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Believing for Reasons

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Philosophy

by

Andrew James Jewell

2015

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# ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

## Believing for Reasons

By

Andrew James Jewell

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Mark D. Greenberg, Chair

Believing for reasons is ordinary. For example, I believe that irises respond well to heavy watering for the reason that my plants have always responded well in the past. During the last rainstorm, I believed that there was lightning outside for the reason that it was thundering. Believing for reasons is part of our rational endowment, and believing for *good* reasons is an important part of our attaining knowledge of the world. But what *is* the relation between a belief and a reason, such that the belief is held for that reason?

One reason we need a theory of believing for reasons is to explain the distinction between, on the one hand, the so-called “normative” or good reasons that there are for a subject *to* believe something, and on the other hand, the reasons *for which* a subject believes it. In order to appreciate this distinction, consider that there may be a normative reason for a person *to* believe that she will win a raffle (perhaps she knows that she has purchased nearly all of the tickets), but she not believe it on the basis of this reason. She might believe it, instead, for the

reason that she dreamed of winning. But that she dreamed of winning the raffle is not a normative reason for her *to* believe it.

One tempting explication of this distinction is that, when a person believes for a reason, the reason must *explain* her believing, whereas a normative reason to believe something need not explain why the person holds the belief. But this understanding of the distinction is inadequate. Many philosophers have observed that it is possible for a person's belief to be explained by a reason without the person believing it for that reason. Suppose that I hear thunder. My belief that there is thunder may make me nervous, my nervousness may cause me to trip, and my tripping may cause me to look up and see lightning. In such a case, my belief that there is thunder will be causally explained by my belief that there is lightning, but I will not believe that there is lightning for the reason that there is thunder. I will believe it, instead, because I see that there is lightning. This "problem of deviant causal chains" shows that we need an account of believing for reasons that does not understand the reasons for which we believe to be *merely* causal or explanatory.

I consider a variety of attempts to give a theory of believing for reasons, and I argue that even the most plausible available accounts fail. In chapter two, I argue against the view, endorsed by Gilbert Harman, that to hold a belief for a reason is to hold a belief that is the result of some historical process of reasoning. This view has difficulties explaining the sorts of control we have over our own believing. It is a necessary feature of our doxastic control that we have the power to change the reasons for which we believe, but we cannot exercise the appropriate sort of control over the history of our beliefs. I argue also against the view, defended by Kieran Setiya, that believing that *p* for the reason that *q* is nothing more than to believe that *p* and separately to believe that the fact that *q* is evidence that *p*. This view is subject to counterexamples, it over-

intellectualizes the phenomenon, and it leaves unexplicated the nature of the explanatory connection between a belief and the reason for which it is held.

In chapter three, I argue that problems with these theories push us toward adopting a causal sustaining theory of the basing relation, but I hold that the available causal sustaining theories cannot solve the problem of deviant causal chains mentioned above. Philosophers supporting a broadly causal conception have proposed solutions to the problem of causal deviance by appealing variously to direct mental causation (supported by Kevin McCain), cognitive dispositions (supported by David Armstrong and John Turri), and causation “in virtue of” rationalizing (supported by Ralph Wedgwood). I argue that even the most sophisticated of these causal sustaining theories fail to solve the problem of deviant causation. Indeed, one version of the problem, involving neurological breakdown, seems intractable given the resources of these theories.

In chapter four, I give a positive account of the basing relation that explains the difference between believing *for* reasons and believing something for which there are merely normative reasons *to* believe. I argue that believing for reasons is constitutively the exercise of a capacity to causally sustain a belief with another belief, where the capacity has the function of sensitivity to normative reasons. Importantly, *pace* the characterizations of cognitive 'abilities' sometimes found in epistemology, for instance in the work of John Turri, being the exercise of a capacity in this sense is not the same as being the manifestation of a disposition. Instead, I isolate a sense of “capacity” according to which capacities, unlike dispositions, have essential aims, and exercises of capacities have characteristic norms of functioning. I argue that this view avoids the problems that beset the theories discussed in chapters two and three.

I conclude the dissertation by answering objections and clarifying the aim and scope of

the account. I extend the scope of my account by offering an account of a general sort of basing that applies to perceptual belief and memory. And I consider the objection that our cognitive capacities do not in fact function to be sensitive to the epistemic reasons. In particular, it might be argued that our supposedly rational capacities do not in fact aim at sensitivity to the normative reasons but instead roughly at survival or procreative success. I argue against this view in part by appealing to the fact that our cognitive capacities can have two kinds of functions: cognitive and biological.

The dissertation of Andrew James Jewell is approved.

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2015



In memory of my grandmother Doris Szyndrowski and Professor Anthony Brueckner.

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## Introduction

The phenomenon of holding a belief for reasons is an ordinary one. For example, I believe that lilies respond well to frequent watering for the reason that they have always responded well in the past. During the last rainstorm, I believed that it was lightning outside for the reason that it was thundering in the distance. We can believe for good reasons, but we can also believe for bad or irrational reasons. A superstitious person, for example, might believe she will win the lottery for the reason that, during the previous night, she dreamed it.

Understanding believing for reasons is an important part of understanding knowledge. In many cases, a central part of the explanation for why a subject knows is that they believe for good reasons. Believing for good reasons also has independent epistemic value (Turri 2011: 384): a subject who believes for good reasons has a belief that is in some important way *good*, even if it fails to attain the status of knowledge; a subject who believes for good reasons has done something *well*; and perhaps she has even believed what she ought to (Feldman and Conee 1985: 19). In contrast, believing for bad reasons does not help a subject secure knowledge, it has negative epistemic value, and it does not redound to her credit.

Believing for reasons is both ordinary and important, but it is the source of significant philosophical confusion. I argue in what follows that the nature of believing for reasons is, at least in important respects, significantly different from how present theories of the phenomenon understand it. In the following chapters, I will answer the following metaphysical question:

MQ: *What is believing for reasons?*

The relation between a belief and a reason, such that the belief is held for that reason, is

conventionally called “the (epistemic) basing relation.” Hence, the metaphysical question can also be stated: *What is the basing relation?* Answering this question will require drawing out the relationships between believing for reasons and related phenomena like reasoning, justifying, and what is sometimes called “taking” a consideration to be a reason (Setiya 2013, Boghossian 2014). It will also require evaluating current theories of the basing relation.

The theories that I discuss in the following chapters fall under four main views or approaches; (i) The *reasoning approach* holds that believing for reasons is to believe as the result of a prior process of reasoning; (ii) The *attitudinal approach* holds that believing for reasons reduces to holding an attitude about the epistemic relation between a belief and a reason; (iii) The *dispositional approach* holds that believing for reasons is to possess or realize a certain sort of psychological disposition; (iv) The *causal approach* holds that believing for reasons is to hold a belief that is appropriately caused by the reason or by an attitude encoding that reason. These four approaches have been combined in various ways (e.g. Turri 2011, Wedgwood 2006), but they broadly represent the different strategies to be found in the contemporary literature.

I will argue in what follows that these approaches are all inadequate. Even the most plausible available theories of believing for reasons suffer from a variety of serious problems. The inadequacy of available theories of believing for reasons might raise the concern that our rational capacities are inexplicable, non-natural, or *sui generis*. But I think that this worry is unwarranted. Instead, problems arise for the available theories of believing for reasons in part because philosophers have neglected the fact that believing for reasons is constitutively the exercise of a capacity and that capacities, unlike mere dispositions, have constitutive aims and functions. In chapter four, I appeal to this fact to offer a novel theory of believing for reasons, and I argue that this theory avoids the problems affecting other accounts. The theory that I will



propose understands the basing relation to be both causal and teleological, and it fits into a naturalistic conception of the world.

I mentioned above that the primary aim of this dissertation is to answer the question: *What is believing for reasons?* One subsidiary aim of the dissertation is to show that current accounts of believing for reasons are mistaken. Another subsidiary aim of the dissertation is to give a substantive characterization of *capacities* that relates them to certain characteristic sorts of success and failure. In addition, an *external* aim of this dissertation is to develop a tool for use in theorizing about epistemic warrant. The central positive theory of this dissertation is that believing for reasons is constitutively the exercise of a teleologically characterized capacity with a certain causal profile and a certain constitutive function. This view holds promise for informing an account of warrant transmission between beliefs, such that warrant transmission involves the successful operation of the relevant capacity with respect to its constitutive function. I discuss this matter in very general terms in chapters four and five, but warrant transmission is not the topic of this dissertation.

The following chapters are organized as follows. In chapter one, I introduce and motivate a preliminary characterization of believing for reasons (“The Basic Conception”). According to this characterization, the reasons for which we believe (i) explain why we believe and (ii) are part of what explains the phenomenon of warrant transmission between beliefs. I distinguish believing for reasons from some related phenomena, and I argue that one of these distinctions (viz. between believing for reasons and holding a belief that is *supported* by reasons)<sup>1</sup> shows that the Basic Conception is incomplete. If we wish to understand the difference between (on the one hand) believing for reasons and (on the other) holding a belief that is supported by reasons, a

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1 I am following Davidson 1963.

more complete characterization is required. The rest of the dissertation is devoted to providing such a characterization of believing for reasons.

In the beginning of chapter two, I consider the view that believing for reasons is to believe as the “result” or culmination of a process of reasoning. I argue that believing for reasons is metaphysically independent of any such process. One problem with such a view is that it is incompatible with one kind of present control that we can exercise over the reasons for which we believe. I consider various modifications to this “reasoning” theory that aim to account for the relevant control. But I argue that they all fail.

In the later sections of chapter two, I consider two additional views of believing for reasons. Firstly, I consider the view that holding a belief for reasons requires having the disposition to justify the belief by appealing to certain considerations (Lehrer 1965). Secondly, I consider the view that believing that *p* for reasons reduces to a mere conjunction of the belief that *p* and a separate belief about the evidence (Setiya 2013). I argue that both views are subject to counterexamples and neither respects the Basic Conception. I conclude the chapter by discussing the view (in Audi 1993: 240–241) that believing for a reason requires that the subject believe something “to the effect” that a consideration counts in favor of believing. This view is motivated, in part, by the intuition that believing for reasons involves the subject “taking” some consideration to count in favor of believing. I argue against this view in part by arguing that the phenomenon of “taking” has been misunderstood.

In chapter three, I discuss a popular class of theories of believing for reasons that take the phenomenon to be essentially causal (Armstrong 1973, Wedgwood 2006, Turri 2011, McCain 2014). According to these theories, the basing relation is a kind of causal sustaining relation between the belief and the reason for which it is held. I consider increasingly sophisticated

versions of this causal sustaining proposal, arguing that each version suffers from the problem of deviant causation. These theories are correct in holding that believing for reasons involves a causal sustaining component. But they are incorrect in holding that believing for reasons can be fully elucidated using the resources causal theorists have allowed themselves.

Chapter four builds on the critical discussion in chapter three. I argue, in particular, that causal sustaining theories have neglected an important resource. Namely, they have neglected the fact that believing for reasons is the exercise of a capacity with a certain aim and function. This neglect is obscured by the fact that capacities are not often distinguished from “mere” dispositions. Hence, I spend the middle of chapter four distinguishing exercises of capacities (in one ordinary sense of “capacity”) from realizations of mere dispositions. In the relevant sense of “capacity,” capacities have aims, and exercises of capacities are essentially subject to certain forms of success and failure. The same is not true for realizations of mere dispositions. I use this characterization of capacities to give a novel account of believing for reasons. According to the account (the “Capacity Account”), believing for reasons is constitutively the exercise of a capacity to causally sustain one belief, employing another belief, with the function of sensitivity to the normative reasons. I end the chapter by showing how this account avoids the problems discussed in chapters two and three.

I conclude the dissertation in chapter five by addressing a number of different objections to the capacity account and by clarifying its aim and scope. I answer the objection, in particular, that the capacity account is question-begging or trivial because it invokes the capacity to believe for reasons. And I answer the objection that the notions of a capacity and a function are not plausibly naturalistic. Capacities and functions do in fact figure in uncontentionably respectable sciences like biology and cognitive psychology. With respect to the aim and scope of the

account, I sketch out a generalization of the capacity account that applies to perceptually warranted belief and to beliefs warranted via memory.

## Chapter One: Ground Clearing

### 1.1 Introduction

We believe things for reasons. I believe that the office is closed today for the reason that today is Saturday and that the office is closed on Saturday. I believe that I am allergic to wool for the reason that after wearing it I develop a mild rash. I believe that the man sitting next to me at the coffee shop is writing a screenplay for the reason that his document has a particular formatting. Believing for reasons is an important part of our rational endowment, and it plays an important role in explaining our knowledge of the world. The fact that I believe something for *good* reasons explains why believing it amounts to knowledge rather than (for instance) a mere hunch. Believing for reasons is part of what allows us to extend our knowledge of the world past the perceivable features of our environment to facts about quarks and capitalism and pareto optimality. The capacity to believe for reasons is also implicated in our unsophisticated knowledge of the world. Young children and unsophisticated adults believe for reasons when they believe (e.g.) that a loved one is taking a nap in the other room. But they do not generally have knowledge of quarks or capitalism or pareto optimality.

The picture of believing for reasons that I will sketch in the following chapters is a picture of a psychological capacity we share with less sophisticated creatures. It is also a picture of a capacity that is largely independent from our justificatory practices and our judgments about what there is reason for us to believe. This picture of believing for reasons stands in stark contrast to accounts of the phenomenon according to which exercising the capacity to believe for reasons involves taking an explicit position on what one ought to believe or which considerations count in favor of which beliefs. The picture of believing for reasons that I defend is also one in

which the phenomenon is a part of the natural causal order. This naturalistic picture has long been afflicted by the problem of distinguishing the right causal phenomena from the wrong causal phenomena (this is the so-called problem of “deviant causal chains”). I argue that the problem is solvable. But I think solving the problem shows that we must take a somewhat more liberal view of what the natural causal order includes. The natural causal order, as I will claim in the following chapters, includes not only electrons and carbon and solar systems but also capacities and functions, aims and successes.

## **1.2 The Basic Conception**

What is believing for reasons? The question is complicated by the fact that we might ordinarily call different sorts of things “believing for reasons.” We might sometimes say “John believes it for the reason that he was angry at his mother,” but we might in the same breath say, without contradiction, “John believes it for no reason – he was just angry at his mother.” Similarly, there are different phenomena that might go under the name “reason” and not all of them are the reasons for which we believe. We talk about reasons *to* believe, reasons *for which* someone believes, reasons someone *has* to believe, *sufficient or good* reasons to believe, and sometimes we talk about the considerations that we *take* to be reasons to believe.

In this chapter, I will begin to isolate one phenomenon that is ordinarily referred to as “believing for reasons” and a corresponding sort of reason. The phenomenon that I want to discuss meets at least the following criteria:

*The Basic Conception of Believing for Reasons:*

- (i) The reasons for which we believe are explanatory reasons.
  
- (ii) Believing for reasons plays an important role in explaining why the warrant for certain beliefs depends on the warrant for other beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

The Basic Conception is not intended to provide an answer to the question with which I began this section. Instead, the Basic Conception is intended to give a first-pass characterization of the subject of the dissertation and to help isolate believing for reasons from some related phenomena. Importantly, the Basic Conception is neutral with respect to many – although not all – of the theories of believing for reasons that I consider in chapters two and three. In addition, I make no claims that the Basic Conception captures the only phenomenon that can be permissibly referred to by the phrase “believing for reasons.” I hold only that the Basic Conception captures a real phenomenon that figures in our ordinary explanations of warranted belief, that this phenomenon is naturally referred to as “believing for reasons,” and that it is described in the example cases below. In the next two sections, I will motivate the criteria of the Basic Conception and issue some additional clarifications.

### **1.3 Explanation**

The first condition of the Basic Conception holds that the reasons for which we believe are explanatory reasons. This condition can be motivated by examples. Here is an ordinary case

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “warrant” in the sense of Burge 2003. Warrant is a positive epistemic status of a psychological state, event or process that applies both to what philosophers have called “justification” as well as what Burge and others have called “entitlement” (Burge 2003: 505–509). When a belief is warranted, that belief is normally sufficient, excluding Gettier cases and given truth, for knowledge.

of believing for reasons:

(1) I have just spent the past several days writing in isolation, and I decide that I need to go to the Philosophy Department office to pick up some paperwork. I am unsure whether the office is open, so I check my phone and learn that today is Saturday. Since I know that the office is closed on Saturday, I promptly come to believe that the office is closed today. And I hold this belief for the reason that today is Saturday and the reason that the office is closed on Saturday.

In the example, if someone asks me to explain *why* I believe that the office is closed today, then one permissible response is to appeal to the fact that “today is Saturday” or to the fact that “I believe that today is Saturday.” The fact that the reasons for which I believe can be cited in answers to such “why?” questions shows that they are reasons cited in true explanations for our believing. I will call such reasons “explanatory reasons,”<sup>2</sup> and I will say that they *explain* (or partially explain) the fact that a subject believes. A little reflection will show that this observation applies quite generally: if we believe something for reasons, then the reasons for which we believe are amongst the reasons *why* we believe it (Harman 1973: 29–30, Neta 2015: 2, Audi 1993: 216).

The fact that the reasons for which we believe explain our believing can help to distinguish the reasons for which a subject believes something from the reasons *there are* for the

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2 The *locus classicus* of the present distinction with respect to action is Davidson 1963: 691. The distinction between “explanatory” reasons and what are sometimes called “justificatory” reasons is widely drawn in the literature in philosophy of action: cf. Lenman 2009, Hieronymi 2011: 413. I do not use the expression “explanatory” reasons, because the reasons *for which* we believe are only a sub-set of explanatory reasons (see section 1.6).



subject *to* believe it. The reasons *there are* for a subject *to* believe something are sometimes called “normative reasons.” They are considerations that constitutively count in favor of the subject believing it. Yet the reasons which constitutively count in favor of a subject believing it may not explain why the subject believes it (Turri 2009: 492).<sup>3</sup> For example:

(2) Suppose that I wish to become a professional actor. There are good reasons for me to believe that I will become a professional actor. I know that my mother is able to influence casting decisions and I know that I am better at acting than the average member of my peer group. However, I am pessimistic about the importance of family connections and talent and so these reasons play no role in explaining my belief. It happens that I do in fact believe that I will become a professional actor, but the reason for which I hold this belief is that I irrationally trust my unreliable weekly horoscope which reads “fame in your future!”

In example (2), there are reasons that count in favor of my believing that I will become a professional actor. One such reason is that my mother is able to influence casting decisions. Another reason is that I am better at acting than the average member of my peer group. But these reasons do not help explain why I believe that I will become a professional actor. Hence, they are not reasons for which I believe it.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, the fact that my horoscope reads “fame in your

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3 Alternatively, normative reasons may count in favor of the *truth* of p or it may count towards settling the question whether p. I do not mean to commit myself to any particular view of normative reasons besides that they in some way support believing and they are not identical to the reasons for which we believe at least in the present sense of “reasons for which we believe” (see Hieronymi 2005).

4 Davidson makes this distinction between different sorts of reasons for action in his famous “Actions, Reasons and Causes” (Davidson 1963). Roughly the same distinction is made for beliefs in Harman 1973, Audi 1993,

future” does not count in favor of my believing that I will be a professional actor, even though I hold my belief for this reason. Hence, the reasons for which I believe need not be normative reasons for me to believe it.

In addition to the distinction between normative reasons and the reasons for which we believe, a distinction is sometimes drawn between the reasons *there are* for a subject *to* believe something, and the reasons the subject *has* to believe it. Here is one way of drawing this distinction from Robert Audi in his “Foundationalism, Epistemic Dependence and Defeasibility:”

A proposition, q, is a reason to believe a proposition, p, if and only if q bears some warranting relation to p, e.g. is an adequate ground on which to base a belief that p (the relevant kinds of warranting relations are difficult to specify, and need not be sorted out for our purposes here). (2) By contrast, typically, a reason which S has for believing p is another proposition, q, such that (a) S believes q, and (b) q is a reason to believe p. (Audi 1985: 123–4)

I will take no official position on Audi's view of normative reasons here. The important point in the passage is that there is a distinction between *there being* a normative reason for a subject to believe that p and a subject *having* a (normative) reason to believe that p. A reason that an individual has to believe something is a normative reason that is available to the individual in a certain way but not all normative reasons are so available. However, I mention this distinction simply to put it aside. I will avoid appealing to the reasons that we “have” to believe something.

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Turri 2009, and by many others.

Instead, I will talk only of the reasons *for which* we believe something and the reasons that *there are* for us to believe it. The relationship between *having* reasons to believe and *there being* normative reasons to believe is interesting, but it falls outside the scope of the present project.

Finally, there is an important distinction to be drawn within the set of normative reasons between *sufficient* normative reasons for S to believe and (merely) normative reasons for S to believe. A normative reason for S to believe is a consideration that counts in favor of S believing to at least some degree. In contrast, q is a sufficient reason for S (in some circumstances) to believe that p iff S's believing that p for the reason that q would be rational in those circumstances.<sup>5</sup> What I will call a “normative reason to believe” does not have this feature. This is partly because a normative reason for an individual S to believe that p can be outweighed by some other reason to *not* believe that p. For example, the fact that (as S knows) bark beetles are endemic in Southern California is *some* reason for S to believe that they are also endemic in other western states. But the fact that (as S knows) bark beetles live only in sub-tropical climates is an even stronger reason for S to believe that the bark beetles are *not* endemic in these other states. And this opposing reason is strong enough to make S's believing that bark beetles are endemic in other western states irrational.

#### **1.4 Warrant**

The second condition of the Basic Conception is that believing for reasons helps to

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<sup>5</sup> I am following the rough gloss that Scanlon 2014: 106 gives on sufficient reasons for action. I do not intend this necessary and sufficient condition on sufficient reasons to provide anything like an *account* of such reasons. I am instead only offering a way of distinguishing sufficient normative reasons from “mere” normative reasons. In addition, we may need to add a further condition to this characterization to account for the fact that whether believing for a reason is rational will depend on the *way* that the belief is based on the reason (Turri 2010: 316).

explain why the warrant for *some beliefs* depends on the warrant for other beliefs. To see this, suppose in example (1) that I am warranted in believing that today is Saturday and that the Philosophy office is closed on Saturday. Barring unusual circumstances, my belief that the Philosophy office is closed today will also be warranted, and it will be warranted because I am warranted in holding these other beliefs. However, the full explanation for why I am warranted in believing that the Philosophy office is closed today requires more than appealing to the fact that I have some other warranted beliefs. To see this, consider another example:

(3) Phillip has the warranted beliefs that the Philosophy office is closed on Saturday and that today is Saturday. He also believes that the Philosophy office is closed today, but he is not warranted in believing it. Phillip has been reading the tabloids, and a recent story about an imminent Martian attack has distracted him from the implications of his other beliefs. Phillip does not believe that the Philosophy office is closed today for the reasons that today is Saturday and that the office is closed on Saturday. Instead, Phillip believes that the office is closed today for the reason that a Martian attack is imminent and the office is shutting down in preparation.

There are some similarities between examples (1) and (3). Phillip and I both believe with warrant that the Philosophy office is closed on Saturday and that today is Saturday. We also both believe that the Philosophy office is closed today. However, only I am warranted in believing that the Philosophy office is closed today. The intuitive explanation for our difference in warrant is that we believe the office is closed today for different reasons. My belief that the office is closed today is warranted because certain other beliefs of mine are warranted, but this is only true

because I believe the office is closed today for certain reasons. In other words, the full explanation of my warrant in believing that the philosophy office is closed today appeals not only to the fact that I am warranted in believing that today is Saturday and that the office is closed on Saturday, but also to the fact that I believe it for those reasons. This feature of believing for reasons is quite general. For many of our ordinary beliefs about the world, it is only because we hold them for reasons that they are warranted: more precisely, *believing for reasons plays an important role in explaining why the warrant for some beliefs depends on the warrant to other beliefs*. In what follows, I will follow convention and call this dependence of warrant “warrant transmission.”<sup>6</sup>

It will be useful to have at least a partial formulation of the conditions under which believing for reasons transmits the warrant for one belief (or set of beliefs) to another belief. I adopt the following as a working hypothesis for the positive epistemic status of *warrant*:

*For a central class of beliefs, a subject's belief that p is warranted in part because*

- (1) the subject has the belief(s) that q and the belief(s) that q is(are) warranted;
- (2) the subject holds the belief that p for the reason(s) that q;

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6 I will adopt the terminology of “warrant transmission” to describe what is happening in the previous example (1) but with some provisos. First, philosophers have often used the phrase ‘warrant transmission’ to refer to transmission of propositional warrant (i.e. the warrant one *has* to believe something), but what I am discussing here is the transmission of doxastic warrant (i.e. the warrant of a token belief). Second, the metaphor of “transmission” can be misleading. A transmission is often an event that takes place at a certain time and can then cease while the property transmitted endures. For example, the ordinary cold virus is transmitted from one person to another via a momentary event (perhaps an episode of coughing) but then it continues in the new host. The basing relation does not appear to transmit warrant in this way. In particular, when a belief that P is held for certain reasons, and the belief is warranted *because* it is held for certain reasons, the warrant of the belief usually remains sensitive to the warrant of other beliefs long after any initial “transmission” event. For instance, my belief that the philosophy office is closed today would become *unwarranted* if my belief that today is Saturday became unwarranted by the acquisition of opposing or undermining evidence.

(3) the belief that q *supports* believing that p.

I will not defend this working hypothesis here. However, I do want to issue a few clarifications before moving on. Firstly, I have framed the three conditions so that they apply only to “a central class of beliefs” because they do not plausibly apply to all beliefs. For instance, I doubt that many memorial beliefs are warranted even partly because they are held for reasons, although this view is contentious (Cf. McCain 2014: 118).<sup>7</sup> Secondly, I have tried to phrase the conditions so that the formulation is non-committal about the relationship between the belief(s) that q and the reason(s) that q. I have tried to be non-committal because it is a subject of debate whether the reasons for which we believe are psychological states, worldly facts, or propositions. I will later stipulate that the reasons for which we believe are beliefs, but I do not want this to simply fall out of the current hypothesis about warrant alone. Thirdly, I do not think it is true that meeting the three conditions is *sufficient* to warrant a subject in believing that p. This is because the subject may believe for reasons that q, and the subject may be *warranted* in believing that q, and the belief that q may *support* believing that p, but the subject may nonetheless believe that p only via some poor reasoning from q.<sup>8</sup>

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7 I think it is somewhat plausible that the conditions apply to cases in which the epistemic warrant to a belief depends on the epistemic warrant to another belief. But we need to be careful about how we understand “depends” in this claim. It should not include cases in which the warrant to one belief *explains* why some other belief is warranted, but in some “strange” way (e.g. perhaps the fact that your belief that q is warranted explains why someone provides you with additional, new evidence E, on which basis you form a warranted belief that p). However, it is difficult so see how to rule out “strange” sorts of warrant-dependence other than by specifying that the sort of dependence we are interested in is warrant-transmission via the basing relation.

8 Turri 2010 gives several examples that show it is not sufficient for S to believe with warrant that S believe on the basis of sufficient reasons. Cf. Harman 1973: 31 and McCain 2014: 109–112.

## 1.5 An Organizing Assumption

The central question of this dissertation is “What is believing for reasons?” As I mentioned above, answering this question is complicated by an ongoing debate about the nature of the reasons for which we believe. It is variously held that such reasons are worldly facts, propositions, states-of-affairs, psychological states, or facts about psychological states (Dancy 2000: Chapter 5, Hieronymi 2011). For the purposes of exposition, I will need to adopt some metaphysical framework in which to discuss the basing relation. I adopt the following assumption:

(iii) The reasons for which we believe are beliefs.

