

## I. WELFARIST PLURALISM<sup>1</sup>

[Chapter 1 of *A New Theory of Reasons for Belief: Pragmatic Foundations and Pluralistic Reasons* under contract with OUP.] This draft is full of typographical errors. It is still in the process of revisions, but it is roughly along the lines of what should end up in the book. Please check with me before citing.]

### O. INTRODUCTION

As individuals, we make our way through life by acting on our beliefs. Beliefs represent the temporal and spatial arrangements of the world around us. They encode our relationships with ourselves and with others. They constitute judgements about the value of things and how things – and we ourselves – ought to be. We rely on shared beliefs to cooperate and sometimes to compete.

Beliefs play a pivotal rôle in our mental ecology, and as believers, we have a vested stake in learning how best to tend to them. Of central interest to doxastic life is the question of what one ought to believe, all-things-considered. To answer this question, philosophers seek to understand what kinds of considerations count in favour, in a strong normative sense, of believing something.

There is no clear consensus in philosophy about what determines what one ought to believe<sup>2</sup> or even about the correct methodology for doing so.<sup>3</sup> There are now a number of opinionated books which try to show particular views are correct, embarking from various points of departure.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of trying to argue in a complete way for a particular view, this book explores a conjecture. It is a conjecture about how to solve a problem, or perhaps resolve a conflict, that has concerned me now for close to 20 years. With many, but not all, others, I share the intuition that

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<sup>1</sup> [Long list of people to thank]

<sup>2</sup> See Chignell (2018) and Reisner (2018)a for a discussion of the literature.

<sup>3</sup> See Reisner (2018b) for more on the methodological question.

<sup>4</sup> Amongst others, see Adler (2001), Marušić (2015), McCormick (2014), Skorupski (2010), and Stitch (1990).

what one ought to believe, all-things-considered, is determined jointly by considerations that indicate or are related to the truth of the contents of a belief and by considerations that make having a particular belief better, either morally or prudentially, than not having the belief. To put things another way, I have the intuition that there are both alethic and non-alethic (pragmatic) normative reasons for belief.

Pluralism strikes me as the most attractive first-order view about how what one ought to believe is determined. However, it is rather less neat than its main non-nihilist alternatives (and indeed than nihilism itself). On the one hand, there is *alethicism*,<sup>5</sup> which is the view that truth-related considerations are all that determine what one ought to believe. On the other hand, there is *pragmatism*, which is the view that prudential or moral considerations are all that determine what one ought to believe.<sup>6</sup> What alethicism and pragmatism have in common is that both views promise a degree of explanatory unity that pluralism appears to lack. The sense of explanatory unity here is one of the grounds for reasons. One can explain why, and perhaps how, truth-related considerations aggregate to determine what one ought to believe – and likewise for prudentially or morally-based considerations. Pluralism, on the other hand, at first blush lacks the same kind of underlying explanatory unity. The way in which alethic reason for belief and the way in which pragmatic reasons for belief are grounded looks to be different. Consequently, one might wonder both why and how alethic and pragmatic considerations combine to determine what one ought to believe. This disunity at the foundational level disturbs me, and I have not found a way to dissolve my unease about the prospects for a successful account of the pluralist foundations of theoretical

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<sup>5</sup> The use of this name is inspired by Leary (2017). A more common name for the relevant family of views is ‘evidentialism’, although both in meaning and all-to-frequently in application, the name is too narrow. ‘Alethecism’ is not entirely unproblematic, but one must choose some name.

<sup>6</sup> This is not strictly, or even non-strictly, accurate. It is, however, both convenient and faithful to how I see things. A pragmatist might accept that there are only moral reasons for believing, and that the correct moral theory is a value-independent form of deontology.

normativity.<sup>7</sup>

What follows in this chapter is a proposal, whose different parts are presented in varying levels of detail, for how to preserve first-order pluralism about the determinates of what one ought to believe in concert with foundational monism. This chapter does much to set the agenda for the rest of the book. I shall call the proposed view ‘welfarist pluralism’. This book explores the extent to which welfarist pluralism is a satisfactory, and possibly correct, account of the determiners of what one ought to believe. I shall begin the chapter with a sketch of welfarist pluralism before making an attempt to exert some order on the important theoretical notions.

#### 1. A SKETCH OF WELFARIST PLURALISM

Welfarist pluralism contains three basic commitments. The first is that facts about wellbeing are ultimately what determine what one ought to believe. In the language of reasons, facts about wellbeing determine what normative reasons there are for beliefs. The second commitment is that wellbeing itself has a pluralist nature and one of the basic components of wellbeing is that of an individual’s being in a positive epistemic state. Finally, welfarist pluralism is committed to the view that something’s contribution to one or more individual’s wellbeing partially fixes its contribution to determining what one ought to believe. In other words, something’s contribution to wellbeing partially determines how strong of a reason of a reason it is.

There is a further feature of the view that I shall largely ignore in this chapter. Strictly speaking, what determines what one ought to believe are not facts about wellbeing, but facts about the value of wellbeing and the value of aggregates or distributions of wellbeing. This feature is an important one that is discussed in detail in chapter 3. Prior to that discussion, however, bringing

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<sup>7</sup> Leary (2017) is less concerned by this worry and offers a pluralist account of the foundations of theoretical normativity.

value into the basic account of welfarist pluralism adds unnecessary complications.

