**A Limitation on the Agency Involved in Judgment**

**Introduction**

My topic is judgment that something is the case, judgment that *p*. To many, judgment has seemed a locus of cognitive agency, a kind of cognitive mental act.[[1]](#footnote-1) In a weak sense, an act is something you do, a doing. The focus of this paper is on whether judgment is agential in a stronger sense, one associated with *aims* on the part of the agent. I use ‘aim’ to include intention, endeavor, or desire on the part of the subject making the judgment. Is judgment a matter, not merely of doing something, but of doing something with a certain sort of aim? To put it more concisely, and using ‘act’ broadly for any sort of doing, I ask: is judgment is a kind of *act-done-with-an-aim?* [[2]](#footnote-2)

To do something with an aim is not merely do it while also having the aim. One must do it *in pursuit of* the aim. If you raise your hand with an aim to ask a question, you raise your hand in pursuit of asking a question; your raising your hand is *directed* at the attainment of the aim. Acts done with aim are robustly agential in a way that goes beyond that of mere doings. They are purposeful actions, and plausibly intentional actions. And they bear on an agent’s responsibility in the sense of attributability and accountability. At least so long as the aim itself is attributable to the agent as her own, the same will hold of the action done with this aim. Similarly, if the aim itself is something for which the agent can properly be held to account for, the same will hold of the action done with the aim. Here I argue that judgment is not so robustly agential. I take no stand against the claim that it is an act, a doing, but I argue that it is not an act done with an aim. If indeed if we can be held responsible for our judgments, this fact must have another explanation.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Why might one come to think that judgment is act done with an aim? Suppose one begins with the thought that judgment is an act. If so, one might suspect it is closely related to affirmation (assent, endorsement, etc.). A simple hypothesis would be that judgment is one and the same as affirmation: to judge that *p* just is to affirm that *p*. But, like public assertions, affirmations can be made with different aims, and some aims seem to disqualify affirmations from being judgments. Suppose I affirm *it wasn’t my fault* to make myself feel better, knowing it really was my fault.[[4]](#footnote-4) This doesn’t seem to be a judgment of mine, and a natural explanation is that it was made with the wrong sort of aim. My affirmation lacks what Sosa (2015, 55) calls the “honesty” of judgment. To capture that honesty, the aim with which I make the affirmation must be appropriately truth-related.

Enter **alethic aims theories**, according to which to judge that *p* is to affirm that *p* with an aim thereby to affirm *F*-ly on whether *p*, where affirming something *F*-ly implies affirming it truly.[[5]](#footnote-5) I mainly consider two such theories in the paper. According to the **truth-aim theory**, to judge that *p* is to affirm that *p* with the aim thereby to affirm truly on whether *p*. According to Sosa’s (2015) **aptness-aim theory**, to judge that *p* is to affirm that *p* with the aim thereby to affirm aptly on whether *p*, where apt affirmation is a matter of affirming truly due to competence. The aptness-aim theory can smoothly explain some data that the truth-aim theory can’t explain, at least not easily. For example, as Sosa (2015, 55) points out, when our evidence only weakly favors *p* over not-*p*, we are prepared to guess that *p* but not to judge that *p*.[[6]](#footnote-6) To have a general term, I’ll say that according to alethic aims theories, judgment is ***alethic affirmation****.*[[7]](#footnote-7) If judgment is a kind of act done with an aim, it seems it must alethic affirmation. I assume as much in what follows.[[8]](#footnote-8)

There seem to be important implications for epistemology depending on whether judgment is alethic affirmation. For instance, Sosa (2015, 124) argues that because judgments are acts done with an aim, they are a special kind of performances he calls “attempts.” Attempts have constitutive aims in this sense: part of what it is to make at an attempt at is to aim at attaining . An attempt is thus assessable in terms of (i) whether the constitutive aim is attained, (ii) whether it is competent, and (iii) whether, if the aim is attained, it is attained through competence. An epistemic attempt is an attempt with a constitutive alethic aim, and epistemic assessment is assessment with respect to (i) – (iii), where the aim is alethic. Taking off from the notion of judgment as epistemic attempts, he extends his account to beliefs, first judgmental beliefs (beliefs that are “policies of judgment”) and then on to functional beliefs and credences.

Shah and Velleman appeal to a conception of judgment as truth-aimed affirmation in their explanation of how doxastic deliberation is possible and why it takes the “transparent” form it does, i.e., why in deliberation about whether to believe *p*, we ask whether *p*. Crucial to their account is a claim about links between doxastic deliberation and deliberation about judgment: “the question *whether to believe that p* is transparent, in the first instance to the question of *whether to judge that p,* which in turn is transparent to the question of *whether it would be correct to judge that p,* and thence to *whether p is true* and, finally, to *whether p*”(2005, 503). Given these links, they take it that if they can explain how deliberation about judgment is possible and why it takes a transparent form, then they can extend the account to doxastic deliberation. Here is where the conception of judgment as truth-aimed affirmation comes in. They claim that the possibility of deliberation about judgment is unproblematic if judgment is an act, since it is unproblematic to deliberate over *acts*; and they claim that if judgment is truth-aimed affirmation, we should expect this deliberation to take a transparent form (503-4).

What’s more, if Sosa is right, a conception of judgment as alethic affirmation is at the focus of traditional Western epistemology, going back through Descartes to the Pyrrhonists (2015, 51). A key sort of traditional epistemological enterprise presumes a question under discussion – a question whether *p* – and asks which of three options one should take on the matter: should one judge that *p*, judge that not-*p*, or withhold judgment? Sosa interprets key contributors to this tradition, especially Descartes and the Pyrrhonists, as holding that the two positive options – judging that *p*, judging that not-*p* – are affirmational actions done with an endeavor or intention to affirm the truth on the matter, and reliably (or aptly) so.

**1. Desiderata for a theory of judgment**

We should want our theory of judgment to accommodate its key features. Without claiming comprehensiveness – and leaving aside controversial matters like whether judgment must be conscious and of course in what ways, if any, it is agential – I identify five key features of judgment. Judgment has a distinctive (i) temporal profile, (ii) normative profile, (iii) motivational profile, (iv) role in belief-manifestation, and (v) role in belief-formation. Let me say something about each.

First, *temporal profile*: judgment is either an act or event, not a state; in Vendler’s (1967) terminology, it has the marks of an “achievement.” For example, when you consider the evidence and then judge that *p* at a time *t*, it’s true immediately after *t* that you “judge*d* that *p*” and false immediately before *t* that you “were judging that *p*.” (Compare ‘cross the finish line’.) This is not true for states like belief, activities like deliberation, and accomplishments such as figuring out the answer to a question.[[9]](#footnote-9) *Normative profile*: judgments come up for assessment as correct or incorrect, and as justified or unjustified. A judgment is correct iff true and justified iff it has the appropriate epistemiccredentials. Having good evidence for *p* – whether in the form of knowledge/beliefs or in the form of nondoxastic perceptual states – provides justification for judging that *p*.[[10]](#footnote-10) *Motivational profile*: we can and often do judge that *p* directly based on evidence we have for *p*. For instance, if you know that the weather report is for rain, you might judge it will rain, directly based on this knowledge. Directness will be important in this paper. For the moment, the rough idea is that we can and often do judge that *p* based on evidence in a way that isn’t mediated by some further intervening basis.

