All Evidential Basing is Phenomenal Basing

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My thesis, which I call the *phenomenal basing thesis*, is that the evidential basing relation obtains between someone’s belief and evidence E only if the mental state associated with E has phenomenal character. In §2, I explain the thesis and provide background. In §3–§6, I show that the phenomenal basing thesis holds for simple basic beliefs, inferential beliefs, and complex basic beliefs, both when the beliefs are being formed and when they are being sustained.

Key Words: Basing, Evidence, Justification, Phenomenal Character

**1. Introduction**

I will defend the following:

*Phenomenal Basing Thesis*: The evidential basing relation obtains between someone’s belief and evidence E only if the mental state associated with E has phenomenal character.

This thesis highlights the important role that states with phenomenal character have to epistemology. In §2, I explain the phenomenal basing thesis and provide background. In §3–§6, I defend it.

**2. Background**

*2.1 Understanding the Thesis*

What do I mean by ‘evidential basing relation’? Let’s start with some paradigm examples. Suppose Riley opens her eyes and sees something moving. On the basis of her visual evidence, she comes to believe that something is moving. Or suppose Holmes learns that the murderer wore a corsage at the party and also that only Greta wore a corsage at the party; on the basis of this evidence, he comes to believe that Greta is the murderer. In both cases, our characters believe something on the basis of their evidence; this relation between belief and evidence is the *evidential basing relation*.

The Holmes story could have gone differently. Despite his good evidence that Greta is the murderer, suppose that Holmes had resisted believing it because of his emotional ties to her. One can have good evidence for p without believing p. Furthermore, suppose we add to the story that Holmes does come to believe that Greta is the murderer, not due to the excellent evidence at his disposal, but due to a brain lesion. Then the evidential basing relation is *not* instantiated. I make the following distinction:

Distinction: There is the evidence you have, and there is the evidence you actually use to form your belief.

The latter evidence is what your belief is based on. (I will appeal to this distinction in §5.)

Some philosophers are interested in some unified relation that holds not only between belief and evidence, but also between *actions* and *non-evidential reasons*.[[1]](#footnote-1) If the reason I hug you is because I like you, then I am also instantiating an important basing relation, one that does not relate belief and evidence. In this paper, I am only concerned with *evidential* basing, which only holds between belief and evidence. It *might* be that what I say in this paper will apply to other sorts of basing, but for focus, I will only address evidential basing.

What do I mean by ‘evidence’? Some think that one’s evidence is one’s beliefs and experiences; others think it is propositions; others think it is only facts.[[2]](#footnote-2) So, in the above example, is Holmes’ evidence the *fact* that only Greta wore a corsage, the *proposition* that only Greta wore a corsage, or Holmes’s *belief* (or *knowledge*) that only Greta wore a corsage? I’ll not take a stance on this hard question.

However, I can now explain what I mean by ‘mental state associated with evidence E’. Notice that Holmes must still *believe* the proposition (or fact) that only Greta wore a corsage in order to *have* the evidence. So, even if the evidence is not the belief itself, in order to *have* the evidence, Holmes must still believe the relevant proposition (or fact). Similarly, Riley believed on the basis of her visual evidence. She might not need to *believe* her visual evidence, but she must at least be in some sort of mental state to have her visual evidence.

So, *either* evidence is itself a mental state *or* one must be in a mental state to *have* the evidence. I intend for ‘mental state associated with evidence E’ to pick out either E itself (if E is a mental state) or the mental state required to *have* E (if E is a fact or proposition). And the phenomenal basing thesis affirms that evidential basing obtains only if *that* mental state has phenomenal character. For ease of discussion, I will assume that one’s evidence *just is* the mental state associated with the evidence. Those who disagree can imagine that whenever I am talking about the mental state that *is* the evidence, I am actually talking about the mental state required to *have* the evidence.

The *phenomenal character* of a mental state is the experiential *what it is like* to be in that mental state. For example, there is something it is like to be in pain. Plausibly, some mental states have no phenomenal character. When I dreamlessly sleep, none of my beliefs (nor any of my mental states) have phenomenal character. Just as there is nothing it is like to be a rock, there is nothing it is like to dreamlessly sleep. Furthermore, most of one’s beliefs have no phenomenal character, even when one is awake; my belief that snow is white has no phenomenal character when, say, I am thinking about philosophy while eating supper.

Still, I can bring my belief that snow is white *to mind*; then it *will* have phenomenal character. There is something it is like to consciously believe that snow is white.[[3]](#footnote-3) Not everybody agrees with this view. Many will say that it’s not the *belief* that has phenomenal character; rather, it is the *conscious* *judgment* that snow is white that has phenomenal character, and a conscious judgment is distinct from a belief.[[4]](#footnote-4) Whether the bearer of phenomenal character is a conscious judgment or a conscious belief (or both) is neither here nor there for my paper. In our current example, there is some sort of conscious judging or conscious belief-like mental state I stand in to the proposition that *snow is white* when that belief “comes to mind”. It *does* have phenomenal character, and I will refer to that mental state with the term ‘conscious belief’. Those who think that what I am calling ‘conscious belief’ is not a real belief can imagine that I am saying ‘conscious judgment’.

