# Reasons in Epistemology

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## Contents

1. **Introduction**

2. Normative Reasons for Belief
   - 2.1 The Ontology of Normative Epistemic Reasons
     - 2.1.1 Mentalism
     - 2.1.2 Alternatives to Mentalism
   - 2.2 Possession and Objective vs. Subjective Normative Reasons
   - 2.3 Defeat and Weight
   - 2.4 Evidence and the Pragmatic
   - 2.5 What Do Epistemic Reasons Require? Permissivism vs. Impermissivism

3. Motivating Reasons for Belief
   - 3.1 The Ontology of Motivating Epistemic Reasons
     - 3.1.1 Mentalism
     - 3.1.2 Alternatives to Mentalism
   - 3.2 Reasons and the Basing Relation

4. Reasons and Other Epistemic Standings
   - 4.1 Reasons and Epistemic Justification
   - 4.2 Reasons, Coherence, and Epistemic Rationality
   - 4.3 Reasons and Knowledge
   - 4.4 Reasons, Perception, and Conceptual Content
   - 4.5 Reasons, Reasoning, and Logic

5. Reasons and the Epistemology-Metaethics Interface
   - 5.1 The Error Theory and the Interface
   - 5.2 Internalism/Externalism Controversies and the Interface
   - 5.3 Constitutivism, Aims and the Interface

6. Acknowledgements and a Note about Content

## 1 Introduction

Reasons attract great interest in new literature on the foundations of epistemic normativity. This follows a trend in metaethics, where many take reasons to be the building blocks of normativity, and where sophisticated work on reasons has illuminated long-standing issues about the nature of normativity. Besides the recent upsurge of interest, reasons have played important roles in the past fifty years of work on the nature of knowledge, perception, reasoning, rationality, and justification. This entry provides a comprehensive overview of (i) the literature on the nature of reasons for belief and other doxastic attitudes, (ii) the role that reasons play in discussions
of the nature of knowledge, perception, reasoning, rationality, and justification, and (iii) the
liaisons between epistemology and meta-ethics that owe to work on reasons and rationality.

This entry is unique in citing work outside of epistemology narrowly understood. Some of the
best work on the general nature of reasons has been written by philosophers typically classified as
meta-ethicists. They include Maria Alvarez, John Broome, Jonathan Dancy, Pamela Hieronymi,
Niko Kolodny, Christine Korsgaard, Derek Parfit, Joseph Raz, T. M. Scanlon, Mark Schroeder,
John Skorupski, and Judith Jarvis Thomson. While their aims are usually meta-ethical, these
writers make general claims about reasons and discuss reasons for belief at length. Awareness
of their work has already led to advances in the literature on epistemic reasons.

Because there are no textbooks and few introductory pieces that focus narrowly on reasons
in epistemology, this entry dives right into the literature. There are, however, a few pieces that
could serve as starting points and a few that stand out as landmark works. Reisner and Steglich-
Petersen (2011) is a collection on reasons for belief that contains a helpful introduction to the
literature. Chapters 3 and 4 of Littlejohn (2012) synoptically cover many of the topics in this
entry. Landmark contributions by meta-ethicists on the general nature of reasons and rationality
and Thomson (2008). Landmark contributions to the literature in epistemology include Swain

an up-to-date statement of the author’s influential views about the ontology of motivating
reasons, this book serves as a terrific overview of this region of the reasons literature.]

tive reasons are facts and that motivating reasons are possibly non-obtaining states of
affairs. While many targets in the book are meta-ethical, Dancy’s view is general and has
implications for epistemology.]

of how experience provides us with reasons for belief, containing important discussions of
the nature of epistemic reasons and reasoning.]

University Press. [Defends the striking claim that there are no false justified beliefs, and
in the course of doing so defends the view that normative reasons for belief are facts; see
Chapters 3 and 4.]

Ronnnow-Rasmussen (eds.) *Exploring Practical Philosophy*. Aldershot: Ashgate. [Argues
that normative reasons of all sorts are facts and that rationality consists in correctly
responding to apparent normative reasons, which need not be genuine normative reasons.]

bridge University Press. [A recent collection of papers on reasons for belief that contains
a helpful and up-to-date introduction.]

Scanlon, T. M. 1998. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
Press. [Chapter 1 of this book is the *locus classicus* of the “reasons first” approach
to normativity, and contains influential discussions of the general nature of reasons and
rationality.]

2

Swain, M. 1981. *Reasons and Knowledge*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. [In the course of this book-length defense of a defeasibility account of knowledge, Swain argues that normative epistemic reasons are propositions and that motivating epistemic reasons are mental states. See Chapter 3.]

Thomson, J. J. 2008. *Normativity*. Chicago: Open Court. [This book contains some influential doubts about the “reasons first” approach and provides an analysis of reasons for attitudes (including belief) and actions. See especially Chapters 8 and 9. These chapters also contain a defense of the intriguing thesis that all normative reasons are a species of reasons for belief: normative reasons for action and for non-doxastic attitudes are, roughly, normative reasons for believing that these acts or attitudes are correct.]

2 Normative Reasons for Belief

Talk of reasons can be used to pick out importantly different things. Arguably the most important things are normative reasons, which are considerations that count in favor of attitudes or acts. In the epistemic domain, normative reasons are considerations that count in favor of doxastic attitudes like belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment. This section covers the literature on five issues about normative reasons in epistemology: the ontology of normative epistemic reasons, the possession of normative reasons, defeat and the weight of epistemic reasons, the status of non-evidential reasons for belief, and the demands made by epistemic reasons.

2.1 The Ontology of Normative Epistemic Reasons

How should we understand the ontology of normative reasons for belief and other doxastic attitudes? There are two broad sorts of answers to this question: mentalist and non-mentalist.

2.1.1 Mentalism

According to mentalist views, normative reasons for belief are mental states. Mentalist views have long been dominant in epistemology. Some defenders of mentalism restrict the relevant mental states to beliefs and other doxastic attitudes. Call them doxastic mentalists. Davidson (1986) is the classic doxastic mentalist. While Davidson is also a coherentist about knowledge and justification, not everyone who holds doxastic mentalism reasons for belief accepts coherentism. Lyons (2009) endorses doxastic mentalism but rejects coherentism by giving a purely reliabilist account of non-inferential justification. Pollock (1974) accepted doxastic mentalism while being an internalist foundationalist: he viewed foundational beliefs as beliefs that are justified without being based on reasons.

