

The Holism of Doxastic Justification

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I argue against the orthodox view of doxastic justification, according to which a belief of a given subject is justified for her just in case the subject has a good reason for the belief and she also bases the belief on that reason. The orthodox view is false, I maintain, because there might be unjustified beliefs that are based on the good reasons that support them. The fault lies with the ‘particularism’ of the orthodox view, which is why it cannot handle those cases where certain ‘holistic’ considerations render an otherwise justified belief unjustified. Accordingly, I argue for a holistic constraint on doxastic justification: whether a subject that bases a particular belief on a reason that supports it is justified in having that belief depends on what she does, cognitively speaking, with that reason vis-à-vis a considerable portion of her other beliefs.

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1. The Orthodox View of Doxastic Justification

According to a widely recognized distinction, first clearly introduced by Firth (1978), epistemic justification comes in two kinds: propositional and doxastic. Propositional justification is a relation that holds between subjects and propositions. When a subject *S* has a good reason *R* for a proposition *p*, *p* is justified for *S*, irrespective of whether she believes *p* or not.¹ When Holmes and Watson have the same pieces of evidence

¹ Surely, with the caveat that there are no defeaters (or, equivalently, the good reason in question is *overall*), which I will take for granted in what follows. And, here are two points about what I mean by “a reason.” First, by “a reason,” I don’t necessarily mean a reason that does not involve any other reasons as constituents. So, when a subject has, say, three different reasons that jointly (but not necessarily individually) support a proposition, those reasons, collectively taken, constitute a good reason for that proposition. Second, I take “a (good) reason” to be whatever it is that is a *source* of propositional justification, be it an experience, a belief, or what have you.

jointly suggesting that the butler is guilty, the proposition that the butler is guilty is justified for both Holmes and Watson, irrespective of whether they believe it or not. However, it does not follow from the fact that *S* has *R*, which justifies *p*, and *S* believes *p*, that *S*'s believing *p* is justified *tout court*: there might still be a clear sense in which her believing *p* is not justified, a possibility that demands the recognition of a distinct kind of epistemic justification, *viz.* *doxastic* justification. If, for instance, the reason for which Watson comes to believe that the butler is guilty is not the evidence that he shares with Holmes but the butler's "suspiciously trimmed moustache," then there is a clear sense in which his believing thus is not justified (not "well-founded"), despite the fact that the proposition that the butler is guilty is justified for him. Under these circumstances, Watson's believing that the butler is guilty is not *doxastically* justified; however, Holmes, an epitome of epistemic perfection, surely does not commit Watson's (or any other) blunder and his believing that the butler is guilty is *doxastically* justified.

What does it take for *S*'s believing *p* to be *doxastically* justified? It is uncontroversial that *doxastic* justification requires propositional justification (and not *vice versa*): in order for *S*'s believing *p* to be justified, *S* must have a good reason *R* to believe it. However, as Watson's "suspiciously-trimmed-moustache" case illustrates, propositional justification does not suffice for *doxastic* justification. In addition to having propositional justification for *p*, *doxastic* justification requires a proper connection between *S*'s believing *p* and *R* (i.e., what makes *p* justified for her): the former must be *based on* the latter.² Watson's believing that the butler is guilty is not *doxastically* justified because it is not based on the good reasons he has for the belief, while Holmes's believing is *doxastically* justified because it is based on those reasons. According to an orthodox view of *doxastic* justification, it is necessary and sufficient for *S*'s believing *p* to be *doxastically* justified, that *p* is propositionally justified for *S* and *S*'s believing *p* is based on what makes *p* propositionally justified for her. Briefly put, on this view, *doxastic* justification is propositional justification *plus* the basing relation.³

² There are two main competing accounts of the basing relation. On the *causal* account, the reason had by the subject for a given belief must causally initiate or sustain the subject's believing in order for the subject to be justified in having that belief. For defenses of (some different versions of) the causal account, see Moser (1989), Turri (2011), and Ye (2020). And, on the *doxastic* account, having a meta-belief to the effect that the reason is a good reason for the belief is either necessary or sufficient for the belief's being based on the reason. For a defense of the *doxastic* account, see Tolliver (1982) and Foley (1984). In what follows, nothing much depends on the distinction between these different accounts of the basing relation.

³ Turri (2010) provides a rich list of representative quotations from prominent epistemologists endorsing the orthodox view of *doxastic* justification. Here are only two of those. Kvanvig writes: "Doxastic justification is what you get when you believe something for which you have propositional justification, and you base your belief on that which propositionally justifies it" (2003: B1). And, Pollock and Cruz write: "To be justified in believing something it is not sufficient merely to *have* a good reason

The orthodox view of doxastic justification appears to be highly plausible. After all, one might reasonably wonder, what *else* can possibly be required for *S*'s believing *p* to be justified, other than it being the case that her believing *p* is based on the good reason *R* she has for it? If the reason *S* has for *p* is good, then it follows that *p* is justified for *S*. And, furthermore, if the reason for which *S* believes *p* is the good reason she has for *p* (that is, if she bases her believing on that reason), then it appears that she has all that is required for having a doxastically justified belief that *p*.