As for belief-manifestation, if you already believe *p*, then normally, if you consider the question whether *p*, you will judge that *p*. My use of ‘manifest’ here is not meant to imply that belief is identical to a disposition to judge, or even to a complex set of dispositions that includes a disposition to judge. The point is only that belief normally has an upshot, broadly speaking, for how one will judge when one considers the matter.

Finally, there is the belief-formation role. Of course, any number of actions, events and processes can give rise to belief. Perhaps taking masses and holiday waters can do this for belief in God. Perhaps a neurosurgeon could directly alter my brain in such a way that I come to believe something. Judgment is distinct from these in that when one comes to believe through judgment in the normal way, the *bases* on which one judges comprise the bases on which one forms the belief. So, if you judge based on certain evidence, and therein form a belief in the normal way, you form your belief on the basis of that same evidence*.* I’ll call this phenomenon **basis-identity.** It’s a key aspect of the belief-forming role of judgment that basis-identity holds when you form a belief through judgment (in the normal way). [[11]](#footnote-11)

Alethic aim theories appear to capture some of these key features well. Concerning temporal profile, alethic affirmation is an act, rather than a state, and it has the marks of an achievement. Concerning normative profile, affirmations generally are correct if and only if true. As for justification, evidence that *p* is also evidence that one’s affirmation on whether *p* would be true, and thus provides justification to affirm *p* to someone who aims to affirm truly on whether *p*.[[12]](#footnote-12) A theory on which judgment is simply affirmation, or is affirmation made with some aim that may be unrelated to truth, cannot deliver this result.[[13]](#footnote-13) Alethic aims theories also seem positioned to accommodate the belief-manifestation role of judgment. Just as believing *p* has a bearing on what one will assert when one aims to assert the truth on whether *p*, so believing *p* has a bearing on what one will affirm when one aims to affirm alethically.

You’ll notice I’ve left out the motivational profile and belief-forming role. I will argue that alethic aim theories do not allow for the possibility of judging that *p* directly based on evidence for *p*. They allow basing on evidence, just not direct basing. And I will show that the disallowance of judgment based directly on evidence creates insuperable difficulties in accommodating the belief-forming role as well.

Here is a roadmap for what follows. In section 2, I settle on a suitable framework for discussing bases and basing. In section 3, I consider uncontroversial cases in which a person acts with an aim based on evidence about the act’s being a way to attain the aim. I focus on cases in which the aim is relevantly like alethic aims in form: it is an aim to the *F* (compare the aim to affirm the truth on whether *p*). This section culminates in the defense of what I call the “indirectness thesis,” according to which, roughly, whenever you with an aim to the *F*, and you do it based on evidence about the identity of the *F*, this evidence is only *indirectly* your basis for -ing with that aim. In sections 4 and 5, I make use of the indirectness thesis to show that if judgment is alethic affirmation, then we cannot judge directly based on evidence. Given its belief-forming role, it would follow that judgment is not a way we can form beliefs directly based on evidence. In fact, if judgment is alethic affirmation, then one can judge that *p* directly only based on beliefs with contents so closely related to *p* as to make it impossible to see how belief-formation could occur through judgment at all, or if it could occur, how one could thereby form the belief in an epistemically appropriate way. Finally, in section 6, I consider and criticize the suggestion that an alethic aims theorist could simply deny that we form beliefs through judgment. I argue that this is too high a price to pay.

**2. Basing**

The language of “bases” and “basing” helps us mark a distinction between merely *having* evidence and *relying* on that evidence. So far so good. But what is evidence? Some insist evidence consists of facts; others propositions (“considerations”) which can be true or false; others that it consists of mental states.[[14]](#footnote-14) These differences matter in cases in which a person’s apparent evidence is out of keeping with reality. To use the famous example, suppose as I am about to take a drink from a glass which in fact contains petrol, I come to believe that I’m soon to be tipsy because – at least as I would put it – it contains gin and tonic. On the basis of what evidence do I form this belief? There is no such thing as the *fact* that the glass contains gin and tonic. So, those who think evidence must consist of facts will have to search elsewhere for my evidential basis, perhaps looking to the fact that I believe that the glass contains gin and tonic. But is this really the evidence I rely on? Is my evidence autobiographical? So the debate goes.

For the purposes of this paper, I would like to avoid taking sides in the dispute over the ontology of evidence. All sides should agree that in the “bad” gin/petrol case, there is a rationalizing psychological explanation of my belief that I will soon be tipsy – a **rationalization** as I’ll say – that cites my belief that the glass has gin and tonic in it: I believe I will soon be tipsy because I believe that the glass contains gin and tonic and believe (together with other beliefs). And it’s clear that this same rationalization holds in a “good” case in which I form the same belief. Perhaps in the good case the belief-invoking explanation is inferior in certain ways to a rationalization invoking my knowledge. But it is still a rationalization, i.e., a genuine explanation, of a rationalizing character, for my belief that I will be tipsy. It renders my reaching intelligible in light of my psychological states.

And what goes for evidence goes for reasons. When I reach in a bad gin and tonic case for the glass, there is a rationalization of my reaching that cites my belief that it contains gin and tonic together with my aim to drink gin and tonic. Depending on one’s position on the ontology of reasons, one might give different accounts of what my reasons were.[[15]](#footnote-15) But one should agree with the correctness of these rationalizations nevertheless.

I will continue to use the convenient term ‘basis’. I use it, stipulatively, to pick out mental states that together rationalize an action, judgment or belief. These include beliefs or other assertive mental states. They also include aims and desires. Thus, if a belief and desire/aim together rationalize an action, I count them together as a basis. This adopted use of ‘basis’ and ‘basing’ is not especially unusual. It is common to find talk in epistemology and philosophy of mind of subjects basing beliefs on other beliefs, basing actions on beliefs and desires, basing intentions on beliefs, etc. Like most philosophers who talk this way, I don’t mean to be taking a stand in the ontology of evidence or reasons.

One important clarification: the notion of a belief involved is a broad one. In the bad gin/tonic case, one does believe the glass has gin and tonic in it, but one might not *think* *the thought* that it does, nor need one make a judgment that it does. Still, one does manifest dispositions associated with belief, such as the disposition to act as if it contains gin and tonic (one *reaches* for the glass) and the disposition to have preferences and emotions that fit with its doing so (one *looks forward* to the refreshing taste). And one has the (perhaps unmanifested) disposition to judge that it contains gin and tonic.

**3. Acting with an aim based on evidence**

In keeping with my stipulated use for ‘basis’, I will understand talk of -ing based on evidence for *p* as -ing based on evidential mental states, i.e., on mental states that are evidential with respect to *p*,[[16]](#footnote-16) e.g., including beliefs in propositions that are evidence for *p*, as well as experiences, seemings, and intuitions which provide one support for *p*. This section considers uncontroversial cases of acts done with aims, and it considers how we can act with aims in these cases based on evidence concerning the attainment of the aim. I defend the claim that such basing must always be indirect. In the next section, I apply these findings to alethic affirmation.