Others allow non-doxastic mental states like perceptual seemings to be normative epistemic reasons. Such non-doxastic mentalists include Conee and Feldman (2001), Huemer (2001), and Pryor (2000). A minority of mentalists have argued that factive mental states like seeing that \( P \) are the crucial normative reasons for justified perceptual beliefs. Such factive mentalists include Gibbons (2010), McDowell (1995) and Pritchard (2012). They illustrate that endorsing mentalism is not the same as endorsing the internalist view that the normative reasons for belief consist in non-factive mental states.
Conee, E. and Feldman, R. 2001. “Internalism Defended.” American Philosophical Quarterly 38: 1-18. [In the course of this defense of internalism about justification, a non-doxastic mentalist view about evidence is defended.]


Gibbons, J. 2010. “Things that Make Things Reasonable.” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 81: 335-361. [Argues that reasons and rationality are both perspective-dependent and understands reasons as mental states, but also accepts the view that knowledge is a mental state, and does not understand perspective in an internalist way.]


Lyons, J. 2009. Perception and Basic Beliefs. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Defends doxastic mentalism in the course of arguing against the view that all beliefs are justified by reasons and defending a new form of process reliabilism.]


Pollock, J. 1974. Knowledge and Justification, Ch.1. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [Chapter 1 provides a discussion of the nature of reasons for belief and their connection to justification and knowledge.]


2.1.2 Alternatives to Mentalism

A few epistemologists reject mentalism about normative reasons. There are two major alternatives. According to factualism, normative reasons for belief are facts. Williamson (2000) and Littlejohn (2012) defend factualism and both take facts to be true propositions. A more moderate factualist position is taken by Ginzborg (2006), who distinguishes two normative senses of “reason” but claims that the primary sense treats normative reasons as facts. It is worth noting that all factualists and non-mentalists will draw a distinction between being a reason and providing a reason or possessing a reason, and agree that mental states provide reasons or help us to possess without thinking that they are the reasons; see Williamson (2000: 197).

The main alternative to factualism is abstractionism. According to one version of abstractionism, normative reasons for belief are propositions that might be false. This view is found in an unqualified form in Dougherty (2011), Fantl and McGrath (Chs.3-4), and Swain (1981: Ch.3). This is not the only conceivable version of abstractionism. Dancy (2000) rejects any identification of reasons with propositions. He holds that normative reasons are facts in the sense of obtaining states of affairs and that motivating reasons are states of affairs that are
possibly non-obtaining. One could imagine a version of abstractionism that would identify normative reasons with states of affairs that might be non-obtaining (though Dancy only accepts the idea for motivating reasons).

People outside of the mainstream epistemology literature have defended factualist accounts of normative reasons for belief. Writers like Broome (2004), Dancy (2000) and Parfit (2001) have made general claims about the ontology of normative reasons, identifying reasons for belief as well as reasons for action with facts. Epistemologists interested in reasons should profit from this work.


Fantl, J. and McGrath, M. 2009. Knowledge in an Uncertain World. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [This extended defense of pragmatic encroachment contains endorsements of the idea that reasons are propositions and of the idea that normative reasons can consist in false propositions; see Chapters 2 and 3.]

Ginsborg, H. 2006. “Reasons for Belief.” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 72: 286-318. [This paper illustrates the importance that meta-ethical work on reasons can have for epistemology. The author argues that there are two important notions of a normative reason for belief, one captured by the idea that reasons are facts and one captured by the idea that reasons are beliefs. But she defends the conceptual priority of the first notion.]

Littlejohn, C. 2012. Justification and the Truth Connection. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Pp. 89-120 defend the view that normative reasons for belief are facts.]

Parfit, D. 2001. “Rationality and Reasons” in Dan Egonsson, Bjorn Petterson and Toni Ronnow-Rasmussen (eds.) Exploring Practical Philosophy. Aldershot: Ashgate. [This paper is a classic representative of the view that normative reasons are facts.]


Williamson, T. 2000. Knowledge and Its Limits. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [In the midst of this classic defense of knowledge-first epistemology, the author argues that evidence consists in true propositions that we know. See Chapter 9.]

2.2 Possession and Objective vs. Subjective Normative Reasons

A second question in the literature concerns the possession of normative reasons for belief. There is an intuitive distinction between good reasons we have and good reasons that merely exist. If some lemonade is arsenic-laced, that fact is a powerful reason not to drink even if one is no position to appreciate it. Nevertheless, one is not irrational if one is in no position to appreciate this fact; cf. Williams (1981). Only reasons that we have seem to matter for rationality. This
A distinction can be drawn in epistemology. There might be good reasons that we have not yet discovered for certain conclusions (e.g., undiscovered evidence on the crime scene). Reasons that are not essentially possessed are sometimes called objective reasons and reasons that are essentially possessed are sometimes called subjective reasons.

The nature of possession is a central issue. Some recent discussions are organized around the status of the Factoring Account. According to the Factoring Account, for one to have a reason to \( \phi \) consists in (i) there independently being a reason to \( \phi \), and (ii) one's standing in some relation of possession to this independently existing reason. Schroeder (2008) rejects this account and defends a dualist account on which subjective normative reasons are not just a special kind of objective normative reason. Lord (2010) defends the Factoring Account against Schroeder’s objections.

A further question concerns the relation that one must bear to a normative reason to possess that reason. While this question may seem to presuppose the Factoring Account, even Schroeder addresses it. Schroeder (2011) defends a “low bar” account, holding that one possesses P as a normative reason iff P is the content of some presentational mental state (e.g., belief or seeming). Schroeder’s discussion is partly a response to Feldman (1988), who claimed that one could only have P as evidence if it was epistemically rational for one to believe P. Neta (2006) provides a critical survey of many reductive accounts of possession.

Discussions of possession intersect with discussions of access. While access conditions on justification are often associated with internalism, they are not essentially internalist. Gibbons (2006) and Littlejohn (2011) defend externalist access conditions and set high bars on the possession of normative reasons for belief.


Gibbons, J. 2006. “Access Externalism.” Mind 115: 19-39. [Argues that access constraints on justification can be understood in externalist terms and defends the idea that possessing a normative epistemic reason is a matter of being in a position to know the fact that is this reason.]

