

## Rational assent and Self-reversion: a Neoplatonist response to the Stoics

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Humans are accountable for what they do and believe in a way that other animals are not. The Stoics held that this is because humans are rational, and in particular because they have the capacity for rational assent. But how exactly does the capacity for rational assent explain accountability? Our Stoic sources do not explicitly answer this question, but I argue that they suggest the following view. Humans are responsible for assenting (and withholding assent) just because of the way in which the capacity for assent is reason-responsive: you can assent (or withhold assent) for reasons, and if you know whether or not you *should* be assenting, you can be guided by this knowledge in either assenting or withholding assent.

This view, however, raises certain further questions. What is it about the nature of our capacity for *assent* that enables it to be reason-responsive in a way that other psychic capacities are not? Why can one *assent* for a reason, but not *have an impression of something's being the case* for a reason? I argue that a basis for answering these questions can be found in a perhaps surprising source: Ps-Simplicius's 6<sup>th</sup> century commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*. Ps-Simplicius draws on the Neoplatonist notion of self-reversion to explain what is distinctive about the rational capacity for assent. His account, I claim, provides a basis for explaining the distinctively reason-responsive nature of our capacity for assent.

Rational assent and control in the Stoics

On the Stoic view, the two important elements in human action and cognition are assent (*sunkatathesis*, *adsensio*) and impression (*phantasia*, *visum*).<sup>1</sup> Chrysippus described an impression as an affection (*pathos*) in the soul.<sup>2</sup> An impression can be theoretical or practical: a theoretical impression presents things as being the case; a practical impression presents things as to be pursued or avoided. An impression can also be either sensory or nonsensory. Though many of your theoretical impressions arise from the senses, you can also have non-sensory theoretical impressions, such as the impression that a certain argument is valid, or the impression that  $2+2=4$ .<sup>3</sup> Sextus Empiricus attributes to the Stoics the view that an impression is a passive affection (*peisis tis*), as opposed to assent, which is an activity (*energeia*) (M. 7. 237). As passive affections, your impressions are not directly subject to your control. Of course, you can deliberately act in such a way as to affect the contents of your impressions. Simple ways to do this include turning your head in a certain direction, opening your eyes, and perhaps rubbing them or squinting.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, though you may voluntarily turn your head, open your eyes and rub them, once you have done all this, the impression you experience is simply a result of your being acted on in a certain way.

Nonhuman animals (and young children) are simply led to action by their impressions. Thus, if an animal has an impression of something as to be pursued, it will automatically have an impulse towards pursuing it and (provided nothing interferes) will act on this impulse. Adult humans differ from other animals in that they do not respond in this automatic way to their impressions. They have a rational faculty of assent.<sup>5</sup> This is a faculty which allows them to endorse, or to withhold endorsement from, their impressions.<sup>6</sup> In assenting to a theoretical impression, a

human being makes a judgment<sup>7</sup>; in assenting to a practical impression, the human has an impulse (and will act on this impulse unless something intervenes).

Assenting, according to the Stoics, is under your direct control. Thus, we find in Cicero the report that ‘to these things that appear and are, so to speak, received by the senses, he [Zeno] adds assent of our minds, which he makes dependent on us and voluntary (*in nobis positam et voluntariam*)’ (Cicero *Academica* I, 40 = L.S. 40B = S.V.F. 1.61). Similarly, Clement reports that ‘not only the Stoics but also the Platonists say that assent depends on us’ (is ἐφ’ ἡμῖν) (*Stromata* II, xii, 54-55 = S.V.F. 2.992).<sup>8</sup> The fact that assent differs in this respect from having an impression is explained by Sextus Empiricus when he reports the Stoic view: ‘Now cognition (κατάληψις), as one may learn from them is “assent to the cognitive impression” and this seems to be a twofold thing, one part of which is involuntary (ἀκούσιον) and the other part of which is voluntary and dependent on our judgment (ἐκούσιον καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ κρίσει κείμενον). For the experience of an impression is unwilling (ἀβούλητον), and being affected in this particular way (as for instance, with a sense of whiteness when a colour presents itself, or with a sense of sweetness when something sweet is offered to his taste) does not depend on the person affected but rather on the cause of the impression (οὐκ ἐπὶ τῷ πάσχοντι ἔκειτο ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τῷ φαντασιοῦντι), whereas the act of assenting to this affection lies in the power of the person who receives the impression (τὸ δὲ συγκαταθέσθαι τούτῳ τῷ κινήματι ἔκειτο ἐπὶ τῷ παραδεχομένῳ τὴν φαντασίαν) (S.E., M. 8. 397 = S.V.F. 2.91).<sup>9</sup>

To a modern ear, the claim that assent is ‘voluntary’ might suggest that we can assent or withhold assent *at will*, but this does not seem to have been the Stoic view.

According to Epictetus, the nature of human understanding is to incline to the true, to be dissatisfied with the false and to withhold judgment from the uncertain.<sup>10</sup> He takes this to show that you cannot assent to something which (all things considered) appears to you to be untrue. Epictetus concludes that anyone who assents to something false does so without meaning to (*‘ouk êthelen pseudei sugkatathesthai’*) (*Diss.* I.28.4).

You cannot, for instance, obey a command to stop believing that it is day (given that it is day and this is evident); nor can you obey a command to believe (or to stop believing) that the number of stars is even (*Diss.* I.28.3).<sup>11</sup> Sextus Empiricus reports a Stoic view that a certain type of impression (the cognitive impression) ‘is so evident and striking that it all but seizes us by the hair and drags us to assent’ (*M.* 7.257 = *L.S.* 40K).<sup>12</sup> Whether or not this implies that such impressions *compel* our assent has been disputed.<sup>13</sup> But even if there is not strict ‘compulsion’ here, the view described leaves no room for believing at will. You might be held back from assenting because of your prior beliefs or because you have reason temporarily to distrust your faculties,<sup>14</sup> but you cannot refrain from assenting simply because you decide you would prefer not to have a certain belief.

When they say that assenting is voluntary, the Stoics are claiming that the power you exercise in assenting (and in withholding assent) is of such a kind as to make you responsible for whether or not you assent. Appearances may be misleading, and other people can attempt more or less successfully to deceive you, but whether you are deceived is still in an important sense *down to you*. This human power to assent to, or withhold assent from, impressions explains why adult humans are held responsible for

their actions and beliefs but animals and young children are not held responsible in the same way.

You are not responsible for your impressions in the *direct* way that you are responsible for your assent. You can, of course, be *indirectly* responsible for having a certain impression: you can be responsible for training yourself to have that impression (or for failing to train yourself to have a different impression). But this kind of responsibility itself depends on your responsibility for assenting or withholding assent: you are responsible for such impressions because you are responsible for your intentional actions (e.g. for the action of training yourself), and you are responsible for those intentional actions because you are responsible for assenting to the corresponding impression (e.g. for assenting to, or withholding assent from, the impression that it would be appropriate to train yourself).<sup>15</sup>

However, this account of responsibility leaves us with a question. What is it about the power for assenting (and for withholding assent) that makes you responsible for exercises of this power in a way that you are not responsible for having impressions? It is surprisingly difficult to find an explicit answer to this question in our Stoic sources.<sup>16</sup> In defending the claim that human beings are responsible for assenting, the Stoics argue that the primary cause of your assenting is your character and that when you assent, you could always have withheld your assent. But although these arguments do shed some light on the sense in which (for the Stoics) your assent depends on you, they do not by themselves explain what it is about assenting that makes you responsible for your assent in a way that you are not responsible for having impressions.

This is not a criticism of these Stoic arguments. These arguments are not designed to answer our question about the difference between assenting and having impressions, but rather to answer a particular objection to the Stoic view: the objection that your supposed responsibility for your assent is incompatible with that assent's being caused by things external to you. In response to this objection, Chrysippus claims that impressions can causally influence assent without forcing it. Though your impressions prompt you to assent, the main cause of your assent is something internal to you: the disposition of your mind, understood as your moral character.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in a situation in which two people are experiencing the same impressions, their reactions will differ in accordance with their characters: someone whose mental dispositions are healthy and beneficial will have different reactions from someone who is 'uncouth, uneducated and uncultured and not supported by any good character qualities' (Gellius, *Noctes*, 7.2.7-8 = L.S. 62D = S.V.F. 2.1000). If the main cause of your assent is your character, then your impressions do not force your assent.<sup>18</sup> According to Cicero, Chrysippus concluded that 'although the impression encountered will print and, as it were, emblazon its appearance on the mind, assent will be in our power' (Cicero, *De Fato*, 43 = L.S. 62C = S.V.F. 2.974; translation from L.S.).

Chrysippus's account of modality allows him to add that your assent, though caused, is not necessitated: when you assent, it was possible for you not to assent; when you withhold assent, it was possible for you to assent.<sup>19</sup> According to Chrysippus, the claim 'X is F' is possible just in case (i) *being something of X's kind* is compatible with *being F* (that is, the claim 'admits of being true') and in addition (ii) there are no external factors preventing X from being F (that is, the claim 'is not prevented by

external factors from being true') (D.L. 7.75 = L.S. 38D).<sup>20</sup> This account of possibility implies that when a human being assents to something, withholding assent was possible (and when she withholds assent, assenting was possible). To see why, consider the claims 'X assents' and 'X withholds her assent'. Both of these claims admit of being true, since either assenting or withholding assent is compatible with being the kind of thing X is (a human being); and in addition, nothing external can prevent either of these claims from being true, since external factors do not prevent one either from assenting or from withholding assent (as is shown by the fact that in the same circumstances, someone with a different character would have assented differently).<sup>21</sup>

Neither of these arguments explains why responsibility attaches to assent in a way that it does not attach to having impressions. There are two main questions they leave unanswered. First of all, in a human being certain impressions also depend on character and on learned dispositions. For example, the Stoics hold that the expert will have different impressions from the nonexpert.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, given this fact, Chrysippus's account of possibility implies that it is possible (in such cases) for you to experience different *impressions* from those you in fact experience.<sup>23</sup> Why, then, are you responsible for your assent in a way that you are not responsible even for this kind of expert impression?<sup>24</sup> The Stoics might perhaps reply that your character and dispositions are the *main* cause of your assent but not the main cause of your impressions. But this reply seems to depend upon the explanation we are seeking, instead of providing us with this explanation. To explain the sense in which your character is the main cause of your assent but not of your impressions, we would need

already to have an explanation of the fact that you are accountable for your assent in a way that you are not accountable for your impressions.

The second question left unanswered by Chrysippus's arguments about character and modality concerns the difference between human beings and trainable animals. Some non-rational animals can be trained.<sup>25</sup> If nonrational animals lack the ability to assent, then the way in which training affects an animal must be by modifying its dispositions to experience impressions. But then, just as your assent depends on your character, so also which impressions a trained animal has when faced with a certain set of external circumstances will depend on something internal to it: the dispositions it has acquired through training. Moreover, Chrysippus's account of possibility implies that in cases in which an animal could be trained, it could have impressions other than those that it in fact has.<sup>26</sup> Why, then, is a human being responsible for her assenting in a way that a trainable animal is not responsible for its impressions? Again, the Stoics have a possible reply. The trained dispositions of an animal are importantly different from the dispositions that make up a human character: the former are dispositions for *having impressions*, the latter are (or at least include) dispositions to *assent*. But again this reply presupposes an answer to our question about the difference between assenting and having impressions. To explain the significance of the difference between these two kinds of disposition, we need to know why assenting matters for responsibility in a way that having impressions does not.

None of our Stoic sources explicitly answers this question about why we are responsible for our assent in a way we are not responsible for our impressions. But an



answer can, I think, be inferred from what these sources say about the nature of assenting and about how assenting differs from merely having an impression.

On the Stoic view, dispositions to assent are not mere *tendencies to go along with* certain impressions. To assent is to make an *evaluative judgment*. When we assent (or withhold assent), we use concepts such as ‘true’ or ‘false’, ‘appropriate’ or ‘inappropriate’ to assess our impressions, and we reject or accept these impressions in the light of this assessment. This evaluative judging is what the Stoics take to be beyond the capacity of non-human animals.<sup>27</sup> As Origen puts it: ‘A rational animal . . . in addition to its impressionistic nature, has reason which passes judgment on impressions (τὸν κρίνοντα τὰς φαντασίας), rejecting some of these and accepting others, in order that the animal may be guided accordingly’ (Origen, *De principiis*, 3.1.3 = L.S. 53A = S.V.F. 2.988; translation from L.S.).

What is the difference between making such an evaluative *judgment* and simply having a higher order impression (an impression about the merits of one’s own impression)? A key difference, I shall argue, is that judgments are reason-responsive in a way that impressions are not. Because of the way in which assenting is reason-responsive, the capacity for assent makes possible both a certain distinctive kind of success and a certain distinctive kind of failure.

The distinctive kind of success is illustrated by the case of the sage. The sage’s assent always amounts to knowledge: he only assents to cognitive (*‘katalêptikê’*) impressions and his assent to these impressions is ‘firm and unchangeable by argument’.<sup>28</sup> The unshakeability that characterizes the sage’s assent must be

distinguished from the imperviousness to argument that characterizes either a stubborn fool or a nonrational animal. The sage is not simply *unaffected* by arguments; he refuses to withdraw his assent *because he understands that the reasons he has been given for doing so are inadequate*. That is, in continuing to assent he is guided by his understanding of what are and are not good reasons for assenting or for withholding assent.

The fact that assenting (or withholding assent) can be an exercise of such understanding is brought out by two alternative descriptions, in our sources, of the sage's virtue of nonprecipitancy (*apromptōsia*) (a virtue that is part of dialectic). One source describes nonprecipitancy as 'the science (*epistēmē*) of when one should or should not assent' (D.L. 7.46 = LS 31B = S.V.F. 2. 130);<sup>29</sup> another describes it as 'a disposition not to assent in advance of cognition' (Herculaneum papyrus 1020, col 4, col 1 = L.S. 41D = S.V.F. 2.131; translation from L.S.).<sup>30</sup> If we put these two descriptions together, we arrive at the view that the sage's *disposition to assent only when he should* just is *his understanding of when one should or should not assent*. This is possible just because the sage, in assenting or withholding assent, is guided by his understanding of when one should or should not assent. This view thus assumes that assenting (and withholding assent) is the kind of activity that *can* be guided by such understanding. Of course, in a way this assumption is wholly unremarkable. But it is unremarkable only because we tend to take for granted the fact that assenting differs in this respect from having an impression. In having (or ceasing to have) an impression you cannot, in the same sense, be guided by your understanding of whether or not you *should* have that impression.

