

## Propositional Justification and Doxastic Justification

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### Introduction

Epistemologists distinguish between two notions of epistemic justification: *having justification to believe that p* versus *justifiedly believing that p*. To keep track of these notions, epistemologists typically refer to the former as *propositional* justification and to the latter as *doxastic* justification.<sup>1</sup> The most obvious difference between these notions is that propositional justification does not require belief: one can have justification to believe *p* without actually believing it. Consider, for example, someone who knows that Simon said he would be home, and knows that Simon is reliable. Other things being equal, this person could go on to justifiedly believe (that is, to have a doxastically justified belief) that Simon is probably home. But this person might simply not have this belief at all. In such a case, one would still have propositional justification to believe that Simon is probably home.

Most epistemologists, however, tend to think that there is more to doxastic justification than merely forming a belief in what one has propositional justification to believe. Most agree that being doxastically justified depends on there being an appropriate connection between one's reasons for believing that *p* and one's actual state of believing that *p*. Someone who believes that *p* on a whim, for example, lacks a doxastically justified belief that *p*, even if she has fantastic reasons for believing that *p* that were left unengaged. The nature of this appropriate connection, of course, is a matter of debate.

Bearing all of this in mind, we can state what we will call *the reasons-first picture* of propositional and doxastic justification:

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<sup>1</sup> This distinction was originally introduced by Roderick Firth (1978) as 'propositional warrant' and 'doxastic warrant'. The terminology for the same distinction has differed among epistemologists. Some prefer 'ex ante justification' and 'ex post justification' (cf. Goldman 1979), some prefer 'justification' and 'well-founded belief' (cf. Feldman and Conee 1985), and some prefer 'justifiable' and 'justified' (cf. Pollock and Cruz 1999).

**Propositional Justification (PJ):** S has propositional justification to believe that p iff S has sufficient epistemic reasons to believe that p.

**Doxastic Justification (DJ):** S has a doxastically justified belief in p iff (i) S has propositional justification to believe that p, (ii) S believes that p, and (iii) S's belief in p is appropriately connected to S's sufficient epistemic reasons to believe it.

These characterizations are quite common, and they bear on a variety of important philosophical disputes. First, there is the matter of the nature of the *truth connection* responsible for the epistemic character of the relevant kind of justification. Internalists and externalists have different answers, and this will impact one's views on the nature of epistemic reasons and, consequently, on the nature of justification. We will try to stay neutral on this debate. Second, there are a range of cases where agents arguably have knowledge but lack any basis for their belief. Beliefs produced by proprioception may be examples of this (cf. Littlejohn 2015). But if knowledge is constituted by doxastically justified belief, then these will be cases where one has a doxastically justified belief without satisfying DJ's (iii). This would mean that DJ is either false or in need of qualification. Alternatively, one could save DJ by rejecting the idea that knowledge requires having doxastically justified belief (cf. Sylvan 2018; Millar 2019).<sup>2</sup> We will try to stay neutral on this debate as well. Third, there is the matter of the relation between the positive normative property expressed with the term 'justification' and other positive normative properties referred to with notions like *goodness*, *permissibility*, *fittingness*, *blamelessness*, *praiseworthiness*, and so forth.<sup>3</sup> We intend our discussion to be compatible with most alternatives.

On the widely held, yet sometimes controversial assumption that our *evidence* is just our reasons for belief, this reasons-first picture is just an expression of a kind of evidentialism. In what follows, we will discuss some of the details of this reasons-first picture and then consider three key challenges to its plausibility.

## 1. The Basing Relation

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<sup>2</sup> Both Sylvan (2018) and Millar (2019) reject the idea that knowing P entails believing P *in response to reasons* one has for believing P. Though, as Sylvan (2018) and Millar (2019) are careful to point out, this doesn't imply that one lacks propositional justification to believe P if one knows P.