Taken together with several further assumptions that I shall discuss in due course, welfarist pluralism entails that both alethic and non-alethic considerations are non-derivative determiners of what one ought to believe. Put in the language of reasons, there are both irreducible alethic reasons for belief and irreducible non-alethic or pragmatic reasons for belief. Both kinds of determiners or reasons share a common grounding in facts about wellbeing. In this way, the normativity of alethic and pragmatic reasons for belief is the normativity of wellbeing. As I shall argue further on,<sup>8</sup> the comparability of alethic and pragmatic considerations or reasons for belief is the comparability of the epistemic and non-epistemic components in determining an individual's total wellbeing. Thus the picture is one of a first-order theory with non-reductive alethic and non-reductive, non-alethic components and also with fully pragmatic foundations.

As is by now apparent, I prefer the locution 'determiners of what one ought to believe' to 'reasons for belief.' It is not that I object to reasons talk, but I prefer to preserve the use of 'reason' to refer to entities with certain specific properties that not all determiners of what one ought to believe must have.<sup>9</sup> Reasons are technically a proper subset of the possible determiners of what one ought to believe. In this chapter I shall not pay the distinction any mind, however, and shall whichever term eases the discussion. The distinction will become important again in chapter 3.

### 1.1 *Non-derivative pluralism*

One way to think about the building blocks of a normative theory, in this case welfarist pluralism, is to consider how things look for a natural theory. For example, in its present state, physics posits the existence of six *force particles*, which govern interactions amongst the 12 basic

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<sup>8</sup>See chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> See Reisner (2018a) & (2019) for a more detailed discussion of why I prefer a restricted use of 'reason'.

*matter particles*, each of which falls into either the quark or the lepton family.<sup>10</sup> In this picture we have a physical universe with several basic constituents, some of which are acted upon and some of which do the acting, at least in a very loose sense.

It is an unwarranted idealisation to say that physicists do little more than discover the constituents of the physical universe, describing their interactions through the use of mathematical models. Nonetheless, this idealisation provides a useful way of thinking about how a science might proceed if we accept a strong form of scientific realism. On a strong realist picture, the physical universe contains whatever it contains, and a correct model would accurately represent or describe its contents. If those prove to be 18 basic particles with no further underlying substance or force, then it is not for the philosopher to say that the universe is insufficiently parsimonious or that some further facts are required to explain the brute interactions of these particles. Appropriate criticisms of present and future theories about the fundamental constituents of physical reality concern evidence, consistency, and the various precepts of scientific reasoning. The metaphysics of the natural world must follow reality.

The study of the normative universe is given over to the constraints on theorising within which philosophers must work. There is no normative property accelerator in which theoretical and practical properties collide, leaving traces of their more basic constituents. The normative world is explored through reasoning, analysis, intuitions, and at times bluster, albeit not always in that order.

Insofar as one is prepared to accept that there are fundamental determiners of what one ought to believe or non-derivative normative reasons for belief, there are three very general possibilities on offer: all non-derivative reasons for belief are alethic, all are non-alethic or pragmatic, or there are both alethic and non-alethic/pragmatic non-derivative reasons for belief. The latter two

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<sup>10</sup> Time may tell whether this picture of the basic constituents of the physical universe is complete and correct or whether there is, for example, some more basic in the way posited by various versions of string theory.

possibilities are consistent with broadly pluralist intuitions, although only the third option is pluralism in the relevant technical sense. On the second option, alethic reasons for belief exist, but derive from non-derivative pragmatic or non-alethic reasons for belief. On the third option, there are non-derivative reasons of both kinds.

To a greater degree than physicists, philosophers are troubled by accusations that they are merely making things up, especially with respect to ontological questions. Perhaps there is yet greater sensitivity to the charge of being fantasists amongst those who investigate the normative domain, for it at least apparently lies farther from the posits of respectable science than many non-normative areas of inquiry. This sensitivity can push philosophers to prefer ontological minimalism, sometimes at a high cost, beyond the sensible methodological principle that one should not unnecessarily multiply entities. Even this principle is wont to be misapplied in a way that treats any ontologically simpler account of the normative domain as preferable to more complex accounts that have more cogent and plausible explanatory characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

Welfarist pluralism is partially and essentially constituted by the thesis that there are non-derivative determiners of what one ought to believe that are fundamentally alethic and also ones that are fundamentally non-alethic. One may thus say that *non-derivative* pluralism is an essential feature of welfarist pluralism. While it is intellectually timorous to worry that non-reductive pluralism violates good taste merely because it does not fly the banner of ontological minimalism, it is wholly reasonable to worry that the greater number entities has been preferred to the lesser, when the lesser has been made available to us at no significant cost. The non-alethic alternative, pragmatism about reasons belief, offers the possibility of working with a single non-derivative determiner of what one ought to believe: non-alethic considerations are such that it is often good for us to believe things based on indications of their truth. Thus truth or evidence is, at least much

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<sup>11</sup> See chapter 5 for a defence of pluralism about basic normative properties.

of the time, a derived determiner of what one ought to believe, or if one prefers, a derived reason for belief.