The non-sage lacks this kind of understanding, but nevertheless he is, like the sage, able to assent or withhold assent for reasons. The fact that he has this ability to assent (or withhold assent) for reasons makes him both distinctively vulnerable and also distinctively capable of improvement. Since he lacks knowledge, the non-sage assents weakly: unlike the sage, he can be persuaded by argument to withdraw his assent.<sup>31</sup>

This ability to be persuaded makes him vulnerable, since he can be misled by argument into either giving or withdrawing his assent for bad reasons. To assent or withhold assent for bad reasons is to fail in a distinctively human way. His ability to be persuaded by argument also provides the non-sage with a distinctively human possibility for improvement. Since he can be led by argument to recognize and respond to *good* reasons for assenting and for withholding assent, he can be rationally persuaded to withdraw a previous mistaken assent and to assent to something different instead. Diogenes Laertius reports the Stoic view that the non-sage can correct his judgments by studying syllogistic: ‘The study of syllogisms is extremely useful; for it reveals what is demonstrative, and this contributes greatly toward making right one’s judgments’ (πρὸς διόρθωσιν τῶν δογμάτων) (D.L. 7.45). Again, this is a kind of improvement that depends on having the capacity for assent. Having (and ceasing to have) impressions is not something one can do for reasons (whether good or bad).<sup>32</sup>

I want to suggest that these differences between assenting and having impressions explain the Stoics’ claim that you are directly accountable for your assent in a way that you are not accountable for your impressions. You are directly accountable for your assent just because in assenting (or withholding assent) you can be guided by reasons that tell in favour of assenting (or withholding assent).<sup>33</sup> The sage can be

guided by *knowledge* of whether or not he should assent; the non-sage, though not guided by such knowledge, can be influenced by considerations that tell in favour of assenting or of withholding assent. When the Stoics say that assenting is in your power in a way that having impressions is not, what they mean, I suggest, is that in assenting (or withholding assent) you can exercise a certain kind of rational control: you can assent (or withhold assent) because you think there is good reason to do so; you can refuse to withdraw your assent because you think there is no good reason to withdraw your assent.<sup>34</sup>

This is, of course, a rather minimal type of control. As we have seen, for those of us who are not sages, this very capacity to assent for reasons can itself lead to error. One might wonder, then, whether this capacity can really be what explains our accountability for our beliefs and our actions. After all, it is possible to have this capacity but be unable to exercise it *well*. Consider, for instance, someone who has been indoctrinated in such a way that she reasons badly: she assents and withholds assent on the basis of reasons, but she is only able to recognize the force of a very limited range of reasons. Must we really conclude that such a person is blameworthy? The Stoics, I suspect, would have been untroubled by this conclusion. But for those modern readers who are squeamish about such a readiness to assign blame, it is worth noting that the Stoic view that we are accountable for our assent does not *by itself* imply that every mistaken act of assent is blameworthy. It implies only that assenting is the *kind* of activity that is appropriately praised, blamed or excused. Whether any particular mistaken act of assent should be blamed or excused will depend on further factors.<sup>35</sup>

I have argued that, on the Stoic view, we are responsible for assenting (and withholding assent) just because assenting (and withholding assent) can be the exercise of a certain kind of rational control. This view depends upon the fact that our capacity for assenting is fundamentally different in kind from the capacity for having impressions: in exercising our capacity for assent, we can be guided by reasons for assenting, but in exercising our capacity for having impressions we cannot be guided in this way. However, if this is the Stoic account, it invites certain further questions. What exactly does this difference between assenting and having impressions amount to? What is *φ-ing for a reason*, and why can ‘φ-ing’ here stand for ‘assenting’ but not for ‘having an impression’? You can, after all, have new impressions as a result of listening to arguments. Why does *that* not count as *being persuaded to have those impressions* or as *having those impressions for a reason*? Again, what is it for the sage’s assenting to be *guided by knowledge of when one should assent*, and why can’t his impressions also be guided by such knowledge? More generally, what is it about the nature of our capacities for assenting and for having impressions that explains these differences between them?

In the remainder of this paper, I shall look at a particular way of explaining these differences between our capacity for having impressions and our capacity for assent. A hint of this explanation can already be found in the writings of the late Stoic, Epictetus, though I shall argue that this hint is only fully developed in the Neoplatonist, Ps-Simplicius’s commentary on Aristotle’s *De Anima*. According to Ps-Simplicius’s account, our power of assent is special in that it can be exercised in a distinctively self-reflexive way. I shall not attempt a full defence of the view that

emerges from this account, but I shall argue that it does suggest an interesting answer to our questions about the distinctive nature of our capacity for assent.

### What is special about reason? A suggestion in Epictetus

Like the earlier Stoics, Epictetus holds that assenting is under our control in a way that experiencing impressions is not. Impressions ‘are neither voluntary nor subject to one’s control (*non voluntatis sunt neque arbitraria*), but through a certain power of their own they force their recognition upon men’; whereas the assents by which these impressions are recognized are ‘voluntary and occur subject to human control’ (*voluntariae sunt fiuntque hominum arbitrato*).<sup>36</sup>

However, Epictetus differs from the earlier Stoics in that his notion of what depends on us (what is *eph’ hêmin*) is narrower than theirs. For Epictetus, something only counts as *depending on the agent* if nothing external to the agent *could* interfere with it. Because of this, he denies that the physical actions prompted by our assent depend on us. Instead, what depends on us is just the ‘use of our impressions’ (that is, assenting, withholding assent, and having the beliefs and impulses that follow upon assent).<sup>37</sup> This is the only activity that cannot be interfered with or prevented.<sup>38</sup> This difference between Epictetus and earlier Stoics partly arises from a difference in their motivations for discussing the notion of what ‘depends on us’. Epictetus’s primary concern in these discussions tends not to be allocating responsibility for our acts, but rather providing advice about how to avoid frustration and disappointment.<sup>39</sup> If you only desire things that depend on you (in Epictetus’s narrow sense), then your desires will never be frustrated by external circumstances (*Encheiridion*, ch 2). As he says, no

one can prevent you from assenting to what is true or force you to assent to what is false (*Diss.* I.17.22-3).

There is, then, an easy answer to the question of why *in Epictetus's sense of 'depends upon us'* assenting depends upon us whereas having impressions does not. As we have seen, the nature of assenting ensures that external circumstances cannot force you to assent: the main cause of assenting or withholding assent is always your character.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, there is nothing about the nature of having an impression that rules out the possibility that certain impressions are forced upon you by external circumstances. If what depends upon us must be the kind of thing that *cannot* be interfered with by external circumstances, then *whether or not we assent* will depend upon us, but *which impressions we have* will not.

If this were all Epictetus had to say about the way in which assenting depends on us, then his account would not help to answer the questions I raised for the earlier Stoics. It would not, for instance, help to explain why assenting, unlike having an impression, is the kind of thing one can do *for a reason* or *in the light of knowledge of whether one should assent*. However, Epictetus also has more to say about the way in which our power for assenting differs from our power for having impressions. Our power for assent, he says, is uniquely capable of a certain kind of self-reflexive exercise.

Epictetus's *Dissertationes* begin with a chapter on what 'depends upon us'. He claims that reason, which he characterizes as 'the power of making correct use of impressions' (that is, of correctly assenting to or withholding assent from impressions) is the only faculty the exercise of which wholly depends upon us. What

is special about reason, he explains, is that it is the only power that can be exercised self-reflexively: no other faculty can contemplate itself, and therefore no other faculty can approve or disapprove of itself;<sup>41</sup> reason ‘alone takes thought both for itself (καὶ αὐτὴν κατανοήσουσα παρείληπται) (what it is, what it can do, and how valuable it has come to be) and also for other faculties’ (*Diss.* I.1.4-5).<sup>42</sup> We need to ask why it is relevant to make this point about reason’s being uniquely self-reflexive in a chapter about what depends upon us. Does this fact about reason add anything to Epictetus’s other claims about the sense in which exercises of reason (in assenting or withholding assent) are uniquely in our power?

Epictetus defends his claim that reason is uniquely self-reflexive in *Dissertationes* I.20.<sup>43</sup> Other powers, he says, are directed at things that are distinct from (and differ in kind from) themselves. For instance, the art of shoemaking has to do with leather, but the art itself is not composed of leather. The art of grammar has to do with written speech, but the art itself is not made up of written speech. Because of this, neither the art of shoemaking nor the art of grammar can operate upon itself.<sup>44</sup> Reason, on the other hand, is in a certain sense ‘of the same kind as’ (*homoeidês* with) its subject matter. The task of reason is the proper use of impressions, but reason is itself ‘a system from certain impressions’ (σύστημα ἐκ ποιῶν φαντασιῶν). Because of this, Epictetus says, reason is ‘contemplative of itself’ (αὐτοῦ θεωρητικός), as well as of other things (*Diss.* I.20.5).

It is not entirely clear what Epictetus means by calling reason ‘a system from certain impressions’, or how this relates to the older, Chrysippean claim that reason is a



collection of concepts.<sup>45</sup> He could be using ‘impression’ (*phantasia*) broadly here, in such a way that concepts (*ennoiai*) also count as impressions of a kind.<sup>46</sup>

Alternatively, the ‘from’ (*ek*) could have a temporal rather than a compositional sense, and his claim could be that reason is a system of concepts that is *developed out of* certain impressions. Either way, the conclusion he wants to draw from this claim about the relation between impressions and reason is that any faculty that can assess the impressions must also be able to assess reason. Thus, the faculty of reason, since it is what assesses the impressions, must also be capable of assessing itself. Epictetus goes on to make a similar point about wisdom (*phronêsis*). Wisdom contemplates what is good and bad, but since it itself is good, in contemplating what is good and bad it must also contemplate itself and its opposite (*Diss. I, 20*).<sup>47</sup>

We are now in a position to understand the significance of this claim that reason can evaluate itself. Epictetus’s point seems to be that you can always reflect upon your own assenting (and withholding of assent) and judge whether you are right to be assenting (or to be withholding assent). The claim is that you *can* evaluate each act of assent (or of withholding assent), not that you actually *do* evaluate every such act. If Epictetus held that you must evaluate *every* act of assent, he would be committed to an infinite regress of acts of evaluation (since each act of evaluation itself involves a distinct act of assenting or of withholding assent). Instead, Epictetus says that each act of assent *can* be reassessed and endorsed or rejected.<sup>48</sup>

This is only possible, he argues, because reason (the faculty by which we assent or withhold assent) is capable of assessing its own operation. Reason has to be self-reflexive in this way if an infinite regress of *powers* is to be avoided. If every act of

assent (or withholding assent) is evaluable, then either there is one power which enables us both to assent and to evaluate that act of assent, or our capacity for evaluating that assent depends on the possession of a further power. If the capacity for evaluating the original assent depended upon the possession of a further power, that further power would also have to be a power for assenting (since to evaluate something is to exercise a power of assenting or withholding assent), so the operation of that further power would also have to be evaluable (given the assumption that every act of assenting or withholding assent is evaluable). The operation of this further power would, then, need to be evaluated either by itself (in which case *it* would be a power capable of evaluating its own operation) or by yet a *further* power, and so on (*Diss.* I.17.1-4).<sup>49</sup> Epictetus concludes that if every act of assent (or withholding assent) is evaluable, there must be a single power that is capable of evaluating its own use.

These remarks about the self-reflexivity of reason suggest a new answer to our question about the difference between assenting and having an impression. Epictetus – I take it – is claiming not merely that the power by which I assent happens also to be uniquely self-reflexive, but rather that there is an essential connection between its being self-reflexive in this way and its being a power for assenting: an activity only counts as *assenting* if it is an exercise of such a self-reflexive power. If this is right, then assenting differs from having an impression in the following way. Assenting (or withholding assent) implies having the ability to evaluate one's act of assent (or of withholding assent), whereas having an impression does not imply having the ability to evaluate one's impression (or indeed, having the ability to form any kind of meta-attitude towards it).

As we have seen, Epictetus makes this point about the self-reflexivity of reason right at the start of a chapter on ‘what depends on us’. We can now see why he thinks the two topics are connected. The rational power of assenting, because of its self-reflexive nature, provides you with the ability to re-evaluate any of your acts of assenting (or of withholding assent). You can reflect on any of your beliefs and ask ‘is it really true?’ Or you can reflect on anything you are about to do and ask ‘is this really an appropriate thing to be doing?’ Having this ability for re-evaluation is a necessary condition for exercising a certain kind of control over what you do or believe: you need to be able to re-evaluate your beliefs and intentions in order to have the capacity to *revise* (or reaffirm) those beliefs and intentions in the light of your thoughts about whether or not they are justified. A creature that altogether lacked this capacity for re-evaluation would just be stuck with whatever beliefs or intentions it had formed, and would thus lack an important kind of control over what it thought or did. A creature that only had the power to re-evaluate a certain limited range of acts of assent would be correspondingly limited in its ability to revise its beliefs and intentions. In a human being, *no* act of assenting or withholding assent is ‘off limits’ for re-evaluation, because reason (the capacity for assenting or withholding assent) is a self-reflexive power.

Can we, then, use Epictetus’s account to answer our earlier questions about the way in which assenting differs from having impressions? The fact that you can always evaluate any of your assents does help to explain why your assent depends on you in a way that an animal’s impressions do not depend on it. Being able evaluate your assent is a necessary condition for being able to revise or maintain that assent in the light of

this evaluation, and this is a necessary condition that animals lack. On the other hand, as it is a mere necessary condition, the fact that you can evaluate your assent does not explain how it is possible for you to *revise* your assent in the light of this evaluation. Hence, it does not explain why a human being can assent (or withdraw her assent) for a reason but cannot have impressions (or cease to have impressions) for a reason. The difference between human assent and human impressions cannot lie in the fact that a human being has the capacity to evaluate each of her assents; she can evaluate each of her impressions too.<sup>50</sup> The difference seems rather to lie in the fact that evaluating your assent can itself be a way of revising that assent, whereas you cannot revise your impressions simply by evaluating them. When you reflect on your assent to P and judge that it was mistaken, you thereby cease to assent to P, but when you judge that your impression that P is inaccurate, you do not cease to have that impression. An account of the difference between assenting and having impressions needs to explain why assent is *such as to be responsive to higher order evaluation*, and why assenting is, in this respect, unlike having an impression.

In what follows, I turn to Ps-Simplicius's *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*<sup>51</sup> for its presentation of a Neoplatonist view on which reason is self-reflexive in a more radical way. I shall ask whether this view can explain the fact that assenting, unlike having impressions, is such as to be responsive to higher-order evaluation.

#### Ps-Simplicius and earlier neoplatonists on self-reversion and control

The authorship of this commentary on *De Anima* is disputed. It was attributed by ancient sources to Simplicius, but most scholars now agree that that attribution is a

mistake. Many attribute it to Priscian of Lydia (born late fifth century AD, an associate of Damascius).<sup>52</sup> For our purposes, it will be important that the author is clearly a Neoplatonist.<sup>53</sup>

According to Ps-Simplicius, what is distinctive about rational assent – what makes assenting different from having impressions – is that assenting involves a special kind of self-cognition. To explain this, he invokes the Neoplatonist notion of ‘self-reversion’ (*epistrophê pros heauton*). All rational assent, he says, is ‘with reversion’ (223, 33-4).

If we are to understand Ps-Simplicius’s appeal to self-reversion here, it will be helpful to look first at earlier uses of this notion. Epictetus himself had used the word ‘*epistrophê*’ and its associated verb ‘*epistrephein*’, though in a somewhat different sense. For Epictetus, to *epistrephein* towards something is to pay attention to and care for that thing. You should pay attention to yourself in order to check whether you are making mistakes (*Diss.*, IV, 4, 7, 3-4). When you encounter something new, you should turn to yourself and ask what ability you have for making use of that thing (*Encheiridion*, 10, 1, 1-2). Clearly, this kind of critical engagement with yourself is something that you might or might not achieve. Epictetus complains that people generally care too much about the results of their activities and not enough about the activities themselves. ‘Give me a man,’ he says, ‘who cares how he does what he does (ὧ μέλει πῶς τι ποιήσῃ), who does not concern himself with the result he may achieve, but with his own activity (ὅς ἐπιστρέφεται οὐ τοῦ τυχεῖν τινος, ἀλλὰ τῆς ἐνεργείας τῆς αὐτοῦ)’ (*Diss.* II.16, 15, 2-5). Epictetus *advises* us to pay attention to

ourselves in this way, knowing that not all of us will follow this advice. This kind of paying attention to ourselves is not, then, something we do simply in virtue of assenting or making a judgment.

