

## **ON JUSTIFYING AND BEING JUSTIFIED**

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We commonly speak of people as being “justified” or “unjustified” in believing as they do. These terms describe a person’s epistemic condition. To be justified in believing as one does is to have a positive epistemic status in virtue of holding one’s belief in a way which fully satisfies the relevant epistemic requirements or norms. This requires something more (or other) than simply believing a proposition whose truth is well-supported by evidence, even by evidence which one possesses oneself, since one could entirely miss the relevance of this evidence and hold the belief as a result of wishful thinking or for some other bad reason. My topic in this paper is the notion of being justified which precludes beliefs flawed in this way. I will take the notion of something’s telling in favor of the truth of a proposition—that is, the notion of evidential support—for granted.

In addition to being (or not being) justified in holding beliefs, we also engage in the activity of justifying: we sincerely articulate what we take to be good reasons for our beliefs, commit to holding our beliefs for those reasons, and attempt to meet objections, all in order to establish our right to hold our beliefs. This activity is often conversational, though it can also take place in private meditation. Either way, if one is taken to have performed successfully, then one’s interlocutor (who may be oneself) will conclude that one is justified.

It would seem, at first blush, that the state of being justified can’t be fully distinguished from considerations pertaining to the activity. In particular, many people find it natural to think that if you can’t justify a belief, then you aren’t justified in holding it. Imagine, for instance, a case in which your interlocutor insists upon a surprising claim. He offers some reasons which manifestly fail to support the truth of his belief, and he has no satisfactory reply when this shortcoming is pointed out to him. His belief isn’t justified, or so it would seem; he really shouldn’t be so certain about

the matter. Consequently, it seems that he is faced with two choices: give up his belief, or find better reasons for it. It would be outrageous dogmatism for him simply to insist upon its truth even though he can't satisfactorily defend it. Thus his epistemic status with regard to this belief appears to be tied to his poor performance in the activity of justifying.

Many epistemologists would disagree. Robert Audi, for instance, writes,

It would seem that just as a little child can be of good character even if unable to defend its character against attack, one can have a justified belief even if, in response to someone who doubts this, one could not show that one does.<sup>1</sup>

William Alston agrees.

We must clear out of the way a confusion between one's *being* justified in believing that *p*, and one's *justifying* one's belief that *p*, where the latter involves one's *doing* something to show that *p*, or to show that one's belief was justified, or to exhibit one's justification. The first side of this distinction is a state or condition one is in, not anything one does *or any upshot thereof*.<sup>2</sup>

He adds that one's belief may be justified even if one is *incapable* of justifying it.<sup>3</sup> Audi and Alston are quite orthodox in this regard. The tendency in most recent epistemology has been to treat epistemic status as being completely independent from the person's performance in the activity of justifying.<sup>4</sup>

My aim in this paper is to argue for an opposing view. Being justified, I will propose, is ordinarily a matter of being able to justify one's belief—that is, of being able to develop and provide an appropriate and adequate defense of one's belief when asked to do so under appropriate conditions. As will become apparent, this proposal amounts to a reconceptualization of the basic framework for understanding epistemic justification.

My topic also raises an issue of fundamental philosophical orientation, for it promises a deeper lesson about what kind of creatures we are—in particular, about what it is to be an appropriate subject of epistemic evaluation. The justificatory status of people's beliefs carries a great deal of normative weight. For instance, if we find that someone is not justified in holding a particular belief, then we demand that he give it up or find better reasons upon which to base it. If he maintains his belief without basing it upon better reasons, we will quite appropriately cease to take him seriously if he asserts its truth. I will argue that such normative evaluations and responses are appropriate precisely because we human beings are able to make particular considerations our reasons by undertaking certain commitments in the course of our conscious deliberative and justificatory activity. So one point which I ultimately want to urge is that because the common

view misunderstands our justificatory activities, it misses precisely what is distinctive about us in virtue of which we are appropriately evaluated in epistemic terms.

My argument will proceed somewhat indirectly. In the first two parts I articulate and reject a view of the relation between being justified and being able to justify which has structured much recent epistemological thought. Seeing this view's failings will help reorient our basic approach to the issue. However, rejecting this view does not suffice to establish a link between being justified and being able to justify. In part 3 I pursue issues initially broached in part 2 regarding the epistemic basing relation, the relation between a belief and the reasons for which it is held. Roughly, the upshot is that basing relations must be established through, or be capable of being appropriately manifested in, the person's explicit deliberative and justificatory activity. Finally, in parts 4 and 5, I elaborate and defend my proposal for the core of an account of justification.

## **I. The Spectatorial Conception**

A certain conception of the relation between justification and the activity of justifying has been presupposed by much of the discussion over the past 25 or so years. To get it clearly in view, it will be helpful to look briefly at two recently influential theories.

According to William Alston, a belief is justified just if it is based upon an adequate ground, such as an appropriate perceptual experience or memory state.<sup>5</sup> Alston holds that whether a given belief is based upon a particular ground is a causal matter: a particular psychological state, say a particular perceptual experience, is the ground upon which a belief is based just if the state served as an input to the processes through which the belief was formed.<sup>6</sup> A belief's ground is "adequate," according to Alston, just if it is a highly reliable indication of the truth of the belief (given how the world usually is).<sup>7</sup> For Alston, then, a belief is justified in virtue of two sets of facts: (1) facts about what states served as inputs in the process of belief formation, and (2) facts about the degree to which those states indicate the truth of the belief. The activity of justifying thus does not enter into Alston's account of the nature of justification. As he puts it, "the *state* concept is the more basic one, since the activity of justifying is an activity directed to showing that a belief is in the *state* of being justified."<sup>8</sup> Justifying, according to Alston, is a secondary and optional activity of trying to report the antecedent facts in virtue of which one's belief is justified.

This conception of the activity of justifying is shared by the many theories of justification which take a belief's justificatory status to be determined simply by the adequacy of the psychological states or processes which causally give rise to or sustain it. For it is commonly assumed that the

correct causal story about one's beliefs is prior to, and not determined by, whatever one might happen to say when asked to justify them. Since the causal view is a main tenet of recent "naturalized" theories of justification, I take these views to be committed to the conception articulated by Alston.<sup>9</sup>

The causal view is not a necessary feature of this conception, however. To see this, consider another example: Laurence Bonjour's former coherentist view. On one plausible interpretation, Bonjour held that positive justificatory status accrues to each belief in a system of beliefs in virtue of features of the whole system such as logical consistency and wide-ranging relations of mutual inferability.<sup>10</sup> A given system of beliefs will possess or fail to possess these features quite independently of its possessor's attempts to justify his or her beliefs. Consequently, Bonjour held that though justification requires that there *be* an acceptable inference from other things one believes, and that the acceptability of this inference not be undercut by other things which one believes, one need not have made the inference or its acceptability explicit in an attempt to justify the belief.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Bonjour allowed that one's belief will be justified even if one is incapable of making the justification explicit at all. One might, he wrote, be too stupid.<sup>12</sup>

The fundamental idea shared by these views is that being justified is something which *happens to you*. According to these theories, the justificatory status of a person's belief is determined by certain facts which obtain prior to and independently of the activity of justifying. The activity itself plays no role in determining justificatory status; it is simply a secondary and optional matter of attempting to determine and report, as far as is conversationally necessary, the prior and independent facts which determine the justificatory status of one's belief. Consequently, even if things go badly wrong in the course of the activity, that will not determine one's actual justificatory status. On this conception, one stands in a primarily theoretical or epistemic relation to the justificatory status of one's beliefs: positive justificatory status is something which one finds out about, not something which one brings about. I therefore call this view *the Spectatorial Conception*.

It may seem that to question the Spectatorial Conception is simply to urge a familiar form of epistemological internalism. However, this impression is incorrect.

Two distinct issues are commonly debated under the rubric of "epistemological internalism." The first concerns the extent to which the factors which determine a belief's justificatory status must be "internal" to the psychology of the individual. An externalist view on this issue allows factors external to the individual's psychology, such as the real-world reliability of a particular belief-forming mechanism, to affect the justificatory status of his or her beliefs. Denial of the Spectatorial Conception is compatible with any position on this issue. I myself hold a view which combines denial of the Spectatorial Conception with an externalist account of the goodness of

reasons. Since I hold that being justified requires having good reasons, my view is externalist, in this sense of “externalism.”

The second issue concerns the cognitive accessibility of the justificatory status of one’s beliefs or of the factors determining their justificatory status. A strong accessibility internalist holds that one can’t be justified unless one is aware of the justificatory status of one’s beliefs or of the factors determining their status, while a more moderate view requires only that one be able to become aware of these matters through introspection and a priori reflection. By contrast, thoroughgoing accessibility externalism maintains that a belief can be justified even if its possessor currently has no good way of finding out about these matters.<sup>13</sup>

Two points should be made here. First, accessibility internalism and the Spectatorial Conception are perfectly compatible. In fact, the current disagreement over accessibility externalism does not concern the Spectatorial Conception at all, but rather proceeds entirely within its terms. For as it is currently conducted, the debate presupposes that a belief’s justificatory status is primarily determined by facts which obtain independently of what goes on when the person justifies the belief; the question is simply whether, and to what extent, being justified also requires epistemic access to these prior and independent facts. BonJour, for instance, advocated a moderate form of accessibility internalism, holding that the inference which justifies a belief must be “available” to the person, so that the person “would be able *in principle* to rehearse it if the belief should be called into question, either by others or by himself . . .”<sup>14</sup> This requirement is perfectly compatible with the spirit of the Spectatorial Conception. BonJour’s internalism is simply an additional, supplementary requirement that one must be able, in principle, to find out about the acceptable inference in virtue of which one’s belief is justified.