<sup>3</sup> See Silva (2017a), Oliveira (2018 and forthcoming), and Beddor (2017), for recent contrasting discussions of the relation between epistemic justification and other normative properties.

The reasons-first picture is silent about what makes a belief appropriately connected to its reasons. But most epistemologists have further described this connection by appealing to a *basing relation*.<sup>4</sup> We can capture this addition in the following way:

**(Basing)** S's belief that p is appropriately connected to S's sufficient epistemic reasons, R, to believe that p iff S's belief that p is based on R.

This characterization is fairly neutral. For while it explicates condition (iii) of DJ in terms of basing, it doesn't say what that relation is. But there are two broad views about this.

The first kind of view is broadly *causal*. Roughly: S's belief that p is based on reason r when r caused S to form the belief that p. Naturally, different accounts of causation produce different pictures of the basing relation. Paul Moser (1989, 157) opts for a causal-associationist account; John Turri (2011, 393) opts for a causal-manifestation account; Kevin McCain (2012, 364) opts for a causal-interventionist account. Causal accounts of the basing relation, moreover, have also been enlarged to include a counterfactual clause. According to Marshal Swain (1981, 74), a belief is based on a reason not only when the reason causes the belief but also when the reason *would have* caused the belief, had what is directly causing it not been in place. On all of these causal accounts, the main challenge is providing a plausible and informative explanation of the difference between deviant and non-deviant causal chains (cf. Plantinga 1993, 69; Pollock and Cruz 1999, 35-36). This is no surprise, of course, since causal accounts in general are plagued by deviance concerns.

The second view of the nature of the basing relation is broadly *doxastic*. Roughly: S's belief that p is based on reason r when S has a meta-belief about there being an appropriate evidential relation between r and p. On this account, r needs not have caused p, in any way, nor does it need to bear some counterfactual support relation to it. Some, of course, add further non-causal conditions to the account. Joseph Tolliver (1982, 159), for example, requires a new belief in r to increase the subjective probability of p.

There are also further, hybrid views that require both a causal and a doxastic condition to be satisfied (cf. Audi 1993 and Korcz 2000). What unifies these pure and hybrid views, at any rate, is the acceptance of the meta-belief condition as at least a necessary condition for basing, and sometimes as

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<sup>4</sup> For a small but representative sample, see Korcz (2000, 525–6), Pryor (2001, 104), Kvanvig (2003, 43-4), Huemer (2007, 40), and Silins (2007, 109).

a sufficient condition as well. This means that, despite their differences, they all face a similar central challenge. Much like deviant causal chains, there seems to be deviant meta-beliefs as well: beliefs about there being an appropriate evidential relation between  $r$  and  $p$  that, intuitively, fail to establish the kind of basing relation that could make one doxastically justified) and are, moreover, entirely irrelevant to that end (cf. Evans 2013, 2949). If I form the belief that I never have false beliefs and take that as evidence for the truth of everything else I believe, it seems hardly plausible to suggest that my beliefs are therefore based on this belief, or that this kind of basing is relevant to my justification.

There is much to say for and against available accounts of the basing relation and we cannot discuss them in great detail here.<sup>5</sup> It is worth mentioning, however, that disputes about the nature of the basing relation are often underpinned by explicit guiding criteria that the correct account is intuitively required to meet. Thomas Kelly (2002, 175), for example, insists that someone's reasons for believing something—the actual bases for their beliefs—are reflected in the conditions under which they would continue to believe it; John Turri (2011, 385) insists that reasons for believing are “difference-makers,” and that the basing relation is not a “brute relation”; Ian Evans (2013, 2946) insists on a five-part list, claiming that (a) the basing relation is not asymmetric, (b) that beliefs can have multiple bases, (c) that backwards basing can occur, (d) that basing termination can occur, and (e) that unconscious basing can occur as well. Whether the appropriate connection between beliefs and sufficient reasons is causal or doxastic (or something else), here we see that even the contours of the phenomena that these accounts are attempting to capture are under dispute.