A preliminary point. It is somewhat awkward to talk of “acting with an aimon a basis*.*” Alethic aims theorists of course need to make sense of this talk if they are to explain how we can judge that *p* on a basis, which we clearly can, since we can judge that *p* based on evidence for *p*. On their behalf, I suggest a deflationary reading. Consider again the “good” gin and tonic case. If I reach to take a drink, my belief that it’s gin and tonic, together with my aim to drink gin and tonic, rationalizes my reaching. We can then “kick” the aim up with the action and speak loosely of my belief as my basis for *my* *reaching for the glass* *with an aim to drink gin and tonic*. Talk of acting with an aim on a basis, at least for the purposes of this paper, is shorthand for talk the relevant beliefs or other assertive mental states, together with the aim, rationalizing the action.

3.1. The indirectness thesis proposed and defended

Start with an uncontroversial example of acting with an aim. The example is chosen to have this structure: one *ϕ’*s a particular thing *x* with an aim thereby to *ϕ* whatever is the *F*, and one does so based on evidence that *x* is the *F*, i.e., on mental states evidential with respect to *x is the F*. (Compare: one *affirms* that *p* with an aim thereby to *affirm* whatever is *the truth on whether p.*)

Here is the example:

**Café Case:** You’re a café aficionado and you’re visiting St. Louis for the first time. You want to go to the best café in town. You come into town with no idea of where to go. Your trusted friend Eve tells you Blueprint is the best café in town. You head toward Blueprint.

Note that in this case, if someone asked you why you were heading to Blueprint, you could cite this testimonial evidence, replying: “I’m going there because Eve told me it’s the best café in town.” And there is a rationalization of your going there that cites your belief in this evidence: you are going there because you aim to go to the best café in town and you believe that Eve told you it is the best one. Even more naturally, you might give a different explanation of why you’re heading there that doesn’t mention Eve at all: “I’m going there because it is the best café in town.” And this gives us a second rationalization, one that cites your belief that Blueprint is the best café in town.

Commonly, when you *ϕ x* with an aim to *ϕ* the *F*, there is a pair of rationalizations of your *ϕ*-ing *x*, one invoking an evidential mental state and another invoking a belief that *x* is the *F*. I say this pairing is common. But sometimes one acts on probabilistic beliefs. Consider a variant on the café example. Suppose Eve mentioned Blueprint and only Blueprint in a discussion of good cafes in St. Louis but didn’t come out and say it’s the best. You didn’t have the chance to ask her directly at the time and now you don’t want to bother her with a phone call. Her mentioning Blueprint in the way she did isn’t quite enough to convince you that it is the best. You don’t *believe* it’s the best one; you only think it’s likely.[[17]](#footnote-17) This probabilistic belief may well be sufficient, nevertheless, given your aim, to rationalize your heading there. In such a case, again, we have two rationalizations: one invoking an evidential mental state and one invoking a probabilistic belief.

Let’s call rationalizations invoking evidential mental states **evidence-invoking** and ones invoking a belief that *x* is the *F* or a belief that *x* is likely the *F* **target-invoking**.[[18]](#footnote-18) What should we think about the relation between two such rationalizations when they both hold of a single action? Should we think they are independent? Compare clear cases of independent rationalizations. For instance, one might do something because it’s the right thing to do *and* because it is to one’s benefit, or because it will save time *and* because it will save money. The belief that it’s right rationalizes the action, but it’s also true, independently, that the belief that the action is in one’s interest also rationalizes it. The action is in a sense overdetermined. These cases seem quite different from the café case.

In the café case, the evidence-invoking rationalization depends on there being some target-invoking rationalization to which it is suitably connected. In support of this, note the following. Your sole relevant aim in these cases is to go to the best café. And your pursuit of this aim consists of two sub-projects: finding out well enoughwhich café is best and then getting yourself to that café. Evidence about which café is best in town feeds into the “finding out” project. It is on the way to finding out well enough, i.e., on the way to a target belief, outright or probabilistic, about which café has the best coffee. This target belief, together with your aim, explains your going to Blueprint.

Plausibly, then, your belief that Eve said Blueprint has the best coffee, together with your aim, rationalizes your going there only *indirectly*: it does so only because, first, it rationalizes your having a target belief, and second, because that target belief, more directly, together with your aim, rationalizes your going there. As rationalizations go, so go bases. Your belief that Eve said that Blueprint is best is your basis for going there in your aim only because, first, this belief is your basis for holding a target belief about it (likely) being the best café, and second, that target belief more directly is your basis for going that café in your aim.

Generalizing, we thus have:

**The Indirectness Thesis.** Suppose that one *ϕ*s *x* with an aim to *ϕ* the *F* and does so based on a set *M* of mental states that are evidential with respect to *x is the F*. Then *M* is one’s basis only indirectly, only in virtue of a pair of facts: (i) the fact that *M* is one’s basis for a target belief, either a belief *x* is the *F* or a belief *x* is likely the *F* (or some trivial equivalent); and (ii) the fact that this target belief, more directly, is one’s basis for *ϕ*-ing *x* with this aim.

This thesis holds because of facts about rationalizations. When *M*, together with an aim to *ϕ* the *F*, rationalizes your *ϕ*-ing *x*, this rationalization is indirect: it holds only in virtue of the fact that *M* rationalizes a target belief you have, which, together with your aim, more directly rationalizes your *ϕ*-ing *x*.

A simple general thought lies behind idea the indirectness thesis, despite its somewhat complex formulation: whenever you take a means toward an end based on evidence that the means is effective, you do so only because this evidence convinces you that the means is (likely) an effective one toward the end. Your belief that the means is (likely) effective is your more direct basis. We can thus “trace forward” your bases like so: your evidence that the means is effective is your basis for your belief that the means is (likely) effective toward the end, which in turn is your basis for taking that means toward the end.

There is further support for the indirectness thesis. If we look at key predictions it makes, they are borne out. First, if your belief in Eve’s testimony is only indirectly your basis for going to Blueprint with your aim, via its being the basis for your holding a target belief that it is (likely) the best, then we should expect, ceteris paribus, that if you had the same belief in Eve’s testimony but it didn’t serve as your basis for any target belief, then it wouldn’t be your basis for going to that café in your aim. And this seems right. Suppose you believed Eve said Blueprint is best but this belief didn’t make you think it was even likely to be best. Maybe you thought Eve was pulling your leg. In such a situation you wouldn’t go to Blueprint based on your belief in Eve’s testimony, even if you did end up going there, and in fact even if you did go there with the aim of going to the best café in town (e.g., if you went there based on a belief about someone else’s recommendation).