I shall describe in the coming section why the ontology, at least at the first-order normative level, is no more complex for non-derivative pluralism than it is for derivative pluralism. While this explains why there is no parsimony-related advantage to derivative pluralism, that derivative and non-derivative pluralism are on equal terms with respect to parsimony says little about which view is correct or better supported.

Motivating non-derivative pluralism is part of the wider project of this book. Here I shall offer a limited account of what I take to be two *prima facie* considerations that favour non-derivative pluralism over derivative pluralism.

The first consideration is conjectural. I believe there are some grounds for doubting that a derivative account of alethic determiners will correctly track the strength of the contribution of alethic considerations to what one ought to believe. A toy example may help. Consider a theory according to which the only non-derivative determiner of what one ought to believe is the pleasure caused by having that belief. Having an individual true belief will bring most of us some additional pleasure, because having certain kinds of true beliefs is conducive to doing things that we enjoy. However, the truth of many kinds of beliefs, for example those about astronomical phenomena and events in the distant past, has little bearing on how much pleasure individuals experience through their present actions, at least for a substantial part of the population.

More important than the truth of or evidential support for those beliefs is whether one believes one's practically irrelevant beliefs are true. Taking one's beliefs to be true or to have other positive epistemic qualities may bring a kind of intellectual satisfaction, which is itself a form of pleasure. A poorly epistemically supported belief would provide equal intellectual satisfaction to an epistemically well supported belief, so long as one had the corresponding second-order belief that the relevant first-order belief was true and perhaps epistemically justified. The perceived

justification or truth is what matters psychologically, not the facts about truth or justification. This seems to me to run contrary to the pluralist intuition that a belief's having some sort of positive epistemic status *reapse* is normatively relevant, irrespective of one's higher-order beliefs about those beliefs. It is important here to understand 'positive epistemic status' as meaning something along the lines of 'recommended or required by epistemic norms', as opposed to 'an epistemic state that produces positive effects on one's mood or life prospects'.

There are, naturally, a number of alternatives to simple hedonism, but examples of this kind can be reconstructed for other views. Taking alethic considerations to bear directly on the normative status of a belief and assigning them a weight based on the importance of that epistemic status may eliminate errors about the strength of the normative contribution of alethic considerations to what one ought to believe.<sup>12</sup>

The second motivation provides a natural segue to the next section. Many philosophers and non-philosophers alike have the intuition that truth is important for its own sake.<sup>13</sup> Putting things this way is vague at best. To provide some substance to the intuition, one must say something about which things' truth is supposed to be important and in what way the truth of those things is supposed to be important.

I postulate that the first question concerns both the beliefs of individuals and the various public forms of expression that those beliefs take. While this is perhaps incomplete, I should imagine it suffices for getting started. The answer to the second question is more complicated. It is tempting, albeit far from necessary, to treat the importance as being related to value. At least in loose talk, this is a common sentiment.

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<sup>12</sup> See chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of how alethic and non-alethic considerations combine to determine what one ought to believe.

<sup>13</sup> Clifford (1877) is of course one, but see also Horwich (2006), Lynch (2004 & 2020), and Mitova (2021). Mitova has particularly interesting new work that draws out important connections between the value of truth and epistemic justice.

The truth may be important in ways that have nothing to do with value. Nonetheless, I conjecture that if one were to introspect carefully and consider the ways in which the importance of truth is discussed in pre-theoretical contexts, one would find that it is a common, if unarticulated, view that the importance of truth is something like the value of believing, or knowing, the truth at both an individual and a social level. In a tradition that begins at least with Aristotle, this idea has been taken seriously by philosophers and given form by treating various positive epistemic qualities, including the possession of knowledge, as a non-derivative component of wellbeing or an aspect of human virtue. I assume that personal good increases as wellbeing increases. In that technical sense, at least, having true beliefs on this account is good.

It is this rather old idea – that truth is non-derivatively important to us – that is the third motivation for accepting non-derivative pluralism. In whatever sense truth (or its indicators) is normative, it is so because it is non-derivatively important to us. As I shall discuss presently, the hypothesis being explored in this book is that it is important to us in the more precise sense that it is a non-derivative, or if one prefers, basic component of our wellbeing.

### *1.2 Welfarist (pragmatic) foundations*

It is more convenient to adopt the terminology of ‘reasons’ here than in some other places in the book. In doing so, I continue to follow the convention of this chapter to mean ‘reasons’ in the looser sense of ‘determiners of what one ought to believe’ rather than in what I take to be the more proper use picking determiners with particular characteristics.<sup>14</sup>

Suppose that the fact that a certain chemical trail in the sand is evidence that a female snake of a particular species has passed by during mating season. Perhaps with the added assumption that this fact about a chemical trail in the sand is epistemically accessible to me, that fact is an alethic

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<sup>14</sup> I take it that reasons have approximately the characteristics assigned to them by Skorupski (2010).

reason for me to believe that a snake has slithered across the patch of sand in question.<sup>15</sup>

On what I take to be the correct view of reasons, the fact that there are chemicals in the sand is the reason itself, *i.e.* it stands in the reason relation to an agent (me), a belief (that a snake has passed by), and degree of strength, and so on. The metaphysical explanation of why it is a reason is that it is evidence for the proposition contained in the belief that it is a reason for.

