

For *Well-Founded Belief: New Essays on the Epistemic Basing Relation*,
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Well-Founded Belief: An Introduction

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I. The Basing Relation: A Brief Overview

Well-founded belief is belief that is properly held on the basis of good, justifying reasons.¹

Just as it often happens that people do the right thing for the wrong reasons, or fail to act when they have good reason for acting, it also often happens that people have good reasons for holding a belief but don't hold it, or they do hold it but on the basis of some other bad reasons instead. Of course holding a belief on the basis of bad reasons does not make the belief false, just as performing an action on the basis of bad reasons does not make the action itself wrong. But in order to be fully justified, the beliefs that we hold for reasons must be held *on the basis of good reasons*.

Epistemologists standardly distinguish between *propositional* justification and *doxastic* justification. Propositional justification is the justification a person can have for

¹ Feldman and Conee's influential evidentialist definition of well-foundedness, for example, goes as follows:

WF: S's doxastic attitude *D* toward *p* is well-founded for S at *t* if and only if

- (i) having *D* toward *p* is justified for S at *t*;
- (ii) S has *D* toward *p* on the basis of some body of evidence *e* such that:
 - (a) S has *e* as evidence for *p* at *t*;
 - (b) having *D* toward *p* fits *e*;
 - (c) there is no more inclusive body of evidence *e'* had by S at *t* such that having *D* toward *p* does not fit *e'*. (1985, p. 24, italics added)

holding a belief, even if she does not hold it, or even if she holds the belief on the basis of some other bad reasons instead. Doxastic justification is full justification, the justification a belief has when it is held in the right kind of way.

“Well-founded belief” and “doxastically justified belief” are not quite synonymous, but in many contexts they are interchangeable. The former is often the more natural expression to use, though it is more theoretically loaded, as it suggests a foundationalist account of the structure of justification.² In any case, the latter is the more widely used expression in contemporary epistemology.

Getting clear on doxastic justification is important in its own right, but because doxastic justification is plausibly also necessary for other epistemic statuses such as knowledge and understanding, getting clear on doxastic justification is of paramount importance for epistemology. A key ingredient in doxastic justification is the epistemic basing relation, the relation between beliefs and the reasons on the basis of which they are held. In order to understand doxastic justification, then, we need to understand the basing

² “Well-founded belief” is also theoretically loaded in that it suggests an account of justification in terms of beliefs that are based on reasons, ruling out an externalist account of justification like Goldman’s (1979; 1986) reliabilism, according to which, roughly, beliefs are fully justified iff they are produced by reliable processes, including processes that do not take reasons for belief as inputs. Goldman calls fully justified beliefs produced by reliable processes “ex post” justified, but we can view his account as an account of doxastically justified belief.

Still, because many accounts of doxastic justification do make essential use of epistemic reasons for belief, and all accounts of doxastic justification allow that at least *some* beliefs are justified in virtue of being held on the basis of good reasons, and this volume is about beliefs held on the basis of reasons, we don’t need to worry about this sense in which “well-founded belief” is theoretically loaded. Beliefs that are doxastically justified in virtue of being held on the basis of good reasons are well-founded beliefs.

relation. And, with a satisfactory account of the basing relation in hand, we can go on and use that account to shed light on a variety of other epistemological issues.

The basing relation is an explanatory relation: it provides an explanation of why a subject holds a belief. But it's not just any kind of explanatory relation. It explains why a person has a belief specifically by reference to what are often called "motivating" or "operative" reasons. To illustrate: suppose we want to explain why Jane brews herself a cup of coffee every morning. Because the caffeine in coffee is mildly addictive, in some contexts we can explain why Jane brews coffee every morning by citing the addictive nature of the drink. But the addictive nature of coffee is not normally a reason on the basis of which Jane acts when she pours her coffee. It is an explanatory reason but not a motivating reason. Jane's (motivating) reasons would be more like, "coffee helps me wake up," or "I like it," or "it makes me feel ready for the day," or something along these lines. These are the reasons which prompt Jane's action, and which Jane sees as making the action of brewing coffee worthwhile. Of course, Jane will often not explicitly think of these reasons before she brews her coffee. We often perform actions on the basis of reasons even without explicitly calling our reasons to mind. Still, Jane has her reasons, and without those reasons she would likely not brew coffee every morning.

So the basing relation is an explanatory relation which holds between beliefs and the reasons for which the beliefs are held. The task for us lies in specifying the content of that relation.

