

## **Disqualifying ‘Disqualifiers’**

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**Abstract:** In addition to the notion of defeat, do we need to expand the epistemological repertoire used in accounting for the context dependence of justification? It has recently been argued that we ought to admit a hitherto unrecognized fundamental epistemic kind called ‘disqualifiers’. Disqualifiers are taken to be not reducible to any other epistemic notion. Rather, they are meant to be primitive. If this is correct, it is a surprising and novel discovery, and so it is worthy of further epistemological investigation. In this paper I shall first argue that the cases given do not motivate positing the notion of a disqualifier. Conclusions drawn about the existence of disqualifiers do not follow from the considerations advanced. Second, I shall directly argue that an essential core claim of those who would posit disqualifiers, that so-called disqualifiers actually do prevent epistemic bases from conferring justification, is false. In sum, I shall argue that there are no disqualifiers.

**Key Words:** Epistemology; Epistemic Justification; Defeaters.

## Disqualifying ‘Disqualifiers’

### Introduction:

Epistemic justification is context dependent in various ways. For example, some evidence may justify a belief in one scenario, but not in another, if defeating evidence is also present. For example, suppose that you seem to see a red table. On that basis you believe that the table is red. Such a belief is epistemically justified. But now suppose further that a trusted, reliable authority tells you that the table is not red, but it is white, and illuminated by red light. You believe what they say. By believing their testimony, many want to say that you have acquired a *defeater* for your belief that the table is red, meaning that the belief is no longer justified (or at least it is now less justified than it was before).

But in addition to the notion of defeat, do we need to expand the epistemological repertoire used in accounting for the context dependence of justification? It has recently been argued that we ought to admit a hitherto unrecognized fundamental epistemic kind called ‘disqualifiers’. Disqualifiers are taken to be not reducible to defeaters, ‘screeners’, or any other epistemic notion. Rather, they are meant to be primitive. If this is right correct, it is a surprising and novel discovery, and so it is worthy of further epistemological investigation.

In this paper I shall first argue that the cases given do not motivate positing the notion of a disqualifier. Conclusions drawn about the existence of disqualifiers do not follow from the considerations advanced. Second, I shall argue that an essential core

claim, that so-called disqualifiers actually do prevent epistemic bases from conferring justification, is false. In sum, I shall argue that there are no disqualifiers.

### **The Case of Alice and Bob:**

So what kind of thing is a disqualifier meant to be? A disqualifier, as the name implies, is meant to remove or eliminate something (such as a piece of evidence) from serving as a source of epistemic justification. As Daniel Muñoz says, in his important recent defence of the existence of disqualifiers, ‘Instead of ruining a justifier [as a defeater does], they *obviate* it.’ (original emphasis) (Muñoz, 2019, p.888) Muñoz’s first cases to motivate the notion of a disqualifier involve Alice and Bob. One hears Alice say that Bob said *p*. Given that Alice and Bob are reliable and trustworthy, on the basis of Alice’s testimony, one is justified in believing that *p*. We are then asked to compare two cases:

*Just Alice*      All I’ve got to go on is Alice’s testimony; it justifies belief in *p*.

*Bob, Too*      Alice shows me the letter she got from Bob. Sure enough, it says *p*.’ (Muñoz, 2019, p. 887)

Muñoz comments on these cases as follows:

In the second case – suitably tightened – Bob’s testimony alone justifies. Alice’s testimony is there, but Bob’s word *disqualifies* it from giving *any* justification, making it unnecessary or gratuitous. That is why, with both bits of testimony in hand, it would be irrational for me to base my *p*-belief on Alice instead of going closer to the source. Disqualifiers take a would-be justifier and make it irrelevant. (emphasis added) (Ibid.)