Littlejohn, C. 2011a. “Evidence and Armchair Access.” Synthese 170: 479-500. [Argues that access constraints on justification can be understood in externalist terms but sets the bar lower than knowledge or being in a position to know.]

Lord, E. 2010. “Having Reasons and the Factoring Account.” Philosophical Studies 149: 283-96. [This paper defends the Factoring Account of having a reason from Schroeder (2008)’s objections and also suggests that the relation of possession should be understood in terms of being in a position to know.]

Lord, E. 2013. The Importance of Being Rational. Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University. [In the course of this defense of the claim that rationality consists in correctly responding to the normative reasons that one possesses, Lord argues that the access constraint on possession should be understood in terms of being in a position to know. He also argues that access is not the only necessary condition for possessing a normative reason.]

Neta, R. 2006. “What Evidence Do You Have?” British Journal for the Philosophy of Science 59: 89-119. [Argues against a great number of attempts to analyze possession in non-normative terms and defends the conclusion that nothing more informative can
be said about what it is to possess evidence except that it is what rationally regulates belief-formation.

Schroeder, M. 2008. “Having Reasons.” *Philosophical Studies* 139: 57-71. [Argues against the Factoring Account of possessing a reason, and argues that we must accept a dualist view on which there are objective and subjective normative reasons, where neither is analyzable in terms of the other]

Schroeder, M. 2011. “What Does It Take to ‘Have’ a Reason?” in Reisner, A. and Steglich-Petersen, A. (eds.) *Reasons for Belief*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Provides a novel defense of a “low bar” account of possession on which merely believing that P or having some other presentational mental state with the content that P is sufficient for possessing a reason to believe P.]

Williams, B. 1981. “Internal and External Reasons” in *Moral Luck*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp.101-113. [One of the first places where subjective and objective reasons were clearly distinguished; the arsenic-laced lemonade case used above deliberately resembles Williams’s famous “petrol and tonic” case.]

### 2.3 Defeat and Weight

One role for normative reasons in epistemology is illuminating the nature of defeat. It is attractive to think that all defeaters for justified beliefs are either reasons to disbelieve, reasons to suspend belief, or reasons to place less weight on the reasons to believe that one originally had. Schroeder (2012a) defends this hypothesis. He explains the defeaters discussed by writers in the pragmatic encroachment literature under a broader explanatory model and gives an account of what it is to have a *sufficient* reason. Schroeder (2011) sketches a general account of weight and provides a reasons-based account of defeat in ethics and epistemology. For an early discussion of defeaters and the distinction between rebutting and undercutting defeaters, see Pollock (1986: 38-39). For a nice overview of the literature and a discussion of defeaters for justification within the context of a defense of externalism about justification, see Bergmann (2006: 153-178).

There are defeaters for knowledge as well as defeaters for justification. Might these also be analyzed in terms of reasons? In the literature on defeasibility theories in the 1970s and 1980s, defeaters for knowledge were often analyzed counterfactually. They were understood as facts that *would* make it no longer rational for the epistemic subject to believe what she believes *if* she were aware of them. Arguably the mistake was not the appeal to defeaters but rather the conditional fallacy, as Shope (1983) suggests. If we instead take objective normative reasons to be fundamental, we might be able to resurrect a simpler version of the defeasibility account held earlier by theorists like Klein (1971), Lehrer and Paxson (1969), and Swain (1981). In his (2012a) and so far unpublished work on the analysis of knowledge, Mark Schroeder makes these suggestions. For a comprehensive overview on defeaters for both knowledge and justification, see Sudduth (2008).


7
Pollock, J. 1986. *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. [This is the first place where the distinction between undercutting and rebutting defeat was drawn.]

Schroeder, M. 2011. “Holism, Weight, and Undercutting.” *Nous* 45: 328-344. [Provides a reasons-based account of defeat and an account of the weight of reasons that captures particularist insights while holding onto the idea that normative theorizing is in the business of generalization.]

Schroeder, M. 2012a. “Stakes, Withholding, and Pragmatic Encroachment on Knowledge.” *Philosophical Studies* 160: 265-285. [Explains how pragmatic encroachment works by arguing that pragmatic factors affect the sufficiency of one’s epistemic reasons by constituting right-kind reasons to suspend judgment.]


2.4 Evidence and the Pragmatic

Which types of considerations can provide normative reasons for doxastic attitudes? Are all normative reasons for doxastic attitudes evidence? Can pragmatic considerations be real normative reasons for doxastic attitudes? Might there be a form of pragmatic encroachment whereby pragmatic factors can affect the weight of one’s epistemic reasons? These questions are the focus of a large literature.

It might sound odd to ask whether pragmatic considerations can be normative reasons for doxastic attitudes. Isn’t it obvious that there can be good practical reasons for belief? But there are genuine controversies here. Some writers have denied that one can have good practical reasons for belief. They argue that what appear to be practical reasons for belief are only reasons for the act of causing ourselves to have a belief or for wanting to have the belief. Defenders of this view hold that only pieces of evidence are genuine reasons for belief. Kelly (2002) and Shah (2006) defend this view. For arguments directed against these “strict evidentialists” and in favor of the possibility of pragmatic reasons for belief, see Reisner (2009). Hieronymi (2005) defends a middle view. She agrees that there is a distinction between “right” and “wrong” kinds of reasons for attitudes and holds that pragmatic considerations are wrong-kind reasons for belief. But she believes that these considerations can still be normative reasons for belief rather than reasons for something else (e.g., the act of making oneself have a belief).

Now, all of the aforementioned writers focus on whether pragmatic factors can be genuine reasons for belief. But there are doxastic attitudes other than belief—viz., suspension of judgment and disbelief. Moreover, not all reasons are reasons for: some reasons are reasons against. Schroeder (2012) argues that pragmatic considerations can be reasons of the right kind for suspension of judgment and against belief. He uses this insight to provide a rationale for pragmatic
encroachment on knowledge. This is an importantly different kind of theoretically driven argument for pragmatic encroachment than the one afforded by appeal to knowledge norms on practical reasoning (see Fantl and McGrath (2009)), and so sidesteps the worries voiced, e.g., by Cresto (2010) and Brown (2012). For an excellent overview of all this literature on the nexus between the epistemic and the pragmatic that also contains a novel case for non-evidential reasons for belief on the basis of beliefs about difficult future actions, see Marusic (2011).


