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Evidentialism

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## EVIDENTIALISM

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## I

We advocate evidentialism in epistemology. What we call evidentialism is the view that the epistemic justification of a belief is determined by the quality of the believer's evidence for the belief. Disbelief and suspension of judgment also can be epistemically justified. The doxastic attitude that a person is justified in having is the one that fits the person's evidence. More precisely:

EJ      Doxastic attitude  $D$  toward proposition  $p$  is epistemically justified for  $S$  at  $t$  if and only if having  $D$  toward  $p$  fits the evidence  $S$  has at  $t$ .<sup>1</sup>

We do not offer EJ as an analysis. Rather it serves to indicate the kind of notion of justification that we take to be characteristically epistemic — a notion that makes justification turn entirely on evidence. Here are three examples that illustrate the application of this notion of justification. First, when a physiologically normal person under ordinary circumstances looks at a plush green lawn that is directly in front of him in broad daylight, believing that there is something green before him is the attitude toward this proposition that fits his evidence. That is why the belief is epistemically justified. Second, suspension of judgment is the fitting attitude for each of us toward the proposition that an even number of ducks exists, since our evidence makes it equally likely that the number is odd. Neither belief nor disbelief is epistemically justified when our evidence is equally balanced. And third, when it comes to the proposition that sugar is sour, our gustatory experience makes disbelief the fitting attitude. Such experiential evidence epistemically justifies disbelief.<sup>2</sup>

EJ is not intended to be surprising or innovative. We take it to be the view about the nature of epistemic justification with the most initial plausibility.

A defense of EJ is now appropriate because several theses about justification that seem to cast doubt on it have been prominent in recent literature on epistemology. Broadly speaking, these theses imply that epistemic justification depends upon the cognitive capacities of people, or upon the cognitive processes or information-gathering practices that led to the attitude. In contrast, EJ asserts that the epistemic justification of an attitude depends only on evidence.

We believe that EJ identifies the basic concept of epistemic justification. We find no adequate grounds for accepting the recently discussed theses about justification that seem to cast doubt on EJ. In the remainder of this paper we defend evidentialism. Our purpose is to show that it continues to be the best view of epistemic justification.

## II

In this section we consider two objections to EJ. Each is based on a claim about human limits and a claim about the conditions under which an attitude can be justified. One objection depends on the claim that an attitude can be justified only if it is voluntarily adopted, the other depends on the claim that an attitude toward a proposition or propositions can be justified for a person only if the ability to have that attitude toward the proposition or those propositions is within normal human limits.

### *Doxastic Voluntarism*

EJ says that a doxastic attitude is justified for a person when that attitude fits the person's evidence. It is clear that there are cases in which a certain attitude toward a proposition fits a person's evidence, yet the person has no control over whether he forms that attitude toward that proposition. So some involuntarily adopted attitudes are justified according to EJ. John Heil finds this feature of the evidentialist position questionable. He says that the fact that we "speak of a person's beliefs as being warranted, justified, or rational ... makes it appear that ... believing something can, at least sometimes, be under the voluntary control of the believer."<sup>3</sup> Hilary Kornblith claims that it seems "unfair" to evaluate beliefs if they "are not subject" to direct voluntary control.<sup>4</sup> Both Heil and Kornblith conclude that although beliefs are not under *direct* voluntary control, it is still appropriate to

evaluate them because “they are not entirely out of our control either”.<sup>5</sup> “One does have a say in the procedures one undertakes that lead to” the formation of beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

Doxastic attitudes need not be under any sort of voluntary control for them to be suitable for epistemic evaluation. Examples confirm that beliefs may be both involuntary and subject to epistemic evaluation. Suppose that a person spontaneously and involuntarily believes that the lights are on in the room, as a result of the familiar sort of completely convincing perceptual evidence. This belief is clearly justified, whether or not the person cannot voluntarily acquire, lose, or modify the cognitive process that led to the belief. Unjustified beliefs can also be involuntary. A paranoid man might believe without any supporting evidence that he is being spied on. This belief might be a result of an uncontrollable desire to be a recipient of special attention. In such a case the belief is clearly epistemically unjustified even if the belief is involuntary and the person cannot alter the process leading to it.

The contrary view that only voluntary beliefs are justified or unjustified may seem plausible if one confuses the topic of EJ with an assessment of the *person*.<sup>7</sup> A person deserves praise or blame for being in a doxastic state only if that state is under the person’s control.<sup>8</sup> The person who involuntarily believes in the presence of overwhelming evidence that the lights are on does not deserve praise for this belief. The belief is nevertheless justified. The person who believes that he is being spied on as a result of an uncontrollable desire does not deserve to be blamed for that belief. But there is a fact about the belief’s epistemic merit. It is epistemically defective – it is held in the presence of insufficient evidence and is therefore unjustified.

### *Doxastic Limits*

Apart from the questions about doxastic voluntarism, it is sometimes claimed that it is inappropriate to set epistemic standards that are beyond normal human limits. Alvin Goldman recommends that epistemologists seek epistemic principles that can serve as practical guides to belief formation. Such principles, he contends, must take into account the limited cognitive capacities of people. Thus, he is led to deny a principle instructing people to believe all the logical consequences of their beliefs, since they are unable to have the infinite number of beliefs that following such a principle would require.<sup>9</sup> Goldman’s view does not conflict with EJ, since EJ does not instruct anyone

to believe anything. It simply states a necessary and sufficient condition for epistemic justification. Nor does Goldman think this view conflicts with EJ, since he makes it clear that the principles he is discussing are guides to action and not principles that apply the traditional concept of epistemic justification.