I will not argue for this view. The arguments in the following chapters do not materially depend on (iii) being correct, and the central puzzles of this dissertation can be put into terms that every party to the debate can accept. As an illustration, I will briefly argue in section 1.7 that the primary puzzle of this dissertation does not depend on accepting (iii).

However, I do not think that (iii) is unmotivated. It is, at any rate, a *prima facie* plausible thing to assume. Firstly, beliefs are the sorts of things that can both (1) explain why we hold other beliefs and (2) figure into explanations for why a belief is warranted given other warranted beliefs. Secondly, assumption (iii) is supported by the intuition that, in order to believe that p for the reason that q, the subject must in some way have taken a positive stand on whether q.<sup>9</sup> That is, it is not possible to believe that p for the reason that q if one's attitude toward q is only one of

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<sup>9</sup> This is noted by Dancy 2000: 102 and by Setiya 2011: 134 with respect to acting for reasons.

doubt or disbelief. And one plausible explanation of this fact is that basing reasons are beliefs. Thirdly, identifying basing reasons with beliefs illuminates the earlier working hypothesis about warrant transmission in 1.3. The fact that a subject's belief that q is warranted explains why the subject's belief that p is warranted *via believing for reasons* in part because the basing relation is a relation between those very beliefs. In other words, no additional story is required in order to connect S's believing that q (with warrant) to *the reason for which* S believes that p. The belief that q is simply identical to the reason for which S believes it. Fourthly, I have assumed that basing reasons are beliefs, but it would be easy to extend the relevant assumption to include other psychological states such as perceptions. This final point will only become relevant in the final chapter of this dissertation, so I will put it to one side.

Although I will assume that basing reasons are beliefs, I do not assume that normative reasons for a subject to believe are psychological states. I think it is *prima facie* plausible that the reasons that count in favor of believing are at least sometimes non-psychological facts in the world. For instance, it seems to me very plausible that the *fact* that the fire alarm went off is a reason to believe that there is a fire. However, this matter is outside of the scope of this dissertation and none of the following arguments will depend on it.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.6 Believing for Reasons and Causal Deviance

What is the difference between believing for reasons and believing something that there are, as it happens, normative reasons to believe? Consider again the earlier example (2). In the

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<sup>10</sup> I take such a conception of normative reasons to be compatible with assumption (iii) if we accept the view that normative reasons are in many cases not strictly *identical* with the basing reasons, but are instead represented by them. For an overview of this approach, see Lenman 2009 with respect to reasons for action.



example, I do not believe that I will become a professional actor for the reason that my mother is able to influence casting decisions even though (i) I believe I will become a professional actor and (ii) that my mother can influence casting decisions is a reason for me to believe it. I do not believe I will become a professional actor *for the reason* that my mother can influence casting decisions because my belief is not explained by that reason. The reason that explains my believing is instead that I trust my weekly horoscope.

However, this explanatory difference cannot be the only difference between believing for reasons and believing something for which there are reasons. This is because there are explanatory relations between beliefs that are insufficient for basing:

(4) There is a rat crawling around Marc's apartment. Marc sees the rat and comes to believe what he sees: namely, that there is a rat crawling around his apartment. This belief causes him to lunge forward to chase the rat, which causes him to knock his head, and the knock causes him to see (and so come to believe) that his front door is open.<sup>11</sup>

In example (4), Marc's belief that there is a rat crawling around his apartment is a cause of his belief that his front door is open. Hence, his belief that there is a rat crawling around his

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<sup>11</sup> This sort of example is modeled on famous examples from Davidson. Davidson 1980: 79: "A climber might want to rid himself of the weight and danger of holding another man on a rope, and he might know that by loosening his hold on the rope he could rid himself of the weight and danger. This belief and want might so unnerve him as to cause him to loosen his hold, and yet it might be the case that he never chose to loosen his hold, nor did he do it intentionally. It will not help, I think, to add that the belief and the want must combine to cause him to want to loosen his hold, for there will remain the two questions how the belief and the want caused the second want, and how wanting to loosen his hold caused him to loosen his hold." Similar sorts of cases applying to belief are common in the literature on believing for reasons and inference. For instance, with respect to inference, see Wedgwood 2006; with respect to believing for reasons, see Turri 2011; and with respect to epistemic *basing* more generally, see Plantinga 1993 (cited in Korcz 2015 and McCain 2012).

apartment partially explains his believing that he left his front door open.<sup>12</sup> However, Marc *does not* believe that he left his front door open in part for the reason that there is a rat in his apartment. Instead, he believes it only because he saw that the front door was open.

The relation between Marc's beliefs in example (4) is a causal relation. Hence, it is an explanatory relation.<sup>13</sup> A causal-explanatory relation that connects two beliefs is called "deviant" just when it is of the wrong sort for the one belief to be held on the basis of the other.<sup>14</sup> I follow this usage and call the problem that these relations present for the theory of believing for reasons the "problem of deviant causation." The existence of deviant causal relations shows that not every explanatory relation between two beliefs is a basing relation, and this shows that the Basic Conception is in an important way incomplete. As I formulated it above, the Basic Conception requires that believing for reasons meet two conditions. Firstly, the basis for the belief needs to at least partially explain why the subject holds the belief; secondly, the relation needs to play a role in explaining warrant transmission between beliefs. However, we cannot explain the difference between deviant and non-deviant explanatory relations by appealing to either of these conditions. The deviant causal relation in example (4) in fact meets the first condition. And it fails to meet the second condition only *because* it fails to count as believing for reasons (Neta 2015: 4). We cannot explain why the causal relation in example (4) is deviant by appealing to the fact that it plays no role in warrant transmission, because this fact about deviance is explanatorily prior to the fact about warrant.

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12 I would like to thank Katrina Elliott for a helpful conversation on this point.

13 I take causal relations to be explanatory relations at least in the following sense: if *c* caused *e*, then *c* can be cited in a true explanation of why *e* occurred or is the case.

14 It could turn out, on this understanding, that a causal chain is deviant but does not present a problem for any theory (because no theory holds that it counts as a basing relation). In addition, it could turn out that all causal relations are deviant, because no sort of causal relation is of the *right sort* to establish basing.

It is consistent with the problem of causal deviance that the basing relation be a certain *sort* of explanatory relation or that it be an explanatory relation that satisfies other conditions.<sup>15</sup> If believing for reasons is a certain sort of explanatory relation, then what sort of explanatory relation is it? If it is an explanatory relation plus some other condition(s), then what is (are) the extra condition(s)? What sort of relation rules out causal deviance while nonetheless respecting the Basic Conception? I take these questions to present a serious and difficult puzzle for any account of the basing relation. They arise again and in different guises in the following chapters.

## 1.7 Dialectical Remarks

I have assumed that the reasons for which a subject S believes are beliefs such as *the belief that today is Saturday*. As I noted in section 1.5, however, the arguments in the following chapters do not depend on making this assumption. I want to briefly argue that the central and important puzzle discussed in section 1.6 *in particular* does not depend on making this assumption. It would restrict the potential scope of the present project if it turned out that causal deviance presented a problem only for views that hold basing reasons to be identical to beliefs.

Suppose, for example, that the reasons for which we believe are the contents of psychological states (that is, the things believed) rather than psychological states themselves.<sup>16</sup>

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15 Audi takes the basing relation to be partly an explanatory relation that also satisfies a series of apparently non-explanatory conditions. One such condition is that it involve a “connecting belief” (Audi 1983: 124).

16 This is the position (for example) of Audi 1983. Audi holds that the reasons for which we believe that p explain why we believe that p by virtue of being the contents of beliefs that explain why we believe that p (Audi 1983: 236). I do not agree with Audi that this gets us the right sort of explanatory connection. As Turri 2009 has argued in a slightly different form, this is because the form of explanation does not seem to generalize to similar cases. For example, suppose that I doubt that q and this doubt explains why I performed some action. In such a case, I would not have performed the action for the reason that q nor (to use slightly different language) did I perform it *because* q (Turri 2009: 499–500).

On such a view, there must still be a difference between there being reasons for a subject to believe something and a subject believing it for those reasons. This difference, at least, is not an artifact of the previous account of basing reasons. In addition, the problem of deviant causation still shows that the difference between (i) believing for reasons and (ii) believing something that is supported by reasons, cannot be captured by the Basic Conception alone. If reasons are contents, then presumably they explain our believing in virtue of being the contents of psychological states that stand in explanatory relations to our beliefs. This is Audi's view in "Belief, Reason and Inference" (Audi 1993: 236).<sup>17</sup> But example (4) shows that not just *any* explanatory relation between a psychological state and a belief is sufficient for basing. And if reasons are facts in the world, then example (4) also shows that such *facts* – e.g. the fact that there is a rat crawling around Marc's apartment – can explain why a subject believes something without being his reason for believing it. Hence, even on these alternative views of basing reasons (viz. normative reasons are facts or contents), causal deviance still presents a puzzle to be solved, and the Basic Conception is still in an important way incomplete.

## 1.8 Conclusion

The reasons for which we believe both explain why we believe and explain why certain beliefs we hold are warranted. But the existence of deviant causation shows that the basing relation cannot simply be any explanatory relation between S's reasons and beliefs. In particular, the explanatory relation cannot simply be *causation*. Hence, we are left with a puzzle about the

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<sup>17</sup> Wedgwood appears to think that the "propositionalist" will have to adopt such a view (Wedgwood 2006: 661) although he never explicitly endorses this position.

nature of believing for reasons. What is believing for reasons such that it meets the Basic Conception and avoids the problem of causal deviance?

In the next chapter, I will consider several different approaches to believing for reasons. The first approach holds that to believe for a reason is to believe *as the result of* some prior process of reasoning. The second approach holds that to believe for a reason is (or at least requires) being in a position to justify the belief by appeal to certain considerations. The third approach holds that to believe for a reason is to “take,” in some non-trivial way, the reason to count in favor of believing, or at least it requires such taking. I argue that each of these approaches is inadequate. The first approach is incompatible with one sort of present control we have over the reasons for which we believe. The other two approaches are subject to counterexamples and are incompatible with the Basic Conception.

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## Chapter Two: Reasoning, Justifying, and Taking

### 2.1 Introduction

What is believing for reasons? In the previous chapter, I isolated a conception of believing for reasons according to which basing reasons are explanatory reasons and the basing relation plays a role in warrant transmission. In this chapter, I will consider several theories of the basing relation that link believing for reasons to the process of reasoning, the activity of justifying, and the activity or state of “taking” some consideration to count in favor of believing. I will argue that believing for reasons is, in important ways, metaphysically independent of these states, processes, and activities. Believing for reasons is not to believe as a result of a process of reasoning. It is not to be disposed to offer a certain consideration as part of an activity of justification. And it does not require holding (or being disposed to hold) any attitude about the available evidence or the normative reasons. The first theory cannot account for the fact that we have present control over the reasons for which we believe. The latter two theories rule out the possibility that unsophisticated believers can believe for reasons, they are subject to counter examples, and they cannot account for the fact that believing for reasons is explanatory.

### 2.2 Etiological Explanation

The problem of deviant causation shows that the basing relation cannot be just any explanatory relation. It is nonetheless consistent with the problem of deviant causation to hold that the basing relation is a certain *sort* of explanatory relation. What sort of explanatory relation



could the basing relation be? We might try to get some insight on the nature the explanatory relation by looking at the following ordinary example of believing for reasons:

(1) Ged wonders how long it will take to get to a certain island so he reasons from his antecedent belief about the distance of the island, and his standing belief about the average speed of travel on water (as well as some background mathematical generalizations), to the concluding judgment that it will take several weeks to arrive at the island. Ged's reasoning involves multiple steps and takes place over a period of time. When the reasoning is complete Ged's concluding belief is *based on* the antecedent considerations in his reasoning.

The example appears to show a connection between believing for reasons and the process of reasoning. But what is the nature of the connection? Gilbert Harman appears to hold that the relationship between believing for reasons and reasoning is constitutive.<sup>18</sup> He writes that:

“ a person's reasons are a function of his reasoning and [...] to say that a man believes something for certain reasons *is to say* that he believes it as the result of certain reasoning” (Harman 1973: 31)

Harman's view in this quotation lacks some detail,<sup>19</sup> but it has much initial plausibility. Harman's

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18 Leite endorses the current interpretation of Harman in Leite 2004: 2.

19 The proposal does not give a theory of reasoning or an account of what it is to be the “result” of some reasoning. Presumably the problem of causal deviance arises for reasoning and “resulting” as well. I also want to note here that Harman himself would probably not find my way of laying out the theory congenial. I discuss this exegetical

view illuminates the pre-theoretical link between reasons and reasoning.<sup>20</sup> In addition—on the surface at least—the view seems to capture the difference between believing something for reasons and believing something that is merely supported by reasons. The difference between believing something for reasons and believing something that is merely supported by reasons is that, when we believe for reasons, we believe as the result of reasoning. But a belief that is merely supported by reasons need not be held as the result of any process of reasoning.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the view promises to explain the way in which the basing relation is explanatory, for according to the view, the basing-relation is a sort of causal historical or etiological relation, and causal historical or etiological relations are a species of explanatory relation. Finally, the theory also provides some limited guidance in explaining the fact that believing for reasons transmits warrant. The fact that believing for reasons is warrant-transmitting can be seen to be a consequence of the fact that a belief held for reasons is the result of a process of reasoning, and this process of reasoning is itself a warrant transmitting process.

Nonetheless, the view may seem implausible on further reflection. We may intuitively

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matter in more detail in section 2.5.

20 Andrew Hsu has pointed out to me that someone might be led into a view like Harman's by noticing that it is permissible to say of someone S who believes for reasons that "S believes that p, reasoning q." According to Harman, to believe for reasons, and so *to believe that p, reasoning q*, is just to believe that p as the culmination or result of a process of reasoning from q. In addition, there may be other notions of reasoning that do *not* take it to be a process that normally culminates in belief. On these views, reasoning is probably not a process at all (it may have no duration, for instance). Thank you to Andrew Hsu and Gavin Lawrence for this important point. I do not consider such notions of reasoning here, but I suspect that whatever one will want to say about *them* can be said directly about believing for reason.

21 Although what I will eventually call the "reasoning theory" is seldom explicitly endorsed (although Harman endorses it) the broad view that believing for reasons is etiological is suggested by a number of philosophers. John Greco, for instance, very strongly suggests that believing for reasons is etiological in Greco 2005: 261–262. I think a similar sort of view can be found implicit in Goldman's claim that his theory of process reliabilism is a "Historical" or "Genetic" theory to be contrasted with what he calls "Current Time-Slice" theories, although Goldman is a complicated case, since he recognizes that sustaining causes can figure into justification (Goldman 1979: see the text surrounding note 8). I think that Matthew Boyle may also assume such a view in parts of his argument against "Process Theories" of doxastic control in Boyle 2011.

think of reasoning as an activity involving conscious deliberation,<sup>22</sup> but we often hold beliefs for reasons without arriving at them via conscious deliberation. However, this view of reasoning need not undermine the general picture. The reasoning theory has some plausibility in part because it provides a clear distinction between those cases in which we believe for reasons and cases in which we hold a belief that is merely supported by reasons. The difference is that when we believe for reasons we believe as the result of a certain historical process but otherwise not. But there is no reason why it needs to be a part of this view that the historical process in question involves conscious deliberation.<sup>23</sup> In order to motivate the present point, suppose that I notice a speeding car go by followed by a police cruiser *and without conscious deliberation* form the belief that the car is being pursued by the police. It intuitively matters to the assessment of my warrant exactly which states figured into the production of my belief. For example, did my coming to believe that the car was being chased by the police depend on my belief that it was speeding? Did I come to believe it via my belief that the car was grey? Did I come to believe it via my apparently unrelated belief that the Pope is Argentinian? If my belief *that the car is being chased by the police* was the result of my belief *that the Pope is Argentinian*, it is hard to see how I could be warranted in holding it.

Why might it matter to my warrant how my belief was created even in those cases where I did not consciously deliberate about it? One plausible explanation is to take the warrant-explaining process that resulted in my belief to constitute the basing relation. The reason why

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22 Robert Audi denies that acting for reasons consists in acting on the basis of practical reasoning (Audi 1993a: 148–149) apparently for something like this reason. See Audi 1982: 34 for more discussion on this point. I doubt that it is correct that reasoning must involve conscious deliberation of any sort, but the present argument does not hinge on the nature of reasoning.

23 Harman requires that unconscious processes can be reasoning in part because reasoning (for him) is necessarily part of the etiology of any piece of knowledge subject to the Gettier problem (Harman 1973: 20-23).

facts about the process matter to warrant is simply that being-the-result-of-such-a process is *constitutive* of the basing relation. And the bases of one's beliefs help to determine the epistemic status of these beliefs. In what follows, I will call the relevant warrant-explaining process "reasoning," but nothing of importance will hang on using this term. What is presently important is simply that there is a particular *reasoning-like* process that generally results in beliefs, that this process often has inputs in the form of other beliefs, and that it helps to explain the subject's warrant in the example cases above.

### 2.3 The Reasoning Theory

Let every theory with the following form be called a "reasoning theory" of basing:

**Schematic Reasoning Theory:** the belief that P is based on the reason that q iff the belief that P is held as the result of some reasoning process from the reason that q.

As I mentioned above, I take a reasoning process to be extended in time, to have duration, and to culminate in a belief or judgment. There are potentially a number of different reasoning theories, corresponding to different understandings of what it is for a belief to be "the result of" a reasoning process. One intuitive way of instantiating the schema is to treat the "result" relation as a generative relation. According to this understanding, the process results in (i.e. generates) a belief just when the process culminates with the creation of the belief:

**The Simple Reasoning Theory:** The belief that p is based on the reason that q for a subject S iff (constitutively) S's belief that p is generated by S reasoning from q.

The simple reasoning theory is still only an outline of a theory of the basing relation. If we want to fill in the account we will need to give a characterization of reasoning that generates beliefs.<sup>24</sup> However, while I think that providing such a characterization is an interesting project, I will not discuss the nature of these processes in this dissertation. As I will now explain, I think we have good reason to doubt that any theory of this general type is correct.

## 2.4 Problems for the Simple Reasoning Theory

The fact that reasoning can generate beliefs is uncontroversial, and I will accept it here. However, I think it should be controversial that the property of being-generated-by-reasoning is constitutive of believing for a reason. One problem with the simple reasoning theory is that it does not allow the subject to exercise present control over the reasons for which she believes: that is, to right now change the reasons for which she believes. For an illustration of this problem, consider the following example, which shows two different ways in which a subject can change her beliefs over time:

(2) Margie has advertised online and found a new roommate Ai. Margie believes that Ai is an easy-going roommate because she believes that Ai was born in the year of the Ox. She later learns that Ai grew up in Santa Cruz, and via some reasoning, she comes to believe that Ai is easy-going for that reason as well. Margie later grows disillusioned with astrology and no longer believes that it means anything that Ai was born in the year

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<sup>24</sup> For some recent work on reasoning see Valaris (unpublished), Wedgwood 2009 and Boghossian 2012.

of the Ox. She retains her belief that Ai was born in the year of the Ox, and she retains her belief that Ai is easy-going, but she no longer believes that Ai is easy-going for the reason that she believes Ai was born in the year of the Ox.

In the example, Margie exercises present control over her own believing. Margie's control over her own believing does not involve her making a choice in what she believes, or in her being free to choose it, or in her willing it. Margie does not believe at will. However, Margie still has control over her own believing. The control she has over her own believing consists in part in a capacity to determine the reasons for which she believes: that is, to right now revise or eliminate the reasons for which she believes. But the simple reasoning theory is incompatible with this sort of control. In order to make this criticism clear, suppose that (2) unfolds as follows:

(a) at time- $t_1$ , Margie learns that Ai was born in the year of the Ox, and infers that Ai is easy-going. She comes to believe that Ai is easy-going for the reason that Ai was born in the year of the Ox.

(b) at time- $t_2$ , Margie learns that Ai grew up in Santa Cruz, and so infers that Ai is easy-going. Margie now believes that Ai is easy going for the reason that she was born in the year of the Ox and, in addition, that she grew up in Santa Cruz.

(c) at time- $t_3$ , Margie becomes disillusioned with astrology, and stops believing that Ai is easy-going for the reason that Ai was born in the year of the Ox. She still believes that Ai is easy-going for the reason that Ai was born in Santa Cruz.

The example raises two difficulties for the simple reasoning theory:

*First difficulty:* The simple reasoning theory cannot explain how someone could come to

hold an old belief for new reasons. At time  $t_2$ , Margie adds to her reasons for believing that Ai is easy-going. In particular, Margie learns that Ai grew up in Santa Cruz and, via some reasoning, comes to believe that Ai is easy-going for the reason that she grew up in Santa Cruz. However, this should be impossible on the simple reasoning theory.

According to the simple reasoning theory, the reasons for which Margie believes that Ai is easy-going are inputs to the process that generated that belief. But Margie learns that Ai grew up in Santa Cruz *after* she forms the belief that Ai is easy-going. Hence, the reason that Ai grew up in Santa Cruz cannot be an input to the process that generated her belief. And this shows that the reasons for which a subject believes are not in general inputs to a process that generated the belief.<sup>25</sup>

*Second difficulty:* At time  $t_3$ , Margie modifies her reasons for believing that Ai is easy-going by eliminating one of the bases for her belief. However, the simple reasoning theory is incompatible with this change in her reasons. The fact that a belief is generated as the result of a certain reasoning process is not subject to this sort of revision. The fact that a belief is generated via *that* historical process, with *those* historical inputs, is fixed

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25 The theory could be complicated somewhat so that it includes not just beliefs that are *generated* by the reasoning, but which are *strengthened* by it as well. This complication is not particularly helpful to the reasoning theorist, however, because one can hold a belief for new reasons that do not increase the strength of the belief. For instance, one can believe a simple mathematical truth for new reasons even though one is absolutely certain about it. Or there are cases (see Kung 2010: 3–4) in which one comes to gain reasons for which one believes that nonetheless *ought not* (and presumably do not) increase one's credence. Adapting the general outlines of Kung 2010, suppose, for example, that a subject believes that p with an irrationally high credence and gains some new evidence for p that indicates that p is likely to be true but not *that* likely (say it has an 70% probability of being true). In such a case, a subject might come to believe that p on the basis of that evidence and in so doing *lower* their previously irrationally high credence.

no matter what happens to it in the future.<sup>26</sup>

These two difficulties point to a general problem with the simple reasoning theory. The theory is apparently incapable of explaining the sorts of present control we exercise over the reasons for which we believe. According to the simple reasoning theory, the reasons for which we believe are the reasons that *created* the belief, but facts about what created the belief cannot be modified in the present. And we can modify, expand, and contract our reasons for believing *in the present*.

## 2.5 The Modified Reasoning Theory

It may seem that there are non-generative versions of the reasoning theory that can avoid the two prior difficulties. I want to spend the next two short sections of this chapter arguing that this impression is incorrect. I will argue that the most plausible versions of the reasoning theory cannot simultaneously solve both of the prior difficulties.

One way for the simple reasoning theory to avoid the prior difficulties is to claim that every time the subject Margie alters the reasons for which she believes that Ai is easy-going, she produces a *new* belief that Ai is easy-going, and that this new belief is generated by reasoning containing all of her basing reasons as inputs. I do not know anything to recommend this response besides the fact that it saves the simple reasoning theory from some embarrassment, so I will set it aside here.

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26 After developing these objections, I discovered that Ian Evans has independently given a version of some of these criticisms against the causal theory in Evans 2013. Some differences between our two approaches are that I take these criticisms to apply more broadly than the causal theory, I explore notions of “resulting” that are not the same as “generating,” and I consider a version of the “reasoning theory” that adds various no-defeaters conditions.



A more plausible way around the difficulties is to abandon the simple reasoning theory and adopt an alternative understanding of the relationship between believing and reasoning. This latter approach is probably closer to what Harman originally intended in *Thought*. He writes:

When a person first comes to believe something, why he believes it appears to be a function of how he came to believe it. [...] But it is not in general true that the reasons for which one believes as one does are simply a matter of how one came to believe what one believes. When the reasons why one believes something change, the reasons for which one believes as one does also change. In that case, the explanation of why one believes as one does has changed and is no longer simply a matter of how one came to believe as one does. (Harman 1973: 30)

Unfortunately, Harman does not have much to say about how reasoning can “result in” a belief *without* generating it. Instead, what he writes seems to suggest the simple reasoning theory. For example, he later writes “to specify a man's reasons is always to specify reasoning that *leads to* his conclusion (Harman 1973: 31)” and “[explanation by reasons] describes the sequence of considerations that *led to* belief in a conclusion [...] (Harman 1973:52). Perhaps Harman intends to only be writing about the circumstances in which a person first comes to believe something in these passages, but he gives no indication that his view is to be understood in this restricted way. And if it is not restricted, then phrases like “leading to” are no more helpful than “resulting in.”<sup>27</sup>

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27 We could also take Harman to be claiming that the reason for which something is held is broadly *whatever* explains it (Tierney and Smith 2012: 31) rather than specifically that it be the result of reasoning. But this approach suffers from the previously discussed problem of causal deviance (section 1.6), and it does not fit easily with what he says about reasoning in *Thought*. I will come back to this issue again with respect to causal

There are, nonetheless, alternative ways to understand believing for reasons in terms of reasoning. It is a familiar fact that if we reason to a conclusion, even if it is one that we already hold, then we (at least very often) come to believe on the basis of the inputs to that reasoning.<sup>28</sup> And we might try to take this familiar fact to be *constitutive* of believing for reasons even in cases where the reasoning does not generate the belief:

**The Modified Reasoning Theory:** The belief that p is based on a reason that q for a subject S iff (constitutively) (i) S holds a belief that p and (ii) S has *at some point* in the past reasoned to the belief that p (that is, performed reasoning that culminated in a belief that p) from the belief that q whether or not the reasoning generated the belief that p.

According to the modified reasoning theory, the belief that p is held for a reason that q just when the subject engaged in a reasoning process, extended in time, that output the belief that q, whether or not that reasoning *created* the belief that p. I take this to describe what Margie does in example (2). At time-t<sub>2</sub>, Margie infers that Ai is easy-going from the fact that Ai is from Santa Cruz, but she already believes that Ai is easy going. Importantly, notice that it is a consequence of the fact that a subject can reason to a belief that she already holds, that reasoning cannot, *pace* some theories of reasoning in the literature (Winters 1982: 202), *only* be a generative or eliminative process. As an alternative, perhaps when one reasons to a belief that p that one already holds, one “reaffirms” (Wedgwood 2006: 661) the belief that p. I will take no position on this matter, but for present purposes, I will assume that there is some good sense to made of talk of a process of inference concluding with a belief that one already holds.

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sustaining theories of the basing relation in the next chapter.

28 The issue is whether this familiar fact supports a conception of the basing relation according to which the relation is constituted by a historical reasoning relation, rather than a view about *reasoning* according to which it merely *creates* (rather than constitutes) the basing relation.

The modified reasoning theory is clearly an improvement over the simple reasoning theory. In particular, the modified reasoning theory can explain how it is possible to come to hold a belief for *new* reasons. However, there are still two problems for the theory. The first problem is that the theory leaves it unclear why, or in what way, the basing relation is an explanatory relation. According to the simple reasoning theorist, the reasons for which S holds a belief are a subset of the etiological reasons for that belief, but the modified reasoning theorist cannot hold this view. This is because the reasoning that produces the conclusion that p does not in many cases (e.g. in example (2)) cause or produce the belief that p. But if the belief that q did not cause the belief that p via reasoning, then in what way does the belief that q *explain* the belief that p?

