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Deliberation and the First Person

David Owens

Having renounced his inherited convictions in the *First Meditation* and thereby taken control of his cognition, Descartes sets himself the task of working out what to believe and (more in the *Discourse* than the *Meditations*) what to do. In Descartes's view, there is a form of thinking by which each of us can determine both when we are convinced and how we are to act. The availability of this form of cognitive self-control is what makes Descartes a rational being, directly responsible for what he believes or decides to do.

A crucial feature of this form of cognitive self-control is that it involves the subject thinking of themselves *as* employing that very form of self-control. For Descartes, the meditator must conceive of himself as the agent of his own meditation. In the *Second Meditation*, Descartes famously describes himself as a thing that 'doubts, understands, conceives, affirms, denies, wills, refuses' (1984: 19), a piece of knowledge which does not merely survive the sceptical reflections of the *First Meditation* but is actually presupposed by them. For Descartes, rational self-control involves first personal thought.

Is there a form of thinking which satisfies Descartes's specification, which involves conceiving of yourself as its agent and is a method by which you can directly control your own beliefs and decisions? Plain reasoning is not a strong candidate, for much of the reasoning by which we arrive at beliefs and decisions is tacit, automatic, or even unconscious and doesn't involve thinking of oneself in any particular way. But other more sophisticated forms of thought might fit the bill. I shall examine three: *deliberation*, *reflective maintenance*, and *reflective reasoning*. Let us start with deliberation.

What is deliberation?

As I shall use the term, *deliberation* is a conscious, intentional activity whose aim is to resolve a certain question. I'll take these features in order.

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First, deliberation is *conscious*, that is it occupies the deliberator's attention (Peacocke 1998: 65–7). I assume there is a resource, conscious attention, which we employ in various ways: we can listen carefully to the person now addressing us, attempt to recall their name, try to visualize them naked. These activities compete for our attention and may well interfere with one another. Deliberation is another such activity: in wondering what we ought to say to them, or in asking ourselves whether they are likely to hit us, we do something which tends to distract from the other activities just mentioned. By contrast, thinking or reasoning – the formation of beliefs or intentions on the basis of reasons for them – can occur in a way which does not compete with looking, recalling, or visualizing for the scarce resource of conscious attention.

Secondly, deliberation is a form of *activity*. The deliberator is not just a forum for discussion or a battleground between contending inclinations: he is the author, the agent of the deliberation (Shoemaker 1996: 28). In deliberation we are trying to do something: to prove a theorem, to make a decision, and so forth. And when these activities involve deliberation, they are *intentional* under that description. I can't unintentionally deliberate about what to think or do.

Thirdly, deliberation is an activity which aims at *resolving* a certain issue (Stroud 2000: 30; Moran 2001: 59 and 131). In this paper I shall focus on deliberation which governs belief and action, on theoretical and practical deliberation. A deliberator does not merely inquire what he ought to believe or to do; he means to make up his mind on the point. Of course he is perfectly capable of thinking about what he ought to *have* believed or to *have* done. He is also capable of thinking about what someone else ought to believe or to do. But such appraisal is not deliberation about what to believe or do. Appraisal does not fail merely because its object refuses to comply whilst deliberation which leaves one with an open mind on the point is unsuccessful deliberation.

What exactly is involved in making up one's mind about something: what is it to be convinced of something or to have decided to do it? A full answer to this question is beyond me but one point should be made: belief and intention both act as a block on further deliberation.¹ Suppose I am convinced of the honesty of my accountant. To have such a belief is not just to think that the evidence currently favours his honesty: that would be consistent with having an open mind on the question, with carefully collecting and assimilating further information and being thoroughly on one's guard. Believing my accountant to be honest, I simply don't consider whether a certain anomaly in the company's books should undermine my faith in him: I ignore it or explain it away on the assumption that he is honest.

The point is quite general. To have made your mind up about an issue is incompatible with further deliberation: deliberation aims to resolve the matter and you can't aim to resolve a matter that has already been resolved. Having made up my mind to lie to the tax inspector this year, I do not reopen the issue of whether to lie to the tax

¹ See Harman (1986) for belief and Bratman (1987) for intention.

inspector. I may construct various lines of thought to support my belief in my accountant but so long as my continued belief is not meant to depend on the success of these efforts, this thinking will not constitute deliberation.

Neither beliefs nor decisions are immutable. Certain events may arouse my suspicions, may sow doubts. They won't do this *via* a process of deliberation – I can't (seriously) consider whether these events show my accountant to be dishonest without already having ceased to trust him – rather it is by undermining this conviction that they make such deliberation possible. This refusal to consider whether my accountant is dishonest may be perfectly reasonable, even in the face of a not insignificant amount of evidence. But as it mounts up, there will come a point when my belief should be undermined by the evidence before me; either I must change my mind or at least open my mind on the issue. At some point conviction wilts and the blockage is removed.