Second, we should generally expect that the existence of a more direct basing relation shouldn’t counterfactually depend on there being a less direct one. Ceteris paribus, had you thought that Blueprint was best, or that it likely enough was, then even if such a target belief wasn’t based on a belief about Eve’s testimony, or indeed on any evidential mental state at all, so long as you had the same aim, you would still go there based on this target belief. Of course, it would be odd to have a belief that a café is (likely) best based on no evidence. But if you had this belief on the basis of wishful thinking, bias or prejudice, it still seems that it would have served just as well as a basis for your doing what you did in your aim. Your resulting action might not be justifiedbut it would admit of a rationalizing explanation in which the target belief figures. Give Swampman a belief that Blueprint is the best café in town and give him the aim to go to best café in town, then even if this belief/aim pair came from a lightning strike, the pair will still rationalize his heading there.

Third, if the indirectness thesis is correct, then we should expect that when there is a rationalization invoking an evidential mental state, there will often be rationalizations invoking *upstream* evidential mental states, because these upstream states would rationalize through a chain of rationalizing relations. And this is the case. If you go to Blueprint based on the belief that Eve said it had the best coffee, and you got this belief from an upstream belief that *Lu assured me that Eve said it had the best coffee,* then it seems that this latter belief, too, qualifies as a basis. It links into a chain of rationalizations in the right way, and so, together with your aim, it indirectly rationalizes your going to that café. Note, as well, that you can cite upstream evidence in explaining what you are doing: “I’m going there because Lu assured me that Eve said it had the best coffee.”

3.2. Objections considered

I pause to consider objections to the indirectness thesis. The first proposes counterexamples. The second claims that the thesis leads to an infinite regress. The third and final one is a worry that the indirectness thesis resembles the well-known claim that inference requires a taking condition, and so runs into the same problems of a Lewis Carroll-style flavor. I take these in turn.

Here is a possible counterexample. Driving at a high speed, I see an obstacle in the road, and based on this perceptual state, I hit the brakes. Here I act with an aim to slow down, and I do it based on “evidence” that slowing down would be a good idea, namely my perception/experience as of their being an obstacle in the road. The thought is then this: surely, I don’t step on the brakes based on some *belief* about the obstacle, let alone about a belief about how hitting the brakes would help me avoid it by helping me slow down; there’s no time for all that. But the indirectness thesis says otherwise, and so it is false.

I want to make two remarks here. First, I plausibly have the relevant beliefs. I know hitting the brakes is a good way to slow down, to avoid obstacles. Do I believe there is or might be an obstacle? Certainly, I have the relevant dispositions – to act, prefer, feel, judge as if there is an obstacle. But one might insist that these beliefs, even if they are there, play no role in my hitting the brakes as a matter of psychological fact. Rather, what transpires is that my experience as of the obstacle together with the aim of avoiding the obstacle explains my stepping on the brakes. But how does my experience connect with my aim in such a way as to make the stepping on the brakes intelligible? The answer might be: it doesn’t. Maybe the usual story of rationalizing psychology involving belief and desire/aims simply doesn’t apply in this case. Does even the aim play a role? One might claim it doesn’t, that there is simply an execution of an automatic routine linking experiences of obstacles with stepping on brakes. Of course, if the aim plays no role, it is hardly clear that I act with an aim.

So I do think this counterexample fails. But rather than fighting over the psychology of cases like this, I turn to the second remark. There are a great many cases in which one acts based on evidential mental states in the form of beliefs, such as the café case and the case of reaching for the glass because one thinks it has gin and tonic. To avoid fights about whether it is possible to act with an aim directly based on perception, without any role for beliefs, I will simply rely in my arguments in subsequent sections of the paper on the restriction of the indirectness thesis to cases in which the evidential mental state is itself a belief, and so on cases in which beliefs are elements of the rationalization along with the aim. These are cases of acting with an aim based on *doxastic evidence***.** We clearly judge very often based on doxastic evidence. As I proceed, I won’t always qualify ‘evidence’ with ‘doxastic’, but I will do so at the crucial stage of the argument in section 4.

Turn, next, to a second worry: regress. Suppose the indirectness thesis is correct. You can go to Blueprint with an aim of going to the best café based on your belief about Eve’s testimony only indirectly in virtue of the fact that this belief is your basis for a target belief that it is the best café, where this latter belief more directly is your basis for going there in your aim. But let’s ask about the target belief. Isn’t it, too, an act one does with an alethic aim? After all, you did aim to figure out which café is best.[[19]](#footnote-19) If so, then by the indirectness thesis, it can’t be based directly on evidence. A regress looms.

There are various complexities about how to spell out the regress. More assumptions might be needed, such as that it’s possible in such a case for all the beliefs involved to be justified, and they can be justified only if based on evidence. Let’s set these details aside. What is important is that if the regress arises, it arises from the combination of the indirectness thesis and the view that belief is itself an act one does in an alethic aim. Now, it is one thing to think that judgment is a kind of act one does with an alethic aim, quite another to think this holds of belief. The threat of regress is a reason to resist such this view of belief, not a reason to reject the indirectness thesis.

Further, the fact that one can aim to find out the truth and then arrive at a belief due to the successful pursuit of this aim is no reason to think that belief is itself a kind of act done in an aim, or even, less implausibly, to think that it is a kind of *state* one is in with/for an aim.[[20]](#footnote-20) For one thing, not all beliefs are proceeded by inquiry or any aim to find the truth on the question. So, we would have to find some more general aim in terms of which to explain belief. But a second problem is more serious. Consider seeing. Suppose I want to see the Danube River and so I do what’s necessary to get to the right spot, and then I look and I see it. My seeing the Danube is not a matter of my being in a certain state with/for an aim. So, the mere fact that the same form of explanation applies to beliefs proceeded by aims to have true beliefs is no reason to think that belief is a kind of state one is in with/for an aim.

The third objection stems from a worry about a perceived similarity between the indirectness thesis and the view that inference must satisfy the “taking condition.”[[21]](#footnote-21) According to this view of inference – call it the *taking view* – when one infers *q* from *p*, one concludes *q* not only because one believes *p* but also because one takes *p* to support *q*. Takings, here, are not mere dispositions; they are propositional attitudes with representational content. According to the taking view of inference, we need a taking to mediate inference. Similarly, according to the indirectness thesis, we need another propositional attitude – a target belief – to mediate the basing of one’s act-done-with-an-aim on evidence. Given the analogy, the same Lewis-Carroll difficulties that beset the taking view will beset the indirectness thesis.

Let’s go over these alleged difficulties for the taking view, as I understand them.[[22]](#footnote-22) Consider a case in which *p* clearly entails *q* and you believe *p*. The motivation for accepting the taking view – according to the present objection taking its cue from Carroll (1895) – is the hope that taking *p* to support *q*, together with the belief that *p*, will comprise a set of attitudes that suffice for you to make the inference from *p* to *q*. But this combination isn’t sufficient. What if you also took that combination not to support *q*, or you doubted the support, or just didn’t “put two and two together”? The same reasoning that leads to the supposed need to posit the first taking seems to lead us to posit a second one: you must also take it that the combination of *p* and *p supports q* to support *q*. And then the problem repeats again, and we are off on a regress. The regress is problematic because: i) we don’t have such infinite sets of ever more complex takings, and ii) even if *per impossible* we did, even this wouldn’t guarantee inference occurs. The conclusion: takings can’t perform the mediating role the taking theorist assigns them; no set of propositional attitudes can.