Kelly, T. 2002. “The Rationality of Belief and Some Other Propositional Attitudes.” Philosophical Studies 110: 163-196. [Argues that the expected consequences of having beliefs are not genuine reasons for belief and makes analogous points about other attitudes, concluding that there is a broad “Consequentialist Fallacy” behind much theorizing about reasons for attitudes.]

Reisner, A. “The Possibility of Pragmatic Reasons for Belief and the Wrong Kind of Reasons Problem.” Philosophical Studies 145: 257-272. [Defends the possibility of pragmatic reasons for belief.]

Schroeder, M. 2012. “Stakes, Withholding, and Pragmatic Encroachment on Knowledge.” Philosophical Studies 160: 265-285. [Observes that pragmatic facts can be right-kind reasons to suspend judgment and defends pragmatic encroachment on the basis of this fact.]

Shah, N. 2006. “A New Argument for Evidentialism.” The Philosophical Quarterly 56: 481-498. [Defends the strict evidentialist view that only pieces of evidence can be genuine reasons for belief.]


2.5 What Do Epistemic Reasons Require? Permissivism vs. Impermissivism

What do normative epistemic reasons require of us? Is there always a unique degree of belief that we ought to have given a certain set of normative epistemic reasons? Or are we rationally permitted to take a range of degrees of belief, at least given some sets of normative epistemic reasons? Recently a large body of literature has developed around these questions.

According to impermissivists such as White (2005) and Feldman (2007), the answer to the first question is “yes.” According to moderate permissivists such as Kelly (2013) and Schoenfield
(2012b), the answer to the second question is a qualified “yes”: there are some cases where several degrees of belief are rationally permissible, but pace extreme subjective Bayesians, not just anything goes. Horowitz (2013) argues that we should be either impermissivists or extreme permissivists on the basis of considerations about (expected) epistemic utility. Hybrid positions are possible, given certain distinctions. Schoenfield (2012a) argues that we should distinguish between what we ought to believe and what the evidence supports. She maintains that while the evidence does indeed always support some precise credence, it doesn’t follow that only that credence is rationally permissible.


Horowitz, S. 2013. “Immoderately Rational.” Philosophical Studies. Online First. DOI: 10.1007/s11098-013-0231-6. [Argues that we must either be impermissivists or extreme permissivists on the basis of considerations about (expected) epistemic utility.]


Schoenfield, M. 2012a. “Chilling Out on Epistemic Rationality.” Philosophical Studies 158: 197-219. [Contains a nuanced defense of moderate permissivism, maintaining that this view is consistent with the view that the evidence always supports a unique degree of belief.]

Schoenfield, M. 2012b. “Permission to Believe.” Nous. Online First. [Contains a further defense of moderate permissivism and argues on the basis of moderate permissivism that it is sometimes rational to maintain our beliefs even upon learning that they were caused by irrelevant influences.]


3 Motivating Reasons for Belief

Talk of reasons does not always pick out something normative. For one thing, we can talk about the reasons why someone believes something without thinking that these are good reasons. Reasons-why are often called explanatory reasons.

Not all the reasons why people believe are reasons for which they believe. Perhaps a reason why Schopenhauer had pessimistic beliefs is that he was depressed. But this was probably not a reason for which he believed philosophical pessimism: instead, it disposed him to find apparently good reasons for being a philosophical pessimist, which then became the reasons for which he believed. The reasons for which people think and act are called motivating reasons in the broader literature on reasons and rationality. It should be noted that this is a term of art. Using the term in epistemology is not meant to presuppose doxastic voluntarism: motivating reasons are nothing more and nothing less than reasons for which people think and act. This section covers the literature on reasons for belief in this non-normative, motivating sense.
3.1 The Ontology of Motivating Epistemic Reasons

One set of questions mirrors our first set of questions about normative epistemic reasons. What sorts of things are motivating epistemic reasons? Are they mental states, facts, propositions, or something else?

One might expect people to give the same answers to the ontological questions about motivating reasons that they give to the ontological questions about normative reasons. But this is not the case. Besides the epistemologists mentioned below, Raz (1975) and Smith (1994) held that normative reasons for action and belief were facts but that motivating reasons for action and belief were mental states. This kind of divided ontology has become less common among meta-ethicists after Dancy (2000).

3.1.1 Mentalism

The dominant view in epistemology is that motivating epistemic reasons are mental states. Indeed, some writers who reject mentalist accounts of normative epistemic reasons embrace mentalist accounts of motivating epistemic reasons. Swain (1981) is an example. Mentalist accounts of motivating epistemic reasons are more often presupposed than defended in epistemology. But Turri (2009, 2011) offers extensive arguments for mentalism about motivating epistemic reasons and against the alternatives. While Davidson (1963)'s causal argument for mentalism was primarily an argument about motivating reasons for action, the argument extends to motivating reasons for belief, as Turri (2011) notes.

Sometimes linguistic considerations are used against mentalist views. We often say things like “Susanne’s reason for believing that God doesn’t exist is that there is unnecessary suffering in the world.” Pryor (2007) offers an extended critique of this linguistic argument.

Dancy (2000)'s argument against mentalism about motivating reasons for both action and belief turns on the thought that it must be possible to act or believe for good reasons. Since Dancy takes good reasons to be facts, he takes mentalism about motivating reasons to imply that it is impossible to act or believe for good reasons. Turri (2011) critically assesses this argument. While Dancy’s argument is influential in meta-ethics, it has not gone without resistance.


Raz, J. 1975. *Practical Reason and Norms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Chapter 1 combines a factualist account of normative reasons for action and belief with a mentalist account of motivating reasons for action and belief.]


3.1.2 Alternatives to Mentalism

The alternatives to mentalism about motivating epistemic reasons resemble the alternatives to mentalism about normative epistemic reasons. Some hold that motivating epistemic reasons are facts. Unger (1975) and Hyman (1999) are examples. Others hold that they are propositions. Armstrong (1973: 78-9), Audi (1986) and Millar (2004) are examples. For a balanced discussion of some arguments against viewing reasons of all kinds (motivating or normative) as propositions, see Turri (2012).

Although non-mentalist views are sometimes supported on the basis of ordinary language considerations, there are also ordinary language arguments against non-mentalist views. Notice that when an agent’s rationale for thinking or acting is false, we are forced to say things like “She believed that P because she believed that Q”. We cannot felicitously say “She believed that P for the reason that Q”. These arguments receive extensive critical discussion in Alvarez (2010) and Dancy (2000). While both focus primarily on motivating reasons for action, the points they make extend in an obvious way to motivating reasons for belief.