In what follows, I will argue that the orthodox view of doxastic justification is mistaken: doxastic justification cannot be conceived as propositional justification plus the basing relation. Before presenting my argument, however, I would like to first briefly point out how it differs from an influential objection raised by Turri (2010) against the orthodox view. On the basis of some (purported) counter-examples to the orthodox view, Turri argues that that view is fundamentally mistaken because it gets the order of explanation between propositional and doxastic justification wrong. A characteristic feature of the orthodox view is that it holds that the primary unit of justification is propositions (and not actual believing attitudes or, simply, beliefs) and, accordingly, that propositional justification is explanatorily prior to doxastic justification: a theory of epistemic justification must, on this view, *first* explain propositional justification and *then* explain doxastic justification in terms of propositional justification and the basing relation. And, according to Turri, what makes the orthodox view vulnerable to the counter-examples he presents is its definitive commitment to the explanatory priority of propositional justification; and, from this, Turri derives the conclusion that propositional justification (what it is for a proposition to be justified for a subject) must be explained in terms of doxastic justification (what it is for a subject to have a justified belief in a proposition) rather than *vice versa*.

The argument I will offer below proceeds, like Turri's own argument, by way of providing counter-examples to the orthodox view: there are, surprisingly, cases in which *S* is not justified in having the belief that *p*, despite the fact that *S* bases her belief that *p* on the good reason she has for it.⁴ Accordingly, I agree with Turri that, contrary to

for believing it. One could have a good reason at one's disposal but never make the connection. What is lacking (in such a case) is that you do not believe the conclusion *on the basis of those reasons*" (1999: 35–36).

⁴ It is important to distinguish two different ways in which the thesis that doxastic justification is propositional justification plus the basing relation might be taken. According to one, the 'thesis' is a definitional truth, according to which the basing relation acts like a place-holder, being *whatever it is* that must be added to propositional justification in order to have doxastic justification. According to the other, the thesis purports to express a substantive truth, which presupposes that we already have a grasp, however tenuous or rudimentary it might be, of the basing relation, and claims that *that* basing relation (perhaps tenuously grasped) is what must be added to propositional justification in order to have doxastic justification.

the orthodox view, doxastic justification cannot be conceived as propositional justification plus the basing relation: propositional justification and the basing relation, jointly taken, are not sufficient for doxastic justification. However, I take the explanatory priority of propositional justification for granted,⁵ and I see no good reason to believe that my counter-examples below point toward anything to the contrary. As will become clear, the lesson straightforwardly suggested by those counter-examples is that the orthodox view's fault lies with its 'particularism' (or 'atomism'), according to which whether a belief is doxastically justified is simply a matter of whether it is based on a reason that supports it, regardless of what the subject does, cognitively speaking, with that reason *vis-à-vis* some of her *other* beliefs. The upshot is that there is a significant holistic constraint on doxastic justification, which goes unnoticed by the orthodox view.

This paper is hereafter divided into four sections. In Section 2, I present two counter-examples to the orthodox view of doxastic justification. In Section 3, I address four objections that might be raised against the proposed counter-examples. In Section 4, I elaborate on the sort of holism about doxastic justification ('doxastic holism') suggested by those counter-examples and distinguish it from some better-known holisms in the vicinity. Section 5 sums up the lesson.

2. Two Counter-Examples to the Orthodox View

Now, consider the following case:

Weather Belief I ask my friend, Thomas, what he thinks the weather will be like tomorrow. He tells me that it is going to rain tomorrow because a reliable weather report has just said that it is going to rain tomorrow. Then, perhaps out of boredom, I decide to ask him some other questions concerning the weather of a more distant future, questions like "So, what will the weather be like two days from now? One week from now? One month from now?" What I come to realize after these queries is something rather unexpected: to each question concerning the weather of a particular future day,

The distinction here is analogous to a distinction between warrant and justification. The 'thesis' that knowledge is true belief plus warrant is definitional, given that warrant acts like a place-holder, being *whatever it is* that must be added to true belief in order to have knowledge. However, the thesis that knowledge is true belief plus justification is substantive and, as Gettier-cases purport to show, might fall prey to counter-examples. Clearly, if the thesis that doxastic justification is propositional justification plus the basing relation is taken as a definitional truth, then it cannot fall prey to counter-examples. In this paper, I take it, plausibly I believe, that that thesis is conceived by the defenders of the orthodox view as purporting to express a substantive truth.

⁵ For a defense of the thesis that propositional justification is explanatorily prior to doxastic justification, see Kvanvig (2003) and Silva (2015). It is worth mentioning that Silva (2015) argues that Turri's purported counter-examples can be disarmed by a relatively straightforward revision of the orthodox view (namely, by endorsing that doxastic justification is propositional justification plus the *proper* basing relation). However, Silva's "fix" does not work against the counter-examples I present below.

Thomas gives the answer that it is going to rain on that day because the weather report has just said that it is going to rain tomorrow. For instance, in response to my question “what will the weather be like one month from now?”, Thomas says that it is going to rain one month from now because the weather report has just said that it is going to rain tomorrow!