That, at least, is roughly the shape of alleged problem. I won’t try to evaluate it. Let’s suppose it does raise a real problem for the taking view. I don’t think a similar problem arises for the indirectness thesis. Lewis-Carroll-style problems aren’t problems for views that merely assert that some inferences are indirect, i.e., that they involve chains of direct inferences. Rather, they are problems for views that try to explain inference by positing further belief-like propositional attitudes that, together with a belief, are meant to suffice for the inference to occur. The relevant sort of mediation for Lewis-Carroll problems is *supplementation,* and in particular supplementation with a further belief-like attitude. But the indirectness thesis isn’t about mediation in the sense of supplementation, but mediation in the sense of indirectness. Consider the café case one last time. It’s not that your belief that Eve said that Blueprint is the best café needs to be supplemented withyour belief that Blueprint is the best café in order to reach a combination of states sufficient for you to go there with the aim to go to the best cafe; rather your belief about what Eve said can be your basis for going there only in virtue of it being a basis for your belief that it is the best café, which itself is more directly your basis for going there. The more direct basis isn’t the pair of beliefs, i.e., the evidential belief + the target belief; it is just the target belief. We are not combining beliefs into a set in an attempt to show that with all those beliefs (and the aim), the relevant basing relation must occur.

Suppose a philosopher were to come along and argue that for one to act with an aim based on a belief – any belief – one needs to *take* the content of the belief, together with the content of the aim, to support doing the action; and that this taking is itself part of the basis for one’s acting with the aim. Then the same Lewis-Carroll-like problems might have purchase (if they have purchase on the taking view). But I am not such a philosopher.

The second and third objections both concern regresses, but of different kinds. The second concerns a horizontal regress: to base *X1* on *X2*, one must base *X1* on a more direct intermediary *X3* and base *X3* on *X2*; but to base *X1* on *X3*, the basing must go through an *X4*, etc. This regress, in effect, asserts the need for an ever-growing chain of basing relations if *X1* to be based on *X2*. The third objection raises the specter of a vertical regress: to base *X1* on *X2*, we need to supplement *X2* with *X3*; but even supplemented with *X3, X2* isn’t enough for the (direct) basing relation to hold; we therefore need to supplement the combination of *X2* and *X3* with *X4*, etc. The two regresses are distinct. I have argued that neither arises for the indirectness thesis.

3.3. A warm-up for the next stage of the argument: assertion

Given the above considerations, I take it that there is good reason to accept the indirectness thesis (and even more clearly good reason to accept it as restricted to basing on doxastic evidence). When we consider humdrum cases like the café cases, the thesis might seem to state the obvious. But as a warm-up for our main application, consider assertion. Suppose you assert that *p* with an aim to assert the truth on whether *p*. You can do this based on evidence for *p* – e.g., based on a belief that you read that *p* in *The* *New York Times*. According to the indirectness view, this belief counts as your basis only indirectly, only thanks to its serving as the basis for your belief that *p* (or likely *p*), which more directly is your basis for your assertion in your aim. This seems right.

We can give a pleasingly parallel treatment of a liar’s assertion that *p* based on evidence against *p*. The liar asserts *p* with an aim to assert falsely on whether *p.* The liar’s evidence against *p* can serve as his basis for asserting with his falsehood aim only indirectly – only because his evidence against *p* serves as a basis for his belief that not-*p* (or his belief that likely not-*p*), which more directly is his basis for asserting that *p* in the falsehood aim.

**4. Implications for alethic aims theories of judgment**

Part of the motivational profile of judgment is that one can judge that *p* directly based on evidence for *p,* including doxastic evidence for *p*. I next use the indirectness thesis to argue that alethic aims theories disallow such direct evidential basing (at least direct basing on doxastic evidence). The argument is very similar to the arguments about assertion given at the end of the last section. Here, however, I will outline the argument in more detail.

Consider first the truth-aim theory. Suppose I affirm that *p* with an aim to affirm truly on whether *p*, and I do so based on doxastic evidence for *p* in the form of a belief that *q.* Then my belief that *q* is evidential with respect to *p.* *q* is also evidence for *p is the truth on whether p.* Thus, the belief that *q* is evidential with respect to *p is the truth on whether p*. We can then apply the indirectness thesis, with *ϕ*-ing as affirmation and relevant aim being to affirm the truth on whether *p*. We can conclude that when I affirm that *p* with an aim to affirm truly on whether *p* based on doxastic evidence for *p* – here a belief that *q* –I do so only indirectly.[[23]](#footnote-23) (The same holds if my doxastic evidence consists of a set of beliefs and not only a single belief.) Thus, if judgment is truth-aimed affirmation, doxastic evidence for *p* can only indirectly be one’s basis for judging that *p.*

Other alethic aims theories face the same fate. I’ll consider only the aptness-aim theory. Suppose I affirm that *p* with an aim to affirm aptly on whether *p*, and I do so based on doxastic evidence for *p* in the form of a belief that *q.* Presumably, *q* is also evidence for *p is* *the aptly affirmable answer to whether p*. Thus, the belief that *q* is evidential with respect to the latter. By the indirectness thesis, it follows that if judgment is aptness-aimed affirmation, doxastic evidence for *p* can only indirectly be one’s basis for judging that *p*.

This is a serious problem for alethic aims theories. We can and often do judge directly on the basis of doxastic evidence. It can be tricky sometimes to pinpoint the direct doxastic evidence, but it is extremely plausible that there is such a thing. You learn that Candidate *X* is far ahead in the polls over the other candidates. You can judge that *X* will win, based directly on your belief that Candidate *X* is far ahead in the polls – perhaps together with your belief that those who are far ahead in the polls normally win.

I should be clear. I think it’s quite plausible that whenever one affirms that *p* with an alethic aim, one does so only indirectly the basis of evidence for *p*, only because that evidence convinces one that *p* is true, or likely enough true, which is more directly one’s basis. In my view, this rightly makes affirmation like assertion. What I deny is that judgment is like either affirmation or assertion in this respect. The indirectness thesis is true of affirmation or assertion with an alethic aim, but it is false of judgment.

I could end my argument at this point. But it’s worth exploring the costs for alethic aims theorists of abandoning the claim that we can judge directly based on evidence. (Plausibly, if you can’t judge directly on the basis of doxastic evidence, you can’t judge directly on the basis of evidence at all, even nondoxastic.) How bad would this be? Maybe the benefits of an alethic aims theory are worth this cost. In the next section, I argue that giving up direct evidential basing, when combined with facts about the role judgment plays in belief-formation, leads to unattractive consequences about belief-formation.