If one is disqualified from a competition, one is removed from it; one’s existence is then irrelevant to the contest’s outcome, either positively or negatively. So too with an

epistemic disqualifier, Muñoz holds that a disqualified source provides no justification at all. Commenting further on the case of Alice and Bob, Muñoz writes:

Bob's testimony (that  $p$ ) *disqualifies* Alice's testimony (that Bob said  $p$ ) from justifying my belief in  $p$ : once I have read the letter, my justification comes from Bob and Bob alone. Alice's word is now irrelevant – otiose, idle – and if it remains part of the basis for my belief that  $p$ , there is something irrational about me. (Muñoz, 2019, p. 888)

Reflecting on these cases, Muñoz is correct that upon receiving Bob's testimony, Alice's testimony is now unnecessary or gratuitous: it is no longer essential for me to be justified in believing that  $p$  – Bob's word alone is sufficient for that. But being inessential, unnecessary, or gratuitous is not equivalent to being *irrelevant*. If Alice's testimony justified my belief in  $p$  before acquiring Bob's testimony, why think that coming to possess evidence that confirms what Alice said makes her irrelevant, such that her testimony is now completely devoid of justificatory force?

By way of explanation, Muñoz asserts that with both bits of testimony in hand, it would be irrational for me to base my  $p$ -belief on Alice instead of going closer to the source and relying on Bob. But this is not a good reason to accept the notion of a disqualifier. It is perfectly consistent with its being irrational for me to base my  $p$ -belief on Alice's testimony *instead* of Bob's, that Alice's word still confers some justification. This is because it can be irrational not because Alice's testimony is no longer a justifier at all, but because an *additional*, perhaps superior justifier is also available. If the aim is to have the best justified belief possible, given the available evidence, then one should base it on the best sources available, which now includes Bob's testimony. But it does not follow that this inclusion must thereby exclude Alice.

I suggest that Muñoz's cases rely on conflating being inessential, redundant, and unnecessary, on the one hand, with being irrelevant, and so disqualified, on the other. But it simply does not follow from something's being unnecessary that it is irrelevant (while it is true that something's being irrelevant entails that it is unnecessary). It is not in general true that if one has a positive source of goodness, that coming across a second, better positive source of that same kind of goodness, thereby disqualifies the first and thus makes it irrelevant. And this is so even if with both sources to hand, it would be irrational to prefer the lesser to the exclusion of the greater.

By way of illustration, consider a charity runner who is trying to raise £1000 for the British Heart Foundation. I pledge £1000, and so the target is met. Suppose someone else comes along and pledges £1500. Given the runner's goal of not just reaching the minimum target, but raising as much money as possible for a good cause, it would be irrational for our charity runner to refuse it. My contribution is now inessential to meeting the target; in terms of meeting the goal, it is now redundant. Nevertheless, this does not entail that my contribution is *irrelevant*, removed, eliminated, or otherwise disqualified. It is just that the runner now has two sources of money, each of which alone is sufficient for meeting their goal, and the second is greater than the first. Importantly, they ought to accept both, and both make positive, albeit different, contributions.

Just as a greater charity donation can make a lesser one redundant or inessential, a better, stronger, or more direct epistemic source can make another redundant and inessential. But just as a greater donation need not disqualify a lesser one, a better epistemic source need not disqualify a weaker one, even if it subsumes it. It is false that

evidence, or other justifiers, are only epistemically relevant when they are essential to a belief's justification.

Another way to see that redundant evidence might still be relevant is to note the general pervasiveness of relevant redundancy. Examples have been offered in recent work that demonstrates this from metaethics to metaphysics. For instance, Zoë Johnson King argues that moral rightness is a reason to act, even though it is redundant given the right-making reasons. She calls this the 'Share the Weight View' (see Johnson King, forthcoming). Johnson King convincingly defends the view that 'just as facts in a metaphysical hierarchy do not compete for causal relevance, nor do they compete for normative relevance. They can all be reasons.' (Ibid., p.177) To take another recent example, Stephen Yablo argues in 'Relevance Without Minimality' that there are cases where *all* explanatory factors are redundant, saying that 'Extra help is still help, and sometimes it is the only kind of help around.' (Yablo, forthcoming, p. 9)

Just as in our charity runner case of relevant redundancy above, moral rightness can also be a reason to act, even though redundant, just as factors can be genuinely explanatory, even though redundant. As these cases show, redundancy does not support irrelevance. Muñoz's case of Alice and Bob gives us no reason to think that a better epistemic source disqualifies a weaker one – we have been given no reason to think that they cannot both be justifiers.