Some think the direct opposite of the view just discussed. They think that beliefs *cannot* exist unconsciously or without phenomenal character: one believes that p only if there is something it is like to believe p.[[5]](#footnote-5) If they are right, then I have no beliefs while dreamlessly asleep. If that is true, then nearly all the troublesome potential counterexamples I must deal with in the following sections are not actually counterexamples. So, in order to not make things too easy for me, I will assume that this view is false and that some beliefs can exist unconsciously (and without phenomenal character).[[6]](#footnote-6)

*2.2 Some Background Epistemology*

First, I will explain propositional justification and doxastic justification. The former is justification *for* believing some proposition. To understand propositional justification, it will be useful to consider one popular theory of it:

*Evidentialism*PJ: what S is propositionally justified in believing is determined solely by S’s evidence.

Note that one might have evidence for believing p (be propositionally justified in believing p) even if one does not actually believe p. Competitors of evidentialismPJ will say that evidence is not the only factor that determines whether one is propositionally justified in believing something; perhaps other pragmatic or moral conditions must be met.[[7]](#footnote-7)

‘Doxastic justification’ refers to a *belief’s* justification; the belief is formed or maintained in an epistemically proper way, perhaps in the way that is necessary (but probably not sufficient) for knowledge. Evidential basing can be a link between propositional and doxastic justification: it can be that relation between a belief and evidence which converts a merely propositionally justified belief into a doxastically justified one. So, when Riley believes that something is moving *on the basis* of her propositional justification (or her evidence), her belief is doxastically justified. An evidentialist theory of doxastic justification will say *at least* this:

*Evidentialism*DJ: S’s belief that p is doxastically justified only if S believes that p on the basis of S’s evidence.

This does not give us sufficient conditions for doxastic justification.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, it gives us a necessary condition that nearly all who identify by the term ‘evidentialist’ would accept.[[9]](#footnote-9)

An important question that will later arise is whether doxastic justification entails propositional justification. Many think that it does. Those who accept evidentialismDJ will naturally think that having doxastically justified belief that p entails having propositional justification (evidence) for p. Furthermore, notice that one could accept evidentialismDJ without accepting evidentialismPJ; one might think that doxastic justification has believing on the basis of evidence as a necessary condition, but then think that other factors are also necessary for propositional justification.[[10]](#footnote-10) So, many will think that doxastic justification entails propositional justification.

However, many will also disagree. For example, Michael Bergmann (2006, 132–142) explicitly denies such a connection. On his view, roughly, what makes a belief doxastically justified is its production by properly functioning, truth-aimed, cognitive faculties. The belief needn’t be based on evidence or propositional justification. Similarly, a *reliabilist* might hold that whether a belief is doxastically justified is determined by its being reliably formed.[[11]](#footnote-11) Again, no appeal to the belief’s being based on evidence or propositional justification is needed. I’ll call such views *nonevidentialist* since they reject evidentialismDJ. They will be important for my later arguments.

Second, I will distinguish between two species of evidentialismPJ: *time-slice evidentialism* and *historical evidentialism*. Both theories affirm evidentialismPJ. However, the time-slice evidentialist says that evidentialismPJ is true, *and* one’s propositional justification at a time t is determined only by one’s evidence at t. The historical evidentialist thinks that evidentialismPJ is true, *and* one’s propositional justification at t can also be determined by one’s evidence at times other than t. For example, evidence you had in the past can be relevant to what you are justified in believing now, even if you no longer have that evidence now.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Third, an *inferential belief* is a belief that is arrived at by way of conscious inference from another belief. A *noninferential belief* is a belief that is not an inferential belief. I will use the terms ‘basic belief’ and ‘noninferential belief’ synonymously and use neither to imply anything about a belief’s justificational status.[[13]](#footnote-13) Notice, however, that a belief’s being basic does not exclude its being based on evidence, such as when Riley noninferentially believes on the basis of her visual evidence. She just doesn’t make a conscious inference from her evidence. With these background theories and points in mind, I will now defend my thesis.

**3. Defending the Phenomenal Basing Thesis: Simple Basic Beliefs**

Defending the phenomenal basing thesis requires checking various beliefs and confirming that *either* they are based on evidence with phenomenal character *or* they are not actually based on evidence. In §3, I will focus on simple basic beliefs. In §4, I will focus on inferential beliefs. In §5, I will focus on more complex basic beliefs and respond to objections. In §6, I will argue for the phenomenal basing thesis.