In this case, Thomas intuitively has a good reason for his belief that it is going to rain tomorrow (i.e., the reliable weather report) and might be plausibly taken as basing that belief on that reason.⁶ Hence, the orthodox view delivers the result that Thomas’s “tomorrow-weather” belief (i.e., the belief that it is going to rain tomorrow) is doxastically justified. However, contra the orthodox view, it seems clear that Thomas’s belief is *not* justified. And, this is, to a first approximation, because Thomas has some other “future-weather” beliefs which are also based on the report about tomorrow’s weather, which is evidently *not* a good reason for those beliefs. Surely, this should give us a pause. The fact that there are various other future-weather beliefs of Thomas’s, each of which is based on what the report says about tomorrow’s weather, appears to disqualify his tomorrow-weather belief that is also based on that report from being justified for him.

What might be plausibly drawn in the first instance from the Weather Belief case is this: if a subject bases a significant number of her other beliefs on *R*, which does not support those beliefs, then her particular belief that *p* on *R*, which is a good reason for *p*, is not (doxastically) justified for her. In other words, whether a subject that bases her belief that *p* on *R*, which is a good reason for *p*, is justified in having that belief depends on what she does, cognitively speaking, with *R vis-à-vis* a considerable portion of her *other* beliefs. Hence, the general lesson is that there is a necessary holistic condition for the doxastic justification of a particular belief, which goes unrecognized by the orthodox view, a condition that concerns whether the subject bases some of her other beliefs on the reason that she bases that particular belief on.

The general lesson above drawn from the Weather Belief case can also be arrived at from an opposite direction. We can imagine cases in which a good reason *R* supports both *p* and some other propositions *q*, *r*, *s*, and so on, and also in which a given subject, basing her belief that *p* on *R*, does *not* base her beliefs that *q*, *r*, *s*, and so on, on *R*. Consider, for instance, the following case:

Fortune Belief There is currently nothing in Michael’s bank account, but he believes that it will have at least \$100000 in three years and he bases this belief on his well-supported belief that he will get promoted in a few months to a top position in the company, which annually pays \$200000. Interestingly, however, Michael has various other beliefs (e.g., that he will be able to afford his \$100000 dream car in three years, that he will be in a position

⁶ I don’t mean to suggest, nor do I intend to argue, that basing requires articulating (or even having the capacity of articulating) one’s own reasons. The case at hand can be suitably revised to fit the reader’s preferred account of the basing relation.

to lend \$100000 to his brother in three years, and so on), each of which is as clearly supported by his promotion belief as is his future-bank-account belief, while he does not base them on that promotion belief.

In this case, Michael bases his future-bank-account belief on the promotion belief that supports it. Hence, the orthodox view delivers the result that the future-bank-account belief is justified for Michael. However, contra what the orthodox view entails, it seems clear that the future-bank-account belief is *not* justified for Michael. And, this is, to a first approximation, because Michael has various other beliefs that he does not base on the promotion belief, despite the fact that the promotion belief *is* as clearly good a reason for those beliefs as it is for his future-bank-account belief. This should give us a pause. The fact that Michael does not base his other beliefs on the promotion belief that supports them appears to disqualify his future-bank-account belief that is supported by the promotion belief from being justified for him.

What might be plausibly drawn in the first instance from the Fortune Belief case is this: if a subject does not base a significant number of her other beliefs on *R*, which supports those beliefs, then her particular belief that *p* on *R*, which is a good reason for *p*, is not (doxastically) justified for her. In other words, whether a subject that bases her belief that *p* on *R*, which is a good reason for *p*, is justified in having that belief depends on what she does, cognitively speaking, with *R vis-à-vis* a considerable portion of her *other* beliefs. Hence, the general lesson is the same as the one drawn from the Weather Belief case, *viz.* that there is a necessary holistic condition for the doxastic justification of a particular belief, which goes unrecognized by the orthodox view, a condition that concerns whether the subject bases some of her other beliefs on the reason that she bases that particular belief on.

The Weather Belief case is intended to show that *basing* some beliefs on a reason that does *not* support them might disqualify a distinct belief that is based on the very same reason that actually supports it from being justified. And, the Fortune Belief case is intended to show that *failing* to base some beliefs on a reason that *supports* them might disqualify a distinct belief that is based on that reason that actually supports it from being justified.

The argument from the two cases presented for a holistic constraint on doxastic justification proceeds in two main steps. The first step is that the intuitive reaction to the cases is, I take it, that there is something epistemically wrong with the target beliefs of the subjects in question—more specifically, that those beliefs are unjustified. It is not merely that, in the Weather Belief case, for instance, Thomas's other future-weather beliefs are unjustified but also that there is something epistemically wrong with his tomorrow-weather belief—that is, that that belief is unjustified. The reaction I have (and expect that the reader will have) is something along the following lines: "Wait! If Thomas has all these other future-beliefs based on the report about

tomorrow's weather, that surely renders his tomorrow-weather belief epistemically problematic!" (or, more specifically: "Wait! If Thomas has all these other future-beliefs based on that report, that surely renders his tomorrow-weather belief unjustified!") Furthermore, given that the subjects have propositional justification for their target beliefs, what is epistemically wrong with those beliefs must be that they are not *doxastically* justified.⁷ And, the second step of the argument is that what explains what renders the beliefs in question doxastically unjustified is that there is a holistic constraint on doxastic justification: what the subject does with a reason *vis-à-vis* some of her other beliefs might render an otherwise justified belief unjustified.

