sane man, we might want to say both that he was not justified in this belief and that he should have known that he was not justified in it.

The fact that we might want to do this seems to imply that there is an element of the voluntary in the way in which we acquire beliefs and although there are limits to the way in which beliefs can be acquired which are essential to the concept of belief and which are based on the fact that there are objective limits to what a man can regard as good evidence, within these limits a man can think something is good evidence for the truth of a proposition which is not, or is not good enough evidence for it. This possibility is essential if belief is to retain its distinction from knowledge.

But does this possibility imply that there is an area of the genuinely voluntary (circumscribed by the objective notion of good evidence) in the acquisition of our beliefs?

In the discussion of belief we have several times come across the word 'ought'. For example: 'What we believe ought to be true' although it could not be the case that everything that is true ought to be something we believe. The function of the word 'ought' in this context is to draw attention to the feature of belief that it aims at truth and to point out what is obvious, that a belief can be false. But there is another point to the use of the word 'ought' in 'What we believe ought to be true', in which it refers to the evidence we have for the truth of the propositions we believe. Here the word 'ought' seems to imply that we have a duty to consider the evidence and to believe what the evidence points to. This does not mean that we can believe what the evidence points to, or what it does not point to as we please, but it does seem to imply that within the realm of what we can logically consider to be good evidence, there is room for something's being better evidence than something else, so that when we give reasons for a belief which we must believe point to the truth of the proposition believed, we can be giving less good evidence than we might have been giving or better evidence than we might have been giving. And sometimes when a belief is not justified, we might have had it in our power to see that it was not justified, and so not to have held it. The only sort of freedom there is in belief is the freedom to allow oneself to be caused to believe that something is good evidence by what is in fact good evidence, and to suspend belief from propositions for which one has not got adequate evidence. But this is a very limited sense of 'freedom' hardly parallel to the sort of freedom we appear to have in action in which the notion of wanting plays a central part. This latter freedom does not exist in the realm of belief: we must be caused to believe by what we believe are rational considerations, but we do

have the power to examine these last beliefs and to decide (in a very limited sense) whether what we believe to be rational considerations really are rational considerations and we have as a standard with which to compare these beliefs the objective notion of what rational considerations are or of what good evidence is. If we fail to take advantage of this power of examination if we could reasonably be expected to have had the power in a particular case, then, if we end up with an unjustified belief, we can in this limited sense, be held responsible for it. So if an action is engendered by an unjustified belief which could have been known to be unjustified, then a man can be held responsible for it, in spite of the fact that he held the belief sincerely. If we could never be held responsible in any way for any of our sincerely held beliefs, there would be many voluntary actions for which we could not be held responsible. We could not hold the sane man who gives a knife to a mad man responsible for the murder committed by the mad man unless it could be shown that the sane man's intentions were not what he professed them to be. That is, he would have to show be shown not to want the best for the mad man, or to want the occurrence of a murder. But if his motive is really that he does want the best for the mad man, then we could not hold him responsible for the murder, unless we could hold him responsible for his belief. Whether in this particular case we would hold him responsible for his belief is an open question and would depend on such things as the sort of justification he could give for his belief and his previous experience in such matters. We might decide that given his previous experience he could not have sincerely believed what he said he believed, in which case we would be forced to conclude that his motives were other than he professed them

to be. But we could decide that he should not have held that belief.

This sort of freedom entails that we do have a limited amount of responsibility for what we believe. We have a responsibility, for instance, to withhold belief until we are as sure as we can be about the evidence. But this is an odd sense of responsibility, since it is to allow one's beliefs to be caused by what really is the evidence, and not to allow one's beliefs to be caused by what is not evidence or what is not strong enough evidence. There are various ways in which we can assist ourselves to do this which are related to the various ways in which it is possible to acquire a false belief. We can examine the evidence for what we already believe and on the basis of this examination come to the conclusion that we are or are not justified in believing. It is this sort of freedom which Descartes was exercising when he resolved to doubt everything which he did not clearly and distinctly perceive to be true. And Lock's use of 'ought', when he says that the degree of our assent to a proposition ought to be apportioned to the strength of the evidence for it, implies this freedom (although it also implies another, unjustified, freedom - the freedom not to consider the evidence.)

In the third chapter I said that there were methods by which one could try to believe something one wanted to believe. If we can acquire beliefs in these ways (although we cannot know that we are acquiring them like this) then we have a responsibility to make sure that we are not acquiring them like this, since if we are, we are not putting ourselves in a position where we may be causally influenced by what really is evidence. By self-analysis we can, up to a point,

make sure that we are not acquiring beliefs in these ways and the degree of our success will depend on the extent of our ability to be honest with ourselves.