Although Goldman does not use facts about normal cognitive limits to argue against EJ, such an argument has been suggested by Kornblith and by Paul Thagard. Kornblith cites Goldman's work as an inspiration for his view that "having justified beliefs is simply doing the best one can in the light of the innate endowment one starts from..."<sup>10</sup> Thagard contends that rational or justified principles of inference "should not demand of a reasoner inferential performance which exceeds the general psychological abilities of human beings".<sup>11</sup> Neither Thagard nor Kornblith argues against EJ, but it is easy to see how such an argument would go: A doxastic attitude toward a proposition is justified for a person only if having that attitude toward that proposition is within the normal doxastic capabilities of people. Some doxastic attitudes that fit a person's evidence are not within those capabilities. Yet EJ classifies them as justified. Hence, EJ is false.

We see no good reason here to deny EJ. The argument has as a premise the claim that some attitudes beyond normal limits do fit someone's evidence. The fact that we are limited to a finite number of beliefs is used to support this claim. But this fact does not establish the premise. There is no reason to think that an infinite number of beliefs fit any body of evidence that anyone ever has. The evidence that people have under ordinary circumstances never makes it evident, concerning every one of an infinite number of logical consequences of that evidence, that it is a consequence. Thus, believing each consequence will not fit any ordinary evidence. Furthermore, even if there are circumstances in which more beliefs fit a person's evidence than he is able to have, all that follows is that he cannot have at one time all the beliefs that fit. It does not follow that there is any particular fitting belief which is unattainable. Hence, the premise of the argument that says that EJ classifies as justified some normally unattainable beliefs is not established by means of this example. There does not seem to be any sort of plausible evidence that would establish this premise. While some empirical evidence may show that people typically do not form fitting attitudes in certain contexts, or that some fitting attitudes are beyond some individual's abilities, such evidence fails to show that any fitting attitudes are beyond normal limits.

There is a more fundamental objection to this argument against EJ. There is no basis for the premise that what is epistemically justified must be restricted to feasible doxastic alternatives. It can be a worthwhile thing to help people to choose among the epistemic alternatives open to them. But suppose that there were occasions when forming the attitude that best fits a person's evidence was beyond normal cognitive limits. This would still be the attitude *justified* by the person's evidence. If the person had normal abilities, then he would be in the unfortunate position of being unable to do what is justified according to the standard for justification asserted by EJ. This is not a flaw in the account of justification. Some standards are met only by going beyond normal human limits. Standards that some teachers set for an 'A' in a course are unattainable for most students. There are standards of artistic excellence that no one can meet, or at least standards that normal people cannot meet in any available circumstance. Similarly, epistemic justification might have been normally unattainable.

We conclude that neither considerations of doxastic voluntarism nor of doxastic limits provide any good reason to abandon EJ as an account of epistemic justification.

### III

EJ sets an epistemic standard for evaluating doxastic conduct. In any case of a standard for conduct, whether it is voluntary or not, it is appropriate to speak of 'requirements' or 'obligations' that the standard imposes. The person who has overwhelming perceptual evidence for the proposition that the lights are on, epistemically ought to believe that proposition. The paranoid person epistemically ought not believe that he is being spied upon when he has no evidence supporting this belief. We hold the general view that one epistemically ought to have the doxastic attitudes that fit one's evidence. We think that being epistemically obligatory is equivalent to being epistemically justified.

There are in the literature two other sorts of view about epistemic obligations. What is epistemically obligatory, according to these other views, does not always fit one's evidence. Thus, each of these views of epistemic obligation, when combined with our further thesis that being epistemically obligatory is equivalent to being epistemically justified, yields results incompatible with evidentialism. We shall now consider how these proposals affect EJ.

*Justification and the Obligation to Believe Truths*

Roderick Chisholm holds that one has an “intellectual requirement” to try one’s best to bring it about that, of the propositions one considers, one believes all and only the truths.<sup>13</sup> This theory of what our epistemic obligations are, in conjunction with our view that the justified attitudes are the ones we have an epistemic obligation to hold, implies the following principle:

- CJ      Doxastic attitude *D* toward proposition *p* is justified for person *S* at time *t* if and only if *S* considers *p* at *t* and *S*’s having *D* toward *p* at *t* would result from *S*’s trying his best to bring it about that *S* believe *p* at *t* iff *p* is true.

Evaluation of CJ is complicated by an ambiguity in ‘trying one’s best’. It might mean ‘trying in that way which will in fact have the best results’. Since the goal is to believe all and only the truths one considers, the best results would be obtained by believing each truth one considers and disbelieving each falsehood one considers. On this interpretation, CJ implies that believing each truth and disbelieving each falsehood one considers is justified whenever believing and disbelieving in these ways would result from something one could try to do.