## **2. Putting (Basing) to Work**

Despite disagreement about its details, (Basing) has seemed to many epistemologists to be both intuitive and useful. It has in fact reached the status of orthodoxy within those working with the reasons-first picture. Accordingly, (Basing) has been used in a variety of influential arguments over the years.

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<sup>5</sup> Aside from the problem of deviant causal chains, causal accounts face a well-known counter-example, due to Keith Lehrer (1971), commonly called “gypsy lawyer cases”: cases where (i) one has sufficient reasons for believing that  $p$ , (ii) one recognizes them as sufficient reasons for  $p$ , (iii) one psychologically cannot believe that  $p$  on the basis of those reasons, but (iv) one forms the belief that  $p$  anyway on the basis of something else (see Korcz 2000, 528-32; Kvanvig 2003, 44-46). Aside from the problem of deviant meta-beliefs, doxastic accounts also struggle to account for unconscious basing and the possibility of mistaken beliefs about one's bases (see Evans 2013, 2949-51). For a recent assessment of these accounts see Neta (2019), who has introduced a dilemma for both causal and doxastic views and in reply offers a novel kind of hybrid between the two.

Nicholas Silins (2007), for example, makes central use of (Basing) in his argument against *conservatism* about perceptual justification (the view that the justificatory power of one's perceptual experiences depends on one's further justification to disbelieve any skeptical hypothesis about that experience).<sup>6</sup> The problem is that we typically do not base our perceptual beliefs on our anti-skeptical reasons. Using 'well-founded' as his term for 'doxastic justification', Silins (2007, 118) writes:

If Conservatism is true, then our perceptual beliefs are well-founded only if they are based on our independent justifications to reject skeptical hypotheses about our experiences. It's hard to see that we actually do base our perceptual beliefs on any such independent justifications, whether or not it is in principle possible for us to do so. So the Conservative may be forced to accept the moderate skeptical claim that our actual perceptual beliefs are not well-founded.

Here the bridge between "we do not base b on x" and "b is not doxastically justified" is (Basing). If being doxastically justified were not a matter of basing one's beliefs on one's justifying reasons, then conservatism wouldn't have the skeptical results alleged by Silins.<sup>7</sup>

Jonathan Schaffer (2010), for another example, makes central use of (Basing) in his development of a new kind of Cartesian skeptical argument. Descartes' original argument claims that the possibility of an evil demon threatens our knowledge of any contingent external-world belief by keeping alive the possibility that any such belief is false. The threat, however, is limited: the evil demon cannot threaten our knowledge, for example, that we ourselves exist, since it is impossible to believe this and be wrong about it (this is Descartes' justly famous *cogito ergo sum*). But Schaffer (2010, 231) identifies an even more powerful threat that is based on the possibility of a debasing demon:

The debasing demon preys not on the truth requirement but rather on the basing requirement. She throws her victims into the belief state on an improper basis, while leaving them with the impression as if they had proceeded properly. So for instance, the debasing demon might force me into believing that I have hands on the basis of

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<sup>6</sup> See Wright (2002) and Silva (2013) for a defense of conservatism. See Pryor (2004) for a defense of *liberalism* (the view that the justificatory power of one's perceptual experiences can be immediate and non-inferential).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Huemer (2007, 39-42) makes a similar argument, but with a wider scope. Since all of our beliefs are ultimately based on appearances, either appearances are sufficient justifying reasons or no belief is ever doxastically justified.

a blind guess or mere wishful thinking, while leaving me with the impression as if I had come to this belief on the basis of the visual evidence.