I have pointed out that the project of forgetting what is true is easier and less incoherent than the project of believing what is false and this draws attention to another way in which we have a freedom, which we ought to exercise, to get into a position to allow the right considerations to cause our beliefs: forgetting what is true can lead to believing what is false and we, therefore, have a responsibility to try not to forget what is true.

As I have stressed, the sort of responsibility which applies to beliefs is a very limited kind because the sort of freedom we have in beliefs is and logically must be so limited. It is also a logically different kind of freedom from the freedom that obtains in action. It is the freedom to allow oneself to be caused to believe by the sort of things by which one ought to be caused to believe and the sort of things by which one ought to be caused to believe stem from the concept of belief itself and are anchored in the objective world in the notion of good evidence. A remark of Tom Nagel's in 'The Possibility of Altruism' seems to sum up the situation with regard to beliefs very well. "It is as though billiard balls decided where to roll, and at what velocity, after carefully noting the forces and frictions operating upon them, and inferring the appropriate direction from the laws of mechanics. (They would also have to be capable of correcting themselves, or acknowledging the accuracy of a correction, if they made a mistake)."

2. Responsibility for Desires

The reason which motivates an action, the primary reason, is composed of a belief and a desire. We have seen that the only freedom a man has in belief (and he does not always have this freedom) is the freedom to allow himself to be caused to believe by the sort of things by which he ought to be caused to believe. Does a man have any more freedom, or a different kind of freedom in the realm of his desires? I have throughout assumed that he does, and if there is an asymmetry between belief and action it must rest on this assumption. In the first chapter I drew attention to the sort of constraint which is imposed on the reasons a man gives for his belief and that which is imposed on the reasons for action, and said that this constraint stemmed from the concept of belief and action themselves: the conditions which impose limitations on the reasons a man can give for his belief stem ultimately from the world which itself gives us our notion of good evidence whereas the conditions which impose limitations on the reasons for action themselves stem from the person who performs the action (his desires). I also said that there is a necessary connection between the notion of voluntary action and the fact that reasons for voluntary action must stand in some relation to desires: that they do is what makes an action voluntary. In chapter II I enlarged on this and said that the primary reason for an action becomes a reason as well as a cause (and so confers voluntariness on that action) in virtue of the fact that a desire of the agent forms part of it. In the third chapter I held that although, in a very limited sense, one might be said to be able to decide to believe something, this is hardly the wider sense

of 'decide' in which the word is used of voluntary action, and later in the same chapter I said that deciding in this sense (the sense in which it is usually used of deciding to act) means essentially that one can decide to do something because one wants to (not that one can always give 'Because I want to' as a reason for one's actions, but one's reasons for action are always ultimately reducible to something of this form.) In intentional action desires cannot be escaped, but the assumption that it is this fact about actions which confers voluntariness on them (which appears to involve the assumption that we are responsible for our desires) and hence justifies us in ascribing responsibility to people for their voluntary actions must now be examined.

A man has no voluntary control over his beliefs (or only to a very limited extent) because he has no voluntary control over the reasons for his beliefs and so, if he is to be to any degree autonomous, he must be able to exercise some voluntary control over his desires (part of the primary reason or cause of his action). He must be able to decide upon his actions to some extent by deciding on what his motives, or desires which constitute the reasons for his actions, shall be. Not every desire a man has, even if it is a desire directly to do something, motivates an action. A man can have conflicting desires only one of which can result in action and some desires are stronger than others. If desires were just something which welled up in a man as it were, upon which he had to act, we would, I think, be reluctant to attribute any degree of autonomy to him, even if his desires were not caused by anything other than himself. We would, at least, hardly call him a rational man. If a man must be able to exercise some voluntary control over which of his desires result in action this in turn means

that he must have reasons for some of his desires (we do not have reasons for all of our desires; we just have some of them. Indeed, a desire is typically something we just have). But if a man can exercise voluntary control over which of his desires results in action, in virtue of the fact that he has reasons for these desires then, it seems he must also be able to exercise some voluntary control over the reasons for his desires, or at least that the reasons for his desires must not be imposed on him by something other than himself. If the reasons for desires were constrained as the reasons for belief are constrained, then a man could not be said to have any more voluntary control over his desires than he has over his beliefs, and if this were so, action would be no more voluntary than belief.