Two broad distinctions will help to orient the approaches to, and the arguments about, the basing relation. The first distinction is between the *activity* of justifying—that is, of providing or at least being able to provide the reasons on the basis of which one's belief is held, and which justify one's belief—and the state of *having beliefs* that are based on, and are justified by, the reasons one possesses. Some epistemologists have held that having

doxastically justified beliefs is a matter of being *able to provide* reasons which justify those beliefs. For example, Stephen Toulmin has written that

We “know” something (in the full and strict sense of the term) if-and-only-if we have a *well-founded belief* in it; our belief in it is well-founded if-and-only-if we can produce *good reasons* in its support...” (1976, p. 89, italics in original)

Toulmin thought that well-founded belief is sufficient for knowledge, that it requires conclusive reasons, and that it requires that one be able to *produce* those reasons. Similarly, Keith Lehrer has written that

if a person has evidence adequate to completely justify his belief, he may still fail to be completely justified in believing what he does because his belief is not *based on* that evidence. What I mean by saying that a person's belief is not based on certain evidence is that he would not appeal to that evidence to justify his belief. (1965, p. 169, italics in original)

It is now widely accepted, however, that the state of having beliefs which are based on, and justified by, one's reasons, is *entirely distinct* from the activity of providing or of being able to provide the reasons on which one's beliefs are based, and which justify one's beliefs. Keith Korb identifies several important, widely-accepted aspects of this distinction:³

First, and most apparently, being justified in believing p is a state whereas showing that one is justified in believing p is an action. Second, it seems clear, for instance, that one may be justified in holding a belief even if one lacks the epistemic concepts needed to *show* that it is justified. Thus, one need not be able to justify one's belief in order to be justified in holding it. Third, I could attempt to show that my belief that p is justified even if I am not justified in believing p. ... Similarly, I might not be

³ See also Harman (1970) and Alston (1985) for similar arguments against the view that the activity of justifying is part of what constitutes the state of being justified.

justified in believing *p* but nonetheless believe *p*. Under pressure to justify my belief, I could discover that I do have good reasons to believe *p* and perhaps become justified in believing *p* on the basis of those reasons. (2000, p. 533 italics in original)

Two of Korcz's points are particularly important for us here. The first is that one can have fully justified beliefs, which one holds on the basis of good reasons, even if one is unable to provide those reasons in defense of one's beliefs. (Maybe one lacks the necessary concepts to formulate the reasons as reasons, or maybe one is simply too nervous and one tends to forget one's reasons when asked for them, or maybe some other mechanism intervenes and prevents a person from providing her reasons.) The second point is that one might hold a belief on the basis of bad reasons at a time t_1 , and not even realize that there are good reasons for holding it—but then, once one is pressed to provide reasons, one immediately comes to realize at t_2 that there are other good reasons available for the belief. So, at t_2 one comes to base one's belief on the good reasons, and one's belief thereby becomes justified. The point is that at t_1 one has this ability to provide good reasons for the belief, but at t_1 one's belief is not held on the basis of the good available reasons. So, Korcz argues, being justified is entirely distinct from being able to provide a justification. That is the current orthodoxy in epistemology,⁴ and that is the first broad distinction to help orient the debates about the epistemic basing relation.

The second important distinction to draw is between *causal* and *doxastic* accounts of basing. We've noted above that the basing relation is an explanatory relation. Causal accounts of basing provide a causal interpretation of that relation. The basic idea of a causal account is that a belief is based on a reason when the reason causes the belief. But that basic idea needs, at minimum, to be bolstered with a way to rule out deviant causal chains, because

⁴ But see Leite (2004), Bondy and Carter (2018) and Hetherington (this volume) for some pushback against this orthodoxy.

beliefs can be caused by reasons in so-called “deviant” ways, where the belief is clearly not held on the basis of the reason. For example:

Suddenly seeing Silvia, I form the belief that I see her; as a result, I become rattled and drop my cup of tea, scalding my leg. I then form the belief that my leg hurts; but though the former belief is a (part) cause of the latter, it is not the case that I accept the latter on the evidential basis of the former. (Plantinga 1993, p. 69n8)

Ruling out causal deviance is a challenge, and it is key to giving a satisfactory account of basing in causal terms. Causal accounts of one sort or another have been widely defended or assumed.⁵

