BASIC EPISTEMIC REASONS: AN ACTION-THEORETIC PROPOSAL

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ABSTRACT: The goal of this paper is to argue that the foundations of epistemology are grounded in the theory of rational action. Specifically, I will articulate and defend a version of internalist foundationalism based on a distinctive, action-theoretic version of non-doxastic justification. The motivating idea is that the justification for our foundational beliefs is inherited from our justification for antecedent doxastic actions, acts of belief formation or acceptance. These doxastic actions are members of a general class of actions that I call non-deliberative responses (NDRs). While NDRs are non-deliberative, I argue that we can make clear sense of the idea that they have both motivating and normative reasons and, consequently, that their performance is normatively evaluable. If this strategy is successful, the justification of our doxastic actions (and, via the inheritance principle, our beliefs) will be subsumed under more general principles of justified action.

Intuitively, there is an ambiguity in our general concept of justification. On the one hand, we often speak of justification as it pertains to action. We can, for instance, ask whether a certain shooting by a police officer is justified or whether the selling of a stock is justified or whether ending a relationship is justified.[1] Let us agree to call the concept of justification invoked in such cases "act-level justification" or "a-justification". On the other hand, we also speak of justification as it pertains to states-of-affairs.[2] For instance, we can ask whether a certain distribution of resources (e.g., the current wealth distribution in the U.S.) is justified or whether a certain parenting arrangement is justified or whether the racial composition of a certain Board is justified. Let us agree to call the concept of justification invoked in these (latter) cases "state-level justification" or "s-justification".

It is a difficult philosophical question how these two kinds of justification are related to one another. The relationship is likely both messy and philosophically interesting. But trying to sort out this issue generally is beyond my interests in this paper. Instead, I will focus narrowly on one dimension of this relationship – the way in which the justification of our actions bears on the justification of the states to which those actions give rise. Specifically, I believe that the following Inheritance Principle is reasonable:

> **Inheritance Principle (IP):** If an action, A, is a-justified to some degree, then if a state-of-affairs, χ, results from A, χ has some (possibly lesser) degree of s-justification.

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[1] I assume that our concept of justification is interest or domain relative. For instance, a given police shooting might well be legally justified, but not morally justified. This relativity will depend, in part, on the aims of the agent.

[2] More carefully, since on my view every action is a state-of-affairs, the distinction is between states-of-affairs that are not actions and those that are.

Simplifying considerably, IP accepts the idea that the consequences of a-justified actions possess at least some degree of s-justification. This principle is most naturally understood as a kind of grounding (or supervenience) thesis positing a fundamental tie between justification at the level actions and justification at the level of states.

IP is *prima facie* plausible and instances of it are sometimes taken for granted in both philosophical discussions and non-academic contexts. For instance, on Nozick's (1974) entitlement approach to distributive justice, we are asked to consider a given distribution of resources as adequately justified (s-justified) if it arose by way of legitimate mechanisms of *initial acquisition* and *transfer*. Since acquisitions and transfers are actions of persons, Nozick's view presupposes that questions concerning the (moral) s-justification of states-of-affairs can be answered at least in part by appealing to the legitimacy (a-justification) of the actions that produce them.[3] Or, to take a real world example, we frequently try to determine (at least in part) whether the death of a person at the hands of the police is s-justified by determining whether the actions of the police that caused the death were a-justified. For instance, whether or not we think George Floyd's death was s-justified will turn, in part, on whether or not we think Derek Chauvin's kneeling on Mr. Floyd's neck was a-justified.[4]

The goal of this paper is two-fold:

(1) to argue that the foundations of epistemology are grounded in general principles of justified action (a-justification) and, *via* the Inheritance Principle,

(2), that foundational s-justification can be grounded in non-doxastic a-justification for foundational belief, yielding a version of internalist foundationalism.

The motivating idea is that the s-justification for our foundational beliefs is inherited from our a-justification for antecedent doxastic actions, acts of belief formation or acceptance. These doxastic actions are members of a general class of actions, including non-cognitive actions, that I dub non-deliberative responses (NDRs). While NDRs are non-deliberative, I argue that we can make clear sense of the idea that they have both motivating and normative reasons. If this strategy is successful, the a-justification of our doxastic actions (and, *via* IP, our beliefs) will be subsumed under a general principle of a-justified action.

For the sake of presentational simplicity, I will assume psychologicism about reasons; specifically, the view that reasons are non-factive psychological states (Conee and Feldman 2004, 2008;

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[3] This is not to say it is the only way of understanding the justificatory status of states. A second possibility is teleological. For example, a state might be justified because of the good consequences that follow from this state. This kind of teleological justification is, in my view, an overlooked consideration in epistemology.

[4] It goes without saying that this would not *settle* the question. Even if, contrary to fact, Chauvin were justifiably acting within the legal parameters of the system, for instance, the broader question of fairness of that system would still impact our overall judgments. And here it is important to note that we might consider an action *legally* a-justified while not considering it, say, *morally* a-justified.

Turri 2009; for pluralism see Kelly 2008; Rysiew 2011).[5] Independently of the views developed here, psychologicism comports best with both my own pre-theoretical view of reasons and with my considered philosophical position. Nevertheless, as far as I can tell, the view I defend is broadly consistent with some, though not all, alternative theories of reasons. In addition to psychologicism, I will also make the widely held assumption that our reasons must be such that they can serve the dual roles of being both motivating and normative reasons – what I will call the Unity of Reasons Thesis, or Unity Thesis for short (Williams 1981; Dancy 2000; Mitova 2014).[6]

The position I develop here is wide-ranging with many moving parts. Although I provide motivations for each of those parts, I cannot hope to defend each of them in detail. This would be unwieldy and would obscure the larger project of showing how foundational s-justification of beliefs can plausibly be grounded in general principles of a-justified action. Indeed, I have no strong commitment to most of the theses taken one-by-one; but as a package, the project is intended as an inference to the best explanation for this version of internalist foundational justification. That is, assuming internalist foundationalism is one's preferred epistemic position, the theory I propose is the best account of how it works.[7] That claim, in turn, has both a broad and a narrow construal. Broadly (and more modestly) construed, the claim is simply that the best explanation of internalist foundationalism is that our foundational s-justifications are grounded in the a-justification of our doxastic actions along the lines suggested in this paper. Narrowly construed, the claim is that the details of the proposal put forward here are the best formulation of this approach. Although I accept the narrow claim, I will be satisfied if the broader claim can be made convincing.