On this interpretation CJ is plainly false. We are not justified in believing every proposition we consider that happens to be true and which we could believe by trying for the truth. It is possible to believe some unsubstantiated proposition in a reckless endeavor to believe a truth, and happen to be right. This would not be an epistemically justified belief.”<sup>14</sup>

It might be contended that trying one’s best to believe truths and disbelieve falsehoods really amounts to trying to believe and disbelieve in accordance with one’s evidence. We agree that gaining the doxastic attitudes that fit one’s evidence is the epistemically best way to use one’s evidence in trying to believe all and only the truths one considers. This interpretation of CJ makes it nearly equivalent to EJ. There are two relevant differences. First, CJ implies that one can have justified attitudes only toward propositions one actually considers. EJ does not have this implication. CJ is also unlike EJ in implying that an attitude is justified if it would result from the *trying* to form the attitude that fits one’s evidence. The attitude that is justified according to EJ is the one that as a matter of fact does fit one’s evidence. This seems more plausible. What would happen if one tried to have

a fitting attitude seems irrelevant – one might try but fail to form the fitting attitude.

We conclude that the doxastic attitudes that would result from carrying out the intellectual requirement that Chisholm identifies are not the epistemically justified attitudes.

### *Justification and Epistemically Responsible Action*

Another view about epistemic obligations, proposed by Hilary Kornblith, is that we are obligated to seek the truth and gather evidence in a responsible way. Kornblith also maintains that the justification of a belief depends on how responsibly one carried out the inquiry that led to the belief.<sup>15</sup> We shall now examine how the considerations leading to this view affect EJ.

Kornblith describes a case of what he regards as “epistemically culpable ignorance.” It is an example in which a person’s belief seems to fit his evidence, and thus it seems to be justified according to evidentialism. Kornblith contends that the belief is unjustified because it results from epistemically irresponsible behavior. His example concerns a headstrong young physicist who is unable to tolerate criticism. After presenting a paper to his colleagues, the physicist pays no attention to the devastating objection of a senior colleague. The physicist, obsessed with his own success, fails even to hear the objection, which consequently has no impact on his beliefs, Kornblith says that after this, the physicist’s belief in his own theory is unjustified. He suggests that evidentialist theories cannot account for this fact.

Crucial details of this example are left unspecified, but in no case does it provide a refutation of evidentialism. If the young physicist is aware of the fact that his senior colleague is making an objection, then this fact is evidence he has against his theory, although it is unclear from just this much detail how decisive it would be. So, believing his theory may no longer be justified for him according to a purely evidentialist view. On the other hand, perhaps he remains entirely ignorant of the fact that a senior colleague is objecting to his theory. He might be ‘lost in thought’ – privately engrossed in proud admiration of the paper he has just given – and fail to understand what is going on in the audience. If this happens, and his evidence supporting his theory is just as it was prior to his presentation of the paper, then believing the theory does remain justified for him (assuming that it was justified previously). There is no reason to doubt EJ in the light of this example. It



may be true that the young physicist is an unpleasant fellow, and that he lacks intellectual integrity. This is an evaluation of the character of the physicist. It is supported by the fact that in this case he is not engaged in an impartial quest for the truth. But the physicist's character has nothing to do with the epistemic status of his belief in his theory.

Responsible evidence-gathering obviously has some epistemic significance. One serious epistemological question is that of how to engage in a thoroughgoing rational pursuit of the truth. Such a pursuit may require gathering evidence in responsible ways. It may also be necessary to be open to new ideas, to think about a variety of important issues, and to consider a variety of opinions about such issues. Perhaps it requires, as Bonjour suggests, that one "reflect critically upon one's beliefs".<sup>16</sup> But everyone has some justified beliefs, even though virtually no one is fully engaged in a rational pursuit of the truth. EJ has no implication about the actions one must take in a rational pursuit of the truth. It is about the epistemic evaluation of attitudes given the evidence one does have, however one came to possess that evidence.

Examples like that of the headstrong physicist show no defect in the evidentialist view. Justified beliefs can result from epistemically irresponsible actions.

### *Other Sorts of Obligation*

Having acknowledged at the beginning of this section that justified attitudes are in a sense obligatory, we wish to forestall confusions involving other notions of obligations. It is not the case that there is always a *moral* obligation to believe in accordance with one's evidence. Having a fitting attitude can bring about disastrous personal or social consequences. Vicious beliefs that lead to vicious acts can be epistemically justified. This rules out any moral obligation to have the epistemically justified attitude.<sup>17</sup>

It is also false that there is always a *prudential* obligation to have each epistemically justified attitude. John Heil discusses the following example.<sup>18</sup> Sally has fairly good evidence that her husband Burt has been seeing another woman. Their marriage is in a precarious condition. It would be best for Sally if their marriage were preserved. Sally foresees that, were she to believe that Burt has been seeing another woman, her resulting behavior would lead to their divorce. Given these assumptions, EJ counts as justified at least some measure of belief by Sally in the proposition that Burt has been seeing another

woman. But Sally would be better off if she did not have this belief, in light of the fact that she would be best served by their continued marriage. Heil raises the question of what Sally's prudential duty is in this case. Sally's *epistemic* obligation is to believe that her husband is unfaithful. But that gives no reason to deny what seems obvious here. Sally *prudentially* ought to refrain from believing her husband to be unfaithful. It can be prudent not to have a doxastic attitude that is correctly said by EJ to be justified, just as it can be moral not to have such an attitude.