Armstrong, D. M. 1973. *Belief, Truth and Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Chapter 6 contains some reasons for thinking that reasons are propositions, though the arguments are hedged and it is unclear whether the author thinks that there are just different legitimate ways to talk about reasons.]

Audi, R. 1986. “Belief, Reason and Inference.” *Philosophical Topics* 14: 27-65. [This discussion of the epistemic basing relation recommends viewing reasons as propositions, though the author reserves the technical expression “reason state” for the beliefs that enable certain propositions to serve as our reasons.]


Hyman, J. 1999. “How Knowledge Works.” *Philosophical Quarterly* 49: 433-51. [In the course of arguing that knowledge is the ability to be guided by the facts, Hyman defends a factualist conception of motivating reasons.]

Millar, A. 2004. *Understanding People*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Chapters 1 and 2 discuss motivating and normative reasons for belief. The author views both as propositions.]


Unger, P. 1975. *Ignorance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Chapter 5 argues that motivating reasons must be facts that we know.]
3.2 Reasons and the Basing Relation

What does it take for a consideration to be one's motivating epistemic reason for some doxastic attitude—i.e., the reason for which one holds that doxastic attitude? Discussions of the basing relation in epistemology are, at bottom, discussions of this question. Theories of the basing relation have traditionally split into three categories, as Korcz (1997) observes: causal theories, counterfactual theories, and doxastic theories.

Defenders of causal theories include Armstrong (1973: Ch. 6) and Moser (1989). Both are open to understanding motivating epistemic reasons as propositions; indeed, Armstrong explicitly argues for this view. They don’t claim that the propositions are causes of belief, but rather claim that a proposition R is someone’s motivating epistemic reason for believing P only if certain causal relations hold between that person’s belief in R and her belief in P. When counterfactual analyses of causal notions were popular, Swain (1981) defended a counterfactual analysis. This led to a very complicated analysis due to conditional fallacy problems.

Causal theories of the basing relation face the same worries about deviant causation that plague causal theories generally. Turri (2011) is among the most notable attempts to solve the problem of causal deviance. Another long-standing worry about causal theories concerns their inability to address “gypsy lawyer” counterexamples from Lehrer (1971). Until recently, the main alternatives to causal theories have been doxastic theories, which demand that the subject see an apparent reason-giving connection between R and her belief in order for R to count as her motivating reason. Tolliver (1982) argues against causal accounts and in favor of a doxastic account. Korcz (1997) provides some reasons for thinking that a pure doxastic theory is unacceptable and proposes a hybrid causal-doxastic theory; Longino (1978) also defended a mixed account long before him. A neglected alternative that goes back to Winters (1983) invokes the ideology of dispositions; Evans (2012) has recently resurrected this dispositional theory and noted its advantages over other causal, doxastic, and causal-doxastic theories.


Korcz, K. 1997. “Recent Work on the Basing Relation.” _American Philosophical Quarterly_ 34: 171-191. [This paper provides a comprehensive survey of work on the basing relation from the early 1970s and to the late 1990s, and provides a statement of the author’s own causal-doxastic account.]


Swain, M. 1981. _Reasons and Knowledge_. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. [Chapter 2 provides counterfactual analyses of the causal notions that the author uses to analyze the basing relation in Chapter 3.]
4 Reasons and Other Epistemic Standings

Much literature on reasons in epistemology focuses on how reasons relate to other objects of epistemological interest. This section covers discussions of the connection between reasons and (i) justification, (ii) rationality, (iii) knowledge, (iv) perception, and (v) reasoning.

4.1 Reasons and Epistemic Justification

Must all justified beliefs be based on reasons? Lyons (2009) argues that the answer is ‘No’ and provides a purely reliabilist account of justified belief. Millar (1991: Ch. 6) has also defended the idea that there are “groundless” justified beliefs. Both authors use ‘reasons’ and ‘grounds’ interchangeably.

While it is hard to find earlier reliabilists explicitly denying that justified beliefs must be based on reasons, earlier reliabilists did provide accounts of justification that seemed to make it possible for justified beliefs to be based on no reasons. Goldman (1979) claimed that a belief is \textit{prima facie} non-inferentially justified iff it is the output of an unconditionally reliable belief-independent belief-forming process. It seems clear that there could be belief-forming processes of this kind that do not involve basing on normative reasons.

While many skeptics about the necessity of reasons for justification are externalists, not all are. Earlier it was noted that Pollock (1974) defined foundationalism so that it entailed that some justified beliefs are not based on reasons. But Pollock is no externalist. Moreover, Wright (2004) argues that there are entitlements for belief that are not grounded in epistemic reasons—though it is unclear whether he regards entitlement as a form of justification; it is also unclear, as Jenkins (2007) argues, why this notion of entitlement is epistemic.

Epistemologists who defend the necessity of reasons for justification include evidentialists like Conee and Feldman (2004). But friends of the necessity of reasons for justification are not limited to evidentialists or internalists. Littlejohn (2011b) upholds the necessity of reasons for justification but not an evidentialist or internalist. And Comesa˜ na (2010) defends a reliabilist form of evidentialism.

The question of the necessity of reasons for justification is not the only interesting question to ask about the relationship between reasons and justification. Another interesting question is whether holding one’s beliefs for good reasons is sufficient for doxastic justification. Turri (2010) defends a negative answer to this question, arguing that there are incompetent ways to base beliefs on good reasons that preclude doxastic justification.

Comesa˜ na, J. 2010. “Evidentialist Reliabilism.” \textit{Nous} 44.4: 571-600. [Defends a fusion of evidentialism and reliabilism.]


Lyons, J. C. 2009. *Perception and Basic Beliefs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Argues against the view that reasons are necessary for justification and in favor of a purely reliabilist conception of justification.]


Pollock, J. 1974. *Knowledge and Justification*, Ch.1. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [Defends a version of foundationalism on which basic beliefs are not justified by reasons, but also defends an internalist view about justification.]


Wright, C. 2004. “Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free)?” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 78: 167-212. [A great example of an internalist view that doesn’t require all warranted beliefs to be based on reasons.]