A different, though related, notion of *epistrophê* came to play a central role in Neoplatonic metaphysics. According to Proclus, for instance, each thing reverts to (*epistrephetai pros*) the higher source from which it proceeds (*Elements of Theology* [E.T.], 31). What this means is that each thing strives to assimilate itself to that higher source, and in so doing, gets its good from that higher source. Intellects and rational souls do this in a special way: they revert to higher things by reverting to *themselves*. They revert to themselves by a certain kind of self-thinking. In striving for a cognitive grasp of its source, an intellect or rational soul succeeds in thinking itself, thereby unifying itself and making itself as similar as can be to that higher source. An intellect engages in self-intellection; a rational soul engages in a less unified kind of self-thinking, which Proclus calls ‘self-movement’.<sup>54</sup> This kind of self-thinking is quite different from the contingent self-concern described by Epictetus. Proclus describes both intellects and souls as engaging in an *essential* kind of self-reversion. An intellect or rational soul, by its self-thinking, makes itself fully what it is.<sup>55</sup> This is not, then, the kind of self-thinking that an intellect or rational soul *might or might not* engage in.

According to Proclus, the rational soul can also revert to itself in another way. As well as reverting to itself *in its essence* (eternally thinking itself, though in a less unified way than is possible for an intellect), the rational soul also has the capacity to be self-reverting *in its activity* (E.T. 44, 191). Though a rational soul’s *essence* is eternally

and necessarily self-reverting, a rational, human soul might or might not succeed in fully reverting to itself in its *activity*. When a soul succeeds in reverting to itself in its activity, it succeeds in recollecting the essentially self-thinking *logoi* that make up its essence.<sup>56</sup> Thus, this kind of self-reversion, when it occurs, is an *achievement* of the rational soul.

Ps-Simplicius is clearly influenced by such earlier discussions, but when he appeals to self-reversion in his account of assent, he is also saying something importantly different. Assenting is not the kind of self-reverting activity by which an entity (such as a soul or an intellect) makes itself what it is. Nor is assenting necessarily an achievement: in assenting, you can be making a mistake. When he invokes self-reversion here, Ps-Simplicius is saying that assenting (whether correctly or incorrectly) is a kind of activity that makes itself what it is by reverting on itself. As we shall see, his view is that an activity only counts as assenting insofar as it is, in a certain special sense, self-endorsing.<sup>57</sup>

As we have seen, the Stoics held that assenting is in our power in a way that having impressions is not, and that because of this, we are, in a special sense, responsible for assenting or withholding assent. It is natural to wonder, then, whether Ps-Simplicius takes himself to be offering an account of this kind of responsibility.

He certainly does not take himself to be offering a *friendly supplement* to Stoic views. He argues that only nonbodily things can engage in the relevant kind of self-reflexive activity (*In De An*, 173, 3-7; 279, 29). On his view, then, Stoic materialism makes it impossible to give an adequate account of assent.<sup>58</sup> But does he think his alternative

account, on which assenting is an essentially self-reverting activity, sheds light on the sense in which assenting is in our power?

Here again it is useful to consider Ps-Simplicius's account against the background of other Platonist discussions. Proclus had connected the self-moving nature of the human soul with the fact that humans are responsible for their own activity. For example, in his *In Alcibiadem*, he invokes the fact that a human being's soul is self-moving to explain why *Alcibiades* is responsible for his own answers, even when such answers are prompted by Socrates's questioning (276-7). To have a self-moving soul is to be able to control how you react to external promptings. Such control would be impossible for a nonrational animal:

‘Nonrational animals are among things “shepherded with a staff”. . . and wherever the leader leads, there the led are led, bereft of the power of ruling and saving themselves; but the human soul, on account of its peculiar characteristic of self-activity and self-movement is of such a nature as to be active concerning itself, move itself and provide itself with the good’.

τὰ μὲν ἄλογα ζῶα τῶν πλ η γ ῆ ν ε μ ο μ έ ν ω ν έστι. . . καὶ ἥπερ ἄν ἄγῃ τὸ ἄγον, ταύτη καὶ τὰ ἀγόμενα ἄγεται, τοῦ ἑαυτῶν ἄρχειν καὶ ἑαυτὰ σώζειν παρηρημένα· ἡ δὲ ἀνθρωπίνη ψυχὴ διὰ τὴν αὐτενέργητον καὶ αὐτοκίνητον ιδιότητα πέφυκε περὶ ἑαυτὴν ἐνεργεῖν καὶ ἑαυτὴν κινεῖν καὶ ἑαυτῇ παρέχειν τὸ ἀγαθόν. (*In Alcibiadem*, 279)

Other Platonic texts hint at a connection between self-movement, responsibility and *assent*. Calcidius, in his *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarium* (156), argues that



because humans are rational animals, choices (or at least certain choices) are within their control. In the course of this argument, he claims that the soul-power by which a human being assents is ‘self-moving’, and hence that assent and impulse are self-moving.<sup>59</sup> Simplicius, in his *In Enchiridion Epictetii* (13,49-14,9), says that people who deny what depends on us overlook both the fact that the soul is essentially self-moving and the fact that it engages in assent and refusal. He goes on to claim that assenting and refusing are ‘internal motions of the soul itself, not external shovings or draggings of some sort.’ (‘ἔνδοθέν εἰσι κινήσεις ἀπ’ αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ οὐκ ἔξωθεν ὠθισμοὶ ἢ ὀλκαὶ τινες’, 14, 7-9).<sup>60</sup>

When Ps-Simplicius appeals to the notion of self-reversion in his account of assent, he does so against the background of such discussions. By invoking self-reversion in this context, he is, I think, implying that we exercise a certain kind of control over our rational assent, and hence over our beliefs and choices.<sup>61</sup> His commentary provides a few indications of this view. Thus, he describes rational life as wholly ‘self-chosen’ (ὅλη αὐτοπροαίρετος ἡ λογικὴ ζωὴ, 36, 3), and he says that the soul, in its reversion on itself, discovers itself as (among other things) ‘authoritative over itself (ἐαυτῆς κυρίαν) on account of living in accord with rational wish’ (7, 22-5). In a later passage he adds that *nonrational* desire cannot ‘govern itself’ (κυβερνᾶν ἐαυτὴν) because of its ‘strong outward tendency’ (τὴν ἔξω σφοδρὰν τάσιν, 290, 9-10), by which he seems to mean its inability to revert on itself.<sup>62</sup>

However, his main focus is not on questions of control or responsibility. As one would expect, the nature of his account is influenced by the fact that it is a commentary on Aristotle. In introducing the notion of self-reversion, he is aiming to account for the differences between kinds of soul power: to explain how the powers of human souls differ from those of animal souls and how the rational powers of the human soul differ from its nonrational powers. To do this, he thinks, it is necessary to spell out in some detail the precise sense in which rational activities are uniquely self-reflexive. Though influenced by Neoplatonic views about self-reversion, Ps-Simplicius's account is also idiosyncratic, drawing on and modifying such views in an attempt to make sense of Aristotle's text. What emerges is an interesting and novel account of the distinctive nature of rational powers. As we shall see, it is an account that explores, in a new and fascinating way, the connection between judging and a certain kind of self-reflexivity.

My aim, in the rest of this paper, is to ask about the significance of this rather striking appeal to the Neoplatonic notion of self-reversion in his account of assent. What does the introduction of the notion of self-reversion add to Stoic accounts of the difference between human and animal behavior? Does it help us to answer any of our questions about the difference between assenting and having impressions? Can it, for instance, explain why it is possible to assent (or withhold assent) for a reason but not possible to have an impression for a reason?

Ps-Simplicius' classification of soul power as rational or nonrational

Unlike the Stoics, Ps-Simplicius follows both Plato and Aristotle in holding that, within the human soul, there are some powers that are strictly speaking rational and others that are not. Thus, on the cognitive side, the powers of belief (*doxa*)<sup>63</sup> and intellect (*nous*) are rational, whereas the powers of perception (*aisthêsis*) and impression/imagination (*phantasia*) are nonrational. On the desiderative side, appetite (*epithumia*) is nonrational, whereas wish (*boulêsis*) and choice (*proairesis*) are rational.

However, this distinction is complicated by Ps-Simplicius's view that the possession of reason influences (in various different ways) all the other powers of the soul. Thus, human perception, *phantasia* and *epithumia* (and even, human vegetative powers<sup>64</sup>) are quite unlike their animal counterparts. Ps-Simplicius goes so far as to say that perception in humans is only homonymously related to perception in animals (187, 37) – a view that he takes from Iamblichus. Because of these views, Ps-Simplicius sometimes describes human perception and appetitive desire as 'rational'.<sup>65</sup> His point, though, is not that perception or desire (in a human) is strictly speaking a power of the rational part of the soul. Rather, the claim is that the human powers of perception and appetitive desire are of a special kind because they are powers that belong to a soul that is essentially rational.<sup>66</sup>

What distinguishes those powers that are strictly speaking rational (a) from the nonrational powers of animals, and (b) from the nonrational human soul-powers? Ps-Simplicius' answer to (a) is that rational powers differ from the nonrational powers of animals in being capable of a kind of self-reversion. All rational cognition, he says, involves self-reversion: 'for every rational cognition, even if it is of something

external, comes about by returning to itself and judging its own understanding' (πᾶσα γὰρ λογικὴ γνῶσις κἄν τοῦ ἐκτὸς ἧ, εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἐπιστρέφουσα καὶ τὴν ἑαυτῆς κρίνουσα σύνεσιν γίνεται, 274, 22-4).<sup>67</sup> This capacity for self-reversion is proper (*idion*) to the rational (*logikē*) soul; perceptual and epithumetic souls are distinguished from rational soul by the fact that they are not capable of self-reversion (41, 26-9).<sup>68</sup> Self-reversion is not possible for a nonrational, animal power.

Ps-Simplicius's account of the difference between rational and nonrational powers *within a human being* (that is, his answer to (b) above) is more complicated since, as we have seen, he thinks that human nonrational powers share in rationality. This leads him to say that human nonrational powers are, like rational powers, capable of a *kind* of self-reversion and hence a kind of self-cognition. He can thus agree with Aristotle's claim that one's awareness of one's own seeing is an exercise of the power of sight (*De Anima* III.2). The capacity for this kind of self-aware exercise is, he claims, unique to *human* (and hence *logos*-influenced) perceptual powers (173, 3-7; 187, 27-36).<sup>69</sup>

In spite of this complication, Ps-Simplicius does, I think, want to say that there is a kind of self-reverting activity that is possible only for powers that are strictly speaking rational (powers of belief, *nous* and wish). Although he says that human perceiving, because it is self-aware, involves a *kind* of self-reversion, Ps-Simplicius describes this as a mere *imitation* of the kind of self-reversion that is possible for reason: sense perception can 'perceive itself and imitate the reversion of reason upon itself' (καὶ ἑαυτῆς συναισθάνεσθαι καὶ ἀπομιμεῖσθαι τὴν τοῦ λόγου πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐπιστροφὴν,

290, 4-6). Moreover, Ps-Simplicius's argument that believing is the exercise of a rational power depends upon the assumption that rational powers are self-reverting in a way that nonrational human powers are not. As we shall see, he argues that taking something to be true involves self-reversion and hence is only possible for a strictly rational power (90, 16-18). That is why, though we can perceive truly, we cannot, using perception alone, grasp *that something is true* (204, 35-205, 1).

On Ps-Simplicius's view, a rational power is, in the following respect, like a human perceptual power: each can be exercised in such a way that it has its own activity as its object. What, then, is the difference between proper, *rational* self-reverting and the kind of self-awareness that Ps-Simplicius thinks is possible in cases of human perceiving? In what sense is the latter only an 'imitation' of the former?

There are two important differences between proper, rational self-reversion and the kind of self-reversion that is possible for human perceptual powers. First, the exercise of a properly rational power is *essentially* self-reflexive in a way that the exercise of a perceptual power is not: if  $\varphi$ -ing is a rational activity, then its being the activity it is consists (at least in part) in its cognizing itself as that activity. For example, if believing is the exercise of a properly rational power, then one only counts as believing insofar as one grasps oneself as believing. This, I think, is what Ps-Simplicius means when he says that rational activity (*logikê energeia*) does not come about without reverting to itself (90, 15-16). By contrast, the exercise of a perceptual power (even a human perceptual power) is not essentially self-reflexive in this way. Your awareness of yourself as seeing is something additional that runs alongside the activity of seeing; this additional awareness is not part of the very activity of seeing

(though it is, like your seeing, an exercise of your power of sight). Just as, when you are aware of *not* seeing, your awareness of yourself trying and failing to see is an additional exercise of your power of sight over and above your exercise of that power in trying to see, so also when you are aware of your seeing, you use your power of sight twice, both in seeing and in being aware of seeing (189, 22-28). On Ps-Simplicius's view, your seeing and your awareness of that seeing are two distinct, though simultaneous, exercises of your power of sight, one of which has the other as its object.<sup>70</sup>

The second way in which perceptual self-reversion differs from strict, rational self-reversion is that reason is able to apprehend both its activity and also its own 'substance and power', whereas perceptual self-awareness involves only the apprehension of an activity. As Ps-Simplicius says, a human perceptual power does not turn to itself as intellect or reason does 'for it is not able to cognize its substance or its power. . . but only its activity' (οὐ γὰρ καὶ τῆς οὐσίας καὶ τῆς δυνάμεως γνωριστική γίνεται, . . . ἀλλὰ μόνης τῆς ἐνεργείας) (188, 1-2).<sup>71</sup>

As we shall see, Ps-Simplicius's account of rational assent draws on both of the distinctive features of rational self-reversion. Assenting is an essentially self-reflexive exercise of a cognitive power, and moreover, assenting necessarily involves apprehending the very power one is exercising in assenting. On both these grounds, then, assenting must be the exercise of a strictly rational power.

Ps-Simplicius on belief (*doxa*), assent and self-reversion

Ps-Simplicius introduces the notion of assent in commenting on the Aristotelian argument that belief requires conviction (*pistis*), and hence is not possible for brutes (*De Anima* III.3.428a19-22):

‘But conviction follows belief (for without conviction in what we believe we cannot have a belief) and in brutes we often find imagination but never conviction.’

δόξη μὲν ἔπεται πίστις (οὐκ ἐνδέχεται γὰρ δοξάζοντα οἷς δοκεῖ μὴ πιστεύειν),

τῶν δὲ θηρίων οὐθενὶ ὑπάρχει πίστις, φαντασία δὲ πολλοῖς.

In explaining this argument, Ps-Simplicius describes conviction (*pistis*) as a kind of rational assent. Conviction (*pistis*), he says, is ‘assent to what has been apprehended, as true’ (πίστις δέ ἐστιν ἡ ὡς ἀληθεῖ τῷ γνωσθέντι συγκατάθεσις, 210, 14).<sup>72</sup> He goes on to claim that conviction, and hence assent of this sort, is also necessarily involved in exercising higher cognitive functions, such as knowledge (*epistēmē*), intellect (*nous*) and practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) (210, 36-7). Nonrational animals cannot assent to something as true (and hence cannot have beliefs) because such assent involves self-reversion of a kind that requires the exercise of a strictly rational power (90, 15-18; 223, 33-4).

Ps-Simplicius was not the first philosopher to appeal to the Stoic notion of assent in explaining this Aristotelian argument, but he was the first to invoke the notion of self-reversion in this context.<sup>73</sup> To make sense of Ps-Simplicius’s version of this argument, we need to understand why he takes assenting to require self-reversion. *Prima facie*, it is not obvious why we should accept that assenting involves any kind of self-reversion. At 90, 17-8, Ps-Simplicius says that conviction (*pistis*) is ‘judging of

the thing apprehended that it is true and at that time (*tote*) assenting’ (τὸ γνωσθὲν ὅτι ἀληθὲς ἐπικρινούσης καὶ τότε συγκατατιθεμένης· τοῦτο γὰρ ἡ πίστις). In many cases, the thing apprehended, and hence judged to be true will be something external. For instance, I might apprehend a blackbird in the garden. Judging that the thing apprehended is true will then amount to judging (and hence believing) that there is, in fact, a blackbird in the garden. What I assent to, in such a case, *seems* to be a claim about the blackbird and the garden not a claim about me or my apprehension. Why, then, does Ps-Simplicius suppose that in giving such assent I must be exercising a self-reverting power?