The Spectatorial Conception allows for an even stronger form of accessibility internalism. One could supplement the basic Spectatorial model with the additional requirement that one must *in fact* be able to find out about and report the prior, independent facts which are primarily responsible for the justificatory status of one’s belief. This additional requirement would allow a proponent of the Spectatorial Conception to hold that a belief can’t be justified unless its possessor is actually able to justify it. But even on this modified view, one’s relation to the facts which determine the justificatory status of one’s beliefs would still be theoretical or quasi-perceptual, merely a matter of epistemic access. The activity of justifying still wouldn’t play any significant role in shaping the facts which determine justificatory status.

The second point about accessibility internalism is this: rejection of the Spectatorial Conception does not force one to accept accessibility internalism. If we already accept the Spectatorial Conception, then it will appear that the question of the justificatory significance of the activity of justifying simply amounts to a question about the acceptability of a very strong

accessibility requirement. But if we challenge the Spectatorial Conception itself, then we open the door to a reconceptualization both of the nature of the facts which determine justificatory status and of the activity of justifying. We allow for the possibility that the activity of justifying is not simply a matter of reporting prior and independent facts which determine justificatory status, but is instead an attempt to secure and defend a positive justificatory status by offering reasons in defense of one's belief and responding to challenges. On this alternative view, the facts which determine justificatory status would depend, at least in part, upon what one does and says when one sincerely attempts to justify one's beliefs. Such a view is not equivalent to any standard form of internalism, though it provides what, I believe, accessibility internalists really want: a view which allows the person some measure of involvement in, and hence responsibility for, the justificatory status of his or her beliefs.<sup>15</sup>

Since any view along these lines requires that one possess and be able to offer reasons in support of one's belief, it might seem that it will also involve a familiar form of accessibility internalism: namely, epistemic access to one's reasons. In a sense, this is correct. But we have to be very careful here. If the act of offering a reason is interpreted simply as a matter of reporting a prior and independent psychological relation which holds between the belief being justified and one's other beliefs (or other psychological states), then the suggested view would indeed require some form of epistemic access to that relation. But, as I will urge, this interpretation is incorrect: in many cases we should instead understand the link between one's belief and one's reasons as being constituted through one's deliberative and justificatory activity. If this view is correct, then in at least many cases there will be no prior fact about the reasons upon which one bases one's belief. Consequently, the activity of justifying will not require epistemic access to any such facts. What will be required, instead, is nothing more than the ordinary ability to utilize beliefs in reasoning and express them in speech. I leave open whether such abilities are appropriately understood as depending upon some form of epistemic access. Even if so, this is hardly the issue standardly debated under the rubric of accessibility internalism. It is rather an issue concerning the nature of our relation to our own minds.

## II. The Failure of the Spectatorial Conception

I will now attempt to bring out a fundamental incoherence in the Spectatorial Conception. My argument will depend upon considerations about the epistemic basing relation, the relation between a belief and the belief(s) or other psychological state(s) which are its ground, or between a belief and the reasons for which it is held. This relation's role is primarily normative: it ties the person's justificatory status regarding the belief to the

adequacy of certain reasons for holding it. (I'll say more about this point later on.)

Any Spectatorialist account of justification needs to appeal to basing relations. Here's why. The Spectatorial Conception is a view about what it is for persons to be justified in believing as they do. As previously noted, a person who believes  $p$  and who possesses evidence which adequately indicates  $p$ 's truth, or who believes things which enable an acceptable inference to it, may still not have a justified belief, since he may believe  $p$  for some ridiculous reason and not for the good reasons which he possesses. The trouble is not that he lacks good grounds for his belief, but that his belief is not appropriately related to those grounds. Any Spectatorialist account of justification must capture this difference without appealing to considerations about the person's justificatory activity. To do so, it will appeal to the epistemic basing relation.<sup>16</sup>

Now the key idea behind the Spectatorial Conception is that all factors relevant to justificatory status are in place independently of and not directly affected by what goes on when the person attempts to justify the belief. Since basing relations are among these factors, the Spectatorial Conception must hold that they too are determined independently of the person's justificatory activity and not directly affected by it. So the fundamental idea is this: a person's belief is justified only if it is located within an appropriate system of basing relations, a system which is in place independently what goes on when the person attempts to formulate a justification for her belief and which is not directly affected by anything involved in that attempt. As we will see, this conception provides the basis for a fundamental criticism of the Spectatorial Conception itself.

Recent work on the basing relation has remained squarely within the terms of this picture. The dominant view is that basing relations are determined, somehow, by the factors causally responsible for originating or sustaining the belief.<sup>17</sup> And even those theorists who reject this approach have mainly conceived of basing relations as being established independently of the subject's justificatory activity.<sup>18</sup>

In a paper which established the framework for the debate about the basing relation over the past three decades, Gilbert Harman offered a particularly clear instance of this Spectatorial conception of the basing relation.<sup>19</sup> On Harman's view, we come to have beliefs as a result of processes of reasoning which are largely subconscious or unconscious. Our reasons are the considerations which, by figuring in these reasoning processes, lead us to have the beliefs that we have.<sup>20</sup> Thus, according to Harman, the reasons upon which a belief is based are the considerations which figure in a correct psychological explanation of why the person believes as he does. This explanation is distinct from what the person says when asked to justify his beliefs; what a person appeals to or offers when attempting to justify a belief are, at best, merely those aspects of the

explanation which he has managed to bring to consciousness, and Harman is pessimistic about our capacity to identify the correct explanations of our beliefs.<sup>21</sup>

This view of the basing relation brings with it a view of what one is doing when one attempts to justify a belief. Harman writes, for instance:

When a person wonders whether a consideration represents one of his reasons, he wonders whether that consideration influenced his conclusion. But that is to wonder whether it has anything to do with why he believes as he does, with the explanation of his belief.<sup>22</sup>

On the Spectatorial Conception, deliberation concerning the reasons for which one holds a given belief gets construed as an attempt to find out about prior and independently-obtaining basing relations, and sincerely stating one's reasons—i.e., offering a justification for a belief—gets construed as issuing a report about these independent relations. There is no other natural and plausible way for this conception to describe what we are doing when we sincerely offer our reasons for holding our beliefs.

It is at this point that the inadequacy of the Spectatorial Conception can be seen: as I will argue in the remainder of this section, this view misunderstands the relation between basing relations and the activity of developing and offering justifications for one's beliefs.

One reason for initial suspicion is that this view fits poorly with what often goes on when people develop or offer reasons for their beliefs. Consider a common kind of case. You confidently hold a particular belief which you did not arrive at through an explicit process of inference or reasoning. Someone challenges you: "On what do you base that belief? Why do you think it is true?" To answer this question you do not consider facts about yourself or your psychology, such as how you came to hold the belief, but instead what there is to be said in favor of the belief—whether and why you should hold it. So in many cases, deliberating about whether a consideration represents one of your reasons is a matter of *evaluating possible reasons for holding the belief*. It is a matter of looking outward, as it were, considering or reconsidering the issue at hand and taking a stand on particular grounds, not of looking inward and attempting to ferret out prior facts about the explanation of your beliefs.

A further mismatch arises regarding our reactions to what people say in defense of their beliefs. According to the Spectatorial Conception, to ask for a person's reasons for holding a belief is to ask the person to describe or report certain facts about his belief which obtain independently of and prior to his consideration of them. However, we do not ordinarily proceed as if stating one's reasons were a matter of making this sort of report. Instead, we proceed as if someone who deliberates about or offers reasons in justification of a belief is doing something which fixes what her reasons are: namely,

*committing to particular reasons for holding the belief.* For instance, we might ask someone, “Are you really willing to base your belief in the suspect’s innocence upon the testimony of a convicted felon?”<sup>23</sup> Such questions indicate that we generally don’t treat what people say in defense of their beliefs as merely *evidence about*, or an *indication of*, the reasons for which they hold their beliefs, but rather as a direct expression of their rational activity. When someone sincerely states what his reasons are for holding a certain belief, we do not question his authority about the matter unless we have reason to believe that his rational authority over his beliefs has been abrogated in the particular case. Furthermore, in ordinary circumstances it would be very strange to treat one’s own declarations of reasons in any other way. Consider someone who replied to the question, “Upon what reasons do you base that belief? What are your reasons for holding it?”, by saying, “To the best of my knowledge, they are \_\_\_\_\_. Yes, I am pretty sure they are \_\_\_\_\_.” In many cases we would not reply to such a statement by urging the person to investigate his psychology further.<sup>24</sup> Instead, we would say something along the lines of, “Make up your mind! Are those the reasons for which you believe that, or aren’t they?” What he needs to do is deliberate further about what he is willing to offer as a basis for his claim. His uncertainty about his reasons would be unintelligible in many cases unless we treat it as a consequence of his failure (or unwillingness) to commit to holding his belief upon particular grounds. One cannot always treat one’s relation to one’s own reasons as if it were merely a topic for investigation and report.

Our justificatory practices thus are not at all what one would expect them to be if the Spectatorial Conception were true. This fact could perhaps be explained away by a proponent of the Spectatorial Conception. But I think it is indicative of a deeper failing which could be put roughly like this: in dismissing our overt deliberative and justificatory activities, the Spectatorial Conception loses sight of the very idea of *a person’s holding a belief for a reason*.

To make this case, I will begin with a basic adequacy condition for an account of the basing relation. Suppose that you consider reasons for and against a claim, find that certain reasons decisively support holding it, and sincerely declare that you believe the claim for those reasons. In the usual case, you thereby directly determine what the reasons are for which you hold the belief. Moreover, in declaring your reasons you both open yourself to epistemic evaluation or criticism on account of those reasons’ inadequacy and incur certain obligations—in particular, an obligation either to give up the belief or to seek better reasons, should those reasons prove inadequate. A minimal adequacy condition for an account of the epistemic basing relation is thus that it *allow* (1) that the reasons for which a belief is held can be directly determined in this way, and (2) that one sometimes directly opens oneself to epistemic criticism and incurs further justificatory

responsibilities by sincerely declaring that one holds one's belief for particular reasons.<sup>25</sup> (It may be helpful to clarify the first requirement slightly. By "directly determine," I mean a role of the sort we ordinarily play in establishing our intentions when we seriously and sincerely declare "I intend..." Barring fundamental irrationality, such a declaration of intention precludes one's not so intending unless one changes one's mind; nothing more need happen in order for one so to intend. However, I do not claim that one can establish basing relations at will. Again, the declaration of intention provides a helpful analogy. I cannot now, simply by an act of will, intend to jump out of the window of my third-floor office.<sup>26</sup> Nor can I seriously and sincerely declare that I intend to do so. Nonetheless, my declarations of intention often directly determine my intentions.)