*3.1 Simple Basic Beliefs When Formed*

When we consider paradigm, doxastically justified, basic beliefs, they are based on evidence with phenomenal character. Consider again Riley’s perceptual belief. When she believes that something is moving, on the basis of her visual evidence, her belief is related to a mental state with phenomenal character, whether that mental state is its seeming that something is moving or some other part of her visual experience.[[14]](#footnote-14) Or suppose Tim believes the law of noncontradiction (LN) on the basis of its seeming true. This seeming has phenomenal character; there is something it is like for it to seem to Tim that LN is true.[[15]](#footnote-15) Note that I do not need to hold that *the seeming* is the evidence; about Tim and LN, for example, some might think that the evidence is a *seeing the truth* (Conee 1998) or a *rational insight* (BonJour 1998, 103). These mental states, though they might not be seemings, still have phenomenal character. Here are three more examples: the moral belief that *suffering is bad*, the memorial belief that *something moved*, and the introspective belief that *I feel pain*. In ordinary cases, these basic beliefs will be based on evidence – probably a seeming or intuition – that has phenomenal character.

Some nonevidentialists might argue that these justified, basic beliefs aren’t formed on the basis of any evidence at all. Perhaps, in some of the above examples, there is not an *independent* seeming that is the evidence upon which the belief is based. For example, perhaps the belief that suffering is bad is not evidentially based on its seeming that suffering is bad; rather, the seeming is just *part of* the conscious experience of having that belief.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Fortunately, the phenomenal basing thesis only says that the beliefs that *are* based on evidence must be based on evidence with phenomenal character. It does not make the stronger claim that all doxastically justified beliefs are based on evidence that has phenomenal character. If the belief is not based on any evidence at all, then there is no problem for the phenomenal basing thesis.[[17]](#footnote-17) The phenomenal basing thesis is compatible with nonevidentialist views.

I have so far discussed only relatively simple basic beliefs. By ‘simple’ basic belief, I mean a basic belief with no other background, unconscious beliefs playing a causal role in its formation. There are more complex perceptual, basic beliefs, such as the belief that *the sunset is beautiful* and the belief that *there’s an avocado*, which do have background, unconscious beliefs playing a causal role in their formation. I will discuss such beliefs in §5.

*3.2 Simple Basic Beliefs When Sustained*

I’ve so far only considered simple basic beliefs *when* they are formed. I should also examine the evidential bases of beliefs *after* they’re formed. William Alston wrote, “[T]he role of post-origination bases in justification is a complex matter, one not at all adequately dealt with in the epistemological literature” (1989, 229).[[18]](#footnote-18) I believe that, over three decades later, this matter is still not given the attention it deserves, so I will try to do justice to consideration of post-origination bases in this paper.

Suppose Tim falls into dreamless sleep from all of the excitement of learning that the law of noncontradiction (LN) is true. As he sleeps at time t, presumably, his belief in LN still exists at t. I argue,

1. Either Tim’s belief in LN at t can only be based on evidence that exists at t or it can also be based on evidence that existed at a time earlier than t.
2. If the former, then it is not based on evidence.
3. If the latter, then either it is not based on evidence or it is based on the same evidence it was based on when it was initially formed.
4. Therefore, either the belief at t is not based on evidence or it is based on the same evidence it was based on when it was initially formed.

Premise 1 exhausts the times at which the evidence must exist.

The support for premise 2 is that, *while* Tim is asleep, there simply is no good candidate to count as the evidential basis for Tim’s belief, if we are only restricting the evidence to what exists at that time. In Moon (2012b), I examine a number of candidates for what the evidence might be, and I argue that they all fail. For example, at t, the earlier conscious seeming that LN no longer exists. And at t, there aren’t *other* unconscious beliefs or memories that serve as the evidential basis for LN. Tim *might* have a memory of having come to believe LN or its having seemed to him that LN, but Tim never comes to believe LN *on the basis of* those memories. The belief in LN just exists without any evidence sustaining it.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The ones who are most likely to accept the antecedent of (2) are the time-slice evidentialist and the nonevidentialist. The nonevidentialist can think that Tim’s belief continues to be doxastically justified in virtue of being sustained by properly functioning faculties or a reliable process (or some other external factor). The time-slice evidentialist, if she accepts my claims in the previous paragraph, must conclude that Tim’s belief is not justified.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The antecedent of (3) could be accepted by either the nonevidentialist or the historical evidentialist.[[21]](#footnote-21) As I just mentioned, the nonevidentialist can think that Tim’s belief’s doxastic justification is determined by external factors. The historical evidentialist will likely think the belief is based on the same evidence it was based on when it was formed. Once we are not restricting the evidence to the present moment, the earlier evidence upon which Tim’s belief was based – the seeming that LN – is a strong candidate for being the evidence upon which Tim’s belief is based.[[22]](#footnote-22) There really is no other good candidate. So, the consequent of (3) includes both of the likely implications of its antecedent and so is plausible.

We can then conclude (4). And what is true of Tim’s simple basic belief in LN is true of other simple basic beliefs. Hence, the phenomenal basing thesis is consistent not only with simple basic beliefs when they’re formed but also when they’re sustained. Either they’re based on nothing or they are based on evidence with phenomenal character (e.g., the earlier seeming). So, the phenomenal basing thesis remains defended for simple basic beliefs.