How exactly does this happen if not via a process of deliberation? It can happen by means of reasoning which is not deliberation about my accountant's probity because it is not an intentional action performed with the aim of settling what to think about this issue.² Perhaps unconscious reasoning makes some action of his strike me as suspicious and that undermines my conviction. Or else I might be reasoning perfectly consciously about my accountant's honesty, say with the aim of convincing someone else, and then find myself in difficulties. Or else I might be deliberating about some apparently unrelated matter and arrive at a conclusion which, I then realize, throws doubt on my accountant's honesty. In no case do I reason with the intention of making up my mind about this matter.³

I hope I have said enough to distinguish deliberation from plain reasoning at least. Why should deliberation, as so far described, require the ability to think of yourself? One possibility is that the deliberator, whether theoretical or practical, makes up his mind by considering certain psychological states, namely his own beliefs, desires (etc.) so conceived. This would imply that a deliberator must indeed be self-conscious. On this view, when I deliberate, I must do so by considering the fact that *I* (the deliberator) am someone who believes that *p* or desires that *q*.⁴

To test this hypothesis, let's examine an example of deliberation and see what it involves. I am driving past a friend's house wondering whether he is home. I could stop, get out of my car, and ring the front door bell but I'd prefer not to go to all that trouble unless he is indeed at home. So I drive slowly by, scrutinizing the front of the house. First I notice that the garage door is closed. That would tend to indicate that he isn't at home for I know that he closes the garage door only when the car has gone. As a check, I glance at the front door and find it open. I know that the front door would

² Considering this example in earlier work, I said that such belief revision cannot be the product of reasoning (Owens 2000: 144–5). I wrote this because I had not clearly distinguished reasoning from deliberation.

³ Later on I shall ask whether I can revise a belief or decision, not by reconsidering the first order issue but rather by considering the higher-order question as to whether this belief or this decision is a reasonable one.

⁴ Korsgaard (1996: 92–3) might be read as suggesting that we think of deliberation in this way.

never be left open unless there were someone in the house and that someone is very likely to be him, the probable absence of his car notwithstanding. So I decide to stop and knock on his door.

This story involves stretches of conscious deliberation. Not that I need have rehearsed this paragraph to myself whilst making the decision. It does not matter what, if any, words sounded in my mind's ear; my attention was occupied with trying to work out whether my friend was at home in just the way described. My deliberation involved experience, belief, and decision, all states with intentional content but none of these contents referred to experience, belief, or decision. First, I saw a closed garage door. From this I concluded that my friend's car was not in the garage. This didn't lead me to infer that my friend was away. Instead I turned my attention to the front door, saw an open door, formed the view my friend was likely to be at home, and so decided to get out of my car. These various states of mind concern the condition of two doors, what else was likely to be true given the condition of those doors, and how to act given what was likely to be true.⁵

This very typical instance of deliberation employs no psychological concepts. That might lead us to conclude that deliberation deploys psychological concepts only when it happens to be about someone's psychology. Such a conclusion would not be far wrong but we need to be careful; facts about my psychology do sometimes contribute to deliberation about non-psychological phenomena. Suppose I have doubts about whether my visual experience of the front door was accurate (I was distracted by driving). Then I might use the fact that I am enjoying that experience under those conditions as a piece of (inconclusive) evidence to be weighed against other forms of evidence: I might treat my experience, so conceived, as a more or less reliable indicator of how things are. But this is not the role my experience normally plays in the formation of beliefs based on experience.

Something stronger is true of belief itself. Take my belief that my friend never leaves his door open when he is away from home. When I infer that he is in fact at home, I base my inference on the fact that he behaves in this way, not on the fact that I believe he behaves in this way (Moran 2001: 83, 128–9). In the eyes of someone who has no idea about the habits of my friend, the fact that I believe this might play an important role in establishing that he is at home. But, for me, it plays no such role. Perhaps there are cases in which the fact that I currently believe *p* can serve as evidence, in my own eyes, for the truth of certain other propositions but there belief is not playing its normal role in inference (deductive or otherwise).

What of desire? When I desire something, there generally seems to me to be something good about it and when deciding whether (or how) to satisfy my desire, I am focused on that good, not on the desire which registers it (Stroud 2000: 34–5). In

⁵ Considering a similar example, Peacocke (1996: 129–30) argues that reasoning leads to 'the revision of beliefs in the light of thought about relations of evidence and support but the thoughts it involves all seem to be thoughts about the world, not about the thinker's thoughts'. See also Peacocke (1998: 73).

the above example, I am focused on how to get to meet my friend, on how to bring about that desirable outcome, not on my desire for it. If there seems to be nothing good in what I desire, the fact that I nevertheless desire it may come to be an element in my deliberations: perhaps I must work out how best to placate this desire or distract myself from its suggestions. But here the desire is not treated as a consideration internal to my deliberations, one which counts in favour of the course of action it suggests but rather as a potential obstacle to my acting on the conclusion of my deliberations. In so far as I simply *act on* the desire, the fact that I have this desire is not an element in my deliberations.