The Spectatorial Conception does not meet the first condition. According to the Spectatorial Conception, basing relations obtain independently of, and are not directly determined by, either what one says or the thinking that is involved when one sincerely offers reasons in justification of one's belief. And this means that basing relations will *never* be directly determined by the conclusions of one's explicit evaluations of reasons. Even barring irrationality, it will always be a further question whether one has thereby succeeded in making those considerations the reasons for which one holds one's belief. For instance, recall Harman's view. Suppose that one currently holds a certain belief. According to Harman, the correct cognitive-psychological explanation of why one holds this belief determines the reasons for which one currently holds it. One now engages in some conscious deliberation about one's reasons and concludes, "I base this belief on \_\_\_\_." On Harman's view, one might very well be wrong about this; one's explicit deliberations will determine the reasons for which one holds the belief only if the reasons arrived at actually explain why one holds the belief. Suppose they weren't the reasons which previously explained the belief. Then something further has to happen: the actual relations between one's beliefs have to be made to line up with one's explicit reflections. A similar point applies even when it seems, from the first-person perspective, that one has arrived at a belief through a course of explicit inference and reasoning. Thus, for Harman, whenever one sincerely declares, after explicit reflection upon the available reasons, "*these* are my reasons for holding this belief," one must either be issuing a hypothesis about what explains one's belief or giving oneself a recommendation. One is not, then and there, doing something which directly determines what one's reasons are.

Of course, Harman can give an explanatory role to explicit reasoning and inference, since he can allow that it is a (contingent) psychological fact that when we explicitly infer a conclusion from particular considerations, the corresponding beliefs ordinarily figure in the correct explanation of our belief in the conclusion. On his view, however, basing relations would still be in place even if our explicit reasoning and inference *never* affected the

correct explanation of our beliefs. And the explanatory role which he allows to our explicit deliberations falls short of the role which these activities ordinarily play in determining basing relations.

Just as the Spectatorial Conception fails to allow for the possibility of directly establishing basing relations through one's explicit deliberations, it also fails to allow for the obligations and vulnerability to criticism which are ordinarily incurred when one sincerely declares that one holds one's belief for particular reasons. If one's statement of the reasons for which one holds a belief is merely a recommendation or hypothesis about what one's belief is independently based upon, then one could take comfort if the reasons which one states are met with decisive criticism. One could say, "Well, I might be wrong, those might not actually be the reasons upon which my belief is based, and so my belief might be justified nonetheless..." Thus even if one acknowledges that the reasons one has offered are inadequate or false, one could always beg off any responsibility either to give up the belief or to come up with better reasons for holding it. The Spectatorial Conception thus prevents us from directly evaluating a person purely on the basis of what she sincerely says about the reasons for which she holds her beliefs.<sup>27</sup>

This point brings us to the Spectatorial Conception's fundamental failing. For the flip side of the problem just canvassed is that, as I will discuss in a moment, the Spectatorial Conception also fails to allow for epistemic evaluation or criticism of a person on account of the reasons upon which her beliefs are (according to the Spectatorial Conception) *actually based*. As a result, it fails to do justice to the basing relation's normative role.

To see this point, consider first the role we expect basing relations to play. If a person holds a belief on the basis of particular reasons, then her justificatory status with regard to the belief is thereby tied to the adequacy of those reasons. Basing relations thus open the person to epistemic evaluation, and to further normative consequences, on account of the adequacy of the belief's grounds, and they engender an obligation to give up the belief or seek better reasons if its grounds prove inadequate. We thus expect the basing relation to span the space between a person, a belief, and particular reasons, so that the person's attitude of belief becomes linked to those reasons in such a way that their adequacy or inadequacy can provide a fair basis for epistemic evaluation of the person and can engender further obligations and responsibilities.<sup>28</sup>

Now the facts which the Spectatorial Conception treats as determining basing relations do not establish the right sort of link between the person and the reasons upon which her beliefs are putatively based. According to the Spectatorial Conception the facts which determine basing relations are in place independently of the person's explicit deliberation, reasoning, or declaration of reasons and are not directly determined by any of the person's explicit deliberative or justificatory activity. On this view, your relation to the bases of your own beliefs is fundamentally like your relation

to the bases of someone else's beliefs: in both cases, your task is to find out what they are and, perhaps, to attempt to influence them. The only difference is that the facts which determine the grounds of your beliefs are "in you"—they concern your psychology. Consider, then, that having found out the reasons upon which someone else's belief is based, you might conclude that they are inadequate or even false. If the Spectatorial Conception is correct, there is no reason why your own case should be any different. Hence, after determining the correct explanation of your own belief, you should be free to conclude, "*q* is the reason upon which the belief that *p* is based, but *q* is a lousy reason for believing that *p*." Now, if you determine that *q* is a poor reason for believing that *p*, then you are ordinarily entitled to repudiate it as a reason for believing that *p*. So insofar as the Spectatorial Conception is intended to account for our ordinary notion of holding a belief for a reason, it must allow one to say, "I don't base *p* on *q*, because *q* is an entirely inadequate reason." (It is, after all, incoherent to say, "I base my belief that *p* on *q*, but *q* is an entirely inadequate reason.") But according to the Spectatorial Conception, one's explicit evaluation and endorsement or rejection of reasons does not directly determine the reasons upon which one's belief is based. So if the Spectatorial Conception is correct, there should be situations in which it would be intelligible to say (putting the two together), "My belief that *p* is based upon *q*, but I don't base *p* upon *q*, since *q* is an inadequate reason." But this is incoherent. Of course, one can discover or conclude that one has held a belief for bad reasons. But to state the reasons my belief is *now* based upon is to state the reasons *I* base it upon, the reasons for which I hold it. And I cannot simultaneously declare that I both do and do not hold a given belief for given reasons.<sup>29</sup>

The Spectatorial Conception runs into trouble here because of a fundamental bifurcation which it forces within our thinking about a person: on one side are the facts which determine basing relations, on the other is the person's overt deliberative and justificatory activity, and the latter does not ever directly determine the former. Once we clearly recognize this division, we can see that the Spectatorial Conception of the basing relation does not do the necessary work: it does not provide an adequate basis for epistemic evaluation of the person, at least not for the forms of evaluation which are my concern here—forms of evaluation connected with the notions of entitlement, responsibility and fair criticism of the person. The crucial question here concerns the appropriateness of treating a person as responsible for a certain condition and hence as an appropriate subject of normative evaluation and criticism on its account. We must distinguish, on the one hand, sub-personal states and processes (such as the states and processes which result in perceptual beliefs) as well as states and processes to which the person is merely passively subject and, on the other hand, states and reasoning processes *of the person*. Only the latter will form a proper basis for normative evaluation of the person. So to enable the relevant sorts of

epistemic evaluation—and the normative consequences thereof—basing relations must be attributable to the person and not merely to some process which takes place “in” him or her. But the Spectatorial Conception prevents this. The problem is not that the Spectatorial Conception places basing relations outside the person’s voluntary control; basing relations, on any plausible view, can’t be modified simply at will. The problem is rather that according to the Spectatorial Conception basing relations are never directly determined through the person’s explicit evaluation of reasons in the course of her deliberative and justificatory activity. In this regard, they are no more an appropriate ground for evaluation of her than is her heart rate. States of a sort which are never directly determined by a person’s conscious deliberation, the commitments incurred through her conscious deliberation, or her best explicit evaluation of reasons are not attributable to her in the relevant sense.<sup>30</sup>

It might be suggested that it is enough for purposes of attributability and evaluation that basing relations be reliably caused by the conclusions of a person’s explicit deliberations. The proposal doesn’t succeed, however, because reliable causal control isn’t sufficient to make a state “mine” in the relevant sense. Suppose, for instance, that I am an excellent hypnotist. As a result, I have a great deal of causal control over the beliefs of my victims. (We might even imagine that I have perfect causal control.) I may justly be held responsible for bringing it about that they have certain beliefs rather than others. That is something which is attributable to me. But their beliefs are not thereby mine: their beliefs are not attributable to me in the relevant sense, since I may not believe what they believe. And one part of the explanation of this fact is that their beliefs are not open to direct determination through my first-personal deliberations about what I should believe.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, on a version of the Spectatorial Conception which allows me reliable causal control over (so-called) basing relations, I may justly be held responsible for bringing it about that there are certain relations and not others. But that alone does not make the basing relations in question mine in the relevant sense; it is not enough to establish that *I* hold the beliefs for those reasons. Imagine, for instance, that there is a systematic derangement of the causal processes. Suppose that we human beings were such that when we arrived at conclusions through explicit processes of deliberation, this causally affected the relations amongst our beliefs in a systematic and predictable way, but in such a way that certain beliefs *other* than our beliefs in the premises took on the causally sustaining role. In that case, too, we would have reliable causal control over the relations in question. But it would be perverse to take the resultant relations to fix one’s reasons for holding one’s beliefs and to evaluate one on their basis. They are not attributable to one in the right sort of way.

In sum, by discounting our ordinary deliberative and justificatory activities the Spectatorial Conception loses sight of the person, the locus of

epistemic evaluation and criticism. This spells disaster. The Spectatorial Conception needs basing relations in its account of justification, but whatever the Spectatorial Conception calls a “basing relation” will not be the relation which is involved when a person holds a belief for a particular reason.