This is not to imply that the contrast between the constraint which there logically must be on the reasons for belief and the unconstraint which there must be on the reasons for desires (if the fact that a desire is a reason for an action is what confers voluntariness on that action) is complete. Not just anything can be a reason for one's desires. There is also a constraint on the sort of things which can logically count as reasons for one's desires imposed by the content of the proposition which expresses the desire. One could not, for instance, give one's belief that London is the capital of England as a reason for one's desire to go to the moon.

Nor, obviously, are desires unconstrained in the sense that we can literally choose what desires to have. A great many of our desires just occur in us, and those which do not, which are cultivated, are cultivated in relation to other desires which we just do have. The notion of choice (or, more especially, decision) itself presupposes the existence

of desires in relation to which we make our choices or decisions. Some desires just occur in us, such as the sudden desire to eat a cake, and for these no reasons can be given, but there are other desires which, it seems, it would be meaningless to have unless we did have reasons for them, such as, for example, the desire to shop for groceries.

Given the fact that desires tend to occur in us, it appears that the voluntary control we have over them, which is necessary to our autonomy (in virtue of which the cause of our action becomes a reason as well as a cause) must be exercised not primarily over the desires which we have, (because it is in general not possible to exercise voluntary control in this field), but in the realm of allowing certain desires to result in action and preventing certain others from doing so. It is here that the asymmetry between belief and desire must, it seems, be located: if we have a belief which is relevant to some action we contemplate performing it cannot but be part of the primary reason for the action (if we actually perform it). We cannot choose to disregard it because, for instance, we do not approve of it. If we have the belief, this is just not logically possible (we can act as though we do not believe it for some other purpose, but this is not the same as deciding to disregard it). But if we have a desire which is relevant to some action we contemplate, it must be open to us, if we are to be voluntary agents, either to allow or to disallow that desire to result in action, to be part of the primary reason for an action. We must, in other words, be able to decide whether we want to want what we want. We would, as I have already said, be reluctant to ascribe voluntariness to a man who did not have this power, whose actions were at the mercy of his immediate desires. This does not mean that a

man's actions must always be motivated by what he wants them to be motivated by (hence the possibility of incontinent actions).

We do, as a matter of fact, seem to have this power of deciding whether we want to want what we want, and when we have conflicting desires we appear to have some control over which of these desires results in action. This control is made possible by the fact that we have reasons for some of our desires, and even when we do not have a reason for a specific desire, we may have a reason for not letting that desire result in action and we have the ability to consider and weigh up these reasons. Having decided that we do not want a particular desire to result in action, we do not necessarily cease to have the desire, but control over what desires we have (which is impossible) is not the sort of control which is essential to voluntariness, and we do appear, in some cases, to be able to prevent it from influencing our actions.

The decision to allow a certain desire to be motivationally efficacious or not must be made in relation to other more basic desires we have such as the sort of person we want to be and so on. This is what makes decision in action a logically different kind of thing from decision in belief and, it appears, what makes a man's actions voluntary. Although our decisions to allow certain desires to motivate our actions are constrained, the factors which impose the constraint stem from the man who makes the decision and not from the world itself, as is the case in belief.

On this view a man's autonomy is manifested in his ability to have second order desires, to be able to decide, on the basis of his more general desires, which of his first order desires he wishes to be motivationally efficacious. His

first order desires, being part of the primary reasons for his actions, are part of the causes of his actions. We might, therefore, say that a man's autonomy was manifested in his ability to allow himself to be caused to act, or to give his assent to certain factors as causes of his actions by the sort of things which he wants to be the causes of his actions, and that he does not have this autonomy in the realm of belief because in belief he must allow himself to be caused to believe by the sort of objective factors by which he ought to be caused to believe.

But there is something odd about locating a man's autonomy in his ability to give his assent to certain factors as causes of his actions, thereby conferring on them the status of reasons as well as causes, if this implies that a man's autonomy is not related to whether he could have done other than he did, or whether he need not have been caused to act by his first order desire.

