

Belief Basis

Matjaž Potrč

The basis for belief may be searched in external world and in the psychological connection to it. This is a descriptivist and externalist way to proceed. On the other hand, one may recognize the basis of belief formation to be one's take upon the available evidence, in one's best faith. Doxastic sensibility and responsibility get involved. This brings together teleological and deontic elements in the very foundation of belief. The existence of belief without descriptive and justificatory foundation but with phenomenology-deontics base is therewith admitted. Belief may then be conceived as a species of genuine judgment, with its proper place in the virtue promoting doxastic environment. Inclusive disjunction ecological engagement against exclusivist separatism comes into the foreground.

The basis for belief may be searched in external world and in the psychological connection to it. This is a descriptivist and externalist way to proceed.

What is belief? Perhaps the most appropriate way to tackle this question is by starting with an example. I *believe* that the cat is on the mat (*p*). The *content* of my belief is 'the cat is on the mat'. In this manner, belief has a *semantic* and *intentional* sides to it. Semantic is tied to *truth*.¹ And truth is construed as correspondence. So my belief that the cat is on the mat is true if a situation corresponds to it in the world, figuring a cat on the mat, and otherwise my belief is false.² One may as well construe truth as indirect correspondence, recognizing normative and contextually attuned ingredients as contributing to the truth of belief. But this would already go over descriptivist take on belief role. External relation to the local world environment is in charge for descriptivist belief rendition. Similarly it goes for intentional relation. There is an inclination for intentional relation to be recognized as primary directedness upon the content. But the related truth and origin of this content may again be conceived as involving the situation in the external world. Notice that belief provides a *psychological* connection to the situation in the world that it is typically supposed to present. This goes along with *descriptive* role of belief to be recognized as having priority. Intentional relation may be conceived as one's psychological directedness to representation, perhaps interpreted as proposition, and then further on to the world. Notice that

¹ Truth being a *goal* of belief-formation is dismissed from the *static* semantic take on truth, especially in the truth as direct correspondence rendition.

² Error theory retains psychological, in fact *phenomenological* side of belief as providing *experiential reality* feeling to it. Error then consists in applying *semantic* (truth or falsity) measure to the realist experience based upon *phenomenologically* experienced data. Error theory claims that one is in error to take phenomenologically based realism supporting experiences as corresponding to, complying with semantic and epistemic facts. There is neither truth or falsity to be ascribed to beliefs, nor is there a certified epistemic, knowledge providing access secured to such reality, upon the intuitive phenomenology supported basis. Error theory (in ethics) gets it that there is *phenomenology* basis of *realism* supporting experiences. But it then subjects this result to the descriptivist and externalist semantic and psychological epistemic access proofs. Another way to take on this issue is realizing that belief is in fact in its basis genuine judgment, although reduced exactly in the manner to fit the descriptivist and externalist agenda.

proposition is a counterpart to judgment.³ A relation of proposition to the situation in the world corresponding to it may then be aimed for. Propositions are therewith closer to the *descriptive* role of language than are the judgments, which introduce other dimensions that do not have primarily to do with description and externalism, such as teleological aiming towards a goal, and deontic striving towards what ought to be achieved.

In this exercise, we aim at characterization of belief *basis*. This basis may be descriptive and externally supported, as we just claimed. But this happens at the expense of judgmental deep nature of belief.

On the other hand, one may recognize the basis of belief formation to be one's take upon the available evidence, in one's best faith.

The formerly discussed basis of belief is adjusted to the *space of causes*. According to it, the relevant input comes from the external world, complying to what is perceived in that world, and this is supposed to involve objects, middle sized dry goods. So, these objects are supposed to cause belief, to be in belief's prototypical basis. *Descriptive* form of belief is then supposed to correspond to that external atomistic information basis. There is cat out there, and my belief describes this cat involving fact. Notice that the cat is atomistically forthcoming, despite that it enters into what figures as a larger fact, and that belief describes the situation. Even if you think about the cat while it isn't in your vicinity, the same atomistic causal and descriptive arrangement stays in place.

Here is another way of approaching belief basis. There is *evidence* that one possesses for one's belief, either forthcoming from one's perception or from one's memory⁴. This evidence now figures as a *reason*, and not as a cause (as it did in the former arrangement) to form the belief. Now reason, in counter distinction to cause, naturally acts in the *space of reasons*, which differently to the causal story, constitutively involves *normativity*. This means that *evidence* which is the basis for belief-formation, gets automatically *evaluated* in direction whether it can be the basis for reliable, appropriate belief. In belief-formation, the evidence for belief as the cause for its coming upon the scene, serves as *reason* for belief formation, and in this direction it is evaluated, from one's normativity involving cognitive background. One automatically engages not just into forming belief upon the causally available evidence, but upon this evidence taken *in one's best faith*. This evaluative normative belief-formation dynamic activity relies not just upon causally or externally available matters, but as well upon what supports these as reasons for belief-formation from one's cognitive background. It is important that in all this, causal basis for belief formation gets disciplined through the entire holistic cognitive background that one possesses, adapting itself to the situation at hand.