Before continuing, I want to consider a possible response one might entertain at this point. One might suggest giving up the view that judgment is alethic affirmation but holding on to the view that judgment in a kind of act done with an aim. Earlier, I claimed that alethic aims theories were the best versions of the act-done-with-an-aim view, but perhaps this matter needs revisiting. Part of the motivation for taking the aim involved in judgment to be alethic is that evidence for *p* is evidence that one would attain one’s alethic aim in so affirming. This helps us see how evidence for *p* could give one justification to judge that *p,* as specified in the normative role for judgment in section 1*.* But perhaps there are non-alethic candidates for the constitutive aim of judgment, but which still meet this condition. The most promising such candidate is the aim to affirm what’s evidentially supported on whether *p*. Let’s assume, for the sake of argument – though this could be questioned – that if something is evidence for *p*, it is also evidence for *p is what’s evidentially supported on whether p*. One might wonder whether the indirectness thesis will imply that, on this evidential-aim theory of judgment, one could judge that *p* only indirectly based on evidence for *p*.[[24]](#footnote-24) The answer is a slightly qualified yes. The one qualification is that *p is what’s evidentially supported on whether p* might itself be thought to be evidence for *p.* One could judge that *p* based directly on that evidence, but not any other sort of evidence, such as *Eve told me that p.*

**5. Belief-formation through judgment**

Recall the special character of belief-formation through judgment. When you form a belief through judgment (in the normal way), basis identity holds: the bases on which you judge are identical to the bases on which you form the belief. Consider now the conjunction of basis identity, the indirectness thesis, and an alethic aim theory. From this conjunction, can derive the conclusion that, whenever you judge based on doxastic evidence you also form your belief based on some target belief.If the alethic aim theory in question is the truth-aim theory, we can derive that you form your belief that *p* based on either a belief that *p* or a belief that likely *p* (or some trivial equivalent). For the aptness theory, we can derive the conclusion that you form your belief that *p* based on either of a belief that *affirming p would be apt* or a belief that it would be likely apt (or a trivial equivalent). Given basis identity + the indirectness thesis, accepting an alethic aims theory commits one to the claim that when a belief is formed through judgment based on doxastic evidence it is also *target-based.*[[25]](#footnote-25)

This “target-basing” consequence is troubling, and indeed enough to sink alethic aims theory, in my view. For, often the bases on which we form a belief, when we do so through judgment based on doxastic evidence, do *not* include target beliefs. When I judge and therein come to believe that Candidate *X* will win, plausibly my bases do not include any of the following or their trivial equivalents: *a belief that X will win (or likely will win), a belief that if I affirmed that Candidate X will win my affirmation would be apt (or likely apt), etc.* They include rather, as my direct bases, beliefs about the polls and perhaps their reliability, and as my indirect bases, whatever bases I have for the latter beliefs.

The problems get worse. Let’s return to the belief-forming role of judgment. I described this role in terms of basis identity. But this, although correct as far as it goes, is incomplete. When we form a belief through judgment, not only are the bases on which we judge identical to the bases on which we form the belief, but in addition the structure of the chain of basing is plausibly identical as well. Suppose one judges that *p* on the basis of a target belief *B1*, and *B1* itself is in turn based on a belief *B2*, so that one’s judgment is based indirectly on *B2*. This same structure of basing should hold for the bases on which one forms one’s belief. One forms the belief that *p* indirectly based on *B2*. And if a mental state *M* is one’s basis for judgment that *p* only indirectly*,* then *M* should also be one’s basis for forming the belief that *p* onlyindirectly. Let’s call this **identity of basing-structure.[[26]](#footnote-26)**

If I am right that identity of basing-structure holds when one forms a belief through judgment, then if one can judge only indirectly based on doxastic evidence*,* the same holds of the bases on which one forms one’s belief through judgment. But this gives us a highly implausible consequence: through judgment, one cannot form a belief directly based on doxastic evidence. One can’t form the belief through judgment that Candidate *X* will win *directly* based on one’s belief about the polls or anything like that. One must form this belief, more directly, on the basis of a target belief. This is not only implausible in itself; it is once again surprising that our theory of judgment should compel us to take such an implausible position.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Even this is not the end of the problems. There are further difficulties about whether one *could* form a belief through judgment based a target belief, or if one could at all, whether one could do so *with epistemic propriety*. One can’t form a belief that *p* based on the belief that *p*, at least not for the first time. And it is doubtful whether one could form a belief that *p* based on a belief that it’s likely that *p* with epistemic propriety. This seems to require a kind of leap from “likely true” to “true” which is at best questionable. And, again, it is even more surprising that one would needto make this leap, especially if the doxastic evidence is strong enough to justify belief that *p*. Why not form the belief that *p* directly based on that evidence, without going through the weaker likelihood belief? But you can’t do this, if an alethic aims theory is correct.

**6. Is judgment a way of forming beliefs at all?**

We’ve seen that alethic aims theories land us in serious trouble if we assume – reasonably – that judgment serves the belief-forming roles I’ve identified. But it’s worth at least exploring the possibility of denying this assumption, despite its reasonableness. I don’t see much hope for holding onto the claim that judgment is a normal way of forming beliefs but one in which either basis-identity or identity of basing-structure fails. The better option, I think, is to deny that judgment is a normal way of forming a belief at all. This would still leave the alethic aims theorist having to admit that judgment cannot be directly based on evidence, but at least she wouldn’t have to make implausible claims about the bases on which we form beliefs.

Denying that judgment plays a belief-forming role wouldn’t prevent the alethic aims theorist from claiming that judgment and belief are closely related. She could of course maintain that judgment is a normal way of manifesting belief.

One worry is why it would *seem* to us that judgment is a normal way of coming to believe. Why would we get this wrong? A truth-aim theorist may offer the following answer. When you are trying to figure out whether *p*, you are aiming to affirm truly on whether *p*, and as soon as you come to believe *p*, you will straightaway affirm that *p* in this aim, i.e., you’ll judge that *p*. Thus, in such inquiries, judgment and belief will arise pretty much “in tandem,” and it’s *this* that fools us into thinking that judgment is a way of acquiring a belief.

This “in tandem” explanation faces a problem. Notice what the truth-aim theory predicts about the timings of judgments vs. comings to believe: in an inquiry in which you aim to affirm truly on whether *p*, as soon as you have sufficient grounds to think *p* more likely than not, we would expect you to affirm that *p*, even if these grounds aren’t strong enough to give you a belief that *p*. There would be no regular experience, in inquiry, of a constant conjunction between judgment and coming to believe – judgment would very often precede belief-acquisition. If we’re fooled into thinking judgment is a way of coming to believe, this can’t be the reason why.

This is a serious problem for the truth-aim theory’s explanation of the supposed error, but other alethic aims theories may be able to pull it off better. (The problem is related to Sosa’s observation about guessing vs. judgment.) On the aptness view, *p*’s being more likely than not is insufficient grounds for affirming *p* with the aim of affirming aptly on whether *p*. We would need stronger grounds, perhaps grounds nearly good enough to serve as a basis for belief that *p*. So, on the aptness view, it does seem that in inquiry, judgment and belief would, at least usually, arise in tandem.