**4. Inferential Beliefs**

Let us return to Holmes’s inferential belief. When he *forms* his belief that Greta is the murderer on the basis of his evidence, he reasons as follows: “Okay, the murderer wore a corsage at the party. Only Greta wore a corsage at the party. Gasp! Greta is the murderer!” When Holmes reasons, he is inferring his belief from other conscious beliefs (or judgments) that have phenomenal character. Conscious inferences are no problem for the phenomenal basing thesis.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Let us now consider the inferential belief when it is *sustained*. Suppose that Holmes, from all his excitement, falls into dreamless sleep. It is natural to think that at this time, call it ‘t’, Holmes’ belief that [G] *Greta is the murderer* is based on his currently unconscious beliefs that [M] *the murderer wore a corsage at the party* and that [O] *only Greta wore a corsage at the party*. If we were to ask, at t, “On what basis does Holmes believe G?” it would be intuitive and natural to cite his knowing (or believing) M and O. But at t, these beliefs have no phenomenal character. This is a potential counterexample to the phenomenal basing thesis.

I’ll argue that this is not a genuine case of basing because the causal condition on basing is not met. Although all three beliefs exist at t, the beliefs in M and O do not, at t, *causally sustain* the belief in G. Now, nobody holds that mere causation is sufficient for basing; counterexamples in the literature are numerous.[[24]](#footnote-24) For sufficiency, one must either specify a *kind* of causal relation or add a meta-belief condition.[[25]](#footnote-25) But as a necessary condition, the causal condition is quite plausible and widely held. So, why think it is not met in this case?

First, drawing from Matthew Boyle (2011, 12), it seems that Holmes’ *present* belief in G can be explained by Holmes’ *having believed* M and O. Put another way, the *earlier* time-slices of Holmes’ beliefs that M and O, back when the initial inference was made, explain why he believes G now. There’s no need to appeal to the beliefs in M and O *now* to explain the existence of the belief in G. Analogously, one’s parents at an earlier time can explain why their adult son exists now, but the parents need not *currently* causally sustain the existence of the adult son. (I am imagining that he has moved out of the house and is relatively independent now, both financially and emotionally.) I agree that it’s natural to cite Holmes’ beliefs (or knowledge) that M and O as the basis for his belief in G. This can be explained by his *past* believing of M and O. We need not appeal to Holmes’ *currently* believing M and O.

Second, I will argue by analogy. Suppose that while I am staying at a hotel, I leave a “Do not disturb” sign hanging outside my room and leave it there during the entire length of my stay. The maid sees it right when I put it up, and so she does not clean my room. Furthermore, she sees it once every morning until I check out and so she never cleans my room during my stay. Now, compare two claims:

1. The sign is part of the cause of my room’s not getting cleaned.
2. *At a particular time t*, when the maid is not around, the sign is part of the cause of my room’s not getting cleaned.

Claim (i) seems true. What makes it true is the fact that there were times during my stay when the maid saw the sign and did not clean up because of the sign. Claim (ii), on the other hand, seems false. *At t*, when the maid is not around, it seems that the sign is causally inert with respect to the room’s getting cleaned. If I were to take down the sign without the maid around, my room wouldn’t get immediately cleaned; it might be awhile. Now, if the maid were to stop by and notice the absent sign, *then* at that moment, the room would get cleaned. But that does not imply that the sign was part of the cause of the room not getting cleaned at the other moments.

Let us apply the analogy. We should distinguish these claims:

1. The beliefs in M and O are part of the cause of the belief in G.
2. *At a particular time t*, when Holmes is not consciously entertaining M and O, the beliefs in M and O are part of the cause of the belief in G.

Claim (iii) seems true. What makes it true is the fact that there was a time when Holmes consciously entertained his beliefs in M and O and believed G because of those beliefs. Claim (iv), on the other hand, seems false. *During those times*, when Holmes’ mind is on other things, it seems that the beliefs in M and O are causally inert with respect to belief G. If Holmes were to lose the beliefs in M and O without noticing that he lost them (say, by forgetting them or by the scheming of a demon), the belief in G would not immediately disappear; it might be awhile. Now, if Holmes noticed that he no longer believed M and O, then at that moment, he would drop his belief in G. But that does not imply that the beliefs in M and O were part of the cause of the belief in G at the moments before then.

I spelled out the scenarios to show how they are analogous in relevant ways. I’ll now state the argument. The sign is causally inert with respect to the room’s not getting cleaned when the maid is not around to see the sign. This state of affairs is relevantly analogous to the Holmes’ doxastic state. So, Holmes’ beliefs in M and O are causally inert with respect to his belief in G when Holmes is not consciously entertaining his beliefs in M and O. And, given the causal condition on basing, it follows that Holmes’ belief in G is not evidentially based on his beliefs in M and O when Holmes is not consciously entertaining those beliefs.[[26]](#footnote-26)

**5. Complex Basic Beliefs**

*5.1 The Challenge of Complex Basic Beliefs*

What makes a basic belief *complex* is that unconscious background beliefs play a causal role in its formation. (So, strictly speaking, the beliefs themselves aren’t more complex; it’s that they have an additional type of cause.) One might think that if a belief is evidentially based on such unconscious beliefs, then the phenomenal basing thesis is false. Here are three ways to spell out the potential counterexample.