Once again, the bridge premise is (Basing)—together with the widely accepted assumption that knowledge requires doxastic justification. If being doxastically justified were not a matter of basing one's beliefs on one's justifying reasons, then Schaffer's debasing demon would cease to be a threat.<sup>8</sup>

There is one more influential use of (Basing) that bears extended discussion. Pollock and Cruz (1999), for example, make central use of (Basing) in their argument against *coherentism* (the view where one's justification for believing that *p* derives from the coherence of one's overall belief system). The problem, once again, is that such a view has severe skeptical consequences. Given the contingent psychological fact that we cannot (or at least do not) base our beliefs on facts about overall coherence, coherentism makes it the case that we are never doxastically justified. Once again, (Basing) here serves as a key premise: Coherentism is only in trouble if doxastic justification requires basing one's belief on one's justifying reasons.<sup>9</sup>

This argument is especially noteworthy, however, given the recent and rapid rise of Bayesian epistemology. *Bayesianism* consists in at least two claims: first, that someone's credences at a certain time should be probabilistically coherent (i.e. Probabilism); second, that someone's credences across times should be updated in accordance with the conditional probability of those credences on the new evidence, if any, that has been acquired (i.e. Conditionalization).<sup>10</sup> Though Bayesian epistemologists typically speak of credences which someone "ought to have", or is "permitted" to have, it is no stretch to understand these claims as being about what is propositionally justified for someone at a certain time. If what is probabilistically coherent for me is credence *C* regarding *p*, then I am propositionally justified in having credence *C* in *p* at that time. Arguably, Bayesianism is a version of coherentism. As such, the anti-coherentist argument mentioned in the previous paragraph, based on (Basing), creates a serious problem for this incredibly popular view.<sup>11</sup>

Cameron Gibbs (forthcoming), however, has recently offered a reply to this challenge on behalf of the Bayesian. According to Gibbs (forthcoming, sec. 5), the Bayesian can accept an alternative

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<sup>8</sup> See Ballantyne and Evans (2013), however, for replies to Schaffer.

<sup>9</sup> See Korcz (2000, 550) and Cohen (2002, 325) for similar arguments.

<sup>10</sup> For a more careful presentation of Bayesianism, see Easwaran (2011).

<sup>11</sup> See Miller (2016) for arguments against this.

account of the basing relation (distinct from the causal and doxastic accounts) according to which we are, in fact, capable of basing our credences on the fact that we satisfy a formal requirement of probabilistic coherence such as Probabilism. Gibbs' preferred account is dispositional: "S's credence  $c$  in  $P$  is based on  $R$  iff  $S$  has the disposition to revise her credence in  $P$  if  $R$  does not hold."<sup>12</sup> Someone's credence  $C$  in  $p$  can be based on the fact that  $C$  satisfies Probabilism and Conditionalization, that is, if it turns out that they are disposed to revise  $C$  if it does not in fact satisfy those constraints.

But it is unclear whether Gibbs' suggestion succeeds in avoiding skeptical consequences. On an intuitive sense of dispositions—Gibbs does not offer a preferred account—it is not clear that we are disposed to track Probabilism and Coherentism. Gibbs (forthcoming, sec. 5) correctly insists that we *could* be so disposed. For "[i]t could be the case that the structure of the cognitive system is set up that so that it is simply a mechanical matter that the credences will be revised if they don't satisfy the Bayesian constraints." But empirical evidence seems to suggest that this is not the case: human cognitive systems fare quite badly at tracking probabilistic relations.<sup>13</sup> Even aside from the empirical evidence, the formal requirements imposed by Probabilism and Conditionalization are so fine grained that even *a priori* it seems entirely implausible to suggest that anyone has a disposition that tracks them at any time. Nonetheless, Gibbs' suggestion is certainly a positive development for Bayesians and coherentists in general. Perhaps there is an account of dispositions that can avoid these (Basing)-centered skeptical worries and vindicate the combination of the reasons-first picture and some form of coherentism.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Challenge #1: Basing and Proper Basing

As influential as (Basing) has been, it seems as if merely basing one's belief on one's sufficient reasons is not enough for creating the "appropriate" kind of connection that is characteristic of doxastic justification. Consider a case discussed by John Turri (2010, 315-316):

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<sup>12</sup> This is a Bayesian version of the account developed by Evans (2013).