More generally, the causal consequences of having an unjustified attitude can be more beneficial in *any* sort of way than the consequences of having its justified alternative. We have seen that it can be morally and prudentially best not to have attitudes justified according to EJ. Failing to have these attitudes can also have the best results for the sake of *epistemic* goals such as the acquisition of knowledge. Roderick Firth points out that a scientist's believing against his evidence that he will recover from an illness may help to effect a recovery and so contribute to the growth of knowledge by enabling the scientist to continue his research.<sup>19</sup> William James's case for exercising "the will to believe" suggests that some evidence concerning the existence of God is available only after one believes in God in the absence of justifying evidence. EJ does not counsel against adopting such beliefs for the sake of these epistemic ends. EJ implies that the beliefs would be unjustified when adopted. This is not to say that the believing would do no epistemic good.

We acknowledge that it is appropriate to speak of epistemic obligations. But it is a mistake to think that what is epistemically obligatory, i.e., epistemically justified, is also morally or prudentially obligatory, or that it has the overall best epistemic consequences.

#### IV

Another argument that is intended to refute the evidentialist approach to justification concerns the ways in which a person can come to have an attitude that fits his evidence. Both Kornblith and Goldman propose examples designed to show that merely *having* good evidence for a proposition is not sufficient to make believing that proposition justified.<sup>20</sup> We shall work from Kornblith's formulation of the argument, since it is more detailed. Suppose Alfred is justified in believing  $p$ , and justified in believing if  $p$  then  $q$ . Alfred also believes  $q$ . EJ seems to imply that believing  $q$  is justified for Alfred, since

that belief does seem to fit this evidence. Kornblith argues that Alfred's belief in  $q$  may still not be justified. It is not justified, according to Kornblith, if Alfred has a strong distrust of *modus ponens* and believes  $q$  because he likes the sound of the sentence expressing it rather than on the basis of the modus ponens argument. Similarly, Goldman says that a person's belief in  $q$  is not justified unless the belief is caused in some appropriate way.

Whether EJ implies that Alfred's belief in  $q$  is justified depends in part on an unspecified detail – Alfred's evidence concerning *modus ponens*. It is possible that Alfred has evidence against *modus ponens*. Perhaps he has just seen a version of the Liar paradox to seem to render *modus ponens* as suspect as the other rules and premises in the derivation. In the unlikely event that Alfred has such evidence, EJ implies that believing  $q$  is *not* justified for him. If rather, as we shall assume, his overall evidence supports *modus ponens* and  $q$ , then EJ does imply that believing  $q$  is justified for him.

When Alfred has strong evidence for  $q$ , his believing  $q$  is epistemically justified. This is the sense of 'justified' captured by EJ. However, if Alfred's basis for believing  $q$  is not his evidence for it, but rather the sound of the sentence expressing  $q$ , then it seems equally clear that there is some sense in which this state of believing is epistemically "defective" – he did not arrive at the belief in the right way. The term 'well-founded' is sometimes used to characterize an attitude that is epistemically both well-supported and properly arrived at. Well-foundedness is a second evidentialist notion used to evaluate doxastic states. It is an evidentialist notion because its application depends on two matters of evidence – the evidence one *has*, and the evidence one *uses* in forming the attitude. More precisely:

- WF       $S$ 's doxastic attitude  $D$  at  $t$  toward proposition  $p$  is well-founded if and only if
- (i) having  $D$  toward  $p$  is justified for  $S$  at  $t$ ; and
  - (ii)  $S$  has  $D$  toward  $p$  on the basis of some body of evidence  $e$ , such that
    - (a)  $S$  has  $e$  as evidence at  $t$ ;
    - (b) having  $D$  toward  $p$  fits  $e$ ; and
    - (c) there is no more inclusive body of evidence  $e'$  had by  $S$  at  $t$  such that having  $D$  toward  $p$  does not fit  $e'$ .<sup>21</sup>

Since the evidentialist can appeal to this notion of well-foundedness, cases in which a person has but does not use justifying evidence do not refute evidentialism. Kornblith and Goldman's intuitions about such cases can be accom-

modated. A person in Alfred's position *is* in an epistemically defective state – his belief in *q* is not well-founded. Having said this, it is reasonable also to affirm the other evidentialist judgment that Alfred's belief in *q* is in another sense epistemically right – it is justified.<sup>22</sup>

## v

The theory of epistemic justification that has received the most attention recently is reliabilism. Roughly speaking, this is the view that epistemically justified beliefs are the ones that result from belief-forming processes that reliably lead to true beliefs.<sup>23</sup> In this section we consider whether reliabilism casts doubt on evidentialism.

Although reliabilists generally formulate their view as an account of epistemic justification, it is clear that in its simplest forms it is better regarded as an account of well-foundedness. In order for a belief to be favorably evaluated by the simple sort of reliabilism sketched above, the belief must actually be held, as is the case with WF. And just as with WF, the belief must be “grounded” in the proper way. Where reliabilism appears to differ from WF is over the conditions under which a belief is properly grounded. According to WF, this occurs when the belief is based on fitting evidence. According to reliabilism, a belief is properly grounded if it results from a belief-forming process that reliably leads to true beliefs. These certainly are *conceptually* different accounts of the grounds of well-founded beliefs.

In spite of this conceptual difference, reliabilism and WF may be extensionally equivalent. The question of equivalence depends on the resolution of two unclaritys in reliabilism. One pertains to the notion of a belief-forming process and the other to the notion of reliability.