First, distinguish between *pre-theoretic* intuitions and *theory-driven* intuitions. Suppose an ardent utilitarian, Eunice, is asked whether it’s right to kill someone and harvest his organs in order to save five people. She says, “It seems right to me!” Eunice believes that it’s right to harvest the organs on the basis of the *intuition* that it’s right. However, plausibly, her intuition is theory-driven. Someone might conclude that her unconscious belief in utilitarianism is also part of the evidential basis of her belief.[[27]](#footnote-27)

The second states that perceptual object identification requires background beliefs as part of one’s evidential basis. Alvin Plantinga notes, “In order to be able to see that something is an orange… I must also know or take it for granted that *things that look like* ***that*** *are oranges*” (1993, 100). He goes on,

Perhaps the thing to say is that such judgments as *That tree is at least 100 feet tall* are *partially* basic; they aren’t formed *solely* on the evidential basis of other beliefs, but are formed partly on the basis of present perception and partly on the basis of beliefs about what trees at least 100 feet tall look like (1993, 100–101).

Matthew McGrath (2017, pp. 12–27) argues that to know by perception, say, that *those are avocados*, one must *know what avocados look like*. On a theory McGrath finds plausible, this entails having knowledge that *avocados look way W* (where W is the way avocados look).[[28]](#footnote-28) So, for the perceptual object identification of oranges and avocados, it seems that unconscious, background beliefs (or knowledge) serve as an evidential basis.

The third draws from Thomas Senor (2005), who gives the following example:

[Y]ou look at the sky and come to believe that the sunset is beautiful. This is a newly formed belief... Nevertheless, its justification is no doubt dependent on other beliefs that you hold. For example, if you didn't at least tacitly believe that you were looking west or that it is evening and not morning, the belief wouldn't be justified (I assume that the phenomenology of sunsets and sunrises is indistinguishable)… many relatively simple beliefs we form about the external world typically depend for their justification on background beliefs; and background beliefs are memory beliefs.

Your belief that *the sunset is beautiful* appears to be based not only on your sensory evidence, but also, say, on the unconscious belief that *it is evening*. Senor’s example has been cited by McCain (2014, 38–43), Lyons (2016, 247), and McGrath (2017, 15) as a reason to think that unconscious background beliefs are part of the evidential basis for one’s beliefs.

These three cases are not meant to be exhaustive. They are just a representative sample of cases in which it seems that unconscious beliefs are part of the evidential basis for a doxastically justified belief.[[29]](#footnote-29) What I will say about these three cases should apply to the other examples.[[30]](#footnote-30)

*5.2. First Reply*

The phenomenal basing thesis requires for evidential basing that *the mental state associated with one’s evidence* has phenomenal character. Suppose that *part* of the mental state associated with one’s evidence in these cases is an unconscious belief. Still, another part of that mental state will be an intuition or a sensory experience, each of which has phenomenal character. Hence, the *total* mental state associated with one’s evidence will include something with phenomenal character. So, the phenomenal basing thesis still holds.

The reply strikes me as satisfactory. However, it would be interesting to see whether a case can be made that the unconscious beliefs are not actually a part of the mental state associated with one’s evidence. I explore this in the next section.

*5.3 Second Reply*

The intended audience of my argument will be those with *internalist intuitions*. According to these intuitions, those who are internally identical to me – those who have the same phenomenal states, experiences, beliefs, and so forth – are justificationally identical to me. Externalists will think that external factors – such as whether my belief was formed by a reliable process – can *also* make a difference to my belief’s being justified.

Now, consider any belief that p that is purported to be evidentially based on some unconscious belief that q. I argue,

1. Either i) the belief that p is partly caused by a seeming that p, which is in turn partly caused by the belief that q, or ii) there is no such seeming.
2. If (i), then there is no counterexample to the phenomenal basing thesis.
3. If (ii), then there is no counterexample to the phenomenal basing thesis.
4. So, there is no counterexample to the phenomenal basing thesis.

I take (5) to be plausible and predict that (6) and (7) will be the more controversial premises.

The antecedent of (6) describes a natural way to understand the cases. The unconscious belief in utilitarianism makes it *seem* as if *it is okay to harvest the organs*, which causes the belief that *it is okay to harvest the organs*. The unconscious knowledge that *it is evening* makes it *seem* as if *the sunset is beautiful*, which causes the belief that *the sunset is beautiful*. And the unconscious knowledge that *avocados look way W* makes it seem as if *those are avocados*, which causes the belief that *those are avocados*.[[31]](#footnote-31) (Those who are skeptical that such seemings exist can move on to my discussion of premise 7.)