An alternative to the causal approach is to give an account of basing in doxastic terms. Doxastic accounts hold that having an appropriate “meta-belief,” to the effect that a reason R is a good reason for holding a belief B, is the key to holding B on the basis of R. Believing, of some reason that you possess, that it is a good reason for a belief that you hold, seems like it’s at least sufficient—and possibly even necessary—for you to count as holding your belief on the basis of that reason.⁶ One worry for doxastic accounts is that they over-intellectualize the basing relation, with the result that conceptually unsophisticated agents cannot count as basing beliefs on reasons. Another worry for some epistemologists is that our beliefs can be based on reasons of which we are unaware, or which we have forgotten. If that is correct, it’s a problem for doxastic accounts of basing, because we clearly cannot have

⁵ See Winters (1980), Swain (1981), Audi (1983), Turri (2011), McCain (2012), and Bondy (2016) for various causal accounts of the basing relation.

⁶ See Tolliver (1982) for a defense of a doxastic account of basing. Lehrer (1971) argues against causal accounts of knowledge, and his central counterexample to the causal account of knowledge (the case of the superstitious lawyer) is also naturally interpreted as an attempt to counterexample causal accounts of the basing relation, in favour of a doxastic account of basing. Setiya (2013) proposes a doxastic account of inferential basing.

appropriate meta-beliefs regarding the quality of our reasons if we are unaware of those reasons.

So we have purely causal accounts of basing, as well as purely doxastic accounts. Hybrid accounts containing both causal and doxastic conditions have also been proposed, as have other alternative approaches.⁷ The essays in this volume propose novel analyses of the basing relation, new lines of argument for and objections against various analyses of the basing relation, arguments regarding what sorts of things can stand in basing relations, and interesting and important connections between the basing relation and various other issues in epistemology.

II. Overview of Chapters

We turn now to an overview of the volume's chapters – sixteen in total – which we've organised into two broad categories: (i) *the nature of the basing relation*; and (ii) *basing and its applications*. The former papers are concerned, principally, with positively characterising the epistemic basing relation and criticising extant accounts of it, including extant accounts of the relationship between epistemic basing and propositional and doxastic justification. The latter papers are unified in that they connect epistemic basing with other topics of interest in epistemology as well as ethics, including: epistemic disjunctivism, epistemic injustice, agency, epistemic conservatism, epistemic grounding, epistemic genealogy, practical reasoning, and practical knowledge. This division between the nature of the basing relation and its applications is of course an imperfect one (as there will be some overlap in places), though we hope it will be helpful nonetheless as a way to navigate the volume.

⁷ For example, Audi (1986) holds that causal and doxastic conditions are both necessary for basing; Korcz (2000) holds that appropriate causal and doxastic conditions are each sufficient for basing; Evans (2013) argues against both causal and doxastic approaches, and in favour of an alternative disposition-based account.

II.1. PART ONE: *The nature of the basing relation*

The book begins with a brand-new account of basing defended by Ru Ye in her paper ‘A Doxastic-Causal Theory of Epistemic Basing’. The key idea of Ye’s account is that a belief is based on a reason just when two conditions hold: first, the reason must cause the belief; in this respect, the view lines up with causal accounts. But, secondly, and here is Ye’s theoretical novelty, *that* the reason causes the belief must itself be because the subject believes that the reason supports the belief. In a bit more detail, the idea is that epistemic basing is a matter of ‘causation caused by taking’ and the taking must be a belief about evidential support. This proposal, which she calls ‘Causation Caused by Believing (CCB), is then argued to both avoid deviant causation and also fit snugly with a plausible view of *proper* basing.

In ‘All Evidential Basing is Phenomenal Basing’, Andrew Moon’s objective is to defend a novel necessary condition on evidential basing, i.e., on what it is for beliefs to be based on evidence. On Moon’s proposal, the evidential basing relation obtains between someone’s belief and the evidence she has only if the mental state associated with that evidence has *phenomenal character*, where the phenomenal character of a mental state is the experiential ‘what it is like’ to be in that mental state. Moon’s argument for this thesis – the phenomenal basing thesis – is inductive: across a wide range of cases considered, either the beliefs are not based on evidence or the mental state associated with the relevant evidence has phenomenal character. So, the phenomenal basing thesis is probably true.

Hamid Vahid, in ‘Dispositions and the Basing Relation’, aims to carve out an alternative to causal and doxastic accounts of the basing relation, what he calls the *dispositional account of the basing relation*. A motivating idea in the paper is that an adequate account of basing must avoid the kind of causal deviance objections that notoriously plague standard

causal accounts. Vahid's key move for getting around the problem is to defend a dispositional analysis of how propositional and doxastic justification are related to one another; in particular, the suggestion is that propositional justification is an (epistemic) dispositional property that a subject can have with doxastic justification as its manifestation. Vahid then argues that this account provides the basis of an account of the basing relation that avoids deviant causal chain objections.