³ Judgment in inferential relations took the form of Subject-Predicate (S-P). Inferences are then understood to be relations between S-P judgmental form of sentences. Fregean approach to logic and inferences dismissed judgments and adopted function-argument way to go, closer to propositions. There is difference between propositional and doxastic take on belief.

⁴ Several years ago, Chisholm tried to made me attentive at the importance of memory.

There are other layers of belief-formation, but the basic one is that of *all-in ultima facie doxastic seemings*.⁵ You primarily form your belief is based upon your *seemings*, which means on the basis of *phenomenological* data. This is of course *narrow* approach, involving consciousness, as opposed to the formerly discussed causal and descriptive externalism.

The *all-in* seemings means that you do not just rely upon the causal, and further on, upon the evidential information keyed to the situation at hand in a direct manner, but that in forming your belief you engage the background involving everything that you know, in a selective manner. This background, as we said, includes memory, and it includes all that you take to be your position in respect to what you learned from your pals, peers, teachers, from your community, appreciating as well that you may be involved into several communities: you are a father in respect to your family, teacher in respect to your students, habitant of the settlement where you live, and many more. All this background memory cognitive information, involving evaluation, forthcoming in an automatic manner, automatically *evaluates* evidence in what manner this one can figure as a *reason* for your belief being formed. If the background doesn't okay the evidence to figure as a reason for belief being formed, this will not happen.

Ultima facie seemings involve the settled phenomenological data. In perceptual situations, your seemings usually figure as ultimate seemings, unless you form some justified doubt in their respect. Whereas other beliefs, such as your moral or epistemic beliefs, may involve kind of *inferential* assessment. Notice now that this inferential assessment happens *automatically* again, from your background, where morphological content acts in supporting your seemings in direction of belief-formation.⁶ The background chromatically illuminates the available evidence so that it gives it its *reasonish* weight in direction of belief-formation. Normative and evidential forces thereby work in tandem.

Sensibility and responsibility

In respect to belief-formation, we talk about doxastic sensibility and about doxastic responsibility. Responsibility clearly involves deontic elements: if one is responsible, one ought to follow one's doxastic sensibility in forming one's belief. Notice that sensibility has primarily a qualitative, phenomenology basis to it. The same can be stipulated about responsibility, just that in its case there are normative and deontic underlying moments guided by the phenomenological basis.

Both doxastic sensibility and responsibility are effective through *seemings*, and this means *phenomenology*, through the qualitative experience into which one engages while one forms belief. We talk about *doxastic sensibility*, which applies to various forms of beliefs, such as epistemic or moral ones. In the first case then we can talk about epistemic sensibility, and in the second about moral sensibility.

One's doxastic *sensibility* consists of certain dispositions one possesses in respect to belief formation on the basis of one's available evidence, which means not ideally elaborated entire available evidence, but just the evidence that one is ready to assess on the basis of one's

⁵ In a moment, this will be presented as the number (4) goal of belief formation, the goal that one starts it, and that shows its directedness, aims, at the upper stages, goals, and their related rationalities all at work in assessing belief truth goal (1).

⁶ The automatic, momentary elaboration indicates dispositional nature of belief formation background.

all-in *ultima facie* seemings in respect to the matter at hand. This then justifies to stick to one's seemings and to be steadfast in cases of peer disagreement.⁷ One is namely not in possession of the entire, ideally present evidence, but with evidence coming from one's sensibility and responsibility attuned competence.

Dispositions involved in one's doxastic *sensibility* comprise

.(1) *doxastic normative standards applying to the evidential support*. The evidence in question may as well involve reliabilist elements, under the transglobal reliabilism-evidentialism take.⁸ This is then compatible with our space of reasons approach to belief-formation, as opposed to the initially discussed and then opposed space of causes brand. Sensibility thus depends upon *normativity*, which goes contrary to descriptivist and externalist belief renditions. These normative standards, being an upshot of *dispositional* sensibility nature, exercise their influence from the cognitive background, without being exceptionless kind of norms.

.(2) *implicitly appreciated evidence*, which exercises its influence upon belief-formation, without though being explicitly articulable at the very moment as this is happening.

.(3) certain *empirical/normative doxastic entanglements*. These feature perception and categorization succeeding simultaneously in cases of bird-watching or wine-tasting. One forms judgment not just that this is a bird, but being an expert, one forms belief that this is a specific kind of bird, say a skylark.