Harry G. Frankfurt, in his article 'Freedom of the will and the concept of a Person' (6) argues that the assumption that a man could have done other than he did is not necessary to our attribution to him of autonomy and, consequently, responsibility. According to Frankfurt, even if a man could not have done other than he did (could not but have been caused to act by a first order desire of his) he acted of his own free will if he gave his assent to this first order desire and allowed it to be motivationally efficacious, regardless of whether he had any genuine ability to allow it or not. We absolve a man of responsibility for his action if he acts only because he could not have done otherwise, but not if he could not have done otherwise and also wanted to want to do what he did. But this account of a man's autonomy has the effect of making our attributions of

responsibility dependent on mere contingencies. If a man cannot but be caused to act by a certain first order desire of his, then the fact that he assents to it is a contingent one; he might just as well have withheld his assent and this could have had no influence on what he did because it could have no influence on the desire which caused him to do it. Perhaps we could make the distinction between voluntary and involuntary action dependent on whether a man had second order desires or not and make this the basis of our attributions of responsibility. But it would be as though we attributed responsibility to a man for his action if he sees that it is inevitable and decides to go through with it with a good grace, to grin and bear it as it were, where we would not attribute responsibility to him if he acted sulkily or angrily, as though he did not want to do what he did. Responsibility attributed on the basis of such contingencies would seem to be a very attenuated form of responsibility. Also, if a man conferred the status of reasons on the causes of his action by giving his assent to them, thereby enabling us to call the action voluntary, this would seem to be a very attenuated form of reason, and could hardly be the element in virtue of which we call an action voluntary. The freedom to give one's assent or not to what is inevitable is a vacuous sort of freedom, and it seems that the notion of being able to do other than one does cannot be escaped in this way.

The assumption that a man's second order desires really can influence which of his first order desires result in action, or whether any of them do, is essential to the attribution of responsibility in any significant sense. But if this is so, to say that a man's autonomy is manifested in his ability to give his assent to certain factors as causes

of his action, and that by doing this the causes become his reasons and he acts of his own free will is, it seems, nothing more than an over complicated way of saying that a man's autonomy is manifested in his ability to do what he really wants to do: in one sense I have an immediate desire to eat a cake, but I do not really want to and so my autonomy shows itself in my ability to refrain from eating it. But even when we act voluntarily or intentionally we do not always do what we really want to do. We often act incontinently, so it must not be made a necessary condition of voluntariness that a man always acts in accordance with his second order desires. It is enough that a man should know what he really wants to do, since he is then in possession of the reasons for and against the action he contemplates and this is the necessary condition of voluntariness and consequently of the attribution of responsibility. If he acts intentionally against his own better judgement he could have done otherwise.

It might be objected, rightly, that the ability to have second order desires which influence the desires which motivate a man's actions does not, even if these second order desires really can influence our actions via our first order desires, show that a man is acting of his own free will. A man's second order desires may be causally determined in which case he could not have wanted to want other than he did want and so cannot be held responsible either for the desires which motivated his action or, in consequence, for the action itself.

The possibility of a man's second order desires being causally determined by something other than himself does create problems and the assumption that they are not is vital to the attribution of responsibility and to our notion

of voluntariness. A man can have reasons for a great many of his desires, but it is in virtue of the relation in which they stand to his more general or basic desires that these reasons are reasons as well as causes, and that a man can be called a voluntary agent. But ultimately, in the chain of second order desires, we arrive at desires for which no reasons can be given; one just has one's basic desires, and it is essential to our concept of voluntary action and a great many related concepts that there should be no causes of these basic desires. If there are causes, these should stem from the man himself and ultimately, if infinite regress is to be avoided, we must come to some causes which are themselves uncaused.

The essential notion of a man's desires 'stemming from himself' and not being caused by 'something other than himself' raises problematic questions about the image of the self we have. It seems that this image can only be defined negatively if at all. If we could identify anything as the cause of a man's most basic desires we could no longer describe them as stemming from himself. If, for example, a man's personal characteristics gave rise to some of his most basic desires (in many cases basic desires and personal character traits can be equated with one another) and the cause of his personal characteristics could be traced to some physiologically identifiable feature such as the structure of his genes, we could no longer say that his desires stemmed from himself. The very elusiveness of the idea of the self which we have is essential to it. If it ceased to elude us and could be tied down, it, and many of our most basic concepts which depend on it, would vanish. There are some things we might say about the self, for instance, that it is an instigator of causes. But more than this we cannot say and still retain

the notion of the self.

If there are no causes of our most basic desires there can equally be no reasons for them, but if there can be no reasons for them, then we cannot be responsible for them. The possibility of choice or decision is essential to the notions of voluntariness and responsibility, but we cannot decide on things for which we have no reasons, and we have no reasons for our most basic desires because we just have them. The notion of the self depends on our having no reasons for our basic desires. But although this indicates that we cannot sensibly be held responsible for them, paradoxically, we cannot be exempted from responsibility for them since this would indicate that there were causes of them which would in turn mean that we could not have the image of the self which we do have and which is essential to the notion of voluntariness.