We are entitled to ask several further explanatory questions.<sup>16</sup> The one of interest here is this: why does this fact's standing as evidence for the contents of a particular belief make it a reason to have that belief? A foundational pluralist would, or at least might, answer that there is no informative answer to this question. It is simply the nature of normativity that something's being evidence makes it be a reason for belief.<sup>17</sup>

Now consider the fact that having a particular belief would make me happy, irrespective of the support for the truth of its contents (or their truth, for that matter). The fact that having the belief would (or does) make me happy is the reason to have that belief. If we ask the further questions about why this is so, the very same foundational pluralist might answer that it is because it makes us happy.

Foundational pluralism is a reasonable view, but I introduce it here as a foil to an alternative, namely *foundational monism*. The particular kind of foundational monism that I have in mind leaves the answer to the question 'What is the reason itself?' intact in both of the preceding examples. However, it offers a wholly different answer to the second question to that given by foundational pluralism.

According to welfarist pluralism's foundational monism, the fact something is evidence for  $p$  is

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<sup>15</sup> Snakes gain epistemic access to this information through their ability to track directional features of chemical trails with their forked tongues in combination with Jacobson's organ. Presumably a person would manage with some sort of artificial sensor. For clarity, that is the scenario I am assuming would apply to me.

<sup>16</sup> I thank Jens Johansson for his advice on how to improve this discussion.

<sup>17</sup> See Leary (2017) for further discussion of foundational pluralist strategies.

a non-derivative reason to believe  $p$ , just as it would be on foundational pluralist theories. However, the explanation of why it is a reason is that *being in a positive epistemic state* is a basic, non-derivative component of wellbeing. Just in the same way that something's being pleasurable to believe is a reason to believe it – i.e. because pleasure is a basic, non-derivative component of wellbeing – the realisation of relevant epistemic goods is also basic components of wellbeing.

Welfarist pluralism is thus committed to a particular kind of account of wellbeing, although not to any particular account of wellbeing *per se*. It is committed to an account of wellbeing that has two or more basic components, at least one of which is being in a positive epistemic state and at least one of which is something else. Welfarist pluralism also must hold that these components combine to produce a total wellbeing state, something I shall take up in more detail in chapters 4 & 6.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider what makes something be a basic, non-derivative component of wellbeing. Here is a sketch of the idea.<sup>18</sup> A component of wellbeing is basic if it is a) an essential component of wellbeing and b) it is not essential to wellbeing only in virtue of its contribution to one or more other components of wellbeing.

This kind of foundational monism holds that all reasons for belief are so, because having that belief contributes to wellbeing.<sup>19</sup> The account's foundational monism is pragmatic in just this sense: all reasons for belief are based in wellbeing. What makes a fact be a reason is its impact on wellbeing. As I shall argue,<sup>20</sup> what explains why and how alethic and non-alethic determiners of what we ought to believe combine is how the corresponding epistemic and non-epistemic components of wellbeing combine to produce a level of total wellbeing.

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<sup>18</sup> See chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion.

<sup>19</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I shall assume for now that the contribution is to the agent's own wellbeing. I discuss the question of how the view extends to other's wellbeing in a limited way in chapter 3 and in detail in chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup> Mainly in chapters 3 & 6.

### 1.3 *The value of truth*

At the end of §1.1, I presented the intuition that truth is in some way good or valuable as being a motivation for welfarist pluralism. Welfarist pluralism is of course not unique in treating truth as valuable. It differs from the main alternatives insofar as it treats truth directly as a personal good. This section looks more closely at welfarist pluralism's treatment of truth as valuable.

The idea that truth is valuable or good has been explored in different ways over the last 20 years. What the different discussions have in common is the notion that certain things that have the property of being true – mainly true beliefs but perhaps also true assertions – are non-personal goods. It is also a special kind of goodness or value that is isolated in the epistemic domain; the goodness or value involved is non-moral and non-prudential.

This picture immediately raises two concerns. The first of these is familiar in various guises. Not all true beliefs seem to be equally valuable. Trivial or irrelevant true beliefs seem to be less valuable than interesting, relevant beliefs. Perhaps the former sort are not valuable at all. Authors<sup>21</sup> try to get around this worry by stipulating that only sufficiently relevant, interesting, or important true beliefs are good.

An interesting question is why the importance of a belief affects its value.<sup>22</sup> After all, the question is not which beliefs are good for a particular individual or individuals, but rather merely which beliefs are good or valuable. This good, as Michael Lynch notes,<sup>23</sup> is typically construed as some kind of alethic good. Yet relevance, interestingness, and importance are not themselves alethic qualities. They are qualities that relate to an individual's concerns in both thought and action.

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<sup>21</sup> See Lynch (2009).

<sup>22</sup> Mitova (2021) offers a different, innovative approach to answering this question.