There are several passages in which Ps-Simplicius draws connections between rational assent, self-reversion and judging something to be true.<sup>74</sup> From these, we can begin to put together some elements of his view. His point is that self-reversion is required to *make a truth claim* (to ‘*alêtheuein*’ or ‘*pseudesthai*’).<sup>75</sup> To make a truth claim is to make an assertion about how things are.<sup>76</sup> It is this ability to make assertions about how things are that distinguishes the kind of cognition that involves assent (namely rational cognition) from the kind of cognition that does not involve assent (perceptual cognition). Nonrational cognition can be true, but it cannot tell truth or falsehood (‘*alêtheuein*’ or ‘*pseudesthai*’), that is, it cannot – correctly or otherwise – make a claim about what is the case (211, 4-5; 237, 9-11).

Ps-Simplicius also says that neither sense perception nor imagination (*phantasia*) can ‘apprehend something as true’ and that instead each is simply a kind of grasp of its objects: sense perception of objects of sense, imagination of impressions.<sup>77</sup> When he says that sense and imagination are merely of their objects, he does not mean to imply



that the content of perception or imagination must be *non-propositional*. He is quite prepared, for instance, to describe sight as cognizing ‘that a thing is white’ (204, 35-205, 1) or ‘that the thing seen is a man’ (210, 20-21). Nor, I think, does he even mean to rule out the possibility that the content of one’s imaginative impression could be *that such and such is true*. His point is that neither perceiving that a thing is white nor having an impression that such and such is true amounts to *apprehending something as true*. That is because (as he understands it) ‘apprehending something as true’ involves making a truth claim (a certain kind of assertion about what is the case), whereas having an impression that something is true does not, in the same sense, involve making a truth claim.<sup>78</sup>

Ps-Simplicius says that making a truth claim involves a kind of self-cognition: in making a judgment that something is true, one must take oneself to be judging truly.<sup>79</sup> For example, he says that sight is not capable of making truth claims because it is not capable of this kind of self-cognition. Sight can have a cognition that something is white but ‘is not capable of perceiving that it is cognizing truly’ (τοῦ δὲ ὅτι ἀληθῶς γινώσκει ἀναίσθητος, 204, 36-205,1). Hence, sight does not ‘tell the truth in the sense of grasping of itself that it is telling the truth’ (οὔτε ἀληθεύουσα οὕτως, ὡς ἑαυτῆς ὅτι ἀληθεύει ἀντιλαμβανομένη, 204, 34-5).<sup>80</sup>

It is this ‘grasping of itself that it is telling the truth’ that requires self-reversion and hence the exercise of a strictly rational power. Thus, he says that the assent to something as true is ‘accomplished in accordance with the reversion of belief to itself, judging as true its own understanding of things’ (κατὰ τὴν τῆς δόξης πρὸς ἑαυτὴν

ἐπιτελουμένη ἐπιστροφήν, κρινούσης ὡς ἀληθῆ τὴν ἑαυτῆς περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων  
 σύνεσιν, 237, 9-11).<sup>81</sup> Of course, judgments can be false, so one can be mistaken in  
 taking one's understanding to be true, but whether or not one is mistaken, Ps-  
 Simplicius holds that one must take one's understanding to be true in order to count as  
 assenting. He says that discursive reason (*dianoia*) 'whether it reaches out to the  
 objects of cognition correctly or falsely, is not satisfied with the reaching out and does  
 not give its assent, unless it also judges, correctly or otherwise, that its understanding  
 is true (and sometimes it also makes a mistake about this judgment)' (ἡ δὲ διάνοια  
 καὶν ἀληθῶς καὶν ψευδῶς προσβάλλη τοῖς γνωστοῖς, οὐκ ἀρκεῖται τῇ προσβολῇ οὐδὲ  
 συγκατατίθεται, εἰ μὴ καὶ ὅτι ἀληθὴς ἡ σύνεσις ἐπικρίνη ἢ ὀρθῶς ἢ οὐ, ποτὲ καὶ περὶ  
 τὴν ἐπίκρισιν ἀμαρτάνουσα, 205, 7-10).

Ps-Simplicius's claim here is that when one assents (that is, takes something to be  
 true), one's belief (*doxa*) or discursive reason (*dianoia*) must take its own  
*understanding* (*sunesis*) to be true. To work out what he means by this, we need to  
 answer two distinct questions: (i) what is meant by 'taking understanding to be true'?  
 and (ii) what is it for belief (or discursive reason) to take *its own* understanding to be  
 true?

Ps-Simplicius uses the word 'understanding' (*sunesis*) in a very broad sense.<sup>82</sup> Both  
 rational and nonrational cognition can be an exercise of *sunesis*. For example, at 210,  
 20-27, he implies that there is a perceptual kind of *sunesis* that is exercised in simply  
 perceiving something (for example, perceiving that there is a man), and he  
 distinguishes this from a second, rational, kind of *sunesis* that is exercised in making a

judgment on the basis of one's perception (for example judging that there is in fact a man).<sup>83</sup>

Ps-Simplicius does not spell out what it is for a kind of *sunesis* to be true, so here we have to speculate. What does the claim that *your sunesis is true* add to the claim that *your judgment or perception is true*? His view, I suggest, is as follows. To claim that your judgment is true is to claim that things in fact are as you judge them to be; similarly, to claim that your perception is true is to claim that things in fact are as you perceive them to be.<sup>84</sup> To claim that your (perceptual or rational) *sunesis* is true is to claim something more than this: it is to claim that you are achieving truth non-accidentally, in virtue of correctly exercising your *sunesis*. Your power of *sunesis* is true on a particular occasion if and only if it is achieving truth *in virtue of functioning well as the kind of sunesis it is*.

Your perceptual *sunesis* is functioning correctly just in case your perceptual powers are functioning well: you are not hallucinating, your vision is not distorted, and so on. When you make a judgment on the basis of perceptual *sunesis*, you judge that your perceptual *sunesis* is achieving truth in virtue of its correct functioning. Ps-Simplicius gives an example in which you hesitate to make such a judgment because you are unsure whether what your perceptual *sunesis* suggests to you is in fact true. You might see that there is a man in the distance, but nevertheless hold back from endorsing your perceptual *sunesis* and hence judging that there is a man until you have confirmed that the thing in question is 'two-footed and moving and upright' (210, 23). In this case, you initially hold back from endorsing your perceptual *sunesis* because you know that (even when your perception is functioning correctly) the

visual appearance of things that are far away can be misleading: how things appear in the distance is not always a good guide to how things are. There is also, I suggest, another way in which you might fail to endorse your perceptual *sunesis*. Suppose you suffer from a hallucination of a man, you know you are hallucinating, and yet you have independent grounds for judging that there is in fact a man there (perhaps even a man who looks just like what appears to you in your hallucinatory experience). In this case, what your visual appearance suggest to you (namely that there is a man) is in fact true, and you do judge (on independent grounds) that there is a man there, but you do not judge that your perceptual *sunesis* is true. You realize that your visual *sunesis* is not achieving truth in virtue of functioning well as the kind of *sunesis* it is. Truth here is not an achievement *of your visual sunesis*. As a result, though you judge that there is a man, your judgment is not based on how things visually appear to you.

To assent, or make a judgment, is to exercise rational *sunesis* (although as we have seen, when you make a judgment on the basis of perception, you also exercise your perceptual *sunesis*). To take your rational *sunesis* to be true is to take yourself to be achieving truth *in virtue of the correct functioning of your capacity for assent*.

Ps-Simplicius does not himself spell out what it is for this capacity to be functioning correctly, but we can reconstruct his view on the basis of certain remarks he makes about the relation between assent and reasoning. In discussing assent, he distinguishes between two different kinds of cognition. You might fully grasp something with your intellect, knowing it in an ‘undivided and unitary way’ or alternatively, you might lack this intellectual grasp, but instead have the kind of cognition that depends on reasoning (210, 16-20). In the first case, your assent need not depend upon reasoning.

In the second case, your assent (or withholding assent) should depend on whether or not there is reason to assent: whether or not you assent should depend ‘entirely on reason (*logos*) (whether necessary or convincing), or on the speaker’s being a trustworthy person, judging this too in accordance with some reason (*logos*)’ (210, 18-20).<sup>85</sup> These remarks suggest that whether your capacity for assent is functioning correctly depends upon your warrant for assenting. If your assent is not based on reasoning, then your capacity for assent is functioning correctly just in case you have the kind of unitary knowledge that warrants giving this kind of assent. On the other hand, if your assent *is* based on reasoning, then your capacity for assent will be functioning correctly just in case the reasons on which it depends do in fact provide good grounds for assenting. When you take the *sunesis* you exercise in assenting to be true, you take yourself to be achieving truth in virtue of the fact that your *sunesis* warrants you in assenting as you do. Once again, then, taking your *sunesis* to be true is a matter of taking yourself to be achieving truth non-accidentally, in virtue of exercising that *sunesis*. A judgment based on bad reasoning might still be true, but the *sunesis* exercised in making such a judgment would not be true.<sup>86</sup>

This explains what it is to judge one’s *sunesis* to be true, but it does not yet explain the peculiar self-reflexivity Ps-Simplicius attributes to the act of judging. To understand this, we need to answer the second question I raised for his account. We need to explain what he means when he says that rational cognition takes its *own sunesis* to be true: that is, when he says that belief (*doxa*) judges as true ‘its own understanding about things’ (τὴν ἑαυτῆς περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων σύνεσιν, 237, 11), or that rational cognition ‘comes about by reverting to itself and judging its own

understanding' (εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἐπιστρέφουσα καὶ τὴν ἑαυτῆς κρίνουσα σύνεσιν γίνεται, 274, 23-4).

When you judge whether your perceptual *sunesis* is true, you use one power (your rational power of assent) to evaluate another (your perceptual *sunesis*). When you judge whether a belief you held ten years ago was warranted, you are exercising your power of assent to evaluate *another* exercise of that very power. According to Ps-Simplicius, the self-reflexivity that is essential to judging is of a stronger kind: judging is self-reflexive in that it involves one cognitive act evaluating *itself*. His view is that any act of judgment must contain, as part of its content, an endorsement of the *sunesis* being exercised *in that very act of judgment*.

It is perhaps easiest to explain this with an example. Ps-Simplicius is claiming that you cannot judge, say, that there is a blackbird in the garden without, *as part of this act of judgment*, judging that you are achieving truth in virtue of using your understanding (*sunesis*) correctly in making this judgment.<sup>87</sup> The content of your judgment will thus be 'there is a blackbird in the garden and the understanding I am exercising in making this judgment is true'. 'This judgment' here must refer to the *whole* judgment (that is, to the judgment that has as its content the whole of 'there is a blackbird in the garden and the understanding I am exercising in making this judgment is true'). In this sense, then, your act of judgment is necessarily self-referential: it has as part of its content something that refers to itself.

As we have already seen, taking this understanding (*sunesis*) to be true is taking yourself to be achieving truth in virtue of being warranted in making the judgment.

When you judge ‘there is a blackbird in the garden and the understanding I am exercising in making this judgment is true’, you are judging that your understanding warrants the *whole* judgment: ‘there is a blackbird in the garden and the understanding I am exercising in making this judgment is true’. This is the sense in which belief (*doxa*) judges as true its *own* understanding (237, 11).<sup>88</sup>

According to Ps-Simplicius, part of what it *is* to make a judgment is to judge that this judgment is warranted. This cannot be satisfactorily accounted for by supposing that each act of judgment is accompanied by some *further* act, in which the original act is judged to be achieving truth in virtue of being warranted.<sup>89</sup> First, such a view would imply an infinite regress of acts of judging;<sup>90</sup> but second, and equally importantly, such a view would fail to account for the essential relation between making a judgment and taking yourself to be achieving truth because you are warranted in making that judgment. Ps-Simplicius is not claiming merely that in judging you must also, necessarily, endorse your judging. His point is that your act of judging only *counts as an act of judging* in virtue of your endorsement of it. Your endorsement does not merely *accompany* your act of judging, it is what *constitutes* that act *as* an act of judging. As such, Ps-Simplicius assumes, this endorsement must be included in the act itself. This is why the content of the act of judgment must be self-referential in the way we have described.

We are now in a position to understand why judging must be the exercise of a strictly rational power. According to Ps-Simplicius, a power must be rational if it is to be exercised self-reflexively in the way that is required for judgment. As we saw earlier, the exercise of human perceptual powers is only self-reflexive in a certain limited

way. You can exercise a perceptual power in being aware of another distinct exercise of the same power (as when you use your power of sight in being aware of your seeing), but this awareness cannot be a single self-reflexive act, nor can it be an awareness of the power itself. The power you exercise in judging must be self-reflexive in just these ways. Your judging is a single self-reflexive act, and it is an act in which you grasp (and evaluate) the power by which you judge, since it is an act in which you endorse the *sunesis* that you are exercising in that very judgment.<sup>91</sup>

### Some problems for this account of judging

This account, if it can be defended, explains why assenting must be the exercise of a self-reflexive, and hence rational, power. But *can* it be defended? In the final two sections of this paper, I consider some advantages of this account and some potential objections to it. The advantages lie in the account's explanatory power: I argue that it provides a basis both for explaining the impossibility of believing at will and for answering our questions about reason-responsiveness. The potential objections are of three types: a worry that the account is circular, a worry that it over-intellectualises judging, and a worry that it is vulnerable to certain counterexamples. In what follows, I first discuss how Ps-Simplicius might respond to these objections, and then go on to consider the account's explanatory power.

#### *(i) Is the account circular?*

There is a certain sense in which this account of judging is circular: it invokes the very notion it is supposed to be explicating. On this account, part of what it is to make a judgment is to *judge* that one's judgment is warranted (or in other words, to endorse



the understanding one is exercising in so judging). In reply, I think Ps-Simplicius would deny that such circularity is vicious. On Ps-Simplicius's view, *any* account of a self-reverting activity must be circular, in the sense of invoking the activity being explicated. This shows that it is impossible to give a *reductive* account of such activities, but it does not show that it is impossible to give an account that is *informative*. Ps-Simplicius's account of judging is clearly informative. For instance, it makes nontrivial claims about the kind of *sunesis* that is exercised in judging and about what it is for that *sunesis* to be exercised successfully.

*(ii) Is it plausible to suppose that merely judging something to be the case requires the exercise of such a sophisticated power?*

On Ps-Simplicius's account, in making a judgment you must judge your judgment-making capacity to be functioning well. It might be objected that such an account over-intellectualises judgment. Surely, there are many people who make judgments but would be mystified if asked whether their judgment-making capacity was functioning well. In response to this, Ps-Simplicius could say two things. First, you can be judging that your capacity for judgment is functioning well without necessarily being able to express your judgment in quite those terms. Judging that this capacity is functioning well *just is* judging that your judgment is warranted. That requires you to have some grasp of what it is for a judgment to be warranted, but it does not require you to have a philosophical account of the nature of different cognitive powers. Second, Ps-Simplicius would, I think, simply accept the consequence that judging is not possible for someone who lacks the ability to think about whether her judgments are justified. This is, after all, an account designed to explain why animals cannot

make judgments. Ps-Simplicius agrees with the Stoics that neither animals nor young children are capable of the relevant kind of assent.

*(iii) Are there cases in which you make a judgment without taking your judgment to be warranted?*

It might seem that Ps-Simplicius's account of judgment is vulnerable to counterexamples. There are cases in which we are willing to describe people as 'judging' or as 'believing', even though they do not seem to satisfy the conditions laid down by Ps-Simplicius's account.