This paper consists of two parts. In Part I, I develop and defend a general theory of how certain primitive actions (NDRs) can be a-justified despite being non-deliberative. Once this is in place, I show how the Inheritance Principle allows us to develop a general theory of state-level justification of the

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[5] In the sense in which I intend to use the term "reasons", reasons are what Schroeder (2021) dubs subjective reasons – they are things that I have. Schroeder's class of "objective reasons" are not in my usage reasons at all, but rather, potential reasons (or, assuming psychologicism, the contents of potential reasons).

Moreover, there are important metaphysical differences between reasons and evidence that are sometimes lost in the philosophical discussion. Consider, for instance, the following sentence pair:

a) Holmes realized that there was lots of undiscovered evidence at the scene of the crime.

b) *Holmes realized that there were lots of undiscovered reasons at the scene of the crime.

Pairs such as a) and b) suggest that evidence, unlike reasons, can exist independently of our awareness of it. In that sense, evidence is much closer to Schroeder's broader notion of "objective reasons". This, in turn, suggests that our reasons and our evidence are of different ontological kinds and that logicism (propositionalism, factualism), rather than psychologicism, may be the best theory of our evidence. I am sympathetic to this view.

[6] In fact, my own view is that all reasons are what have come to be called explanatory reasons. Some explanations are psychological/motivational in nature. So, some explanatory reasons are motivating reasons; conversely, all motivating reasons are explanatory.

[7] If one's primary reason for rejecting epistemic foundationalism is that it is unclear how to make it workable, then this project also serves as a partial antidote to that skepticism.

resulting states. In Part II, I argue that certain doxastic actions, judgments, constitute NDRs. Consequently, they follow under the general principles of rational action defended in Part I. The result is a defense of a form of action-theoretic moderate dogmatism.

I.   Non-Deliberative Actions and Normativity

A good deal of work in recent epistemology has gone into defending the epistemological significance of seemings understood as a natural class of non-factive intentional states (e.g., Bealer 1987, 1992; Bengson 2015a; BonJour 2001; Chudnoff 2011; Huemer 2001; Pust 2000; Pryor 2000, and many others). In my view, the most promising versions of internalist foundationalism currently on offer are those that accept some form of "moderate dogmatism" which treat seemings as epistemically basic reasons for belief. Stated generically:

> Moderate Dogmatism (MD): If x has a seeming as of p's being the case, then x thereby has some degree of immediate (prima facie) justification for believing that p.[8]

MD purports to explain how our foundational beliefs can be justified, *s-justified*, in light of our seemings. And, indeed, Huemer says that it is the sole "principle of foundational justification [and] can account for all foundational beliefs" (2001, 99).

I will return to a consideration of MD in Part II. For now, I want to note that this focus on doxastic states has come at the expense of a broader consideration of the role of seemings, particularly their role in the case of rational action. It is possible that this lacuna arises from a tacit assumption that rational actions are best understood as being mediated by belief. Consequently, if one can give an account of the epistemic significance of seemings for belief one can use this model to give a similar account of their role in rational action by way of practical deliberation.

I will argue that this deliberative model of rational action is mistaken. In its place, I will suggest an alternative neo-Rylean theory of rational action that allows seemings to play a *direct* role in their generation.

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[8] Pryor (2000, 532): To a first approximation, my view will be that whenever you have an experience as of p's being the case, you thereby have immediate (prima facie) justification for believing p.
Huemer (2007, 30): If it seems to x that p, then, in the absence of defeaters, x thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that p.
Chudnoff (2011, 322): (DIJ) If it intuitively seems to you that p, then you thereby possess some prima facie justification for believing that p.
Chudnoff (2011, 314): (DPJ) If it perceptually seems to you that p, then you thereby possess some prima facie justification for believing that p.
Bengson (2015a, 741): Given the nature of presentations, so long as x lacks reason to question x's presentation, then x has at least some prima facie justification for believing that things are the way they are presented as being

1. Non-deliberative Responses

It has become increasingly clear that actions – as opposed to mere happenings – come in at least two varieties: deliberative and non-deliberative or "primitive" (for discussion see Chan 1995; Bengson 2016; Burge 2009; Di Nucci 2011, 2014; Hursthouse 1999; Jones 2017; McDowell 2007). Deliberative actions are those based on prior practical reasoning or having the appropriate standing intentional states arrived at through antecedent practical reasoning. Non-deliberative actions have, and require, no such background. I will not here defend this distinction, which strikes me as adequately motivated by intuitive judgments about particular cases. Rather, I will argue that among the non-deliberative actions, some are best thought of as responses to overt stimuli, specifically, seemings. When playing this role, I will argue, seemings may be understood as motivating and normative reasons for those actions.

To motivate this approach, consider a familiar example of a non-deliberative action (Hursthouse 1999):

1.   a. Drumming my fingers absent-mindedly

A behavior such as (1a) intuitively counts as an action I perform, and not a "mere happening", even though it is not grounded in any sort of practical deliberation. This suggests the category of actions will be too narrowly circumscribed if we lean on an overly "intellectualist" criterion, specifically criteria like deliberation. This is not to deny that the cognitive environment is irrelevant to the distinction. But rather to claim that what distinguishes actions from non-actions is more likely how the behavior is more broadly situated in that environment in terms of the agent's control, access, and broader cognitive goals. For instance, Jones (2017) makes the plausible suggestion that the natural class of actions is isolated by appeal to the following characteristic homeostatic property cluster:

> (A1) They are produced by agents.
> (A2) They are coordinated behaviors.
> (A3) They are, at least partially, under our voluntary control.
> (A4) We have non-observational access to them.
> (A5) We are unsurprised to find that we have so-acted and uniquely surprised when thwarted.
> (A6) They have substantive success conditions that are not merely derivative of proper functions but are attributable to the desires and goals of cognitive agents.