### III. The Basis of Basing Relations

The demise of the Spectatorial Conception does not entail that being justified requires the ability to justify. However, it clears the way for a defense of this requirement. This section begins such a defense by sketching an account of the basing relation just far enough to make it plausible that if someone holds a belief on the basis of particular reasons, then (to put it roughly) she must be able to acknowledge or appropriately express those reasons in the course of her explicit deliberative and justificatory activity. If this claim is correct, then in order for someone’s belief to be justified in virtue of being based upon certain reasons, she must be able to justify it by appealing to those reasons.

As our consideration of the Spectatorial Conception revealed, the normative significance of ordinary epistemic evaluation places certain constraints on accounts of the basing relation. It must be possible for basing relations to be directly established by one’s conscious reasoning, decision to hold one’s belief for particular reasons, or sincere declaration that one holds one’s belief for given reasons. And in order for a person to hold a belief on the basis of particular considerations, she must at least have the *capacity* to directly establish her reasons for holding the belief through her explicit deliberation and reflection about reasons for belief.

By themselves, these points are logically compatible with the view that once a basing relation is in place, there is no need for one to be able to express or manifest it in any way in one’s explicit thought or attempts to justify one’s belief. For instance, it might be said that so long as the above requirements are met, basing relations are always in place prior to one’s explicit deliberative or justificatory activity simply in virtue of causal or other explanatory factors which one may not be in any position to find out about. (On this view, causal or other explanatory factors would establish default basing relations, subject to overriding by links established through one’s explicit deliberative or justificatory activity should one ever engage in it.) Or it might be claimed that once one has put a basing relation in place through one’s explicit deliberations, there is no need for one later to be able to articulate that basing relation in order for it to persist. On such views, one could be justified in virtue of holding a belief for adequate reasons even if one is incapable of justifying it.

However, though these suggestions are logically compatible with the above points, we can't make good sense of them once we've put *the person* at the center of our thinking about what's involved in holding a belief for a reason. Consider an example of the first suggestion. We are supposed to imagine that certain good reasons play a causal or explanatory role which suffices for a person's belief to be based upon those reasons, but that when the person attempts to justify the belief he can only come up with bad reasons even though he hasn't forgotten anything and there is no other special condition which explains this failing. I don't think that we can see this as a case in which he ever held his belief on the basis of the good reasons. Admittedly, there is a sense in which he had (and continues to have) good reasons for believing as he does. But what he does when he attempts to justify his belief reveals that *he* does not appreciate their force. Consequently, though there are many favorable things which we can say about his belief and its provenance, he doesn't hold his belief on the basis of those reasons. At most, those reasons affected him.

Consider, now, the second suggestion. A person has established a basing relation through her explicit deliberation and reasoning. We are supposed to imagine that she continues to hold her belief for this reason even though she cannot now manifest it either in her explicit thinking or when she attempts to justify the belief in optimal circumstances. And we are supposed to imagine that there is no special condition which explains this inability. I must admit that I can make no sense of this. Certain cases are perfectly intelligible: she can't articulate the relevant reasons because of absent-mindedness, temporary amnesia, exhaustion, neurosis, anxiety, repression, etc. But none of that is what is supposed to be going on here. We're simply supposed to imagine that in virtue of her previous explicit deliberative activity she now bases her belief upon certain reasons which are brutally unavailable to her explicit thinking. No good sense can be made of that suggestion.

Both suggestions present a dissociated picture analogous to that arising from the Spectatorial Conception. They grant that one can directly establish basing relations through one's explicit thinking and activity, but they deny that one must be able to appropriately manifest or express previously established basing relations in one's explicit thinking and activity. This view must be rejected. It neglects, as does the Spectatorial Conception, that basing relations involve a kind of *commitment* on the part of the person. Holding a belief for particular reasons is an attitude of the person—a matter of taking up a certain normative position—in virtue of which the belief and the reasons are linked in such a way that evaluation of the person on their basis becomes legitimate. It involves, in particular, endorsement of certain considerations as adequate reasons for holding the belief and a commitment to give up the belief (or appropriately hedge one's conviction and seek better reasons) if those reasons prove inadequate.

This is not to say that explicitly stating that one undertakes these commitments always suffices to establish basing relations. I will say more about this below. The crucial point here, however, is that a person's commitments, however established, must be capable of being manifested, expressed, or acknowledged in certain characteristic ways in the person's explicit thought, conversation, and other conduct. This requirement is defeasible. Someone may hold a commitment which, because of irrationality or forgetfulness, he cannot currently manifest in his explicit thinking and conduct or acknowledge even when he is speaking sincerely. In such cases, the failure is intelligible in terms of other features of his mental life. If there is no such special circumstance, however, and if a person in appropriate circumstances cannot manifest or express a given commitment in his explicit thought, conversation or conduct and does not acknowledge it when speaking sincerely, then he does not hold it.

Because basing relations depend upon the person's commitments, a similar requirement holds in their case as well. One must be able to appropriately manifest, express, or acknowledge one's reasons in one's explicit thinking or attempts to justify one's belief unless there is some special circumstance (such as absentmindedness, temporary amnesia, anxiety, exhaustion, or repression) which hinders one's ability to do so. And what is required, in the absence of such conditions, are some appropriate instances of behavior such as the following: giving up one's belief (or appropriately hedging it while seeking further reasons) if one stops believing one's reasons for it or recognizes good evidence against them; appealing to those reasons when sincerely attempting to justify one's belief; otherwise treating them as good reasons in one's sincere conversations and explicit reasoning; refusing to reason from the belief to the truth of one's reasons (or else recognizing the need for new reasons for holding the belief); acknowledging one's reasons when reminded. If one is not speaking sincerely, then one will not manifest or acknowledge one's reasons in some of these ways. But insincerity, too, constitutes a special circumstance, rendering one's behavior intelligible in a way consistent with the attribution of a basing relation.

As we have seen, recent discussions of the basing relation have emphasized an essential link between basing relations and psychological explanation. I have argued that the common view is incorrect: etiological or other explanatory considerations do not suffice to establish basing relations. Still, there is something right in the common view. Basing relations are bound up with explanatory considerations, in particular with commonsense, person-level psychological explanation, in three ways.<sup>32</sup>

First, if one holds, or has held, a belief for particular reasons, that fact can explain certain features of one's thought and conduct, such as why one accepts certain arguments or reasoning, why one refuses to argue in certain ways, or why one has given up a certain belief upon discovering that certain

other considerations are false. In this regard, basing relations are like other commitment-related states of the person, such as having promised, which play a role in commonsense psychological explanations.

Second, commonsense explanatory considerations can sometimes fix basing relations even if one has not engaged in any explicit deliberative or justificatory activity. For instance, suppose that you are walking across a snowy meadow. You remark that someone has been there recently. I look where you are looking and see footprints in the snow ahead. I don't take you to have any other relevant information. Accordingly, I take your belief to be explained by your belief that there are footprints ahead, which is in turn explained by your having seen footprints. And I take it that your reason for believing that someone has been there recently is that there are footprints ahead.

This verdict about your reasons depends upon considerations about your commitments. You have the ability to make certain considerations your reasons by explicitly taking on relevant commitments. Given this background capacity, and given your basic rationality, it is reasonable to take you to have undertaken the relevant commitments by believing as you do in the described circumstances. You believe that there are footprints ahead and that this is a good reason for thinking that someone else was here recently, and you are committed to giving up your belief that someone else was here recently (or to doing something else appropriate) if it turns out that these things aren't so. So when a mature human being with appropriate background abilities forms a particular belief in an appropriate way in an appropriate setting, that can constitute undertaking the commitments necessary for the establishment of basing relations. If one were to request the person's reasons in such a case, his reply (assuming he is sincere and there is no other special circumstance) would manifest the commitments which he has undertaken. And if, despite the correct explanation of his belief, he is incapable of appropriately manifesting any such commitments and there is no explanation of the right sort for this inability, then he does not now hold the belief on the basis of the reasons in question.

Finally, it is constitutive of belief and the basing relation that if one holds a belief for particular reasons, then those reasons figure in an adequate commonsense psychological explanation of one's belief. For this reason, Harman is quite right when he comments, "it is difficult to see how to imagine a difference in the reasons for which people believe as they do without imagining a difference in the explanation of why they believe as they do."<sup>33</sup> It doesn't follow, however, that a correct causal or other psychologically explanatory account of a belief always suffices, merely as such, to establish that the person holds the belief on the basis of given reasons. For one thing, explanatory factors will fix basing relations only in appropriate circumstances and against a background of appropriate capacities on the person's part. And this means that we can't hold that a basing

relation is established merely in virtue of the fact that a cognitive-psychological process went on which we want to model as reasoning, since these processes can go on even in creatures which lack any ability to make the relevant endorsements and commitments.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, in some cases it would be quite ludicrous to ascribe commitments to the person corresponding to the elements figuring in the explanation. Consider, for instance, the sophisticated representations regarding motion which figure in a cognitive-psychological explanation of a person's visually-prompted belief about where a ball will land. Finally, even an adequate commonsense psychological explanation of a person's belief will not always suffice to establish that the person holds the belief on the basis of particular reasons, since such an explanation can be had even when the person is not committed to anything in particular regarding reasons for the belief. Just consider the case in which there is no straightforward reasons-based explanation of the belief and the person believes many things which could constitute good reasons for believing as he does.