To sum up, if deliberation requires that the deliberator think of himself, this isn't because the deliberator must be thinking of himself as the owner of certain psychological states.

Practical and theoretical deliberation

We have been asking what the deliberator considers in the course of his deliberations, rather than how this deliberation is initiated and controlled. Yet deliberation is an action with a characteristic goal. The successful deliberator establishes a certain relationship between himself and the world: *knowledge* in the case of theoretical deliberation, *agency* in the case of practical deliberation. Doesn't this imply that the deliberator must intend that he (thought of as the agent of this deliberation) come to know or decide on something?

On this hypothesis, a theoretical deliberator aims to remove *his own* ignorance on a certain point and a practical deliberator is out to settle how *he himself* will act. But must deliberation involve the deliberator intending to establish a relation between himself, conceived of as the agent of the deliberation, and the world? To tease out the content of the aim which the deliberator must set himself, let's attend to the form of the question which a deliberator seeks to answer.

Williams suggests that practical and theoretical deliberation differ in this regard (Williams 1985: 68–9). Take an epidemiologist trying to work out whether there will be an avian flu pandemic. His deliberation begins with the question 'Will there be an avian flu pandemic?' and it ends once that question is answered. Neither the question nor the answer requires either the first person concept or the notions of knowledge and ignorance to formulate them. True, the issue will not arise for the scientist unless he is ignorant of the answer and wishes to know it but it does not follow that his inquiries are guided by thoughts about what *he* knows. The scientist could instead ask himself an explicitly normative question: 'Ought I to believe that there will be an avian flu pandemic?' But, as Williams says, for the purposes of theoretical deliberation, this question is equivalent to 'Ought *one* to believe that there will be an avian flu pandemic?'

It would be different were our scientist advising a government minister on this matter. Then his actions would be guided by thoughts about the minister, about what

the minister knows and what he does not know, as well as by thoughts about avian flu. Here the scientist must deploy his knowledge that he, the deliberator, is distinct from the person whose ignorance he is trying to cure. It does not follow from this that when the scientist is trying to cure his own ignorance, his deliberations must be guided by the thought that the deliberator and the person whose ignorance he is trying to cure are the same person, namely himself.⁶ Why need he think that in order to estimate the threat posed by avian flu?

Now consider the deliberations of the minister who must decide what preparations to make for a possible pandemic. When a practical deliberator asks himself a normative question, the form of the normative question is not ‘what ought to be done about this?’ something which any bystander might ask, but rather ‘What should *I* do about it?’ a question which can sensibly occur only to one who might have some influence over the matter.⁷ A practical deliberator is conscious of the fact that *his own* actions are the focus of attention rather than someone else’s. ‘Practical deliberation is in every case first personal and the first person is not derivative or naturally replaced by *anyone*’ (Williams 1985: 68).⁸

Williams is surely right that theoretical deliberation makes no essential use of the first person. What of practical deliberation? Perhaps we need the first person concept here only because we have gratuitously introduced normative concepts. Can’t the minister avoid normative concepts altogether in setting the theme of his practical deliberation simply by asking himself what *to do* about avian flu? True, that is a question which only one with influence over what is done on the matter can sensibly ask themselves. But only someone with influence over what is thought about avian flu can sensibly ask themselves what *to think* about it. And if you can decide what to think about avian flu without thinking of yourself, why can’t you also decide what to do about avian flu without thinking of yourself?

Still a contrast remains, a contrast at the level of what I shall call *reflective* deliberation. Someone who thinks about what he *ought* to do with a view to thereby determining what he will do, someone who engages in practical deliberation by thinking about *reasons* for action, must deploy the first person concept. Not only must he know that the point of view from which these deliberations are being conducted is the point of view of the agent whose actions are the object of these deliberations. He must link the point of view of the deliberator with the point of view of the agent by means of the *I* concept. He must think of them both as *his* point of view. A theoretical deliberator can weigh the reasons for and against various answers to his question without doing any such thing. Or so, at least, I shall argue.

⁶ Pace Shoemaker (2003: 399–400).

⁷ The first person plural might be more appropriate both in this case and in others.

⁸ Williams says various other things (e.g. that action is motivated by desire and that the deliberator must be thinking about his own desires in deciding what to do) which I do not endorse. The explanation of this practical-theoretical asymmetry which I shall later offer would not serve Williams’s metaethical purposes.