One's doxastic sensibility, as noticed, consists of several, just mentioned dispositions. One is being able to properly apply normative standards to the available evidence, thereby evaluating this evidence. Along with this, there is as well disposition of applying to this evaluative momentaneous activity not just explicitly presented, but as well implicitly available background evidence, which is relevant for the matter at hand. In doing this, one is able, if the case allows it, to categorize and if needed evaluate available perceptual data.

The mentioned dispositions form *competence* in one's doxastic sensibility. That competence however is not full-proof in respect to possible *performance* errors. I may possess doxastic sensibility, yet may still not meet it in certain cases. My judgments or beliefs for a specific case may turn out to be *performance errors*, as I may realize afterwards. Monty Hall problem may figure such a case. Doxastic sensibility dispositions need and cannot be explicitly present to one's attention while exercising their effect. Doxastic *responsibility* does not imply inferential tractability. To the contrary, due to the useful cognitive performance limitations, belief formation has its main share coming from the background.

Doxastic sensibility supports evidential data in an indirect manner so that these phenomenological data can act as *reasons* in belief-formation. Just evidential data would not suffice for a belief being formed; one needs to evaluate these data through the mentioned forms

⁷ Notice that Henderson and others 2017 paper, from which we take characterization of sensibility elements deals with epistemic sensibility, whereas we take belief-formation in a more generic manner, appealing to doxastic sensibility, which involves epistemic sensibility as its sub-case, besides moral and aesthetic doxastic sensibilities, and more. Rational disagreement is the topics of the mentioned paper. We defend steadfast position, supported by the means-to-ends goals and subgoals, several rationalities involving layers.

⁸ Compare Potrc unpublished, Henderson and others 20017?, Henderson and others 2017. Transglobal evidentialism-reliabilism disciplines externalist and descriptivism leaning approach to belief-formation.

of doxastic sensibility, in a responsible manner, although responsibility cannot be guaranteed or taken for granted either.

Doxastic seemings become reasons for a certain belief being formed once as the sensibility involving dispositions allow these seemings to chromatically illuminate the situation at hand.

How does one form belief?

We try to hastily reconstruct how one forms belief, upon which basis, and how one may proceed from that basis, what are the possible hurdles, the stations where things can stop or get into a wrong direction.⁹

First we reconstruct the overall belief formation sequence. Notice that this sequence is not just descriptive, but that it essentially involves normativity, teleology and deontic elements, as we will elaborate further on. Belief formation proceeds over a nested hierarchy of successive goals, along the means-to-ends stations of goals and subgoals. All of these are constitutively involved into a rational belief formation. The guidelines are that one should pursue the nearest subgoal beneath the targeted goal in order to get to that goal. There is as well the requirement that one should start with the lowest subgoal. Here is the hierarchy, in the opposite order:

First, we have (1) *truth goal*. Forming true belief is an uncontroversial matter: one would not be happy to entertain beliefs that aren't true, it would go against one's comfortable rationality complying feelings.

Doxastic agent is *situated* in several manners. First is the situatedness in respect to *agent's own body of total available evidence* for *p*. This leads to the subgoal: that believed propositions are *likely true*, given total available evidence. That's the (2) *goal of objective doxastic rationality*. This sub-goal supports the formation of the truth goal.

But the just mentioned sub-goal needs to be supported itself. Support comes from the further situatedness of doxastic agent, which has a specific *doxastic sensibility*. This one embodies one's own deep doxastic standards with respect to the matters of evidential support that believed propositions are likely true, according to one's own doxastic sensibility. We took a look at these standards in the previous sections where we singled out the normative points pertaining to doxastic sensibility. This is then the (3) *goal of sensibility-based subjective doxastic rationality*. This goal is there in support of the goal of objective doxastic rationality. But it is further supported by the situatedness of doxastic agent in the world. That situatedness involves forming beliefs in accordance with one's responsible-seeming, *ultima facie* all-in doxastic seemings. That's the station we are mainly concerned with here. It is the (4) *goal of experientially subjective doxastic rationality*. This goal is in support of the upper goal of sensibility based subjective doxastic rationality.

After this preliminary laying-out of the settings, we now turn the table, and try to indicate how belief gets formed along the just introduced stages. As the basis of belief formation, we first proceed from our experiential situatedness in the world, from (4) the goal of experiential subjective doxastic rationality. Notice that if one does not achieve this form of rationality, all the

⁹ These hurdles involving stations need still be elaborated, we actually just sketch their leaning points in this exercise.

subsequent proceedings will be blocked. But if one satisfies it, the goal (4) will lead to the goal (3), that of sensibility based subjective rationality. Here blocking may be forthcoming as well, but in the case it is superseded, the goal of (2) objective doxastic rationality will be supported. And again, satisfying its rationality, one will be able to support belief formation upper (1) truth goal. So truth goal does not come directly and immediately as descriptive and externalist approach to belief would have it, but it is an upshot from a nested hierarchy of goals and subgoals, involving different rationalities. All of this will normally not take lot of time. This is possible because of these goals supporting *reason* to form a belief become their support from the dispositional, already accumulated cognitive background, involving normative and factual stuff. A reason that automatically evaluates the encountered situation where belief is formed has its roots in the cognitive morphological content background, and it gets its effect upon the scene via chromatic illumination.