An unclarity about belief-forming processes arises because every belief is caused by a sequence of particular events which is an instance of many types of causal processes. Suppose that one evening Jones looks out of his window and sees a bright shining disk-shaped object. The object is in fact a luminous frisbee, and Jones clearly remembers having given one of these to his daughter. But Jones is attracted to the idea that extraterrestrials are visiting the Earth. He manages to believe that he is seeing a flying saucer. Is the process that caused this belief reliable? Since the sequence of events leading to his belief is an instance of many types of process, the answer depends upon which of these many types is the relevant one. The sequence falls into highly general

categories such as perceptually-based belief formation and visually-based belief formation. It seems that if these are the relevant categories, then his belief is indeed reliably formed, since these are naturally regarded as “generally reliable” sorts of belief-forming processes. The sequence of events leading to Jones’s belief also falls into many relatively specific categories such as night-vision-of-a-nearby-object and vision-in-Jones’s-precise-environmental-circumstances. These are not clearly reliable types. The sequence is also an instance of this contrived kind: process-leading-from-obviously-defeated-evidence-to-the-belief-that-one-sees-a-flying-saucer. This, presumably, is an unreliable kind of process. Finally, there is the maximally specific process that occurs only when physiological events occur that are exactly like those that led to Jones’s belief that he saw a flying saucer. In all likelihood this kind of process occurred only once. Processes of these types are of differing degrees of reliability, no matter how reliability is determined. The implications of reliabilism for the case are rendered definite only when the kind of process whose reliability is relevant is specified. Reliabilists have given little attention to this matter, and those that have specified relevant kinds have not done so in a way that gives their theory in intuitively acceptable extension.<sup>24</sup>

The second unclarity in reliabilism concerns the notion of reliability itself. Reliability is fundamentally a property of kinds of belief-forming processes, not of sequences of particular events. But we can say that a sequence is reliable provided its relevant type is reliable. The problem raised above concerns the specification of relevant types. The current problem is that of specifying the conditions under which a kind of process is *reliable*. Among possible accounts is one according to which a kind of process is reliable provided most instances of that kind until now have led to true beliefs. Alternative accounts measure the reliability of a kind of process by the frequency with which instances of it produce true beliefs in the future as well as the past, or by the frequency with which its instances produce true beliefs in possible worlds that are similar to the world of evaluation in some designated respect, or by the frequency with which its instances produce true beliefs in all possible worlds.<sup>25</sup>

Because there are such drastically different ways of filling in the details of reliabilism the application of the theory is far from clear. The possible versions of reliabilism seem to include one that is extensionally equivalent to WF. It might be held that all beliefs are formed by one of two relevant kinds of belief-forming process. One kind has as instances all and only those

sequences of events leading to a belief that is based on fitting evidence; the other is a kind of process that has as instances all and only those sequences leading to a belief that is not based on fitting evidence. If a notion of reliability can be found on which the former sort of process is reliable and the latter is not, the resulting version of reliabilism would be very nearly equivalent to WF.<sup>26</sup> We do not claim that reliabilists would favor this version of reliabilism. Rather, our point is that the fact that this *is* a version shows that reliabilism may not even be a rival to WF.<sup>27</sup>

Evaluation of reliabilism is further complicated by the fact that reliabilists seem to differ about whether they *want* their theory to have approximately the same extension as WF in fact has. The credibility of reliabilism and its relevance to WF depend in part on the concept reliabilists are really attempting to analyze. An example first described by Lawrence Bonjour helps to bring out two alternatives.<sup>28</sup> Bonjour's example is of a person who is clairvoyant. As a result of his clairvoyance he comes to believe that the President is in New York City. The person has no evidence showing that he is clairvoyant and no other evidence supporting his belief about the President. Bonjour claims that the example is a counter-example to reliabilism, since the clairvoyant's belief is not justified (we would add: and therefore ill-founded), although the process that caused it is reliable – the person really is clairvoyant.

The general sort of response to this example that seems to be most commonly adopted by reliabilists is in effect to agree that such beliefs are not well-founded. They interpret or revise reliabilism with the aim of avoiding the counter-example.<sup>29</sup> An alternative response would be to argue that the reliability of clairvoyance shows that the belief *is* well-founded, and thus that the example does not refute reliabilism.<sup>30</sup>

We are tempted to respond to the second alternative – beliefs such as that of the clairvoyant in Bonjour's example really are well-founded – that this is so clear an instance of an ill-founded belief that any proponent of that view must have in mind a different concept from the one we are discussing. The clairvoyant has no reason for holding his belief about the President. The fact that the belief was caused by a process of a reliable kind – clairvoyance – is a significant fact about it. Such a belief may merit some favorable term of epistemic appraisal, e.g., “objectively probable.” But the belief is not well-founded.

There are, however, two lines of reasoning that could lead philosophers to

think that we must reconcile ourselves to the clairvoyant's belief turning out to be well-founded. According to one of these arguments, examples such as that of Alfred (discussed in Section IV above) show that the evidentialist account of epistemic merit is unsatisfactory and that epistemic merit must be understood in terms of the reliability of belief-forming processes.<sup>31</sup> Since the clairvoyant's belief is reliably formed, our initial inclination to regard it as ill-founded must be mistaken.

This argument is unsound. The most that the example about Alfred shows is that there is a concept of favorable epistemic appraisal other than justification, and that this other concept involves the notion of the *basis* of a belief. We believe that WF satisfactorily captures this other concept. There is no need to move to a reliabilist account, according to which some sort of causal reliability is *sufficient* for epistemic justification. The Alfred example does not establish that some version of reliabilism is correct. It does not establish that the clairvoyant's belief is well-founded.