This claim about reflective practical deliberation must be distinguished from some superficially similar observations. It is widely agreed that agents need information in an egocentric form: they must think of places as ‘here’ and ‘there’, times as ‘now’ and ‘then’ if they are to be able to act on what they know (Perry 1979). For example, I may have a complete map of the library and be able to point to the place I want to be on the map but unless I know where that place is in relation to a place thought of as *here* I won’t be able to use the map to get to where I want to be. This is true enough but it imputes no relevant form of self-consciousness to an agent. Thinking of oneself as an agent is a quite different matter from having information about one’s environment in an egocentric form. A cat needs to be able to think of places in this egocentric way in order to get around the world but cats presumably don’t think of themselves as the agents of their actions because they don’t know what an agent is (Burge 1998: 259).

Some writers have claimed that the *I* concept is crucial to our practical thinking because agents such as humans don’t just engage in present activity; they plan their future agency, they form future-directed intentions and thereby exercise a type of control over their own agency which most animals lack. These writers maintain that one who intends to act in a certain way must identify the agent who has the intention with the agent who is to carry it out by means of the *I* concept: intentions to act have a *de se* content.⁹

This may be so but I am not concerned with what is involved in exercising control over our future action by forming intentions. Rather, I am focused on what is involved in controlling *both* our intentions *and* those actions not foreshadowed in our future-directed intentions by means of practical deliberation. It may be that someone who wishes to control certain future actions by forming intentions must do so by thinking of these actions as *his* actions. But this will not explain why someone who is deliberating about whether to form a certain intention must do so by thinking of it as *his* intention. Nor will it explain why someone who is deliberating about how to act must do so by thinking of what he does as *his* action. In so far as we are rational, we can exercise an immediate and direct influence over both action and intention by deliberating about what *we* should do, influence of a kind which we do not have over what other people do.¹⁰ That sort of influence is not exercised by forming future-directed intentions to decide.

Later I shall argue that whilst deliberation about the reasons we have to perform various actions has, in so far as we are rational, an immediate and direct influence over

⁹ For different versions of this claims, see Velleman (1996: 69–72) and Burge (2004: 293–5).

¹⁰ We exercise this influence over our own decisions by assessing the rationality of carrying out those decisions and *not* by assessing the rationality of causing ourselves to take them. There may be cases in which it would be rational for me to cause myself to take a decision which it would not be rational for me to execute (Kavka 1983). In these cases, I would argue, the decision it is rational for me to induce is not a rational decision and so rationality alone does not guarantee that I can get myself to take it but only that I can decide to do something to get myself to take it (Owens 2000: 81–2). In trying to get myself to take this irrational decision, I am in much the same situation as I would be were I trying to get someone else to take an irrational but advantageous decision. I have no immediate influence.

what we decide to do, the same is not true of deliberation about the reasons we have to form various beliefs. That is the truth in Williams's claim that the *I* concept is indispensable in practical but not in theoretical deliberation. But before exploring that idea, let us ask what other forms of cognitive self-control there are besides reflective and unreflective deliberation.

Reflective maintenance: Shoemaker

We are on our way to concluding that only practical deliberation requires the deliberator to think of himself as the agent of his deliberation, at least when it is deliberation about reasons. If so, practical but not theoretical deliberation will fit Descartes's specification. But perhaps we have been looking in the wrong place for Descartes's all-purpose tool of cognitive self-control.

At least during the destructive phase of the *First Meditation* Descartes's meditator is not in the business of making up his mind about any first order matter. Rather he is reviewing the beliefs he already has with a view to getting rid of them if they don't hold up to rational criticism. So the meditator is not engaged in deliberation as we defined it. Rather he is 'bracketing' his current beliefs (and decisions) in order to consider whether those beliefs (and decisions) are reasonable and an unfavourable assessment is meant to have an adverse impact on these beliefs (and decisions), at least in so far as he is rational. People are capable of *revising* their beliefs and intentions as well as of forming them and it looks as if such revisions sometimes come about by means of higher order normative assessments rather than first order deliberation. Perhaps this is the point at which Cartesian self-control is exercised. Should this checking process involve deployment of the first person concept, Descartes will have what he wants.

So let us ask what is involved in the revision of a propositional attitude. Shoemaker urges that the revision of belief and intention *always* requires something more than first order deliberation, that it always requires us to think about our beliefs and intentions:

If the beliefs and desires are all first order beliefs and desires i.e. beliefs and desires that are not themselves *about* the agent's beliefs and desires, then one thing they do not rationalise is changes in themselves. For such changes to be rationalised, the beliefs and desires would have to include second-order beliefs and desires – desires to promote consistency and coherence in the system of beliefs and desires, and beliefs about what changes in the beliefs and desires would be needed in order to satisfy the second-order desires, which in turn would require beliefs about what the current beliefs and desires are. (Shoemaker 1996: 33)

Here Shoemaker implies that any reasoned change in belief (or desire/intention) must involve such higher order states. This can't be right. As already noted, reasoning can *determine* what I believe without being *about* what I believe (Moran 2001: 110–12).