It may be helpful to expand on this last point in order to remove any residual feeling that explanatory or causal factors must always suffice to establish basing relations. Consider, for instance, my belief that I live in the United States. I believe many things which tell in favor of its truth. But it is implausible to suppose that I currently hold this belief on the basis of specific reasons. (What are they?) Granted, this belief can be explained: it was formed and reinforced as a result of many and various experiences (including being told things repeatedly and by various sources), and it fits well with all my other relevant beliefs. But this explanation is not the right sort to fix the reasons for which I now hold the belief. A proponent of the view that causal or other explanatory factors always suffice to fix basing relations will claim that the difficulty here arises simply from our ignorance of the details of the causal story. But it is hard to make good sense of the suggestion that beliefs such as this one are already part of a structure of basing relations. The propositions constituting one's basic standing view of the world form a tangled web of reciprocal relations of evidential support. If we suppose that there are basing relations tracking all of these relations of evidential support, then many of these beliefs will be caught up in justificatory circles. Since this is epistemically unacceptable, we will need to conceive of the network of basing relations as having a directional structure, and we will need to find a principled ground for thinking that the basing relations go in one direction rather than another. But this isn't to be expected. Consider, for instance, my beliefs that my wife loves me and that she would not lie to me about matters concerning our relationship. Given appropriate background considerations, each of these beliefs could function as a premise in a cogent argument to the other. Counterfactual tests won't tell us which belief is currently based on the other; both beliefs are such that (given my basic rationality) if I stopped believing one I would stop believing

the other. Perhaps it will be suggested that both beliefs are based on some shared ground. But what? My belief that she has sincerely told me she loves me? This won't do. It could equally well be suggested that this latter belief is based, in part, on my belief that she wouldn't lie to me. Other suggestions are possible here, but I won't pursue the matter further.<sup>35</sup> It suffices to note the difficulty. It is quite plausible that there is no structure of epistemic basing relations which is currently in place regarding these beliefs. The same goes for many of one's beliefs. As we will see, this is not to say that they are unjustified.<sup>36</sup>

Returning now to the main thread, the explanatory role of basing relations has an important consequence. Sincerely declaring one's reasons, or engaging in conscious reasoning, does not always make it the case that one holds one's belief on the basis of the given reasons. Such activities establish the reasons for which one holds a belief only if one's rationality is not impaired. This point is clearest in cases of rationalization. A rationalizer may sincerely offer certain reasons in defense of his belief and make use of them in his solitary deliberations about why he should believe as he does. But they are not in fact his reasons for believing as he does, and in appealing to them in these ways he does not make them his reasons for believing as he does. This is because they do not explain why he believes as he does. But this is a very special kind of case. Given that one is functioning rationally, one's consciously adopted commitments *do* explain one's beliefs, and consequently one can directly establish basing relations through one's conscious deliberations or explicit declarations of one's reasons.<sup>37</sup>

In sum, I suggest the following basic approach to the epistemic basing relation. To be in the business of holding beliefs for reasons, one must have the ability to make considerations one's reasons by making certain endorsements and taking on certain commitments. Against this background of abilities, a proposition *q* is a reason upon the basis of which one believes that *p* just when (1) one believes *q*, endorses its adequacy as a reason for believing that *p*, and is committed to responding in appropriate ways if *q* proves to be an inadequate reason, and (2) these endorsements and commitments play appropriate roles in commonsense psychological explanations of one's belief, thinking and conduct. In many cases, condition (1) is met in virtue of one's explicit deliberative or justificatory activity. In some cases, however, one can make the relevant endorsements and commitments simply by forming a belief which has the right sort of commonsense psychological explanation. Either way, however, one must be able to express, manifest, or acknowledge one's reasons in one's conscious thinking or sincere conversation, provided there are no special conditions preventing exercise of this ability. For if one sincerely appeals to some other consideration(s) when attempting to justify one's belief, or doesn't know what to say, then, unless there is some special explanation, one can no longer be viewed as having maintained the relevant commitments.

I should stress that I have *not* claimed that the reasons for which one now holds a belief are the reasons which one would sincerely offer in defense of it when asked. Like the view that merely declaring that one holds a belief for certain reasons always makes it so, this claim conflicts with the manifest facts about the explanatory role of basing relations and the ways in which we can lose rational authority over our mental lives. What I have claimed is that basing relations can be directly established through a person's consciously adopted commitments, and that if a basing relation is already in place, then the person must be able to appropriately manifest or express the relevant reasons in his explicit deliberative and justificatory activity unless something of an appropriate sort prevents him from doing so. Consequently, if someone is justified in believing as he does in virtue of basing his belief upon good reasons, then, in the absence of any special circumstances preventing him from doing so, he must be able to provide those reasons in defense of his belief. He must be able to justify holding it.

#### IV. Justifying and Being Justified: A Proposal

I now want to propose a basic framework for understanding epistemic justification, where (to repeat) my concern is what it is for a mature human being to be justified in believing as she does. My aim here is to motivate an approach. Its detailed development must await another occasion.

Let me begin by taking stock. In order to be susceptible to epistemic evaluation in the way that adult human beings are, a creature must be able to hold beliefs for reasons. As we have seen, this requires in turn that it have certain background abilities and capacities necessary for engaging in the activity of justifying, such as the abilities to evaluate reasons and to undertake the commitments involved in basing relations. So, in general being justified in holding any beliefs at all requires that one have some justificatory abilities. Furthermore, if one's belief is justified in virtue of being held for adequate reasons, then, as I have argued, one must be able to justify it. Once we've come this far, two plausible options remain if we want to say that beliefs which are not (yet) held for any reasons can be justified even if one is unable to justify them. We can say that one can be justified in holding beliefs of this sort, even if one cannot justify holding them, in virtue of etiological or other explanatory facts which do not establish basing relations.<sup>38</sup> Or we can hold that one can be justified in holding some such beliefs in virtue of their privileged position in one's inquiries or in the epistemic practices in which one is engaged.<sup>39</sup> However, both views conflict with our ordinary expectations. We expect mature adults to be able to say *something* in defense of their justified beliefs, even if we don't think it worthwhile or appropriate to ask them to do so. Moreover, both views strike me as unmotivated. Once we have accepted a general link between being justified

and being able to justify one's beliefs, why stop short of holding that the ability is required in each case? So far as I can see, the only significant motivation is fear that this requirement generates a vicious justificatory regress. As I explain below, however, this fear is unwarranted. I propose, therefore, that we should accept the requirement.

What does this requirement come to? It will be helpful here to reconsider the nature of the ordinary activity of justifying. According to the Spectatorial Conception, when one justifies a belief one attempts to show that one possesses a status which is independent of this activity. As we have seen, however, this interpretation is fundamentally incorrect in many cases. The basic point of the ordinary conversational activity of requesting and offering reasons in defense of beliefs is to provide a setting within which entitlements to hold beliefs can be challenged, defended, established, and shared. To develop a justification for one's belief is to attempt to establish or secure a positive normative status by offering reasons in one's defense, and successfully justifying a belief is more like achieving a checkmate than like showing or reporting that one has won the game. So we can put the requirement this way: in order to be justified in holding a particular belief, one must be able to succeed in this activity, so understood. In particular, one must have an adequate set of justified background beliefs (including beliefs about what is a good reason for what), and sufficient rational capacities, to be able to successfully defend holding the belief by coming up with and committing to adequate reasons and responding adequately to objections.

Several further clarifications may be helpful.

First, the requirement is not that one must actually succeed in justifying one's belief whenever one is asked to do so, but rather that one must succeed when one has adequate time, is not under undue stress, and is not too tired or otherwise cognitively impaired. As with any standing ability, one can possess the ability to justify even when its exercise is blocked on a particular occasion by interfering factors. This consideration undermines putative counterexamples drawn from cases of temporary amnesia, neurotic fear, and the like, since such conditions only involve blockage of the exercise of the ability to justify, not loss of the ability itself. (Compare the case of a sprinter who has the ability to run a four-minute mile but currently has a hurt toe.)

Second, the requirement does not demand verbal articulateness. Any practice which allows for the establishment of propositionally contentful commitments of the sort involved in basing relations will do. For instance, an inarticulate but expert mechanic may be justified in believing that the trouble is with your fuel pump, if he can defend this assessment by making manifest some considerations which support it (for instance, by pointing, or by saying "Listen to that" while tapping on something appropriate with a

screwdriver). I take no stand here on the difficult question of whether a completely non-linguistic being could engage in such practices.

Third, the proposed requirement speaks of “adequate reasons” without specifying what counts as “adequate.” This is as it should be. The question is a large and difficult one, and I cannot decide it here. Still, the proposal is specific enough to be worth debating, since it counters the widespread view that one can be justified even if one cannot do anything at all to justify one’s belief. It should be noted, too, that the proposal need not be interpreted in an overly stringent way. It is sometimes urged that a requirement along these lines has unacceptable skeptical consequences because most people are incapable of justifying many of their beliefs. For instance, one might think that in order to justify a perceptual belief, one would have to provide or deploy a philosophical theory of perceptual justification, which most people obviously cannot do.<sup>40</sup> However, this worry evaporates once we abandon the Spectatorial Conception of our justificatory activities. In ordinary life we often accept assertions such as, “Well, I see that it is so,” “I’ve studied the matter quite thoroughly,” or even, “There is no reason to doubt it,” as quite enough to justify a belief, so long as we aren’t aware of any reason for doubt which the person is unable to overcome. I think that we should take this fact at face value. In appropriate settings, such considerations can constitute adequate reasons. It is not easy to specify under what circumstances, exactly, such a consideration is in fact adequate.<sup>41</sup> My claim here is simply that there can be some such circumstances. This does not trivialize the requirement, since (again) the pertinent alternative view is that one need not be able to justify one’s belief at all.