**The Regress Problem**

Disputes between foundationalists, coherentists and infinitists in epistemology have traditionally been organized around the problem of the regress of reasons. The problem begins with the observation that there seem to be only three logically possible ways that reasoning can proceed: by stopping somewhere, by proceeding infinitely, or by going in a circle. Epistemologists have defended views about the structure of epistemic justification that countenance all three possibilities: foundationalists require termination in foundations that can provide support without themselves needing support, infinitists require justified beliefs to be supported (propositionally, at least) by an infinite chain of reasons, and coherentists maintain that a given belief can be justified simply by hanging together in a mutually supportive web of beliefs.

Foundationalism retains so many adherents in the contemporary scene that it is hard to supply a satisfactory list in this context. Infinitism, by contrast, was first defended as a serious option by Klein (1999), who remains the view’s lone staunch supporter. Coherentism has had many influential adherents, but perhaps the most noteworthy is BonJour (1985). Hybrid views have also been defended: Haack (1993)’s “foundherentism” is a particularly salient example. Sometimes foundationalism is defined (as noted earlier) as a view on which there are some beliefs—the foundational ones—that are justified without being based on any reasons. But foundationalists, especially of the internalist variety, more often appeal to a special kind of state that doesn’t itself need to be based on a reason to provide a reason—e.g., a non-doxastic seeming in the more modest form of the view (see Huemer (2001)) or an instance of direct acquaintance in the classical form of the view (see Fumerton (1995)). Of course, foundationalism does not have to take an internalist form: Goldman (1979)’s account of justification has a foundationalist structure, with beliefs that are formed by unconditionally reliable, belief-independent processes.
serving as the foundations. For a classic overview of the options that ends with an endorsement of a virtue-theoretic form of externalism, see Sosa (1980). For a recent, short, and accessible defense of coherentism, see Elgin (2005).


Sosa, E. 1980. “The Raft and the Pyramid.” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5: 3-26. [A classic discussion of the options vis-à-vis the regress problem, as well as the first place where Sosa’s virtue epistemology began to take shape.]

### 4.2 Reasons, Coherence, and Epistemic Rationality

A hot topic in the last fifteen years has been the relationship between reasons, rationality, and normativity. There was a time when rationality was regarded as the normative authority *par excellence*. But recent years have witnessed increasing doubts about this idea, beginning with Korsgaard (1997) and culminating in Kolodny (2005) and Broome (2008). These doubts are driven in large part by the idea that objective reasons are the gold standard of normativity and by certain views about the nature of rationality. Theorists like Broome and Kolodny all take the core requirements of rationality to be requirements of coherence. Given certain views about the logical form of these requirements, it is easy to see why someone might be skeptical about their normative significance.

Broome (1999) influentially viewed these requirements in a wide scope fashion; this idea goes back, however, at least as far as Greenspan (1975). Consider the “enkratic” requirement to have attitude A if one believes one ought to have A. For Broome, this hypothetical requirement is equivalent to a ban against a conjunction of states: it requires one not to both believe that one ought to have A and lack A. While Broome’s picture was popular in the early 2000s, the terrain shifted with Kolodny (2005). Kolodny argued that coherence requirements are narrow scope requirements. Kolodny’s version of this view predicts that enkratic requirements are detaching requirements.

This led Kolodny to deny that there are conclusive reasons to be rational. The obvious worry concerns bootstrapping. Suppose it is true that there are conclusive reasons to comply with the requirements of rationality. The detaching readings of enkratic requirements will generate conclusive reasons to drop or form certain attitudes whenever one believes that there are conclusive reasons to drop or form these attitudes. But it is hard to believe that our beliefs...
about whether we have conclusive reasons are self-verifying! Hence, Kolodny (2005) and (2007) encouraged skepticism about the normativity of rationality and provided an error theory. While Broome still holds the wide scope picture, he too has become skeptical about the normativity of rationality; see Broome (2005) and (2008). Reisner (2011) addresses the issue for epistemic coherence requirements and argues that we need not be skeptics. It is worth noting that there are some doubts in recent epistemology about whether the “enkratic” principle that figures so heavily in these discussions really is a requirement of rationality. These doubts are well catalogued and critically examined in Horowitz (2013).


Broome, J. 2005. “Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?” *Philosophical Issues* 15: 321-37. [The first place where Broome expresses doubts about whether there is a tight connection between being rational and correctly responding to reasons.]


Horowitz, S. 2013. “Epistemic Enkrasia.” *Nous*. Online first. DOI: 10.1111/nous.12026. [A comprehensive critical discussion of doubts in recent epistemology about whether enkratic principles are requirements of rationality.]


Scanlon, T. M. 1998. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [Chapter 1 contains an influential argument for thinking that requirements of rationality should be understood very narrowly, which is presupposed by Broome and Kolodny.]

**The Importance of this Literature for Epistemology**

While this literature has great importance for epistemology, the impact has only begun to show. One example is Jackson (2011), who questions some arguments for “seemings internalism” by appealing to a non-detaching picture of the rational pressure exerted by seemings. Jackson also observes in passing that one might use the resulting distinction between rational pressures and
justifying pressures to explain conflicting intuitions about what we ought to believe in the cases of cognitive penetration discussed by Siegel (2012). Another example is Pryor (2004). In his assessment of Moorean responses to skepticism, Pryor claims that the relation of being rationally committed to certain doxastic attitudes by other doxastic attitudes is “non-detaching”. After claiming that a belief is rational if none of one’s other doxastic attitudes rationally commit one to abandoning it, Pryor (2004: 365) echoed Broome: “This makes ‘being rational’ a different quality than having justification.” While Pryor (2004: 375) cites Broome, he expressed reservations about using a wide scope interpretation to capture the idea that coherence requirements are hypothetical. It is worth comparing Lord (2011), who has shown how to accept a narrow scope interpretation while viewing coherence requirements as rationally escapable. Magdelena and Brendan Balcerak Jackson (2013) have also made insightful use of ideas from Broome in discussing the idea that reasoning is sometimes a generative (rather than merely preservative) epistemic source.


Lord, E. 2011. “Violating Requirements, Exiting from Requirements, and the Scope of Rationality.” Philosophical Quarterly 61: 392-399. [This paper shows how narrow-scopers about the requirements of rationality can consistently agree that these requirements are rationally escapable.]