<sup>23</sup> Lynch (2009)

Welfarist pluralism assumes that correct account of wellbeing is one according to which being in a positive epistemic state – one which is epistemically required, for example – is part of wellbeing. This is closely in line with views about wellbeing that treat knowledge as part of wellbeing, although it is not identical to them.<sup>24</sup> Those views assume, mainly tacitly, that knowledge is the final epistemic good. I believe the emphasis on knowledge was and is mistaken, although it is not a point that I am prepared to argue for here. Rather, I should point out that what is particularly interesting about knowledge is that it connects the mental lives of agents to the actual state of the world via factivity. It is a particularly robust form of true belief.<sup>25</sup>

There are several strands of thought about wellbeing that take veridicality as an important feature of genuine human happiness.<sup>26</sup> Famous examples, such as Robert Nozick's Experience Machine,<sup>27</sup> rely on eliciting the intuition that things done and experienced have a higher importance to wellbeing than the corresponding simulacra and experiences of those simulacra. Ersatz achievement is not as personally valuable as real achievement. Genuine relationships contribute more to wellbeing than qualitatively identical supposed ones.

I am moved, at least within limits, by the intuitive force of thought experiments and examples that treat veridical doings and one's experiences of them as more personally valuable than their ersatz counterparts. I have no additional arguments in favour of these intuitions. If 'veridicalism', as I shall call the view, is false, then welfarist pluralism is unlikely to be true.

Let us then suppose that veridicalism is true for the sake of advancing the discussion. The epistemic component of wellbeing is tied to veridicalist intuitions. The reality, or correspondence

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<sup>24</sup> There are various examples of such views, but many fall into the Aristotelian tradition. See for example Griffin (1986) for relevant discussion. Moore (1984), Rashdall (1907), and probably Ross (1930) all fall into this tradition, which dates from Aristotle (2000).

<sup>25</sup> *Pace* Williamson (2000) and others who treat knowledge as a separate type of mental state.

<sup>26</sup> Griffin (1986) remains an essential point of departure for contemporary discussions about this aspect of wellbeing.

<sup>27</sup> Nozick (1974).

with reality, of our interior life is a good. One's having the phenomenal experience of ascending K2 is valuable in no small part, because it is a representation of one's actual achievements in climbing K2. The doing, as opposed to the mere phenomenological experiencing, contributes to wellbeing, and so does the experience of the actual doing. The latter does so beyond what having identical internal states would contribute, were one to undergo them whilst sitting inside a simulator.

This is the underlying thought, at least: if we accept veridicalism about wellbeing, the doxastic component of our mental lives is improved by having appropriate connections to the outside world. However, things are in some ways more complicated with our doxastic states. Doxastic achievement and correlation with the outside world has two distinct components. One is correctness in the sense of simply being true. Another is responsiveness to reality, at least partially in the form of responsiveness to evidence, rational argument, and reflectively adopted precepts of good reasoning. Doxastic correctness – having a true belief – is not the sole way in which beliefs reflect a real connection to the world. A belief's connecting in the right way by conforming to appropriate epistemic norms does not entail that the belief will be true.

It is a job for epistemologists to discover how to balance these considerations. The aim of belief may be truth. Having beliefs that strive to connect to and represent the world as it is, however, does not secure their truth. My own opinion, and it is not very much more than that, is that a belief's response to its environment is of greater epistemic importance than its truth, although both may well matter. This seems to be the most common view in the literature on epistemic reasons for belief.<sup>28</sup> Welfarist pluralism leaves open the question of what being in a positive epistemic state is, but treats being in a positive epistemic state as part of wellbeing in the main because wellbeing is partially determined by our connections to the world as it is and by the aetiology of our internal mental states.

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<sup>28</sup>See Gibbons (2013) for a thorough and opinionated survey.

An attractive feature of this explanation of why true or at least positively epistemically valanced beliefs are valuable is that they are valuable to us as individuals. Any epistemically positive belief is equally good for us *qua* epistemically positive belief. However, at the same time different beliefs can be good for us in additional ways. Beliefs which are of practical value, because they are both true and relevant, will make further contributions to our wellbeing. Being a certain kind of person, perhaps a learned person or an expert on a particular subject, may be a type of achievement. Having true beliefs relevant to being learned or to being an expert would thus confer additional gains on wellbeing to an individual, as having them would contribute towards her making worthwhile achievements. The welfarist pluralism explanation for the greater value of interesting or relevant beliefs is that they contribute to wellbeing in additional, complex ways over and above their being epistemically positive.

Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that relevance and interestingness are essential features of epistemically positive beliefs. If they are, then welfarist pluralism accommodates that, too. Nonetheless, if they are not, welfarist pluralism at least can help to explain the intuition that relevance and interestingness matter to the value of beliefs that (otherwise) share the same epistemic status.<sup>29</sup>

I have not tried to argue that welfarist pluralism offers a better explanation of the value of truth than alternative accounts. In keeping with the broader approach taken in this book, I am more interested in exploring the extent to which welfarist pluralism is a plausible, attractive view that is at least not clearly false. Nonetheless, I believe that this account of the value of truth is promising. The truth is important to us collectively, in part because it contributes to each of our wellbeing individually.