I will give two arguments that the unconscious beliefs are not part of the evidential basis in these cases and that the seemings are doing all the work. The first one appeals to an analogy. Suppose you have a machine that performs calculations and flashes true equations on a screen. Inside the machine are all the steps in a proof that lead up to (and causally bring about) the flashing on the screen, although you won’t see the steps unless you press a few buttons. “46x37=1702” flashes on the screen, and you form the belief that 46x37=1702. Even though the steps inside the machine played a causal role in flashing “46x37=1702” on the screen, the evidential basis for your belief was not those earlier steps.

Return to Eunice. She uses the intuition (or seeming) that *it’s right to harvest the organs* to form her belief. The unconscious belief that *utilitarianism is true* might have played a causal role in producing this seeming, just as the calculations inside the machine play a causal role in producing what is flashed on the screen. However, just as your belief is not evidentially based on the calculations inside the machine, Eunice’s belief is not evidentially based on her unconscious beliefs. Recall what I earlier called the *Distinction*: “There is the evidence you have, and there is the evidence you actually use to form your belief.” What is Eunice actually *using* to form her belief that it is right to organ harvest? She is using the intuition. Just as you “read off” the correct answer from the screen and believe 46x37=1702, so does Eunice “read off” from her intuition (how things seem) to form her belief that it’s right to organ harvest. Similarly, what is actually used in the other two cases is the seeming that *those are avocados* and the seeming that *the sunset is beautiful*. The seemings are what you actually use, what you “read off” from, just as what’s on the screen is what you actually use or “read off” from.

The second argument will appeal to internalist intuitions. Consider the *unconscious belief snatching demon*.[[32]](#footnote-32) Returning to McGrath’s avocado case, suppose that, at 5pm on his 40th birthday, Matt walks up to his desk and sees and believes that *those are avocados* in the usual way. As mentioned before, it initially seems that Matt’s belief is evidentially based on his unconscious belief that avocados look way W (where W is the way avocados look).

Now imagine another possible individual, Matt\*, who is nearly identical to Matt with respect to their history and experiences. In fact, Matt\* even came to know what avocados look like in the same way Matt did. The only difference is that at 4:59:59pm on Matt\*’s 40th birthday, a demon deletes Matt\*’s unconscious belief that *avocados look way W*. The demon also makes it so that the phenomenal character of Matt\*’s experiences are exactly like Matt’s at 5pm; it seems to Matt\* that *those are avocados* and he comes to believe it on the basis of the seeming. At 5:00:01, the demon reinserts the unconscious belief that avocados look way W, and the rest of Matt\*’s life is exactly like the rest of Matt’s life. Throughout this process, Matt and Matt\* are phenomenologically identical. It seems that, at 5pm, Matt and Matt\*’s belief that *those are avocados* are equally doxastically justified.

For those who do not share this intuition, consider that it seems that Matt\* *shouldn’t* withhold belief or believe less confidently than Matt at 5pm. Put another way, it seems that it would be wrong for Matt\* to stop believing *those are avocados* for those two seconds. But this should not be if Matt’s belief has a firmer evidential basis than Matt\*’s since Matt’s evidential base is supposed to *also* include knowledge of what avocados look like. I conclude that Matt’s evidential base does not include the belief that avocados look way W after all.

For comparison, suppose that the demon had altered the *phenomenal character* of Matt\*’s experience instead of his background beliefs. If the demon altered Matt\*’s experience between 4:59:59 and 5:00:01 so that it appeared to him, in that time interval, as if there is a salmon (rather than avocados), then Matt\* wouldn’t be justified in believing *those are avocados* during those two seconds. It *would* seem that Matt\* should stop believing that there are avocados. But if Matt\* loses only the unconscious belief, remaining phenomenally the same, it seems that Matt\* shouldn’t withhold belief.

Now, some might be unpersuaded by this case because they are *externalists*. They might think, for theoretical or other reasons, that Matt\*’s belief forming or sustaining process is less reliable because of the interference of the demon; hence, his belief is not justified during the two seconds. So, I do not expect externalists to be persuaded by this case.[[33]](#footnote-33) This argument is meant for those with strong internalist intuitions, which lead some to think that external factors are justificationally irrelevant. My case takes us to the next step and shows that that type of intuition should also lead us to think that unconscious beliefs are justificationally irrelevant.

What I say about the avocados case applies to the utilitarian case and the sunset case. Even if a demon were to quietly delete and re-create the relevant unconscious beliefs, the target beliefs would seem equally justified. So, premise (6) is defended.

Now to premise (7). Some philosophers are skeptical that there are such things as seemings that exist independently of beliefs and sensory experiences. They will think that there are better ways of interpreting the cases than the ways mentioned in my discussion of premise (6).[[34]](#footnote-34) Imagine that there is no intervening seeming in our three scenarios; there is only belief. When Eunice hears the organ-stealing scenario, she just believes, without any intervening seeming, that it is permissible to harvest the organs. When Matt has the sensory experience as of avocados, he just believes, without any intervening seeming, that those are avocados.[[35]](#footnote-35) When you see the sun over the horizon, you just believe that the sunset is beautiful, but there is no intervening seeming that the sunset is beautiful.