It is certainly possible to judge that P while judging that your *general capacity for determining whether P* is unreliable. For instance, you might judge that Labour will win the next election, while acknowledging that you are not very good at predicting such things. This, I think, is not a counterexample. As we have seen, when Ps-Simplicius says that in making a judgment you must endorse the understanding you are exercising, he does not mean that you must take yourself to be exercising a capacity for judgment that is *generally* reliable. To endorse your understanding, is to take it to be achieving truth by functioning well *in this instance*, and hence to take yourself to be justified in so judging. You cannot judge that Labour will win the next election while acknowledging that your judgment is completely unwarranted. That would be *guessing* not judging.

The possibility of having repressed beliefs might also be thought to provide a potential counterexample. If you can believe that P without having any conscious access to this belief, then you can (presumably) unconsciously believe that P while

consciously judging that this belief is unwarranted. Perhaps, however, Ps-Simplicius could allow for this. He could maintain that when you unconsciously believe that P you must also unconsciously believe that you are justified in believing that P. The fact that you can at the same time consciously judge that you have no justification for believing P merely shows that your conscious judgments can contradict your unconscious beliefs.

Certain types of irrationality might seem to provide a different kind of counterexample. We do sometimes say things like ‘I can’t help believing this, even though I know I’m not justified in doing so.’ If you are afraid of flying, you might find yourself ‘judging’ that the plane you are on will crash, even while recognising that it is not reasonable so to judge. If you are an optimist, you might find you can’t help ‘believing’ that ‘something will turn up’, even while you acknowledge that all the evidence points the other way.

To this, I think, Ps-Simplicius would reply that in spite of the language we sometimes use to describe such cases, they are not really examples of genuine judging or believing. They are, rather, cases in which people behave in certain respects *as if* they have the relevant belief, without actually having it. The fearful flier does not assent to the claim that the plane will crash and hence does not believe it will crash, but she has the kind of panicked reaction that would normally arise from such a belief. The optimist does not believe that something will turn up, but he has the sunny disposition one would expect such a belief to engender.

The use of the words ‘belief’ and ‘judgment’ in such cases is merely evidence of a certain looseness in our language. Ps-Simplicius is giving an account not of the way in which people *use* the word ‘*doxa*’ (‘belief’), but rather of *what it is* to hold something to be true or take something to be the case. He himself makes this clear when he notes that the word ‘*doxa*’ is sometimes used (by Iamblichus, for instance) for a kind of nonrational cognition: ‘the cognition of what is superficial and seems to be’ (309, 34-6). This use of the word is not, he says, evidence of any real disagreement between Iamblichus and Aristotle (or between Iamblichus and Ps-Simplicius): Iamblichus would agree that one must exercise a *rational* power in taking something to be the case; when he describes a kind of nonrational cognition as ‘*doxa*’, he is simply not using the word ‘*doxa*’ to mean *belief that something is the case*.<sup>92</sup>

Some consequences of this account of assent: believing at will and reason-responsiveness

I have claimed that this account can help to answer our questions about the reason-responsiveness of assent. This claim might at first seem surprising. Ps-Simplicius follows Aristotle in arguing that belief (*doxa*) does not depend on us: it is not ‘*eph hêmin*’ (206, 30-35, commenting on *De Anima* III.3.427b16-21). *Prima facie*, this looks like a *rejection* of the Stoic view that assenting depends on us, and hence also of the view that assenting is, in a special sense, reason-responsive. However, the disagreement here is only verbal. Ps-Simplicius’s point is simply that we cannot believe *at will*, which is something the Stoics never meant to deny.<sup>93</sup> In fact, I shall argue that the very feature of Ps-Simplicius’s account that enables it to explain the

impossibility of assenting (and hence believing) at will *also* provides a basis for explaining the way in which our capacity for assent is reason-responsive.<sup>94</sup>

Ps-Simplicius's defence of the claim that we cannot believe at will is often thought to be hopelessly confused. McCready-Flora (following Barnes) provides the following reconstruction: 'Whether a given belief is true or false is set by the facts. A belief that p (for some proposition p) is true given that p and false given that not-p. We do not, in general, control what the facts are, and therefore it is not up to us whether we have a true belief or a false belief. The truth or falsehood of any given belief is a semantic necessity, not subject to our wishes. Belief is, therefore, not up to us.' As McCready-Flora goes on to say, 'This argument fails ... because imaginings also have truth-values.'<sup>95</sup>

We can, I think, credit Ps-Simplicius with a better argument if we consider his remarks against the background of his more general account of assent. He argues as follows:

'Telling truth or falsehood is common to all [*hupolêpsis*], since all *hupolêpsis* consists in assent, but assent is not in accordance with the understanding (*sunesis*) of what impinges, but in accordance with the judgment of truth or falsehood. Truth and falsehood consist in agreement and disagreement with the facts, but the facts do not depend on us'.

πάσης γὰρ κοινὸν τὸ ἢ ἀληθεύειν ἢ ψεύδεσθαι, ἐπειδὴ ἐν συγκαταθέσει πᾶσα  
 ὑπόληψις. ἢ δὲ συγκατάθεσις οὐ κατὰ μόνην τὴν τῶν προσπιπτόντων  
 σύνεσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἢ ψεύδους διάκρισιν. ἐν δὲ τῇ πρὸς

τὰ πράγματα συμφωνίᾳ καὶ διαφωνίᾳ τὸ ἀληθὲς καὶ τὸ ψεῦδος· τὰ πράγματα  
δὲ οὐκ ἔφ' ἡμῖν (206, 31-35).

Certainly the last two lines of this argument, taken by themselves, suggest the interpretation given by McCready-Flora and Barnes. But for a full understanding of what Ps-Simplicius is saying here, we need to grasp the significance of his remarks about the kind of *sunesis* that is exercised in assent and of his appeal to the notions of telling truth and falsehood (*alêtheuein* and *pseudesthai*).

Ps-Simplicius takes the argument to apply not merely to belief (*doxa*) but to every *hupolêpsis* (or ‘rational cognition’ 206, 5).<sup>96</sup> ‘*Hupolêpsis*’, he says, is a broader term than ‘*doxa*’, including within its scope also *epistêmê* and *phronêsis* (207, 18-22, commenting on Aristotle, *De Anima* III.3.427b24-6).<sup>97</sup> What distinguishes *hupolêpsis* from both perception and imagination is that it ‘tells truth or falsehood’ (ἢ ἀληθεύειν ἢ ψεύδεσθαι). *Hupolêpsis* can tell truth or falsehood just because it involves assent (206, 31-2). As I remarked earlier, ‘telling truth or falsehood’ is *making a true or false assertion about how things are* (not simply *being true or false*).<sup>98</sup> That is why imagination does not count as ‘telling truth or falsehood’. When you imagine things, they appear to you to be a certain way, but imagining does not involve making a claim about how things are.

As we have seen, Ps-Simplicius holds that *making a claim about how things are* is a matter of *assenting* to something, and that such assenting must be the exercise of a particular kind of power. It must be the exercise of the kind of rational *sunesis* that is capable of self-reversion. In our passage, he says that every *hupolêpsis* consists in

assent (206, 32). Such assent, he says, is not simply in accord with the *sunesis* of what impinges (that is, the *sunesis* we have described as ‘perceptual’). It must, rather, be in accord with one’s judgment of truth or falsity (truth and falsity being a matter of agreement or disagreement with the facts) (206, 32-5). These last remarks are, of course, very brief. But his other remarks about assent suggest the following view.<sup>99</sup> In assenting, one makes a judgment about how things are. For this, the exercise of perceptual *sunesis* is not sufficient. In assenting, one must be exercising rational *sunesis* and moreover one must be taking oneself to be achieving truth in virtue of the correct functioning of that *sunesis*. Part of what it is to make a judgment is to take oneself to be achieving truth in virtue of being warranted in so judging.

If this is Ps-Simplicius’s point, it goes at least some way towards explaining why believing at will is not possible. If it were possible to believe that P at will, then you could consciously judge that P for reasons that you took to have nothing to do with whether or not ‘P’ was true.<sup>100</sup> For instance, you could believe that P on the grounds that this belief would make you happier, while holding that this was in fact not a good ground for taking ‘P’ to be true. Ps-Simplicius’s account (on the interpretation given here) shows why this is impossible.<sup>101</sup> As we have seen, this account implies that in the act of judging that P, you must take yourself to be achieving truth (that is, agreement with the facts) in virtue of the well functioning of your *sunesis*. But this implies that in judging that P, you must take yourself to be justified in so judging. You cannot take yourself to be justified in so judging while at the same time taking your judgment that P to be based on inadequate grounds, and hence to be unjustified (and of course, by the same token, you cannot make the meta-judgment that your judgment that P is justified, while taking that meta-judgment to be unjustified).<sup>102</sup>

Thus, the fact that it is impossible to believe at will simply follows from the fact that judging essentially involves taking oneself to be justified in so judging.<sup>103</sup>

In the special case in which your judgment is about some fact that depends on you, you have a kind of indirect way of bringing yourself to make that judgment. If you think you would be happier if you were to judge that you were singing, you can start singing, and then judge that you are singing. But of course, this does not involve judging that P while recognizing that you are not warranted in so judging. You can bring yourself to judge that you are singing just because you can make it the case that you are warranted in so judging, and you can do *this* just because you can make it the case that you are singing. Most of our beliefs are not about things that depend on us, and so in most cases we cannot, even in this indirect way, alter our beliefs at will.<sup>104</sup>

If I am right that this is how Ps-Simplicius's account rules out the possibility of *belief at will*, the same considerations also provide a basis for answering our questions about reason-responsiveness. Again, it is the essentially self-reflexive nature of assent that is relevant. As we saw, Epictetus recognized that in order to count as assenting, you must be able to reflect on whether you should be assenting and to reaffirm or revise your assent in the light of such reflection. His account, however, left unexplained the relation between *re-evaluating* your assent and *revising* or *reaffirming* that assent in the light of this re-evaluation. It did not explain why, when you conclude your assent is not justified, you thereby cease to assent. Here the account I have attributed to Ps-Simplicius provides the basis for an answer. As we have seen, on this account, you not merely *can*, but *necessarily do* engage in a certain kind of reflection on any act of assent. Your endorsement of your assent is built into the very act of assent itself: your



act of judging that P includes, as part of its content, the judgment that you are justified in so judging. This explains why, if you re-evaluate your act of judging that P and conclude that you are *not* justified in so judging, you thereby cease to judge that P. Continuing to judge that P would involve making two obviously contradictory judgments: the judgment that you are justified in judging that P (made as part of your act of judging that P) and the judgment that you are not justified in so judging.<sup>105</sup>

The fact that assent (and hence judgment) is responsive in this way to higher-order evaluation also explains the possibility of *judging for a reason*. You only count as *judging that P on the grounds that Q* if your act of judging that P *depends* in a certain way on your taking the fact that Q to provide good grounds for so judging. For instance, you only count as judging *on the basis of the weather forecast* that there will be rain, if you take the forecast's prediction to provide good grounds for judging that there will be rain and you judge as you do because of this.<sup>106</sup> This implies that were you to become convinced of the unreliability of the forecast, you would either revise your judgment or find new grounds for it. That is, it implies that your judging is responsive to a certain kind of higher-order reflection on whether it is justified by its grounds. Again, this is just what Ps-Simplicius's account (as I have interpreted it) would predict. On that account, making a judgment essentially involves endorsing the *sunesis* exercised in that judgment; when the judgment is based on reasons, endorsing the *sunesis* exercised in that judgment just is taking those reasons to warrant making that judgment.<sup>107</sup>

Your impressions are not, in the same way, responsive to higher-order evaluation.

This is because having an impression does not essentially involve either endorsing the

content of that impression or taking the impression to be the exercise of a capacity that is functioning correctly. Thus, although you might in fact cease to have a certain impression as a result of judging that the capacity that led you to have that impression was not functioning correctly, when this happens it is simply the result of a causal relation between that impression and that act of judgment: there is nothing about the *nature of the impression itself* that ensures you will cease to have the impression when you make such a judgment.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we have seen how Ps-Simplicius draws upon the Neoplatonic notion of self-reversion to explain the nature of rational assent. I have argued that this account of assent provides a basis for explaining a fundamental difference between assenting and having impressions: the fact that we can assent for a reason but cannot (in the same sense) have an impression for a reason.

Ps-Simplicius's account thus suggests an interesting new view of the nature of assent, a view that combines elements of Aristotelian, Stoic and Neoplatonist thought. From the Stoics, he inherits the view that believing involves assenting. He draws upon the Neoplatonist notion of self-reversion to explain the essentially self-reflexive nature of assent. This enables him to defend Aristotle's claim that we cannot believe at will. On this account, though we do not believe at will, we nevertheless have a kind of rational control over our beliefs: beliefs, by their very nature, are such as to be revised or maintained for reasons. This account thus provides an answer to the question we raised for the Stoics: what is it about the nature of assent that explains why you are

responsible for assenting in a way in which you are not responsible for having impressions? You are responsible for assenting just because you can assent (or withhold assent) for reasons, and you can assent for reasons just because of the essentially self-reflexive nature of the act of assent.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Stoic account of this distinction is helpfully discussed by S. Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy [Determinism]* (Oxford, 1998) ch 6, R. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals, the Origins of the Western Debate*

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[*Animal*] (London, 1993) ch. 3 and T. Brennan, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties and Fate [Life]* (Oxford, 2005), ch. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Aetius 4.12.1 = Ps-Plutarch *Placita Philosophorum*, 900d = A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, [L.S.] (Cambridge, 1987) 39B = H. von Arnim (ed) *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* [S.V.F.] (Leipzig, 1903) 2.54.

<sup>3</sup> Sensory and non-sensory impressions are distinguished at Diogenes Laertius [D.L.], 7.51 (= L.S. 39A = S.V.F. 2.61). See also Sextus Empiricus [S.E.], M. 7. 242-6 (= L.S. 39G = S.V.F. 2.65)

<sup>4</sup> As Sextus Empiricus remarks, reporting Stoic views, you can rub your eyes in an attempt to make your visual impression clearer (M 7. 258-9 = L.S. 40K). Diogenes Laertius reports that according to the Stoics, you can also alter which impressions you experience by undergoing a process of training in some craft. When looking at a table, a skilled carpenter will have different impressions from someone who is unskilled. When hearing arguments, someone who is trained in syllogistic will have different impressions from someone who is not. (D.L. 7.51 = L.S. 39A = S.V.F. 2.61).

<sup>5</sup> According to some accounts, certain Stoic philosophers attributed assent to animals too. (See Alexander of Aphrodisias [Alexander], *Quaestiones* 3.13, 107.6-12 and *De Fato* 183, 21-184, 5, Bruns.) Even if this correctly represents the views of some Stoics, it is clear that all of them agreed that *rational* assent is impossible for animals and that, since animals are carried along by their impressions, they do not have the power to withhold assent. If they assent, they do so automatically and invariably. See Sorabji, *Animal*, 41 and B. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism, [Action]* (Oxford, 1985), 77-8.

<sup>6</sup> Exactly what is endorsed is not very clear: the impression itself, or a corresponding proposition. This question is helpfully discussed in Brennan, *Life*, 54-8.

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<sup>7</sup> That is, a *hupolêpsis*, *doxa* or *katalêpsis*. See Bobzien, *Determinism*, 240-41.

<sup>8</sup> These passages are cited in J. Barnes, ““Belief is up to us”” [‘Up to us’] *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 106 (2006), 189-206.

<sup>9</sup> Although at the beginning of the passage, he is talking about a particular type of impression (a cognitive impression), I take it that in what follows he means to be drawing a general distinction between impression and assent.