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<sup>29</sup> Welfarist pluralism offers a more flexible way to account for the rôle of interest or practical importance in generating reasons for belief than interest-relative approaches to epistemic properties, such as being justified or being an instance of knowledge. See for example Stanley (2007).

#### 1.4 The epistemic component

In §§1.1-1.2, I presented a rough picture of how each of the two main components of welfarist pluralism work to combine a) monist foundations with b) non-derivative pluralism about reasons for belief. The source of reasons for belief is wellbeing, and their combinatoric properties are those of the individual components of wellbeing.

One issue that arises immediately on this picture is that of how to understand the epistemic component of wellbeing. A perhaps tempting, but unacceptable view is that being in doxastic states or engaging in doxastic processes for which there are alethic reasons is *ceteris paribus* good for an individual, with the order of explanation going from reasons to wellbeing (or perhaps personal good, where ‘good’ refers to the value of wellbeing rather than wellbeing itself). This picture places reasons prior to wellbeing and would require an explanation about the source of alethic reasons which does have wellbeing in its *explanans*. A picture of this kind is inconsistent with welfarist pluralism in both logic and spirit. There are accounts of personal good, and even wellbeing under that name, that treat being in line with various normative reasons as an inherently positive contribution to one’s wellbeing.<sup>30</sup> Whatever account of wellbeing is ultimately the right one for use in welfarist pluralism, it is not one of those.

There is a certain idea of a *normative source* that has appeared with different glosses in earlier work of mine and the work of John Broome.<sup>31</sup> Broome’s idea, very roughly, is that different sorts of domains or systems are capable of producing requirements. For example, the source of the requirement that one eat peas on the reverse side of one’s fork is etiquette. And the source of the requirement not to harm innocents is morality. One of the possible sources is epistemology. The requirement that one not believe a transparently false proposition has epistemology as its source.

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<sup>30</sup> Fitting-attitude analyses can have this character. For an in-depth discussion, see Sylvan (2021).

<sup>31</sup> See Reisner (2004 & 2015) and Broome (2007 & 2013).

According to Broome, some sources are normative. For example, morality may be normative, whereas etiquette is non-normative. According to Broome, when a source is normative, it confers the force of being a normative reason on its requirements. This is why there is a reason not to harm innocents, while there is no non-derivative reason (at least) to eat peas by balancing them on the reverse side of one's fork; morality is a normative source, whereas etiquette is not. Broome does not elaborate on what makes a normative source be normative. I believe it is correct to read him as being open to existence of either one or of many basic normative sources.

For my own part, I did not consider the possibility of there's being non-normative sources underlying a common requirement structure in which some requirements (those generated by normative sources) are normative requirements and others (those generated by non-normative sources) are not. My thinking was that sources were properties or categories of properties that gave rise to reasons or oughts. For example, the source of the requirement that one not believe necessary falsehoods is truth, or perhaps logic, rather than epistemology. Likewise, the source of the requirement not to harm innocents is goodness (assuming a broadly teleological ethics for the sake of argument).<sup>32</sup> I shall soon make use of both Broome's notion of a source and my own.

The question of in virtue of what something is valuable invites several answers, as there are several potentially relevant senses of 'in virtue of'. Here, two particular kinds of questions are of interest. It is helpful to present the relevant part of his idea here by using a toy example. Suppose that subjectivism about goodness is true, i.e. what it is for something to be good is for me to believe that it is good.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In contrast particularly to Broome's view, Bruno Guindon (2016) makes a strong case for treating reasons as conceptually and metaphysically prior to normative sources. The welfarist pluralism account may not be compatible with the the view that Guindon sets out. Readers persuaded by his work may thus have (additional) reasons to be sceptical about welfarist pluralism.

<sup>35</sup> This idea is inspired by various work of Ralf Bader's. The original, unpublished paper from which I got the idea has evolved instead into several different papers, including work in progress. Consequently, it seems best to me to acknowledge my intellectual debt to Bader without providing a specific citation.

Let us assume that pinnipeds are good. In virtue of what are they good? The first answer to this question is the fact that I believe that they are good. This *grounds*, to use the popular term of today, the fact that they are good. The relation itself is grounded by a second fact, namely that what makes something good is that I believe it is good. This in turn explains why what is good changes along with my beliefs about what is good and also why what is good is always determined by what I believe is good and not something else. An idea along these lines is present in welfarist pluralism.

According to welfarist pluralism, the fact that believing  $x$  is required by epistemology is the first kind of grounding fact. That satisfying the requirements<sup>54</sup> of epistemology is a basic (positive) component of my wellbeing is the grounding fact of the second kind, namely what makes it the case that the first fact itself grounds the fact that there is an alethic reason for me to believe  $x$ .<sup>55</sup>

This structure supports two integral parts of the the welfarist pluralism picture. The first is that it distinguishes welfarist pluralism from foundational pluralism. Welfarist pluralism and foundational pluralism both cite the fact that something is required by epistemology as the grounding fact (of the first kind) for the fact that there is an alethic reason to believe  $x$ . According to welfarist pluralism's foundational monism, the explanation of why the fact that  $x$  satisfies a requirement of epistemology grounds the fact that  $x$  is an alethic reason for belief is because satisfying a requirement of epistemology contributes to increasing the level of a component of one's wellbeing. According to foundational pluralism, the explanation instead would be that the fact that  $x$  satisfies a requirement of epistemology is itself the complete explanation.