Luca Moretti and Tommaso Piazza, in 'The Many Ways of the Basing Relation', set out to expand traditional thinking about how well-grounded beliefs must be based on reasons that give the subject propositional justification for those beliefs. They note, as a starting point, that what the basing process involves can be different depending on the kind of reason one has. For example, non-doxastic reasons (e.g., experiences) require a basing process that is immediate in a way that doxastic reasons, which require inference, do not. Moretti and Piazza's novelty is to show that these ways of basing in cases of well-grounded beliefs are not exhaustive, and to accommodate outlier cases, they introduce what they call *enthymematic inference*, which corresponds with a way of basing that stands apart from the more traditional varieties.

John Turri, in his chapter 'Reasons and Basing in Commonsense Epistemology: Evidence from Two Experiments', combines traditional thinking about the nature of the basing relation with non-traditional methodology. Turri begins by arguing for the importance of experimental evidence in our theorising about the closely related notions of basing and epistemic reasons. He then reports the results of two new experiments about our concepts of both: the first experiment lends support to the causal theory of the basing relation, and the second suggests that reasons include both psychological and non-psychological items.

In 'Inference and the Basing Relation', Keith Allen Korcus's main objective is to resolve some mistaken ideas about the relationship between epistemic basing and inference,

and in particular as regards the latter, whether inferences can occur only among beliefs, and whether an inference must be stated as a premise within an argument. Once these confusions about the nature of inference and its relation to basing are sharpened, Korcz argues, it will help us to appreciate among other things how basing works in cases of analytic truths, and also how to better understand the relationship between propositional and doxastic justification.

We (that is, Pat Bondy and Adam Carter) in ‘The Superstitious Lawyer’s Inference’, offer a new diagnosis of what is the most well-known—as well as perhaps the most divisive—case in the basing relation literature: Keith Lehrer’s (1971) case of the superstitious lawyer, which Lehrer poses as a counterexample to the causal theory of the basing relation. On our view, and *contra* Lehrer, the superstitious lawyer case plausibly features both doxastic justification *and* well-founded basing, even though there are independent reasons (though not those Lehrer or others have adverted to) to think that the target belief falls short of knowledge.

We round out Part One of the volume with Errol Lord and Kurt Sylvan’s chapter ‘Prime Time (for the Basing Relation)’, which challenges received thinking about what it takes to believe something for sufficient normative reasons. Their target is what they call the ‘Composite View’, according to which believing something for a sufficient normative reason involves nothing more than (i) believing on the basis of a motivating reason, and (ii) that motivating reason’s corresponding to a sufficient *normative* reason for that belief, where (i) and (ii) are conditions that could obtain independently of each other. Seeing why the composite view is false and a prime view true, they argue, has important ramifications for our theorising about propositional and doxastic justification, the place of reasons in epistemology and of competence in theories of doxastic justification that appeal to reasons.

II.1. PART TWO: *Basing and its applications*

Part Two of the book, which connects basing with other topics of interest in epistemology and ethics, begins with Mona Simion's 'Hermeneutical Injustice as Basing Failure'.

Hermeneutical injustice, a key species of *epistemic injustice*, occurs, according to Fricker's (2007) influential account, when the interpretive resources available to a community render a person's experiences unintelligible to her. Moreover, as Fricker maintains, this unintelligibility must itself be due to the epistemic marginalization of that person or members of her social group. Simion's chapter has two main aims, one negative and the other positive. The negative aim is to show that Fricker's account is too restrictive; it rules out genuine cases of hermeneutical epistemic injustice. Building from this criticism of Fricker, Simion then advances and defends the positive thesis that hermeneutical injustice is unjustly brought about basing failure. An important implication of unpacking hermeneutical injustice in terms of epistemic basing, Simion maintains, is that hermeneutical epistemic injustice can be appreciated as a form of distributive injustice, a point that is elided on Fricker's more restrictive characterization.