Before considering Muñoz's second example that is meant to motivate the existence of disqualifiers, it is important to consider a pressing objection to my argument above involving the charity runner<sup>1</sup>. After all, is there not a serious disanalogy between the case of the charity runner and that of Alice and Bob? That is, one might think that

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this worry.

there is no possibility of ‘double-counting’ in the charity case, unlike the Alice / Bob case. One can accept both charity gifts at full value, without the total somehow being less than the sum. Whereas according to Muñoz, ‘Bob’s letter disqualifies Alice’s testimony because the testimony bears on  $p$  only in so far as it bears on the letter. The letter’s evidential contribution, in this sense, “subsumes” the testimony.’ (Muñoz, 2019, p. 889) If this is correct, the objection goes, then with both pieces of evidence to hand, Alice’s testimony cannot be counted as an additional reason to accept that  $p$  over and above Bob’s letter – to do so would be to illegitimately count two reasons to believe that  $p$ , when really there is only one. This is why ‘subsumed’ evidence is irrelevant and so is disqualified.

So the question is, is it really correct that Alice’s testimony bears on  $p$  only in so far as it bears on the letter? Or is Alice’s testimony ‘*critical*, in the sense of having some independent probative value besides serving as an indicator of the closer testimony’? (Muñoz, p. 890) Muñoz agrees that in distant testimony cases, hearing from the source will not always disqualify the transmitters. He accepts that there are lots of nearby cases to the original Alice / Bob case where Alice’s testimony bears on  $p$  to some independent degree, and so these will not be cases of disqualification. For example, Muñoz considers:

*Bob, Too 2* I discover that Bob’s letter says that  $p$ , but I’m not certain that I’ve read it right. Alice’s testimony might still be helpful here [i.e. and so not disqualified]. (Muñoz, p. 891)

So in the original case of Alice and Bob that is meant to motivate the notion of a disqualifier, is Alice’s testimony merely indicative of Bob’s, as Muñoz holds? Or does it have any independent probative value? Muñoz suggests that to see that the Alice and Bob case is one of disqualification, we need only *stipulate* that Alice’s testimony is uncritical and so has no independent value. (Muñoz, p. 892)

But unfortunately, with such a stipulation, we no longer have a potential case of disqualification. For the case of Alice and Bob to be one of disqualification, it must have the following structure: at t1 I hear Alice say that Bob said that *p*, and at t1 Alice's testimony justifies my belief in *p*. At t2, Alice shows me the letter from Bob that says that *p*, and at t2 Bob's testimony justifies my belief that *p*, whereas Alice's testimony no longer does. It is of course essential to the case that before gaining Bob's testimony, Alice's testimony justifies my belief.

As Muñoz describes the case in setting it up: 'Bob is a reliable source when it comes to matters *p*-related – and ditto for Alice on things Bob-related'. (Muñoz, p. 887) Which is as it should be: Alice must be a reliable and trustworthy informant on what Bob says if her testimony is to justify my belief at t1. Given this essential reliability, this shows that the case is really more like *Bob, Too 2* than Muñoz recognizes. For example, should any possible doubt arise as to whether Bob said *p*, I can rely on Alice's testimony, given that she is a reliable source on matters Bob-related, and so her testimony remains a reason to believe *p*.

But suppose we simply stipulate that Alice is *not* reliable on matters Bob-related: rather, her testimony *merely* indicates, by correctly reporting, what Bob said. In that case, Alice's testimony *would not* justify my belief that *p*. If her testimony, while happening to be accurate, could just as likely have been false, it would confer no justification.