The second argument for the conclusion that the clairvoyant's belief is well-founded makes use of the strong similarity between clairvoyance in Bonjour's example and normal perception. We claim that Bonjour's clairvoyant is not justified in his belief about the President because that belief does not fit his evidence. Simply having a spontaneous uninferred belief about the whereabouts of the President does not provide evidence for its truth. But, it might be asked, what better evidence is there for any ordinary perceptual belief, say, that one sees a book? If there is no relevant epistemological difference between ordinary perceptual beliefs and the clairvoyant's belief, then they should be evaluated similarly. The argument continues with the point that reliabilism provides an explanation of the crucial similarity between ordinary perceptual beliefs and the clairvoyant's belief – both perception and clairvoyance *work*, in the sense that both are reliable. So beliefs caused by each process are well-founded on a reliabilist account. The fact that reliabilism satisfactorily explains this is to the theory's credit. On the other hand, in advocating evidentialism we have claimed that perceptual beliefs are well-founded and that the clairvoyant's belief is not. But there appears to be no relevant evidential difference between these beliefs. Thus, if the evidentialist view of the matter cannot be defended, then reliabilism is the superior theory and we should accept its consequence – the clairvoyant's belief is well-founded.

One problem with this argument is that reliabilism has no satisfactory

explanation of *anything* until the unclarity discussed above are removed in an acceptable way: What shows that perception and clairvoyance are relevant and reliable types of processes? In any event, there *is* an adequate evidentialist explanation of the difference between ordinary perceptual beliefs and the clairvoyant's belief. On one interpretation of clairvoyance, it is a process whereby one is caused to have beliefs about objects hidden from ordinary view without any conscious state having a role in the causal process. The clairvoyant does not have the conscious experience of, say, seeming to see the President in some characteristic New York City setting, and on that basis form the belief that he is in New York. In this respect, the current version of clairvoyance is unlike ordinary perception, which does include conscious perceptual states. Because of this difference, ordinary perceptual beliefs are based on evidence – the evidence of these sensory states – whereas the clairvoyant beliefs are not based on evidence. Since WF requires that well-founded beliefs be based on fitting evidence, and typical clairvoyant beliefs on the current interpretation are not based on any evidence at all, the clairvoyant beliefs do not satisfy WF.

Suppose instead that clairvoyance does include visual experiences, though of remote objects that cannot stimulate the visual system in any normal way. Even if there are such visual experiences that could serve as a basis for a clairvoyant's beliefs, still there is a relevant epistemological difference between beliefs based on normal perceptual experience and the clairvoyant's belief in Bonjour's example. We have collateral evidence to the effect that when we have perceptual experience of certain kinds, external conditions of the corresponding kinds normally obtain. For example, we have evidence supporting the proposition that when we have the usual sort of experience of seeming to see a book, we usually do in fact see a book. This includes evidence from the coherence of these beliefs with beliefs arising from other perceptual sources, and it also includes testimonial evidence. This latter point is easily overlooked. One reason that the belief that one sees a book fits even a child's evidence when she has a perceptual experience of seeing a book is that children are taught, when they have the normal sort of visual experiences, that they are seeing a physical object of the relevant kind. This testimony, typically from people whom the child has reason to trust, provides evidence for the child. And of course testimony from others during adult life also gives evidence for the veridicality of normal visual experience. On the other hand, as Bonjour describes his example, the clairvoyant has no confirmation at all



of his clairvoyant beliefs. Indeed, he has evidence against these beliefs, since the clairvoyant perceptual experiences do not cohere with his other experiences. We conclude, therefore, that evidentialists can satisfactorily explain why ordinary perceptual beliefs are typically well-founded and unconfirmed clairvoyant beliefs, even if reliably caused, are not. There is no good reason to abandon our initial intuition that the beliefs such as those of the clairvoyant in Bonjour's example are not well-founded.

Again, reliabilists could respond to Bonjour's example either by claiming that the clairvoyant's belief is in fact well-founded or by arguing that reliabilism does not imply that it is well-founded. We turn now to the second of these alternatives, the one most commonly adopted by reliabilists. This view can be defended by arguing either that reliabilism can be reformulated so that it lacks this implication, or that as currently formulated it lacks this implication. We pointed out above that as a general approach reliabilism is sufficiently indefinite to allow interpretations under which it does lack the implication in question. The only way to achieve this result that we know of that is otherwise satisfactory requires the introduction of evidentialist concepts. The technique is to specify the relevant types of belief-forming processes in evidentialist terms. It is possible to hold that the relevant types of belief-forming process are believing something on the basis of fitting evidence and believing not as a result of fitting evidence. This sort of "reliabilism" is a roundabout approximation of the straightforward evidentialist thesis, WF. We see no reason to couch the approximated evidentialist theory in reliabilist terms. Moreover, the reliabilist approximation is not exactly equivalent to WF, and where it differs it appears to go wrong. The difference is this: it seems possible for the process of believing on the basis of fitting evidence to be unreliable. Finding a suitable sort of reliability makes all the difference here. In various possible worlds where our evidence is mostly misleading, the frequency with which fitting evidence causes true belief is low. Thus, this type of belief-forming process is not "reliable" in such worlds in any straightforward way that depends on actual frequencies. Perhaps a notion of reliability that avoids this result can be found. We know of no such notion which does not create trouble elsewhere for the theory. So, the reliabilist view under consideration has the consequence that in such worlds beliefs based on fitting evidence are not well-founded. This is counterintuitive.<sup>32</sup>