My defense of (7) will employ the unconscious belief snatching demon that I used in defense of (6). Imagine Eunice hearing the story and believing, at 5pm, that it is permissible to harvest the organs. Imagine our Eunice’s phenomenological twin, Eunice\*, whose demon does three things: deletes her background belief in utilitarianism at 4:59:59pm, causes the belief that it is permissible to harvest the organs at 5pm, and reinserts the belief in utilitarianism at 5:00:01pm. Eunice and Eunice\* are phenomenologically identical throughout this time.

As with our earlier case of Matt and Matt\*, it seems that they are justificationally identical. Insofar as we think that Eunice shouldn’t withhold her belief, it seems that we should think the same about Eunice\*. So, we should think that Eunice and Eunice\*’s evidential bases are the same. What I’ve said here applies to versions of the avocado case and the sunset case where there is a sensory experience but no independently existing seemings. In both cases, we can imagine an unconscious belief snatching demon, with the relevant beliefs remaining justificationally the same. With (6) and (7) defended, it follows that (8) is defended. The phenomenal basing thesis remains unscathed from the challenge of complex basic beliefs.

**6. Arguing for the Phenomenal Basing Thesis**

My first argument for the phenomenal basing thesis uses a generalized version of the case of Matt and Matt\*.[[36]](#footnote-36) Suppose that the demon deleted *many* of Matt\*’s unconscious beliefs throughout his life, including those that epistemologists are inclined to think are part of Matt\*’s evidential basis for his beliefs. The demon also ensured that Matt and Matt\* were phenomenologically identical. If one agreed with my original case (where the demon only deletes Matt\*’s belief for two seconds), then one should agree that Matt and Matt\* are equally justified in their conscious beliefs in this more generalized case. Furthermore, it seems that the case of Matt and Matt\* can generalize to other believers and their justified beliefs. This indicates that mental states without phenomenal character are irrelevant to justification. A complaint about this argument some might have is that it depends on certain internalist intuitions.

My main argument for the thesis is as follows. Throughout the course of this paper, I’ve assessed a number of paradigm cases of belief formation and sustenance. In every case, the belief was either evidentially based on nothing or based on evidence with phenomenal character, whether that evidence existed in the past or at the present moment. This is inductive evidence that every case of belief is either not based on evidence or based on evidence with phenomenal character. So, the phenomenal basing thesis is probably true.[[37]](#footnote-37)