So Muñoz's case of Alice and Bob faces a dilemma: either Alice's testimony *merely* indicates what Bob said, in which case I cannot form a justified belief on that basis, and so there is no source of justification to disqualify; or else her testimony does



justify, in which case it must be a *reliable* report on what Bob said, and so her testimony is critical and thereby has some degree of independent probative value. If the former is correct, this case is disqualified from being a potential instance of disqualification; if the latter is correct, then as Muñoz would allow, the proximal testimony will not disqualify the distal.

I have argued that Muñoz's case of Alice and Bob, a kind of case he labels a 'subsumer', does not motivate the existence of disqualifiers. But Muñoz argues that not all disqualifiers are subsumers. Some should be classified as what he calls 'overwhelmers'. So it is to Muñoz's case of the overwhelming disqualifier to which I shall now turn.

### **The Case of the Wall and the Guru:**

In motivating his claim that disqualifiers exist, Muñoz offers a second case: that of the wall and the guru. The case is described as follows:

*Solo* The wall looks red to you. Lo: justification for belief in its redness.

*Guru* The guru, you are rationally certain, cannot but speak the truth. She tells you that the wall is red. You look at it, and red it looks.

If you are *really* rationally certain that the guru speaks the truth, and just as rightly sure that the guru has pronounced the wall to be red, then it doesn't matter that the wall looks red to you. You are justified no matter how it looks. Just think: what would have happened had the wall looked *green*? You would, quite reasonably, have concluded that you were being visually tricked. [...] The guru's declaration thus leaves no *room* for the experience to play any role. The experience is gratuitous, otiose, irrelevant. [...] The guru's word, I am imagining, would trump your experience, but not by subsuming its evidential upshot. In sum, *disqualified evidence is irrelevant because it's unnecessary*. (original emphasis) (Muñoz, 2019, pp. 889-890)

As noted above, being unnecessary or inessential does not entail irrelevance.

Grant that the guru's word does trump one's own experience, in the sense that it is a

better source of justification for one's belief that the wall is red than one's own fallible perception. Also, grant that one knows that it is a superior epistemic source. Even grant that upon receiving the guru's testimony, one is rationally required to upgrade and (partially or even wholly) base one's belief upon their assertion. None of this entails that one's own experience, which provided justification in the absence of the guru's testimony, now no longer does to any degree at all.

Muñoz's primary reason to think that your experience is disqualified from being a justifier when you have the guru's testimony is that you are justified in believing that the wall is red no matter how it looks. In light of this fact, how could the experience be playing any epistemic role at all? But that is not a good reason to think that your experience is disqualified, since that is perfectly consistent with your experience also actually justifying your belief. It could be that piece of evidence is simply defeated in cases where what the guru says conflicts with how things appear. If the wall appeared green to you, but the guru tells you that it is red, their testimony serves as a defeater: it undercuts the link between the evidence of your experience and your belief. The guru's testimony gives you a reason to think that your belief is false. But one's experience is then surely playing some relevant role, since it is defeated if it conflicts with a superior epistemic source. If it were irrelevant, it should be incapable of being affected, positively or negatively.

But in the absence of such a conflict, there is no reason to deny that one's perceptual experience can justify one's belief about the wall's redness. This could be so even if: the evidence the guru provides is superior; one is rationally required to upgrade to include this additional source; and one would end up with a justified belief that the

wall is red regardless of how it appeared to you. Again, having a source become unnecessary does not by itself entail its irrelevance and disqualification.

### **An Argument Against Disqualifiers: Can One Know On the Basis of ‘Disqualified’ Evidence?**

So far I have argued that Muñoz’s cases do not support his thesis that we need to admit the category of disqualifiers. What they seem to illustrate rather is when sources can be made epistemically redundant or inessential. But this says nothing about disqualification, which is about irrelevance and the elimination of a source as a justifier. I shall now directly argue that we have good reason to think that one can acquire justification from what Muñoz’s holds are disqualified sources, in the presence of alleged disqualifiers. If this is correct, then they are not disqualifiers at all.