This whole area is fraught with paradoxes since it is in virtue of the fact that we cannot be held responsible for our most basic desires (because that we cannot have reasons for them is essential to our image of the self) that we can be held responsible for our less basic desires (and consequently for our actions) and that we can say that the causes for our less basic desires stem from ourselves and so constitute reasons. The possibility of a genuine decision based on second order desires as to whether a first order desire should motivate an action is, paradoxically, dependent on the impossibility of a genuine decision in the area of our most basic desires.

Perhaps this image of the self is a nebulous metaphysical assumption, and perhaps it is mythological, but without this assumption we would be divested of many of our most fundamental

concepts. We could not have the concept of desire as something which essentially stems from a man himself and, if we did not have this concept of desire, there could be no necessary connection between desires and motives of action. It would be as impossible to explain how a desire brought about an action as it would be to explain how the fact that a man had blue eyes, or held a certain belief, by itself brought about an action of his. There could be no reasons for action, only causes of action, because something is a reason for action in virtue of the fact that it stands in relation to the agent's desires. And if there could be no reasons for action, there could be no voluntary action and so no responsibility. This is perhaps the least serious of the consequences. We could conceivably do without the notion of responsibility but not without desires. On the other hand, it has, I think, been shown that if we have the concept of desire as something which essentially stems from a man himself and as something which motivates an action, we automatically have the notion of voluntary action and, consequently, that of responsibility. The assumption, which I said at the beginning of this section, must be examined, that it is the fact that a desire is part of the reason for an action which confers voluntariness on that action, is a necessary assumption. The notions of desires as reasons and voluntariness are inextricably entwined and mutually dependent.

But, it might be objected, this may be so, but it does not show that we can hold a man responsible for his desires or, consequently, for the actions they motivate. Surely the attribution of responsibility in any significant sense must depend on the notion of having been able to do otherwise and, where a man's most basic desires are concerned, (and even where

his less basic desires are concerned) it makes no sense to say he could have wanted otherwise. The answer to this is that although a man cannot usually be held responsible for the desires which he has (though he might be responsible for having a desire if he had cultivated it) he is responsible, in a significant sense, for allowing or not allowing his first order desires to be motivationally efficacious because in this area he really can decide which of his desires he wishes to result in action because he really does have reasons on the basis of which to make these decisions, (this does not mean that he will always do what he decides he wants to do). A man, to be a voluntary agent, must have this sort of autonomy; he must not be at the mercy of his first order desires.

It is a necessary condition, however, of this sort of autonomy that a man should not be responsible in the same sense (the sense in which he can have reasons and so make a decision) for his most basic desires, as has already been shown. We might attribute responsibility to him for his basic desires in a rather special sense of responsibility; the sense, perhaps, in which they can be ascribed to him. But this does not, and cannot, carry any implications about being able to want otherwise. Ultimately, if we are to have the concept of voluntariness at all, we have to get beyond the notion of having been able to do or want otherwise.

The image of the self, about which all we can say is that it is, or is the source of, a man's most basic desires, is necessary to our concept of voluntary action because some of the factors which impose constraint on a man's reason for action must, if the action is to be voluntary, stem from himself and it is in virtue of these factors that the action is voluntary. It is not, however, necessary to our concept of belief because it is an essential feature of belief that

the factors which impose constraint on the reasons for a man's beliefs must stem not from himself, but from the world.

I conclude that the asymmetry between belief and action can be located in two areas. Firstly, in the control a man has over which of his first order desires he allows to result in action, which is manifested in the fact that he has reasons for many of his first order desires. The possibility of this sort of voluntariness is essential to a man's autonomy. A man cannot have a similar control over whether he allows certain of his beliefs to result in action. As I have already said, if a man has a belief which is relevant to some action he contemplates (and knows he has this belief) it cannot but be part of the primary reason for his action. This is not so in the case of first order desires which should, if a man is to be autonomous, be only potentially part of the primary reasons for action.

The second area in which the asymmetry between belief and action can be located is in the constraint which is imposed on the reasons for a man's action and that which is imposed on the reasons he gives for his belief, in the former case some of the factors which impose the constraint must, if the action is to be voluntary, stem from the man himself and in the latter case, if it is to be a genuine belief, the factors which impose the constraint must stem from the world.

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