On Jones's view, whenever some behavior exhibits most or all of these "action properties" to at least

some degree, we will be inclined to categorize it is an action. This list is not to be understood as articulating necessary and sufficient conditions for actionhood. For my purposes, it serves simply as a heuristic for confirming our intuitive judgments about which behaviors are actions and which are not.[9]

When considering many of the proposed cases of non-deliberative actions – like drumming one's fingers absent-mindedly or rocking back-and-forth – it might appear that such actions are arational. This is not unreasonable since these examples tend to be things we do "for no reason" and this is precisely what seems to make them non-deliberative. Had they been done for some reason, then it is natural to think that they would also have to be deliberative. For instance, if I drum my fingers in order to annoy my teacher. But this is a mistake. Consider a second example of a non-deliberative action (adapted from Jones 2017):

1.   b. Ducking upon seeing a punch directed toward my head

In cases like (1a), I need not be acting in response to any stimulus from the internal or external environment.[10] By contrast, in (1b) my ducking depends essentially on an antecedent perceptual stimulus. Despite this, both actions are non-deliberative.

Plausibly, therefore, we can distinguish between two types of non-deliberative actions:

Primitive Non-deliberative Actions (PNAs): Actions of an agent that are not based on any antecedent deliberation or specific intentions and that do not occur as a response to any antecedent experience that is the subject of the agent's immediate attention.

Non-deliberative Responses (NDRs): Actions of an agent that are not based on any antecedent deliberation or specific intentions but which are performed in response to some antecedent experience that is the subject of the agent's immediate attention.

A significant part of the difference between PNAs and NDRs is reflected in whether or not they have success conditions (condition A6 above). My absent-mindedly drumming my fingers cannot be evaluated as being successful or not, at least not in the intended range of cases. It is simply something I do. By contrast, my ducking a punch can be so evaluated; successful, presumably, if I avoid being struck. For

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[9] Methodologically, I am approaching the problem of intentional action as a particularist (Chisholm 1917).
[10] I leave open the possibility here that primitive non-deliberative actions may occur "in response" to sub-intentional or "ambient" stimuli of various sorts.

this reason, NDRs (unlike PNAs) can be evaluated as "fitting" or not.[11] Ducking is a fitting response to a fist, even when unsuccessful; sticking out my chin, is not.

This difference between NDRS and PNAs is significant: It distinguishes NDRs as a kind of *Intelligent* (re)action, an Intelligent response to a particular situation type; PNDAs, on the other hand, are not Intelligent actions (Ryle 1949, Ch. 2).[12] I will now argue that this difference motivates a kind of Rylean theory of NDRs.

2. NDRs, Quasi-Ryleanism, and Seemings as Reasons

According to Ryle, some actions *directly* display qualities of mind: they are clever or stupid, sensitive or crass, and so on. Such actions are, broadly speaking, Intelligent actions, where "Intelligent" here contrasts with "Stupid" to indicate a lack of mental qualities (as reflected in the saying "It's just a stupid machine"). In claiming that the Intelligence of the action is "direct" Ryle is rejecting the so-called "intellectualist legend":

> Champions of this legend … [argue] … that intelligent [i.e., Intelligent] performance involves the observance of rules or the application of criteria. It follows that the operation which is characterised as intelligent must be preceded by an intellectual acknowledgment of these rules or criteria; that is, the agent must first go through the internal process of avowing to himself certain propositions about what is to be done ('maxims', 'imperatives' or 'regulative propositions' as they are sometimes called); only then can he execute his performance in accordance with those dictates. He must preach to himself before he can practice (1949, 29).

Here Ryle is effectively introducing a double distinction. The distinction, on the one hand, between deliberative and non-deliberative actions; and, on the other hand, between Intelligent and Non-Intelligent actions.

Ryle assumes that these two distinctions track one another. However, the difference between PNAs and NDRs suggests that this is not the case – NDRs are not deliberative but nevertheless

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[11] I use the term "fitting" not as a technical philosophical term but in a more colloquial sense without assuming any philosophical account. Other terms – "apt", "appropriate" – would serve equally well.

[12] I follow Bengson & Moffett (2011) here in using "Intelligent" with a capital "I" to indicate the general class of actions that include intelligent (clever smart, witty, etc.) and stupid (dumb, crass, etc.) actions.

Bengson suggests that a case he dubs "Flinch" (2016, 29), which is similar to the case of ducking, does not count as an Intelligent action, though nothing he says commits him to the claim that it is not an action.

Flinch: Your son, intending to tease you, taps you on the shoulder. You look up and see something (your son's hand) heading towards your face. Although it comes to a stop before making contact, you flinch.

The characterization of the response in question (flinching vs. ducking) may make a difference to our judgments here. Nevertheless, Bengson does concede that such cases may be "evaluable in some respects." I agree and, consequently, I am inclined to think Bengson's assessment is mistaken, but this will depend to some degree on the details of the case.

Intelligent.[13] This means that the distinction between Intelligent and Non-Intelligent actions must be found in something other than their deliberative etiology. Given Ryle's anti-internalist ("anti-ghost") ideology, it is not surprising that he would find the distinction difficult to draw in terms of mere (dispositions to) behavior.[14] The question we now want to pursue is how this distinction should bedrawn.

As already noted, I take it that the real distinction between lies in the presence or absence of success conditions. Indeed, there is an interesting contrast between the cases vis a vis their standing as actions. PNAs like absent-mindedly drumming one's fingers, seem to lack success conditions but also tend to be under fairly high voluntary control. By contrast, NDRs, like ducking, seem to have relatively clear success conditions but are typically under less voluntary control. They each count as actions in virtue of the extent to which they display different properties from the above hypothesized property cluster.