<sup>13</sup> See Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky (1982) for a collection of foundational work in the empirical psychology of human inference.

<sup>14</sup> Wedgwood's (2018) picture is one where basing is a matter of  $S$  manifesting a disposition that across a sufficiently wide range of nearby cases non-accidentally results in  $S$ 's having a credal or doxastic attitude that it is propositionally justified for her to have. This is another promising way forward for Bayesians worried about the basing demand on doxastic justification.

Consider two... jurors, Miss Proper and Miss Improper, sitting in judgment of Mr. Mansour. Each paid close attention throughout the trial. As a result, each knows the following things:

- (P1) Mansour had a motive to kill the victim.
- (P2) Mansour had previously threatened to kill the victim.
- (P3) Multiple eyewitnesses place Mansour at the crime scene.
- (P4) Mansour's fingerprints were all over the murder weapon.

<Mansour is guilty> is propositionally justified for both jurors because each knows (P1–P4). As it happens, each comes to believe <Mansour is guilty> as the result of an episode of explicit, conscious reasoning that features (P1–P4) essentially. Miss Proper reasons like so:

(Proper Reasoning) (P1–P4) make it overwhelmingly likely that Mansour is guilty. (P1–P4) are true. Therefore, Mansour is guilty.

Miss Improper, by contrast, reasons like this:

(Improper Reasoning) The tealeaves say that (P1–P4) make it overwhelmingly likely that Mansour is guilty. (P1–P4) are true. Therefore, Mansour is guilty.

It seems clear that while both Miss Proper and Miss Improper have sufficient epistemic reasons to believe Mansour is guilty, and while both base their belief in Mansour's guilt on those reasons, only Miss Proper is doxastically justified in that belief. This is because only Miss Proper bases her belief on her evidence *in the right sort of way*.<sup>15</sup> This suggests the following modification of (Basing):

**(Proper Basing)** S's belief that p is appropriately connected to S's sufficient epistemic reasons, R, to believe P iff S's belief that p is *properly* based on R.

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<sup>15</sup> A common reaction to this case is to think that Miss Improper's error is that she believes partially on the basis of a false or bad reasons as well as good reasons. There are two problems with this. First, there are cases involving the application of bad inference rules that yield the same problem (cf. Turri 2010). Second, we all regularly believe things partially on the basis of bad reasons (cf. Turri 2010). So imposing such a constraint would yield a problematic form of skepticism about good belief. So some other explanation of Miss Improper's problem is, at least, well-motivated.



This formulation is once again fairly neutral. How exactly one should understand the property of being “properly based” should be a matter of substantive debate (cf. Silva 2015a, 953-4).

One suggestion, for example, is that Miss Improper’s problem is that she bases her belief in Mansour’s guilt in part on her belief that the tea leaves are trustworthy while having evidence (or at least it being the case that she ought to have evidence) that suggests that tea leaf readings are unreliable. After all, our intuitions about the impropriety of Miss Improper’s belief vanish if we assume that she has sufficient higher-order *evidence* for the trustworthiness of tea leaves.

For further reason to think that higher-order evidence can impact whether or not one has doxastic justification consider a variation on Turri’s case, from Silva (2017b, 317):

Miss Stubborn, like both Miss Proper and Miss Improper, also pays careful attention throughout the trial. So she also comes to know (P1–P4) and thus comes to have propositional justification to believe <Mansour is guilty>. Moreover, she ends up using the same kind of reasoning that Miss Proper uses. But she does so after having a conversation with Sherlock Holmes – a known expert at assessing trial evidence. After their conversation about the trial, Sherlock tells her that (P1–P4) do not make it likely that Mansour is guilty. However, this is an uncharacteristic moment for Sherlock for he’s actually mistaken about this. But Miss Stubborn has no reason to think Sherlock is mistaken apart from her own non-expert and far less reliable assessment of (P1–P4). Moreover, she doesn’t have any reason to think she is intellectually better placed to assess the trial evidence in the present instance, indeed she has reason to think she’s much worse at assessing the trial evidence than Sherlock. But being stubborn she prefers her own assessment of the trial. Thus she reasons as follows:

(Stubborn Reasoning) Sherlock said (P1–P4) do not make it likely that Mansour is guilty, and he’s certainly better placed to make a judgment about this matter than I am. Moreover, I have no reason to think Sherlock is mistaken apart from my own less-than-expert assessment of (P1–P4). Indeed, it’s more likely that Sherlock is correct and I’m wrong. But never mind that. For (P1–P4) make it overwhelmingly likely that Mansour is guilty. (P1–P4) are true. Therefore, Mansour is guilty.

Like Miss Improper, it’s intuitive to think that Miss Stubborn lacks a doxastically justified belief. While we have to speculate about the higher-order evidence Miss Improper has (or may not have,

but ought to have), it's clear in the case of Miss Stubborn that it is her higher-order evidence that *makes* her resulting belief in Mansour's guilt inappropriately held.

Those who reject the possibility of propositionally justified akratic states would likely explain Miss Stubborn's lack of doxastic justification in terms of her higher-order evidence defeating her propositional justification to believe that Mansour is guilty. However, this way of addressing the problem will not be available to externalists, whose theories of justification tend to ensure the possibility of having proposition justification for being in an akratic states—though externalists sometimes add caveats to rule it out (cf. Goldman 1986).<sup>16</sup> For externalists and others who allow for propositionally justified akrasia, one lesson to draw from the case of Miss Stubborn is that the proper basing that is required for doxastic justification requires that one, at least, *lack* propositional justification to believe that one's evidence doesn't support believing *p*.<sup>17</sup> The challenge then becomes one of *explaining* just why doxastic justification (and presumably knowledge) requires such an absence even if propositionally justified akratic states are possible. See Neta (2019) for a recent account of the basing relation that navigates just this issue.

#### 4. Challenge #2: The Question of Fundamentality

The reasons-first picture characterizes propositional justification in terms of epistemic reasons and doxastic justification in terms of propositional justification. But not all epistemologists see things this way. Alvin Goldman was the first to define propositional justification in terms of doxastic justification. Using the terms 'ex ante justified' and 'ex post justified' to mean 'propositionally justified' and 'doxastically justified', Goldman (1979, 124) suggests:

Person S is *ex ante* justified in believing *p* at *t* if and only if there is a reliable belief-forming operation available to S which is such that if S applied that operation to his total cognitive state at *t*, S would believe *p* at *t*-plus-delta (for a suitably small delta) and that belief would be *ex post* justified.

For Goldman, doxastic justification is a matter of being the result of a reliable process of belief formation—a process that produces a preponderance of true beliefs in the relevant circumstance.

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<sup>16</sup> Some argue that the implication of justified akrasia offers an argument against externalist views of justification (Smithies 2012). Other's argue that this is just what we should expect from a theory of justification (Lasonen-Aarnio 2014).

<sup>17</sup> An upshot in observing this lesson is that it offers a novel, appealing, and independently motivated solution to the puzzle of misleading higher-order evidence (cf. Silva 2017b, 315-21). See also Neta (2019) and van Wietmarschen (2013).

This view is now known as *process reliabilism*. On this view, propositional justification is a relation between S and a proposition defined not in terms of epistemic reasons, but rather in terms of the status that S's belief in p *would have*, were S to form it with the natural processes that are available. However, one needn't be a process reliabilist to endorse this general approach to the relation between propositional and doxastic justification (see Turri 2010).