My main worry about giving up the belief-forming role of judgment lies elsewhere. When inquiring about whether *p*, we very often want to make a judgment whether *p*. On the current suggestion, judgment could at best *manifest* belief. Judgment would thus be a sign or basis by which we could come to know we had acquired a belief. But this is not the primary reason why, in the midst of inquiry, we care about making a judgment. Rather, we care because we want to arrive at a high-quality belief, indeed knowledge, on whether *p*, and we think of judgment, when based on good evidence, as a way of doing this.[[28]](#footnote-28) We think of judgment as a way to make up our mind, rather than merely a sign or basis we can use to tell that our mind is made up.

It could turn out, of course, that our minds work very differently than we think they do. We think judgments are a way of arriving at beliefs, and we care about them in inquiry because of this. But what if we’re wrong about their relation to belief-formation? Recall the key features of judgment identified at the beginning of this paper – temporal, motivational and normative profiles, and roles in belief-manifestation and in belief-acquisition. Perhaps it will turn out that there is no actually instantiated phenomenon that has the first four features (minus the directness of basing on evidence) and which is also a way of coming to believe. The alethic aims theorist might ask us: would we say there is no such thing as judgment should this possibility be actual? The theorist might encourage us to answer *no*, i.e., to concede that judgment would still exist despite not being a way in which we ever do come to believe.

However, it’s one thing for a theory of judgment to allow for the possibility that we do make judgments in a world in which we never acquire beliefs through judgment. This may well be a virtue of such a theory. But it’s quite another for a theory to rule out the possibility of coming to believe that *p* through judging that *p*. And I take it that given the centrality of the assumed belief-forming role for judgment, and how it makes sense of why we want to go in for judgment when we inquire, we should at the very least require that our theories not to rule it out. But alethic aims theories do just this.

Consider a comparison case. In outlining desiderata for a theory of practical decisions, we might well point to key features like the temporal, motivational and normative profiles of decision, as well as its role in intention-acquisition. There is good reason for including the latter. Not only is it a platitude that decision is a normal way to acquire an intention; its playing this role helps explain why we go in for making decisions. We do so – at least in cases in which we are deciding about future action – because we think that by doing so, we can come to have intentions which will then do their work in guiding us to perform appropriate actions at the appropriate time. Although we shouldn’t require a theory of decision to guarantee that if there are decisions at all then decisions do sometimes are ways people acquire intentions, we should require a theory of decision to allow for this possibility.

**7. Conclusion**

There are serious obstacles to identifying judgment with alethic affirmation. Doing so prevents us from acknowledging that judgments, and the beliefs we form through judgment, can be directly based on evidence. Since alethic aims theories hold out the most hope for the view that judgments are acts done with aims, I think we should turn away from the view that judgment is a kind of act done with an aim. Judgments are not aimed-direct, purposeful actions; they are not intentional actions.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Where does that leave us? Recall my account of why one might come to accept an alethic aims theory. One might reason roughly as follows: 1) judgment is an act; but 2) if it is an act, surely it is an affirmational act; but 3) it can’t be the same as affirmation, because it requires that the *aim* with which one makes the affirmation must be appropriately truth-related; and so, 4) the most attractive account of judgment is an alethic aims account. Where does this reasoning go wrong? Perhaps at step (1). We should entertain the possibility that judgment is not an act at all but a non-agential event; it is not something that we do but something that happens to us.[[30]](#footnote-30) But another possibility is to deny step (2). The suggestion might be that judgment is indeed an act, but not an act of affirmation, at least if affirmation is understood as on the model of assertion. It might instead be an act of belief-formation or belief-retention.[[31]](#footnote-31) The hope would be that these are acts that can be done for reasons, but which, unlike assertion, are not acts we do in pursuit of our aims.[[32]](#footnote-32)

I close not with speculation about the correct theory, but with a suggestion about where to look for it. We should look to phenomena which, in addition to having the right temporal and normative profiles, can be directly based on evidence and can enable us thereby to form beliefs directly based on evidence.[[33]](#footnote-33)