Recall that in the case of Alice and Bob, Muñoz asserts that Bob’s word disqualifies Alice’s testimony from giving *any* justification whatsoever. (Muñoz, 2019, p. 887) As he sees it, once I have read Bob’s letter, my justification comes from Bob and Bob alone, which is meant thereby wholly to disqualify Alice’s testimony, completely eliminating it as a positive epistemic source. (Ibid. p. 888) Muñoz holds that it is irrational in some way, that I would be making some kind of mistake, if I believed that *p* on the basis of *both* Alice’s and Bob’s testimonies. It would not be epistemically irresponsible, he concedes, but it would be improper. (Muñoz, 2019, pp. 894-895) Importantly, he does nevertheless grant that one can know that *p* even if one’s belief in *p* is *partly* based on disqualified evidence (unlike defeated evidence for *p*, upon which one cannot know that *p*). (Muñoz, 2019, p. 895, footnote 9)

This raises a crucial question: could I know that *p wholly* on the basis of so-called disqualified evidence? It follows from Muñoz’s account that the answer is meant to be ‘no’: being disqualified is meant to entail that a would-be source is unable to confer *any* justification at all.<sup>2</sup> But it does seem possible to know wholly on the basis of ‘disqualified’ evidence, as I shall now argue.

All should agree that if I lost Alice’s testimony as a source, I would still know that *p* on the basis of Bob’s letter. On the other hand, if I had not come across Bob’s letter, I could still know that *p* on the basis of Alice’s testimony. But here is where things get interesting: enter an evil demon bent on wreaking havoc on the basing-relation<sup>3</sup>.

Suppose I have Alice’s testimony. I also have Bob’s. I also believe that *p*. Imagine too that I believe that *p* on the basis of these two sources. Muñoz will hold that Bob’s testimony disqualifies Alice’s, but I could know that *p* on these bases all the same. But now suppose that the demon leaves untouched the connection between my belief and its basis on Alice testimony. The demon, however, debases my belief from Bob’s testimony, although I still have it; everything else is left intact.<sup>4</sup> I suggest that I would still know that *p* even while possessing Bob’s testimony, a piece of evidence that my belief is not based upon, even partly (the demon sees to that).

Assuming that true belief is insufficient for knowledge, that my belief that *p* both counts as knowledge and is based solely on Alice’s testimony, and that I also possess

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<sup>2</sup> Recall, commenting on the case of Alice and Bob: ‘In the second case – suitably tightened – Bob’s testimony alone justifies. Alice’s testimony is there, but Bob’s word *disqualifies* it from giving *any* justification, making unnecessary or gratuitous.’ (emphasis added) (Muñoz, 2019, p. 887)

<sup>3</sup> An anonymous referee suggested that perhaps I could just stipulate the agent believes on the basis of Alice entirely, not Alice + Bob. They wondered why we need a demon to be pulling the psychological strings. I do not hold that a debasing demon is the *only* way of making this particular argument. Perhaps mere stipulation would be enough. But my hope is that a debasing demon is a clear, vivid, and compelling way of making this point.

<sup>4</sup> How might the demon debase beliefs? Options vary, depending on the nature of the basing relation. I offer one possible answer below in the body of the text in the course of replying to an objection.

Bob's testimony, the only possible source of what is converting my true belief into knowledge is Alice's testimony. It seems that despite my possession of Bob's testimony, Alice's testimony is conferring justification, and so is not disqualified. But having Bob's testimony is meant to be a paradigm case of a disqualifier; hence I conclude that there are no disqualifiers.

The same point can be made, and a perhaps a little more concretely, in the case of the wall and the guru. It is possible for you to know that the wall is red wholly on the basis of so-called disqualified evidence, which of course ought to be impossible, if there really are disqualifiers. Here too, Muñoz will allow that you can know that the wall is red if that true belief is based partly on its looking red to you, and partly on the guru's say so. Either, on its own, would also be sufficient for you to know that the wall is red. Again: enter the evil demon bent on wreaking havoc on the basing-relation.