The second difficulty for the modified reasoning theory is that it does not give a sufficient condition for believing for reasons. This is because it is possible for a subject to cease to believe for a certain reason. But the modified reasoning theory does not allow for this possibility. If a subject's belief that p *has* been reasoned to, that is, i.e. it is part of the history of her believing that p, then that fact is immutable in the present. Just as with the simple reasoning theory, we cannot *now* change the fact that we once reasoned to a belief or judgment from certain premises.

The present point is important. It may be thought that the problems with the simple reasoning theory are tied to its understanding of the process of reasoning as *generative or creative*. Hence, it may seem one can resist the criticisms by treating the relevant reasoning process as non-generative. However, the present discussion suggests that this strategy will be unsuccessful. The difficulty the simple reasoning theory has accounting for our ability to change the reasons for which we believe can arise solely from the minimal conception of believing for reasons as a current trace of a past process, whether or not that process *generated* any beliefs. It

is because it is not possible to change a belief's history from the present that issues with present control arise.

We might try to respect the apparently non-historical aspects of the relation by adding something like a “no-defeat clause” to the account:

**The Second Modified Reasoning Theory:** The belief that  $p$  is based on the reason that  $q$  for  $S$  iff (constitutively)

(i)  $S$  holds a token belief that  $p$ .

(ii)  $S$  has (in the past) reasoned to the conclusion that  $p$ .

(iii) *the reason that  $q$  is not (presently) rejected by  $S$  with respect to the belief that  $p$ .*<sup>29</sup>

This account has some prospect of success because it adds a non-historical condition. We do in fact have present control over whether we *presently* reject some reason. In the next section, I will argue that adding this “no-rejection clause” will not help solve the problem. This is because we do not have a theory of rejection that can do the work required of (iii) that is likely to be compatible with the reasoning theory.

## 2.6 Rejecting a Reason

I do not think it is at all clear what it is to reject a reason with respect to a belief, but not every option is consistent with the reasoning theory. Here are two options that *do* seem

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<sup>29</sup> Korcz considers a similar condition (but one that does not fit easily into the reasoning theory) in Korcz 2000: 546.

compatible with it:

*The reason that q is (presently) rejected by S with respect to the belief that p:*

**Option One:** to presently reject a reason that q with respect to the belief that p is to presently not hold the belief that q.

**Option Two:** to presently reject a reason that q with respect to the belief that p is to presently hold a negative evaluative attitude about the rational *connection* between the reason that q and the belief that p.<sup>30</sup>

Neither understanding of rejecting a reason will work. Regarding the first option, it is possible to stop believing that p for the reason that q while continuing to believe that q. Margie stops believing that Ai is easy-going for the reason that she was born in the year of the Ox, but she nonetheless continues to hold that Ai is an Ox. The second option is better, and it apparently fits what happens in example (2), but it makes the account too restrictive. It is possible to both believe that p for the reason that q *and* believe that q does not rationally support that p. For instance, it is possible for someone who is extremely superstitious to deny the rationality of their reasons but nonetheless believe on their basis. Indeed, part of the explanation for the fact that such a person would be *irrational* is that they hold these sorts of incompatible attitudes.

I want to discuss this last point in some more detail because some readers will doubt that it is *in fact possible* to simultaneously do the following even irrationally:<sup>31</sup> (i) believe that the consideration that q does not rationally support the belief (or content) that p; (ii) believe that p for the reason that q. I cannot give a complete response to this skepticism without putting an

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30 For example, one might reject a reason (relative to a belief that it supports) by forming the attitude: “I believe that R does not indicate that P” (or something of this very general form).

31 AJ Julius has expressed such skepticism to me in conversation.

alternative theory of believing for reasons on the table. I will do this in chapter four. However, there are some things that we can say now that lend partial support to the view that a subject can meet (i) and (ii) simultaneously. Firstly, it is *prima facie* plausible that we can hold such attitudes simultaneously. Consider the following example:

(3) Sara is convinced by a persuasive philosopher that skepticism about other minds is rational and so comes to believe that the fact that an individual appears to be in a certain mental state is no reason to believe that he *is* in such a mental state. Suppose that most of the time Sara is able to keep this commitment in mind and is able to maintain what she thinks is a courageous, albeit depressing, skeptical outlook on the world. Nonetheless, on occasion, she find herself with ordinary beliefs about the mental lives of others, beliefs that are based on what she takes to be facts about their behavior, even though she does not believe that these facts are evidence that they are in any particular mental state (from an example in Greco 2013: 204).

Although I find it *prima facie* plausible that Sara believes for reasons in this example, we can say a little more in support of this intuition. Let us ignore the claim built into the example that she believes for reasons and instead just consider the *ways* she might be warranted in the situation in question. In particular, suppose that the subject in example (3) is unwarranted in her skepticism about other minds but does not recognize this. It is then plausible that, when she occasionally finds herself with ordinary beliefs about the mental lives of others, these beliefs of hers *could* be warranted, and the explanation for their warrant could be that certain other beliefs (i.e. beliefs about the behavior of others) are warranted. But in such a case, what is the explanation of this

dependence, if not that the subject believes for the reasons in question?

Secondly, it is difficult to see what a dialectically good motivation could be for denying the possibility of holding a belief for a reason that one rejects. One motive might be the following: according to some, believing that *p* for reasons that *q* is constituted in part by a belief *that the fact that q is evidence that p*.<sup>32</sup> But this will not be helpful to the reasoning theorist for two reasons. Firstly, the reasoning theorist does not actually endorse such a constitutive condition. Indeed, the condition is apparently at odds with the strategy outlined earlier in this chapter, because present belief seems to have little to do with etiological explanation. Secondly, the possibility of believing for a reason that you reject is still possible on such a view. It is possible for an irrational subject to believe that [the fact that *q* is evidence that *p*] *while believing that* [the fact that *q* is not evidence that *p*].<sup>33</sup>

I want to be clear about what I am claiming here. I am *not* claiming that the reasons for which we believe cannot be defeated or “rejected” in some sense. Indeed, I think it is obvious that we *can* make a present judgment that defeats one of the reasons for which we believe (that is, that makes it the case that we no longer believe for a certain reason). I am claiming, instead, that present judgments do not *necessarily* succeed in defeating our reasons. Separately from this point, I think we should deny that this sort of defeating judgment is something that we can simply assume is compatible with the reasoning theory, where the basing relation is understood as constituted by (in non-defeat cases) a historical relation of a certain sort. This is because *the way* in which a present judgment defeats a reason may depend on the existence of a basing

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32 Setiya 2013. Cf. Valaris unpublished: 2 for a related account of inference.

33 An additional strategy might hold that the belief is defeated when the relevant additional belief is no longer held by the subject. The plausibility of this view depends in part on whether it is a necessary condition on believing for reasons that there be such a belief. I discuss this issue in some detail in section 2.8 of this dissertation.

relation that is not constituted, even in part, by historical facts about the belief. For example, if believing for reasons is a present counterfactual relation between present beliefs, then our present judgments may defeat a reason simply by removing the relevant counterfactual relation.<sup>34</sup>

Alternatively, if believing for reasons is constitutively to believe that p and believe that there is compelling reason that q to believe that p, then our present judgments may eliminate the belief that q is compelling reason to believe that p. But neither of these pictures of rejecting a reason is compatible with the reasoning theory.

Finally, importantly, I take the whole strategy of appealing to a defeat condition to be at odds with the spirit of the reasoning theory. The reasoning theory takes the basing relation to be a certain sort of etiological relation. But why ought present facts have any effect on such a relation? The same point can be put in terms of a problem for the explanatory power of the current account. In particular, in those cases where the reason is not defeated, the fact that a belief was produced by reasoning is sufficient to make that belief held on the basis of reasons. But what is the explanation for the fact that holding a certain sort of present belief (e.g. that q is not evidence that p) defeats basing? This is a fair question because presently holding a belief seems to have nothing to do with etiology. But, according to the Second Modified Reasoning Theory, the question has no answer. It is simply a constitutive requirement of believing for reasons that there be no belief of the relevant sort and that is enough to make it a defeater. But there are other theories that I will discuss that can provide explanations for why some beliefs (and not others) are defeaters. And this gives us some reason to prefer these alternative theories.

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<sup>34</sup> Evans 2013, Kvanig 2015 give additional citations for this counterfactual view. Marshall Swain holds a counterfactual view of basing, although his view is substantially more sophisticated than the one briefly mentioned above (Swain 1979). Swain's view is ably rejected by Turri 2011: 387.



## 2.7 Justifying

The arguments in the previous sections suggest a view of believing for reasons that is not etiological. It also suggests that the study of reasoning (understood as a generative or historical process extended in time) in cognitive psychology and in large swaths of contemporary epistemology (see e.g. Adler 2008, Boghossian 2014, Winters 1983, Wedgwood 2006) cannot be applied in any straightforward way to the phenomenon of believing for reasons.

An alternative approach might hold that the basing relation is constitutively related to the activity of offering reasons or providing a justification for believing. For example, Keith Lehrer in “Knowledge, Truth and Evidence” writes:<sup>35</sup>

If a person has evidence adequate to completely justify his belief, he may still fail to be completely justified in believing what he does because his belief is not based on that evidence. What I mean by saying that a person’s belief is not based on certain evidence is that he would not appeal to that evidence to justify his belief. (Lehrer 1965: 169)<sup>36</sup>

Lehrer holds that believing that *p* on the basis of a reason that *q* is constitutively to be disposed to offer the reason that *q* for believing that *p* as part of an activity of justification.<sup>37</sup>

**Justificatory Theory:** the belief that *p* is based on the reason that *q* for *S* *iff*

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35 Lehrer later changed his mind on this matter (Lehrer 1971: 311).

36 Cf. Tierney and Smith 2012 for a different understanding of Lehrer. I am ignoring any potential difference there might be between *evidence* and *reasons*.

37 I am glossing “would appeal” as marking a disposition although strictly-speaking this counterfactual fact does not entail the existence of such a disposition.

(constitutively) S believes that p and is disposed to appeal to the fact that q in order to justify S's believing that p.<sup>38</sup>

The Justificatory Theory handles the previous problems with the Reasoning Theory. We do in fact have present control over whether we (right now) have a disposition to give any particular justification for our beliefs. The theory is also plausible because there is clearly a link between justifying the belief that p and believing for a reason. At the very least, when we justify a belief that p with some consideration that q, we usually believe that p for the reason that q. But the Justificatory Theory is nonetheless false.<sup>39</sup> One problem is that S may be disposed to lie about what he takes to justify his own believing. But the reasons S is disposed to offer in lying are not the reasons for which S believes. Harman gives the following example case in *Thought*:

(4) Albert believes that he will fail his ethics course. There are reasons for him to believe this. For instance, he has failed the midterm. But although Albert is aware that he has failed the midterm, he does not appreciate the force of this reason. Instead, he believes that he will fail the ethics course for the reason that he gave an impassioned speech in support of existentialism earlier in the term and his professor hates existentialism.

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38 A related version of this theory might try to respect the previously discussed link between believing for reasons and reasoning by holding that the relevant disposition must be to engage in a process of reasoning (rather than justifying or appealing) to the belief that P from the prior belief(s) that Q:

*Dispositional Reasoning Theory*: the belief that p is based on reasons that q for S iff (constitutively) S believes that p and is disposed to reason from beliefs that q to the belief that p.

The Dispositional Reasoning Theory is in some ways superior to the Reasoning Theory, because whether or not one is *currently disposed* to do some reasoning is something that can be altered in the present. The Dispositional Reasoning Theory is nonetheless false and for roughly the same reasons as the Justificatory Theory. It is possible for a subject S to be disposed to do some reasoning from beliefs that Q to the belief that P even though S does not *now* believe for that reason. And it is similarly difficult to see how the considerations that figure into merely dispositional reasoning are capable of explaining why a subject holds a belief.

39 My discussion in this section closely follows Harman 1973: 26–30.

Nonetheless, Albert is disposed to justify his belief by saying what he thinks his audience want to hear. Hence, he is disposed to justify his belief that he will fail his ethics course by appealing to the fact that he failed his midterm (Harman 1973: 26–27).

We can avoid this counterexample by requiring that the subject be disposed to *sincerely* offer the relevant reasons. However, the general problem cannot be avoided in this way. Harman has observed that it is possible for Albert to be disposed to sincerely offer a consideration as a justification for believing that he will fail the course without believing for that reason:

(5) Albert believes that he will fail his ethics course for the sole reason that he supports existentialism and the professor hates existentialism. But unbeknownst to Albert he has the following disposition: if he were to justify his belief, then he is disposed for the first time to see the fact that he failed the midterm as a reason to believe that he will fail the course. Hence, he is disposed to provide a justification for believing that he will fail the course by appealing to the fact that he failed the midterm. But, in fact, Albert believes he will fail the course *only for the reason* that he supports existentialism and the professor hates existentialism (Harman 1973: 26–27).

In example (5), Albert does not believe that he will fail the ethics course for the reason that he failed the midterm. But if he were given the task of providing a justification, then he is disposed to see the fact that he failed the midterm as a reason to believe that he will fail the course, and he is disposed to provide this reason as justification for believing it. Hence, the Justificatory Theory is false even under the assumption that the subject's justificatory activity is sincere.

These two counterexamples point to a general problem. In particular, it is unclear on the Justificatory Theory how believing for reasons is explanatory (Harman 1973: 29). Suppose for argument that basing reasons are not psychological states but are instead propositions or belief contents.<sup>40</sup> It is unclear on the Justificatory Theory how even *true contents* manage to explain why a subject holds a belief. One possibility is that a subject's dispositions to appeal to such contents are what explain her believing, and the relevant contents are explanatory only insofar as they figure in these explanatory dispositions.<sup>41</sup> But example (5) shows that the fact that a subject is disposed to sincerely offer a consideration as a justification for a belief has *no necessary explanatory connection* to the fact that she believes it. Indeed, the fact that a subject is disposed to appeal to a certain consideration in order to justify a belief could instead be explained by the fact that S holds the belief and not the other way around.

## 2.8 Taking

One way to avoid the previous problems is to replace the disposition requirement with the condition that the subject “take” some consideration to be a reason *to* believe something or to *count in favor* of believing. Defenders of this approach hold that *taking something to be a reason* can be specified independently of the basing relation and that the condition is at least partially constitutive of believing for reasons. Here is one recent (2013) proposal from Kieran Setiya:

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40 I take it that some such view is necessary if we accept the Justificatory Theory. In the first chapter I assume that the reasons for which we believe are other beliefs, but it is clear that one need not in fact *believe* that p in order to be disposed to offer the consideration that p as a justification.

41 I intend this proposal to mirror the proposal given by Audi 1993. Audi holds that the reasons for which we believe are propositional contents that “explain” a belief in virtue of being the contents of psychological states that explain why we believe something. I have put quotes around “explain” above because I doubt that it is correct that the propositional contents of attitudes explain by virtue of being part of attitudes that explain. I discuss this issue in footnote 16 in chapter one.

**Doxastic Theory:** S believes that p for a reason that q iff (constitutively) (i) S believes that p; (ii) S believes that q; (iii) S believes that the fact that q is evidence that p (Setiya 2013: 190).<sup>42</sup>

Setiya's theory aims to illuminate the link between believing that p for a reason that q and being disposed to justify the belief that p by appealing to the fact that q. According to Setiya, both a subject's *disposition to explain their believing that p by appealing to the fact that q* and the fact that the subject believes that p for a reason that q are explained in part by the fact that the subject believes that the fact that q is evidence that p (Setiya 2013: 191). In addition, the theory avoids counterexamples (4) and (5) because these examples are not cases in which the subject *right now believes* that the relevant consideration (the fact that he failed the midterm) is evidence that he will fail the ethics course. And the theory is compatible with the fact that we have present control over the reasons for which we believe.

Setiya marshals several arguments in support of his theory. Each argument points to some phenomenon related to believing for reasons and then claims that the phenomenon is best explained by the Doxastic Theory. Firstly, Setiya considers a variation on Moore's Paradox:

This generalization is confirmed by reflection on Moore's paradox and its variations. Just as it is incoherent to assert "p, but I don't believe that p," so it is incoherent to assert "p and the fact that q is evidence that p, but I don't believe that p even partly because I believe that q." In each case, the paradox rests on the fact that being in a position to assert the first claim entails the falsehood of the second. One cannot believe that p, and that the

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42 Setiya's official statement of this view does not include condition (ii). I take it to follow from (iii). The name "Doxastic Theory" is used by Turri 2011 who borrows it from others.

fact that q is evidence that p, without believing that p because one believes that q, in the epistemic sense.<sup>43</sup> (Setiya 2013: 191)

It is not clear what Setiya means by “incoherent to assert” in this passage. Presumably he means that it would be irrational or impossible for someone to sincerely assert the Moore-type claim “p and the fact that q is evidence that p, but I do not believe that p even partly because I believe that q.” According to Setiya, the supposed irrationality or impossibility of sincerely asserting this claim can be best explained by the Doxastic Theory. If a subject sincerely asserts the Moore-type claim, then she must believe it. But if she believes the first two conjuncts of the claim, then (according to the Doxastic Theory) she believes that p because she believes that q. Yet in order to believe the entire claim, the subject must also believe the third conjunct: that is, she must believe of herself that she does not believe that p because she believes that q. Hence, in order to sincerely assert the claim, the subject must believe of herself that she does not believe that p because she believes that q *even though she does in fact believe that p because she believes that q*. And it is supposed to follow from this fact that it is “incoherent” (i.e. impossible or irrational)

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43 Eugene Chislenko 2014 makes several important points about epistemic akrasia that are helpful in this context. I take Chislenko to argue as follows. It may be true that someone who asserts “p and the fact that q is evidence that p, but I do not believe that p even partly because I believe that q” is irrational to the extent that they believe what they assert. For the purpose of argument, let us agree that they are always irrational to sincerely assert the claim. It may even be that it is *impossible* for a subject to believe what is asserted by this sentence. But it is important to notice that conceding these points does not strictly entail anything about believing for reasons. It does not follow from the fact that it is irrational or impossible to *believe* the sentence or to sincerely assert it, that one *cannot* – nonetheless – believe that p, believe that the fact that q is evidence that p, and *fail to believe that p even partly because one believes that q*. The irrationality or impossibility that is strictly entailed by the paradox is the irrationality or impossibility of holding a certain conjunctive belief or making a conjunctive assertion. It is not the impossibility of being in a certain overall doxastic state. Indeed, this is true even in the ordinary Moore's paradox cases. The fact that it is irrational or impossible to believe the conjunction: it is raining and I do not believe it is raining, does not entail that a subject *cannot* believe that it is raining and (separately) believe of themselves that they do not believe it is raining. All this latter possibility requires is the possibility of introspective error. And, although this point will be denied by infallibilists, it certainly seems possible for one to be mistaken about what it is they believe.

to sincerely assert the Moore-type claim.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, Setiya observes that one can determine the reasons for which one believes by sincerely answering the question “Why?” or “Why do you believe it?” Setiya writes:

If someone asks “Why do you believe that  $p$ ?” and I answer by citing the fact that  $q$  as evidence, there is no room for doubt whether the fact that  $q$  is among my reasons for belief. It follows from my answer that I believe that  $p$  partly on the ground that  $q$ , and that my belief is justified in proportion to the strength of that evidence.” (Setiya 2013, 191)

Setiya makes two separate claims in this passage. Firstly, he makes the epistemic claim that my appeal to the fact that  $q$  as evidence that  $p$  leaves “no room for doubt” that the fact that  $q$  is my reason for believing that  $p$ . Secondly, he makes the metaphysical or logical claim that such a sincere appeal *entails* that I believe that  $p$  for the reason that  $q$ .<sup>45</sup> Setiya seems concerned only with the second claim. According to Setiya, the Doxastic Theory explains how we can determine the reasons for which we believe by sincerely answering the question “Why do you believe?” If a person sincerely appeals to the fact that  $q$  as evidence that  $p$ , then they believe that  $q$  is evidence that  $p$ . And believing that  $q$  is evidence that  $p$  is sufficient, given the belief that  $p$ , to believe that  $p$  for the reason that  $q$ .

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44 I am not sure if this is supposed to be the full explanation of the paradox since Setiya says so little about it. In particular, it is not clear if the full explanation for the purported incoherence of sincerely asserting the Moore-type claim is that sincerely asserting it involves believing something false about your own reasons. I am not sure if this is correct because such a false belief is not obviously irrational. I suppose that asserting the first two conjuncts of the claim *puts you in an extremely strong position* to know the last part of the conjunct, and so failing to know it would constitute a particularly egregious mistake.

45 I think it is important to distinguish these two claims because the first could be *true* while the second false.

I think that the two arguments just sketched are not compelling. The first argument assumes that it is always incoherent to sincerely assert “p and the fact that q is evidence that p, but I don’t believe that p even partly because I believe that q.” But this assumption is false. There are circumstances in which it is rational (and not impossible) to sincerely assert a claim with this form. It is possible, for instance, to hold that something counts as evidence for a belief even though the explanatory relation between the evidence and that belief is other way around:<sup>46</sup>

(6) I believe that Steven—someone I know—went to court yesterday. The question arises during a conversation with my co-worker whether anyone I know went to court yesterday. In response to this question, I infer from my belief that Steven went to court yesterday to the belief that someone I know went to court yesterday. I reflect on the fact that someone I know went to court yesterday and realize that it is some weak evidence that *Steven* went to court yesterday. After all, I think, I know only a few people, and the fact that someone I know went to court yesterday counts, in a limited way, in favor of *Steven* (someone who I know) having gone to court yesterday.<sup>47</sup>

In example (6), I might rationally describe the situation as follows: “Steven went to court yesterday, and the fact that someone I know went to court yesterday is evidence that Steven went to court yesterday, but I do not believe that Steven went to court yesterday even in part because I

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46 Thank you to Mark Greenberg for this helpful way of putting the point.

47 It may be alleged that the fact that someone I know went to court yesterday is not evidence that Steven went to court yesterday *for me* (perhaps it could be evidence for someone else). But I do not think that it is necessary for the argument to go through that my current conception of evidence be correct. Suppose that I am mistaken about the nature of evidence. It could still turn out that, in example (6), I *mistakenly* believe that *the fact that someone I know went to court yesterday is evidence that Steven went to court yesterday*. But (assuming that the other details of example (6) remain the same) I would not believe that Steven went to court yesterday for the reason that someone I know went to court yesterday. And this because, at least in part, my belief that *Steven went to court yesterday* would not be explained by my belief that *someone I know went to court yesterday*.



believe that someone I know went to court yesterday. Instead, I believe that someone I know went to court yesterday because I believe that Steven went to court yesterday.” But if this is correct, then there *is no Moore-type paradox* that the Doxastic Theory is needed to explain. And the Doxastic Theory apparently has a simple and straightforward counterexample.

A supporter of the Doxastic Theory may try to insist that I believe that Steven went to court yesterday in part for the reason that someone I know went to court yesterday. This is what Setiya says about a similar-sounding case in “Epistemic Agency: Some Doubts”:

I believe that I was born in Hull and that the fact that my passport says so is evidence for this claim. Do I believe that I was born in Hull because I know that my passport says so? In some sense of “because,” surely not. (Setiya 2013: 192)

Setiya acknowledges that there is one sense of “because” according to which he does not believe he was born in Hull because he knows his passport says so. But he holds that there is another sense of “because” according to which he does believe that he was born in Hull for that reason. We think otherwise only because we conflate the causal “because” with the “because” of believing for reasons. But while this response might be convincing with respect to Setiya's passport example,<sup>48</sup> it is not convincing with respect to example (6). There is *no intuitive sense* in which it is correct to say that I believe that Steven went to court yesterday, because I believe that someone I know went to court yesterday.

This rough intuition can be given additional support. Consider that if it were true that I

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48 I do not accept that there are different *senses* of “because” rather than different things we might mean to communicate using that term in different contexts.

believed that Steven went to court yesterday for the reason that someone I know went to court yesterday, then the fact that I am warranted in believing that someone I know went to court yesterday *should have some relevance* in explaining the fact that I am warranted in believing that Steven went to court yesterday. This follows from the Basic Conception of believing for reasons. But in example (11), the fact that I am warranted in believing that someone I know went to court yesterday is not be at all relevant to explaining my warrant in believing that Steven went to court yesterday.<sup>49</sup> And this is some reason to think that I do not believe that Steven went to court yesterday because I believe that someone I know went to court yesterday.<sup>50</sup>

The second argument that Setiya gives in support of the Doxastic Theory is similarly problematic. He claims that if one sincerely appeals to the fact that q *as evidence* that p when answering the question “Why do you believe that p?” then it “follows” that one believes that p for the reason that q. This claim as it stands is too strong. Sincere appeals to facts as evidence do not entail that the subject believes for any particular reason. This is in part because, as Audi has nicely argued in “The Causal Structure of Indirect Justification,” one might simply be irrational. Imagine a subject S who answers the question “Why do you believe it?” by sincerely asserting that “the fact that q is evidence that p.” We should all agree that this would normally be compelling evidence that she believes that p for the reason that q. But suppose that although S sincerely asserts this, she is in no way disposed to adjust her belief that p in response to learning

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49 Consider an alternate version of example (6) in which I am asked to determine whether it was Steven or Laura who went to court yesterday and suppose that I do not believe that I know Laura. In this alternative case, the explanation for my warrant in believing that Steven went to court yesterday might appeal in part to my warrant in believing that someone I know went to court yesterday.

50 The same test applied to the Hull example gets the opposite result. The fact that Setiya is warranted in believing that his passport says that he was born in Hull *is relevant* in explaining his warrant in believing that he was born in Hull. Suppose that his memory becomes highly unreliable about the distant past, such that he ought no longer rely on it. In such a case, while many of Setiya's beliefs would lose their warrant, his belief that he was born in Hull might still be warranted because he is warranted in believing that his passport says so.

that it is false that q, and she is in no way disposed to bring this reason to mind, or to make inferences using it, or to care one way or the other whether it is true that q. In other words, suppose that the purported fact that q is more-or-less *unrelated* to S's believing that p apart from the fact that S holds this belief about what the evidence happens to be for her belief that p (this example is from Audi 1993: 228).<sup>51</sup> In such a case, I think it is plausible that *even though* S sincerely cites the fact that q when answering the question “Why do you believe that p?” S does not believe for that reason. Of course, we ought to all agree that S is irrational in such a case. But, while there is a strong tendency to switch from talk of irrationality to talk of impossibility, the former does not in fact entail the latter.<sup>52</sup>

It is true that when we sincerely answer the question “Why do you believe that p?” by citing the fact that q as evidence, we usually (or at least very often) believe that p for the reason that q. But it is not obvious that *this regularity* is best explained by the Doxastic Theory. Indeed, it seems explicable on almost every available theory of the basing relation. For example, it is explicable on the simple reasoning theory so long as sincerely answering the question involves an etiological or historical process that begins with the belief that q and “concludes” with the belief that p. It is also explicable on theories that take the basing relation to be a causal sustaining relation. This is because answering the question “Why do you believe that p?” by appealing to the fact that q is exactly the sort of thing that might put such sustaining relations into place.

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51 Audi motivates the distinction between believing something to be evidence and believing for a reason by appealing to the difference between believing for a reason and using that reason to rationalize the believing (Audi 1993: 228-229).

52 Notice that the Doxastic Theory apparently also has the resources to allow exceptions to the rule. It may hold, for example, that in exceptional cases, sincere answers to “Why” questions do not express the subject's believing, but the irrationality here is an irrationality of sincere assertion or self-report.