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1. Recent writers who claim that judgment is an act include McHugh (2013), Peacocke (1998), Shah and Velleman (2006), Shoemaker (2009), Sosa (2015, forthcoming), and Soteriou (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There are weaker aim-involving conceptions of judgment, ones that back off from the robust agency associated with acts agents do with aims but which take judgment to be more robustly agential than mere doings. For instance, one approach is to think of judgment as an act that *itself* has a certain sort of aim, regardless of any aim on the part of the agent. The aim would be functional rather than a matter of intention, desire, or the like. Another approach relaxes the requirement that the aim directing the action be the agent’s; it allows the aim instead to be attributable to a subpersonal system or state. I am not arguing against either approach here. Both views, I think, take a clear notion – persons performing acts in pursuit of (their) aims – and gesture at extending it in two different ways. We are left with metaphors that need spelling out. Before or at least in addition to exploring such metaphors, it is worthwhile seeing whether the clearer view is defensible. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. To give just one example of a proposed explanation: perhaps judgment is an act or event that “embodies its subject’s answering a question in Hieronymi’s (2008) sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. According to Sosa (2015, 66), you can affirm a proposition for any number of ends, e.g., “instilling confidence, reducing dissonance, etc.” Shah and Velleman (2005, 504) maintain that you can affirm a proposition as part of a story you tell yourself, knowing it to be fictional, or in making an assumption you know to be false, or in making a conjecture, and so on. The exact contours of affirmation are not easy to describe, but the same is true of assertion. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This definition of alethic aims theories is narrow in certain ways. For one thing, the definition refers only to aims concerning *whether* questions. Surely, a theory that explains judgment in terms of aims directed on *other* sorts of questions should qualify as an alethic aim theory. Another limitation is in the exact content of the aim. For instance, suppose I affirm that *p* with the aim thereby to affirm that *p* if *p* (or iff *p*) but don’t care much about affirming that not-*p* if not-*p*. I am presumably not, then, affirming with the aim to affirm truly on whether *p,* for that aim is satisfied equally well if I affirm that not*-p* if not-*p* is the case. Inspired by William James, for instance, I might want to affirm that God exists if God exists but not care much about affirming that God doesn’t exist if God doesn’t exist. With complications, I could make adjustments to broaden my definition to capture such theories. But insofar as the problems I will present for alethic aim theories do not depend on these subtle matters, I will stick with the simpler, narrower definition. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The aptness-aim theory resembles a theory invoking knowledge: to judge that *p* is to affirm that *p* with the aim of affirming what one is positioned to know on the question of whether *p*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Recent advocates of alethic aim theories, in addition to Sosa and Shah and Velleman, include McHugh (2011, 248), and Roeber (2019, 843). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. But see note 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For more on Vendler’s situation types and for a subtle discussion of linguistic tests for them, including discussions of aspectual shifts, see Walkova (2012). For further philosophical discussion of the temporal features of judgment, see Soteriou (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Some might prefer to say that non-evidential reasons, such as monetary rewards, can’t *epistemically* justify judgments. This leaves room for the possibility that they can justify judgments in some other sense. Still, it seems that even if the practical benefits of judgment are reasons to judge, they are reasons of the “wrong kind.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For endorsements of the claim that we can come to believe through judgment, see Friedman (2019, 681), McHugh (2011, 246), Peacocke (1998, 88), Shah and Velleman (2005, 503), Toribio (2011, 346), to list only a few. Philosophers who agree that judgment is a way of coming to believe may still disagree about the metaphysical relationship between the judgment and the belief formed. According to Jenkins (2018, 13), following Ryle, when you come to believe through judgment, your judgment is token identical with your coming to believe. Given a plausible account of the relation between *coming to ϕ* and *ϕ-ing*, he concludes that at the time at which you judge (and thereby come to believe), you also believe. Others regard the relationship as causal, e.g., Cassam (2010) and Shah and Velleman (2005). See Boyle (2009) and Jenkins (2018) for critiques of the causal view. It might appear that the causal theorist must claim that when we form a belief through judgment, we form the belief based on the judgment, and thus the causal theorist must deny basis identity (insofar as judgments aren’t self-based). But I think this isn’t mandatory: they can take a judgment to cause but not serve as a basis for one’s belief-formation. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This attractive account of how evidence for *p* provides justification for judging that *p* is unavailable on the less agential views of judgment mentioned in note 2. If the alethic aim is not the person’s own aim, it is not clear how it, together with the person’s having evidence that affirming *p* (or generally doing A toward *p)*, could provide the person justification to do A. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. One possible exception here is the evidential aims theory of judgment, on which to judge that *p* is to affirm *p* in an am to affirm what’s evidentially supported on whether *p.* I consider this view in section 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Conee and Feldman (2008) for a discussion of these issues and their relationship to epistemology. See also McGrath (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For discussion, see Comesaña and McGrath (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. When I discuss evidential mental states in what follows, I will sometimes omit mention of the proposition with respect to which they are evidential when the relevant proposition is clear from context. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Two clarifications here. First, there is some subtlety about exactly what your probabilistic belief is. Depending on the case, you might believe that *x* is very likely the *F*, believe that *x* is more likely than not to be the *F*, or believe only that *x* is more likely to be the *F* than the other candidates. The reader is invited to read my use of ‘likely’ loosely enough to cover all such possibilities. Second, in appealing to probabilistic beliefs, I run the danger of entering into a thicket of issues about their nature. When one has such a belief, should this be understood as believing a proposition about some sort of probability, e.g., epistemic probability? Or should it instead be understood as a matter of having a graded state of confidence, a “credence” in the proposition that *x* is the *F*? I cannot completely sidestep this debate. I will assume that when you believe that it’s likely that *p* you do have the appropriate state of confidence. I leave open whether the belief that it’s likely that *p* isa state of confidence or is instead a belief in a proposition which grounds such a state of confidence. Part of my thinking here is that, although believing that *p* is a further “plunge” on the question whether *p* beyond believing it’s likely that *p*, the latter is itself some sort of plunge, and we should understand this plunge to involve confidence. If believing something likely had no implications for confidence concerning it, there are reasons to worry whether could play its role in rationalizing action. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. I should address a terminological issue at this point. Is *p* evidence for *p*? Is *likely p* evidence for *p*? If so, then what I’m calling target beliefs could also count as evidential mental states. Rather than dipping into this debate, I stipulate that ‘evidential mental states’ is to apply to *mere* evidential mental states, and so to exclude target beliefs. My focus is on ordinary garden-variety evidence, not fringe cases involving the very proposition itself or a probabilistic qualification of it. The motivational profile of judgment needs no revision in light of this clarification of my usage. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Thanks to an anonymous referee for this objection and the next one. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. There are states one can be in with or for aims: one can live in a McMansion with an aim to impress one’s friends. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For defenses of the taking condition, see Boghossian (2014, 2019) and Hlobil (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. McHugh and Way (2016) discuss Lewis-Carroll-style worries, along with other problems. See also Balcerak Jackson and Balcerak Jackson (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Given that the aim is to affirm the truth on whether *p*, the corresponding target beliefs, to be precise, would be the belief that *p is the truth on whether p* and that *p is likely the truth on whether p*. These are trivially equivalent to beliefs that *p* and that likely *p*, and so I take the latter to count as target beliefs. No such trivial equivalence exists when the relevant aim is aptness. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Thanks to Andrew Chignell for raising this question. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. If we make full use of the unrestricted indirectness thesis, the consequence would be even more astounding: whenever a belief is formed through judgment based on *any evidential mental state* it is also target-based. For, we do sometimes form beliefs through judgment solely based on nondoxastic evidential mental states – perceptual experiences, intuitions, episodic memories – and not based on any beliefs at all and so not based on any target beliefs. It is debatable just where doxastic bases give out, but it is plausible that they do give out at some point, at which point the relevant “basic beliefs” have nondoxastic bases. At the very least, it would be surprising, and not in a desirable way, if our theory of judgment required us to deny this. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Suppose I judge that the Yankees will lose the game based on my belief that they are behind by 10 runs in the 8th inning. And suppose I believe the latter based on a belief that ESPN reports it. Suppose I form the belief that Yankees will lose through my judgment. Could it be that I’m forming this belief directly based on a belief that ESPN reported that the Yankees are 10 runs behind in the 8th and only indirectly on the basis of a belief that they are 10 runs behind in the 8th inning? Could the structure for the basing of my judgment fail to match that of my belief in this way? This seems absurd. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The evidential aims theory has similar implausible consequences. On this view, in forming a belief that *p* through judgment based on evidence for *p*, one’s belief would have to be based on a belief to the effect that *p is what’s evidentially supported on whether p.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Silins (2012, 308) argues that judgment plays a key role as a guide to belief, insofar as judging that *p* can give one immediate justification to believe that one believes that *p*. For a similar view, see Peacocke (1999). I do not deny that judgment plays such an epistemic role. I am claiming only that when we are inquiring, the primary reason we care about judgment is not its power to justify second-order beliefs about our beliefs but its being a way we can arrive at justified and knowledgeable first-order beliefs. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. My conclusion contrasts with those of Sosa (2015) who views judgments as acts with intentions (66) and claims that when a judgment is apt, the judgment “is an intentional action of affirming aptly” (166). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See O’Shaughnessy (1980), Jenkins (2018), and especially Strawson (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See Koziolek (2020) for an account along these lines, Koziolek’s account is knowledge first: it understands judgment as in the first instance the acquisition of knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. If one wanted to allow for the possibility of judgment without either belief or knowledge (and so without the acquiring or retaining belief or knowledge), one might entertain the view that judgment is an act of the sort that *normally* constitutes the acquisition or retention of belief or knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. I dedicate this paper to Ernest Sosa. I am grateful to two referees for *Synthese* for valuable comments. For illuminating discussion of the ideas of the paper, I thank Andrew Chignell, Jeremy Fantl, Chris Willard-Kyle, Dave Liebesman, Ernest Sosa, and the participants of the Spring 2021 Rutgers graduate epistemology seminar I co-taught with Sosa. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)