Suppose that the wall looks red to you. You also have the guru's testimony. You also believe that the wall is red. Imagine too that you believe that the wall is red on the basis of these two sources; you thereby know that the wall is red (as Muñoz grants). The demon, however, now does his work. He leaves untouched the connection between your belief and its basis on your perceptual experience. The demon, however, debases your belief from the guru's testimony, although you still have it; everything else is left intact. I suggest that here too you would still know that the wall is red, even in the presence of the guru's testimony, a piece of evidence your belief is not based on, even partly (the demon sees to that).

Assuming again that true belief is insufficient for knowledge, your belief that the wall is red both counts as knowledge, and is based solely on how it looks to you. You

also possess the guru's testimony. The only possible source of what is converting your true belief into knowledge is your visual experience, as that is the only thing your belief is based upon. It seems that despite your possession of the guru's testimony, your perceptual experience is nevertheless conferring justification, and so is not disqualified. But having the guru's testimony is meant to be a paradigm case of a disqualifier; hence I conclude that there are no disqualifiers.<sup>5</sup>

### **An Objection:**

One might object to the above argument as follows: it relies upon the possibility of an evil demon debasing one's beliefs, without one noticing, and leaving everything else intact -- and that is metaphysically impossible.

Whether this objection is correct will of course depend on the nature of the basing relation, which is itself a huge topic, one outside the scope of this paper. But on the face of it, a debasing demon does seem possible.

Jonathan Schaffer introduces a version of a debasing demon in the course of developing an argument for a novel kind of near universal scepticism. (Schaffer, 2010) Given that knowledge requires proper basing, Schaffer proposes a demon who puts one into a belief state on a bad basis, while leaving the impression that one had proceeded properly. As Schaffer says, 'So for instance, the debasing demon might force me into believing that I have hands on the basis of a blind guess or mere wishful thinking, while

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<sup>5</sup> A possible worry: perhaps in these Demon cases, the guru and Bob's testimony do not disqualify, given what the Demon is doing? But the demon is not affecting what the subjects believe, or what evidence they have. It is only manipulating the basing relation. But nothing essential about being a disqualifier has anything to do basing. It is simply the possession of a disqualifier that is meant to remove would-be justifiers. Receiving the guru's testimony is supposed to disqualify your perceptual experience; Bob's letter, simply in virtue of having read it, is supposed to disqualify Alice's testimony. As Muñoz says: 'Bob's testimony (that *p*) *disqualifies* Alice's testimony (that Bob said *p*) from justifying my belief in *p*: once I have read the letter, my justification comes from Bob and Bob alone.' (Muñoz, 2019, p. 888)

leaving me with the impression as if I had come to this belief on the basis of the visual evidence.’ (Schaffer, 2010, p.231)

Schaffer’s debasing scepticism has not been without its critics (e.g. Brueckner, 2011; Ballantyne and Evans, 2013; Conee, 2015; Bondy and Carter, 2018). But notably, the possibility of a debasing demon is usually not disputed – nearly all parties to the debate grant that a demon could manipulate what beliefs are based upon.<sup>6</sup> What is normally the central dispute is whether this mere possibility results in us actually lacking knowledge. As Ballantyne and Evans conclude in their criticism of Schaffer’s argument: ‘Although the debasing demon seems to us perfectly possible, whether it threatens our knowledge is far from settled.’ (Ballantyne & Evans, 2013, p.557)

So how is it possible that a demon could make any belief improperly based? Again, it will vary with one’s account of the basing relation. But to take one example, consider causal theories of the basing relation. Most generally, these maintain that a belief is based on a reason only if the reason suitably causes, or causally sustains, the belief.<sup>7</sup> A causal theory of the basing relation is perhaps the default view since it requires