One cannot overstate the influence in contemporary epistemology of Goldman's approach. But notice that one important implication of this reversal is that empirical inquiry regarding the reliability of actual psychological processes of belief formation becomes directly relevant to one of the most fundamental notions in epistemology. Since doxastic justification is now necessary for propositional justification, whether we have epistemic justification for believing some proposition p is not a matter to be investigated *a priori*: it is not a matter of introspectively examining the evidence I have for p (cf. Chisholm 1977). Instead, questions about propositional justification become questions about the contingencies of psychological processes and the typical environments that we find ourselves in.

To some, this empirical penetration of epistemology effected by the reversal of fundamentality advocated by Goldman is precisely what in turns recommends Goldman's picture over the reasons-first picture. According to Hilary Kornblith (2017), for example, holding on to the view where propositional justification is more fundamental than doxastic justification leads to an inescapable skepticism about doxastically justified *inductive* beliefs and, consequently, to skepticism about inductive knowledge. This is because of extensive empirical research showing that our inductive beliefs are not at all based on the kinds of epistemic reasons that are traditionally taken as grounding propositional justification. "Our inductive tendencies," as Kornblith (2017, 74), puts it, "do not conform to the probability calculus, nor to any system which would even seem to satisfy a priori standards of propositional justification." So if doxastic justification is defined in terms of propositional justification, and propositional justification in terms of epistemic reasons, it turns out that we don't have much inductive doxastic justification after all, and not much inductive knowledge either.

There is, however, one important consequence of such reversal that must be clearly highlighted. The Goldman-Kornblith alternative picture seems to excise the notion of an *epistemic reason* from the heart of epistemology. The reversal of fundamentality called forth by process reliabilism, after all, defines doxastic justification in terms that are independent of the evidential relations that are traditionally taken to be constitutive of epistemic reasons. This is not at all lost on externalist epistemologists attracted to this picture. For example, we arguably have independent reasons to jettison talk of

*normative reasons* from epistemology anyway—a point of view from which talk of evidence as epistemic reasons seems much less central to epistemology (cf. Oliveira forthcoming).<sup>18</sup> It is widely recognized that there are different kinds of normativity or normative phenomena. Certain normative claims, such as those of etiquette, are normative in the sense of being evaluative, but are not normative in the sense of creating binding obligations. Other normative claims, such as those of morality, are normative in both the sense of being evaluative as well as in the sense of creating binding obligations.<sup>19</sup> Seeing epistemic normativity as merely evaluative and non-binding allows us to avoid a central puzzle in epistemology—the clash between epistemic normativity, our lack of epistemic agency, and the principle that ought-implies-can—since mere evaluations can be appropriate even where there is no agency. On one widely accepted picture, however, normative reasons are the very building blocks of binding obligations, such that a commitment to there not being epistemic binding obligations (only mere evaluations) is tantamount to a commitment to there not being epistemic normative reasons (cf. Oliveira forthcoming, sec. 4).<sup>20</sup> If this is right, at any rate, then talk of normative reasons is out of place in epistemology, and the initially troubling consequence of the Goldman-Kornblith picture of doxastic justification loses much of its bite.

### 5. Challenge #3: Moral and Doxastic Parity

There is one more reason to be suspicious of DJ. It has to do with the disanalogy DJ generates between the moral assessment of actions and the epistemic assessment of beliefs. This is because many moral theories entail that actions can be morally justified (i.e. permissible) even if one's reasons for so acting (i.e. the basis of one's action) are not morally appropriate. Consider someone who saves a child but their reason for doing so is to harm that child when they reach adulthood: if one saves the child, *that act* is morally justified even if one's *reasons for acting* are morally reprehensible. But if one's reasons for acting are irrelevant to the moral justification of an action in such cases, why should one's reasons for believing be important for the epistemic justification of a belief in parallel cases?

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<sup>18</sup> See also Kornblith's (2015) argument that talk of reasons is a relic from epistemological theorizing that is overly focused on the phenomenology of deliberation and lacking attention to the psychology of belief fixation.

<sup>19</sup> For discussion of similar distinctions, see Parfit (2011, 144-145) on reason-involving normativity and rule-involving normativity, McPherson (2011, 232-233) on robust and formal normativity, and Wodak (2019, 828-830) on substantively normative standards versus merely formally normative standards.