Suppose I discover a great deal of evidence for *p* where *p* is inconsistent with something I already believe: *q*. The inconsistency here is not very subtle and requires no great logical acumen to detect. Here reasoning will lead me to abandon the belief

that q once I adopt the belief that p ; I am prepared to reason from the evidence for p to the truth of p only if I am also prepared to abandon my belief that q . *Pace* Shoemaker, these manoeuvres do not require me to think about my beliefs. What such reasoning depends on is my knowledge that p and q cannot both be true. In the course of the reasoning which leads to the adoption and abandonment of these beliefs, I am exclusively concerned with such things as the truth of p and q and the facts which serve as evidence for each of them. Such evidence does not (normally) include facts about what I believe or don't believe.

Still people don't just pose questions about the world; on occasion they also ask themselves about their own beliefs. Perhaps Shoemaker is looking for a way in which the rational person can deliberately revise their own beliefs and intentions and he correctly sees that first order deliberation cannot provide it. Here Shoemaker invokes what one might call a process of *reflective maintenance*. This process is driven by a desire 'to promote consistency and coherence in the system of beliefs and desires'. Clearly we need beliefs about psychological states in order to pursue the goal which this desire sets but must we think of them as *our* beliefs and desires to keep them coherent? Do rational beings exercise a form of control which is special to *their own* beliefs and intentions when engaged in reflective maintenance?

Take a closer look at Shoemaker's second order desire. There is no personal pronoun in the specification of its object: the content clause mentions '*the system*', not '*his system*' or '*my system*'. If reflective maintenance is an activity motivated by this desire, second order beliefs employing the first person concept are not required to guide this activity towards its goal. Someone interested in promoting consistency and coherence in a given system of beliefs and desires must be able to discriminate between the components of that system and the components of other systems. But, for all we have been told, one might do this whilst thinking of the system in question as DO's system or simply as *this system*. One need not think of it as a system composed of *my* beliefs and desires.

Was this just a slip on Shoemaker's part, a slip which can be repaired by giving the desire which drives reflective maintenance an egocentric content? Perhaps reflective maintenance should be defined as cognition motivated by a desire for consistency and coherence in *one's own* system of beliefs. But why suppose that rational people have such an egocentric desire simply in virtue of being rational? If rational people value consistency or coherence in their own case, this is because they value consistency or coherence as such. As Burge says, 'an individual's assessment of some judgement as irrational carries with it some *prima facie* grounds not only that it be altered – but *prima facie* grounds to alter it, regardless of who the source of the judgement is' (Burge 1998: 254). True, rational people with a command of the first person concept will form the derivative desire for consistency and coherence amongst their own mental states. But what lies behind this egocentric desire is the desire for coherence as such, a desire which may cause me to scrutinize my own beliefs but which may equally lead me to argue

with other people about the rationality of their beliefs and attempt thereby to change them for the better.

Of course, for all sorts of practical reasons, I will normally take a special interest in those beliefs and desires which are, in fact, my own (and I can't do much to help others until my own house is in some kind of order). Yet, on occasion, it will seem more important to resolve (by reasoning from premises which I believe they accept) an incoherence in someone else's beliefs than it does to attend to a problem with mine. The idea that rational people have a special form of control over (and thus a special responsibility for) their own cognition which they don't have over other people's seems to have escaped us (Moran 2001: 112–13, 118–19).

I don't deny that reflective maintenance is a real phenomenon. I do deny that the capacity for reflective maintenance is what gives each of us some special control over and responsibility for our own mental lives which (as the likes of Descartes suppose) we have simply in virtue of being rational. Why should the satisfaction of the desire for coherence etc. which motivates reflective maintenance always be the rational person's highest priority? They may decide that pursuing coherence isn't feasible in this instance. Furthermore, at any given moment, it might be more important to devote their limited energies to monitoring and repairing another's mental states – or to something else altogether. Yet one's own rationality depends on the rationality of one's mental life in a way that is not contingent on the urgency of one's desire for coherence or the feasibility of acting on it.

Reflective reasoning: Burge

Like Shoemaker, Burge focuses on the process of assessing and revising one's propositional attitudes in the hope of discovering an instrument of cognitive self-control which deploys the first person concept. In this section, I allow that his view works well when applied to action and intention but I conclude the paper by casting doubt on whether we have the same sort of control over belief.

Burge distinguishes two types of reasoning (Burge 1996: 98–101). First there is *plain reasoning*. In plain reasoning, we form and change our attitudes on the basis of reasons without thinking of them *as* reasons; in the process we assess truth, falsity, evidential support, entailment, etc. amongst propositions but do not assess the truth or reasonability of attitudes. Then there is *critical reasoning*. In critical reasoning one thinks of reasons as reasons, that is *as* reasons for attitudes; one thinks about the different sorts of propositional attitude, of the rationalizing connections between them and of whether the resulting attitudes are justified or correct. Critical reasoning involves thinking about thoughts but Burge leaves open the possibility that a creature might engage in such reasoning without being able to think of any of its thoughts as *my* thoughts (Burge 1998: 259–62). Still, he insists, any critical reasoner who lacks the first person concept lacks a full understanding of what he is doing.