Many prominent accounts which emphasize the ability to justify also relativize justificatory success to what is accepted, or would be accepted, by some relevant social group.<sup>42</sup> However, I find such relativization implausible. Even if one’s reasons are good, one’s interlocutors (or the members of the relevant social group) may be stubborn, dense or confused. Likewise, one might be silver-tongued but benighted. I therefore hold that justificatory success depends instead upon objective relations of evidential support.<sup>43</sup> A successful justification requires objectively good epistemic reasons for one’s belief, that is, reasons which actually provide strong support for the truth of one’s belief given how the world actually is. And the set of objections which one must be able to defeat is likewise determined, at least in part, by what is the case which defeasibly tells against the truth of one’s belief or against the truth or adequacy of the reasons one has offered in its favor. Three considerations support this view. First, it gives us a straightforward way to accommodate the familiar thought that being justified, though not truth-entailing, is “truth-conducive” in the sense of making it objectively likely that one’s belief is true. Second, I take the notion of epistemic justification to be correlative with judgments regarding whether or not someone *should* hold a given belief, where such judgments have an

epistemic basis and are not based on the truth-value of the belief in question. The proposed view accords well with our judgments about whether or not people should believe as they do, in this sense of “should.” Third, the proposed view accords well with our actual justificatory practice. When you attempt to justify holding a particular belief about the world, you offer other considerations about the world which you take to constitute good reasons for holding the belief, and you attempt to offer good reasons for dismissing objections which you take to have some reason in their favor. You thus attempt to offer what are in fact good reasons, not merely what you take to be reasons sufficient to convince or satisfy any particular group of interlocutors.

With these clarifications in place, let us now consider the many justified beliefs which we have never actually attempted to justify. If one succeeds in justifying a belief, then one establishes one’s right to hold it. If one did not previously hold it for bad reasons, then one can also thereby establish that one previously had the right as well. Consequently, a belief which one has not attempted to justify can be justified in virtue of one’s ability to successfully justify it, so long as one does not hold it for bad reasons. This is not to say that being in a position to equip oneself to justify a belief at a later time is sufficient for being justified in holding it now. What is sufficient is not the ability to find a justification by gaining new information or insight, but rather the ability to provide an adequate justification using the resources which one already has in one’s possession. It is difficult to formulate a precise characterization of this difference, but we draw the distinction well enough in practice and there is no reason to expect (or demand) a sharp line.<sup>44</sup>

It should be emphasized that the claim here is not that someone is justified merely in virtue of being able to state a good argument in defense of his belief. He must be sincere, and he must not already hold his belief for bad reasons or on an irrational basis (such as wishful thinking). This appeal to sincerity can be cashed out by adverting to the person’s intentions and the fit between his assertions and his larger background sense of what is the case and what would constitute a good reason for believing as he does. It does not require that he have already held his belief for the reasons which he arrives at in the course of his justificatory activity, or indeed that there already have been any basing relation in place at all. This point has an important implication. We do not need to appeal to basing relations already in place in order to draw the familiar distinction between someone who is justified in believing as she does in part because of the good reasons she possesses and someone who has the same good reasons but isn’t justified because she holds her belief on an irrational basis. The relevant difference may simply be that the former person, unlike the latter, does not already hold the belief on the basis of bad reasons or out of wishful thinking,

self-deception, or anything of the sort, and is currently in a position to justify her belief by basing it upon her good reasons.<sup>45</sup>

I propose, then, that we take the following thought as the basis for the attempt to understand epistemic justification: in the case of normal adult human beings, to be justified in holding a belief is to be able to justify holding it. Or, to put it slightly more fully, to be justified is to be able to draw upon one's background conception of the world in order to defend one's belief by basing it upon objectively adequate reasons and providing objectively good reasons against certain objections.<sup>46</sup> On this view, to be justified is to have a sufficient grasp of how the world is (including both the relevant facts and the relevant relations of evidential support), and sufficient rational capacities, to enable one to recognize good reasons which one possesses for believing as one does, to make them one's reasons for holding the belief, and to respond adequately to objections. Whether one is justified in holding a particular belief in particular circumstances is thus a product of the interplay between what is the case in the world and one's ability to deploy one's overall conception of the world to provide reasons in defense of believing as one does.

## V. Two Worries

Any proposal along these lines can give rise to two important worries. The first concerns the threat of vicious regress, the second young children and animals. I will address each in turn.

Here's how the threat of vicious regress can seem to arise. The ability to justify seemingly can't do one any good unless one is justified in believing the considerations which one offers in defense of one's belief. Given this thought, a vicious regress of basing relations results if one conjoins the requirements (1) that one must be able to justify one's belief and (2) that one can't be justified unless one holds one's belief for adequate reasons. In order to avoid this regress, some epistemologists who otherwise link being justified and the ability to justify have claimed, in effect, that there must be at least some beliefs which are justified though they are not based upon other beliefs and one can't justify holding them.<sup>47</sup> But this is overkill. To avoid a regress of basing relations it is sufficient to deny, as I have, that being justified requires that one already hold one's belief for adequate reasons.

This solution may not seem to avoid all threat of vicious regress, since I grant that one must also be justified in believing whatever considerations one might appeal to in defense of one's belief. But no problematic regress arises from this point, once we have rejected the requirement that one must already hold one's belief for adequate reasons. One is justified in believing the justifying considerations because one is able to justify believing them.

Thus being justified in holding a particular belief requires being able to justify many other beliefs as well. However, the requirement that one be able to justify *each* belief is not equivalent to the requirement that one be able (even in principle) to satisfactorily justify all of them at once. And there is nothing inherently problematic in the thought that possession of one ability requires possession of a whole set of interlocking abilities. One may still have worries at this point concerning the dialectical regress familiar from Pyrrhonian skepticism. Such worries can be assuaged, however, by considering the structure of the activity of justifying: a particular justificatory attempt can appropriately terminate, on a particular occasion, with claims which one does not *have* to defend in order to be justified, though one must be able to justify them.<sup>48</sup>

One other regress may seem relevant here. It is sometimes urged that an account of justification built around the activity of justifying generates an infinite regress of higher-order epistemic beliefs because it requires that in order to be justified, one must have justified beliefs about the justificatory status of one's beliefs. This result can seem unavoidable if one is thinking about the issue from within the Spectatorial framework. However, my proposal does not in fact have this consequence. The ability to justify requires the abilities to reflectively evaluate reasons, make use of them in defense of one's convictions, and respond appropriately to one's evaluations: the abilities constitutive of epistemic agency. Full possession of these abilities may require possession of the concepts of *reasons*, *responsible belief*, and *justified belief*. But none of this entails that one can't be justified in believing that *p* unless one has justified higher-order epistemic beliefs about one's belief that *p*. I do hold that if one believes that *p* and believes, with what one takes to be good reason, that one is *not* justified in believing that *p*, then one is not justified in believing that *p*, since one's belief is not responsible. But to require the absence of certain higher-order beliefs is not to require the presence of any higher-order beliefs.

I turn now to the second worry. Given the plausible assumption that non-human animals and very young children cannot justify their beliefs, my proposal implies that they are not justified in believing as they do. Experience has shown me that this implication can seem troubling. I don't think it should be, however, so long as one is clear about just what status I mean to be picking out by the term "justified."<sup>49</sup>

Several points are relevant here. First, my view does not imply that animals and very young children have *unjustified* beliefs. Rather, it implies that such terms of appraisal (and the larger normative structure of obligations and entitlements which they invoke) don't appropriately apply to them. A similar point is familiar from the moral realm: animals and very young children are not aptly charged with *immorality*; rather, they are not appropriate candidates for moral evaluation at all. In the epistemic

case, the crucial issue concerns basing relations. As I have argued, a creature can't be an appropriate candidate for normative epistemic evaluation and criticism unless it is able to base its beliefs upon particular reasons. This requires having the conceptual and reasoning abilities requisite for evaluating reasons and mastery of the skills and practices through which the commitments establishing basing relations are made. Very young children have not yet attained such skills and abilities, and most (if not all) animals lack even the capacity for them. They therefore do not hold beliefs on the basis of reasons and are not appropriately subjected to the forms of epistemic evaluation with which I am concerned. There is admittedly room for debate regarding particular types of animals. But to argue that any animals are justified in just the way that adult humans are, one would have to show that they are capable of holding beliefs for reasons—with all that that involves.

Second, I do not deny that an importantly related notion of justification may pertain to animals and very young children. For instance, an animal or small child can believe something in a way that involves and is sensitive to considerations which constitute good evidence for its truth. I have no opposition to using the word “justified” to describe this situation. It is important, however, not to be misled into thinking that there must be something in common between the “justified” dog's belief and the justified adult human's belief which suffices to make both beliefs justified, so that in order to determine what it is for an adult human to have a justified belief one could just as well investigate dogs. The dog enjoys an epistemic status which is importantly different from that enjoyed by a mature human being who bases a belief upon good reasons.

This difference shows up in our interactions with very young children and animals. As I have emphasized, the notion of epistemic justification with which I am concerned involves significant normative demands: if one is not justified in holding a particular belief, then one must either give it up or find better grounds for holding it. This larger normative structure is missing in the dog's case. If we judge that a dog has no good reasons for a belief, we might say, “Stop barking, you dumb dog!” But we will not feel that the dog is rationally obliged to give up the belief. Dogs are not appropriately subjected to such obligations. The same goes for my 18-month-old son's belief that airplanes flying overhead are geese. Nor, moreover, do dogs or very young children have the corresponding entitlements when all goes as well as it can for them. A dog cannot be entitled to tell you how things are and to invite you to believe him on the strength of his assurance. This is not to deny that we might rely on a dog as on an instrument. But this kind of reliance is fundamentally different from our relation to the speaker in many cases where we rely on someone's say-so.<sup>50</sup> The difference isn't just that a dog can't speak, as the case of very young children shows. It is that a dog lacks the rational abilities which enable a creature to enter into these practices. The same is true of young children, though we do something

*like* impose this larger normative structure on them from a very early age. This is part of how we turn them into mature epistemic agents.