Interestingly, the actions that are intuitively under higher voluntary control (PNAs) are the ones that are less open to normative evaluation. If, prior to philosophical reflection, we thought that normativity was closely tied to voluntariness this might be surprising. This is evidently not the case and we need not, I think, look too far for an explanation. A salient feature of PNAs is that they are performed in the absence of any specific motivation, they lack motivating reasons. In fact, this seems to be a defining feature of PNAs. If you ask me why I am drumming my fingers, I might *explain* my behavior by appeal to, say, habit. But explanatory reasons of this sort do not rise to the level of being motivating reasons, reasons *for which* I act.[15] They are merely things which play a causal, but not sufficiently conscious, role in generating my behavior. We can put this by saying that they are merely things *because of which* I act and not for which I act.

But there are, as we saw in accepting the Unity Thesis, important connections between motivating and normative reasons.[16] Because PNAs lack motivating reasons, the principles for their normative evaluation are comparatively fraught. To see this, consider an action-theoretic version of the "ought-implies-can" principle, which Williams (1981, 106–107; see also Mitova 2015) invokes in defense of the Unity Thesis:

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[13] More specifically, Ryle seems to conflate a behavior's displaying "qualities of mind" that suggest it is an action, as opposed to a mere happening, with a behavior's displaying Intelligence (and *inter alia* being normatively evaluable). Ryle begins Chapter 2 with the following: The mental-conduct concepts that I choose to examine first are those which belong to that family of concepts ordinarily surnamed 'intelligence'. Here are 'a few of the more determinate adjectives of the family: …". He then proceeds to give a long list of evaluative terms such as "witty", "prudent", and "cunning".

[14] I am inclined to think Ryle's problem here is a symptom of the broader problem logical behaviorism has in capturing mental-to-mental interactions, problems which gave rise to functionalism.

[15] See Alvarez (2016) for discussion of explanatory reasons. My own view is that motivating reasons are a specific type of explanatory reason.

[16] There can be no such general connections between the class of explanatory reasons and normative reasons, since explanatory reasons are applicable to non-agents.

Modified Ought Implies Can (MOIC): r can be a reason why S ought to φ (a normative reason) only if r can be a reason for which S φ-s (a motivating reason).

When φ is a PNA nothing counts as a motivating reason for φ-ing. If we accept MOIC, this entails that nothing can count as a normative reason to φ, either. This seems right. There is something markedly odd about a claim like, when the drumming is understood as a PNA:

2.   r is a good reason to absent-mindedly drum one's fingers.

Assuming the "absent-mindedness" isn't merely pretense, the best reading of (2) is as asserting that r makes it so that it would be fortuitous if one absent-mindedly drummed one's fingers.[17] Alternatively, it might be taken to assert that r is a good reason to act in ways that bring it about that one absent-mindedly drums one's fingers. But in neither case would (2) be asserting that r is a normative reason to absent-mindedly drum one's fingers.[18]

The normative subtleties involved in evaluating PNAs is in marked contrast with NDRs. We have no comparable trouble in judging that ducking a punch is (defeasibly) the *smart* thing to do, or that sticking out our chin is not. The difference in the cases, as we noted, seems to be related to the fact that NDRs have success conditions. Ducking a punch is smart *modulo* a goal of staying uninjured, though not *modulo* a goal of throwing a fight. Its successful to the extent that it furthers that goal. For a wide range of cases, what seems to be sufficient is that the agent performs the action *for the sake of* satisfying or advancing some goal or purpose attributable to the agent.[19] It is not enough that the action does, in fact, satisfy or advance some goal. After all, my absent-mindedly drumming my fingers might incidentally satisfy or advance some goal of mine. In other words, an Intelligent action is something *I* do and, in so doing, I take it to further (some of) my goals. If the action succeeds in furthering my goals, then it might be considered clever or intelligent; if it thwarts those goals, it might be stupid.[20]

Actions grounded in past or current episodes of practical reasoning are, of course, paradigmatic cases of Intelligent actions. But cases like (1b) show that it is a mistake to treat them as the only kind. Intuitively, ducking a punch is (defeasibly) the *smart* thing to do, because it is a fitting response, even if I

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[17] r makes it so that it would be good if one happened to absent-mindedly drum one's fingers.

[18] There are also cases in which it is natural to talk about having good reasons to *not* absent-mindedly drum one's fingers. For instance, if I believe that pressing the button on the table in front of me will launch a full-scale nuclear strike on Russia, that is a good reason to not absent-mindedly drum my fingers on the table. Interestingly, if I do drum my fingers and accidently press the button, I might claim, "Well, that was stupid!". But here, I would argue that the stupidity of the PNA is derivative of the stupidity of failing my due diligence.

[19] For my purposes, I have no need to provide necessary or necessary and sufficient conditions. My goal here is merely to provide a framework within which to think about NDRs and not to provide a full analysis of Intelligent action.

[20] "Might" because sometimes the smart action fails and the stupid one succeeds. I take it that not every Intelligent action, so-characterized, is normatively valenced with respect to the little "i" intelligence epithets. If I am walking along and suddenly desire to perform a jumping jack, then my action is Intelligent. But it seems perverse to characterize it as clever or stupid (regardless of whether it is performed well or badly).

have never thought this through or explicitly formulated an overt intention to avoid accidental bodily injury. We might think of such cases as cases of "built-in" or "ground floor" Intelligent actions (for related points see, e.g., Dreyfus (1991) and McDowell (1994)). This is so, I suggest, in two ways. First, the responses in NDRs are not strategies considered and planned in advance. Instead, they are simply reactions which we find non-reflectively natural, at least in the case of physical actions, simply by being embodied ("being-in-the-world").[21] Second, and perhaps more importantly, the goals that provide the criterion of success are not themselves derived from deliberation. Instead, they arise as (possibly overridable) constitutive conditions on practical cognition. Although a goal like "Avoiding significant harm" is likely phylogenetically old (pre-dating the appearance of practical rationality), it is nevertheless a starting point on which practical cognition is built and, consequently, not itself something arrived at through practical cognition.