This brings together teleological and deontic elements in the very foundation of belief.

Notice that the means to ends nested hierarchy which is at work in belief formation is teleological, by the very fact that it pursues several goals that are related in a certain several rationalities involving manner: the truth goal, the goal of objective doxastic rationality, the goal of subjective doxastic rationality and the goal of experiential subjective doxastic rationality. This clear *teleological way* to approach belief formation, and to account for constitution of belief, is *normatively* supported. The entanglement of teleology and normativity then leads to *reasons* that are in the background of belief-formation. In this manner, reasons can be acknowledged to be the basis of belief formation, as not coming from the space of causes (as descriptive and externalist account of belief would like it), but from the *space of reasons*. Teleology-normativity entanglement allows for this. Normative ingredients are to be found in various involved rationalities and as well in doxastic sensibility and responsibility.

The very foundation of belief features the goal of the experiential subjective doxastic rationality. Despite that belief-formation beginning usually proceeds automatically and momentarily (on the basis of cognitive dispositionally encoded background), things may eventually go wrong if one is not following normative requirement to evaluate the incoming material in one's best faith. Normative dimension is thus constitutively involved in these proceedings.¹⁰

The existence of belief without descriptive and justificatory foundation but with phenomenology-deontics base is therewith admitted.

Once we realize means-to-ends hierarchy of embedded goals and subgoals to be constitutive for belief formation, along with its normativity, all this being effective in the space of reasons, this leaves in doubt descriptive and externalist rendering of belief, operating from the space of causes. The goal of belief is then not so much to describe, but actually to fall a judgment. Truth goal of belief then receives a quite different basis and role. Truth is figuring in teleological setting, and it is constitutively normatively supported and co-constituted.

¹⁰ Potrc principle claims that one is obligated to treat the incoming seemings, i.e. phenomenological data, that support belief formation, in one's best faith.

One can ask why beliefs were treated externalistically and descriptively. The answer is that that was the overall bashing of genuine judgment in high church analytical tradition.

Belief may then be conceived as a species of genuine judgment, with its proper place in the virtue promoting doxastic environment.

We can realize that belief, according to our teleological-normatively based reconstruction, shares with what we call *genuine judgment* the following characteristics: a. Phenomenological (seemings) basis, b. Commitment (one does not take one's belief lightly, as some arbitrary opinions, but rather is able to defend them, to stick to them, and to generally follow their motivational force if available), c. Sensibility, and d. Responsibility.¹¹ All these points are shared between belief and genuine judgment. But they are not available, neither of them, in descriptive and externalist rendition of belief. So belief turns out to be genuine judgment of a kind.

Some approaches, we take it, see the right direction, but are still hampered with descriptive traditions in recognizing beliefs to be genuine judgments. So cognitivist expressivism in metaethics takes moral judgments to be beliefs and not emotional reactions to the situation, building the basis for reasons effectivity recognition. It does not go all the way until recognizing them to be *genuine judgments*.

In rational disagreement debate, people embrace *belief* in defending steadfast position as against conciliation. But they should actually recognize belief as what it is, as genuine judgment. Conciliatory positions go quantitatively and not qualitatively, coming down to further reducing genuine judgments not just to beliefs (as many people do), but to the so called credences. The road to recognition of genuine judgment steadfastness, coming from the nested means-to-ends hierarchy of goals, normatively and rationality involvement supported, is then precluded.

Now, the proper place to recognize for *belief* as *genuine judgment* comes from the *virtue* perspective. Doxastic epistemic approach finds its proper place in *virtuous* epistemic character, naturally involving normativity and deontic forces. Doxastic ethical approach similarly then finds its proper place in *virtuous* moral character of the involved person. Things then succeed in the space of *reasons*.

Inclusive disjunction ecological engagement against exclusivist separatism comes into the foreground.

There is a parallel between descriptive belief construction and between externalist intentionality construal. Separatism between intentionality and phenomenology is usually embraced. As against this, phenomenology of intentionality and intentionality of phenomenology thesis is promoted.¹²

The overall methodological approach underlying this allows for *inclusive disjunction*: couples that may seem exclusive, seemingly being just independent, realize that they profit from living together.¹³

¹¹ For c. and d. take a look at the section above dealing with these items.

¹² Horgan and Tienson 2002.

¹³ James Brown claims that a man's world is nothing without a woman or a girl.