In this section we have compared reliabilism and evidentialism. The vagueness of reliabilism makes it difficult to determine what implications the theory

has and it is not entirely clear what implications reliabilists want their theory to have. If reliabilists want their theory to have approximately the same extension as WF, we see not better way to accomplish this than one which makes the theory an unnecessarily complex and relatively implausible approximation to evidentialism. If, on the other hand, reliabilists want their theory to have an extension which is substantially different from that of WF, and yet some familiar notion of ‘a reliable kind of process’ is to be decisive for their notion of well-foundedness, then it becomes clear that the concept they are attempting to analyze is not one evidentialists seek to characterize. This follows from the fact that on this alternative they count as well-founded attitudes that plainly do not exemplify the concept evidentialists are discussing. In neither case, then, does reliabilism pose a threat to evidentialism.

## VI

*Summary and Conclusion*

We have defended evidentialism. Some opposition to evidentialism rests on the view that a doxastic attitude can be justified for a person only if forming the attitude is an action under the person’s voluntary control. EJ is incompatible with the conjunction of this sort of doxastic voluntarism and the plain fact that some doxastic states that fit a person’s evidence are out of that person’s control. We have argued that no good reason has been given for thinking that an attitude is epistemically justified only if having it is under voluntary control.

A second thesis contrary to EJ is that a doxastic attitude can be justified only if having that attitude is within the normal doxastic limits of humans. We have held that the attitudes that are epistemically justified according to EJ are within these limits, and that even if they were not, that fact would not suffice to refute EJ.

Some philosophers have contended that believing a proposition,  $p$ , is justified for  $S$  only when  $S$  has gone about gathering evidence about  $p$  in a responsible way, or has come to believe  $p$  as a result of seeking a meritorious epistemic goal such as the discovery of truth. This thesis conflicts with EJ, since believing  $p$  may fit one’s evidence no matter how irresponsible one may have been in seeking evidence about  $p$  and no matter what were the goals that led to the belief. We agree that there is some epistemic merit in responsi-

bly gathering evidence and in seeking the truth. But we see no reason to think that epistemic justification turns on such matters.

Another thesis conflicting with EJ is that merely having evidence is not sufficient to justify belief, since the believer might not make proper use of the evidence in forming the belief. Consideration of this claim led us to make use of a second evidentialist notion, well-foundedness. It does not, however, provide any good reason to think that EJ is false. Nor do we find reason to abandon evidentialism in favor of reliabilism. Evidentialism remains the most plausible view of epistemic justification.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> EJ is compatible with the existence of varying strengths of belief and disbelief. If there is such variation, then the greater the preponderance of evidence, the stronger the doxastic attitude that fits the evidence.

<sup>2</sup> There are difficult questions about the concept of fit, as well as about what it is for someone to *have* something as evidence, and of what kind of thing constitutes evidence. As a result, there are some cases in which it is difficult to apply EJ. For example, it is unclear whether a person has as evidence propositions he is not currently thinking of, but could recall with some prompting. As to what constitutes evidence, it seems clear that this includes both beliefs and sensory states such as feeling very warm and having the visual experience of seeing blue. Some philosophers seem to think that only beliefs can justify beliefs. (See, for example, Keith Lehrer, *Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 187–188.) The application of EJ is clear enough to do the work that we intend here – a defense of the evidentialist position.

<sup>3</sup> See ‘Doxastic agency’, *Philosophical Studies* 43 (1983), pp. 355–364. The quotation is from p. 355.

<sup>4</sup> See ‘The psychological turn’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1982), pp. 238–253. The quotation is from p. 252.

<sup>5</sup> Kornblith, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

<sup>6</sup> Heil, *op. cit.*, p. 363.

<sup>7</sup> Kornblith may be guilty of this confusion. He writes, “if a person has an unjustified belief, that person is epistemically culpable”, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

<sup>8</sup> Nothing we say here should be taken to imply that any doxastic states are in fact voluntarily entered.

<sup>9</sup> See ‘Epistemics: The regulative theory of cognition’, *The Journal of Philosophy* LXXV (1978), pp. 509–523, esp. p. 510 and p. 514.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Justified belief and epistemically responsible action’, *The Philosophical Review* 92 (1983), pp. 33–48. The quotation is from p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Thagard, ‘From the descriptive to the normative in psychology and logic’, *Philosophy of Science* 49 (1982), pp. 24–42. The quotation is from p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Another version of this argument is that EJ is false because it classifies as justified for a person attitudes that are beyond *that person’s* limits. This version is subject to similar criticisms.

<sup>13</sup> See *Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), especially pp. 12–15.

<sup>14</sup> Roderick Firth makes a similar point against a similar view in ‘Are epistemic concepts

reducible to ethical concepts', in *Values and Morals*, edited by Al. L. Goldman and J. Kim (D. Reidel, Dordrecht, 1978), pp. 215–229.

<sup>15</sup> Kornblith defends this view in 'Justified belief and epistemically responsible action'. Some passages suggest that he intends to introduce a new notion of justification, one to be understood in terms of epistemically responsible action. But some passages, especially in Section II, suggest that the traditional analysis of justification is being found to be objectionable and inferior to the one he proposes.