For critical reasoning to be a genuine instrument of cognitive self-control, we must be able to engage in it intentionally i.e. engage in it with the intention of thereby revising the attitudes under review, should that prove necessary. And this entails having a certain understanding of what critical reasoning involves. Burge calls critical reasoning that meets this condition *reflective reasoning*. But why does a full understanding of critical reasoning require deployment of the first-person concept? What exactly is someone without it failing to grasp?

Acknowledging, with the *I* concept, that an attitude or act is one's own is acknowledging that rational evaluations of it which one also acknowledges provide immediate...reason and rationally immediate motivation to shape the attitude or act in accordance with the evaluation. Unless further evaluations of the attitude must be taken into account, there need be no further intervening reasoning involved for it to be rational to have the reason affect the attitude or act. The first-person concept fixes the locus of responsibility and marks the immediate rational relevance of a rational evaluation to rational implementation on the attitude being evaluated – to epistemic or practical agency. (Burge 1998: 253)

The key claim here is that 'there need be no further intervening reasoning involved for it to be rational to have the reason affect the attitude or act'. What 'further reasoning' does Burge have in mind?

Here Burge is thinking of the further reasoning that would be involved in working out how to reform someone else's propositional attitudes. As we have seen, Burge assumes that all rational beings have an interest in the elimination of irrationality. But when the attitude in question is thought of third-personally, further issues arise. First, there has to be some chance of affecting the offending attitude. Second, one has to decide whether this chance is worth taking. This will involve a stretch of practical reasoning, reasoning about the cost and effectiveness of various means (Burge 1996: 113; 1998: 255).¹¹

Suppose somebody has an unreasonable attitude. Rational beings as such must regard this fact as providing *prima facie* grounds for reform but there are at least two ways in which such reform might fail to take place without them having shirked their responsibilities. First, they might simply be unable to do anything about it. Second, they might decide that there was no reasonably priced means of reforming it. Either way, there is a gap between the fact that this attitude is unreasonable and it's being the case that one ought to change it.

But now suppose that the unreasonable attitude is one's own. According to Burge, this immediately closes the gap. No rational subject can be relieved of the responsibility of reforming their own attitudes. If there is reason to reform an attitude and that attitude is one's own, and one makes a reasonable evaluation of it, one must acknowledge that reason. Furthermore that very acknowledgement should suffice to ensure the

¹¹ It will also mean discovering what the other person's propositional attitudes actually are which may, Burge says, involve reasoning (Burge 1996: 110; 1998: 254).

abandonment of the attitude. One who knows (a) that an attitude is unreasonable and (b) that this attitude is their own, also knows (c) that they *can* revise it. There is no question of having to discover some method or technique of self-manipulation in order to rid oneself of it. A reasonable person can't decline to relinquish an irrational attitude on the grounds that there is no suitable way of so doing:

If in the course of critical reasoning I reasonably conclude that my belief that a given person is guilty rests entirely on unreasonable premises or bad reasoning, then it normally follows immediately... that it is reasonable to give up my belief about guilt or to look for new grounds for it. (Burge 1996: 110)

Burge does not deny that one can find it hard to rid oneself of an irrational belief or even fail to know of it altogether. Suppose I maintain that my brother had nothing to do with my father's death but my analyst convinces me that I do in fact believe his behaviour drove my father to an early grave. Even once I have been brought to acknowledge this conviction, I may find it very hard to relinquish it. Perhaps hypnosis is required. Then it will be a question how costly and effective the hypnosis is. Clearly such behaviour exhibits a deep sort of irrationality and, Burge suggests, one might not regard such attitudes as truly *one's own* (Burge 1996: 111; see also Moran 2001: 93–4).

Burge's central idea is that each of us has a special power over and responsibility for our own attitudes and the function of the *I* concept is to mark that locus of power and responsibility. Each of us knows that we have the power to rid *ourselves* of an unwarranted belief or of a senseless intention simply by judging that we ought not to have this belief or this intention (Burge 1998: 251–2). But we are unable to rid *other* people of their unwarranted beliefs or intentions simply by judging that *they* ought not to have those beliefs and intentions. This asymmetry of power (and thus of responsibility) can be grasped only by someone in possession of the *I* concept. The critical reasoner who lacks the *I* concept may discover that certain beliefs or intentions happen to be immediately responsive to his evaluations of them whilst the process of reforming other beliefs and intentions requires further action on his part. But from the perspective of this reasoner, it is a brute contingency that certain psychological states are responsive in this way, not something he can be sure of simply in virtue of being rational (Moran 2001: 131–2, 145–6). Such a critical reasoner cannot understand why his reasoning has the influence that it does.