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<sup>6</sup> The only exception is Bondy and Carter (2018) who dispute the possibility of a debasing demon. But what they dispute is the specific version of the debasing demon scenario Schaffer’s introduces for sceptical purposes. As Bondy and Carter note, key to Schaffer’s sceptical argument is that a debasing scenario is consistent with three things: (i) a demon causes a subject to believe something on the basis of a bad reason; (ii) at a later time the demon makes the subject think that her reason for her belief was a different good reason; (iii) and also at this later time it remains the case that the subject holds her belief only on the basis of the bad reason, and not the good one. (Bondy and Carter, 2018) They argue that none of the main accounts of the basing relation are consistent with all of (i)-(iii).

Schaffer’s debasing scenario is far more controversial than the one I propose. My own proposal, by not committing to the possibility of (i)-(iii), falls outside of Bondy and Carter’s critique. My argument only requires the possibility of a demon debasing a belief, without the subject noticing it. My argument does not also require that a demon be able to specifically make one’s belief be based on a bad reason, while one consciously thinks it is based on a good reason, but the belief nevertheless still be based wholly on the bad reason.

<sup>7</sup> If one assumes that reasons are propositions, and propositions are abstract entities, it may seem odd to think of abstract entities as able to cause anything at all. Accordingly, we can follow Robert Audi in interpreting ‘reason’ in the locution, ‘a reason causes the belief that *p*’, as what he calls a ‘reason state’. A reason state is a causally efficacious mental state whose content is the proposition that functions as one’s

the least amount of cognitive sophistication on the agent's part, thus allowing it be applicable to the widest segment of epistemic beings. No higher-order concepts or cognitive abilities are presupposed<sup>8</sup>.

So if my belief that  $p$  is causally related in the right way to Alice's testimony and Bob's letter, then my belief is based upon these sources. To debase my belief from Bob's testimony, for example, we need only suppose that the demon manipulates the causal chain, perhaps either by creating a deviant causal chain, or by removing the causal link entirely, all outside my ken. So just as a debasing demon can make one believe that one has hands on the basis of a bad reason, like a guess, all the while leaving the impression that one came to this belief on the basis of the visual evidence, so the demon can make your belief that the wall is red be based solely on your perceptual experience, and not on the guru's say so. Unlike Schaffer's demon, the one I propose does not rob you of knowledge: it simply knocks out a better epistemic source that you have, by disconnecting it from your belief, but leaves you with a source sufficient to know the target proposition in question.

So on the face of it, the possibility of an evil demon debasing one's beliefs, without one noticing it, and leaving everything else intact, seems genuine. And so my argument against the existence of disqualifiers stands. If a debasing demon is impossible, the onus is on the objector to show why it is impossible, perhaps by offering an alternative analysis of the basing relation. For example, if one cannot be mistaken about which cognitive process underlies a belief, and so one cannot be mistaken about what a belief is based upon, then the debasing demon would be impossible. Such claims to

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reason to believe that  $p$ . So to say a reason  $r$  causes a belief that  $p$ , is shorthand for saying that it is one's believing the reason  $r$  that is the cause of one's belief that  $p$ . See Audi, 1993, pp. 234-5.

<sup>8</sup> For a survey of issues relating to the basing relation, see Korcz (1997); Korcz (2015).



infallible self-knowledge, however, are highly dubious: these are not capacities that we as fallible, limited, cognitive agents possess.

In conclusion, I have argued that there are no disqualifiers. Their existence is unmotivated: the cases provided do not require positing the notion of a disqualifier. Considerations of redundancy do not support claims of irrelevance. Finally, I argued that knowledge is possible wholly on the basis of what are meant to be paradigm instances of disqualified sources, which in turn is strong evidence that there are no disqualifiers that remove would-be sources as justifiers.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Thanks to anonymous referees, Adam Carter, Arthur Schipper, and especially Rhiannon James for helpful discussion and written comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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