<sup>20</sup> See Parfit (2011) for this picture of reasons and obligations. An upshot of these considerations is that typical arguments for evidentialism fail to support normative versions of that view (cf. Oliveira 2017, 499-504). For different takes on the implications of the merely evaluative nature of epistemic normativity, see Southwood (2016) and Maguire & Woods (forthcoming).

Making use of this disanalogy, Silva (2015b, forthcoming) has drawn attention to—but did not endorse (2015b: 374)—the following argument:

### **The Parity Argument**

- (1) When the term ‘doxastic justification’ is used in epistemic theory it expresses the same concept that ‘moral justification’ does in moral theory, namely, the concept of permissibility within a certain domain.
- (2) An action can be morally justified (i.e. permitted) even if it’s not performed for morally appropriate reasons.
- (3) What’s true of the structure of moral justification is true of the structure of epistemic justification.
- (4) So a belief can be epistemically justified (i.e. permitted) even if it’s not held for epistemically appropriate reasons.

It’s easy to see that a basing demand on doxastic justification is inconsistent with (4).

Can anything be said on behalf of basing in light of such a stark disanalogy with the moral assessment of our actions? Under certain assumptions about the nature of belief and action (1) and (3) come out false, as Oliveira (2015, 391) writes:

We are agents with respect to our actions; that means that our actions are under our voluntary control. To say that certain actions are permitted, then, is to say that certain deployments of our agency do not violate the norms guiding our choice of available options. But we are not similarly agents with respect to our *beliefs*. That is, our beliefs are not similarly under our voluntary control. To say that certain beliefs are permitted, then, cannot be to say that certain deployments of our agency do not violate the norms guiding our choice of available options: we have no relevant agency in the doxastic case, and there are no corresponding available choices to be made.

If something like this is correct, then the nature of our epistemic assessment of beliefs and our moral assessment of actions is structurally disanalogous. For when we speak of an action being ‘morally justified’ we are expressing the view that an action is consistent with a certain *requirement-relation* between an agent and a course of action. But when we speak of a belief being ‘epistemically justified’

we are expressing the view that a belief is consistent with *a relevant ideal*. Plausibly, the relevant ideal in epistemology has traditionally been taken to be “believing the right thing for the right reason”. If correct, then, these reflections not only offer us a reason to think doxastic justification has a basing requirement, they also offer us reason to think both (3) and (1) are false.

However, the view that belief is not agential in any sense that allows for belief to be assessed in terms of a requirement-relation is relatively controversial. Many epistemologists view the relevant notion of “agency” in a much broader way that allows beliefs to be assessed according to their *responsiveness to reasons*, despite their differences with voluntary action (cf. Sosa 2015; Schroeder 2015; Wedgwood 2017; Hieronymi 2008). For those who endorse such a view, the Parity Argument may well threaten to undermine the basing demand on doxastic justification, depending on the connections between responsiveness to reasons and requirement relations.

An alternative way of resisting (3), and thus making space for the special role of basing in having a doxastically justified belief, is to defend a theory of epistemic justification that implies that one justifiedly holds a belief only if the basing requirement has been satisfied—at least in cases where one’s propositional justification is reasons-dependent (e.g. paradigmatic cases of perceptually, inferentially, and testimonially justified beliefs). Externalists arguably have unique resources for resisting (3) in just this way without having to take on any controversial stance on the nature of epistemic assessment (Silva 2015b: 382-383).

## Conclusion

The notion of doxastic justification is central to epistemology. Many of its features, however, are subject to substantive controversy. Should it be defined in terms of propositional justification? Should it be defined in terms of the basing relation? How should the details of the basing relation be understood? How do broader questions about epistemic normativity affect our picture of doxastic justification? In this short discussion, we have tried to explain the various and conflicting motivations for different answers to these questions.

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