## VI. Coda

I have argued that the justificatory status of our beliefs is determined by what we are able to do when we attempt to defend our beliefs. It can be tempting to think that this view is itself an instance of something like the Spectatorial Conception. Isn't positive justificatory status still something which "happens to you"? And if our overt rational abilities in some sense consist in or arise from facts captured by cognitive psychology (or perhaps even by neurophysiology), then won't the same be true for the ability to justify? Take the latter question first. I have not quarreled with the view it suggests. However, I have attempted to show that a description of these facts, if there are such, would not provide us with an adequate reflective understanding of what it is for a person to be justified. For it is only in virtue of their connection with the activity of justifying that those facts would have whatever epistemological significance they have. They would suffice to render a person justified in holding a given belief only in virtue of what they enable the person *to do*, namely, successfully justify the belief. And if a person were to report such facts in response to a request for justification, this by itself would not amount to justifying the belief. A mere description (as if from a third-person perspective) of one's psychological or neurophysiological situation is not a justification or defense of believing as one does. For it to be a justification or defense, one would have to offer it in a spirit which would tie the justificatory status of one's belief to the adequacy of that answer as a reason for holding the belief. One would have to establish it as the basis of one's belief. The mere description of one's psychology does not do that.

Consider now the charge that on my view, too, justification is just something which "happens to you." This is certainly how matters look from a third-person standpoint. Consider, however, how they look from the vantage-point of the person who is doing the justifying. Here, what goes on during a justificatory episode, and hence the status of his belief, appears to be relevantly up to him, his doing, something for which he is properly held accountable. This provides a marked contrast with views of justification which embrace the Spectatorial Conception, insofar as they render the person's justificatory activity incoherent from his own point of view. There is a parallel here with issues relating to moral responsibility (in the sense of accountability). According to a familiar line of roughly Kantian thought, the first-personal standpoint of the deliberating agent is fundamentally different from the standpoint of the external observer attempting to construct a scientific prediction or explanation. What may appear ineluctably

“up to the agent” from the former standpoint, may appear to be something which “just happens to the person” from the latter. Still, the former standpoint is itself inescapable, and in responding to an agent in morally-evaluative terms we respond from a stance which is the other-person counterpart of that first-person standpoint, a stance in which we treat the person as an autonomous, accountable agent. Something similar, I would suggest, takes place in the epistemological sphere as well. There is a point of view, shared by both the evaluator and the person under evaluation, from which the person’s justificatory activity is “up to” the person in the relevant sense, not something which merely happens to the person—whatever its natural explanation might be. The task is to get a description of our epistemic lives which does not render that point of view incoherent. That is what my proposal aims to do.

It is an interesting question whether the ability to justify is underwritten by specific facts discoverable in any science of the mind or brain. That question, however, concerns what it is about us, as natural creatures, which makes it possible for us to evaluate reasons, engage in certain practices, and make the normative moves constitutive of making certain considerations our reasons. It is a question about the explanation of our abilities. It is a different question from the question of *what it is* for a rational being to be justified in holding a particular belief. The latter question has been my concern here. As I have proposed, an adequate answer appeals to the ability to justify.<sup>51</sup>

## Notes

1. “The Foundationalism-Coherentism Controversy,” in Audi, *The Structure of Justification* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 145.
2. “Concepts of Epistemic Justification,” in Alston, *Epistemic Justification* (Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 82, final italics added.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 83, fn. 3.
4. In addition to Audi and Alston, this tendency can be found in the writings of Laurence Bonjour, Alvin Goldman, Hilary Kornblith, Susan Haack, Alvin Plantinga, Roderick Chisholm, John Pollock, and James Pryor. I discuss Alston and Bonjour below.

Opposition can be found in Wilfrid Sellars’ remark, “In characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, *of justifying and being able to justify what one says*” (Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” in his *Science, Perception and Reality* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 169, second italics added). However, many epistemologists who have drawn inspiration from Sellars accept the dominant view. Robert Brandom, for instance, writes: “A fundamental point on which broadly externalist approaches to epistemology are clearly right is that one can *be* justified without being *able* to justify”

- (“Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55 (1995), pp. 895–908, at p. 904, italics in the original). Michael Williams agrees, since he maintains that on pains of vicious regress being justified cannot always require the ability to justify (“Skepticism,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, J. Greco and E. Sosa (eds.), Blackwell Publishers, 1999, pp. 35–69).
5. “An Internalist Externalism,” in *Epistemic Justification*, p. 227.
  6. *Ibid.*, pp. 228–31, in particular 228–9.
  7. *Ibid.*, pp. 231–3.
  8. *Epistemic Justification*, p. 7. Italics in original.
  9. One could supplement such views with the requirement that one must also be able to determine and correctly report the facts in virtue of which one’s belief is justified, but such an addition would not repudiate the conception articulated by Alston, as I argue below.
  10. BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 24. Cf. p. 90.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
  12. P. 20. BonJour is not always perfectly consistent on this point elsewhere in the text or in subsequent discussion, and at times he appears to favor a view of the sort which I advocate here. In this regard, his view may not be a perfect example of the conception which is my target. As I explain below, however, BonJour’s “accessibility internalism” is perfectly compatible with this conception. Consequently, one could endorse an internalist form of coherentism, deny the causal view, and still accept this conception.
  13. Finer-grained positions are possible here, since one could impose accessibility requirements on some of the factors relevant to justificatory status but not others. See, for instance, Alston’s “An Internalist Externalism,” in *Epistemic Justification*.
  14. *Op. cit.*, p. 19.
  15. See, for instance, BonJour’s attempt to motivate accessibility internalism by appealing to the requirements which one must meet in order to hold a belief in a responsible way (*op. cit.*, chapt. 1).
  16. I don’t claim that the Spectatorial Conception logically or conceptually entails an appeal to basing relations, but rather that this appeal is needed in order to work out the Spectatorial Conception in a plausible way. This need has been widely recognized. See, for instance, Roderick Firth, “Are Epistemic Concepts Reducible to Ethical Concepts?” and lecture II of his 1978 Schneck Lectures (both in *In Defense of Radical Empiricism*, J. Troyer (ed.), Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), and Hilary Kornblith, “Beyond Foundationalism and the Coherence Theory,” *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), 597–612. Indeed, the need to appeal to basing relations provides a crucial part of a standard argument for “naturalizing” the theory of justification (see Kornblith, *op. cit.*, pp. 601–3, Philip Kitcher, “The Naturalists Return,” *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992), pp. 53–114, esp. p. 60). (BonJour, too, acknowledges this need when he requires that in order for a person’s belief to be justified, the acceptable inference must be “in the final analysis and in a sense most difficult to define precisely, *his actual reason for holding the belief*” (*op. cit.*, p. 19, italics added).

17. For representative statements, see Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, pp. 228–9; Audi, “Psychological Foundationalism,” in *The Structure of Justification*, p. 54, and “Belief, Reason, and Inference,” *ibid.*, pp. 233–73; Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1986), p. 37. See also Swain, “Justification and the Basis of Belief,” in George Pappas (ed.), *Knowledge and Justification* (D. Reidel, 1979), pp. 25–50. For a survey of recent work on the basing relation in this broad tradition, see Keith Korcz, “Recent Work on the Basing Relation,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1997), pp. 171–91. Gilbert Harman rejects the causal view on the grounds that reasons-explanations of people’s beliefs are not, strictly speaking, *causal* explanations, but he defends an etiological account of the basing relation, as I discuss below.
18. Keith Lehrer denies the causal view and, it seems, etiological views as well (*Theory of Knowledge* (Westview Press, 1990), p. 171). Nonetheless, he maintains that the reasons upon which a belief is based are determined by the correct answer to the question, “How do you know that *p*?”, and he insists that the answer to this question “need not be anything *S* would be able to produce” (“How Reasons Give Us Knowledge,” *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971), p. 312).
19. Harman’s paper, “Knowledge, Reasons, and Causes” (*Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970), pp. 841–55), offered arguments against an earlier characterization of basing relations offered by Lehrer, according to which a belief is not based upon particular reasons if the person would not appeal to those reasons to justify his belief (“Knowledge, Truth, and Evidence,” 1965, reprinted in L. Galis and M. Roth (eds.), *Knowing: Essays in the Analysis of Knowledge* (University Press of America, 1984), at p. 56). Lehrer’s suggestion is the last instance of an earlier tradition which took the person’s justificatory activity to be centrally important in establishing basing relations. Lehrer accepted Harman’s criticisms (see “How Reasons Give us Knowledge,” p. 311), and the subsequent discussion has proceeded entirely within the terms of the framework laid out by Harman (though later writers have rejected Harman’s restrictive conception of causal explanation).
20. Compare Alston’s description of the grounds of a belief as “those features of the input to the formation of the belief that were actually taken account of in the belief formation” (*op. cit.*, p. 231).
21. “People often believe things for good reasons, which give them knowledge, even though they cannot say what those reasons are. . . . In most cases a person is unable to state his reasons in any sort of detail. At best he can give only the vaguest indication of the reasons that convince him. It is only in rare cases that we can tell a person’s reasons from what he can say about them. Indeed, it is doubtful that a person can ever fully identify his reasons” (“Knowledge, Reasons, and Causes,” p. 844).
22. *Ibid.*, p. 845.
23. I am grateful to Dick Moran for this example.
24. One significant exception is the case in which the person arrived at a belief through an explicit process of inference and is now attempting to remember precisely how the inference had gone. I’m grateful to Fred Schmitt for pointing this out.