Given this, we can see that NDRs share a structural similarity with deliberative actions, namely, the presence of reasons. Just as a chain of practical reasoning invokes one's reasons for action, many paradigmatic NDRs are responses to perceptual seemings and such seemings should be understood as both motivational and normative reasons for our responses. To show this, it will be useful to first turn to the question of what seemings are.

In my view, the best theories of the nature of seemings currently on offer are presentational theories (e.g., Bealer 1992, Bengson 2015; Chudnoff 2013; Huemer 2001, 2007; Moffett 2023, Pust 2000). Presentational states differ from representational states such as belief in virtue of the fact that they in some sense present their contents as true. It is not necessary develop or endorse any specific theory of presentational states here. Instead, I take it that the crucial feature of such states is that they are *revelatory* in the sense that they are cognitive happenings (not acts) that seem to have a direct "world-to-mind" ontogenesis that *reveals how things in fact are*. Thus, they seem to directly reveal some aspect of the world to the mind, whether that is some aspect of the physical world (perception) or the psychological world (introspection) or the conceptual world (intuition).[22]

When I have a perceptual experience that there is a fist headed toward me, this *de se* experience seems to reveal to me how I am oriented with respect to the world. In response, I duck. It is clear that in such cases *what motivates me to duck is the experience qua revelatory state.* This is indeed how we talk about such experiences:

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[21] Joseph Ulatowski (in conversation) has questioned me as to whether or not the "bobbing and weaving" of a trained boxer should be considered an NDR. Such cases are difficult to adjudicate clearly. Much of what a boxer trains to do is *refine* and *reinforce* an extant and sensible response to punches. In these cases, my inclination is to count them as NDRs. Nevertheless, some boxing strategy (I am no expert here) is surely deliberative. Perhaps one example is Muhammad Ali's "rope-a-dope" strategy in fighting George Foreman.
[22] The question of whether or not intuition is a source of basic evidence is an independent issue. One can adopt the proposal on offer regardless of how one comes down on that debate.

A: "Why'd you do that (i.e., duck)?"

B: "Oh, I saw his fist coming right at me."

In this exchange, A is plausibly understood as asking for a motivational explanation of B's behavior, presumably in terms of motivating reasons. B plausibly cites his perceptual experience. What motivates him to duck is the experience; in fact, given the non-deliberative nature of the action, it is plausible to think that it is *all* that motivates him. When presentational states function in this way, we can view them as *non-doxastic motivating reasons* for action

At the same time, non-deliberative responses can be evaluated in terms of their goodness or badness (in a word "fittingness") as responses to their precipitating experiences *modulo* the agent's goals, assuming the veracity of the experience. (The caveat "assuming the veracity of the presentational state" is needed in order to capture the intuition that the same actions "make sense" in response to the same presentational states irrespective of the veridicality of those states. A perceptual experience as of a car barreling toward me constitutes a *prima facie* good reason to exit the walkway even if it should turn out that I was hallucinating. Thus, on this proposal, the goodness or badness of a presentational state as a normative reason for action does not depend on its veracity. This is why presentational states continue to count as basic reasons even in skeptical scenarios.) Put the other way around, a given presentational state can be something that counts in favor of certain actions (and against others). To the extent that they recommend the action taken, the action is a fitting response to what the state appears to reveal about the world (see Howard 2018, fn. 2).[23] Thus, the presentational state can make my action reasonable or rational (or its opposite).[24]

Generalizing the connection between presentational states and NDRs the following principle is evidently well-motivated:

Presentational States are Normative Reasons: If x is in a presentational state, φ, then x thereby has at least some *good non-deliberative reason* (namely, φ) to act in ways that are fitting *modulo* some set of x's goals, desires, intentions, etc.

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[23] Howard notes that the concept of fittingness with which he and others are concerned pertains to attitudes and not actions. I find this focus awkward. It seems to me that a notion of the fittingness of actions and events is far broader and more natural. The notion of the fittingness of an attitude can be recovered via the fittingness of the act of taking that attitude. (I include events here to accommodate cases like this: The January 6th, 2021 Capital riots were a fitting end to the Trump presidency. I disagree with Howard's contention in fn. 3 that this notion is not concerned with merit or worthiness.)

[24] Some responses need not be considered either fitting or unfitting, but are instead normatively unvalenced. For example, upon seeing a snowflake I might (non-deliberatively) stick out my hand to try to catch it. Such an action need not be fitting or unfitting.

Furthermore, assuming that having good reasons to act in a certain manner entails (absent defeaters) having at least some degree of justification for so-acting, we can derive the following principle of basic justified action:

> **Basic Justified Action (BJA):** If x is in a presentational state, φ, then, absent defeaters, x thereby has at least some degree of a-justification to act in ways that are fitting *modulo* some set of x's goals, desires, intentions, etc.

BJA provides a general account of how presentational states (seemings, appearances) can confer a-justification on at least some of our actions and serve as something recognizable as (simultaneously) a normative and motivating reason for that action.

At this point, let us return to the Inheritance Principle articulated in the introduction, repeated here:

> **Inheritance Principle (IP):** If an action, a, is a-justified to some degree, then if a state-of-affairs, χ, results from a, χ has some (possibly lesser) degree of s-justification.

IP stems from a more general intuition that the normative evaluation of states of affairs is grounded in the normative evaluation of agents and their effects on the world by way of their actions. IP localizes that global intuition by positing one mechanism, though not necessarily the only mechanism, by which normative properties are transferred from actions to states.

Moreover, neither IP nor the general intuition imply that there are no novel (emergent) normative properties at the level of states. It seems plausible, for instance, that a certain state could in part be s-justified or (s-)unjustified, not because of the (a-)justificatory status of the actions which contributed to its existence (its etiology), but because of its downstream effects (its teleology). For instance, even if the current wealth gap in the United States arose entirely from the aggregate effects of fully a-justified individual acts, it's conceivable that the potential negative future effects on well-being or constraints on possibilities for action are enough for it to *currently* count as s-unjustified.[25] But such cases would not count against IP. They merely count as defeaters or overriding considerations for whatever s-justification those states might have inherited in virtue of their etiology.