This way of describing the structure also puts us in a position to distinguish between welfarist

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<sup>54</sup> I am assuming for the present discussion that what there is to being in a good (as far as it goes) epistemic state just is being in the state of satisfying one or more requirements of epistemology.

<sup>55</sup> One may reasonably ask whether there are further grounding questions to ask, namely in virtue of what it is the case that being a part of wellbeing grounds something's being grounds for a reason for belief. This further grounding question is not one that I pursue in this book. For some methodological considerations in trying to answer it, see Reisner (2018b).

pluralism and versions of pragmatism that treat alethic reasons for belief as being derivative rather than non-derivative. On the latter view, the fact that  $e$  is evidence for  $p$  grounds the fact that  $e$  is a reason to believe  $p$ . However, what grounds the relation between these facts is that believing according to the evidence (either in this case or generally) increases the level of some non-epistemic component of wellbeing, for example the amount of pleasure one feels. What makes the reason non-derivative according to the foundational monism of welfarist pluralism, as opposed to a (for example) hedonic pragmatism, is due to the nature of wellbeing itself. Epistemic goods are wellbeing goods, so to speak, on the former view, whereas they are not on the latter.

To further characterise the structure of welfarist pluralism, it is helpful to extend the grounding model with an additional step. The fact that  $e$  is evidence for  $p$  grounds the fact that  $e$  is a reason to believe  $p$ . In turn, this grounding relation obtains because epistemology requires one to believe according to the evidence. What *confers* normativity on the requirements of epistemology is in turn the fact that being in a positive epistemic state is a basic component of an individual's wellbeing.

To return now to talk of 'sources', in the sense in which I have used the term, the source of all normativity is wellbeing. In Broome's sense, the source of normativity is epistemology, and the rest of the story is part of the explanation of why epistemology is a normative (reason providing) source.

The picture on offer relies on the dual grounds model presented in this section. I shall call the first ground for a reason or determinant of what one ought to believe 'the reason itself' or 'the (partial) determiner itself'. I shall use 'source' in the way that Broome does, namely the sort of system or structure that produces requirements and reasons or (partial) determiners. A source which can issue reasons non-derivatively is a *normative source* and one that cannot is a *non-normative source*. Following my earlier practice, something like wellbeing, which confers normativity to a

source, is a *source of normativity*.<sup>36</sup> One may rightly complain that it is too easy to confuse a *normative source* with a *source of normativity*. However, other terminology is more awkward and adds difficulty when comparing what is said here to the literature. I apologise for not having a neater terminological solution.

Coming full circle, it is now possible to locate the epistemic component. The epistemic component is a component of wellbeing. Epistemic facts are thus reasons or (partial) determiners for/of belief themselves. They are so because epistemology is a normative source. The source of normativity for epistemology is wellbeing.

### 1.5 *Epistemology as a component of wellbeing*

I shall explore the outlines of a serviceable, and one hopes plausible, theory of wellbeing for welfarist pluralism later in the book.<sup>37</sup> For now, I want to say more about what I mean by ‘epistemology’.

‘Epistemology’ is a word used to name a field of philosophical inquiry. This field was originally constituted by the study of the theory of knowledge, but in time it has come to concern concepts and properties like *justification*, *warrant*, *oughts*, and *reasons* as they apply to a variety of doxastic states, sometimes in connection to knowledge and sometimes not.

I am interested in much narrower part of epistemology, that part which issues requirements. With respect to this narrower part, epistemology is a kind of function from states of the world to requirements. These requirements may be evidential in character: that there is overwhelming evidence for *p* requires one to believe *p*.<sup>38</sup> They may be logical: that *x* and *not x* are contradictories

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<sup>36</sup> See Reisner (2004 & 2011).

<sup>37</sup> See chapters 6 & 7.

<sup>38</sup> There are those who are sceptical about this claim. See Reisner (2013) for more discussion. Kevin Mulligan has also pressed objections to this principle to me in conversation.

requires one not to believe both  $x$  and not  $x$ . I do not mean to limit the requirements of epistemology to logic and evidence. In fact, I take it that it is the job of the epistemologist to discover the requirements of epistemology. Satisfying those requirements is a basic, non-derivative component of wellbeing, whatever the requirements turn out to be.

There are some limits as to what can be included in epistemology. For reasons outlined in §1.3, I take it that epistemology, or the part of it that appears in welfarist pluralism, is concerned with mind-world relations. This means that strictly internalistic features of epistemology are ruled out. This has three important upshots.