Let me now summarize the main result of this section. The orthodox view of doxastic justification is particularist (or atomistic) in the sense that it presumes that whether a particular belief is justified depends solely on whether its subject has a good reason for it and she bases *it* on that good reason. The presumption here is that whether a particular belief is justified has nothing to do with how its subject, so to speak, cognitively stands with respect to some of her other beliefs. However, the cases presented above point toward the conclusion that doxastic justification is holistic in the sense that whether a particular belief is justified for a subject cannot be decided in isolation from her cognitive doings with some of her other beliefs, in particular from whether she bases those other beliefs on a reason which supports that particular belief but does not support them.⁸

3. *Objections Answered*

There are four objections I want to address in this section that might be levelled against the cases proposed above. The first and second objections reject that the proposed cases are genuine counter-examples to the orthodox view as it currently stands, while the third and fourth objections acknowledge that they are genuine counter-examples but they hold that the orthodox view might be saved by a suitable revision preserving its particularism and nothing as dramatic as a holistic constraint on doxastic justification is needed.

The first objection I want to consider is the most straightforward one, which simply insists that in the given cases, the target beliefs that are based on the good reason that supports them (e.g., Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief) *are* doxastically justified, despite the fact that the other beliefs (e.g., Thomas's other future-weather beliefs) are not

⁷ I assume, plausibly I believe, that there are only two kinds of epistemic justification relevant here and that they are propositional justification and doxastic justification.

⁸ Since I believe that the general moral to be drawn from the Fortune Belief case is the same as the one drawn from the Weather Belief case, I will, for convenience's sake, formulate my discussion below mainly only in terms of the latter.

doxastically justified. According to this objection, what the orthodox view delivers with respect to these cases is correct and, therefore, no revision is called for.

My response to this objection is that it is based on a misunderstanding of the current dialectic. The question at issue is not what the orthodox view delivers with respect to the proposed cases but whether its deliverances are correct, and merely insisting that they are correct does not make them so. The intended dialectic has indeed a familiar thought-experimental structure, where an intuitively compelling case is presented against a certain view. I take it as intuitively clear that in the Weather Belief case, for instance, Thomas's basing his other future-weather beliefs on tomorrow's weather report casts serious doubt on the epistemic standing of his tomorrow-weather belief: there is clearly something epistemically wrong with his tomorrow-weather belief, given what he does, cognitively speaking, with his other future-weather beliefs.⁹ Furthermore, I take it that the obvious explanation of what it is that is epistemically wrong with Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief is that it is *not* doxastically justified (given especially that it *is* propositionally justified). So, it appears that the orthodox view delivers an intuitively false verdict for the Weather Belief case: while it seems that Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief is not doxastically justified, it delivers the result that it is. A defender of the objection that the proposed counter-examples do not call for any revision of the orthodox view needs to argue either that there is nothing epistemically wrong with Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief or that what is epistemically wrong with it has nothing to do with doxastic justification. And, I take it that neither claim is compelling.

The second objection maintains that the proposed cases are psychologically implausible and thus fail to be genuine counter-examples to the orthodox view. Why would anyone act, cognitively speaking, in the way Thomas does? Thomas's cognitive behavior is highly eccentric and hard to make sense of: human beings do not normally cognitively act like *that*. How can Thomas fail to recognize that the report about tomorrow's weather is not a good reason for the belief that it is going to rain one month from now? Thomas's failure is, one might insist, so peculiar that it is hard to take his case seriously as a genuine challenge to the orthodox view.

I agree with this objection that Thomas's failure is peculiar, but it does not follow from this peculiarity that the Weather Belief case fails to be a genuine counter-example to the orthodox view of doxastic justi-

⁹ I suspect that some readers might be unmoved by the proposed cases, shrug their shoulders and maintain "Everything seems to be in order with Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief!" This sort of 'dismissive' attitude is to be expected (as it is the case with many other thought-experiments in epistemology and other fields—cf. for instance, reactions to the fake barn cases (see Lycan 2006)), but my prediction is that it will be limited. I have nothing to offer in order to convince the readers that do not feel the pull of the proposed cases.

fiction. The crucial point about the Weather Belief case is not whether it is psychologically plausible but whether its possibility is excluded by the orthodox view, and the answer to the latter question is no. Similar considerations apply to some famous philosophical thought-experiments. The crucial point about the Knowledge Argument, for instance, is not whether it is psychologically plausible (e.g., not whether it is psychologically plausible to assume that a human being, Mary, can live in an isolated room, without having no visual contact with colors, for a very long period of time and learn, basically through reading, everything physical about colors), but whether it is *possible*, given what physicalism says about how the world is. And, its possibility, not its psychological plausibility, makes the Weather Belief case a genuine counter-example to the orthodox view.