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1. For example, see Sylvan’s (2016, 377) introductory remarks on the topic. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For discussions of these views, see Turri (2009), LittleJohn (2012, 92–109), McCain (2014, 9–30), and Sylvan (2016). Similar to the first view, Smithies (2019, ch. 5) argues that your evidence consists of facts about your phenomenally individuated mental states. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Notice that, in holding this view, I do not need to hold anything nearly as strong as David Pitt’s (2004, 30) view that a conscious thought’s phenomenal character is proprietary (different from any other conscious mental state), distinctive (different from consciously believing any other proposition), and individuative (constitutes its representational content). I only hold that consciously believing that snow is white *has* a phenomenal character, not that that phenomenal character is proprietary, distinctive, or individuative. Thanks to Adam Carter for pushing me to clarify. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For example, see Crane (2013, 162–167). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For example, see Pitt (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The distinction between ‘conscious belief’ and ‘unconscious belief’ roughly follows the distinction epistemologists commonly make between ‘occurrent belief’ and ‘dispositional belief’ (e.g., Senor (1993, 461) and Moon (2012a, 349)). I prefer the former terms because that way, 1) there is no temptation to confuse ‘dispositional belief’ and ‘disposition *to* believe’ and 2) a belief’s being conscious doesn’t imply that it is *occurring* any more than when it is not conscious. Cf. footnote 1 of Moon (2015, 108). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. On pragmatic encroachment, see Fantl and McGrath (2002, 2009) and Kim (2017). On moral encroachment, see Gardiner (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For an example of a sufficient condition, see Conee and Feldman’s (2004, 93) lengthy definition of doxastic justification (or ‘well-foundedness’). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I say ‘nearly all’ because Smithies (2019, ch. 6, sect. 2) endorses evidentialism but also argues that in cases of *a priori* justified belief, the belief need not be based on one’s evidence. Thanks to Declan Smithies for helpful conversation. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See footnote 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For the canonical view, see Goldman (1979). For a recent defense, see Lyons (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Here is a comment on my terminology. Conee and Feldman (2004, 101) define ‘evidentialism’, or what they call ‘ES’, as what I am calling here ‘time-slice evidentialism’. According to their definition, then, the view I call ‘historical evidentialism’ is not, strictly speaking, a type of evidentialism. However, it is natural to categorize both views as types of evidentialism, so I will go with my new terminology in this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This non-normative use of ‘basic belief’ goes back at least to Plantinga (1981, 41). He and other epistemologists reserve the term ‘properly basic belief’ for basic beliefs that *do* have the relevant positive epistemic status. I’ll note that some epistemologists use ‘basic belief’ to denote only beliefs that *are* justified, e.g., Lyons (2009, 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The view that seemings can be an evidential basis for beliefs is discussed in Alston (1989, 106–107), Tolhurst (1998), Swinburne (2001), Huemer (2001), Tucker (2010), and the essays in Tucker (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For argument that seemings have phenomenal character essentially, see Moon (2012b, 313–315). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For arguments to this effect, see Plantinga (1993, 185–193) and especially Lyons (2013, 23–25). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Smithies (2019, ch. 6, sect. 2) argues that *a priori* justified beliefs are not based on evidence. I’ve analytically defined ‘evidential basing relation’ as a relation that obtains between one’s belief and one’s evidence. So, at least as I am using the terms, Smithies’ view entails that the evidential basing relation is not instantiated by *a priori* justified beliefs. So, such beliefs are no problem for the phenomenal basing thesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This is from his essay, “An Internalist Externalism”. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Moon (2012b) for more defense of these claims. For criticisms, see Madison (2014, 56), McCain (2014, 148), and McCain (2015, 371-372). For replies to these criticisms, see footnotes 21 and 22 of Moon (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This, in my view, is a strike against time-slice evidentialism, since it seems that Tim’s belief is justified. For argument and discussion of this claim, see the references in the previous footnote. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. A time-slice mentalist *could* accept the antecedent of (3) if she thought that although what grounds one’s propositional justification at t must exist at t, what grounds one’s doxastic justification at t can still exist before t. This contradicts a thesis I call ‘Unity’, which claims that what grounds one’s propositional justification at *t* also grounds the evidence that determines one’s doxastic justification at *t*. I call it ‘Unity’, since it claims a unity to what grounds propositional and doxastic justification at a time. However, since I suspect that most people will accept Unity, I assume it in the main text. Thanks to Declan Smithies for helpful discussion, and see footnotes 12 and 23 of Moon (2018) for more discussion of Unity and its relevance to evidentialism. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. I examine in more detail this sort of theory in §2.3 of Moon (2012b), §4 of Moon (2012a), and §14.4.4 of Moon (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Huemer (2016) argues that seemings or appearances could be part of the evidential base of an inferential belief. If so, this is consistent with the phenomenal basing thesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Here’s one from Plantinga (1993, 69): “Suddenly seeing Sylvia, I form the belief that I see her; as a result, I become rattled and drop my cup of tea, scalding my leg. I then form the belief that my leg hurts; but though the former belief is a (part) cause of the latter, it is not the case that I accept the latter on the evidential basis of the former.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See a survey of these theories in Korcz (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Some might not accept a causal condition. If so, then I will rely on the unconscious belief snatching demon argument in section 6 to help us see that the beliefs in M and O are not part of the evidential basis of the belief in G. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Some might be hesitant to call Eunice’s utilitarianism as part of her evidence, either because they think that nobody could be justified in believing utilitarianism or because they think that utilitarianism is false and cannot be known (and further, only justified beliefs or knowledge can be part of one’s evidence). However, so long as it’s *possible* to know that some localized, moral theory is true, we could then just replace the example with a case in which someone knows a moral theory. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This is based on what he calls the *simple intellectualist theory*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For other examples, see Fales (2004, 377–379), Koons (2011), and Huemer (2016, 144–145). Huemer gives cases of complex inference, where unconscious beliefs appear to serve as part of an evidential basis for an inferred belief. What I say below should apply to these cases. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. What about *subpersonal* representational states? Might they be part of the evidential basis of our beliefs since they are often part of the cause of our beliefs? See Lyons (2016, 249–255) for good reasons to think that they aren’t part of the evidential basis of our beliefs. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. I need not take a stance on *how* the background belief causes the seeming. It might make the person’s sensory experience have a *rich content* (see Siegel (2010)) or the sensory experience might remain the same and the person has a *felt inclination to believe*, and this felt inclination is identical to the seeming. Or perhaps there is another way. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. I draw from my argument in Moon (2012a, 350–352), which is basically my new evil demon problem for internalism. The main difference between this case and my earlier Melissa case is that the demon intervenes after belief formation in the Melissa case whereas in this case, the demon intervenes before belief formation. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. However, they *should* be persuaded. Clearly, Matt\* shouldn’t be withholding belief for those two seconds. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Chudnoff and Dedomenico (2015). For further discussion and references, see footnote 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. This assumes that the seeming can exist independently of the sensory experience itself. This view is held by Plantinga (1993), Huemer (2001), and Tucker (2010). For dissenters, see previous footnote. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For further defense of the argument I give here, see Moon (2012a, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Thanks to Pat Bondy, J. Adam Carter, David Didomenico, and Mona Simion for helpful comments on previous drafts. Thanks to Miriam McCormick, Matthew McGrath, and Chris Tucker for helpful conversation. Thanks to the audience at Dalhousie University colloquium (5/2018). Lastly, thanks to Declan Smithies for many helpful conversations. Unfortunately, there was not space and time to incorporate some relevant issues from his forthcoming book (Smithies (2019, ch. 5)), including his objection to the sort of argument I give in this paper; that will have to wait for a future paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)