However, suppose that these objections can all be answered. There is still a deep and simple problem with the Doxastic Theory. The problem is that it is not clear how the Doxastic Theory meets the Basic Conception. For example, suppose that S does all of the following: S believes that q, S believes that q is evidence that p, and S believes that p. If the Doxastic Theory is correct, then S believes that p for the reason that q. And if the Basic Conception is correct, then it follows that the reason that q *explains why S believes that p*. But notice that it is wholly inexplicable why *this fact* about explanation should be the case. What is the connection between S's belief that p and the belief that q such that the latter explains the former?<sup>53</sup>

We could try to answer this question by appealing to the purported fact that S's believing that p for the reason that q is *partially constituted* by S's believing that q.<sup>54</sup> However, the fact that believing that p for the reason that q is partially constituted by the belief that q does not secure the right sort of explanatory connection to the belief that p. If the subject's believing that p for the reason that q is constituted in part by the subject's believing that q, then the subject's believing that q helps explain why she *believes that p for the reason that q*. But the subject's believing that q need not explain why the subject believes that p. Indeed, example (6) shows that (i) the subject's believing that q; and (ii) the subject's believing that the fact that q is evidence that p, need not explain why she believes that p.

The Doxastic Theorist could still claim (digging in her heels) that it is a matter of brute fact that whenever conditions (i) and (ii) are met, then the subject's belief is explained by the

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53 Turri makes the same point about “difference makers” in Turri 2011. I take the point to be Davidson's as well. I do not believe Turri makes the argument given above about the explanatory power of the Doxastic Theory, but his response to Swain (Turri 2011: 387) strongly suggests it.

54 The thought is that constitutive relations are explanatory relations, so believing for reasons is explanatory by virtue of being a sort of constitutive relation (cf. Turri 2011: 388, fn. 14).

reason. But this response is not plausible. There is no independent evidence that there *is* any such brute fact apart from the fact that the Doxastic Theory requires it. Indeed, we have positive evidence to think otherwise. The mere fact that someone holds several different attitudes with complementary contents is not usually sufficient for them to stand in explanatory relations (cf. Audi 1993: 228). For instance, I can believe that *q* is a reason to fear that *p*. I can believe that *q*. And I can fear that *p*. But I need not fear that *p* because for the reason that *q*. I may simply be emotionally unresponsive to a consideration to which I think I *ought* to be responsive (cf. Turri 2009: 499–500).<sup>55</sup>

## 2.9 Taking and Connecting Beliefs

The Doxastic Theory does not give sufficient conditions for believing for reasons. In addition, it is important to notice that it also does not give necessary conditions for believing for reasons. One way to see this is that young children can believe for reasons even though they plausibly lack the concepts necessary to form the relevant evidential beliefs.<sup>56</sup> Young children do not have the concept of evidence. Hence, young children cannot hold beliefs of the form: *that the fact that q is evidence that p*. But it seems quite plausible they can (and often do) believe for reasons. This is plausible, in part, because there apparently exist relations of warrant transmission between their beliefs.

Robert Audi holds that it is a necessary condition on believing for reasons that the subject

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<sup>55</sup> Turri gives a similar example using the attitude of withholding. He does not use it to make the same point.

<sup>56</sup> This argument is routinely mentioned in the literature. See, for instance, Winters 1983: 209–210, Leite 2004: 244, Boghossian 2014: 7.

take a consideration as a reason to believe (Audi 1993: 240–241). But he attempts to avoid the problem presented by unsophisticated believers by holding that a subject can take a consideration to be a reason to believe *without possessing any epistemic concepts* (Audi 1993: 241). According to Audi, in order for a subject to “see [a reason] as supporting p,” (Audi 1993: 241) the subject needs to hold a belief that *connects* the reason to the belief. One kind of connecting belief is the belief that q is evidence that p. But not all connecting beliefs employ epistemic concepts. Audi proposes that a belief can count as a connecting belief even if it is about a “support relation” *de re*. Exactly what Audi has in mind with this proposal is a little unclear, so it is useful to quote the his discussion in detail. Audi writes:

My suggestion is that while such de dicto beliefs may play the required connecting role, we need a condition that recognizes de re connecting beliefs as well. I propose then a disjunctive *connecting belief requirement*: where r is a reason for which S believes p, there is a connecting relation, specifically a support relation, C, such that either S believes C to hold between r and p, or S believes something to the effect that r bears C to p. [...] S may believe implication to hold between r and p by simply taking r to be such that if r, then p [...]. (Audi 1993: 241)

Audi understands “taking r to be such that if r, then p” to entail holding a belief *to the effect that* r implicates p (Audi 1993: 241). And the class of support relations is supposed to include entailment, implication, confirmation, explanation, indicating, probabilistic entailment, and so

on.<sup>57</sup>

Not every part of this quoted passage is clear. Importantly, the phrase “believes something to the effect that” is left unexplicated. The best sense that I can make of it is the following:

**Connecting Belief Requirement:** given a support relation *C*, it is necessary for a subject *S* to believe that *p* for the reason that *q* that *S* meet the connecting belief requirement: either (i) *S* believes that [*q* bears *C* to *p*]; or (ii) *S* believes *of C* that *q* bears *it* [i.e. *C*] to *p* [call this latter a “*de re* connecting belief”].<sup>58</sup>

The connecting belief requirement apparently allows epistemically unsophisticated believers to believe for reasons. Hence, the requirement is superior to the analogous requirement in the Doxastic Theory. Unfortunately, it is difficult to assess whether the requirement is correct. The problem is that the exact nature of the relevant *de re* connecting beliefs is left unexplained. Audi gives one example: it is sufficient to have a *de re* connecting belief about implication that one believe that if *q* then *p*. But he does not explain exactly how this belief is “to the effect” that implication holds between the relevant propositions, and he has nothing to say about what similar connecting beliefs are for probabilistic entailment, explanation, and so on.

In the introduction to *The Structure of Justification* (Audi 1993: 20), Audi briefly expands on his discussion in the earlier paper. He writes: “One way to see the plausibility of this [...] is to suppose that when we learn to appreciate, say, valid syllogisms, we grasp the relation of

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57 Although the examples Audi gives are all positive epistemic relations that count in favor of believing, he allows the existence of support relations that in fact fail to count in favor of believing (Audi 1993: 244–245).

58 Audi is not entirely forthcoming about the nature of support relations, but he does give one condition on such relations. He writes that support relations hold between the propositions *that p* and *that q* only if the relations “make [that *q*] relevant, for *S*, to *p*, and his taking one or more to hold between [that *q*] and *p* tends to lead him to, or to confirm him in, the belief that *p*” (Audi 1993: 242).

entailment between premises and conclusion *before* we develop the concept of entailment and can then believe *that* the premises entail the conclusion.” However, it is quite difficult to see what this “grasping” amounts to apart from *having the capacity* to make valid inferences. That is, it is plausible that unsophisticated patterns of reasoning (such as can be done by children) reflect certain patterns of induction, entailment, explanation or indication. But these patterns of reasoning are not *themselves* beliefs that are “to the effect” that such patterns hold between propositions. And having an inferential capacity to reason in accordance with such patterns does not suggest that the subject also has a capacity to form *de re* beliefs about them.

Audi's proposal is not subject to counterexample, but this is in part because it is unclear what the proposal requires. Nonetheless, I think we have reason to be skeptical of the strategy. According to Audi, the motivation for the connecting belief requirement is the intuition (also given voice by Setiya and others)<sup>59</sup> that believing for reasons involves *taking* a consideration to be a reason to believe.<sup>60</sup> However, taking something to be a reason to believe does not obviously require that the subject hold any kind of further belief. Instead, a subject can “take something to be a reason to believe” just by believing for that reason.<sup>61</sup> On this way of understanding “taking something to be a reason,” taking a consideration to be a reason is not a *part* or *component* of believing for reasons, but it is rather a gloss on believing for reasons itself.

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59 Others include Boghossian 2014 with respect to inference and Neta 2015 with respect to basing more broadly.

60 Audi writes: “[...] when S believes p for a reason, r, he believes p in light of r, not merely because of it, and that he must in some way see r as supporting p. In part, the idea is that otherwise his belief that p is cognitively unmotivated; the reason S has for it, r, figures in the reason why he believes p, but his believing is not *on account of r*, [...]” (Audi 1993: 241)

61 More precisely, one way a subject S can take a consideration that q to be a reason to believe that p is by S believing that p for the reason that q. Precision is important here because the *consideration* that q and the *basing reason* that q are not obviously the same thing. If they are not, then strictly speaking, one cannot believe *for a consideration*, although one can believe for a reason that in some sense encodes that consideration (i.e. one can believe that p because one believes that q and *that q* can be reason that counts in favor of so believing).



In other words, we ought to *agree* that believing for reasons involves “taking something to be a reason to believe.” But I do not think we ought to agree that this sort of “taking” can be understood independently of (and prior to) believing for reasons itself. In section 4.7, I sketch out how believing for reasons can be a kind of “taking something to be a reason to believe” that does not require that the subject believe anything of the form *that p is a reason to believe that q*.

## 2.10 Conclusion

I have argued that believing for reasons is not to believe as the result of prior process of reasoning understood as a historical feature of the belief. I have also argued that believing for reasons is not to be disposed to offer certain justifications for the belief. Nor does it require taking any attitude (*de re* or *de dicto*) about the evidence. Importantly, the justificatory and “doxastic” theories are unable to account for two important features of believing for reasons. First, the reasons for which we believe something *explain why* we believe it; second, unsophisticated adults and young children can believe for reasons. The picture that begins to emerge out of this discussion is one in which believing for reasons is a relatively unsophisticated cognitive achievement that is independent of activities like providing justification and forming beliefs about evidence. Indeed, I think it is plausible, although I will not argue this here, that believing for reasons is explanatorily prior to these other activities (Alston 1989: 7, Cf. Leite 2004: 220–232). In the next chapter, I will consider a promising class of theories of believing for reasons (causal sustaining theories) that seem capable of explaining these features. I argue that although causal sustaining theories are on the right track, they nonetheless fail to solve the problem of causal deviance.

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## Chapter Three: Causal Sustaining Theories

### 3.1 Introduction

Believing for reasons is not to believe as the result of a past process and it is not an aggregate or conglomerate of present attitudes. So what is believing for reasons? In the present chapter, I discuss what I take to be the most promising approach to answering this question. The approach holds that a belief is based on a reason if and only if the reason causally sustains the belief. Different causal sustaining theories will hold that different sorts of causal sustaining relations are constitutive of believing for reasons. The present section is devoted to showing how these different causal sustaining theories fail. The primary difficulty facing these theories, as we shall see, is that they cannot solve the problem of deviant causation. The causal theories that I discuss invoke increasingly sophisticated requirements to rule out new versions of the problem of causal deviance, but no theory seems capable of solving the problem.

### 3.2 The Naive Causal Sustaining Theory

The reasons for which someone believes explain why that person believes. But what sort of explanatory relation holds between the belief and the reasons? One well-known and venerable approach holds that the basing relation is a causal relation (Turri 2011, Armstrong 1973, Korcz 1997). We know from chapter two that the basing relation cannot be a historical or etiological relation. Hence, believing for reasons cannot be constituted by an historical or etiological causal relation. However, it is possible that the reasons for which we believe causally sustain our

believing in roughly the way that pylons causally sustain the elevation of a bridge, or a car alarm might sustain someone's irritation (Audi 1993: 239–240).

Here is one attempt to understand the basing relation by appeal to such relations:

**Naïve Causal Sustaining Theory:** a subject S believes that p for the reason that q iff S's belief that q is a sustaining cause of S's belief that p.<sup>1</sup>

The naïve causal sustaining theory is apparently capable of distinguishing between, on the one hand, believing that p and separately believing that q and, on the other, *believing that p for the very reason that q*. In particular, when we believe that p and believe that q, but we do not believe p for the reason that q, (the theory says) the belief that p and the belief that q are not linked by a causal sustaining relation.<sup>2</sup> In addition, according to the naïve causal theory, the relationship between a belief and the reasons for which it is held is explanatory because it is a causal relation and causal relations are explanatory. The theory also avoids the problems with the Reasoning Theory (see the earlier sections 2.2–2.6), because sustaining relations are exactly the sort of things over which a subject might exercise present control.

Unfortunately, the naïve causal sustaining theory is false. Similar to example (4) in

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- 1 The exposition in this chapter is complicated by the fact that some philosophers who have offered causal theories of what they call “believing for reasons” – such as Turri 2011 – have taken the relation in question to include both sustaining and historical causal relations. I think that this understanding of believing for reasons is incorrect for reasons I discuss in chapter two. A related complication is that much of the literature related to the basing relation is directed specifically at *inference* and so cannot be applied in a straightforward way to believing for reasons (Boghossian 2014, Wedgwood 2006, Winters 1983). I have tried to adapt some of this material for present purposes, and I note places where I have done so.
  - 2 A more sophisticated version of the naïve causal theory might hold that the two are not causally linked in a way that is “non-deviant.” However, I do not take purported explanations in terms of “non-deviant causal chains” to be explanatory, because they amount to the question-begging claim that the causal relation sufficient for basing is one which is sufficient for basing.

chapter one, there are deviant causal relations that satisfy the conditions of the theory but are insufficient for believing for reasons.<sup>3</sup> Here is an example of such a token relation:

(1) Steve believes that he has been fired from his job. His belief causally sustains his anxiety, which causally sustains his increased heart-rate, his upset stomach, and the tension in his back. Steve is aware of his increased heart-rate, upset stomach and tense back, but he attributes them to the flu. Hence, his symptoms of stress causally sustain his belief that he has the flu, and his symptoms of stress are causally sustained by his belief that he has been fired from his job.

Example (1) is a case in which Steve's belief that he has been fired from his job partially causally sustains his belief that he has the flu.<sup>4</sup> But it is not true that Steve believes that he has the flu for the reason that he has been fired from his job. He believes it (rather) because he has an increased heart rate, an upset stomach, and a tense back.

### 3.3 Modified Causal Sustaining Theories

The previous example shows that the basing relation cannot be just any old causal sustaining relation. However, it is compatible with this insight to hold that the basing relation is a

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3 The problem here has the same form as widely discussed counterexamples to causal theories of action. The problem that deviant causal relations present for accounts of the basing relation and inference are discussed throughout the literature on inference and believing for reasons: cf. Korcz 1997, Turri 2011, Wedgwood 2006.

4 I do not claim that sustaining causal relations are transitive. I take myself only to be committed to the view that sometimes an event or state (etc)  $x$  is a causal sustainer of an event of state  $y$  *because of* an intermediate causal sustainer. I believe that example (1) is such a case.

specific sort of causal sustaining relation. Proponents of this approach might respond to the problem of deviant causation by offering various modifications to the naïve causal sustaining theory. These modifications may involve specifying further details about the source of the relevant causal sustaining relation or placing restrictions on what states, objects, facts or events can figure in the relevant relation.<sup>5</sup>

We could modify the naïve causal sustaining theory somewhat by restricting the relevant sustaining relations to those containing only mental causes.<sup>6</sup> But there are examples of deviant causal sustaining relations that contain only mental causes:<sup>7</sup>

(2) Suppose that John believes that there is an insect in his office (something large and terrifying) and this belief causes and sustains his extreme anxiety. His extreme anxiety in turn causes and sustains (via some appropriate quirk in his psychology) his delusional belief that he is being followed.

The modified causal sustaining theorist might further restrict the naïve causal sustaining theory by requiring that the causal relation between the reason and the belief be “direct”: i.e. contain no

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5 Korcz 1997 gives a helpful survey of some parts of the older debate.

6 I take a causal relation between x and y to “contain” a cause z just in case x causes y at least partially *in virtue of the fact* that x causes z and z causes y. Wedgwood 2006: 668–669 considers and accepts such a restriction although he does not think that it is sufficient to solve the problem of deviant causation.

7 It would be better to say “apparently containing only mental causes” because an additional problem with this modification is that it threatens to rule out certain theories of psychological causation by fiat, since it rules out mental sustaining causation that involves *mental to non-mental* intermediate sustaining causation in the brain (Turri 2011: 389). For expository purposes, I will assume that it is possible for there to be mental causal sustaining relations that contain no non-mental causes.

intermediate non-mental or mental causes.<sup>8</sup> This is the view of Kevin McCain in “The interventionist account of causation and the basing relation” (2012). McCain develops his view using concepts in the interventionist causation literature (see Woodward 2003), but the basic claim is that the reasons for which one believes must be psychological states that are *direct causes* of a belief.<sup>9</sup> However, it is widely recognized that the problem of deviant causation arises even if we restrict the relevant causal sustaining relations to direct mental relations (Wedgwood 2006: 670, Evans 2013: 2949, Boghossian 2014: 4):

(3) Margo has a mental defect (attributable to a brain lesion occurring *just so*) that is usually undetectable and has no appreciable impact on her mental life except for the following freak occurrence: one day she forms the belief that her coffee is bitter and (due to the defect) this belief directly causes and sustains her belief that Vincent Gallo loves shellfish.<sup>10</sup>

In example three, Margo's belief that Vincent Gallo loves shellfish is causally sustained by the belief that her coffee is bitter (suppose that she wouldn't continue believing that Vincent loves

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8 We should only disallow intermediate personal-level mental states (Wedgwood 2006: 699) because we would not want to rule out the possibility that believing for reasons involves, in part, intermediate causal sustaining relations between sub-personal mental states. Turri 2011: 389 discusses how to extend this sort of theory so that it allows believing for reasons to be transitive.

9 McCain gives two theories of basing: a theory of general basing (which applies to beliefs held for both good and bad reasons) and a “*proper*” basing relation, which applies only to the evidence (McCain 2012: 363–364) and which is supposed to be sufficient, given propositional justification, for doxastic justification. The view that I am glossing above is his theory of the general basing relation, since the relation that we are discussing is one that allows for the possibility of believing on the basis of reasons that are not evidence.

10 There are a number of examples like this in the literature: e.g. see Evans 2013: 2949. I assume that it is possible for a change in the structure in the brain to explain why a mental causal transition occurred without that causal transition *containing* the change in brain structure as a component cause. We need to make this assumption in order to respect the first restriction on the naïve causal theory (i.e. that the causal relation be purely mental). If this assumption is incorrect, then it seems unlikely that *any* mental transition is direct.



shellfish if she didn't continue believing that her coffee is bitter). But she doesn't believe that Vincent Gallo loves shellfish for the reason that her coffee is bitter.<sup>11</sup>

One plausible diagnosis of these examples of deviant causation is that they involve causation that is *merely accidental* with respect to the believer (Winters 1983: 216, Armstrong 1973: 85). Believing for reasons is not, one might think, the sort of thing that can happen entirely by accident. Acting on this diagnosis, a number of philosophers have tried to rule out deviant causation by requiring that the causal relation be an expression of a disposition or habit of the believer (Armstrong 1973, Winters 1983, Turri 2011). David Armstrong, for instance, uses this strategy in his 1973 account of the basing relation:

**Armstrong's Causal-Dispositional Theory:** the belief that p is based on the reason that q for a subject S iff

- (i) S's belief that p is causally sustained by S's belief that q (and created, if necessary);
- (ii) The causal sustaining in (i) is the realization of a general disposition of the believer S;
- (iv) the general disposition has the following form: if S believes something of the form Fx, then the belief that Fx will create (if necessary) and sustain a belief of the form Gx is true (Armstrong 1973: 85-86).<sup>12</sup>

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11 McCain seems to accept such examples as cases of believing for reasons (McCain 2012: 373). I disagree: intuitively, the example case (3) is *not* a case of believing for reasons. Some additional motivation for this disagreement will come out in the next chapter. One problem with such cases is that they are not plausibly the exercise of a capacity of the believer.

12 More precisely, Armstrong 1973 holds that the sustained belief has the form “the corresponding proposition of the form Gx is true.” I do not think anything hangs on the exact form of the sustained belief, so in what follows I treat it as having the form Gx rather than either “Gx is true” or “the corresponding proposition of the form Gx is true.”

Armstrong's theory is several decades old, but the general approach has contemporary adherents.

For example, John Turri gives a similar theory in his (2011) paper "Believing for a Reason":

**Causal-Manifestation Account (CMA):** R is among your reasons for believing [that p] if and only if R's causing your belief [that p] manifests (at least some of) your cognitive traits. (Turri 2011, 393)

where: a *cognitive trait* is "a disposition or habit to form (or sustain) a doxastic attitude in certain circumstances." (Turri 2011, 391)

Turri and Armstrong both appeal to dispositions in order to rule out causal deviance, but their theories have some important differences. Unlike Armstrong, Turri places no restrictions on what sort of mental states can be the reasons for which (or that encode such reasons)<sup>13</sup> a subject believes. Indeed, he takes it to be a positive feature of his theory that it allows believing on the basis of (e.g.) perceptions (Turri 2011: 393). Nor does Turri require that the relevant cognitive traits conform to any representational pattern: instead, it is sufficient that these traits be dispositions to form or sustain doxastic attitudes in "certain circumstances." In addition, unlike Armstrong's theory, Turri's theory is not restricted to causal sustaining relations but in principle includes other sort of causal relations. In what follows, however, I will understand it only in terms of causal sustaining. Finally, although Turri understands a cognitive trait to be a disposition to believe, the CMA does not officially appeal to these dispositions but instead to "cognitive traits." Hence, it is possible to accept the CMA while rejecting Turri's characterization of such traits. I discuss this possibility later in this section.

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<sup>13</sup> Armstrong holds that reasons for which we believe are *sometimes* beliefs and sometimes the contents of beliefs (Armstrong 1973: 78–79). I put this complication to one side because the theory is supposed to apply in either case (Armstrong 1973: 78).

Turri and Armstrong's accounts successfully rule out the previous examples of deviant causation. For example, Turri's CMA handles example (1) because it is only a one-off accident that Steve's belief that Phillis is a good person stands in any causal sustaining relation to his belief that he has lost his job. However, the CMA does not solve the problem of deviant causation in its full generality. For consider the following example:

(4) Patrick is in a distraught emotional state that causally sustains his depressed belief that it is not worth it to get out of bed in the morning. Patrick is the sort of person who is disposed (when distraught) to think quite negative things about himself and his relationships, and his present negative thinking is the realization of this disposition.

Patrick's depressed belief is created and sustained by his distraught emotional state, and the causal relation between his belief and his distraught emotional state is the realization of his disposition to “form (or sustain) a belief in certain circumstances.” Hence, according to the CMA, Patrick believes that it is not worth it to get out of bed in the morning *for the reason that he is in a distraught emotional state*. But it is consistent with the example that Patrick holds his depressed belief on the basis of no reason at all (rather, he holds it because he is depressed) (Cf. Audi 1993: 245).

Armstrong's account can handle example (4) because it holds the somewhat stricter requirements (i) that the causal basis be a belief of the subject and (ii) that the causal relation be the realization of a disposition conforming to an appropriate pattern. In example (4), Patrick's

disposition to form depressed beliefs does not conform to the appropriate pattern,<sup>14</sup> and the cause (his distraught emotional state) is not itself a belief. Hence, the Dispositional Causal Theory does not classify the causal relation as a basing relation. Nonetheless, there are examples of deviant causation that Armstrong's theory cannot handle:

(5) Ann has a malfunctioning cognitive system and finds herself with a compulsion (and so is disposed) to believe that people are her friends only so long as she believes something bad about them. Suppose, further, that via this strange compulsion, her beliefs about the badness of others both *create* and *sustain* her beliefs attributing friendship to them. Ann agonizes about her compulsion, and sincerely denounces it, but is helpless to change it. One day, she comes to believe that her boss Prabha is rude, which causes her to believe that Prabha is her friend, and her former belief causally sustains her latter belief.

According to Armstrong, we ought to say that Ann believes that Prabha is her friend for the reason that Prabha is rude, because (i) Ann's belief that Prabha is her friend is causally sustained by her belief that Prabha is rude, (ii) her belief is the realization of a general disposition to malfunction, and (iii) the general disposition is a disposition to create and causally sustain a belief of the form Gx with a belief of the form Fx. But it is intuitive – at least, according to one understanding of the example –<sup>15</sup> that Ann does not believe that Prabha is her friend for the

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14 The disposition is not a disposition to cause (if necessary) and sustain a belief of the form Fx with a belief of the form Gx.

15 There is one understanding of this example according to which to her malfunctioning cognitive system makes her believe for that reason. But there is another understanding according to which the malfunctioning in question simply causally sustains her belief in the way that a blow to the head might causally sustain one belief with another or a lesion might cause one belief (via unusual biological means) to causally sustain another. I intend the

reason that she is rude.<sup>16</sup> Her belief results instead from her malfunctioning, and it is not the successful exercise of her capacity to believe for reasons.<sup>17</sup>

I mentioned above that we could try to defend the CMA by rejecting Turri's characterization of cognitive traits. However, it is not clear what a cognitive trait could be such that the CMA gets the right results.<sup>18</sup> Here is one proposal: suppose that a cognitive trait is any disposition whose realization in normal circumstances is enough (with truth) to sustain knowledge rather than mere belief.<sup>19</sup> If we accept this rough account of cognitive traits, then we can use the CMA to rule out the previous examples of deviant causation. This is because the realizations of the dispositions described in the previous examples are *insufficient* (given truth and normalcy) for knowledge. Unfortunately, this understanding of cognitive traits makes the CMA too restrictive. The manifestation of a disposition to sustain knowledge must be a sustaining of *knowledge*,<sup>20</sup> but a belief held only on the basis of poor reasons cannot be knowledge even in normal conditions.<sup>21</sup> Hence, holding a belief only for poor reasons cannot be

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latter understanding of this case.

16 Ann has the following disposition: if she believes something of the form Rude(x) then she is so disposed that belief will cause and sustain a belief of the form Friend(x). I take this disposition to be of the form required by Armstrong's account (Armstrong 1973: 88–89).

17 Example five is similar to one given in Wedgwood 2006: 670.

18 Some characterization of cognitive traits is required because our non-philosophical understanding of *cognition* is too broad to appeal to it without amendment. It includes speech production, memory, perception, mental imagery, planning, animal signaling, concept acquisition, and so on. It seems unlikely that a causal relation to believe that manifests *any* trait that is part of (e.g.) concept acquisition, or memory, or speech production will count as believing for reasons.

19 This is supposed to capture the intuition that “cognitive” traits are involved with learning about and navigating the world. The specification that the situation be “normal” is being used to rule out Gettier cases.

20 Turri suggests (although does not explicitly endorse) the view that manifesting a disposition to  $\phi$  entails  $\phi$ -ing (Turri 2011: 390-391).

21 I am assuming that there are no other sources of warrant for the belief coming from (e.g.) perception or memory.

the manifestation of a cognitive trait and so – according to the CMA – is impossible. But believing only for poor reasons is clearly and obviously possible (see example (2) from chapter one). So even on this alternative understanding of a cognitive trait, the CMA is incorrect.

### 3.4 Rationalizing Causation

Ralph Wedgwood (“The Normative Force of Reasoning”) gives a related account of inferential *reasoning* that might be adapted to believing for reasons. Wedgwood begins by considering general dispositional accounts of reasoning and dismisses them for reasons roughly like those outlined above (Cf. Wedgwood 2006: 670). He then proposes to solve the problems facing these accounts by understanding reasoning as causation resulting from a very particular sort of disposition: namely, a disposition sensitive to the fact that the reason rationalizes the connected belief. He calls this sort of causation “causation in virtue of rationalization” (Wedgwood 2006: 670).