The third objection acknowledges the intended morale of the proposed cases, *viz.* that in the Weather Belief case, for instance, Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief is doxastically unjustified; and, it builds on a certain diagnosis about what goes wrong in those cases. Why is it that the fact that the subject bases some of her other beliefs on a reason that does not support them disqualifies *this* particular belief of hers based on that reason, which actually supports it, from being justified for her? According to a proponent of the third objection, there is a plausible answer to this question that is consistent with the particularism of the orthodox view, which goes as follows. If a subject bases a significant number of some of her beliefs on *R*, which does not support those beliefs, then this indicates something significant about her basing the particular belief that *p* on *R*, which supports it, *viz.* that particular basing does not result from its being the case that *R* supports *p*.¹⁰ This is because, surely, if the subject's basing her belief that *p* on *R* resulted from it being the case that *R* supports *p*, then she would not base those other beliefs of hers on *R*, which does not support them. Consider a 3-year-old child who gives "4" as an answer to every multiplication problem. Clearly, those answers indicate that his saying "4" in response to " $2 \times 2 = ?$ " does not result from (his appreciation of) the truth that $2 \times 2 = 4$. Similar considerations apply, for instance, to our subject, Thomas, who bases all his beliefs about future weather on what the report says about tomorrow's weather. Furthermore, if the subject's basing *p* on *R*, which supports *p*, does not result from it being the case that *R* supports *p*, then the belief that *p* is not justified for the subject. If, for instance, the subject's basing *p* on *R*, which supports *p*, results from it being the case that the subject likes the sound of *R*, then the belief that *p* is clearly not justified for the subject. And, what explains why this is so is that, in such a case, what is responsible for the basing is not that *R* supports *p*.

And, if this diagnosis of what is wrong with, for instance, Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief, is correct, then, the third objection goes, what

¹⁰ For an extended and illuminating discussion of this idea, see Wedgwood (2006).

fundamentally matters to the doxastic justification of that particular belief is not what Thomas does, cognitively speaking, with some of his other future-weather beliefs but whether Thomas bases that belief on the tomorrow's weather report *because* that report supports it. Furthermore, it seems that this accords well with the particularism of the orthodox view, and all that is needed to save the view is to strengthen it by adding the following constraint on doxastic justification: a subject's belief that *p* is doxastically justified by *R* only if she bases her belief that *p* on *R* because *R* supports *p*. According to the proposal suggested by this objection, what a subject does with some of her other beliefs might serve as *evidence* that there is something wrong with a particular belief of hers that is based on a reason that supports it (more specifically, as evidence that it is not based on the reason that supports it *because* the reason supports it), but this does not mean, the objection goes, that there is a holistic constraint on doxastic justification.

I believe that this 'causal-responsibility' diagnosis—*viz.* what is wrong with Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief is that what is causally responsible for its being based on the weather report is not that the weather report supports the belief—is attractive and deserves careful attention; however, I don't believe, unfortunately for the orthodox view, that it survives close scrutiny. Note that it is not clear at all how the epistemic support relation between a reason and a belief can be causally responsible for the latter's being based on the former. The epistemic support relation appears to be causally inert and as such does not appear to be capable of being causally responsible for anything, let alone a belief's being based on a reason.¹¹ In response to this observation about the causal powers of the epistemic support relation, a natural move available to a proponent of the causal-responsibility diagnosis is to go 'doxastic' and appeal to the subject's *belief* regarding the support relation in question (given that beliefs about the support relation can be causally effective even if the support relation itself cannot). Given this move, the causal-responsibility diagnosis amounts to this: what is wrong with Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief is that what is causally responsible for it being based on the weather report is not that *Thomas believes that* the weather report supports the belief. Now, however, the obvious problem is that there is nothing in the Weather Belief case that excludes the possibility that what is causally responsible for Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief's being based on the weather report *is* that

¹¹ I do not take this reply that appeals to the causal inefficacy of the normative to be a decisive argument against the objection at hand. The point of the reply is rather that endorsing the objection comes with a significant *cost*, which is that such a move needs to explain how normative facts can figure in causal explanations and that it is not intuitively clear at all how this can be done. A thesis of the causal efficacy of the normative is perhaps ultimately defensible (see, for instance, Wedgewood (2006)) but I see it as a serious, if not deadly, bullet to bite. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing on this issue.

Thomas believes that the weather report supports the belief. Thomas might believe that the weather report supports his tomorrow-weather belief, and his basing the tomorrow-weather belief on the weather report might result from this supporting belief of his, *despite the fact that* he also bases his other future-weather beliefs on the very same weather report. And, if this is so, then the causal-responsibility diagnosis is mistaken: what is wrong with Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief is not what the causal-responsibility diagnosis says it is.