The first is that theoretical rationality, understood as a system of wide-scope requirements governing relations amongst mental states, is not part of epistemology in the relevant sense. I discuss this in more detail elsewhere,<sup>39</sup> but the idea is straightforward enough. Theoretical rational requirements, construed thusly, do not depend on non-mental features of the world. The requirements do not arise from considerations that concern how one's mental-states relate to worldly states. This is not to say that there are no overlapping requirements of theoretical rationality and epistemology. Insofar as the former are consistency requirements, they forbid having pairs of logically inconsistent beliefs. Two logically inconsistent beliefs cannot both be true. Epistemology requires us not to have beliefs or combinations of beliefs that are necessarily false. Therefore, there are at least some requirements of epistemology that are identical in content to at least some requirements of theoretical rationality. But they are numerically different requirements in virtue of having different sources.<sup>40</sup>

The second upshot is that some aspects of epistemology, concerning which there is debate about whether they are internal or external, must be external. The sense of 'internal' and 'external'

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<sup>39</sup> See chapter 7 of this book and Reisner (MS).

<sup>40</sup> This commits me to the view that requirements are more finely grained than their contents; they are as finely grained as the conjunction of their contents and their source.

is like that used in traditional reasons literature, not the justification literature, which is to say the issue is whether extra-mental facts play a particular kind of rôle or whether they do not. A straightforward example is evidence.

Some theories of evidence, such as traditional Bayesian theories, take mental states to be evidence. This is an internalist view in the relevant sense. On the other hand, some philosophers offer accounts of evidence that are essentially non-mental, for example Jonathan Dancy and John Skorupski in some of their work on reasons.<sup>41</sup> Evidence for them is various accessibility constraints, but the facts themselves are the evidence. These are external views in the relevant sense.

Finally, there are mental state views of evidence that treat evidence as veridical mental states. Perhaps most famously, there is Timothy Williamson's view that our evidence is our total knowledge.<sup>42</sup> More recently, Velislava Mitova has developed an account of evidence as true beliefs.<sup>43</sup> Although these are mental state views, they are external in the relevant sense, because they link evidence to veridical states of the world.<sup>44</sup>

The final upshot is methodological rather than substantive. As with many things, welfarist pluralism does not meet a standard of neutrality. It is a committed view, committed both in the sense that it has several substantive components and in the sense that it is not compatible with various positions in as yet unsettled debates in philosophy. The methodological point is this. The plausibility and correctness of welfarist pluralism partially depends on the plausibility and correctness of a number of other views in philosophy. A complete reckoning of its prospects requires substantial work beyond what is done in this book.

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<sup>41</sup> See Dancy (2000) and Skorupski (2010).

<sup>42</sup> Williamson (2000).

<sup>43</sup> Mitova (2017).

<sup>44</sup> This classification of internal and external differs from the one I use in Reisner (2016). This is regrettable, but cannot be helped.

### 1.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have outlined the basic ideas underlying welfarist pluralism. My aim has been to set out and motivate the view in a sketchy manner, looking at some details of interest. Many of the points in this chapter will be taken up in more detail in subsequent chapters.

Perhaps the most important amongst the features of welfarist pluralism discussed thus far is the way in which components of wellbeing provide distinctive types of grounds for reasons for belief. The fact that epistemology itself is a source of reasons for belief distinguishes welfarist pluralism from standard forms of pragmatism, on the one hand. On the other, the fact that wellbeing is the source of normativity for those reasons assimilates welfarist pluralism to standard forms of pragmatism.

I close this chapter with a pair of observations. Clifford's evidentialism is no longer a popular view about the ethics of belief. Contemporary evidentialists typically do not see their views as having an ethical component in the way that Clifford saw his as having one. Contemporary pragmatists have not been inclined to see conformity to truth-related epistemic norms as inherently morally worthy. The conjecture I am exploring in this chapter and in this book will ultimately come to entail that that it is morally good, and that there are moral reasons, to believe what is true, or at least what the indicators of truth point to. Although much of what Clifford says is surely wrong, I am surprised to find myself not only offering (conjectural) support for a part of his view, but also to find that I now am inclined to think that connecting the true and the good is an admirable *desideratum*.

This leads to the second observation. This book was not motivated by contemporary affairs or politics, although it does discuss the salience of welfarist pluralism to some contemporary

concerns.<sup>45</sup> Its subjects are issues I have worked on for 20 years and represents an incomplete effort to set out and explore a conjecture that I favour but cannot fully defend. For all that, its connection to world happenings is clear enough, as we live in an age where there is much importance to what we believe and a concerted assault on the importance of believing those things that evidence and sound reasoning suggest are true. During the times, and there have been many, when I have been inclined towards believing a version of radical pragmatism about reasons for belief, I have worried about the way that the view loses a grip on the intuitive importance of truth, or at least of striving to believe the truth. I was no more impressed by the answers given by evidentialists of varying stripes, and consequently I have wondered what an account that is truer to at least my own intuitions could be like.

I have offered one possible answer in this book, or at least a programme for giving an answer. Truth is important to us not because of some dubious talk of the constitutive norms of belief or related arguments, but because the connection between our mental lives and the world around us is directly central to our wellbeing. In an earlier era, it might have been said that the gods love truth, that it was dear to them. Even as we sometimes try to run away from it, I suggest that the truth is dear to us. If this is right, then truth matters because it is important for us, and its normative grip is the same as that of morality and prudence. Perhaps recent events make this sound plausible. I leave it to the reader to decide for herself.

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<sup>45</sup> See chapter 8.