It will be worthwhile to consider Wedgwood's causal theory of inference in a more detail. Wedgwood claims that a basic inference (i.e. an inferential chain with a single link) is a causal relation such that the antecedent mental states “must [directly] cause one to form that belief or intention precisely *in virtue of* their rationalizing one’s forming that belief or intention” (Wedgwood 2006: 670).<sup>22</sup> Wedgwood understands causation “in virtue of” a feature in terms of manifesting a disposition. According to Wedgwood, one event-type  $e_1$  causes another event-type  $e_2$  *in virtue of* some feature  $P$  of the first event-type, just in case the causal relation is the

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<sup>22</sup> Wedgwood takes it (as a first approximation) that a set of psychological states “rationalizes” a belief just in case they make it rational to form that belief (Wedgwood 2006: 662).

manifestation of a disposition of the form *S is disposed to e2 if e1 has P* (Wedgwood 2006: 671).<sup>23</sup> Given this framework, a belief that q directly causes a belief that p in virtue of the belief that q rationalizing the belief that p *just in case* (i) the belief that q is a direct cause of the belief that p, and (ii) this causal relation is the manifestation of the following general disposition: S is disposed to directly form the belief that p given an input (e.g. coming to believe that q or considering one's belief that q) that rationalizes believing that p (Wedgwood 2006: 672).<sup>24</sup>

We might try to adapt Wedgwood's theory of inferential reasoning to believing for reasons as follows:

**(RCD) Rationalizing Causal-Dispositional Theory:** the belief that p is based on the reason that q for a subject S iff

- (i) the belief that q directly causally sustains the belief that p;
- (ii) the direct causal sustaining relation between the belief that q and the belief that p is the manifestation of a general disposition of the subject S;<sup>25</sup>
- (iii) this general disposition is of the form: (for a suitable range of propositions that p) S is disposed to directly sustain the belief that p with a belief that q, if given the input of a belief that q that rationalizes believing that p.

One rather serious problem with applying this view to believing for reasons, as Wedgwood

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<sup>23</sup> Wedgwood sometimes says things that suggest this is only a necessary condition, but I will take it to be a sufficient condition here. It is otherwise difficult to see how he is warranted in saying that he has given an account of inference (Wedgwood 2006: 660, 673).

<sup>24</sup> The “p” variable here is restricted so that it ranges over a large but not unlimited set of propositions (Wedgwood 2006: 674).

<sup>25</sup> Strictly speaking, it the [*belief that q causing the belief that p*] that is the manifestation of the disposition and not the relation itself. For purposes of exposition, I will sometimes say that a causal relation between two beliefs manifests a disposition (following Turri 2011:392), but this locution ought to be understood as claiming that one belief *causing the other* is the manifestation of a disposition.

acknowledges in the context of reasoning, is that the account applies only to cases of *rationaly* believing for reasons.<sup>26</sup> This is because the account requires that the basing reasons rationalize the supported belief and irrationally believing for reasons does not (or often does not) involve reasons that rationalize in this way. This means that the theory does not apply to a large class of ordinary basing relations (see example (2) from chapter one).

An additional problem is that Wedgwood's account appears to suffer from a version of the problem of deviant causation. This problem is less obvious. For purposes of illustration, consider the following example:

(6) Carlos has an ordinary cognitive system except that – due to a degenerative disease – he has lost his disposition to directly causally sustain beliefs in a way that conforms to *modus ponens*. That is, Carlos has lost his disposition to directly causally sustain beliefs whose contents have the form [*that q*] with beliefs whose contents have the form [*that if p, then q*] and [*that p*]. His other dispositions remain intact, such that (e.g.) he is disposed to directly causally sustain beliefs whose contents have the form [*that q or p*] with beliefs whose contents have the form [*that q*]. In other words, although Carlos is not disposed to causally sustain his beliefs in a way that conforms to *modus ponens*, he otherwise has the disposition picked out by condition (iii) above: i.e. he is disposed to directly causally sustain the belief that p with an input that rationalizes believing that p (for some suitable range of propositions that p). One day, Carlos develops a lucky brain

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26 Wedgwood 2006 and Valaris (unpublished) both mention this problem. Wedgwood is not particularly concerned by the problem because he takes himself to be giving an account of justified reasoning. He claims that perhaps the account of justified reasoning could be extended in some way to unjustified reasoning, but he does not say much about how this will be done, although he does cite Grice 2001 in this context. Valaris, in contrast, takes the problem to count decisively against Wedgwood's causal account of reasoning.



lesion that gives him the disposition (via some massive malfunctioning) to directly causally sustain beliefs in conformity with *modus ponens*.

Suppose that Carlos manifests his lesion-supported disposition by directly causally sustaining his belief that *today is a holiday* with his belief that *today is Memorial Day* and his belief that *if today is Memorial Day, then today is a holiday*. In such a case, I think it is intuitive that Carlos does not believe that *today is a holiday* for the reason that *today is Memorial Day* and the reason that *if today is Memorial Day, then today is a holiday*. The situation described is rather one in which Carlos has the disposition to believe in conformity with *modus ponens* only via a lesion-induced malfunction. And, in cases where Carlos causally sustains his belief by manifesting this lesion-induced malfunction, it is intuitive that he does not believe for a reason. This presents a problem for RCD, because it is intuitive that when Carlos manifests his malfunctioning disposition to believe in conformity with *modus ponens*, he has also – at least, so far as I can determine – manifested his *general disposition* to directly sustain his beliefs with inputs that rationalize them. Hence, example (6) shows that the RCD fails to give a sufficient condition on believing for reasons. Hence, RCD is false.

Wedgwood considers a case like example (6) with respect to reasoning (Wedgwood 2006: 677), but he does not think that the case presents a problem for his account. In particular, Wedgwood considers the view that a subject might have “separate dispositions corresponding to each of many highly specific forms of rational reasoning” (Wedgwood 2006:676) and says of this view that:

It seems intuitively possible that such a highly specific disposition could just be some non-rational compulsion (perhaps implanted into one’s mind by a manipulative

neuroscientist), unconnected with any more general ability for rational reasoning; and it seems doubtful whether manifesting a non-rational compulsion of this sort could really be a case of reasoning. In short, reasoning must involve exercising some relatively *general* reasoning ability; it is doubtful whether any such ability can be identified with a disposition that does not respond directly to rationalizers as such. (Wedgwood 2006: 677)

I am not entirely sure what to make of this response as it applies to believing for reasons. I think that I agree with Wedgwood that, when Carlos manifests his malfunctioning disposition, he does not thereby exercise a general *ability* to (rationally) causally sustain his beliefs. But this response is no help to the RCD, because the theory is framed in terms of general dispositions, not abilities.<sup>27</sup> And I think it is in fact true that when Carlos manifests his specific disposition to conform to *modus ponens*, he also manifests a general disposition of the required form: for a large range of propositions that p, Carlos is disposed to directly sustain his belief that p with an input (a belief that q) that rationalizes believing that p.

The fact that Carlos' specific disposition to causally sustain beliefs in conformity with *modus ponens* has a different neurological basis than his disposition to causally sustain beliefs in conformity with other sorts of rational connection *does not show that in example (6) he fails to manifest the general disposition*.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, I think it is intuitive that he manifests such a general disposition. And nothing about Wedgwood's preferred account of dispositions (originally from

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27 I will later argue that capacities are not the same as mere dispositions, and the same argument will plausibly apply to abilities (see section 4.3).

28 Suppose, for example, that *all* of Carlo's specific dispositions to believe in conformity with rational principles were due to specific lesion-induced malfunctions like the one discussed in example (6). In such a case, I think it is true that he has a general disposition to believe in conformity with rational principles, even though his specific general disposition is a conglomeration of more specific dispositions to malfunction.

Fara 2005) seems to rule this intuition out. Wedgwood writes:

Something has this disposition if and only if it has some *intrinsic feature* in virtue of which, in any *normal* case in which it undergoes an event of one of the stimulus event-kinds, it also undergoes an event of the kind onto which the relevant function maps that stimulus event-kind. (Wedgwood 2006: 667)

Carlos has some intrinsic feature (his brain is in some overall state) in virtue of which, in normal cases, when he holds a belief that rationalizes his believing that p, then that belief directly causally sustains his belief that p. Hence, Carlos is disposed to directly causally sustain the belief that p given an input (coming to believe) that rationalizes believing that p. And it seems plausible that this general disposition is exercised in example (6), because it is by *this* intrinsic feature (his overall brain state) that his belief that *today is a holiday* is sustained by the belief that rationalizes it.<sup>29</sup>

I take the discussion in this section to at least strongly suggest that the RCD is false. The view apparently fails to give necessary conditions and falls victim to a version of the problem of deviant causation. Of course, perhaps there is a sort of disposition or a notion of “manifesting a disposition,” such that Carlos does not manifest a general disposition of the correct sort in example (6). But whatever this notion is, it is not obviously Wedgwood's stated notion, and it will need substantial further elucidation.

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<sup>29</sup> Wedgwood does not, in his discussion of his preferred account of dispositions, give a theory of *when* a disposition is manifested. One option is that it is manifested when the relevant intrinsic feature is causally responsible for the stimulus having the relevant effect. I believe that Lewis 1997: 150 implies something like this view.

The prior examples show that current causal theories of believing for reasons cannot avoid the problem of causal deviance. Importantly, there is a kind of causal deviance (deviance-via-brute-neurological-malfunction) that is apparently unavoidable if the causal theorist restricts themselves to resources like direct causal relations and the manifestations of traits or dispositions. This is because such neurological malfunction is compatible with a causal relation being the manifestation of a trait or disposition (it will be a disposition to malfunction) and it is possible for such malfunction to be causally “direct.”

### 3.5 The Causal-Doxastic Theory

One way we might try to solve the problem of causal deviance is to add a doxastic condition (see section 2.9) to the account (Audi 1993). This condition might require that if a subject believes that *p* for the reason that *q*, that they must also believe something to the effect *that q makes p likely to be true*. I argued in section 2.9 that such a requirement is not necessary for believing for reasons. However, I think it is important to see that the addition of a doxastic condition also fails to solve the problem of causal deviance. If this is correct, then we have a reason to reject the doxastic condition that is independent of the arguments in chapter two.<sup>30</sup>

It will help to consider a simple doxastic condition:

**Simple Causal-Doxastic Account:** given a subject *S* who has the belief that *p* and the

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<sup>30</sup> Korczy gives a very brief treatment of causal theories that include a doxastic component that gestures along these same lines in Korczy 2015 (section 3). I take the term “Causal-Doxastic Theory” from him. The same considerations will count against views that take the additional condition to be an attitude or attitudes other than belief (e.g. perhaps other forms of what Wright calls “modes of acceptance” in Wright 2004: 176).

belief that q: S believes that p for the reason that q iff

(i) S believes that q makes that p likely to be true [or something to the same effect: see sections 2.8 and 2.9].<sup>31</sup>

(ii) S's belief that q directly causally sustains S's belief that p.

The Simple Causal-Doxastic Account cannot escape the problems for the earlier causal sustaining views. For example, reconsider example (5):

(5) Ann has a malfunctioning cognitive system and finds herself with a compulsion (and so is disposed) to believe that people are her friends only so long as she believes something bad about them. Suppose, further, that via this strange compulsion, her beliefs about the badness of others both *create* and *sustain* her beliefs attributing friendship to them. Ann agonizes about her compulsion, and sincerely denounces it, but is helpless to change it. One day, she comes to believe that her boss Prabha is rude, which causes her to believe that Prabha is her friend, and her former belief causally sustains her latter.

In the example, Ann does not believe that Prabha is her friend because Prabha is rude. However, neither would Ann believe for that reason if we stipulated that she holds the connecting belief that if Prabha is rude, then it is likely that Prabha is her friend. If Ann holds the belief that Prabha is her friend *only because* of the disposition instilled in her by her malfunctioning cognitive system, and not even in part because, e.g., she has taken her connecting belief into account, then she believes it for no reasons at all (Audi 228–229).

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31 Cf. Valaris (unpublished) for a discussion of a doxastic condition of inference.

The problem can perhaps be solved by requiring that the additional belief in condition (i) be part of the causal sustaining relation between the belief that R and the belief that P. I will call this the “Modified Causal Doxastic Theory:”

**Modified Causal-Doxastic Account:** given a subject S who has the belief that p and the belief that q: S believes that p for the reason that q iff

(i) S believes that q makes p likely to be true [or something to the same effect: see sections 2.8 and 2.9].

(ii) S's belief that q directly causally sustains S's belief that p.

(iii) the belief in (i) combines with the belief that q to directly causally sustain the belief that p.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, the problem of deviant causal sustaining relations arises for this modified proposal as well. For example, consider a modified version of example (5):

(7) John has a brain lesion that happens to have the following effect: whenever John believes that someone S is rude *and he believes that S's being rude makes it likely that S is his friend*, then, due to some unusual neurological changes caused by the lesion, these beliefs jointly cause and sustain his belief that S is his friend. One day, he comes to believe that Anna is rude and that Anna's being rude makes it likely that she is his friend,

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32 There are a number of ways in which the belief in (i) could combine with the belief that q to causally sustain the belief that p. One way the belief in (i) could combine with the belief that q to causally sustain the belief that p, is by *jointly sustaining it* (as when a bridge is sustained by two pylons), another way is by causing the belief that q to sustain the belief that p (as when *placing* a bridge on some pylons that sustain it). I will not choose among these different options.

and, affected by the lesion (and *not* via reasoning or by utilizing his general connecting belief) he comes to believe that she is his friend and his belief that she is his friend is directly causally sustained by his belief that she is rude and his belief that Anna's being rude makes it likely that she is his friend.

Example (7) is really only a slight variation of (5) and (3). As in those examples, I think it is intuitive that, although John's belief that Anna is his friend is causally sustained by his beliefs of the form “that q makes p likely to be true” and “that q,” John does not believe that Anna is his friend for the reason that she is rude. Instead, he is only suffering from some strange neurological malady and has not exercised his capacity to believe for reasons.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.6 Unconvincing Objections

I have been considering examples of deviant causation. These examples count against causal sustaining theories that appeal variously to “directness,” to realizations of patterns of dispositions, to the manifestations of cognitive traits, and to additional doxastic requirements. The problem of deviant causation shows that at least these sorts of causal sustaining relations are insufficient for believing for reasons. However, the examples do not show that causal sustaining relations are not *necessary* for believing for reasons. Indeed, the positive picture that I will develop in the next chapter holds that the basing relation is – at least in one respect – a special sort of causal sustaining relation. However, there are a number of philosophers who have held

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<sup>33</sup> Of course, some maladies are such that John could be suffering from them and *still* believe for reasons. The malady would be affecting his capacity to believe for reasons, and not bypassing it. However, I think it is intuitive that some lesion-cases involve simply by-passing the relevant capacity entirely (Cf. Audi 1993: 245).

that it is possible to believe that p for a reason even if the reason is not a causal sustainer of the belief that p. Importantly, Lehrer and Setiya have both maintained that there are intuitive cases in which a subject believes for reasons although the belief is not caused in any way by those reasons. Here is an example from Setiya:

The sense in which one believes that p because one believes that q, when one believes that p on the ground that q, does not require causation or dependence of this kind. This comes out most clearly when one's evidence is conclusive. To illustrate: suppose that I am prone to wishful thinking, and I would continue to believe that I will win the lottery even if I had no evidence. As it happens, I know that the lottery is rigged in my favour and regard this as proof that I will win. Although the belief that I will win is not sustained by my belief that the lottery is rigged and is counterfactually independent of it, that does not prevent me from believing that I will win on the ground that the lottery is rigged, or from having a justified belief that I will win. Asked "Why do you believe that you will win the lottery?" I can cite conclusive proof. What more could knowledge demand? (Setiya 2013: 191)

Setiya's example is a version of a famous example given by Lehrer in "How Reasons Give us Knowledge, or the Case of the Gypsy Lawyer." Here is a paraphrase of the case:

(8) A lawyer has recently been assigned the task of defending a man accused of eight murders. The lawyer is convinced that his client is guilty of each murder until one night he consults his cards. The lawyer has an unshakeable faith in his cards, and the cards tell



him that his client is innocent of the eighth murder. Believing that his client is innocent of the last murder, the lawyer again examines the facts of the case, and finds a subtle and complicated line of reasoning that fully exonerates his client of the eighth murder. He comes to justifiably believe that his client is innocent of the eighth murder by this reasoning. However, the case being what it is (highly emotional) and his reasoning being what it is (subtle and complicated), the lawyer *would not* be convinced by this reasoning if he did not trust in his cards. Instead, he would slip back into believing that his client is guilty of each of the eight murders. (Lehrer 1971: 311–312)

Although Lehrer's example is explicitly put in terms of justification (rather than believing for reasons), for present purposes I take the example to apply to believing for reasons. I assume in what follows that the example is intended to show that the lawyer believes for the reasons given by his subtle and complicated reasoning, even though such reasons do not causally sustain his belief.<sup>34</sup>

Lehrer holds that, in example (8), the subtle and complicated reasoning (more precisely: the reasons given by such reasoning) does not even *potentially explain* the lawyer's belief. Lehrer writes:

As a result of having the belief, he uncovers reasons for the belief that give him knowledge. But these reasons do not potentially explain his belief, because he would not

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34 Turri 2011 : 318–319 gives this understanding of the example as does McCain 2014: 102, but they are careful not to attribute this understanding directly to Lehrer. For an interesting discussion of what Lehrer may have intended by the example see Tierney and Smith 2012. Also see Evans 2013: 2951 (fn. 11).

hold the belief for those reasons if he were to become doubtful of his superstitious reasons for belief. (Lehrer 1971: 311)

But we ought not build this into the specification of the example for dialectical reasons. If Lehrer is right that the relevant reasons do not even *explain* the lawyer's belief, then we would have to deny (via a straightforward application of the Basic Conception) that the lawyer believes for such reasons. Hence, the example would not count against the causal theory. Instead, I think that the most charitable way to read the example for present purposes is as purporting to show that basing reasons are not causal-sustainers and *not* that basing reasons are not explanatory. For dialectical purposes, I will assume in what follows that example (8) that the lawyer's belief that his client is innocent is *explained by* the reasons given in his subtle line of reasoning.

One problem with Lehrer and Setiya's examples is that they seem to infer from the absence of certain counterfactual relations to the absence of causal relations. But it is not clear, given the details of the examples, whether these counterfactual facts show anything definitive about causal sustaining. For instance, in Setiya's example, my belief that I will win the lottery may simply be causally overdetermined by my belief that the lottery is rigged and by my tendency to wishful thinking. The fact that my belief that I will win is “counterfactually independent” (Setiya 2013: 191) of my belief that the lottery is rigged does not show that the former is causally independent of the latter.

Similarly, the fact that the lawyer in example (8) would (i) give up his belief that his client is innocent were he to lose faith in his cards but (ii) hold onto his belief that his client is innocent were he to stop trusting his reasoning, *does not show* that his belief is not sustained by his reasoning. This is because it is possible for a sustainer to have a causal sustaining effect only

in the presence of another sustainer. For instance, imagine Johanna is holding up a piano all by herself, which causes Margot to help her hold it, *so long as Johanna continues to do so*. In such a case, both Johanna and Margot causally sustain the elevation of the piano, but the following is true: (i) if Johanna were to stop holding the piano, then it would fall, and (ii) if Margot were to stop holding the piano, then it would not fall. But, nonetheless, Margot and Johanna both causally sustain the elevation of the piano.<sup>35</sup>

The reliance on counter-factual relations in the previous examples is misplaced. What the opponent of the causal theory ought to do is simply stipulate that in the examples above there is no relevant causal sustaining relation. Then the previous problems can be avoided. However, there are two problems with this strategy. The first problem is dialectical: it is not clear that Lehrer and Setiya are allowed to stipulate just whatever they want. Suppose it turns out – although I will deny this in a moment – that the examples above are intuitive cases in which the subject believes for reasons, but the reasons do not causally sustain his belief. I think this would be *prima facie* evidence that the reasons for which we believe need not be causes. But such evidence can be overridden. In particular, it can be overridden by the sorts of theoretical considerations that motivated the discussion in chapter two. Setiya and Lehrer owe us some explanation for *how* the basing reasons *explain why* the subject holds the belief in non-causal cases like example (8). But it is not clear what to say: it isn't true – as I have argued, *pace* Setiya, in section 2.8 – that merely holding beliefs about evidence is sufficient for explanation. Hence, the cases we are being asked to entertain may turn out to be metaphysically impossible: i.e. it may simply be metaphysically impossible for the basing reasons to explain the subject's

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<sup>35</sup> Audi makes some similar remarks to this effect in Audi 1993: 240.

believing in cases where the basing reasons do not cause the belief.

Secondly, setting aside this dialectical worry, let us grant the following: suppose that the lawyer's belief that his client is innocent is not causally sustained by the reasons given by his subtle and complicated line of reasoning. And let us also grant that the beliefs figuring in the lawyer's subtle and complicated line of reasoning in some way (strange though it may be) explain the lawyer's belief that his client is innocent. Having granted all this, does it seem in such a case that the lawyer believes that his client is innocent *for the reasons* given by his subtle and complicated reasoning? I think that the answer is “no.” Suppose that the lawyer's subtle and complicated reasoning is warranted and that it has warranted beliefs as inputs. In the normal case, the lawyer's belief that his client is innocent will thus also be warranted, and (given truth and normalcy) he will know it. But it is widely and correctly held that the lawyer does not know that his client is innocent, or at least that it is not clear that he knows it (McCain 2014: 102, Audi 1993: 225, Wedgwood 2006: 683). I agree with this view. Whatever the sort of explanatory role we are granting to basing reasons in Lehrer's example, the explanatory relation in question does not seem to transmit warrant sufficient for knowledge (given truth and normalcy).<sup>36</sup> Hence, the

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36 I am moved here by Audi 1993: 225, who points out that the lawyer's belief is simply too *lucky* to count as justified or (given truth and normalcy) knowledge:

“[...] it is simply good fortune that he holds it *relative* to his evidence beliefs, his holding it (rather than no beliefs, or a false one, on the subject) is lucky. Happily, the cards cause him to believe a true proposition for which he has evidence. But if S is justified, by good evidence, in his belief that p, his evidence belief surely cannot function in him so that, as far as it is concerned, he just happens to believe p (because of the cards).”

One might find this observation congenial to a requirement on doxastically justified or warranted belief that it be produced or sustained by a reliable process (Tierney and Smith 2012: 31). Alternatively, one might find it congenial to a requirement on justification that it be produced or sustained by the exercise of a virtuous ability or well-functioning capacity.

Tierney and Smith do not find Audi's argument persuasive (Tierney and Smith 2012: 31). They note that the subtle and complicated process of reasoning that the lawyer uses is in fact quite reliable, and they claim that “a story is owed” about why the unreliable causal origin (and I would add sustaining cause) of the belief should

lawyer cannot believe on the basis of the warranted beliefs that figure in his reasoning.

A similar sort of point applies to Setiya's example above. Setiya imagines a subject (himself) who believes that he will win lottery via wishful thinking, and supposes that if asked “Why do you believe that you will win the lottery?” that such a subject will cite conclusive proof. Setiya claims that *this* (viz. this sincere citing of conclusive proof) is all that knowledge demands. But he is incorrect that all that knowledge demands is the citing of conclusive proof. At least one additional requirement is that the person sincerely citing such conclusive proof, believe that she will win the lottery on the basis of that proof.<sup>37</sup>

### 3.7 Conclusion

The causal sustaining theories considered above are all susceptible to the problem of deviant causation. Indeed, one particularly pernicious sort of causal deviance (deviance-via-neural-malfunction) is apparently unavoidable if causal theorists restrict themselves to resources like “directness” or the manifestation of traits. However, causal sustaining theories are supported by two positive features. First, causal sustaining theories are compatible with a plausible naturalistic picture of the world. Second, such theories are capable of accounting for the fact that believing for reasons is an explanatory relation.

In the next section, I will offer a theory of believing for reasons that is – at least in certain respects – a *sort* of causal sustaining theory. However, avoiding the problem of causal deviance

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matter more to justification than the reliable process of reasoning. I think this challenge can be met. The reason that the reliability of the process of reasoning does not matter is that the reasoning is not *why* the subject holds the belief, and, hence, the fact that it is reliable does not help make it likely that the belief is true (Audi 1993: 225–226).

37 Thank you to Mark Greenberg for noticing this very strong claim.

will require appealing to resources that I have not yet discussed. I will argue, in particular, that the way to avoid the problem of causal deviance is by appealing to capacities, which constitutively involve aims and functions. As with the causal sustaining theory, I take my account to illuminate the way in which basing reasons are explanatory and to be compatible with a naturalistic picture of the world.

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## Chapter Four: The Capacity Account

### 4.1 Introduction

I have argued that even the most sophisticated available theories of the basing relation are inadequate. In the present chapter, I give a novel account of believing for reasons that appeals to capacities, aims, and functions, and I distinguish capacities from mere dispositions. This account respects the insights of a broadly causal approach, but goes beyond the available proposals in an important way. I claim that believing for reasons is constitutively the exercise of a capacity to causally sustain one belief with another belief for a certain purpose: namely, sensitivity to the normative epistemic reasons. According to this view, the capacity to believe for reasons is metaphysically prior to instances of believing for reasons, and understanding individual cases of believing for reasons requires understanding the capacity.

The present chapter is organized as follows: (i) I begin by making a few generalizations about the unsuccessful views discussed in the last chapter; (ii) I try to explain what has gone wrong with these theories by invoking the notion of a capacity, and I give a characterization of capacities that distinguishes them from mere dispositions; (iii) I develop my positive account of the basing relation (the “Capacity Account”), and I argue that it avoids the problem of deviant causation; (iv) I contrast the Capacity Account with the superficially similar Dispositional Theory (Evans 2013); and (v) I conclude the chapter by outlining how the Capacity Account can help us understand some of the central features of believing for reasons discussed in the first two chapters of the dissertation.



## 4.2 Causal Theories

I discussed so-called “causal sustaining theories” of the basing relation in some detail in the last chapter, but I have not been explicit about what is supposed to distinguish causal theories from other sorts of theories.<sup>1</sup> One difficulty is that most philosophers who endorse causal theories of believing for reasons and inference have not been explicit about what is supposed to unify such theories. Wedgwood, for instance, claims that his view (like others) is “broadly causal” and that he conceives of the basing relation as a “causal relation,” but he does not think the basing relation is *merely* causal (Wedgwood 2006: 660; 683). Turri similarly defends what he calls a “causal theory” (Turri 2011: 384), but he also doesn’t think that the basing relation is *merely* causal.<sup>2</sup>

One possibility endorsed by Korcz in his *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on the basing relation is that causal theories “hold that for a belief to be based on a reason, the reason must cause the belief in an appropriate way” (Korcz 2015), but this characterization must be incomplete. It must be incomplete because it is consistent with the characterization that the basing relation be significantly non-causal or even non-natural in character. For example, a theory would count as a causal theory on Korcz's view even if it required, in addition to the causal component, that one be disposed to offer one's reasons as part of the activity of justification. I do not think most causal theorists would consider this to be a kind of causal theory. In addition, conceiving of causal theories as offering only a necessary condition makes it

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1 I take causal sustaining theories of the basing relation to be a species of “causal theory.”

2 Turri and Wedgwood both hold, for instance, that the basing relation must be the manifestation of a trait or disposition of the believing subject.

difficult to draw any general conclusions about causal theories *as such* from the problem of deviant causation discussed at length in the previous chapter. This is because the problem of deviant causation shows only that certain causal sustaining conditions are insufficient for believing for reasons. It does not show anything about putatively necessary conditions.