Pryor, J. 2004. “What’s Wrong with Moore’s Argument?” Philosophical Issues 14: 349-378. [Puts Broomean insights to work in a nuanced discussion of Moorean anti-skeptical arguments which explains their dialectical ineffectiveness consistently with their justificatory force. The author does, however, express doubts about whether wide-scoping is the right way to capture Broome’s insights.]

Siegel, S. 2012. “Cognitive Penetrability and Perceptual Justification.” Nous 46: 201-222. [Draws attention to the importance of cases of cognitive penetration for the status of dogmatist accounts of perceptual justification—cases that are arguably resolved by distinguishing between the pressures of rationality and the pressures of justification.]

4.3 Reasons and Knowledge

Discussions of the relationship between reasons and knowledge mirror discussions of the relationship between reasons and justification. Some have denied that reasons are necessary for knowledge while seeming to leave it open whether they are necessary for justification. Examples include Dretske (1991), Sosa (2007), Greco (2010) and Moon (2012). Greco and Sosa do claim that there is an epistemic status weaker than knowledge that does not require reasons. But they do not use the term ‘justification’. Greco uses the term ‘k-normative status’, while Sosa uses ‘epistemic competence’ and ‘adroitness’. Other writers who deny that reasons are necessary for knowledge explicitly agree that reasons are necessary for justification. They rely on this assumption in arguing that justification is unnecessary for knowledge. Kornblith (2008)
is an example. He accepts a reasons-based account of justification and denies on this basis that knowledge requires justification. He cites Goldman (1967) as an earlier example. While all these writers agree that absence of unreasonableness is necessary for knowledge, some people reject even this claim. See Lasonen-Aarnio (2010).


Goldman, A. 1967. “A Causal Theory of Knowing.” *Journal of Philosophy* 64: 357-372. [Goldman suggests at the end of this classic defense of a causal theory of knowing that knowledge does not require justification. In drawing this conclusion, he assumes—in sharp contrast to his later thinking—that justification must be understood in an internalist way.]

Greco, J. 2010. *Achieving Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Chapters 3 and 4 argue against understanding knowledge as requiring reasons, though Greco seems to presuppose that epistemic reasons must be understood as internalist evidentialists understand them.]


Lasonen-Aarnio, M. 2010. “Unreasonable Knowledge.” *Philosophical Perspectives* 24: 1-21. [Argues that one can know that P even if one is unreasonable in believing that P.]

Moon, A. 2012. “Knowing without Evidence.” *Mind* 121: 309-331. [Argues that we can know that P without believing that P on the basis of evidence.]

Sosa, E. 2007. *Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, v. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [In discussing intuitive knowledge in Chapter 3, Sosa suggests that this knowledge is best understood in terms of competences that are not reasons-based.]

### 4.4 Reasons, Perception, and Conceptual Content

Reasons play an important role in recent discussions of the contents of perceptual experience. Some have thought that we can defend the claim that perceptual experiences have conceptual content on the basis of the claim that perceptual experience provides reasons for belief. This idea goes back to McDowell (1994) and receives an extended defense in Brewer (1999) and (2005). Heck (2000) and Byrne (2005) both provide critical assessments.

Brewer has changed his mind. He now denies that perceptual experience has content at all, favoring an “austere relationalist” account of perceptual experience. See Brewer (2006). For a critical discussion of Brewer’s new view and a defense of the conceptualist picture on the basis of considerations about the reason-providing character of experience, see Ginsborg (2011). Schellenberg (2011) also provides a defense of perceptual content that captures the epistemological insights of Brewer’s more recent austere relationalist view. Siegel (2010) is another important place to look for the state of the art on these issues at the intersection of the philosophy of perception and epistemology.
Other epistemologically significant conclusions have been drawn from the premise that perceptual experiences provide reasons for belief. Lyons (2009) defends doxastic mentalism about reasons for belief and argues that experiences of the kind that provide justifying reasons are beliefs. But he does not take this to support coherentism. On the contrary, he takes it to show that not all justified beliefs are justified by reasons! Millar (2011)’s account of how perception provides reasons for belief has some related implications. Millar thinks that it is by exercising certain recognitional abilities in perception that we come to gain perceptual reasons for belief. But Millar understands recognition as a kind of knowledge. This leads him to accept a version of knowledge-first epistemology—a view that he might not accept if he took there to be a reductive explanation of how we gain reasons for belief.

Brewer, B. 1999. *Perception and Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Contains Brewer’s defense of the thesis that possessing a reason requires the concepts necessary to articulate the proposition that constitutes that reason, as well as Brewer’s defense of conceptualism about perceptual content.]


Brewer, B. 2006. “Perception and Content.” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14: 165-181. [Marks the shift in Brewer’s thought to an austere relationalist or “no content” view of perceptual experience.]


Ginsborg, H. 2011. “Perception, Generality, and Reasons” in Reisner, A. and Steglich-Petersen, A. (eds.) *Reasons for Belief*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [This paper critically assesses the shift in Brewer’s thought and provides a defense of the claim that perceptual experience has conceptual content in response to Brewer’s new doubts about the idea.]


4.5 Reasons, Reasoning, and Logic

It is common to see introductory logic textbooks suggesting tight links between logic, good reasons, and reasoning. But in epistemology, the tightness of the connection has been questioned. Harman (1984) famously denied that there is any tight connection. It is, after all, implausible that we have good reasons to believe the most arcane logical consequences of our justified beliefs simply because these are logical consequences. We would only seem to possess these reasons if we are in a position to recognize the entailment relations. But as Harman noted, even if one recognizes that one’s beliefs entail a conclusion, the proper response to this might be to drop those beliefs, not accept the conclusion.

While Harman’s points have proven influential, they arguably overlook important distinctions and dialectical possibilities. Earlier, we saw that meta-ethicists distinguish between objective and subjective normative reasons, or between the reasons there are and the reasons we have. Harman’s first point only has straightforward bearing on the relationship between logic and possessed or subjective normative reasons for belief. And its significance remains unclear. Some have doubted whether recognition of the entailment provides the deepest explanation of how we can come to possess certain logical reasons; cf. Boghossian (2003) and Dogramaci (2012). In any case, Harman’s first point does not undermine tight connections between logic and objective reasons for belief.