<sup>16</sup> Bonjour, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> This is contrary to the view of Richard Gale, defended in 'William James and the ethics of belief', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 17 (1980), pp. 1–14, and of W. K. Clifford who said, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for every one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (quoted by William James in 'The will to believe', reprinted in *Reason and Responsibility*, edited by J. Feinberg (Belmont, California, Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1981) p. 100).

<sup>18</sup> See 'Believing what one ought', pp. 752ff.

<sup>19</sup> See 'Epistemic merit, intrinsic and instrumental', *Proceedings and Addresses of The American Philosophical Association* 55 (1981), pp. 5–6.

<sup>20</sup> See Kornblith's 'Beyond foundationalism and the coherence theory', *The Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), pp. 597–612, esp. pp. 601f. and Goldman's 'What is justified belief?' in *Justification and Knowledge*, George S. Pappas, ed. (D. Reidel, Dordrecht, 1979), pp. 1–24.

<sup>21</sup> Clause (ii) of WF is intended to accommodate the fact that a well-founded attitude need not be based on a person's whole body of evidence. What seems required is that the person base a well-founded attitude on a justifying part of the person's evidence, and that he not ignore any evidence he has that defeats the justifying power of the evidence he does base his attitude on. It might be that his defeating evidence is itself defeated by a still wider body of his evidence. In such a case, the person's attitude is well-founded only if he takes the wider body into account.

WF uses our last main primitive concept – that of *basing* an attitude on a body of evidence. This notion is reasonably clear, though an analysis would be useful. See Note 22 below for one difficult question about what is entailed.

<sup>22</sup> Goldman uses this sort of example only to show that there is a causal element in the concept of justification. We acknowledge that there is an epistemic concept – well-foundedness – that appeals to the notion of basing an attitude on evidence, and this may be a causal notion. What seems to confer epistemic merit on basing one's belief on the evidence is that in doing one *appreciates* the evidence. It is unclear whether one can appreciate the evidence without being caused to have the belief by the evidence. But in any event we see no such causal requirement in the case of justification.

<sup>23</sup> The clearest and most influential discussion of reliabilism is in Goldman's 'What is justified belief?' One of the first statements of the theory appears in David Armstrong's *Belief, Truth and Knowledge*, (Cambridge University Press, London, 1973). For extensive bibliographies on reliabilism, see Frederick Schmitt's 'Reliability, objectivity, and the background of justification', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62 (1984), pp. 1–15, and Richard Feldman's 'Reliability and justification', *The Monist*, forthcoming.

<sup>24</sup> For discussion of the problem of determining relevant kinds of belief-forming processes, see Goldman, 'What is justified belief?', Schmitt, 'Reliability, objectivity, and the background of justification', Feldman, 'Reliability and justification', and Feldman, 'Schmitt on reliability, objectivity, and justification', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

<sup>25</sup> In 'Reliability and justified belief', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 14, (1984), pp. 103–115, John Pollock argues that there is no account of reliability suitable for reliabilists.

<sup>26</sup> This version of reliabilism will not be exactly equivalent to WF because it ignores the factors introduced by clause (ii) of WF.

<sup>27</sup> It is also possible that versions of reliabilism making use only of natural psychological kinds of belief-forming processes are extensionally equivalent to WF. Goldman seeks to avoid evaluative epistemic concepts in his theory of epistemic justification, so he would not find an account of justification satisfactory unless it appealed only to such natural kinds. See 'What is justified belief?', p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> See 'Externalist theories of empirical justification', p. 62.

<sup>29</sup> See Goldman, 'What is justified belief?' p. 18–20, Kornblith, 'Beyond foundationalism and the coherence theory', pp. 609–611, and Frederick Schmitt, 'Reliability, objectivity, and the background of justification'.

<sup>30</sup> We know of one who has explicitly taken this approach. It seems to fit most closely with the view defended by David Armstrong in *Belief, Truth and Knowledge*.

<sup>31</sup> We know of no one who explicitly defends this inference. In 'The Psychological Turn', p. 241f., Kornblith argues that these examples show that justification depends upon "psychological connections" and "the workings of the appropriate belief forming process." But he clearly denies there that reliabilism is directly implied.

<sup>32</sup> Stewart Cohen has made this point in 'Justification and truth', *Philosophical Studies* 46 (1984), pp. 279–295. Cohen makes the point in the course of developing a dilemma. He argues that reliabilism has the sort of flaw that we describe above when we appeal to worlds where evidence is mostly misleading. Cohen also contends that reliabilism has the virtue of providing a clear explanation of how the epistemic notion of justification is connected with the notion of truth. A theory that renders this truth connection inexplicable is caught on the second horn of Cohen's dilemma.

Although Cohen does not take up evidentialism as we characterize it, the second horn of his dilemma affects EJ and WF. They do not explain how having an epistemically justified or well-founded belief is connected to the truth of that belief. Evidentialists can safely say this much about the truth connection: evidence that makes believing *p* justified is evidence on which it is *epistemically* probable that *p* is true. Although there is this connection between justification and truth, we acknowledge that there may be no analysis of epistemic probability that makes the connection to truth as close, or as clear, as might have been hoped.

Cohen argues that there must be a truth connection. This shows no flaw in EJ or WF unless they are incompatible with there being such a connection. Cohen does not argue for this incompatibility and we know of no reason to believe that it exists. So at most Cohen's dilemma shows that evidentialists have work left to do.

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