There is a further point I want to make against the objection at hand. I have just argued that the causal-responsibility diagnosis is mistaken; however, one might reasonably wonder whether, even if that diagnosis were correct, it would follow that there is no holistic constraint on doxastic justification. Assume, for the sake of the argument, that what goes wrong in the proposed cases is that what is causally responsible for the basing is not that the reason supports the belief. Now, let us raise the following question: How can we tell whether a given subject bases her belief that p on R because R supports p ? We now assume that the fact that R supports p can be causally responsible for the fact that the subject bases her belief that p on R ; however, this assumption surely does not entail that we can tell whether the causal-responsibility claim in question holds in a particular case without taking a look at what the subject does with R *vis-à-vis* some other beliefs. It might well be that the *only* way to tell whether the subject bases her belief that p on R because R supports p is to check whether, for instance, the subject bases some of her other beliefs on R , which does not support those beliefs: if she does, then we can plausibly conclude that what is causally responsible for her basing the belief that p on R is not that R supports p ; and if she does not, then not. And, if the only way to tell whether the causal-responsibility claim holds in a particular case is to do such a holistic checking, then it seems reasonable to argue that the truth of causal-responsibility diagnosis as such does not guarantee the particularism of the orthodox view. Consider: if the only way to tell whether something is an X is, say, by figuring out whether that thing has blue eyes, then it seems reasonable to say that being an X is nothing other than having blue eyes. In a similar vein, if the only way to tell whether a belief is doxastically justified is by looking at what other beliefs the subject bases on the reason, then it seems reasonable to say that what makes a belief doxastically justified is at least in part a matter of what other beliefs the subject bases on the reason.

However, I expect that some philosophers might not be inclined to agree with my appeal in the previous paragraph to a sort of 'verificationism:' they might object that the question of what it is to be an X should not be conflated with the question of how one can tell whether something is an X . This brings me to the last point I want to make against the objection at hand. If the only way to tell whether the causal-responsibility relation holds in a particular case is by doing some 'holis-

tic checking,' then you can perhaps save the *letter* of the particularism of the orthodox view but not its *spirit*. That is to say, a proponent of the orthodox view might insist that doxastic justification is particularistic in nature while accepting that a sort of holistic checking is required to tell whether it obtains. I take this conception of the orthodox view as a serious departure from the original one, where holistic checking is absent. And, if this paper succeeds in persuading some proponents of the orthodox view that holistic checking is required, then I would be glad that it has served its purpose.¹²

According to the fourth, and final, objection I wish to consider, the cases presented in the previous section (such as the Weather Belief case) are best conceived as pointing at the need to impose, contra the causal-responsibility diagnosis examined above as well as the holistic thesis I propose, not a condition directly on the doxastic justification of a particular belief but a condition directly on its basing on the relevant piece of reason. According to this objection, a subject can only *base* her belief that *p* on *R*, which supports that belief, if she does not base some of her other beliefs on *R*, which does not support them. This objection maintains that, in the Weather Belief case, for instance, Thomas fails to base his tomorrow-weather belief on the report because he bases a significant number of his other future-weather beliefs on the report. The proposal that the Weather Belief case points at the need to impose a condition *directly* on the basing relation (and thereby a condition *at one remove* on doxastic justification) saves the orthodox view from the threat posed by that case: if Thomas fails to base the tomorrow-weather belief on the report, then the orthodox view delivers the intuitively correct result that that belief is not doxastically justified.

There are two points I wish to make against the move suggested by this objection. First, this move can only save the particularist letter of the orthodox view of doxastic justification but not its particularist spirit. The spirit of the orthodox view is particularist regarding the conditions for the basing relation in that that account takes it that whether a particular belief is based on a reason has nothing to do with whether some other beliefs are based on that reason.¹³ However, the move at hand incorporates a holistic constraint on the basing relation, thereby sacrificing the particularist spirit. Second, placing holistic constraints along the lines suggested by this move on the obtaining of the basing relation is implausible. Whatever the correct account of the basing relation eventually turns out to be, it certainly appears to be possible, to

¹² This rather extended reply of mine to objection 3 has benefited greatly from the critical observations of an anonymous reviewer about its previous version. I thank the reviewer for insightful remarks.

¹³ It is worth noting here that both of the two main (namely, the *causal* and the *doxastic*) accounts currently available of the basing relation are particularist in this sense (see fn. 2 above). On both of these accounts, whether the basing relation holds between a reason and a belief has nothing to do with what the subject does with the reason *vis-à-vis* some other beliefs.

be a datum if you wish, that Thomas bases both the tomorrow-weather belief and some other future-weather beliefs on the report about tomorrow's weather, something which is deemed impossible by the move under consideration.

4. Reflections

Having answered what I take to be the most significant objections against the proposed counter-examples to the orthodox view of doxastic justification, I would now like to further elaborate on the holistic thesis suggested by those counter-examples, which I henceforth call "doxastic holism" ("DH"). Recall that DH is the thesis that whether a subject that bases her belief that p on R , which is a good reason for p , is doxastically justified in having that belief depends on what she does with R *vis-à-vis* a considerable portion of her other beliefs.