Burge concludes that a critical reasoner without the *I* concept can't intend to engage in that special cognitive activity in which we engage when checking and revising our own first order attitudes. Without the *I* concept, one is incapable of reasoning with this intention because one can't conceptualize the owner of the object reviewed – a psychological state – in a way which gives one's reasoning the right sort of authority over it, i.e. one can't conceptualize that owner as being identical with the occupant of the point of view from which the review is being conducted. And unless the critical reasoner conceptualizes the object of review in a way which reveals the basis of his authority over it, he can't intend to change the object in the way a rational person does,

i.e. simply by exercising that authority. Our subject may reason critically and that reasoning may have an impact on the states reviewed but he won't know that he can do this in the way that fully rational people know that they can influence their mental lives. Rather he will be engaged in something more like reflective maintenance.

Reflective deliberation

Burge's line of thought suggests an explanation of the asymmetry between theoretical and practical deliberation which I derived from my discussion of Williams. This may surprise for two reasons. First, Burge is concerned with reflective reasoning, with the appraisal and revision of attitudes already formed. Williams was concerned with deliberation which aims to form such attitudes. Second, where Williams saw an asymmetry between theoretical and practical deliberation, Burge sees none between reflective reasoning about beliefs and reflective reasoning about intentions. Yet, as I shall urge, Burge is wrong on the latter point and once we have seen why, we are in a position to explain the asymmetry.

Let us begin with the first point. Williams argued that the practical deliberator must link by means of the *I* concept the perspective from which the deliberation is conducted with that of the agent who performs the action decided upon. This is so, I argued, where practical deliberation takes a reflective form, where it is deliberation about reasons for action. When practical deliberation takes that form, the deliberator is invoking the peculiar authority (the direct and immediate influence) which his practical deliberation has over his own actions. Now Burge suggests that someone deliberately engaged in reflective reasoning about decisions already made is invoking the special authority which his reflective reasoning has over those decisions. I suggest that authority which an agent's practical deliberation has over his (potential) actions is the very same authority his reflective reasoning has over his (actual) plans and projects. Now where practical deliberation turns reflective, where it involves thinking about the reasons for potential *attitudes* like decision, it involves hypothetical reflective reasoning (an appraisal of hypothetical decisions). I conclude that a reflective practical deliberator must invoke the very same authority which Burge identifies and thus must deploy the *I* concept.

Turning now to the asymmetry between theoretical and practical deliberation, we must first note an important fact about practical deliberation: it is a psychological process which consumes time, energy, conscious attention, and other resources in limited supply. When assessing the quality of someone's deliberation from the outside, we ask whether it is properly sensitive to the amount of time and energy, etc. that can be devoted to resolving the issue at hand. In particular, when considering whether it was right for someone to conclude their deliberation by taking a decision at a given moment (rather than doing this earlier or later or not at all), we ask whether this was sensible given that they couldn't go on amassing relevant considerations indefinitely or assessing those they already knew of.

Surely facts relevant to the assessment of decisions already taken should also be considered when taking them. Recall our earlier example. At some point, I need to decide whether to get out of the car to visit my friend or drive on – I can't go on deliberating about this for ever – and a good deliberator not only takes the right decision but knows when to take it. Having judged that now is the moment of decision, a rational agent will take the required decision; simply in virtue of being rational, our agent has the power to decide whether to stop the car by judging that he ought *now* to make up his mind about whether to stop. But to make this judgement he must think not only about the merits of the action to be decided upon but also about the constraints on the process of decision making.

Let us turn now to theoretical deliberation. When we assess such deliberation from the outside, the same points seem to apply. Consider the belief I form about how likely my friend is to be at home. I could form a view about this just by looking at the garage door or I could decline to form a view even after I have seen both the garage door and the front door. What makes it appropriate for me to form a view when I do is how much the issue matters and how easy it would be to gather and absorb more evidence. In this case, the belief has a largely practical significance but the same question – how much evidence should I require? – will arise for any belief and non-evidential considerations are needed to answer it. Yet on one point theoretical deliberation differs crucially from practical: though such non-evidential considerations seem highly relevant to the assessment of belief, they won't figure in the subject's theoretical deliberations. Why not?