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[25] This kind of teleological justification is, in my view, an overlooked consideration in epistemology. It is suggested by a certain defense of steadfastness in the literature on reasonable disagreement and epistemic conservatism (Current Author). On that view, one thing that might justify belief retention in the face of peer disagreement is the role our beliefs play in developing a more comprehensive worldview and the corresponding kind of understanding that accompanies such a view. It could be that these forward-looking effects are sufficiently epistemically (or, perhaps, noetically) significant that they serve to s-justify our beliefs.

But my goal here is not to give a full defense of IP. For the purposes of this paper, I merely require the weaker claim that the a-justification of our actions *can be*, in the right circumstances, inherited by the states to which they give rise. And a general explanation for the acceptability of this kind of inheritance is not hard to find: Our actions affect the world, and thereby shift it from one state to another. If the action (or actions) that causes the shift is a-justified, this is something to be said in favor of the resulting states.

From the combination of BJA and IP (or some appropriately weakened version of IP), we can derive the following general principle concerning the connection between presentational states and the justification of states-of-affairs:

> **Action-Theoretic Dogmatism (ATD):** If x is in a presentational state, φ, and performs an action, A, such that A is a fitting NDR to φ, and if χ is a state of affairs that results from A, then there is at least some degree of s-justification for χ.

In stipulating that A is an NDR, I am effectively stipulating that φ is the agent's motivating reason for A-ing. For this reason, ATD articulates in generalized form the kind of justification epistemologists dub "doxastic justification", since χ's occurrence is based on φ by way of x's action (Firth 1978).[26]

As with BJA, ATD provides a general account of how presentational states can confer a kind of justification on at least some of states-of-affairs and how they can serve as something recognizable as reasons for those states-of-affairs.[27]

In Part II, I will argue that BJA, appropriately restricted, provides an adequate basis for Epistemic Foundationalism.

II.   Action-Theoretic Epistemology

There is, of course, a significant philosophical debate over the possibility of "doxastic agency", and so of doxastic actions (for one recent overview see McCormick 2018). Much of this discussion is irrelevant to the purposes of this paper. In extending the preceding framework to foundational epistemology, however, I will be committed to the status of judgments ("belief formation") as actions. Consequently, it will be essential to defend a form of doxastic voluntarism, and so I begin with this issue.

1. In Defense of Doxastic Voluntarism

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[26] Indeed, in this setting, there is a straightforward way of understanding the basing relation: **Basing:** χ is based on φ just in case there is an a such that a is an NDR to φ and χ results from a.

[27] This latter point about reasons relies on a kind of inheritance principle similar to the one posited in IP: Reasons for action are also reasons for the states those actions produce.

It is clear that we cannot judge a proposition to be true "at will" and this is sometimes understood to indicate that we lack adequate voluntary control over our judgments for them to count as actions. But, as I will now argue, such considerations are not compelling for many uncontroversial acts exhibit a similar behavior because specific conditions are required in order to perform them. Consider, for example, resisting a strong gust of wind. This is in action that I can (and in my part of the world frequently do) perform. And yet, I cannot resist a gust of wind at will, if by that is meant "whenever I feel like it". Performing this action, obviously, requires a gust of wind. While these kinds of enabling conditions are arguably widespread across a wide range of actions, they are particularly salient in the class of actions that we dub "responses". *Resistances*, whether to gusts of wind or to political oppression, are one class of responses. And for ease of locution, let us agree to call the conditions that responses are responses to, "precipitating conditions". So, in resisting a gust of wind, the precipitating condition is the gust.

Now consider the class of actions opposite resistances, which I'll call "givings-in" or "acceptances".[28] If I give in to (accept) the seductive overtures of my neighbor, I am likewise performing an action. But, just as with resistances, I plainly cannot give in to seductions at will, doing so requires a precipitating condition, to wit, a seducer. Metaphorically, to give in is it is to acquiesce to a "force" that is "pushing us" (inclining us) in a given "direction". Unlike resistances, givings-in are a kind of passive response, allowing things to "take their course". In such cases, the course things take is not itself directly determined by the actor, but by the precipitating condition. If the current of a river is pushing me downstream, I can resist the current by swimming against it. If I tire, and decide to give in to the current, my resulting position is a matter of where the current takes me. This is not to say that giving-in is a non-action. I can actively and consciously give in to a force or pressure. For instance, I can consciously release my muscles so that I am carried downstream by the current. But the result of that act is not (directly) determined by me, but by the current.

Resistances and acceptances are two-sides of the same coin. If giving in to something is to be understood as an action, it must also be possible to act otherwise, to resist (or, at least, not accept) that thing. If I cannot do otherwise but to "give in" then I am not really giving in as a kind of action; I am merely being coerced along a certain trajectory. For instance, being blown off my feet by hurricane force winds is not a matter of my giving in to the wind, but something that merely happens to me. In other words, the passivity of acceptances cannot be complete and total passivity lacking even the possibility of acting otherwise

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[28] Avoidances (e.g., ducking a punch) are, perhaps, a third general class of response-actions; and facilitations, a fourth.

Now, I propose that judgment (in the sense of belief formation) is an action best understood as a kind of giving in (acceptance) whose precipitating conditions are (typically, epistemic) reasons. I cannot accept any proposition "at will" for the simple reason that I don't have reasons "pressuring" me to give in to accepting the truth of an arbitrary proposition.[29] Judgment may be defined as an act of giving in to epistemic reasons. And while such acceptances often approximate "complete and total" passivity, resistance is possible. To take one kind of example, it may be that in a variety of contexts we have strong cognitive biases that incline us to believe things on less-than-ideal bases, as in hasty generalizations. But such biases can be rationally resisted. Or, to take the converse situation, cases of motivated reasoning arise when we irrationally resist pressures to believe on adequate grounds. Fantl and McGrath's (2002) observations concerning pragmatic encroachment may be modified as a final case in point. Depending on the practical stakes involved in being wrong, it may make good (prudential) sense to resist believing something on the basis of reasons that one would, under lower-stakes conditions, readily accept. This suggests that we do not simply accept a proposition when our reasons hit some "threshold of convincingness". Rather, we have some capacity to modulate (viz., resist) giving in to our reasons under a variety conditions.[30] This suggests that judgments can be understood to be at least partially under our voluntary control. If so, they satisfy to some degree one of the significant conditions proposed by Jones (condition A3 above).