<sup>10</sup> *Dissertationes [Diss.]* I.28.2-3. Although, as we shall see below, Epictetus differs in some significant ways from the older Stoics, in making *this* claim about the nature of our understanding, he seems to be expressing a view with which they would have agreed. At *Diss.* I.18.1, he ascribes a similar view to ‘the philosophers’ (presumably referring to the older Stoics). They held, he says, that there is one principle that governs our assent: we assent to what we experience as being so, we dissent from what we experience as not being so, and we suspend judgment from what we experience as uncertain.

<sup>11</sup> Epictetus’s actual words are that one cannot obey the command to ‘experience’ (πάθε) that it is night or to deny the experience (ἀπόπαθε) that it is day, but his point must be that one cannot assent to such things in response to a command, since he takes these observations about how one can or cannot respond to commands to show that no one willingly assents to what is false.

<sup>12</sup> Sextus attributes this view to the younger Stoics. C. Brittain argues convincingly that it was also the view of the older Stoics. See his ‘The Compulsions of Stoic Assent’ [Compulsion] in Mi-Kyoung Lee (ed) *Strategies of Argument. Essays in Ancient Ethics, Epistemology and Logic* (New York, 2014), 332-355 at 339.



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<sup>13</sup> For arguments that on the Stoic view, such impressions do not compel our assent see Brittain ‘Compulsion’ and T. Nawar ‘The Stoic Account of Apprehension’ *Philosophers’ Imprint*, 14. n29 (2014) 1-21.

<sup>14</sup> A story about Menelaus was cited as an example of refusing to assent to a cognitive impression because of prior false beliefs. Menelaus falsely believed Helen to be imprisoned in his ship and so couldn’t believe his eyes when he saw her in front of him (S.E., M.7. 255-6). Brittain, ‘Compulsion’ 342-6 argues that a Stoic sage might withhold assent from a cognitive impression because he had grounds for temporarily distrusting his faculties (because he was aware of the fact that he was suffering from a temporary illness, for instance).

<sup>15</sup> Thus your intentional actions are voluntary in a derivative sense, just *because* they arise from voluntary assent. This explains why, on the Stoic view, it is a mistake to think that your  $\varphi$ -ing can only be voluntary if *whether or not you  $\varphi$*  depends on your decision or choice. It is true that an *action* can only be voluntary if the agent was (at the time of action) able to decide whether or not to perform it, but this is true just *because* deciding to act is assenting to a practical impression and the voluntariness of action is derivative from the voluntariness of assent. On the Stoic view, it would be a mistake to take this as a sign that voluntariness *quite generally* depends upon decision. It would thus be a mistake to suppose that the fact that assent is voluntary implies that we can assent or withhold assent *at will*.

<sup>16</sup> Here I am concerned principally with the views of the older Stoics (Chrysippus and his immediate followers). I consider Epictetus in the following section.

<sup>17</sup> Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* [*Noctes*], ed. P. K. Marshall (Oxford, 1968), 7.2.7 (= L.S. 62D. = S.V.F. 2.1000). ‘Character’ here needs to be understood in a sense that implies it is not possible to act out of character. For example, if illness, exhaustion or grief

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leads you to act in a way that is contrary to how you would normally behave, *your disposition to act in such a way in response to being ill or exhausted or grief-stricken* is part of your character.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, there is room for objection here. For instance, one might question whether the fact that my character is the main cause of my assent can really ground my responsibility for assenting if my character is *itself* ultimately caused by external things acting on me. For discussion of this objection, see Bobzien, *Determinism* 290-301.

<sup>19</sup> In this paragraph, I follow Bobzien, *Determinism* especially 112-116 and 310-313. (See also 119-22 for her defence of the attribution of this view to Chrysippus.)

<sup>20</sup> For example, ‘Dio is walking today’ is possible just in case (i) being human (that is, being the kind of thing Dio is) is compatible with walking (in a way that, say, being a tree or a fish would not be) and (ii) there is nothing external that prevents Dio from walking today (for example, he is not chained down).

<sup>21</sup> The question of whether this account of possibility provides the basis for a convincing defence of Stoic compatibilism is beyond the scope of this paper. For some doubts, see T. Brennan’s ‘Fate and Free Will in Stoicism’ *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 21 (2001) 259-286 at 268-271.

<sup>22</sup> See D.L. 7.51 (= L.S. 39A = S.V.F. 2.61): ‘some impressions are technical (*technikai*) and others not: a work of art is viewed in one way by an expert and differently by a nonexpert’.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, in a situation in which you, as a carpenter, are having an expert impression of a table, it is *possible* for you to be having a non-expert impression. (You are not prevented by external circumstances from having such an impression and having such an impression is clearly compatible with being human).

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<sup>24</sup> There is, of course, an important difference between assenting and having impressions. The nature of the faculty of assent *ensures* that external circumstances never force us to give or withhold our assent: the power we exercise in assenting is a two-way power (a power to assent or not) and whether we assent depends on our character. (Bobzien makes this point, *Determinism* 286-7.) By contrast, our ability to have impressions is not a two-way power, and we can be externally forced to have certain impressions. This shows that it will *always* be possible, on encountering certain impressions, to assent otherwise than one does, but it will not always be possible, on encountering external objects, to undergo impressions that are other than those one in fact undergoes. That would explain why we do not always have power over our impressions, but it does not explain why we lack such control in those cases in which our impressions depend on our character and hence are not necessitated by things that are external to us.

<sup>25</sup> This point is made by Philoponus, in his commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima* (*In De Anima*, III. 488,36-489,6; 497,2-14; 500,29). (The authorship of this commentary on *De Anima* III has been disputed. For a defence of the claim that it is in fact written by Philoponus, see P. Golitsis, 'John Philoponus on the third book of Aristotle's *De Anima*, wrongly attributed to Stephanus' forthcoming in R Sorabji, *Aristotle Reinterpreted. New Findings on Seven Hundred Years of the Ancient Commentators on Aristotle*. (London, 2016).) Philoponus says that the horse that has been trained to respond to the whip has a *kind* of nonrational assent, and he contrasts this with rational assent, which (he says) requires being persuaded. Ps-Simplicius also takes up the question of how animals can be trained, given that they lack rationality. He says that some animals have a *kind* of rationality, in that they can be habituated by other beings. This is not the same as human rationality: it does not, for instance, include the

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ability to deliberate, and it does not enable the animal to train or habituate itself. But such animals, in virtue of their ability to be trained by humans, have something in common with rational animals. On Ps-Simplicius's view, their existence supports the view that there is no sudden transition in nature between the rational and the nonrational (Ps-Simplicius, *In De Anima*, 308, 15ff).

<sup>26</sup> Suppose, for instance, that horses can be trained to keep their place in the battle line. One particular horse, however, is untrained, and so it bolts. Having the kind of impressions that would lead it to stay in its place is compatible with its nature *qua* horse, and there is nothing in its external circumstances that prevents it from having such impressions (as is shown by the fact that a different, trained horse, would have impressions that led it to stay in its place in the same circumstances). In these circumstances, then, it is possible for the horse to have impressions that are other than those it in fact has.

<sup>27</sup> This is partly because only humans possess evaluative concepts (such as true, false, appropriate, inappropriate). It might, then, be suggested that adult humans are rightly held responsible because, unlike animals, they possess these concepts. But although this is surely part of the explanation, it does not account for the difference between impression and assent *within a human being*, such that assenting is in our power but having an impression is not. A human being's impressions are influenced by her possession of evaluative concepts. Thus, she can have the impression that something is true or appropriate. The difference must depend on the fact that in assenting one uses one's evaluative concepts to make a *judgment* about how things are.

<sup>28</sup> For the view that the sage, in assenting, never has mere opinion (*doxa*), but only has knowledge, see S.E., M. 7, 151-2 (= L.S. 41C) and Stobaeus, *Anthologium [Anth]*, 2, 111, 19-112, 2. (= L.S. 41G = S.V.F. 3. 548). A cognitive impression is one which is

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‘true and of such a kind that it could not turn out false’ (S.E., M. 7, 152 = L.S. 41C).

Knowledge is a *katalêpsis* that is ‘ἀσφαλῆ καὶ βεβαίαν καὶ ἀμετάθετον ὑπὸ λόγου’ (S.E., M. 7, 151 = LS, 41C). See also the similar accounts of knowledge in Ps-Galen, *Definitiones Medicae*, 7, XIX, 350 (S.V.F. 2. 93) and Cicero, *Academica*, I. 41 (= L.S. 41B = S.V.F. 1.60).

<sup>29</sup> Quite how broadly this should be understood has been disputed. Is it knowledge of when one should or should not assent *quite generally*, or only of when one should or should not assent *in response to argument*? For my purposes, nothing hangs on this question. For useful discussion, see L. Castagnoli, ‘How dialectical was Stoic dialectic?’ in A. Nightingale and D. Sedley, eds. *Ancient Models of Mind: Studies in Human and Divine Rationality* (Cambridge, 2010) 153-179 at 168.

<sup>30</sup> There is reason to think both these sources reflect the views of Chrysippus, and hence that they are two alternative statements of one and the same view of nonprecipitancy (rather than being reports of two rival views). A. A. Long, in ‘Dialectic and the Stoic Sage’ [‘Dialectic’] in Rist, J. M. (ed.) *The Stoics* (Berkeley, 1978) 101-124 at 108-9, argues that Diogenes Laertius is here reporting the views of Chrysippus. For a defence of the claim that the Herculaneum papyrus is a work either of Chrysippus or of one of his immediate followers, see H. von Arnim, ‘Über einen Stoischen Papyrus der Herculansenischen Bibliothek’ *Hermes*, 25 (1890) 473-95 at 489-95.) The fact that these two passages are our only sources which use the word ‘nonprecipitancy’ (*aproptôsia*) also suggests that they both reflect the views of the same philosopher.

<sup>31</sup> This is implied by the claim that the non-sage, even when he assents to a cognitive impression, does not have knowledge but only opinion (*doxa*), opinion being a weak

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assent. See S.E., M, 7, 151-2 (= L.S. 41C), Cicero *Academica*, I. 41-2 (= L.S. 41B = S.V.F. 1.60).

<sup>32</sup> You can, of course, act for a reason in such a way as to bring it about that you have certain impressions, but in that case, it is your action rather than the impression itself that is based on a reason. What makes it possible for your action to be based on a reason is just that the assent that prompted it is based on a reason.

<sup>33</sup> This is not to claim that whenever you assent you assent for reasons. The point is that the strength or weakness of *any* act of assenting (whether or not it is an act of assenting for a reason) depends on certain counterfactuals about how the agent would respond to arguments purporting to present reasons for withholding assent.

<sup>34</sup> If this is right, then the Stoic view finds an echo in the writings of certain modern philosophers. For example, Richard Moran (*Authority and Estrangement. An Essay on Self-knowledge* (Princeton, 2001) 113-120) claims that we are active in relation to our judgment-sensitive attitudes (such as beliefs and certain desires), and he contrasts this with our passivity in relation to our sensations. See also Gary Watson's claim that having 'doxastic control' amounts to having one's beliefs determined by 'belief-relevant norms': 'our cognitive lives would be out of control to the extent we were incapable of responding to the norms of coherence and relevant evidence'. (G. Watson, 'The Work of the Will' in G. Watson, *Agency and Answerability, Selected Essays* (Oxford, 2004) 123-157 at 144.)

<sup>35</sup> Angela Smith ('Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life', *Ethics* 115.2 (2005) 236-271 at 266) makes just this point in defending her account of responsibility (on which we are responsible for those attitudes and reactions that reflect our evaluative judgments). She is, she says, giving an account of 'the conditions under which something can be attributed to a person in the way that is

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required in order for it to be a basis for moral appraisal of that person. Merely claiming that a person is responsible for something. . . does not by itself settle the question of what appraisal, if any, should be made of the person on the basis of it.’

<sup>36</sup> From Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, XIX, i, 15-16, (Gellius’s report of the 5th book of Epictetus’s *Dissertationes*).

<sup>37</sup> For a helpful discussion of Epictetus’s views about what is involved in correct use of impressions see A. A. Long, ‘Representation and the Self in Stoicism’ in S. Everson (ed.) *Companions to Ancient Thought: Psychology* (Cambridge, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> Thus, at *Encheiridion* 1,1-2, Epictetus gives the following list of things that depend on us and hence are our deeds (*erga*): ‘supposition, impulse, desire, inclination, aversion’. At *Diss.* I.1.7 (= L.S. 62K), he says that ‘the one thing which the gods have made dependent on us is the one of supreme importance, the correct use of impressions. The other things they have not made dependent on us.’ At *Diss.* III.24.69-70, he asks ‘what is your own?’ and answers ‘the use of impressions’. This is your own, he says, because no one can interfere with it. See also *Diss.* IV.1.72-3. I take passages such as these to support the interpretation I give here. (See also Bobzien, *Determinism*, 331-338.) For a contrary interpretation, on which Epictetus’s view is much closer to that of the older Stoics, see R. Salles, ‘Epictetus and the causal conception of moral responsibility and what is *eph’ hēmin*’ [Epictetus] in P Destrée et al, *Up to us?* 169-182. On Salles’s interpretation, Epictetus would face just the same question about assent that I raised for the earlier Stoics (since if Salles is right, Epictetus cannot help himself to the ‘easy answer’ I suggest for him below).

<sup>39</sup> This is not to deny that Epictetus was *also* interested in questions of responsibility, as Salles emphasizes (‘Epictetus’, 174-9). Salles cites, in particular, *Diss.* I.11. 27-37.

<sup>40</sup> See my footnote 24 above.

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<sup>41</sup> Τῶν ἄλλων δυνάμεων οὐδεμίαν εὐρήσετε αὐτὴν αὐτῆς θεωρητικὴν, οὐ τοίνυν οὐδὲ δοκιμαστικὴν ἢ ἀποδοκιμαστικὴν. *Diss.* I.1.1.

<sup>42</sup> For this view, see also Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 11.1.1: ‘These are the properties of the rational soul: it sees itself, analyses itself, and makes itself such as it chooses.’ (τὰ ἴδια τῆς λογικῆς ψυχῆς· ἑαυτὴν ὁρᾷ, ἑαυτὴν διαρθροῖ, ἑαυτὴν ὅποιαν ἂν βούληται ποιεῖ).

<sup>43</sup> For discussion of his argument here see A. A. Long, *Epictetus: a Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life [Epictetus]* (Oxford, 2002), 129-134.

<sup>44</sup> It might be objected here that the rules of grammar can be applied to the statements that articulate the rules of grammar. For example (as an anonymous reader pointed out to me), the statement ‘a verb always agrees with its subject’ is itself in accord with the very rule of grammar it is articulating. When he denies that grammar operates on itself, Epictetus must be distinguishing between grammar itself and the statements by which the rules of grammar are articulated in language. On his view, the fact that the rules of grammar can be used to judge such statements does not show that grammar can ‘operate on itself’.

<sup>45</sup> Galen tells us that Chrysippus described reason (*logos*) as ‘a collection of concepts and preconceptions (*ennoiai* and *prolēpseis*)’ (*De Hippocratis et Platonis Decretis*, V.3, 160, p421, M. = S.V.F. 2. 841).

<sup>46</sup> Long suggests this in *Epictetus*, 130, ft 3, and cites Plutarch *De Communibus Notitiis*, 1084F-1085A (= L.S. 39F = S.V.F. 2. 847), where concepts are classified as ‘a kind of impression’.

<sup>47</sup> This argument that reason, unlike other arts, is self-reflexive has its roots in Plato. See *Charmides* 165c-169c; *Euthydemus* 291d-293a. Cicero also takes up this



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argument, claiming, in *De Finibus*, 3.24 (= L.S. 64H = S.V.F. 3.11), that ‘wisdom is wholly directed toward itself, which is not the case with other arts’. In *Academia* 2.91, Cicero spells out the sense in which reason ‘judges itself’: reason enables the philosopher to judge ‘what conjunctive and disjunctive argument is valid, what is ambiguously stated, what follows from what, and what is inconsistent’, and in doing so, reason judges itself.