The sort of holism proposed in this paper concerns doxastic justification and must be carefully distinguished from holism about propositional justification (or, propositional holism). The core idea of propositional holism is that what makes a particular proposition p justified is not another particular proposition but a feature of the set of propositions to which p belongs. As is well-known, a straightforward kind of propositional holism is offered by coherentism, *viz.* the thesis that p is justified for a subject S just in case the set of propositions, which are available to S and of which p is a member, is coherent (to a certain degree).¹⁴ It must be clear that doxastic holism does not require (but is surely consistent with) propositional holism.¹⁵ Doxastic holism is the thesis that there are holistic conditions that apply to doxastic justification, and this thesis can be true without there being holistic conditions that apply to propositional justification. Consider "propositional particularism," which allows for the possibility that p might be justified for S despite the fact that the set of propositions, available to S and of which p is a member, is not coherent (to the degree deemed required by coherentism). The point is that doxastic holism is consistent with propositional particularism.

It is worth emphasizing that there are three different readings of the DH, and it is the weakest reading that is intended here. The strong DH claims that the justification for a subject of a particular belief re-

¹⁴ For defenses of coherentism, see BonJour (1985) and Lehrer (1974).

¹⁵ This is good news for doxastic holism because it means that doxastic holism is not necessarily vulnerable to some of the objections that might be raised against propositional holism. Consider the question whether we can base our beliefs on holistic facts about our belief sets. If the answer is no, then it follows from propositional holism that our beliefs cannot be doxastically justified. (*Cf.* Cohen (2002) and Korcz (2000).) And, given that doxastic justification is required for knowledge, this in turn would entail skepticism. So, assuming that skepticism is false, that would give us an excellent reason to reject propositional holism. However, surely, such an argument against propositional holism does not have a direct bearing on doxastic holism as such, given that doxastic holism does not require propositional holism.

quires that she *have* some other beliefs (and also that she does not base those beliefs on a reason which supports that particular belief but does not support them). However, the weak DH imposes only a conditional requirement having to do with what must obtain if the subject has some other beliefs (e.g. that, as the Weather Belief case is intended to show, *if* the subject has some other beliefs, then she does not base those beliefs on a reason which supports the target particular belief that she bases on but does not support them). Unlike its strong cousin, the weak DH does not deny that a subject that has only one belief can be justified in believing it (more on this below). Finally, the moderate DH imposes a counterfactually-strengthened conditional requirement having to do with what must obtain if the subject has or *had* some other beliefs (e.g., that if the subject has or had some other beliefs, then she does not or *would not*, respectively, base those beliefs on a reason which supports the target particular belief that she bases on but does not support them). The moderate DH is weaker than the strong DH in that it does not deny, unlike the strong DH, that a subject that has only one belief can be justified in believing it. And, it is stronger than the weak DH in that it does not exclude, unlike the weak DH, the possibility that a subject that has only one belief, based on a reason supporting it, might be unjustified in believing it. It is clear that only the weak DH is supported by the Weather Belief and Fortune Belief cases as they are presented,¹⁶ and by “DH,” I will henceforth mean the weak version.

Another clarificatory point I wish to make is about the qualification “a considerable portion” involved in the thesis. This qualification is significant because it seems unclear whether what the subject does with *R vis-à-vis* one or two of her other beliefs, if she has any, has any undermining effect on the justificatory status of her belief that *p* based on *R*, which is a good reason for *p*. For instance, it seems unclear whether Thomas’s basing his belief that it is going to rain one week from now on the report about tomorrow’s weather, *taken by itself*, disqualifies his tomorrow-weather belief based on that report from being justified for her. However, it seems clear that if Thomas bases a considerable number of his future-weather beliefs on that report, then the disqualification effect takes place.¹⁷

DH is substantively different from a sort of holism about epistemic justification inspired by Quine’s classic “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (1951) and also from the sorts of holism about the mental defended famously by Davidson in various works including, for instance, “Radi-

¹⁶ This does not of course mean that there are no cases in the vicinity that might be taken as supporting one of the other (stronger) versions of DH. I am especially sympathetic to the idea that the cases presented in section 2 might be rephrased in a way that supports the moderate DH. However, I wish to remain non-committal about this issue in this paper.

¹⁷ How many beliefs make up a considerable portion? Evidently, no definite answer is forthcoming and vagueness plagues here as it does many other areas.

cal Interpretation" (1973). Quine maintains that "our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body" (1951: 38). According to Quinean holistic epistemology, the basic unit of justification is "theories" as a whole but not particular beliefs: evidential support relates systems of beliefs, but not particular beliefs, to pieces of evidence. However, the orthodox view I have targeted above presumes that a given subject might have a *good reason for a particular belief* and hence that evidential support relates particular beliefs, but not systems of beliefs, to pieces of evidence. And, my argument against the orthodox view shares with that view these presumptions. The sort of holism I propose about justification is particularist in *this* sense. The holism of DH stems from the claim that whether the belief that *p* based on *R*, which supports *p*, is justified for the subject cannot be decided in isolation from her cognitive doings with *R* regarding some of her other beliefs (if she has any). However, this is consistent with the sort of particularism rejected by Quinean holism.

Davidson defends a number of non-equivalent theses, each of which might be properly viewed as a sort of holism about the mental; and, here I will address two of those, both of which pertain to belief possession. One is about what it takes to have a *single* belief. Davidson straightforwardly argues from what he takes to be the correct theory of individuation of concepts as components of beliefs that beliefs necessarily come as "a matched set" (1982: 319) and that it thereby does not make sense to have only one belief. DH is about what it takes to have a belief that is justified and makes no commitments about the conditions for having a belief as such, and it is consistent both with the thesis that there is no such thing as a singleton belief set and with its negation.