Nonetheless, I think that there are some important similarities between the causal theories discussed in the last chapter. In particular, each of these theories aims to give an account of believing for reasons that meets the following conditions: (i) the theory explicates the “because” of reasons-explanations as causal explanation; (ii) the theory takes a causal relation to at least partially constitute the basing relation; and (iii) *it characterizes the basing relation using only resources that are naturalistically acceptable.*<sup>3</sup> In what follows, I will take “causal approach” and “causal theory” to refer to approaches and theories that hold (i) – (iii) above. A causal theory in this sense takes a substantive position on the nature of the basing relation: the basing relation is, at least in part, a causal relation. And it takes a position on the *sort* of sufficient conditions that apply to believing for reasons: i.e. these conditions must be “naturalistic.” It is compatible with this conception of causal theories that a theory could hold that the basing relation is causal but not be a causal theory (because it employs other resources that are not naturalistically acceptable). And it permits causal theories to incorporate “doxastic” clauses like those endorsed by Setiya and Audi (see sections 2.7 and 3.5).

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3 I take conditions (i) and (ii) to be simply obvious. I take condition (i) to be more-or-less explicitly endorsed by Turri as part of his argument that reasons are “difference-makers” (Turri 2011: 386), and I believe it is implicitly endorsed by Wedgwood (Wedgwood 2009: 661) when he discusses Davidson in connection with believing for reasons. Condition (ii) is endorsed by every theory discussed in the previous chapter. Condition (iii) is not widely discussed in the literature, perhaps because it is such a fundamental assumption of the view. But Wedgwood (Wedgwood 2009: 660) takes pains to show, for instance, that his causal theory of reasoning is “quite compatible with any plausible versions of naturalism,” while Winters (Winters 1983: 202) claims of her related approach that it will “replace the image of Man the Rational Calculator with a naturalistic picture of humans as entities who acquire beliefs as the result of a causal process...”

On this expanded characterization of causal theories, it is explicable why modifications in response to causal deviance have tended to invoke naturalistically acceptable resources like *dispositions*, or *patterns of dispositions*, or *direct causal connections*, and it is clear why self-described causal theorists have seemed so concerned to give naturalistic characterizations of causal relations that are sufficient as well as necessary for believing for reasons. The general causal approach aims to give a theory of the basing relation that appeals only to certain sorts of resources: that is, only to naturalistically acceptable resources. But *absent* a solution to the problem of deviant causation, no theory using only these resources will be sufficient.

Not every theory discussed in the previous chapter is uncontroversially a causal theory in the current sense. Wedgwood's theory, for instance, appeals to a sort of rational causal connection, and whether this phenomenon is naturalistic will depend on the details of one's naturalism (Wedgwood 2006: 681–682). However, I will set this complication aside for the moment (see section 5.4) because even this sophisticated theory does not manage to give sufficient conditions on believing for reasons. I hypothesize that the reason for the failures of causal theories to solve the problem of deviant causation is that they restrict themselves to too narrow a set of resources. Every theory of which I am aware tries to state conditions such that, if the conditions were correct, then the fact that they hold would be sufficient for the capacity to believe for reasons to be exercised.<sup>4</sup> Armstrong and Turri do this by appealing to certain traits or dispositions, and McCain does it by reference to direct causation. But they have neglected an important resource: in particular, they have neglected *the fact that* believing for reasons is the exercise of a certain capacity. In section 4.4, I propose to avoid the problem of causal deviance

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<sup>4</sup> I do not mean to imply that that they (apart from Wedgwood) would describe what they are doing in this way. They are largely not thinking about capacities at all.

by *starting with* this fact about believing for reasons.

### 4.3 Capacities and Dispositions

I agree with the skeptic about causal theories in certain important respects. I do not think that a solution to the problem of deviant causation is available given the resources that the causal theorists discussed in the previous chapters have allowed themselves. However, I do not think this fact ought to suggest that the basing relation is not causal or that the notion of believing for reasons is not naturalistically acceptable. Instead, philosophers who are sympathetic to the broadly causal, naturalistic outlook given by conditions (i)–(iii) should appeal to ordinary psychological resources that they have treated as off-limits.

The causal theories discussed in the previous chapter appeal to resources such as psychological states, causally efficacious facts in the local environment, efficient and sustaining causal relations, and the dispositions that produce such relations. But these resources are not the only resources relevant to characterizing causal activities, processes, and events.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, many causal activities, processes, and events are *exercises of capacities*.<sup>6</sup> For example, the tumbling of a rock in a rock tumbler is a cause of the rock becoming polished, and this causal

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5 The phenomenon in which I am interested is [X causing Y], and I take this to be an activity, process or event.

6 I will assume here that objects, states, and events can cause events or states. The view that one state can cause another state is a widely shared assumption in the literature on believing for reasons, since beliefs (which are states) are widely taken to cause other beliefs. But this assumption is not necessary for the view so long as *some sense* can be made of a belief causing another belief. Perhaps, in other words, it is strictly false that beliefs cause other beliefs, but the causal theorist can accept this so long as there is some phenomenon in the conceptual neighborhood of a belief causing another belief that is (at least roughly) extensionally equivalent with the class of cases in which we *intuitively* want to say a belief causes another belief. For example, perhaps it is the *event* of the state obtaining that causes the *event* of a state obtaining. See Wedgwood 2006: 664 for a discussion of these matters.

activity is an exercise of the capacity of the rock tumbler to polish rocks.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the contraction of a heart causes blood to circulate, and *the contraction of the heart causing the circulating of blood* is an exercise of the heart's capacity to pump blood.

Rock polishing is probably only contingently an exercise of a capacity in the sense that not every rock polishing is the exercise of a capacity to polish rocks.<sup>8</sup> Some activities and processes, however, are necessarily the exercise of capacities. Speech, for example, is necessarily the exercise of a capacity, because a token activity of speaking counts as *speech production* only if it is the exercise of a subjects' capacity for speech production. A noise that sounded like speech would not in fact *be* speech if it were not produced by the subject's speech capacity. And the same is plausibly true for other psychological phenomena like perceiving and believing for reasons.<sup>9</sup>

It is noteworthy that the causal sustaining theories discussed in chapter three do not appeal to capacities or to their exercise. Armstrong and Turri each appeal to dispositions in their theories of the basing relation, but dispositions to  $\phi$  are intuitively not the same as capacities to  $\phi$  in at least one ordinary sense of "capacity."<sup>10</sup> This difference may be obscured by the fact that

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7 Turri 2011 gives a similar example in arguing that some causal relations are manifestations of traits.

8 Perhaps the shuffling feet of pilgrims polish a rock over a thousand years. But, intuitively, the group of pilgrims has not exercised a capacity to polish the rock. Alternatively, a rock that has been softened by exposure to some acid might be polished by an ant walking over it, but the ant has not exercised a capacity to polish the rock.

9 Wedgwood claims that inferential reasoning is (intuitively) the expression of an "essentially rational" ability in Wedgwood 2006: 671.

10 This difference is not always acknowledged or recognized. For instance, Choi 2012 takes the word "disposition" to pick out the same (or almost the same) thing as "power," "ability," "tendency," and "capacity." John Heil (Heil 2005: 343) simply stipulates that his use of the term "disposition" will pick out what he calls "powers" and "capacities." Greco 2012: 103 and Turri 2012: 136–138 also appear to take capacities and abilities to be dispositions. I believe that these theories elide a very real difference between capacities and dispositions in at least some ordinary uses of the terms "capacity" and "disposition." The difference between capacities and dispositions is explicitly recognized by Armstrong 1973: 52. It is also suggested by Smith's treatment of rational

the word “capacity” is used in different ways in ordinary English.<sup>11</sup> In the remainder of 4.3, I will give a characterization of capacities in *one sense* of “capacity.” The discussion that follows is not intended to be a piece of ordinary language analysis nor is it intended to be wholly stipulative. The sense of “capacity” in which I am interested is part of our common conceptual repertoire: it is commonly employed in biology and psychology. But the notion requires some sharpening to be theoretically useful. The present discussion is intended to provide some of this sharpening and to help us distinguish capacities from mere dispositions. I do not intend to give anything like a full theory of capacities here.

Let us call  $\phi$ -ing the “object” of the capacity to  $\phi$ . As I will use the term “capacity,” a capacity is a power of an individual that is *aimed at* the production of its object. In other words, a capacity to  $\phi$  is a power of an individual that is directed toward or aimed at  $\phi$ -ing. In the present sense of “capacity,” human agents have capacities to shoot arrows at targets, capacities to sit, and capacities to feel pain. These capacities sometimes require special knowledge or talents (shooting arrows) but sometimes they do not (sitting). Some of these capacities are capacities to perform actions (sitting) but some are capacities to do things (like feeling pain) that are not. Agents, animals, biological organs, and artifacts all have capacities. Monarch butterflies have the capacity to fly. The hearts of mammals have the capacity to pump blood. And automobiles have capacities to go up hills.

In the relevant sense of “capacity,” an individual can have a disposition to do something

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capacities in Smith 2003 (see the way Smith handles the discussion of finckish dispositions on page 24) and by Burge's treatment of psychological competences as subject to certain norms in Burge 2003: 510–514.

<sup>11</sup> In the next paragraph I claim that there is a sense of “capacity” that is essentially teleological. This sense of “capacity” is presumably *not* the sense of “capacity” that might be used in physics or geology. A raw diamond has the capacity to resist scratching, but the raw diamond and its features have no aims.

without having a capacity to do it. This is because, at least in part, not all dispositions are aimed at their objects. For example, I am disposed to have an allergic reaction to wool, but my disposition to have an allergic reaction to wool is not aimed at having such a reaction. Hence, my disposition is not a capacity to have an allergic reaction to wool. Similarly, a damaged knife that is disposed to snap in half when chopping carrots does not have a disposition that *aims* at snapping in half, hence it does not have a capacity to snap in half when chopping carrots. A weak mammal heart might be disposed to rupture in response to a sudden increase in blood pressure, but its disposition does not aim at rupturing, hence the weak heart does not have the capacity to rupture in response to such an increase.<sup>12</sup>

It is because capacities have aims that exercises of capacities are capable of certain characteristic sorts of success and failure. Imagine that a skilled archer carefully aims and shoots at a target, utilizing perfect technique, but an errant gust of wind blows the arrow away. The archer exercises her capacity to hit the target by shooting the arrow but her exercise is a failure. In contrast, imagine an archer who exercises her capacity to hit the target *by hitting the target*. The latter archer exercises her capacity to hit the target, and her exercise is a success. These examples point to *one way* in which the exercise of a capacity can succeed and fail:

**object-success condition:** necessarily, if something is the exercise of a capacity to  $\phi$ , then it succeeds (in at least one way) when it is a  $\phi$ -ing, and it fails when it is not a  $\phi$ -ing.

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<sup>12</sup> I am not claiming that *no heart* could have a capacity to rupture in response to high blood pressure. Perhaps there are hearts of certain individuals that are meant to rupture in order to reduce blood pressure. If so, then the hearts of *these individuals* may very well have the capacity to rupture in response to high blood pressure. My claim is that the hearts of *mammals* are not like this, and if they rupture, they do not exercise a capacity to do so. The same point holds with developing hives in response to wool. Humans do not have a capacity to do this, but there could be a sort of creature for whom developing hives in response to wool might count as the exercise of a capacity to do so.

The object-success condition highlights the difference between capacities to  $\phi$  and mere dispositions to  $\phi$ . The disposition of the knife to snap in half is *not* a capacity to snap in half in part because the manifestation of the knife's disposition does not succeed by the knife snapping in half. Nor does the manifestation of my disposition to develop hives when exposed to wool succeed by my developing hives after being exposed to wool. The manifestations of these dispositions are merely things that happen. They are neither successful nor unsuccessful manifestations of the relevant disposition.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that exercises of capacities succeed or fail by achieving the object of the capacity gives us some reason to believe that they can succeed and fail in other ways as well. This is because if exercises of capacities succeed by achieving the aim of the capacity, then there are likely to be norms of functioning that are derivative from this aim. For instance, it seems possible for the exercise of a capacity to hit the target to be done *well* (because it demonstrates good technique) without succeeding in hitting the target. One plausible necessary condition on functioning well in *this* way is that the exercise of the capacity be likely to result in a  $\phi$ -ing in some appropriate range of circumstances. For example, if there is an activity of a heart that is the exercise of its capacity to pump blood, and that activity is very unlikely to produce a blood pumping in the appropriate circumstances (one such circumstance might be that the heart is connected to a functioning circulatory system, etc.), *then that exercise is unsuccessful in at least one respect* even if it manages to somehow succeed in pumping blood.

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13 Turri uses the related language of “manifestation” (but of traits or dispositions) in Turri 2011: 390–391. Although the activities mentioned above are not successful exercises of, e.g., capacities for developing hives and breaking-in-half, the activities may nonetheless be *unsuccessful* exercises of some *other* capacities. For example, my allergic reaction to wool is, perhaps, the *unsuccessful* exercise of my immune system's capacity to manage certain sorts of threats. But it is not a successful manifestation of my disposition to have an allergic reaction to wool. Similarly, if a skilled archer carefully shoots an arrow at a target and misses, her missing the target is the unsuccessful exercise of her capacity to hit the target. It is not the successful exercise of her capacity to miss it.



In addition, it may be a necessary condition on certain exercises of capacities being “done well” in this further respect that the exercises be done in the appropriate *way*.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the exercise of the heart’s capacity to pump blood is not plausibly done well if it pumps blood by some extreme malfunctioning (perhaps the valves contract at odd intervals that *just happen* to stably produce blood pumping). Similarly, the exercise of a vacuum cleaner’s capacity to eliminate dust is intuitively not done well, if it blows dust rather than captures it. And the exercise is not done well even if, by blowing the dust, the activity of the vacuum is likely to eliminate dust.<sup>15</sup> These additional possible sorts of success and failure will come up again a little later in this chapter when I discuss the prospects my positive account has for explaining certain sorts of epistemic warrant. For present purposes, I note them in order to set them aside.

The examples of the rupturing heart and the breaking knife show that not every  $\phi$ -ing is a successful exercise of a capacity to  $\phi$ . However, every successful (in the sense of object-success) exercise of a capacity to  $\phi$  *is* a  $\phi$ -ing. For example, when a skilled archer successfully exercises her capacity to hit the target with respect to the object of the capacity, then that exercise of her capacity *is* a hitting the target. In addition, it is important to notice, given the problem of causal deviance, that when a capacity to  $\phi$  is successfully exercised with respect to the object of the capacity, it does not *merely cause or generate* a token  $\phi$ -ing. Instead, the token  $\phi$ -ing *is* an exercise of that capacity (cf. Turri 2011: 391–392). That is, there is a significant difference between a token target-hitting that is an exercise of a capacity to hit the target and a token target-

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<sup>14</sup> This idea can be found in a more developed way in Plantinga 1993 who discusses it under the name of the “design plan.” I think that Plantinga is clearly onto a real feature of our capacities, but I do not wish to develop an account of this feature here.

<sup>15</sup> Thank you to Mark Greenberg for this example.

hitting that is merely the *causal result* of an exercise of that same capacity.<sup>16</sup> Suppose that an archer exercises her capacity to hit the target carelessly, such that she shoots an arrow at an angle over the target. But suppose that on the arrow's way up it accidentally strikes a bird and falls down directly onto the target. In such a case, the archer's hitting the target is the *causal result* of her exercising her capacity to hit the target, but the hitting of the target *is not* an exercise of the archer's capacity. The fact that successful exercises of capacities to  $\phi$  *are*  $\phi$ -ings, rather than merely *cause*  $\phi$ -ings, will help to rule out certain forms of causal deviance in the following discussion.

I have distinguished capacities from “mere dispositions,” but I do not mean to imply that capacities cannot be *sorts* of dispositions. As Armstrong emphasizes (Armstrong 1973: 52), there are some important similarities between them. For example, both capacities and dispositions are capable of being manifested, and it is possible for an individual to possess a disposition or capacity without manifesting it. Indeed, for all I have said here, capacities may be dispositions with certain aims. In what follows, I would like to remain neutral on what the proper account of capacities ought to be. What is important for present purposes is only that (i) the property of having a capacity is not identical to the property of having a disposition, and that part of the explanation for this fact is that (ii) capacities are essentially teleological. It is essential to being a capacity, unlike to being a disposition, that the capacity aims at its object in the sense above.

These last points are particularly important. One problem, although not the only one, with the causal sustaining theories considered in the last chapter is that they classify certain sorts of neurological or cognitive malfunctioning as believing for reasons. In example (5) from chapter

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<sup>16</sup> Turri makes this helpful point with respect to *traits* in Turri 2011: 392.

three, Ann has a malfunctioning cognitive system that gives her an irresistible compulsion to believe certain things in response to coming to believe other things. But this malfunctioning is compatible with Ann believing for no reasons. The same is true with the brain-lesion example from chapter three (example (6)). These examples show that *part* of what a theory of believing for reasons needs to do is rule out certain sorts of malfunction or breakdown. Appealing to capacities and their exercises provides a way to do this. It is intuitive that certain sorts of malfunction *are incompatible* with being the successful exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons (for related thoughts, see the discussion of purported “epistemological problems” with my positive view in section 5.3). In the following section, I propose an alternative theory of believing for reasons that eschews talk of dispositions and instead appeals *directly* to teleological capacities and therefore to aims.

#### **4.4 The Capacity Account**

The alternative theory that I introduce here is not a straightforward competitor to many causal theories. If we understand the causal theorist to be engaged in a certain sort of radical reductionist project, one that aims to give a reductive account appealing only to causal dispositions, mental states, and causally efficacious facts in the local environment, then the alternative theory (which I will call the “capacity account”) aims at something else. Nonetheless, the capacity account is a naturalistically acceptable and broadly causal theory in the sense of section 4.2. Here is an outline of the alternative theory to be filled in:

**The Capacity Account:** S believes that p for reasons that q iff S successfully exercises his or her capacity to believe for reasons *by* holding the belief that p, employing the reasons that q.

The exercise of the capacity must be “successful” in order to rule out cases where the capacity is exercised but the object of the capacity (viz. believing for reasons) is not achieved. Hence, the relevant success is just the success of achieving the object of the capacity. I take it to be simply obvious that we believe for reasons, that we have a capacity to believe for reasons, and that *in believing for reasons*, we successfully exercise this capacity.

However, the theory as formulated is not very informative. According to the capacity account, when we believe for reasons, our believing is the result of a particular capacity that we possess (the capacity to believe for reasons), and successfully exercising this capacity is necessary and sufficient for believing for reasons. Hence, the capacity account may seem to suffer from a problem that is sometimes called the “dormitive virtue” problem (Choi and Fara 2012, Dennett 1991: Ch. 3). Famously, in the Molière comedy *La Malade Imaginaire*, a medical student must pass an exam during which he is asked why opium makes people sleep. He answers that the reason is that opium possesses a “virtus dormitiva” or a dormitive virtue, and it is in the nature of this virtue to make people sleep. The examiners in the comedy accept this explanation, but it is popularly held that the student's purported explanation is trivial or no explanation at all. Similar to the dormitive virtue account of sedatives, the capacity account seems to give us an explanation of doing a thing in terms of a capacity to do that very thing. According to the account, a subject S's believing for reasons is to be explained *in terms of the exercise of S's capacity to believe for reasons*. And it may be alleged that this purported explanation is also trivial or does not explain. I agree that there is something seemingly inadequate about the

Capacity Account. But what is inadequate about the account is *not* that it is trivial.<sup>17</sup>

One reason we might think that the purported explanation is trivial is because it is explanatorily circular.<sup>18</sup> That is, the notion of *believing for reasons* appears in both its explanans and explanandum. However, this circularity by itself does not show the explanation to be trivial. It doesn't show this, at least, if triviality is taken to entail that the explanation is uninformative. This is because it does not follow from the proposition that one *does*  $\phi$ , that one has a capacity to do  $\phi$  or that in doing  $\phi$  one has thereby exercised it (Michon 2007: 134). In the previous section, I sketched out a case where a heart does something (it ruptures) *without* having a capacity to do it, and I take it that many failures, malfunctions, and accidents are of this sort. We do not exercise a capacity to misremember when misremembering someone's name, and a person who wins the lottery does not exercise a capacity to win it. Hence, when we learn that an action or state is the result of the exercise of a capacity, we learn something substantial (Cf. Davidson 1963: 696).

Nonetheless, I agree that the capacity account does not seem to provide a very satisfying answer to the question “What is believing for reasons?” Most importantly, the capacity account might seem to fail in explaining the difference between merely believing two separate things and believing one on the basis of the other. For what could such an explanation look like on the capacity account, but that in the one case (and not the other) we have successfully exercised our capacity to believe for reasons? This seems vacuous. By analogy, suppose that we wished to know what it is to love someone rather than merely desire them: it would not be much of an

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17 Related points can be found in Michon 2007. For a different sort of theory emphasizing *abilities*, see Eric Marcus's *Rational Causation* (Marcus 2012).

18 I take this to be one popular understanding of the case. Dennett hints at a charge of vacuity, for instance, in *Consciousness Explained* (Ch. 3), although he does not seem to wholly endorse it (Dennett 1991: 386).

answer to this question to say that when we love someone, we successfully exercise our capacity for love.

The capacity account can be made explanatory, however, if we give an informative account of the capacity to believe for reasons. There are several ways we might go about this. For example, we might try to give an account of capacities in general and then spell out what makes a capacity a capacity-*to-X*. Alternatively, we might try to give a compositional analysis of the capacity to believe for reasons: i.e. it may be that the capacity is composed out of other capacities, just as a capacity to tie one's shoes is arguably composed out of the capacity to pull laces, the capacity to loop laces, the capacity to move one's fingers in such-and-such a way, and so on.<sup>19</sup> However, we do not need to give a general theory of capacities or a compositional analysis in order to make the capacity account explanatory. Instead, we can provide a characterization of the capacity to believe for reasons in terms of a partial characterization of its object (i.e. a characterization of what it does) and its *function*:

**The capacity to believe for reasons** is (constitutively) the capacity to causally sustain one belief with another belief(s) that functions to (has the function to) make the belief sensitive to the (sufficient) normative reasons there are to hold it.<sup>20</sup>

Just as the biological capacity to sweat is constituted by a certain bodily activity (liquid being produced by sweat glands) and *what it functions to do* (cool down the body), the psychological

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19 Anthony P. Aktinson describes this sort of explanatory approach in cognitive psychology in his unpublished "Wholes and Their Parts in Cognitive Psychology: Systems, Subsystems, and Persons." I get the present helpful example from Andrew Hsu.

20 My account here is heavily influenced by the characterization of our perceptual competences in Burge 2003. Jonathan Kvanvig has also sketched out a quick proposal for a sort of "proper functioning" account of the basing relation in his "Plantinga's Proper Function Account of Warrant" Kvanvig 1996. Kvanvig does not develop this proposal past a few suggestive sentences.

capacity to believe for reasons is also partly constituted by its function. In particular, the capacity to believe for reasons is—I claim—constituted by a causal activity (that is, one belief causally sustaining another belief) and *what it functions to do* (make beliefs sensitive to reasons). In addition, we can now say what it means in the capacity account for a subject to exercise her capacity to believe for reasons by “employing” a reason. A reason is “employed” by a subject just in case it causally sustains the subject's belief.

The function of a capacity is not the same as what I have earlier called the “object” of a capacity. The object of the capacity to sweat is *sweating*, but the function of the capacity to sweat is to cool down the body. It is possible for an exercise of a capacity to succeed in achieving the object of the capacity while failing to meet the function of the capacity. For example, it is possible for the exercise of the capacity to sweat to produce *sweat* while failing to cool down the body, just as it is possible to cool down the body without sweating.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, it is possible for the exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons to succeed in producing *a belief held for reasons* while nonetheless failing to make that belief sensitive to the normative reasons there are to hold it (e.g. because the belief is held for irrational reasons).

According to the capacity account, the capacity to believe for reasons is partially constituted by the function of making beliefs sensitive to the sufficient normative reasons that support them. What is sensitivity to reasons? There is a lot that could be said about sensitivity, but I want to just give an overview of it here. I take sensitivity to reasons to consist in the following: if the reasons to hold a belief *cease to be or are not* (sufficient) reasons to hold it, then

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21 Cf. Sosa 2007: 22-23 on performances.

the subject will give up the belief.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the function of believing for reasons is to counterfactually link certain beliefs to the normative reasons that support them, such that if there are no sufficient normative reasons to hold a belief, then the belief will be revised or rejected. This means that if the subject believes that *p* on the basis of a belief that *q*, and there are no sufficient *normative* reasons that *q* to believe that *p*, then that exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons will—with respect to the function of believing for reasons—have failed.

#### 4.5 Applying the Capacity Account

If we adopt the capacity account, then we can explain the difference between, on the one hand, merely believing that *p* and believing that *q* and, on the other, *believing that p for the reason that q*, and we can do so in a way that is informative. The explanation will go like this: in the one case (but not the other) we will have exercised a capacity that (i) causally sustains the belief that *p* with the belief that *q* and (ii) which has the function of making the belief that *p* sensitive to the normative reasons that there are to hold it. It will be helpful to illustrate the point with an example:

- (1) Consider two individuals, Rhonda and Pim, both of whom believe that there is a fire on a nearby mountain, and both of whom believe there is smoke billowing from the mountain. However, although Rhonda believes that there is a fire on the mountain *for the*

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22 This account of sensitivity is similar to, and influenced by, Evans' "dispositional" account of the basing relation, which is itself a modification of what he calls the "counterfactual" approach (Evans 2013). I discuss Evans' account in more detail in 4.8. Notice that it is possible for an individual exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons to be done well (and so succeed in that sense) without fulfilling the function of the capacity.



*reason* that there is smoke billowing from the mountain, Pim does not believe it for this reason. Pim believes that there is a fire on the mountain because his belief that there is smoke billowing from the mountain causes him to be extremely agitated, and his agitation causes him to trip and fall, thereby seeing the flames for the first time.

The capacity account explains the fact that Rhonda believes for the reason that there is smoke on the mountain, but Pim does not believe for that reason. The explanation is that Rhonda, but not Pim, has a belief which is causally sustained by her (further) belief that there is smoke on the mountain, and this causal relation is the exercise of a capacity that has the function of making beliefs sensitive to normative reasons. Indeed, the exercise of Rhonda's capacity apparently *meets* its function. It succeeds, that is, in achieving its object and its function. Pim's belief, on the other hand, is not produced by a capacity that is subject to the same sorts of successes. Indeed, the causal chain that results in and sustains his belief (a chain of causes involving his extreme agitation) is not *itself* an exercise of a capacity at all.

The capacity account is also capable of handling example (5) from chapter three:

(2) Ann has a malfunctioning cognitive system and finds herself with a compulsion (and so is disposed) to believe that people are her friends so long as she believes something bad about them. Suppose, further, that via this strange compulsion, her beliefs about the badness of others both *cause* and *sustain* her beliefs attributing friendship to them. Ann agonizes about her compulsion, and sincerely denounces it, but is helpless to change it. One day, she comes to believe that her boss Prabha is rude, which causes her to believe that Prabha is her friend, and her former belief causally sustains her latter.

According to the Capacity Account, Ann does not believe that Prabha is her friend for the reason that she is rude, because *in believing that*, she does not exercise a capacity that has the function of making beliefs sensitive to the normative reasons there are to hold them. That her belief that Prabha is rude causally sustains her belief that Prabha is her friend is not any sort of *success*, and importantly the causal sustaining is not the successful *exercise* (in the sense of object-success) of any of Ann's capacities. Indeed, the cognitive malfunctioning involved suggests that *no capacity* (apart from the bare capacity to believe) is being exercised in her believing that Prabha is her friend.