<sup>48</sup> Of course, this implies that the series of assents is potentially infinite: for any assent, there can be a further assent that endorses it. But Epictetus takes a *potential* infinite of this kind to be unproblematic, so long as it does not imply an actually infinite series of powers for assent.

<sup>49</sup> Epictetus argues first that what evaluates reason must itself be a kind of reasoning power, and then that if no reasoning power were capable of evaluating itself there would have to be infinitely many such reasoning powers. His argument seems vulnerable to the objection that the regress can be avoided if someone possesses two reasoning powers, each of which is used to evaluate the operation of the other. Perhaps Epictetus thinks that this would really just amount to having a single self-evaluating reasoning power, made up of those ‘two’ powers.

<sup>50</sup> There is, of course, a difference in the two kinds of evaluation. For Epictetus, the power by which you evaluate your assent is the very power you exercise in assenting, whereas the power you exercise in evaluating your impressions is not the power you exercise in having an impression. But it is not at all obvious why this difference should imply that assenting is in your control in a way that having an impression is not.

<sup>51</sup> Ps-Simplicius, *In Aristotelis De anima commentaria*, ed. Hayduck. Vol. XI, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* (Berlin, 1882).

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<sup>52</sup> Carlos Steel has argued (i) that the author is not Simplicius, and (ii) that the author is Priscian of Lydia. For a summary of his views, with references to further discussion, see C. Steel, *'Simplicius' On Aristotle On the Soul 3.6-13* [*'Simplicius' 3.6-13*] (London, 2013) Introduction, 1-4.

<sup>53</sup> He tells us, in particular, that he is a follower of Iamblichus (*In De Anima* 1,18-20). In reading Ps-Simplicius's commentary, I have benefited from the translations in the Ancient Commentators series: J. O. Urmson with notes by P Lautner, *Simplicius On Aristotle on the Soul I.1-2.4* [*Simplicius I.1-2.4*] (London, 1995), P Huby and C. Steel with notes by P Lautner, *Priscian: On Theophrastus On Sense Perception with 'Simplicius': On Aristotle On the Soul 2.5-12* [*'Simplicius' 2.5-12*] (London, 1997), H.J. Blumenthal *'Simplicius': On Aristotle on the Soul 3.1-5* [*'Simplicius' 3.1-5*] (London, 2000) and Steel *'Simplicius' 3.6-13*). I have been guided by these in my translations below, though I have sometimes modified them.

<sup>54</sup> Only *rational* souls are capable of self-reversion or self-movement. For discussion of this view in Proclus and Hermias see S. Menn 'Self-motion and reflection: Hermias and Proclus on the harmony of Plato and Aristotle on the soul' in J. Wilberding and C. Horn (eds) *Neoplatonism and the Philosophy of Nature* (Oxford, 2012) 44-67.

<sup>55</sup> Because of this, Proclus describes intellects and souls as 'self-constituted' (*authupostata*), *Elements of Theology*, 42-44.

<sup>56</sup> See Proclus, *In Alcibiadem*, 189-190, ed. L.G. Westerink (Amsterdam, 1954). Proclus says that the soul that is unaware of its own ignorance has not begun to revert to itself in its activity. The soul that has begun to revert to itself recognises its own ignorance and hence is motivated to inquire. The soul fully reverts to itself when it discovers, or recollects, the *logoi* that are within it. For helpful discussion of this see C. Steel 'Breathing Thought: Proclus on the Innate Knowledge of the Soul' in J.

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Cleary (ed.) *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism* (Leuven, 1997) 293-309. For an account of self-reversion and its role in Proclus's metaphysics more generally, see R. Chlup *Proclus. An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2012), ch 2.

<sup>57</sup> Plato himself anticipates the claim that having the ability to engage in a kind of self-reflection is a necessary condition for being able to reason or have beliefs. He says that the kind of soul that cannot reflect on itself must also be incapable of believing or reasoning (*Timaeus*, 77bc).

<sup>58</sup> This criticism of the Stoics contrasts interestingly with the much more well-known criticisms made by Alexander of Aphrodisias. Alexander, like Ps-Simplicius, held that the Stoics could not make sense of what is special about rational assent. Rational assent, according to Alexander, is the kind of assent that results from deliberation. This kind of assent, he claims, depends upon the agent (Alexander, *De Anima* 73, 7-13). Because humans have the power to deliberate, and because on the basis of this deliberation they can either assent to or withhold assent from their impressions, they are not automatically led to action by their impressions (*Quaestiones* 3.13, 107, 5-19; *Mantissa* 23. 172, 25-30; *De Fato* 14. 183, 30-184, 16). Alexander argued that the Stoic commitment to determinism prevented them from giving a proper account of this kind of assent. He claimed that we can only make sense of the distinctive rational control that humans have over their actions, if we allow that adult humans have the kind of power to act otherwise that is incompatible with determinism (a power to act otherwise *even when under the influence of precisely the same causes*). (See *De Fato*, 6. 171, 11-17; 12. 180, 26-8; 29. 199, 27-200, 7.) Thus Alexander, like Ps-Simplicius, holds that Stoic metaphysics gets in the way of a proper account of rational assent. But for Alexander this is because Stoic determinism rules out the possibility of a certain kind of power to act otherwise, whereas for Ps-Simplicius the culprit is Stoic

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materialism, which (he holds) rules out the possibility of the kind of self-reverting activity that is required for rational assent.

<sup>59</sup> He says that the choice between things that are ‘evenly contingent’ (that is, between things that might equally well happen or not happen) ‘is within the control of man’ (*penes hominem*), who brings all things back to ‘reason and deliberation’ (*ad rationem atque consilium*). He goes on to say that reason or deliberation is an inner movement of the soul’s moving principle. This ruling principle of the soul is ‘self-moving and its movement is assent or impulse’ (*hoc vero ex se movetur motusque eius assensus est vel appetitus*). Thus, ‘assent and impulse are self-moving’ (*assensus et appetitus ex se moventur*), though they aren’t moved without imagination, or ‘what the Greeks call “*phantasia*”’ (Calcidius, *In Platonis Timaeum commentarium*, ch. 156, ed. Waszink).

<sup>60</sup> Simplicius, *In Enchiridion Epictetii*, 13, 49-14, 9. Translation from C. Brittain and T. Brennan, *Simplicius, On Epictetus’ Handbook 1-26* (Ithaca, 2002) 52.

<sup>61</sup> Though he argues that belief (*doxa*) does not depend on us (is not ‘*eph’ hêmin*’), what he means by this is just that we do not believe at will. (I discuss his argument below at xxx.)

<sup>62</sup> The context is one in which he is arguing that human perceptual powers, because they are *in a way* self-reverting, share in a kind of rationality (an argument I discuss below, pxxx). His claim here is that since human nonrational desires are not self-reverting in any way, they do not share in rationality. Hence such desires are *nonrational* in a way that even human perception is not (290, 4-15).

<sup>63</sup> Ps-Simplicius describes *doxa* as the lowest rational power at 237, 8-9.

<sup>64</sup> For perception, see 187, 27-36; for vegetative and perceptual powers see 80, 12-17; for perception and appetitive desire see 290, 1-15.

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<sup>65</sup> See 290, 1: ‘In a human being both sense perception and desire are rational’.

Similarly, at 306, 18-20, he says that imagination in humans is rational.

<sup>66</sup> Human perception is self-aware in a particular way (a human can be aware by sight or her seeing). Human appetite is especially capable of being corrupted because it is conjoined with a rational power. (290, 1-15).

<sup>67</sup> See also 90, 15-16; 223, 33-4.

<sup>68</sup> See also, 173, 3-4: ‘it is proper particularly to intellect, and in the second place to reason, to have the capacity to cognize itself’. At 187, 28-9, self-reversion is described as the ‘*ergon*’ of rational life.

<sup>69</sup> Ps-Simplicius claims that the aim of the whole third book of *De Anima* is to give an account of the powers of a rational soul (‘the soul that makes choices, that is the reasoning and intellective soul in mortal beings’, see 172, 4-5). This allows him to take Aristotle’s discussion of perception in this book as being specifically about the perceptual capacities of rational animals. Ps-Simplicius’ account here stands in interesting contrast to that of Philoponus (who also thinks that the third book of the *De Anima* is about the rational soul, but takes the discussion of perception and imagination to be introduced so as to draw a contrast between these powers and rational powers, 466, 5-19). Philoponus, like Ps-Simplicius, regards the capacity for self-reversion as a distinctively rational or intellectual capacity (and claims that only something that is ‘eternal and incorporeal’ can have such a capacity, *In De Anima*, 466, 20-22), but he concludes from this that Aristotle is mistaken to claim that perceptual powers are self-reflexive (and hence that the power of sight can know that it sees). Rather, he claims, we are aware of our perceiving by means of a certain rational attentive power (465, 32ff).

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<sup>70</sup> Modern scholars have disagreed over the interpretation of Aristotle's remarks about perceptual self-awareness in *De Anima* III.2. On one view, he is claiming only that it is by using the *capacity*, sight, that one is aware of one's own seeing; on an alternative view, his claim is that the *activity* of seeing is self-reflexive, and hence sees itself. T. Johansen ('In defense of inner sense: Aristotle on perceiving that one sees' *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 21 (2005) 235-276) defends the former 'capacity' reading; V. Caston ('Aristotle on Consciousness', *Mind*, 111 (2002) 751-815) defends the latter 'activity' reading. If my interpretation of Ps-Simplicius is right, then he must read Aristotle in the former way (though interestingly, his account of *rational* self-reversion is rather like the account of *perceptual* self-awareness that Caston attributes to Aristotle). Ps-Simplicius is clearly using the word '*opsis*' here (and taking Aristotle to use it) to mean 'sight' not 'seeing', and similarly, he is using the word '*aisthêsis*' in this passage to mean 'sense' not 'activity of perceiving'. Thus, at 188, 16-23, in discussing Aristotle's claim that his imaginary opponent is committed to an infinite regress, Ps-Simplicius says that if another sense (*aisthêsis*) than sight (*opsis*) cognizes that sight sees, that sense also would be 'cognized, when active (*energousan*), that it is active' (188, 18). The qualification 'when active' shows that '*aisthêsis*' and '*opsis*' must here refer to the capacities, rather than the activities themselves. Ps-Simplicius must, then, be assuming that the threatened regress here is a regress of higher-order senses not a regress of higher-order activities. (He faces no threatened regress of higher-order activities. Though he thinks that seeing and being aware of one's seeing are two different exercises of the power of sight, by claiming that we can always be aware of our *seeing*, he does not commit himself to the view that we have higher order awareness of every *exercise of our power of sight*.)

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<sup>71</sup> He also adds that perception is not ‘self-aroused’ (οὐδὲ ἄφ’ ἑαυτῆς τὸ ὅλον ἐγχειρομένη): perceiving depends upon the presence of an object of perception (188, 2). At 118-9, he says that this dependence of perception on something external explains why the senses are not self-reverting in the way that reason is (i.e., why the senses cannot revert on their own power): only a self-perfecting activity can be self-reverting in this way (119, 20-21), and an activity can only be self-perfecting if it is the activity of a power that is self-sufficient and not dependent on external things (118, 29ff). *Phantasia* is in an intermediate position: it is, in a way, self-aroused (202, 4-6), since one can have *phantasia* of things that are not present, but *phantasia* still depends in an indirect way on perception (‘it grasps only external things and is originally stimulated by the affections of the sense organs’ 119, 14-16). This indirect dependence of *phantasia* on external things is enough to prevent *phantasia* from engaging in self-perfecting activity, and hence from engaging in the kind of self-reversion that is only possible for rational powers.

<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere (90, 17) he says that *pistis* follows (is ‘*meta*’) assent. At 206, 32, he says that *hupolêpsis* is ‘in’ assent.

<sup>73</sup> Alexander, Themistius and Philoponus all appeal to assent in discussing this Aristotelian argument. See Alexander *De Anima* 67, 15-23; Themistius, *In Libros Aristotelis De Anima paraphrasis*, 89-90 (especially 90, 24: ‘belief is a rational assent’); Philoponus, *In De anima III* 497, 1-14.

<sup>74</sup> 90, 15ff; 206, 30ff; 210, 14ff, 20ff; 211, 1ff; 237, 7ff.

<sup>75</sup> To ‘ἀληθεύειν’ is to make a correct truth claim (a truth claim that is in fact true); to ‘ψεύδεσθαι’ is to make an incorrect truth claim (a truth claim that is in fact false).

<sup>76</sup> Ps-Simplicius says that this ability to ἀληθεύειν or ψεύδεσθαι is common to all *hupolêpsis*, since every kind of *hupolêpsis* involves assent (206, 31-2). In commenting on Aristotle's remarks at 427b24, he goes on to make it clear that he takes 'hupolêpsis' to include *doxa*, *epistêmê* and *phronêsis* (207, 18-22). 'ἀληθεύειν' and 'ψεύδεσθαι' must, in such contexts, mean 'tell the truth' or 'tell falsehood' in the sense of making a true or false assertion. What is characteristic of rational *hupolêpsis* (in contrast to nonrational operations, like seeing or imagining) is that it tells truth or falsehood, in this sense. Similarly, it is the fact that *doxa* necessarily tells truth or falsehood (where this means, correctly or incorrectly, making an assertion about how things are) that explains why *doxa* is 'not dependent on us'. Thus, I think Blumenthal (2000) is wrong to translate 206, 31 as 'being true or false is said to be common to every kind' (of *hupolêpsis*), and also wrong to translate 210, 12-13 as 'having an opinion was said not to be in our control because it is necessarily false or true'. On Ps-Simplicius' view, imagining is also grasping something that is necessarily either false or true, but to imagine something is not to make an assertion about how things are, so imagining does not require the ability to 'ἀληθεύειν' or 'ψεύδεσθαι'. Contrast Themistius's use of the terms 'ἀληθεύειν' and 'ψεύδεσθαι' in his *In De Anima Paraphrasis*, 90, 20-21. Themistius says that it is common to both *doxa* and *phantasia* to 'ἀληθεύειν' and 'ψεύδεσθαι'. This suggests that Themistius, unlike Ps-Simplicius, is using these terms to mean 'be true or false'.

<sup>77</sup> 206, 14-16: ὥσπερ γὰρ ἡ αἴσθησις οὐκ ἦν ὡς ἀληθοῦς ἀντιληπτική, ἀλλὰ μόνον τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ, ὡσαύτως οὐδὲ ἡ φαντασία, ἀλλὰ μόνον τῶν τύπων. The context is a discussion of Aristotle's remark that *phantasia* depends on us in a way that belief



does not. Ps-Simplicius has just pointed out a way in which *phantasia* is unlike belief: *phantasia* depends on us, because we do not fashion the impressions (*tupoi*) in accordance with things, nor do we bring forward (*proballein*) images (*phantasiai*) with our minds focused entirely on the truth (τῆς ἀληθείας φροντίζοντες πάντως) (206, 14). He now goes on to point out a way in which *phantasia* is like perception: neither perceiving nor having *phantasiai* amounts to apprehending things as true.

<sup>78</sup> In a later passage, he repeats the claim that nonrational cognition cannot ‘apprehend something as true’ and explains that though such cognition can be true, it cannot ‘judge the very fact that it is true’ (‘ἀληθὴς μὲν ὑπάρχουσα, οὐκ αὐτὸ δὲ τοῦτο κρίνουσα ὅτι ἀληθὴς’) (211, 4-5).