In 'Agency and the Basing Relation', Ram Neta connects epistemic basing with agency, by criticizing a particular way of thinking about the relationship between epistemic and practical agency defended by Kieran Setiya (2013). Setiya's account of epistemic agency and its relationship to practical agency is predicated on his acceptance of a particular view of basing, according to which to believe that *p* on the ground that *q* is to believe that *p* and that the fact that *q* is evidence that *p*. Setiya maintains that if this is right, then, epistemic agency is unlike practical agency in that it does not involve our exercise of a capacity to cause anything – it involves nothing over and above our having certain kinds of belief. Neta argues that even if Setiya's preferred way of thinking of basing were true, this difference between practical and epistemic agency wouldn't follow, though he also argues that basing is in fact

not what Setiya assumes it is. An upshot, Neta maintains, is that the very same kind of agency that we find in intentional action can also be found in beliefs and other attitudes.

Kevin McCain's chapter 'Epistemic Conservatism and the Basing Relation' attempts to resolve an apparent tension between the causal theory of the basing relation and epistemic conservatism, the view that having a belief confers some positive epistemic status on the content of that belief. The *prima facie* tension between the two views is this: it looks as though, if the causal theory of basing relation were true, then epistemic conservatism could be true only if a belief could cause *itself*, which it can't. As McCain argues, this apparent incompatibility between the causal theory of the basing relation and epistemic conservatism boils down to a misunderstanding of epistemic conservatism which, once suitably clarified, suffices to dissipate the puzzle.

Miriam McCormick's contribution 'Can Beliefs be Based on Practical Reasons?' answers her title's question in the affirmative. It's uncontroversial that practical reasons can contribute to what one believes in the sense that they can make a difference to what one believes. Much more controversial, though, is whether beliefs can be *based* on practical reasons. Some philosophers, such as Nomy Arpaly (2019; see also Thomas Kelly 2002), have gone so far as to suggest that the very idea of practical reasons for belief is a 'category mistake'. After arguing that beliefs can be, and commonly are, based on practical reasons, McCormick then proceeds to defend the further thesis that in at least some cases, practical reasons can justify the beliefs that are based on them.

Duncan Pritchard, in his chapter 'Epistemological Disjunctivism and Factive Bases for Belief', shows how epistemic basing interfaces with a particular way of thinking about rational support in cases of perceptual knowledge. According to *epistemological disjunctivism*, one's perceptually formed belief can enjoy rational support that is both factive and reflectively accessible (see, e.g., Pritchard 2012). An important commitment of epistemic

disjunctivism, Pritchard shows, is that basing is itself distinctively factive. A benefit of the kind of factive basing that epistemological disjunctivism involves is that it can be used in the service of responding to traditional problems for epistemological disjunctivism, including what Pritchard has described elsewhere (e.g., 2012) as the basis problem and the access problem.

In his chapter ‘From Epistemic Basing to Epistemic Grounding’, Jesper Kallestrup shows how epistemic basing differs, despite some similarities, from epistemic grounding, and gives a novel account of the latter. The key difference, according to Kallestrup, comes at the level of explanation: an epistemic basis, as a result of which you know, backs causal explanation of knowledge, while an epistemic ground, in *virtue of which* you know, backs metaphysical (rather than causal) explanation of knowledge. On the account of epistemic grounding Kallestrup proposes and defends, epistemic grounding is a non-primitive relation of asymmetric metaphysical dependence between knowledge and its epistemic ground.

Guy Axtell, in ‘Well-Founded Belief and the Contingencies of Epistemic Location’, takes as a starting point that many of our beliefs in controversial areas (e.g., politics, religion, etc.) are culturally nurtured—viz., historical, temporal, geographical, cultural contingencies often play a significant role in determining how our opinions in these areas take shape. Suppose we reflect on this fact and then conclude that we would be very likely to see our own nurtured belief as both false and tainted by unrecognized bias, *were* we have been nurtured in a different culture or epistemic community. Should this undermine the well-foundedness the nurtured beliefs we hold? Axtell’s answer is ‘no’, but this negative answer comes with a range of important qualifications, including some that are in tension with how epistemic conservativists and dogmatists will be inclined to think about the epistemic status of these beliefs.

Finally, in ‘The Epistemic Basing Relation and Knowledge-That as Knowledge-How’, Stephen Hetherington shows how the platitude that knowledge requires basing can be unpacked on Hetherington’s own *practicalist* conception of propositional knowledge, according to which knowledge-that is a species of knowledge-how (see, e.g., Hetherington 2011a; 2011b). Drawing inspiration from Plato’s Statues of Daedalus analogy in the *Meno*, Hetherington defends the view that proper basing – a kind of ‘tethering’ relation – is best understood as a kind of knowledge-how, nestled within knowledge-that.

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