I want to motivate the idea that it is a necessary condition for believing for reasons that it have a certain function. Consider, importantly, that it is not sufficient for a capacity to be a *capacity to believe for reasons* that it merely be a capacity to causally sustain one belief with another. To see this, let us reconsider example (2), but let us imagine that Ann learns how to inculcate her compulsive disposition for her own purposes and can activate it voluntarily. Perhaps she perversely likes believing bad people are her friends (it helps her stay positive) and truly surmises that inculcating the relevant disposition in herself will allow her to fulfill this desire.<sup>23</sup> In such a case, I think we should say, especially since this disposition is inculcated for a specific purpose and voluntarily activated, that Ann has a *capacity* to causally sustain one belief with another belief. But the believing that is the result of the exercise of this capacity would not be believing for reasons. Importantly, the capacity does not have the appropriate function.<sup>24</sup>

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23 This capacity might be something like a capacity for wishful thinking. The example can be revised if necessary, so that the subject is not aware of the self-deception, along the lines put forward in Bennett 1990.

24 Cf. Mark Murphy 2013. Mark Greenberg has a quite useful discussion of constitutive norms (where he distinguishes functions from other sorts of aims) in Greenberg 2010: 62-63. I do not mean to take a stand on

Ann's capacity would not thereby have succeeded if it sustained beliefs in a way that was sensitive to the normative reasons, whereas the capacity to believe for reasons would constitutively have succeeded.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the Capacity Account allows us to give a general diagnosis of the problem of deviant causation. A causal relation is deviant just when it fails to be the exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons. One salient way that a relation can fail to be the exercise of this capacity is by failing to be the expression of any capacity whatsoever. This is what goes wrong in the examples of deviant causation in chapter three. However, another salient way that a causal relation can fail to be the exercise of the relevant capacity is by being the exercise of *another* incompatible capacity. The re-imagined example of Ann (discussed in the paragraph immediately above) is such a case. The causal relation between Ann's beliefs is the expression of some capacity but—due to a difference in constitutive function—not the correct one.

#### 4.6 The Dispositional Account

It will be useful to compare the Capacity Account with a recent non-causal theory of the basing relation. Ian Evans calls his theory the “Dispositional Theory” (DT) and formulates it as follows:

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whether what I am calling the “function” of the capacity is properly a function as opposed to something else.

25 My claim is not that treating the capacity to believe for reasons as a mere causal capacity is inconsistent with holding that particular beliefs held for reasons can be good. I think it is possible for a belief to be good *qua belief* (because it is true, for example) no matter what capacity produces or sustains it. Rather, I am thinking of a sort of success that is (i) properly attributed to the capacity itself and (ii) is taken to be constitutive of that capacity. My present claim is that not every causal capacity of the appropriate sort—that is, not every capacity to causally sustain one belief with another belief—is a capacity that would be successful *qua* capacity in producing a belief that was sensitive to the normative reasons. The success here is success *qua function of a member of the relevant kind*. I am indebted to Mark Greenberg for this helpful way of understanding this feature of certain capacities.

**DT:** *S*'s belief that *p* is based on *m* iff *S* is disposed to revise her belief that *p* when she loses *m* (Evans 2013: 2952).

*where:* *S* is disposed to revise her belief that *p* when she loses *m* iff her *belief revision system* is disposed to produce a change in *p* as output when given a loss of *m* as input (Evans 2013: 2953).

The theory as formulated may seem to fall victim to an analogue of the problem of deviant causation. This is because the subject's disposition to revise her belief may be a disposition to change her belief via a process of the wrong sort. Evans sketches an example like this that is supposed to count against the (generic) causal sustaining theorist:

(3) Suppose that Ian is afflicted by a brain tumor that “establishes a strange neurological connection between [his] belief that [he] was born in Colorado and [his] belief that Lynn Hill was the first person to free climb the Nose route of El Capitan” (Evans 2013: 2953). Suppose, in particular, that this tumor makes the former belief causally sustain the latter belief, such that if Ian loses his Colorado belief then he would lose his Lynn Hill belief. However, Ian does not believe that Lynn Hill was the first person to free climb the Nose route of El Capitan *for the reason that* he (Ian) was born in Colorado (Evans 2013: 2949).

Evans' example explicitly targets the causal theorist. However, example (10) may also seem to threaten the Dispositional Theory, because the subject in the example both (a) has the disposition to revise his Lynn Hill belief, given the loss of his Colorado belief, yet (b) does not hold his Lynn Hill belief on the basis of his Colorado belief. Evans tries to handle the example by appealing to the requirement in the DT that the relevant disposition be a disposition *of the belief*

*revision system:*

Intuitively, my Lynn Hill belief need not be based on my Colorado belief, even though the latter sustains the former and both are mental states. DT captures this intuition. For in this case, the tumor establishes only a wayward neurological connection between my Lynn Hill belief and my Colorado belief. But this has nothing to do with the dispositions of my revision system: if I were to lose the tumor, the resulting change in my Lynn Hill belief would not be an output of the revision process. So: I am not disposed to revise my Lynn Hill belief upon the loss of my Colorado belief (Evans 2013: 2953–4).

However, Evans' response in this passage fails to directly address the problem. This is because it is unclear whether or why we ought to grant that the belief-revision system in example (10) fails to have the relevant disposition. The fact that the tumor establishes a “strange neurological connection” does not show that the belief-revision system lacks the disposition, since the strange neurological connection may affect the dispositions of that system. Similarly, the fact that the belief-revision system would not make the transition without the existence of the tumor does not show that the belief-revision system lacks the disposition to make that transition, since the presence of the tumor may—importantly—give the system the disposition to produce the transition via some tumor-induced breakdown.<sup>26</sup> But a subject who changes his belief that p, given the loss of his belief that q *only because he has experienced some tumor-related breakdown or neurological malfunction*, is not plausibly exercising his capacity to believe for

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<sup>26</sup> It may be useful to think of an analogy with the heart, which can be disposed to produce blood circulation *not* by exercising its capacity to pump blood, but rather by some lucky break-down.

reasons, and so does not believe that  $p$  for the reason that  $q$ , even if the disposition to malfunction can be attributed to a cognitive system that revises beliefs.<sup>27</sup>

Although Evans does not directly address the problem in the quoted passage, I think that he does have the resources to handle the example. He writes as though the issue is whether or not we should attribute the relevant disposition to the appropriate system. But it seems to me that the issue is really whether the disposition we attribute to the system is a disposition to *revise* the relevant beliefs, rather than merely produce (perhaps via breakdown or malfunction) changes in beliefs. A few paragraphs before the quoted section above, Evans gives a brief characterization of “revision”:

We then say that a belief that  $p$  was revised if it was lost (or weakened) as the result of the proper functioning of this [i.e. a belief-revision] process. When this process functions properly, it takes a change in mental state as input and produces a change in belief as output (Evans 2013: 2953).

According to one reading of this passage, Evans requires that a belief revision *be the (“proper”) functioning of the belief revision system*.<sup>28</sup> If this is what Evans intends when he writes about the system's disposition to “produce a change,” then he has a way of avoiding the earlier worries about deviance. The tumor might contribute to the belief-revision system's dispositions, but these

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27 I do not think Evans can claim that if the tumor affects his belief-revision system, *then* he believes for reasons. This is because it is possible for a tumor to so affect the belief-revision system that the relevant disposition will be a disposition to “produce” a change in belief given some input only via some breakdown or malfunction. And I take this sort of disposition to be compatible with believing for *no reason*.

28 I am ignoring the fact that—strictly speaking—the condition specified is only a *sufficient* condition. I am (relatedly) ignoring the fact the requirement that the revision be the *proper* functioning of the system is too strict, at least if proper functioning entails that the system is functioning well or functioning as it ought. This is because it is possible to believe for poor reasons, and in such cases, presumably the belief-revision system is not well-functioning.

dispositions would not after all be dispositions to function properly, and therefore, would not be dispositions to revise (rather than simply change) the belief in question.

However, even if Evans intends to invoke functioning here, his theory does not give a sufficient condition on believing for reasons. There are at least two problems with the Dispositional Theory: (i) not every disposition of a belief-revision system to make the relevant change in belief tracks the appropriate directionality of believing for reasons; (ii) relatedly, the notion of a “belief-revision system” is too broad to rule out everything that ought to be ruled out.

To see what I mean by the “appropriate directionality” of believing for reasons, consider the following example:

(4) Suppose that Wei lives in Indianapolis and that her brother Jun lives in Santa Barbara. She has a call planned with her brother for Saturday evening on his landline, but he does not pick up the phone. Wei calls her friend, who lives nearby, and asks her to check up on Jun. Specifically, she asks her friend to check if she can see Jun from the illuminated windows. The friend approaches the house and notices that all of the lights are out. She promptly calls Wei and gives her an update on the situation.

Let us stipulate that before Wei hears from her friend, she believes the following propositions:

1. My brother is home [believes with high confidence]
2. If my brother is home, then the lights are on in his house [believes with high confidence]
3. The lights are on in his house [*inferring it directly* from (1, 2) and believes with high

confidence]

Now suppose that after hearing from her friend, Wei comes to lose her belief (3) that the lights are on in Jun's house. Trusting that her brother is nonetheless home, Wei comes to stop believing the conditional proposition (2), and this change in belief is something that she is disposed to do.<sup>29</sup>

In example (4), it is intuitive that Wei believes that the lights on are in Jun's house solely on the basis of her belief *that her brother is home* and her belief *that if her brother is home, then the lights are on in his house*. In particular, Wei does not believe the conditional proposition that *if her brother is home, then the lights are on in his house for the reason that the lights are on in his house*. However, the DT predicts that she holds the conditional belief for that reason. Her belief-revision system is apparently disposed to revise the former belief, given the loss of the latter, and this revision apparently counts as the proper-functioning of the system.

Evans could try to avoid the problem by claiming that the relevant disposition isn't a disposition of the belief revision system. But this seems unlikely, given the broad way Evans has characterized the system. Example (4) plausibly involves the operation of *some system*—the revision is apparently part of the minimal functioning of Wei's cognitive systems—and whatever system is involved is responsible for at least certain sorts of belief revision. If the system involved is *not* the belief-revision system, then we are owed some account of what distinguishes it from such a system.

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<sup>29</sup> This example is a relative to a counterexample against the so-called “counterfactual theory” of the basing relation given by Joseph Tolliver (Tolliver 1981) as discussed in Turri 2011.



This point is closely related to the second, more general, problem with the theory.<sup>30</sup> In particular, the DT requires only that the relevant dispositions be of “the belief-revision system,” but there may be many different belief-revision systems, and not all of them are relevant to believing for reasons. For example, some individuals may have wishful-thinking systems that revise beliefs in response to further beliefs about what it would be practically useful to stop believing. However, the dispositions of such wishful-thinking systems seem unrelated to the reasons for which an individual believes (Hieronymi 2006). Wishful-thinking systems are *not* the sort of things that function to be sensitive to the normative reasons to hold the belief (indeed, they would be defective if they were so sensitive). But the capacity to believe for reasons constitutively functions to be sensitive to the normative reasons to hold beliefs.

The Capacity Account can avoid the problems faced by Evans' Dispositional Theory. The Capacity Account handles the second difficulty because it requires that whatever cognitive capacity is responsible for believing for reasons have the function of being sensitive to the normative reasons. The dispositions of a wishful-thinking system do not have (or realize a capacity with) this function. Indeed, failing to have this function is part of what makes it a *wishful-thinking system*. The Capacity Account can also handle the first difficulty by holding that Wei's conditional belief (2) that if her brother is home, then the lights are on in his house, is not causally sustained by her belief (3) that the lights are on in his house. This second response is more contentious because it might be alleged (as discussed in Evans 2013: 2955) that wherever one finds a disposition of this sort, one will also find sustaining causation. I agree with Evans that this view is incorrect, although the issue falls outside of the scope of this dissertation.

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30 I would like to thank Gregory Antill for suggesting that I use this kind of example of a belief-revision process.

## 4.7 Additional Considerations

I would like to close this chapter by briefly discussing several additional considerations that support the capacity account. I argued in the first two chapters of this dissertation that believing for reasons has the following features: (i) it meets the Basic Conception (section 1.2); (ii) it involves “taking” a consideration to count in favor of believing (section 2.8); and (iii) it is something done by sophisticated epistemic subjects as well as unsophisticated adults and young children (section 1.9). An additional reason to accept the capacity account is that it promises to help explain why and how the basing relation has these features. The following discussion is promissory, but I have included it here in order to give the reader a rough picture of how the account might be applied.

Firstly, the Basic Conception requires that the basing relation meet two conditions: (i) the basing reasons must be explanatory reasons, and (ii) the basing relation must play a role in explaining warrant transmission between beliefs. Condition (i) is clearly explicable on the capacity account. A token activity of believing for reasons is the successful exercise of a capacity to causally sustain one belief by employing some other belief(s) for the purpose of sensitivity to the normative reasons. It follows that a successful exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons yields a causal sustaining relation between the belief and some basing reason(s). And since causal sustainers are explanatory (that is, causes or facts about causes are one kind of reason why), then basing reasons are explanatory.

A serious treatment of the epistemic component (condition (ii)) of the Basic Conception would require significantly more attention than I can give it here. However, I want to at least gesture at the *sort* of account of warrant transmission that the capacity account might be able to

provide. In outline, the present conception of believing for reasons in terms of capacities and functions naturally suggests a treatment of warrant transmission according to which warrant is transmitted between beliefs through the *well-functioning* of the capacity to believe for reasons (Cf. Plantinga 1993, Burge 2003). In particular, the capacity to believe for reasons plays a role in explaining warrant transmission between beliefs because a belief is *prima facie* warranted (putting aside possible defeaters) just when it is the appropriate product of a warranted exercise of an epistemic capacity. And an exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons is *warranted* just when the exercise is *done well* with respect to the epistemic aims of the capacity.

Of course, there is much more that needs to be said about the conditions under which the exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons is well-functioning or is “done well,” and the plausibility of this account of warrant transmission will depend on what we say about this. However, it is important that the present conception of the basing relation is at least *compatible* with such an account of warrant transmission, and more interestingly, I think that it suggests a proper-functioning account.<sup>31</sup> An account of believing for reasons that takes it to be constituted partly by aims and functions is exactly what a proper-function account of warrant might require.

Secondly, exercising the capacity to believe for a reason entails taking a consideration (or fact, reason, etc.) to count in favor of believing. I claim in section 2.9 that this sort of “taking” does not involve *believing* that the consideration is a normative reason (or evidence) to believe. Instead, I claim that the phenomenon of believing for reasons *is itself* a kind of “taking” something to be a reason. Understanding the capacity to believe for reasons as a capacity that is aimed at sensitivity to the normative reasons helps us to see how this can be the case.

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31 Korcz discusses the ways in which different theories of the basing relation might relate different theories of justification or warrant in Korcz 2015.

Roughly, when we employ a belief that q to causally sustain another belief that p as part of the exercise of a capacity that functions to make the belief that p sensitive to the normative reasons, then we are using the belief that q in a way that *is supposed to* correspond to (or be identical to) a normative reason to believe that p. In other words, it is part of the *way* that the capacity to believe for reasons is supposed to function that the causal-sustainers correspond to (or are identical to) the normative reasons to believe. And employing a belief in a way that is supposed to correspond to the normative reasons for the subject to believe *just is a way for the subject to “take” a consideration to be a normative reason to believe.*<sup>32</sup>

Third, finally, the Capacity Account is compatible with the fact that children and unsophisticated adults can believe for reasons. Exercising a causal-sustaining capacity of this sort does not require that one have any epistemic concepts or any epistemic sophistication. The function of the capacity to believe for reasons, like the function of the heart to pump blood, does not require that the individual with the capacity be able to articulate this function.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

I have argued that it is possible to give a naturalistically acceptable, broadly causal theory of believing for reasons that avoids the problem of deviant causation. We can avoid the problem by appealing to resources that most causal theorists have neglected: namely, psychological capacities, and therefore, to aims, successes, and functions. I have argued that believing for

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32 Audi writes: “[...] when S believes p for a reason, r, he believes p in light of r, not merely because of it, and that he must in some way see r as supporting p” (Audi 1993: 241). I think that one way of “seeing” r as supporting p is simply to use r (or the belief that r) in a way that aims at correspondence with the reasons.

reasons is the exercise of a capacity to causally sustain one belief with another belief, such that the capacity functions to make beliefs sensitive to the normative reasons there are to hold them. I have used this theory to diagnose what goes wrong with the Dispositional Theory developed by Evans. And I have argued that the Capacity Account respects both the Basic Conception and some important features of the phenomenon of believing for reasons. In the following chapter, I consider a series of potential objections to the Capacity Account.

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## Chapter Five: Objections and Clarifications

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with potential objections to the capacity account. Addressing these objections requires clarifying the aim and scope of the account. As part of this task, I will indicate places where the account might be extended, or where it might have consequences for related topics such as, for example, the study of normative epistemic reasons.

The objections discussed below fall into the following five categories. First, there are objections regarding the sufficiency of the account. These objections allege that the capacity account falls victim to an analogue of the problem of causal deviance. Second, there are questions concerning the overall structure of the account. For instance, it may be claimed that by appealing directly to successful exercises of capacities, the account is uninformative or objectionable circular. Third, there are questions concerning the extent to which the capacity account is naturalistically acceptable, given that it appeals to teleological capacities and functions. Fourth, there are questions concerning the scope of the account. It may be alleged that the capacity account is incorrect or at least inferior to other available causal theories (such as the CMA) because it does not apply to perception, memory, testimony, etc. Fifth, it may be alleged that our capacity to believe for reasons does not function to be sensitive to the normative reasons, but rather serves some other purpose. Hence, it may be claimed, the Capacity Account has misidentified the capacity at issue.

### 5.2 Sufficiency

I take the capacity account to give us a causal theory of the basing relation. This is



because it follows from the account that the basing relation is a certain sort of causal relation (viz. one that plays a particular role in the successful exercise of a certain capacity), and it uses resources that are naturalistically acceptable.<sup>1</sup>

It has been suggested to me that the capacity account, like causal theories in general, also falls victim to the problem of causal deviance. For instance, it has been proposed to me that the following sort of case presents a problem for the capacity account:<sup>2</sup>

(1) Ade has the capacity to causally sustain one belief employing another belief, and his capacity has the *function* to make beliefs sensitive to reasons, but his capacity works in the following way: Ade holds a belief, this belief sustains his extreme anxiety, and this episode of extreme anxiety sustains his belief in something else.

Example (1) may appear worrisome, but it does not succeed as a counterexample. If Ade's extreme anxiety is stipulated to be part of the exercise of a capacity with an appropriate function, i.e. to make his belief sensitive to the reasons there are to hold it, and isn't merely accidentally sustaining his belief, then I think we have no reason to deny that his believing is believing for reasons. It is, rather, an *unusual* sort of believing for reasons, because it employs a non-standard causal mechanism. But I see no reason to think that the causal mechanism involved in believing for reasons needs to look a particular way. For example, it may be possible to give people who have been severely brain-damaged an artificial capacity to believe for reasons, and I see no reason why this capacity should not use unusual resources like episodes of extreme anxiety in

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1 I argue that the resources the Capacity Account employs are naturalistically acceptable in section 5.3.

2 A version of this example was suggested to me by Katrina Elliott.

functioning.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, thinking of the basing relation in terms of capacities suggests that there may be *many* causal paths by which subjects could believe for reasons, and what might count as a deviant causal relation for normal humans, might not count as deviant for something (or someone) else. I take this to be a reason to reject the modifications to the causal theory (discussed in chapter three) that require the basing relation to be solely “mental” or “direct.”

Another alleged counterexample is one in which the exercise of the capacity involves an intermediate irrational sustaining belief:

(2) Alexander has the capacity to sustain one belief with another belief with the function of sensitivity to the normative reasons. However, his capacity works in the following way: whenever Alexander exercises this capacity on any belief that *p*, employing a belief that *q*, the belief that *q* sustains his contradictory and unrelated belief that (*w* and not-*w*), and this contradictory belief in turn sustains his belief that *p*.<sup>4</sup>

In example (2), it appears to follow from the capacity account that Alexander believes that *p* for the reason that *q* and for the reason that (*w* and not-*w*).<sup>5</sup> But it has been suggested to me that this is an unintuitive result. Alexander does not seem to believe that *p* for the reason that (*w* and not-*w*), and he does not seem to believe that *p* for the reason that *q*.

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3 I owe this response to Peacocke 1979: 133, who discusses a similar sort of example (in this case, involving a causal relation that jumps outside of the body), and responds to it in roughly the same way.

4 I get this example to AJ Julius, although I am not certain it has the form that he originally intended. Any mistakes here are my own. For a somewhat similar example, see McCain 2012: 373.

5 We might think this on the grounds that the relation between his belief that *p* and his belief that (*w* and not-*w*) is the successful exercise of a causal sustaining capacity with the function of sensitivity to the normative reasons.

I think that Alexander believes for the reason that  $q$ , but he does not believe for the reason that  $(w \text{ and not-}w)$ . One part of the correct response to example (2) is the same as for example (1). If we allow that the relevant capacity is successfully exercised by Alexander, then we have no reason to deny that he believes that  $p$  for the reason that  $q$ . Instead, what the example shows is that the exercises of some token capacities to believe for reasons require (for the exercise of the token capacity) some further irrational believing. But I think this is an acceptable consequence of the capacity account. If the opponent of the account wants to deny the possibility of a token capacity to believe for reasons whose exercise requires such irrational believing, then some argument must be given.

I agree that Alexander does not believe that  $p$  for the reason that  $(w \text{ and not-}w)$ . But this fact is compatible with the capacity account. The causal sustaining of Alexander's belief that  $p$  by his belief that  $(w \text{ and not-}w)$  is *not itself* the successful exercise of Alexander's capacity to believe for reasons.<sup>6</sup> Not every state or activity in which one belief causally sustains another belief that is a *part* of the successful exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons is *itself* the successful exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons. Compare, for example, the exercise of the archer's capacity to hit the target: part of successfully exercising this capacity may involve successfully exercising the archer's capacity to aim the arrow, but aiming the arrow is *not itself* the same as successfully exercising the capacity to hit the target.<sup>7</sup>

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6 Given the details of the example case, the component sustaining relations *cannot* be the exercise of Alexander's capacity to believe for reasons. This is because any successful exercise of Alexander's capacity to believe for reasons requires an intermediate sustaining belief of the form  $(w \text{ and not-}w)$ . Hence, if Alexander believes that  $p$  for the reason that  $(w \text{ and not-}w)$ , then he must hold a further belief of the form  $(x \text{ and not-}x)$ , and this belief must be an intermediate sustainer between his belief that  $(w \text{ and not-}w)$  and his belief that  $p$ . But, according to the example, Alexander does not hold such a belief.

7 Turri 2011: 392 makes a related point that for a causal chain to manifest a trait, it is not sufficient that some

### 5.3 The Structure of the Account

There are several complaints that a critic might raise about the structure of the overall account. The critic may complain as follows: “the original problem was to spell out the nature of believing for reasons. We wanted to know the nature of the relationship between a *reason* and a *belief* such that one *believes for that very reason*. But you have simply replaced the problem of explaining the nature of the basing relation with explaining the nature of the exercise of the capacity. And this is equally as mysterious.” There are three directions in which the opponent of the capacity account may wish to press this point:

- (i) Capacities and their exercises are more mysterious than believing for reasons, and so should not appear in an explanatory account of the phenomenon.
- (ii) The capacity account of believing is uninformative or question-begging because it simply assumes that some causal relations are the exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons.
- (iii) The capacity account is objectionably difficult to assess because it does not give us the resources necessary to identify exercises of specific capacities.

The first objection expresses—I think—a natural sentiment. It is good to have explanations whose explanans are better understood than the explanandums. However, it is not necessary to being an explanation, or even necessary to being a *good explanation*, that the explanans be less “mysterious” or better understood than the explanandum (Cf. Plantinga 1993: 5).<sup>8</sup> Of course,

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proper part of the chain manifest that trait. The causal chain *itself* needs to be the manifestation.

8 Terence Parsons has pointed out to me in conversation that the paradigms of successful explanations, the physical sciences, do not appear to always fit this pattern. For instance, the fundamental powers that are used to explain physical interactions are not themselves better understood, at least in one ordinary sense of “understood,”

there are contexts in which an explanation ought to make a phenomenon less mysterious. This is plausibly the purpose of explanations in architecture (e.g. explaining why the tower is that height) and in many other ordinary contexts. However, some explanations, let us call them “metaphysical” explanations, are successful when the explanans are metaphysically more fundamental than the explanandum, whether or not the explanans are better understood. The present account of believing for reasons is this sort of explanation. Indeed, the explanation given here is, at least to this extent, similar to metaphysical accounts in general (e.g. accounts of mental states or mental content in terms of their functional role, accounts of epistemic warrant in terms of evidence, etc.).<sup>9</sup>

The second objection is more worrisome. The main difficulty facing the causal-sustaining theories discussed in chapter three is that they cannot explain the difference between the appropriate causal sustaining relations (the ones that are sufficient for believing for reasons) and the deviant ones. One way to avoid this difficulty is to claim that the causal sustaining relations that are sufficient for believing for reasons are ones that are “non-deviant.”<sup>10</sup> One complaint sometimes raised against this approach (Owens 1998: 157) is that it assumes exactly what must be argued. The approach holds that believing for reasons is to believe as-the-result-of a non-deviant causal sustaining relation. But what is meant by “non-deviant causal sustaining relation” if not the sort of causal sustaining relation that, when it obtains between two beliefs, is *sufficient* for believing for reasons? Yet absent additional argument, we have no reason to think that there

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than the phenomena they are used to explain.

9 Ricki Bliss and Kelly Trogon 2014 mention, as an example of metaphysical grounding, the putative fact (according to Plato) that an action is lovable by the gods in virtue of being pious. I do not think that piety is better understood than “being lovable by the gods,” but the account does seem to provide an explanation.

10 Turri suggests that such a theory may be acceptable in Turri 2011.

is any sort of causal-sustaining relation that is sufficient for believing for reasons. In addition, an account in terms of “non-deviance” is not informative: What *sort* of causal-sustaining relation is non-deviant and so sufficient for believing for reasons?

It may be alleged that a similar problem affects the capacity account. The capacity account similarly holds that some token activities of causal-sustaining are the successful exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons. But it may seem that we have no theory of what makes a particular causal-sustaining activity the *successful exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons* rather than *merely causal*. Hence, the opponent may complain that the capacity account also assumes what it needs to argue: that some causal sustaining activities are the successful exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons. There are two aspects to this complaint. The first aspect of the complaint is that the capacity account “assumes what needs to be argued.” The second aspect of the complaint is that the account is uninformative. I argue below that both aspects of the complaint are incorrect.