<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, Ps-Simplicius makes an analogous point about the distinction between rational and nonrational desire. Just as taking something to be true requires a rational cognitive power, so also desiring something as good (as opposed to as merely pleasant) requires a rational desiderative power. In both cases, a kind of self-reflexivity is required: ‘in the simultaneous perception of something as being good or true there is necessarily included also the subject’s being benefited or itself saying what is true’ (211, 10-12). Ps-Simplicius does not explain how to understand this self-reflexivity in the case of rational desire. If it is to be analogous to what he says about cognition, then he should say that in desiring something as good, one endorses the power one exercises in so desiring, as being in this instance rightly exercised – but that is quite a lot to read into the remark that in desiring something as good one must grasp oneself ‘as being benefited’.

<sup>80</sup> As should be clear from what I have already said, Ps-Simplicius is here spelling out what is involved in ‘telling the truth’ (‘ἀληθεύειν’), not merely what is involved in a

certain special *kind* of truth telling (the kind that involves grasping of oneself that one is telling the truth). His view is that if something is to tell the truth, it must grasp of itself that it is telling the truth.

<sup>81</sup> I translate ‘*doxazein*’ as ‘believe’ and ‘*krinein*’ as ‘judge’, but I do not think that much hangs on the distinction here. The Greek word ‘*doxazein*’ can also be translated ‘judge’. The English word ‘believes’ tends to be used to attribute a dispositional state (such that it can be true that x believes P, even while x is asleep), whereas ‘x judges that P’ tends to be used of something that one does at a particular time. The relation between judging and believing is not straightforward. Often, making a judgment is forming a belief, but judging can also be a kind of activation and reaffirmation of a belief one already has, and it is possible to come to have a belief that P without there being any time at which one considered whether P and made a judgment. I shall argue that according to Ps-Simplicius, one only counts as believing/judging that P if one endorses the understanding in virtue of which one believes/judges that P. It does not matter whether we take this claim to be about the disposition of believing or about the activity of judging, so long as we understand the notion of ‘endorsement’ accordingly: if the claim is about believing that P, then the relevant kind of endorsement is believing that our understanding is correct; if the claim is about judging that P, then the relevant kind of endorsement is judging that our understanding is correct. In what follows, I shall spell out the claim as a claim about judging that P.

<sup>82</sup> For this reason, ‘understanding’ is a slightly misleading translation, more appropriate for rational than for perceptual *sunesis*. In what follows, I shall mostly just use the transliterated Greek word ‘*sunesis*’.

<sup>83</sup> At 210, 25-6, he says that the *sunesis* of a thing is not the same as the *sunesis* of the fact that that *sunesis* is true (οὐ γὰρ ταῦτόν ἡ περὶ ὅτουοῦν σύνεσις καὶ ἡ περὶ τοῦ ὅτι

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καὶ ἀληθείας ἢ σύνεσις). In this context, he is distinguishing between perceptual and rational *sunesis*. His point is that the *sunesis* we exercise in simply perceiving a thing is not the same as the *sunesis* we exercise in judging this perceptual *sunesis* to be true and hence in making a judgment that something is the case.

<sup>84</sup> As Ps-Simplicius says, truth consists in agreement with the facts (206, 34-5).

<sup>85</sup> A necessary *logos* for a certain conclusion proves that conclusion to be true; a convincing (*pithanos*) *logos* gives good reason to believe the conclusion. Here (at 210, 17-20), Ps-Simplicius uses the term ‘rational cognition’ (*logikê gnôsis*) to refer narrowly just to this kind of cognition that depends on *logos* (as opposed to the intellectual cognition of *nous*). However, I shall continue (as Ps-Simplicius does elsewhere) to refer to both this kind of cognition and the kind that is an exercise of *nous* as ‘rational’, and to treat both as exercises of different types of rational *sunesis*.

<sup>86</sup> When you judge that P on the basis of seeing that P, you endorse not only your perceptual *sunesis*, but also the rational *sunesis* you exercise in endorsing your perceptual *sunesis*, and also the rational *sunesis* you exercise in assenting to P on this basis. You judge that how things then visually appear to you is a good guide to how they are (that is, you endorse your perceptual *sunesis*). You take yourself to be warranted in making this judgment about your perceptual *sunesis* (that is, you endorse the *sunesis* you exercise in assenting to ‘how things now appear to me is a good guide to how they are’). And you *also* take yourself to be warranted in assenting to P on this basis (that is, you endorse the *sunesis* you exercise in assenting to P). An infinite regress might seem to threaten here. Do you also need to judge *that you are warranted in taking yourself to be warranted in endorsing your perceptual sunesis*, and if so, do you then also need to judge that you are warranted in making *that* judgment, and so on? (Similarly, do you need to judge *that you are warranted in*

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taking yourself to be warranted in assenting to *P*, and that you are warranted in making *that* judgment, and so on?) As we shall see, Ps-Simplicius's account of the way in which rational *sunesis* is self-reflexive gives him an answer to this worry.

<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, this view has something in common with a self-referential account of belief that has been defended by Gilbert Harman. Harman argues that to accept a conclusion *h*, as known, one must implicitly accept the self-referential claim 'h and there is no actually undermining evidence to the truth of this whole conjunction' (G. Harman, 'Reasoning and Evidence one does not Possess', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980) 165-182 at 172). In another paper, Harman suggests that the content of a belief that  $\phi$  'is something like "I am in this mental state because of something that settles it that  $\phi$ "' (G. Harman, 'Self-reflexive thoughts' *Philosophical Issues* 16 (2006) 334-45 at 341). Harman argues that the fact that *certain* self-reflexive thoughts give rise to paradox (as in the famous paradox of the liar) is not a good ground for rejecting the possibility of *any* self-reflexive thoughts.

<sup>88</sup> Of course, in reporting our judgments we do not usually articulate this self-referential content. We say 'There is a blackbird in the garden' not 'There is a blackbird in the garden and the understanding I'm exercising in this act of judgment is true'; we say 'Labour has a good chance of winning the next election' not 'Labour has a good chance of winning the next election and the understanding I'm exercising in this act of judgment is true', and so on. On Ps-Simplicius's view, this is simply a pragmatic point about how we express our judgments. What we judge will always include the self-referential content: 'the understanding I'm exercising in this act of judgment is true', and it is possible to make this content of the judgment explicit (as I

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have done in the examples above), even though in reporting our judgments we do not generally do so.

<sup>89</sup> At 205, 7-10, Ps-Simplicius says that *dianoia* does not give its assent unless it *also* (*kai*) judges that its *sunesis* is true. But the '*kai*' here does not imply two distinct acts of judgment. His point is that *dianoia* must, in one and the same act of judging, judge both that P and also that the *sunesis* exercised in this very act of judging is true.

<sup>90</sup> It would imply an infinite regress since the act of judging the original judgment to be warranted would itself need to be judged warranted by yet another act of judgment, that act by yet another one, and so on.

<sup>91</sup> The account that emerges from Ps-Simplicius is, in certain respects, strikingly similar to Aquinas's account of rational judgment. See my 'Aquinas on judgment and the active power of reason' in *Philosophers Imprint* 13. n.20 (2013) 1-19. Aquinas did not have access to a translation of Ps-Simplicius's commentary, so there cannot have been direct influence here. (For an account of the later availability of Ps-Simplicius's commentary, see C. Steel, *Simplicius 3.6-13*, 28-32.) But Aquinas, like Ps-Simplicius was drawing upon Neoplatonic views about self-reversion and at the same time trying to make sense of Aristotelian remarks about the difference between rational and nonrational powers. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that both philosophers arrived at similar views about the essential self-reflexivity of rational judgment.

<sup>92</sup> Ps-Simplicius could also have cited Plato's use of '*doxa*' at *Republic* X, 602e-603a, which suggests that someone who is subject to a perceptual illusion has two contradictory *doxai*. In such a case, for example, you might have a nonrational *doxa* that the stick in water is bent and a rational *doxa* that the stick is straight. Clearly, the nonrational *doxa* here would not be something that Ps-Simplicius (or Aristotle) would call a '*doxa*'.

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<sup>93</sup> In this, Ps-Simplicius is following Aristotle. Imagining, Aristotle says, depends on us *whenever we wish* (ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἐστίν, ὅταν βουλώμεθα), 427b18. As McCready-Flora remarks, Aristotle's point is that belief is, in this respect, unlike imagination: 'we cannot form beliefs simply because we want to' ('Aristotle and the Normativity of Belief' ['Normativity'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 44 (2013) 67-98 at 85). For the Stoic view, see above pxxx.

<sup>94</sup> If this is right, then the explanatory power of the account is, I think, a point in its favour. In saying this, I am not claiming to give a *conclusive* argument in its favour. I shall not, for instance, argue it is the *only* account that could provide such explanations. Nor do I mean to claim that Ps-Simplicius *took* himself to be making these points about the account's explanatory power. Although he makes some brief remarks about the impossibility of believing at will, he does not address my questions about reason-responsiveness. This last section of my paper is, then, as much an exercise in drawing out the philosophical consequences of this account as it is an attempt at strict historical exegesis.

<sup>95</sup> McCready-Flora, 'Normativity', 85-6. McCready-Flora is here following Barnes, 'Up to Us' 27-8. Barnes attributes this argument to both Aristotle and Ps-Simplicius. McCready-Flora claims that Aristotle himself had a better argument, but that Ps-Simplicius misinterpreted him.

<sup>96</sup> As he makes clear at 206, 30-1: '*hupolēpsis* is a broader term than *doxa* but *doxa* is here used to stand for all *hupolēpsis*'. Ps-Simplicius is presumably influenced here by the remark with which Aristotle introduces this argument: 'ὅτι δ' οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ αὐτὴ νόησις καὶ ὑπόληψις, φανερόν' (427b16-17). Ps-Simplicius takes '*noēsis*' here to mean *phantasia* (206, 5-6), and hence takes Aristotle to be introducing this argument

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with the claim that *phantasia* is not the same as *hupolêpsis*.

<sup>97</sup> McCready-Flora ('Normativity' 86-8) makes it a condition on the interpretation of *Aristotle's* argument here that the argument should apply only to belief. As McCready-Flora points out, Aristotle elsewhere says that our exercise of understanding does depend on us. This might, then, be thought to be an objection to Ps-Simplicius, at least insofar as he is attempting to provide an interpretation of Aristotle. However, there is, I think, a possible reply to McCready-Flora here. The sense of 'depends on us' in which understanding depends on us is rather different from the sense in which belief is said *not* to depend on us. The sense in which understanding depends on us is that we can exercise understanding or not at will. But something analogous also seems to be true of belief: I can call to mind a particular belief at will. On the other hand, the *content* of understanding is surely not something we can alter at will any more than we can believe at will. If you take the belief that P to be unwarranted, you cannot decide to *exercise understanding in thinking* that P any more than you can decide to *believe* that P.

<sup>98</sup> See above pxxx and footnote 76.

<sup>99</sup> Ps-Simplicius himself encourages us to understand his argument here in the light of his further remarks about assent. For instance, when he later spells out his view that rational assent is essentially self-reverting (210,10-211,15), he introduces this discussion by saying 'The difference between imagination and belief which is stated now seems to me to be the same as the one that was mentioned before. There believing was said not to depend on us because it necessarily involves telling falsehood or truth, and here it is said that conviction always follows belief' (210,11-14).

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<sup>100</sup> Denying that we can believe at will is, of course, compatible with recognizing the possibility of wishful thinking: the possibility that our hopes and desires can influence what we believe without our realizing it.

<sup>101</sup> Showing this is sufficient for showing that we cannot believe at will. However, a full account of why believing at will is impossible would have to explain why it is impossible to withhold assent from P while taking the judgment that P to be decisively justified by the evidence. Ps-Simplicius's account does not, I think, help to explain this.

<sup>102</sup> My argument depends here on the assumption that it is impossible, at the same time, to make two obviously contradictory judgments. For some discussion, see footnote 105, below.

<sup>103</sup> This also gives Ps-Simplicius an answer to a version of Moore's paradox. Moore raises a puzzle about assertions such as 'P, but I am not justified in judging that P'. An assertion of this sort is defective in some way, but its content is not inconsistent (since 'P' and 'I am not justified in judging that P' can both be true). In what way, then, is it defective? Ps-Simplicius's answer is that when you express a judgment by saying 'There is a blackbird in the garden', this only partially expresses your judgment. Fully expressed, your judgment is 'There is a blackbird in the garden and I am justified in making this judgment'. But this implies 'I am justified in judging that there is a blackbird in the garden' (since if you are justified in making the whole judgment, you must be justified in making each part of it). So your judgment, if fully expressed, *is* in fact inconsistent with 'I am not justified in judging that there is a blackbird in the garden.'

<sup>104</sup> Of course, this does not rule out the possibility of altering one's beliefs in an even more indirect way, by voluntarily undergoing a process of education, training or



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indoctrination. In denying that belief depends on us, neither Aristotle nor Ps-Simplicius means to rule out the possibility of bringing oneself to have new beliefs in this indirect way.

<sup>105</sup> Though one cannot simultaneously make two obviously contradictory judgments one *can* simultaneously have an impression that P and an impression that not P (as for instance, in the waterfall illusion, when one has the impression both that the rocks are moving and that they are not moving). A full account of judgment would also need to explain this difference between judging and having impressions. The account we have outlined has something to contribute here too, since it shows there is an important difference between *judging that P and not P* and *having the impression that P and not P*. On this account, in *judging that P and not P*, you would have to take yourself to be achieving truth in virtue of the well-functioning of your judgment-making capacity. By contrast, *having the impression that P and not P* does not involve taking yourself to be achieving truth in virtue of the well-functioning of your impression-having capacity.

<sup>106</sup> For the fact that Q to count as your *reason* for judging that P, your *taking the fact that Q to be a good reason for so judging* must have the right kind of explanatory connection to your judging that P. It is hard to spell out just what this explanatory connection is. Not just any causal connection will do. Your judgment that P could be caused by your *taking the fact that Q to be a good reason for judging that P* without *the fact that Q's* being your *reason* for judging that P. On the other hand, the claim cannot be that if the (presumed) fact that Q is your reason for judging that P, then your *reason* for judging that P must be the fact that *the fact that Q is a good reason for so judging*. This condition on *judging for a reason* would give rise to an unacceptable infinite regress: it would imply that any judgment based on a reason was

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based on infinitely many reasons. (For modern discussions, see P. Boghossian, ‘What is inference?’ *Philosophical Studies* 169 (2014) 1-18 and R. Neta, ‘What is an inference?’ *Philosophical Issues* 21.1 (2013) 388-407.) On the account I have attributed to Ps-Simplicius, this condition on judging for a reason is simply a special case of the more general condition on judging: if you judge that P, you must take yourself to be warranted in so judging and judge that P *because* of this. And the ‘because’ in this more general condition is a kind of *essential* ‘because’: you only *count* as judging that P if, as part of that very act of judging, you take yourself to be warranted in so judging.

<sup>107</sup>For a full answer to our questions about the difference between assenting and having impressions it would be necessary also to explain the possibility of *withholding assent* for a reason. Ps-Simplicius does not himself give an account of withholding assent. If we extrapolate from what he says about assenting, we might expect him to claim that withholding assent essentially involves judging oneself justified in withholding assent. Since the capacity in virtue of which we withhold assent just is our capacity for assenting (and hence for judging), it is at least possible for withholding assent to be related in this way to making a certain judgment. However, the attempt to spell out such a view in detail would take us far beyond anything in Ps-Simplicius.

<sup>108</sup> I would like to thank Victor Caston, Eyjolfur Emilsson, Terry Irwin, Richard Sorabji for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. I am also grateful to the two anonymous readers for OSAP and to the author of a further set of anonymous comments. The paper has also been improved as a result of discussions following talks given at Oxford, Chicago and Berlin.