The reason is that a subject can't influence what he believes (as he *can* influence what he does) by reflecting on the process of deliberation itself. Take practical deliberation once more. Suppose our agent is trying to decide whether to lie to the taxman. He is inclined to think that lying is the best option here but he also knows that further information might come along which will change his mind, not by convincing him that his situation has changed but rather by showing him that his original judgement was wrong: perhaps there was some aspect of the situation he overlooked or some consideration he gave insufficient weight to. Our agent has the capacity to get himself to wait a bit longer before taking a decision simply by judging that he has not yet got sufficient evidence about his current situation to make up his mind, given the importance of the issue, etc. Of course, our agent has a choice about whether to exercise this capacity to determine whether he makes his mind up; he might have moved straight from the present appearance that things favour lying to a decision to lie.¹² Still that would be his choice.¹³

¹² Indeed at some point in the hierarchy of possible levels of reflection on such choices he *must* fail to exercise this capacity but there is no particular point at which this must happen.

¹³ Following Korsgaard (1996: 92–3), Moran (2001: 140–2) makes a related point. Neither author sees a difference between practical and theoretical reasoning.

The same is not true of belief. Return to the issue of whether there will be an avian flu pandemic. Suppose our subject believes that there won't because he has been told this by a friend whose judgement he trusts and who has had more time to think about these matters. The rest of us can wonder whether this testimony gives our agent sufficient evidence to form a view, given the importance of the issue, the limitations on their cognitive resources, and so forth. Couldn't our subject raise this sort of question with himself before forming a view and couldn't his answer determine whether he finds what he has been told convincing, at least in so far as he is rational?

It seems not. True one can make an assessment of how reasonable such belief would be as easily in the first person as in the third person but when it comes to actually forming the belief, one is left unmoved by *reflection* on time and cognitive resources, on considerations which concern how reasonable it would be to form any view at all, given the amount of evidence we have. No doubt believers have some sort of sensitivity to such non-evidential factors – how else could they form reasonable beliefs? – but that is quite different from saying that your *judgements about* such matters determine when you are convinced on the further question at issue. Rational people can't control their convictions by deliberating about whether they should make their minds or not, given the importance of the issue and so forth. At least they can't do this simply in virtue of being rational.

From the point of view of the theoretical deliberator there is no role for a self-conscious decision about whether to believe: the moment of conviction is simply the moment at which the evidence (seems to) establish the truth. The subject may deliberate about how reliable the evidence is and, in so far as he is rational, such deliberations will help to determine whether or not he believes it. What need not have any influence on belief is the judgement (however right) that he has heard enough and should now make up his mind. By contrast, the practical deliberator can get himself to take a practical decision simply by reflecting on the reasons for making his mind up now and then judging that the time has come to take a decision.¹⁴ And exercising this capacity intentionally involves deploying the first person concept. There is no analogue of this in theoretical deliberation.

Now we have our explanation of the asymmetry suggested by Williams. That asymmetry shows up when the deliberator engages in 'normative ascent', when his deliberations take the form of thinking about reasons. In the practical case, such normative ascent gives the rational agent a reflective purchase on his decision making. To get this purchase, the agent must consider not just the reasons which count in favour of various courses of action but also the deliberative process itself, the constraints it labours under, and how these should influence his decision making; the subject must think of himself as both deliberator and agent. Seeing himself as both deliberator and agent, the rational subject must think of the process of deliberation as no less a part of

¹⁴ This judgement about when to decide is not a belief. See Owens (2009).

the subject matter of deliberation than the action to be decided upon. He must integrate the point of view of the agent whose actions are being decided upon with the point of view from which the deliberation is being conducted. And to do this in a way that he knows will be immediately efficacious, he must use the *I* concept. The deliberator could register the pragmatic constraints on the deliberative process by using impersonal formulae like ‘this process must come to an end now’ but such formulae would not reveal his rational authority over the process.

By contrast, the theoretical deliberator gains no purchase on the process of belief formation by going in for normative ascent. The subject engaged in first order theoretical deliberation is not required to connect up the standpoint of deliberation with any other standpoint. In posing himself the deliberative question, he need not think of these deliberations as part of the very world whose character he is investigating. And since rationality alone does not enable the theoretical deliberator to govern his beliefs by thinking about the constraints on the deliberative process, he cannot exercise rational control over his beliefs by instead thinking about how reasonable they are (or would be). The theoretical deliberator lacks that capacity to control his beliefs by reflecting on the reasons for them which Burge attributes to him and which the practical deliberator has.

Conclusion

We have failed to find a source of mental self-control which meets Descartes’s specification. Deliberation controls the formation of both belief and intention but only what I called reflective practical deliberation must deploy the *I* concept and no form of deliberation gives us direct control over the revision of either belief or intention. Reflective Maintenance controls the revision of both belief and intention but this control is not direct, nor need it involve deployment of the first person concept. Finally, Reflective Reasoning is an instrument of direct control and requires the *I* concept but it is an instrument we can deploy to control intention and action, not belief. Descartes was right to think that, where our mental life takes the form of free agency, we have a distinctively first personal method of controlling it. But much of our mental life manifests our rationality without being a form of free agency. Therefore, what makes us responsible to the norms of reason cannot be some instrument of mental self-control which we have in virtue of being self-conscious.

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