Judgments also have substantive success conditions (condition A6).[31] Here is one way to see this as a "ground-floor", non-deliberative goal: Plausibly, any rational agent *qua* rational agent must have a standing goal of acquiring true beliefs; such goals are partially constitutive of rational agency. Zagzebski (2004), for instance, argues that if we care about anything, we must care about truths concerning that thing. And one might think that caring about some things is not rationally optional. But on the assumption that caring about some things is not optional, it seems that in a strong sense we *must* have truth (i.e., true

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[29] Moreover, the "pressure" exerted by reasons is directional. If I am confronted with reasons that suggest p, I cannot "give in" to the proposition that not p (for there is no pressure in that direction). Chris Tucker (forthcoming) in a recent paper argues that practical and epistemic rationality "weigh" reasons differently since in practical rationality "ties" tend to generate permissions while in epistemic rationality they tend to generate withholding. This observations connects nicely to the present view of judgments as givings in – in effect, ties yield no net pressure and so there is no way to give in to epistemic pressure.

[30] This is not to deny that our voluntary control over our judgments is attenuated compared to other kinds of actions. But, as we saw in Part I, behaviors need not exhibit every feature of paradigmatic actions (e.g., voluntary control) to a high degree to be considered actions.

[31] I will assume, without further discussion, that they also satisfy conditions A1, A4, and A5. My inclination is to think that judgments are (or at least often are) simple, not coordinated, actions. If so, they do not satisfy condition A2. But as we have seen, satisfying all the conditions is not necessary for actionhood.

belief) as a general standing goal. If so, then our judgments will have success conditions, namely, the production of true belief.[32]

2. Epistemology for Foundational Judgments

The preceding considerations reinforce what seems to me to be the intuitive position that judgments are a kind of cognitive action. Given this, we are now in a position to derive a version of epistemic foundationalism for a certain class of basic doxastic actions. The first step is to recognize that givings-in are a kind of response. When I give in to the seductive overtures of my neighbor, I am responding to those overtures in a specific way. When I resist them, I am responding differently. The same can be said for judgments. When I give in to the epistemic force of my reasons, I am responding to those reasons in a specific way. When I resist them, I am responding differently.

Against this backdrop, consider seemings. As we saw (§I.2), seemings are presentational states that ostensibly reveal how the world is in some respect and, for this reason, can function as non-doxastic (motivating and normative) reasons for actions. Many of those actions lack any deliberative antecedent and, consequently, count as non-deliberative responses (NDRs) to our seemings. Finally (as formalized in BJA), if those responses are fitting, they are accorded some degree of a-justification.

But many basic judgments exhibit precisely this motivational and normative structure. Consider the process of forming a perceptual belief: The revelatory nature of our perceptual seemings exerts pressure on us to assertively represent the world as being the way it is (ostensibly) revealed to be. If it perceptually seems to me that this is a hand, then this creates some pressure to believe that this is a hand. But the seeming does not blindly cause the belief. For us to acquire the belief, we must first *do* something, namely, *give in* to this epistemic pressure. In this way, our perceptual beliefs arise, at least in part, as a consequence of our doxastic actions.[33] In such cases, the seeming – and specifically, its presentational nature – is the motivating reason for judging.

At the same time, seemings are not deliberative antecedents to our judgments, but mere happenings. Moreover, as argued in the preceding subsection, our alethic goals as rational agents are not arrived at through deliberation but are ground floor goals of any epistemically rational agent. So, our

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[32] I find evolutionary considerations against alethic success conditions in belief completely underwhelming. But for my purposes here, this issue need not be settled so long as we agree that there will be some other success condition in play, for example, fitness enhancing conditions.

[33] This point helps to distinguish the significance of the current proposal from standard approaches to moderate dogmatism that don't use actions to mediate the connection between seemings and belief states. Those approaches simply gloss over the intuitive significance of agency in normative evaluation. Thanks to Jim Pryor for pressuring me on this point.

perceptual judgments are non-deliberative responses (NDRs) to those seemings.[34] As such, the relationship between perceptual experience and perceptual belief formation would seem to be covered by the principle BJA (repeated here):

> **BJA:** If x is in a presentational state, φ, then, absent defeaters, x thereby has at least some degree of a-justification to act in ways that are fitting *modulo* some set of x's goals, desires, intentions, etc..

For instance, taking the case of it perceptually seeming to me that this is a hand, we get:

> If it perceptually seems to me that this is a hand, then, absent defeaters, I thereby have at least some degree of (epistemic) a-justification to judge that this is a hand given my alethic goals.

The assumptions here are as follows: (1) its perceptually seeming to me that this is a hand puts some pressure on me to a form corresponding beliefs, and (2) given the revelatory nature of perceptual seemings, giving in to that pressure is fitting in light of my alethic goals (i.e., veridical representation).

Both of these assumptions seem well-motivated. In the first case, the pressure to form perceptual beliefs on the basis of perceptual seemings has been thought sufficiently strong to blindly *cause* those beliefs without any mediating cognitive actions on our part. But even in purely perceptual cases, this connection is too strong and tends to undermine the normative status of basic beliefs. This can be seen from considering cases of, at least temporary, incredulity. For instance, we resist judging (at least temporarily) when the contents of our seemings are at odds with our general expectations or background knowledge, as happens when we encounter possible but improbable situations. In fact, in these kinds of cases, we may be quite aware of ultimately accepting our appearance. The presence of mediating cognitive actions can be brought out further by cases where we are primed to think that at least some of our perceptual seemings are likely to be non-veridical. For instance, imagine an immersive art installation along the lines of *Meow Wolf* in which observers are told that some of the "objects" in their environment are merely holographic images. In these cases, they are "on their guard" in evaluating incoming perceptual experiences and withhold judgment until more decisive information is gathered than would normally be epistemically required.