Regarding the first aspect of the complaint, it is true that we have no *account* of what makes a token causal activity the successful exercise of the capacity. But this does not mean that the Capacity Account assumes what it needs to argue. I agree that the account would be making an unwarranted assumption, for instance, if it held *only* that believing for reasons is a causal activity that is constitutively the successful exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons. But the capacity account does not claim this. Instead, the capacity account holds as a *first* approximation that a token activity of believing for reasons is constitutively the successful exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons. But notice, first, that this claim is not question-begging with respect to the non-causalist, for the claim says nothing about *causes*; and second, this approximation is only a first approximation. It is further explicated in terms that do not

involve conditions analogous to “non-deviance.” The capacity to believe for reasons is not, that is, held to be a capacity to non-deviantly cause one belief by employing another belief. Rather, the capacity to believe for reasons is a capacity to causally sustain one belief, employing another belief or beliefs, for the purpose of making the sustained belief sensitive to the normative reasons there are for the individual to believe it. It follows that *whenever* a token causal-sustaining activity is the successful exercise of this capacity, then it is a token activity of believing for reasons. But nothing about this assumes what needs to be argued.

Regarding the second aspect of the complaint (i.e. the charge of uninformativeness), once we have given an independent characterization of the capacity to believe for reasons, the capacity account is not plausibly uninformative. It is informative, for example, to learn that believing for reasons involves a causal sustaining relation, and that it is constitutively the exercise of a capacity that has a certain function. Indeed, as far as *informativeness* goes, I argue briefly in section 4.4 that even the bare Capacity Account—that is, the account without the further specification of the nature of the capacity—is at least somewhat informative, because not all mental phenomena, nor all “doings,” are the exercise of capacities.

Of course, a further question might always arise: What makes a token causal relation the exercise of a capacity of the appropriate sort? This question may seem particularly pressing to causal theorists who think that believing for reasons needs to be explained using a certain set of resources. But this concern is much broader than the questions with which we started. In addition, it is worth noting that nothing about this concern suggests (as the problem of deviant causation may have suggested)<sup>11</sup> that believing for reasons cannot be at root a natural, causal

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<sup>11</sup> Valaris (unpublished) explicitly argues from the failure of causal theories of *inference* to solve the problem of

relation. That is, there is nothing about an activity or state or event  $x$  being the exercise of a capacity that disqualifies  $x$  from being part of the natural, causal order. There are many capacities that have objects that are causal. When a heart pumps blood by the exercise of its capacity to do so, it is doing something different than if did so via external interference, or by *mere accident*, or by certain sorts of malfunctioning. But the “pumping of blood”—the thing that the heart does in successfully exercising its capacity—falls within any plausible understanding of the natural causal order. I discuss this issue with a special focus on capacities and functions in more detail in section 5.4.

The third objection claims that the capacity account has epistemological problems. In particular, the capacity account has nothing to say about what criteria we ought to use to identify *when* a certain capacity is exercised. The opponent of the capacity account may hold that this is a problem because if we do not have a way of identifying exercises of capacities, then it will be objectionably difficult to generate potential counterexamples. The opponent may worry that the capacity account seems correct only because it is so difficult to know what sort of example could count against it.<sup>12</sup> Importantly, the objection is *not* that the capacity account needs to be able to provide an account of how to identify exercises of capacities in order to be correct. The opponent can agree with the point that epistemology and metaphysics can come apart and agree that it is possible to give a theory of the latter without a theory of the former. Rather, the objection is that the present account is objectionably difficult to *assess* because the theory does not offer a guide to identifying exercises of the capacities (or at least the relevant capacity). And this difficulty in

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deviant causation to a non-causalist theory of inference. Evans 2013 makes the same argumentative move with respect to believing for reasons, and a similar strategy can be found in Owens 1998 with acting for reasons.

<sup>12</sup> Katrina Elliot has raised a version of this objection in conversation.



assessment gives us reason to be skeptical of the theory.

If this sort of problem does arise, presumably it does so when we are considering examples that are intuitively cases of believing for reasons and wondering whether they are also the exercise of the relevant capacity (i.e. example cases we want to use to test if the theory gives necessary conditions). Presumably these are also cases where it is not possible to stipulate that the example case does not include the exercise of the relevant capacity.<sup>13</sup> Suppose that there are cases like this: i.e. cases in which, intuitively, (i) the subject believes for reasons; (ii) we cannot just stipulate that the capacity to believe for reasons was *not* exercised; (iii) we *need to use* the cases to test the capacity account. I am not sure if it is true that there are any cases that meet these three conditions, but let us suppose for argument that there are.

I doubt that the existence of these sorts of cases presents any special difficulty for the capacity account. This is because—while it is true that I have not given an *account* of how to identify exercises of capacities—the concept of a capacity is an ordinary concept, one that we have practice using all the time, and for which we apparently have no special difficulties knowing when it applies. That is, we do not in general have problems saying when someone has exercised their capacity to throw a baseball, or play piano, or go for a hike, or perceive, or feel pain. We *know* when someone has exercised a capacity, in a wide range of cases, without having to apply any philosophical theory. Of course, we might be wrong about whether, e.g., someone exercised a capacity to play piano *rather than* (say) mashed their hands around on the keys and produced (what sounds like) an elegant sonatina. But the mere possibility of error does not show that we cannot assess the Capacity Account. Indeed, our intuitions about exercises of capacities

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<sup>13</sup> If it were possible to stipulate this, then there would be no epistemic problem.

in particular cases can be quite fine-grained. In section 4.5, I argue that exercising a mere causal sustaining capacity isn't sufficient for a subject to believe for reasons, and my argument relies heavily on intuitions about a case in which it seems we *shouldn't* impute a certain capacity.

## 5.4 Naturalism

One motivation for the causal sustaining theory is that it might seem that it is the best hope of *naturalizing* believing for reasons and, hence, of making the theory of the basing relation compatible with the natural sciences. However, given a sufficiently radical conception of what it means to naturalize something, it may seem that the Capacity Account is no help at all with this project. A theory invoking capacities and functions is not (the opponent might think) a serious naturalistic proposal. It is notoriously difficult to know exactly what is required for something to be “naturalistic” and the topic strictly falls outside the scope of this dissertation.<sup>14</sup> However, this complaint seems to me incorrect on at least one entirely standard conception of naturalism: that is, the capacity account is plausibly naturalistic, if being naturalistic involves only appealing to objects, processes, and properties that are appealed to in the natural sciences. Biology and psychology both appeal to capacities and functions in their theories of the world, and the capacities and functions invoked in this dissertation are intended to be *those sort of capacities* (see section 4.3). This point has been made by many philosophers, (for an intuitive development of the argument, see Plantinga 1993: 5–6),<sup>15</sup> and I will not pursue it in any more detail here.

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14 Cf. Feldman 2001, Plantinga 1993.

15 Plantinga bolsters his treatment by quoting a few select passages from biologists and psychologists who appeal to functions. I have listed a few similar passages from Susan Carey's *The Origin of Concepts* below in which she

In addition, the capacity account may even be of significant interest to a radical reductionist, for there is—so far as I have argued—no barrier to reducing the (so-to-speak) “teleological” facts about capacities and functions to etiological facts about selection pressures and so on (Millikan 1984:17-19, 28). This is a project that the radical reductionist must pursue in any event, since appeals to functions and capacities are common in highly successful sciences like biology and cognitive and perceptual psychology.

According to the capacity account, believing for reasons is constitutively the successful exercise of a capacity that has the function of making a belief sensitive to the normative reasons that there are to hold it. Some naturalists will worry that my appeal to *normative* reasons to believe in characterizing the capacity to believe for reasons invokes non-natural resources. In chapter one, I glossed normative reasons to believe as reasons that “count in favor of” or “support” a belief. The naturalist may allege that this relation of “support” or “counting in favor of” is non-natural.<sup>16</sup> A full treatment of this topic falls outside the scope of this dissertation. I take it, however, that the existence of normative epistemic reasons cannot be reasonably rejected

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explicitly appeals to capacities and competences. Here is one characteristic example in which Carey treats depth perception as a type of capacity:

A second type of evidence that a given representational capacity may be innate in humans, in spite of not being observed until some months after birth, is data that show that it is manifest in neonates of other species. Examples offered were depth perception, which emerges without opportunities for learning in neonate goats and neonate rats, and object representations, which are observed in neonate chicks (Carey 2009: 454).

and again, when discussing the possibility of discovering masked perceptual competences:

We know that in normal face-to-face interaction, infants begin to follow the gaze of others at around 6 months of age, and reliably do so by 10 months or so. Point following begins a few months later. Bruce Hood and his colleagues suggested that even younger infants might have the competence to follow another’s gaze, but this competence might be masked by very young infants’ poor control of their own attentional resources (Carey 2009: 176).

<sup>16</sup> Feldman 2001 considers a non-naturalist understanding of the relation of epistemic support. AJ Julius has made this point to me in conversation.

for the reason that any such rejection would be self-undermining: i.e. in order for one to be warranted in rejecting such reasons, there would need to *be* such reasons.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the naturalist ought to acknowledge that appeals to normative reasons are an important part of the scientific enterprise, at least to the extent that science aims at giving us *knowledge* of the world. Hence, even a radical reductionist will need to offer some account of normative reasons, as such reasons feature in successful scientific practice.

I have said nothing about the nature of normative reasons to believe, apart from the fact that they are distinct from basing reasons and that they in some way “count in favor” of a belief. But it is worth noticing that if the present account of the capacity to believe for reasons is correct, then we can *rule out* one sort of theory of normative reasons to believe. It might have seemed possible to give an account of *normative* reasons in terms of *basing* reasons:

**For S to have a normative reason that q to believe that p (at t) is for it to be rational for S to believe that p for the reason that q (at t).**

But this cannot be the correct characterization of normative reasons, if the Capacity Account is correct.<sup>18</sup> According to the Capacity Account, normative epistemic reasons are metaphysically prior to the phenomenon of believing for reasons and so cannot be partly constituted by the phenomenon of believing for reasons. Hence, the Capacity Account can be used to limit the range of theories that can be given for normative reasons to believe.

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17 There are several different ways to spell out why this rejection is self-undermining. One explanation for why it is self-undermining is that rejecting a view with warrant requires doing so on the basis of good reasons, and good reasons are simply identical to normative reasons.

18 There are similar views in Goldman 1979: 345 and Turri 2010: 319–320 with respect to justification. Kvanig sketches an argument against this view of justification in Kvanig 1996.

It remains possible that normative reasons to believe can be explicated in terms of rational psychological capacities. Ralph Wedgwood in “Primitively Rational Belief-Forming Practices” (Wedgwood 2011) considers a similar characterization of normative reasons but appeals instead to reasoning. According to Wedgwood, we can understand reasons for a subject *to x* in the following way:

... there is a reason for you to *x*—where *x*-ing could be either an action (such as writing a letter) or an attitude (such as believing that it is snowing)—if and only if there is a possible process of sound or rational reasoning that can take you from your current state of mind to your rationally *x*-ing. (Wedgwood 2011, 180)<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to the view sketched above, Wedgwood's understanding of normative reasons appeals to *processes of rational reasoning* and not to believing for reasons. Hence, his view does not exhibit the sort of circularity I mentioned above. However, whether we will want to adopt his characterization will depend in part on whether the process of reasoning *itself* has a function similar to that of believing for reasons. That is, if reasoning is to be understood along the lines of believing for reasons, then concrete instances of reasoning will be constitutively the expression of a causal capacity that functions to achieve a particular epistemic end. But it had better not turn out (on pain of circularity) that *this end* is specified in terms of normative reasons to believe. I say more about how we might understand the process of reasoning in the following section.

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<sup>19</sup> Wedgwood does not explicitly say whether this biconditional gives us constitutive conditions on believing for reasons. He says only that the biconditional is part of “understanding” reasons for a subject to *x* (Wedgwood 2011: 180). For present purposes, I will understand the biconditional as giving constitutive conditions.

## 5.5 Scope

As I mentioned in section 1.3, the phrase “the basing relation” is often taken to apply to a broader class of phenomena than those discussed in this dissertation. For instance, it is often held that *perceptual experience* and *memories* can be basing reasons. In addition, the relation is often thought to play a role in explaining perceptual, memorial, and testimonial warrant, as well as warrant transmission between beliefs. For instance, Feldman and Conee write that a belief is well-founded (and so doxastically justified) only if it is held “on the basis of” some body of evidence (Feldman and Conee 1985: 24), and they are prepared to count as evidence experiences (Feldman and Conee 1985: 15), as well as the *vivacity* of memorial beliefs and associated feelings of confidence (Feldman and Conee 2001: 9). Kevin McCain articulates an intuitive statement of this view in his *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification*:

The necessary requirement for bridging the gap between S's merely having propositional justification that p and S's having a well-founded belief [necessary for knowledge] is that S *base* her belief on her evidence.” (McCain 2014: 84)

And McCain takes this evidence to include “beliefs, introspective experiences, perceptual experiences, memorial experiences, and perhaps [...] intuitions and rational insights” (McCain 2014:11).

In addition, a number of the theories I discussed in the previous chapters are aimed at capturing this wide notion of basing. Turri explicitly intends his Causal Manifestation Account (CMA), for example, to apply to perceptual experiences, memories, intuitions, and testimony (Turri 2011: 20). And the same point applies to McCain's direct causal theory (McCain 2014: 91)

and Evans' Dispositional Theory (Evans 2013: 2943).<sup>20</sup>

However, the Capacity Account as defined above does not plausibly apply to cases of perception, testimony, and memory. According to the Capacity Account, the basing relation holds between the subject's beliefs and not a subject's perceptions or memories. Indeed, this is an explicit commitment of the theory. I mentioned in chapter one that I am not in principle opposed to expanding the class of basing reasons to include certain other kinds of psychological states, for example, memorial “seemings” or “recollections” (Evans 2013: 2955).<sup>21</sup> However, I think it remains to be seen whether this proposed expansion fits the details of the Capacity Account. For example, it remains to be seen whether (some) memorial beliefs are in fact causally sustained by memorial seemings, or whether the capacity to base a memorial belief on memorial seemings has the function of sensitivity to the normative reasons rather than some alternative function.

By contrast, the Capacity Account seems unlikely to be compatible with taking perceptual experiences to be basing reasons. According to the Capacity Account, basing reasons causally sustain a belief as the result of the exercise of a capacity that functions to make our beliefs sensitive to the normative reasons. This sensitivity involves being ready (when circumstances are right) to modify or alter our beliefs in response to changes in the normative

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20 Evans goes even further and holds that a belief can be held on the basis of “desires, fears, vanity, prejudices, and other epistemically disreputable states” (Evans 2013: 2943). I think that at least in ordinary cases in which we say that a belief that *p* was “based on” a desire or a mere prejudice, we are not talking about anything like the basing relation. A subject *S*'s belief may be explained by a depressed episode or a mental illness, but *that S is depressed* or *that S has a mental illness* are presumably not the reasons for which the subject believes. As I mentioned in chapters two and four, believing for a reason is a way of *taking* a fact or consideration to count in favor of believing. But believing that *p* because one is depressed is *not plausibly* a way for one to “take” the depression to count in favor of believing.

21 I do not mean to suggest that I accept that there are memorial “seemings” or “recollections.” Evans, for instance, thinks that (most) of our perceptual beliefs are based on separate states of recollection (Evans 2013: 2955), but I do not see that we have reason to accept this view.

reasons. But perceptual experiences are not clearly sustaining causes.<sup>22</sup> And perceptual belief is not clearly the exercise of a capacity with this function. Believing via perception is plausibly the expression of a capacity to generate *new beliefs* or *update old beliefs* with the function of veridically representing objects in the surrounding environment. But it does not clearly aim at *sensitivity* to the normative reasons in the sense of sensitivity discussed in chapter four.<sup>23</sup> In part, this is because the features of the objects in the environment that perception is supposed to represent are impoverished compared to the reasons that the capacity to believe for reasons is supposed to be sensitive, but it is also because perception appears to be in large part generative.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, we ought to agree that there *is* a phenomenon similar to what I have called “believing for reasons” with respect to belief warranted by perception. For one thing, perceptual experiences seem to meet conditions analogous to those of the Basic Conception. Perceptual experience plays a role in explaining why we believe in certain cases, and perceptual experiences help explain the epistemic status of our beliefs in the same cases. In addition, like believing for reasons, believing on the basis of perceptual experience appears to be required to explain the difference in warrant in certain pairs of example cases. Here is one such pair:

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22 It is an empirical matter whether they are *sometimes or also* sustaining causes, but it is at least true that perceptual experience is generative and that generating is a significant part of its purpose.

23 The issue of *what* the exact function is of perceptual belief (rather than perception or perceptual representation) is undoubtedly more complicated than what I have sketched here. The important point is only that perceptual belief (believing via perception) is not obviously aimed at making present beliefs counterfactually sensitive to normative reasons in general, rather than generating new beliefs about the immediate environment. If perceptual belief *does* have the same function as believing for reasons, then there is no issue here, and we can simply expand the set of basing-states to include perceptual experiences as well as beliefs. The present discussion assumes that the capacity to believe via perception does not easily fit under the account proposed in chapter four.

24 A belief that is warranted on the basis of perception does not usually lose its warrant once the perceptual experience ceases to exist. In contrast, and in the usual case, if a subject stops believing one of the basing reasons that explain its warrant, then the warrant to a belief held on the basis of reasons will be lost. This point is complicated somewhat by the warrant-preserving power of memory.



(3) Martin has the perceptual experience as of *that* red object with such-and-such a shape. He has no reason to doubt that there is such an object in the environment. However, he believes that *that* red object has such-and-such a shape *not* on the basis of perception, but rather via some massive brain malfunction. Martin is unwarranted in holding his belief that *that* object is red.

(4) Brandon has the perceptual experience as of *that* red object with such-and-such a shape. He has no reason to doubt that there is such an object in the environment. Brandon, unlike Martin, believes that *that* object is red *on the basis* of his perception. Brandon is warranted in holding his belief that *that* object is red.

Both Martin and Brandon have warrant *to* believe that that object is red, but only Brandon has a *warranted belief* that that object is red. But what is the explanation for this difference? Plausibly, the difference lies in the fact that Brandon—and not Martin—believes that *that* object is red *on the basis* of his perceptual experience as of that red object.

For the purposes of argument, I am going to suppose that all of this true: that is, I am going to agree that perceptual experiences help explain why we hold perceptual beliefs and help explain our warrant in believing them, and that some sort of perceptual basing relation explains the difference between cases (3) and (4). I will also assume that a similar sort of basing relation can be found in cases of memory and testimony. In light of this assumption, an opponent of the capacity account may claim that the *real* phenomenon of basing is broader than the account given in chapter four suggests. It may be alleged that the basing relation does not hold solely

between beliefs, and it is *not* primarily a sustaining relation aimed at sensitivity to the normative reasons. According to this view, the capacity account is false because it is parochial.

I would like to resist this criticism in two ways. First, I think we ought to insist that there is a phenomenon involved in warrant-transmission between *beliefs* that is properly characterized as “believing for reasons,” and that this phenomenon is not simply *identical* to believing via perception or believing via testimony. If there is a distinction between these different phenomenon, then it ought to be possible to treat the present theory as an account of *that particular phenomenon* and use it to distinguish believing for reasons as it applies to warrant transmission between beliefs from perceptual or memorial basing. In other words, the fact that believing for reasons falls into a broad class of warrant-explaining relations does not show that these warrant-explaining relations are all the same. Indeed, I hold that there *is* a difference between the phenomenon that transfers warrant between beliefs and the phenomenon that generates warrant for perceptual beliefs.

Suppose that there is a difference between perceptual basing, memorial basing, and so on. It is nonetheless possible to say something about what makes these different relations (holding between beliefs and memory, perception, etc.) a type of what we might call “general basing relation.” It is commonly and standardly held that our knowledge producing and sustaining capacities aim at or function to produce (or sustain) true belief.<sup>25</sup> I think this view is correct. Given this view, we can generalize from the capacity account as follows:

**Generalized Capacity Account:** a relation type R is a *general basing relation* iff (constitutively)

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<sup>25</sup> For example, see Plantinga 1993: 15–16 and Burge 2003: 509.

(1) R is a historical or sustaining causal relation holding between committal psychological states.

(2) There is a capacity C, such that R is yielded by a successful exercise of the capacity C, and C has, as one of its functions, the function of sustaining or creating true belief.

(3) The capacity C may have other functions (such as sensitivity to the normative reasons) that serve the truth-function. The capacity may have additional functions that fail to serve the truth-function (such as evolved biological functions that prioritize other sorts of goods).

The present proposal is only a sketch of a more detailed future account. There are various places where changes may be called for: for instance, the requirement that the capacity have the function of sustaining or producing true belief might need to be modified to include other distinctively epistemic aims, such as knowledge or understanding. Similarly, the specification of what the capacity *does* (causally generate or sustain) may need to be made more precise.

Nonetheless, if the proposal is even broadly correct, then we can then see what binds together perceptual believing, memory, testimony, and what I have been calling “believing for reasons.”

Each of these capacities is a capacity to put a causal relation into place between a belief and some other psychological states such that the exercise of this capacity functions to produce or sustain a true belief. At least some of these capacities have intermediate cognitive functions: believing for reasons has the intermediate cognitive function of sensitivity to the normative reasons, which serves the truth aim of the capacity. Similarly, if the evidentialist about episodic memory is correct, then the capacity to maintain a belief via episodic memory *may have* the intermediate cognitive function of maintaining beliefs that fit the available memory episodes, with the function of *preserving* truth, and ultimately, with the function of sustaining (currently)

true beliefs. Finally, although this claim takes us into some difficult epistemological issues, just as the capacity account for believing for reasons suggests a view of warrant transmission, the generalized capacity account shows us why perceptual and memorial basing might be suited to play a role in explaining warrant. This is because warrant is closely related to the well-functioning of capacities with such truth-aims (Burge 2003; Plantinga 1993).<sup>26</sup>

## 5.6 Functions

It may be alleged that believing for reasons does *not* have the function of sensitivity to the normative reasons and does not aim at sustaining true belief. Why might we think this? One reason might be that a compelling body of work in psychology, deriving from the seminal ideas of Kahneman and Tversky, shows that human beings are systematically prone to make certain sorts of irrational mistakes. For example, we often make poor probability judgments based on heuristics of representativeness (Kahneman 2011: 159, 420). One plausible and familiar explanation for this fact is that such heuristics operate quickly and help serve some other function besides truth: e.g. promoting the survival of the animal.<sup>27</sup> These observations do not apply *directly* to the capacity to believe for reasons: Kahneman's points seem to apply primarily to sorts of belief-generating capacities, and he never explicitly discusses believing for reasons,

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26 This point is properly the subject of another dissertation. Extending the discussion in section 4.7, the fact that the present account complements such approaches in epistemology (e.g. Burge 2003) counts in favor of the generalized capacity account.

27 Sheldon Smith has raised this point in conversation. Burge has claimed that our cognitive systems have functions other than truth (Burge 2003: 521). Plantinga imagines that our cognitive capacities might include what he calls “modules” for *wishful believing* or *optimistic believing* that function primarily to aid survival and not to accurately represent the world (Plantinga 1993: 12–13).

but such observations at least raise questions about the function of the capacity to believe for reasons.

I do not want to deny that our cognitive capacities can have aims other than epistemic or representational ones. Many capacities evolved in order to aid our survival, and hence (very roughly), many of our capacities have the biological function of aiding reproduction or survival. Our cognitive capacities are amongst these evolved capacities, and they at least plausibly have these same biological functions. However, this fact does not show that our cognitive capacities fail to have truth-related functions (Burge 2010: 299, 302, 308). In particular, the fact that the capacity to believe for reasons has the biological function of aiding survival, and the fact that achieving this function sometimes means operating in a way that does not track the truth, does not entail that the capacity does not also have the function of sensitivity to the normative reasons.

We might try to distinguish between a *biological function* (e.g. of aiding survival) and a *cognitive function* (e.g. of sensitivity to the normative reasons or true belief) (cf. Burge 2003: 520–521). One of the cognitive functions of believing for reasons is sensitivity to the normative reasons. One biological function of believing for reasons *may be* aiding survival. All that the present account requires is that believing for reasons has this cognitive function.

If the capacity to believe for reasons does have these two kinds of functions, then it is likely that the cognitive functions of the capacity to believe for reasons play a different role in specifying the nature of the capacity than do its putative biological functions. I cannot argue for this point in any detail here, but I take the cognitive functions of the capacity to believe for reasons to be part of what makes an exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons *a successful or unsuccessful exercise of that capacity qua capacity* (cf. Murphy 2013). For instance, a particular

exercise of the capacity is the successful exercise *of the capacity to believe for reasons* when it is performed in a way that is likely to achieve its cognitive function: viz. rationally. It seems unlikely that the same is true of the biological functions of the capacity. A token exercise of the capacity to believe for reasons that is likely to achieve the aim of survival may nonetheless be, in every way, an unsuccessful exercise of that capacity *qua believing for reasons*, because it is (for instance) irrational. Of course, we could *say* that the exercise “failed to promote survival,” but this does not mean it was an unsuccessful exercise of the capacity *qua* that capacity. Similarly, a toaster might be used as paperweight, and it might fail to keep some papers from blowing around, but when it fails to do that, it does not *fail as a toaster*. Instead, the toaster fails insofar as it is being used as a paperweight.

I think it is likely that the cognitive functions of the capacity to believe for reasons play a unique role in specifying the nature of the capacity. However, the Capacity Account is not committed to any particular view about this matter. Instead, the Capacity Account is compatible with whatever view one might have about the biological functions of the capacity to believe for reasons, so long as we acknowledge that having a particular biological function *does not* rule out having a particular cognitive function, and so long as these functions are compatible with having the cognitive function of sensitivity to the normative reasons.

There are issues that arise if one thinks that our capacity to believe for reasons is not the sort of thing that is capable of meeting this function. Mark Murphy holds, for instance, that in order to have a function, the thing with the function must be “constitutionally able” (Murphy 2013: 12–14) to meet that function. This is a vexed issue, in part because having a function does not seem to entail that the thing with the function *can as a matter of fact* meet it. A broken watch

might be incapable of keeping time but still have the function of keeping time.<sup>28</sup> This shows that being “constitutionally able” is not the same as merely *being able* in some sense of “able.” However, we can put this issue to one side because there are no reasons to think that our cognitive capacities are not the sort of things able to meet their cognitive functions. Indeed, the sorts of evidence that might lead us to think otherwise (e.g. the sorts of experimental results discussed by Tversky and Kahneman) presuppose that we meet at least some of these cognitive functions at least some of the time.<sup>29</sup> If the evidence showed that our cognitive capacities are *unable* to meet their cognitive functions, then we would have good reason to reject that same evidence, for it was collected and analyzed using these very capacities.<sup>30</sup>

## 5.7 Conclusion

I have argued in this dissertation that believing for reasons is constitutively the exercise of a capacity to causally sustain one belief with another belief with a certain function: namely, to make the sustained belief sensitive to the sufficient normative reasons to hold it. This conception is compatible with the Basic Conception because causal sustaining relations are explanatory, and the exercise of the relevant capacity is apparently capable of explaining warrant transmission between beliefs. This picture of believing for reasons stands in stark contrast to the attitudinal view that believing for reasons involves the subject *believing* something about the evidence or being disposed to offer a certain consideration as justification. The picture also stands in more

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28 I owe this example to Mark Greenberg.

29 Kahneman 2011: 25 holds that our so-called “system one” capacities are often accurate.

30 Cf. Azzouni 2000: 75 on a similar point about the role of perception in experiment.

limited contrast to the *merely* causal or dispositional theories discussed in chapters three and four. Believing for reasons is not just the realization of a regularity or trait: it is the exercise of a capacity that is essentially teleological. Finally, this picture of believing for reasons is not historical or etiological. The present understanding of the capacity to believe for reasons allows us to rule out the sorts of causal deviance discussed in chapter three. And, finally, the capacity account is not question-begging or uninformative; neither does the fact that it appeals to capacities and functions disqualify it from being naturalistically acceptable.



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