25. As will become apparent, these two requirements are linked: in order for an account to meet the second requirement, it must meet the first.
26. C. Ginet, "Contra Reliabilism," *Monist* 68 (1985), pp. 175–87, at p. 183.
27. The argument of this paragraph uses an assumption which is not strictly speaking essential to the Spectatorial Conception, namely, the thought that if stating one's reasons is a matter of offering a report about prior and independent causal or etiological relations between one's beliefs, then statements of one's reasons will have to be construed as *fallible*. In principle, one could combine the Spectatorial Conception with the claim that barring irrationality (such as rationalization or self-deception), we are guaranteed to be right about what our beliefs are based upon whenever we make a judgment about the matter. Robert Audi suggests such a view—a (more or less) causal account of the basing relation plus a *ceteris paribus* infallibility condition—in "Belief, Reason, and Inference," in Audi, *op. cit.*, pp. 233–73, especially pp. 250 ff. The resulting view seems implausible. Why think that barring irrationality we have infallible access to the correct causal explanations of our beliefs? Surely we don't! (This is not to deny that people *do* speak with authority about their reasons when they are not suffering from irrationality. But this fact cannot really be rendered intelligible within the terms of the Spectatorial Conception.)
28. It might be urged that the basing relation does not play this normative role. It seems undeniable, however, that if there is such a thing as the epistemic evaluation of persons with the normative consequences I have in mind, then we must postulate a relation playing the role I describe. And it seems plain that we do engage in epistemic evaluation of people and place normative epistemic demands upon them. (One might doubt that such evaluation is really appropriate or really makes sense, e.g., on the grounds that we lack voluntary control over our beliefs, but that is another issue. As I explain below, I do not think that these forms of evaluation presuppose or require voluntary control.)
29. One can say, without incoherence, "q is my reason for believing that p, but I admit that it is a rotten reason." However, though not incoherent, this utterance is irrational; it marks a failing on the part of the agent. Another way to put the problem with the Spectatorial Conception is to note that if it were correct, such a statement would not mark any failing by *the person*, but only a failing in the causal processes within him which produce or sustain the belief.
30. For an important recent discussion of when it is appropriate to treat a condition as attributable to a person for the purposes of normative evaluation of that person, see T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 17–25 and 267–90. Scanlon argues, correctly in my view, that normative appraisal of the person does not require the person's voluntary control over the condition in question, but rather that the condition be responsive to the person's evaluations of reasons. A full discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the need for such discussion points towards a potentially fruitful interaction between epistemology, philosophy of mind, and ethics (particularly, the literature on "moral responsibility") and reveals one of the many ways in which epistemology is part of the larger philosophical project of understanding the normative aspects of our lives.

31. For an important discussion of the role of first-personal deliberation, particularly in relation to self-knowledge, see Richard Moran, *Authority and Estrangement* (Princeton University Press, 2001).
32. One may doubt whether the concept *holding a belief for a reason* can have the features I have described and also be genuinely explanatory. Since this concept is part of the network of concepts of commonsense psychology, this is an instance of the familiar, and more general, puzzle regarding the relation between person-level commonsense psychological explanation and explanations in scientific psychology (or, indeed, neurophysiology). This difficult topic is beyond the scope of this paper.
33. *Thought* (Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 29. Lehrer has offered putative counterexamples to this requirement (his well-known example of the Gypsy Lawyer in “How Reasons Give Us Knowledge” and the slightly different example of Mr. Raco in *Theory of Knowledge*). With slight modifications, the account sketched here can deal with these examples.
34. A note on non-human animals. Cognitive-psychological explanations of animals’ beliefs might show that these beliefs arise through processes usefully termed “reasoning,” and for certain purposes we might talk as though these explanations provide reasons for which these creatures hold these beliefs. But this talk must be taken with a grain of salt. If we fail to recognize that it is an extension to the more primitive case of notions which apply in the first instance to the more sophisticated adult case, then we might be tempted to treat the adult case as being merely the more primitive case along with something added (the ability for explicit reflection, deliberation, etc.) But then we will think that in the adult case, too, basing relations have no fundamental connection with the commitments and endorsements taken on by the person, and as a result we will lose sight of precisely what makes it possible for basing relations to play their normative role. So to retain the normative role of the basing relation in the epistemic evaluation of persons, we must treat the adult case as central. The animal case is a derivative version of the case in which we attribute basing relations to an adult human being in virtue of the commitments which the person has undertaken. In both cases, a certain sort of explanation of the belief is possible; what is missing in the animal case is the larger background of abilities (e.g., to make the appropriate commitments) which enables full-fledged attribution of basing relations in the first place. (In section V (below) I discuss animals in relation to my account of justification.)
35. Perhaps it will be suggested that both beliefs are based on some body of experiences or memories. But now we return to the first problem. Precisely *which* experiences or memories are the relevant ones? Furthermore, if the memories or experiences are described in a way that is noncommittal as to whether she loves me, then basing the belief that she loves me on those experiences or memories arguably requires believing that she isn’t misleading me through her behavior; for if I didn’t believe that, then I couldn’t plausibly be said to take my experiences (or memories) of her behavior to be a reason to believe she loves me. But then the problem of the structure of basing relations recurs. For what is my

- reason for believing that she wouldn't mislead me? These puzzles are dissolved if we simply allow that these beliefs aren't (yet) epistemically based on any particular reasons at all.
36. This point has important implications for traditional debates about the "structure of justification." It is often assumed that the traditional debate over foundationalism concerns the structure of a system of basing relations which encompasses all of one's justified beliefs. If the debate is understood in this way, however, then it is based upon a false presupposition. At any given time, there is no system of basing relations encompassing all of one's justified beliefs. An adequate account of justification must allow for this fact.
  37. Harman appeals to rationalization as support for a purely explanatory or etiological account of the basing relation and against the suggestion that one must be able to express one's reasons (*Thought*, p. 28.). In his example, a person holds a belief for certain reasons which, because of repression, he cannot acknowledge even in his own private deliberations. It appears possible for someone to get into such a fix. However, this does not tell against my proposals. In such cases, the correct explanation of the person's belief shows that he holds the commitments necessary for making the repressed considerations his reasons for believing as he does. However, because he has repressed the relevant beliefs they are not available to his conscious thought when he reflects upon the grounds for and against the belief in question. Consequently, he cannot acknowledge his commitments in his explicit thinking, nor can he currently change the reasons for which he holds this belief in the usual way. But it remains the case that *if* the repression were lifted, then he would both be able to acknowledge these commitments and modify them in the usual way. Such a case is thus a highly derivative one; it depends upon the person's background ability to explicitly undertake the relevant commitments, his having the relevant commitments in the particular case, and his possession of the psychic structures necessary for repression and self-deception. Consequently, even if (as I am willing to grant) such examples are intelligible, they do not show that explanatory factors alone always suffice to establish basing relations or that basing relations are ordinarily in place even if one can't acknowledge them. Nor is it appropriate to take such a case as central for an account of the basing relation, as Harman in effect does.
  38. This is roughly the position of Robert Brandom (*Articulating Reasons* (Harvard University Press, 2000), chapter 3, and *Making It Explicit* (Harvard University Press, 1994), esp. chapter 4) and Michael Williams ("Skepticism," *op. cit.*).
  39. Michael Williams urged this sort of view in *Unnatural Doubts* (Princeton University Press, 1996). On one common interpretation of *On Certainty* (Blackwell, 1969), so did Wittgenstein.
  40. Alston, "Concepts of Epistemic Justification," in *Epistemic Justification*, pp. 82–3 fn.
  41. One might hold, for instance, that standards of adequacy depend in some way upon social or conversational factors. Though I am not inclined to accept such views, I take no official stand on them here.
  42. Richard Rorty once claimed that a person is justified just if he is able to convince his conversational partners (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press, 1979)). David Annis makes a similar claim, emphasizing

instead a relevant group of experts (“A Contextualist Theory of Epistemic Justification,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978), pp. 213–9).

43. I take no stand here on the metaphysical nature of relations of evidential support, except to rule out the crudest subjectivist or relativist views, which would hold that  $x$  supports  $y$  just if, and in virtue of the fact that, some relevant group of people take (or would take)  $x$  to support  $y$ .
44. Consider, for instance, Andrew Wiles’ success in developing a proof of Fermat’s last theorem. He was able to find a justification for his belief, but he wasn’t in possession of that justification from the beginning. Finding it required making discoveries. This is so even though his proof was a priori.
45. This point undermines a standard argument for a certain form of “psychologistic epistemology” articulated by Kornblith, Harman, and Kitcher. Kitcher puts it this way:

Take any set of favored logical relations among propositions that a subject believes. It is nonetheless possible that the subject lacks knowledge and lacks justification because the *psychological* connections among her states of belief have nothing to do with the logical relations. . . . Apsychologistic epistemology can struggle to accommodate such examples by invoking ever more complicated conditions on knowledge and justification, but the accumulation of epicycles serves only to disguise the fundamental point that the epistemic status of a belief state depends on the etiology of the state, and consequently, on psychological facts about the subject (“The Naturalists Return,” p. 60, italics in original).

The problem with the argument is this. While a person’s justificatory status regarding a particular belief does indeed depend upon something about the person, it is not true that what is crucial are always psychologically explanatory connections mirroring the logical relations amongst her beliefs. Of course, someone is not justified if she currently holds a belief for bad reasons, regardless of whether she also believes things which constitute good reasons for her belief. But someone may be justified who does not (yet) base her belief on *any* reasons, and this is not because of the etiology of her belief but rather because of her justificatory abilities. In this sort of case, etiological considerations are only negatively relevant.

46. These formulations assume that one does not already hold the belief on the basis of bad reasons.
47. See, for instance, Michael Williams, “Skepticism,” *op. cit.*
48. This issue is discussed at length in my unpublished manuscript, “A Localist Solution to the Regress of Epistemic Justification.”
49. In what follows, I grant for the sake of discussion that animals and very young children have determinate beliefs. Though I have reservations on this score, they are not pertinent here.
50. For important discussions of this large and difficult topic, see Tyler Burge, “Content Preservation,” *Philosophical Review* 102 (1993), pp. 457–88 and “Interlocution, Perception and Memory,” *Philosophical Studies* 86 (1997), 21–47, and Angus Ross, “Why Do We Believe What We are Told?” *Ratio* 28 (1986), pp. 69–88. I have been helped here by unpublished work by Dick Moran.
51. Many people have helped, encouraged, and challenged me regarding the ideas in this paper. I’d especially like to thank Luca Ferrero, David Finkelstein, Warren Goldfarb, Mark Kaplan, Hilary Kornblith, Dick Moran, Ram Neta, James

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