We also have a robust sense of the fittingness (appropriateness) of judging that q on the basis of it perceptually seeming that p. To a first approximation, such judgments will be fitting whenever p = q. But

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[34] While primitive, non-deliberative cognitive actions are possible, they do not seem to be an adequate model for perceptual judgments. Consider a possible primitive non-deliberative cognitive action: In the context of daydreaming, I might end up absentmindedly reminiscing about an old girlfriend. Such reminiscing is an action of mine. Nevertheless, it is not a deliberative action. My reminiscing is, rather, the cognitive equivalent of drumming my fingers. But perceptual judgment is not like letting one's mind reminisce.

this identity is neither necessary nor sufficient for the fittingness of such judgments. For instance, it may be fitting to judge certain simple logical entailments of the contents of our seemings rather than the contents themselves. If it perceptually seems to me that p and q, it may be fitting for me to judge (merely) that q if that happens to otherwise be the object of my cognitive focus. Or it may be that it is fitting for me to judge some existential generalization of the content of my seeming as, for example, when I judge that there are deer in the field upon seeing one specific deer. Conversely, it may be inappropriate to judge that p, where p is a detailed or specific content of a seeming. This is the sort of phenomenon that arises in the so-called speckled hen problem (Fumerton 1995; Sosa 2015).

But this way of talking about judgment is, on the present view, rhetorically misleading insofar as it makes it sound as if the agent is substantively controlling which propositional *content* is being judged. Instead, on the view of judgment as a giving-in, our seemings in conjunction with our cognitive apparatus generate pressure for (incline) us to believe certain propositions. Our doxastic actions in these cases are limited to either giving in to or resisting that pressure. Generally speaking, a well-functioning cognitive system will offer candidate propositions that are epistemically fitting in light of the seeeming's presentational content. In such cases, when we give in to the doxastic pressure, the result will be a fitting belief. This view, therefore, posits a kind of minimalist doxastic agency (giving-in) that keeps our basic beliefs from being merely brutely caused by our seemings without committing us to a phenomenologically unrealistic quasi-deliberative picture of our doxastic agency in these cases (compare Heumer 2001, 96). Indeed, the role of our doxastic agency is typically even more highly attenuated because these doxastic actions are non-deliberative responses (NDRs) to presentational states. In other words, the apparent automaticity of belief-formation in the case of basic beliefs arises from the fact that our default action in such cases is to give-in to the revelatory force of seemings, resisting only under more specialized circumstances.

As minimal as our doxastic agency is in the case of foundational beliefs, it nevertheless gives us a wedge into the normativity of foundational belief formation by connecting it directly to BJA. Specifically, when we consider our foundational doxastic actions with respect to our alethic goals, those actions will be *epistemically* fitting. This is not because, as the externalist would have it, such actions reliably produce true belief since (as in evil demon scenarios) they may not. Rather, the dogmatist intuition is that the revelatory nature of presentational states makes them giving in to them a (*ceteris paribus*) fitting response.If so, we arrive at the following epistemically restricted instance of BJA:

> **(Basic) Epistemically Justified Judgement (EJJ):** If *x* is in a presentational state, φ-that p, that inclines us to believe that q, then, absent defeaters, *x* thereby has at least some degree of epistemic a-justification to accept that q.

EJJ constitutes a principle of doxastic act-justification for foundational judgments, that is, judgments that are NDRs to seemings.

Before moving on, it is worth considering what has been achieved to this point. In Part I, I developed a partial theory of the foundations of rational action based on non-deliberative responses to presentational states. That theory was driven by considerations of how the revelatory nature of our presentational states generate intelligent, non-deliberative responses and why such responses are open to normative evaluation. I then argued that acts of judgment were a specific kind of minimal action and that they frequently occur as NDRs to seemings. Given these points, it follows that foundational judgments fall under BJA as an instance and, consequently, have the same normative properties (*modulo* our alethic goals) as the broader class of NDRs. This is already a substantive epistemic conclusion because it introduce a form of epistemic evaluation into our cognitive behavior in a non-*ad-hoc* manner. This is precisely the kind of normative basis that the foundationalist is seeking.

3. Action-Theoretic Foundationalism

All that remains at this point in order to defend epistemic foundationalism is to show that EJJ provides an appropriate wedge into the justification of beliefs. The focus of the preceding discussion on the justification of action is central. Traditionally, foundationalism has been hard-pressed to give a theory of non-doxastic justification for belief states and, as a result, has foundered on efforts to provide some form of self-evidence or self-justification. Even where plausible, the predictable result of such efforts is an all-too narrow epistemic foundation. By focusing on the justification of actions, including physical actions like ducking a punch, the current approach is able to side-step concerns about non-doxastic justification. Our actions are not representational states with intrinsic veridicality conditions and so we were able to take a more expansive view of reasons.

As we saw at the end of the preceding subsection, EJJ is an instance of BJA where the actions in question are judgments evaluated *modulo* our basic alethic goals. For that reason, the Inheritance Principle is applicable. But IP and EJJ together entail the following restricted version of ATD, namely,:

> **Epistemic Action-Theoretic Dogmatism (EATD):** If *x* is in a presentational state, φ, and judges that p and judging that p is a fitting NDR to φ, then there is at least some degree of s-justification for *x*'s (resulting) belief that p.[35]

Nuances aside, EATD is similar to most forms of Moderate Dogmatism developed in the literature. It differs from those principles, however, by explicitly articulating how the s- justification of foundational beliefs emerges out of(conversely, is grounded on) the a-justification of prior non-deliberative doxastic actions.

Conclusion

In this paper I have developed a partial theory of the foundations of rational action based on non-deliberative responses to presentational states. That theory was driven by considerations as to how the revelatory nature of our presentational states generate Intelligent, non-deliberative responses and why such responses are subject to normative evaluation. From those general principles, I have shown that we can derive a convincing form of epistemic foundationalism, both at the level of justified doxastic action (EJJ) and at the level of justified belief (EATD).

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[35] There is no need to specify the resulting belief state in the antecedent since this is entailed by the judgment that p.

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