Harman’s second point does not undermine certain ways of establishing a tight link between entailments and objective normative reasons for belief. We could follow Broome (2013) in taking the conclusive reason to prohibit a certain combination of doxastic attitudes rather than to require any particular doxastic attitude. One could hold that if P entails Q, there is a conclusive objective epistemic reason not to both believe P and disbelieve Q. Streumer (2007) has defended this type of view and critically assessed Harman’s arguments. For another important discussion of Harman, see Field (2009).

Other attacks on the connection between logic and correct reasoning have come from formal quarters. Christensen (2004) has argued that the proper response to the preface and lottery paradoxes is to abandon deductive consistency as a rational requirement on full belief. Christensen’s worries cannot be addressed by appealing to Broomean wide-scoping.

Boghossian, P. 2003. “Blind Reasoning.” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 77: 225-248. [Argues against standard versions of inferential internalism and inferential externalism, and attacks the idea that recognition of entailment relations is what fundamentally explains how one’s knowledge of certain propositions can provide one with sufficient reasons to believe some but not other logical entailments of these propositions.]

Broome, J. 2013. Rationality Through Reasoning. Oxford: Blackwell. [The definitive and up-to-date expression of Broome’s views about reasons, rationality, and reasoning in the epistemic and practical domains.]
Christensen, D. 2004. Putting Logic in Its Place. Oxford: Clarendon Press. [Argues extensively against coherence requirements on full belief that are grounded in logic, though the author is in favor of Bayesian coherence requirements and skeptical about the importance of full belief.]

Dogramaci, S. 2013. “Intuitions for Inferences.” Philosophical Studies 165: 371-399. [Like Boghossian (2003), this paper casts doubt on the idea that recognition of entailment relations is what fundamentally explains how one’s knowledge of certain propositions can provide one with sufficient reasons to believe some but not other logical entailments of these propositions.]


Harman, G. 1984. “Logic and Reasoning.” Synthese 60: 107-127. [This is the locus classicus of Harman’s doubts about the connection between logic, normative reasons for belief, and good reasoning.]


5 Reasons and the Epistemology-Metaethics Interface

New interest in reasons has increased the cross traffic between epistemology and meta-ethics. This concluding section documents some of this activity.

5.1 The Error Theory and the Interface

As early as Railton (1997), meta-ethicists began to appreciate similarities between epistemic and moral reasons. Epistemic reasons are categorical like moral reasons are categorical, authoritative like moral reasons are authoritative, intrinsically prescriptive like moral reasons are intrinsically prescriptive, and so on. These are all features that that inclined error theorists like Mackie to label moral reasons as “queer”. If the queerness of these properties is a good reason for being an error theorist in ethics, it is equally a good reason for being an error theorist in epistemology. Yet an error theory about epistemic reasons is arguably implausible and even self-defeating, as Cuneo (2007) argues. This suggests a “companions in guilt” strategy for realists. Of course, the devil is in the details. This strategy has received critical attention; see Olson (2011). Anti-realists such as Street (2011) run the argument in the opposite direction.

Cuneo, T. 2007. The Normative Web. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Argues that typical arguments for anti-realism about moral reasons can be equally used to defend anti-realism about epistemic reasons. The author takes this to be a reductio of anti-realism about moral reasons.]


5.2 Internalism/Externalism Controversies and the Interface

Another locus of cross traffic is in recent discussions of internalism/externalism controversies in meta-ethics. While these controversies are not structurally identical to the similarly named controversies in epistemology, recent writers have landed on interesting analogies.

In meta-ethics, two distinct internalist theses receive discussion, which Darwall (1983) labeled existence internalism and judgment internalism. Existence internalism claims that R is a normative reason for S to φ only if S bears a certain motivational relation to R. There is wide disagreement among internalists about the character of the motivational relation. But one idea is that R would motivate S to φ if S were fully informed and conformed to all requirements of coherence. Markovits (2011) explores some analogies between the existence internalism/externalism debate and the debate between coherentists and foundationalists in epistemology, taking existence internalism to be analogous to coherentism. While she agrees that we should reject coherentism, she argues that there are no analogues of basic beliefs in the practical domain, and that this is part of why we should be existence internalists.

Judgment internalism is the view that judgments about normative practical reasons are essentially motivating, at least in certain idealized circumstances. Judgment internalism plays an important role in arguments for expressivism. Might there be a defensible epistemic analogue of judgment internalism? Mitova (2011) explores this possibility. Chrisman (2012) also discusses the tenability of epistemic judgment internalism and its role in arguments for epistemic expressivism.

Chrisman, M. 2012. “Epistemic Expressivism.” Philosophy Compass 7: 118-126. [Surveys the literature on expressivism in epistemology.]

Darwall, S. 1983. Impartial Reason. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. [In addition to containing helpful discussions of the difference between normative and motivating reasons and critical assessments of Humean theories of both, this book is the source of the distinction between “judgment internalism” and “existence internalism.”]


5.3 Constitutivism, Aims and the Interface

In the past twenty years, epistemology and meta-ethics alike have witnessed an upsurge of interest in the sources of normative reasons. Constitutivism—the view that normative facts can be grounded in facts about the constitution of agency or mentality—has loomed large in this discussion. The recent prominence of this view owes heavily to the writings of Christine Korsgaard, beginning with Korsgaard (1996) and receiving further development and defense in Korsgaard (2008) and (2009), among many other works.

As soon as this view rose to prominence in the literature, meta-ethicists immediately began to explore the analogies with epistemology. This is partly because it seems so promising that facts about normative epistemic reasons are grounded in facts about the nature of belief—in particular, about the aim of belief. It has been recognized at least since Williams (1973) that it is an essential fact about the nature of belief that it aims at the truth, and this fact about the aim of belief would seem to explain why only truth-relevant considerations seem to be epistemic reasons for or against belief. The analogy is explored in Velleman (1996), and Velleman has also influentially discussed the epistemic case in isolation in his (2000). Enoch (2006) has attacked constitutivism on the basis of the “schmagency” challenge: it is intelligible to suppose that we shouldn’t be agents but rather schmagents, and if so, it seems doubtful that we can ground genuine normativity in facts about the constitution of agency.


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*Oxford Bibliographies Online* only permitted me to cite material that is published, either in a hard copy of a journal or online first. There is a huge amount of excellent material on reasons...
in epistemology (or relevant to the topic of reasons in epistemology) that remains unpublished. I fully intend to update this entry on a regular basis as this material starts to be published.

And since this entry is a work in progress, I welcome further suggestions, especially ones that would continue to help me improve the representation of women in the entry.