DH does not entail that having a single belief requires having many, nor does it entail that having a single justified belief requires having some. For all DH claims, not only might there be a subject that has only one belief but there might also be a subject that has only one belief, which is justified. DH does not deny that neither the having nor the justification of a particular belief requires neither the having nor the justification of other beliefs. It is important to note here that in the Weather Belief case, what makes it true that Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief is not justified is *not* that Thomas's other future-weather beliefs are not justified (on account of the fact that they are based on the report about tomorrow's weather). Even if Thomas's other future-weather beliefs *were* justified, the tomorrow-weather belief would *not* be justified if those other beliefs were based on the tomorrow's weather report. To see this, suppose that Thomas's other future-weather beliefs are based not only on the tomorrow's weather report, which does not support them, but also on some other pieces of evidence that support them (e.g., on some other future-weather reports). Under these circumstances, it is plausible to think that Thomas's other future-weather

beliefs, being based both on a reason that does not support them and on a reason that supports them, are justified. However, it still intuitively seems that Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief is not justified, given that Thomas bases some of his other future-weather beliefs on the report about tomorrow's weather, the sole basis of the tomorrow-weather belief, which does not support them.

The other Davidsonian holistic thesis I wish to consider concerns what it takes to have a belief *set* (rather than a single belief). Davidson argues from the conditions that a radical interpreter finds herself in that belief possession as well as belief attribution is subject to some (minimal) rationality (especially, coherence) constraints. It might be observed in this connection, for instance, that rather than attributing both the belief in a particular proposition and its negation to a subject, who asserts both that proposition and its negation, we tend not to attribute her either. It is, for Davidson, only against the background of at least some degree of overall rationality had by a subject's belief set that we can speak of her having a belief set at all (and *a fortiori* of her having an irrational belief). However, considerations similar to the one I have made in relation to the former sort of Davidsonian holism also apply to this sort: DH is about what it takes for a belief to be justified and makes no commitments about the conditions for having a belief set. DH is consistent both with the thesis that a belief set necessarily satisfies some degree of rationality and its negation.

It is worth noting that the fact that a given belief set satisfies some minimal rationality constraints does not guarantee that the condition imposed by DH on the justification of particular beliefs is thereby satisfied. We can imagine Thomas in the Weather Belief case, for instance, having a deductively consistent belief set. Indeed, nothing in the description of the Weather Belief case entails that Thomas's belief set is deductively inconsistent. However, Thomas's tomorrow-weather belief is not justified, which entails that satisfying some minimal rationality constraints does not entail that the condition imposed by DH is thereby satisfied.

It might be proposed, perhaps by a tough-minded Davidsonian holist, that the rationality constraints that need to be satisfied for there to be a belief set include *inter alia* the condition imposed by DH on the justification of particular beliefs. However, this is highly implausible. If this proposal were true, then the Weather Belief case as described would be impossible since in that case, Thomas is described as *having* a belief set one of whose members is a belief (namely, the tomorrow-weather belief) that does not satisfy the condition imposed by DH. However, the Weather Belief case appears to be clearly conceivable; and, therefore, irrespective of the final verdict about its plausibility, Davidson's insight that there are some basic rationality requirements for having a belief set should not be stretched to its breaking point, where we lose the distinction between having a belief set that satis-

fies those rationality requirements and having a belief set all of whose members are justified.

DH claims that a given subject is justified in believing that p on R , which supports p , only if she does not base a considerable portion of her other beliefs on R , which does not support those beliefs. DH is not to be confused with the claim that a subject is justified in believing that p on R , which supports p , only if she does not base a considerable portion of her other beliefs on (a different piece of evidence) R' which does not support those beliefs. DH concerns what the subject basing a particular belief on a piece of evidence does with *that very same* evidence *vis-à-vis* some other beliefs, and the latter concerns what that subject does with a *different* piece of evidence *vis-à-vis* some other beliefs. Evidently, DH is consistent both with this latter “different-evidence” claim and its denial. I think (but will not argue here) that the different-evidence claim is implausible; however, another claim in its vicinity, sometimes attributed to Davidson (e.g., by Kim (1988: 393)), is plausible, *viz.* that a subject that does not get evidential support relations right in general (or a subject whose cognitive “output” is not regulated and constrained in general by those relations) cannot be said to *have* a belief system.¹⁸ Again, DH is consistent both with this “regulation-by-support-relations” claim and with its denial.

5. Conclusion

Let me conclude by highlighting the central points that have emerged in our discussion. The orthodox view of doxastic justification maintains that basing a belief on a reason that supports it suffices for the justification of that belief. I have argued above that the orthodox view is false: there might be unjustified beliefs that are based on reasons that support them. This is because, *contra* what is presumed by the orthodox view, there is a holistic constraint on doxastic justification: the justification of a belief based by the subject on a reason that supports it depends on what she does with that reason *vis-à-vis* some of her other beliefs. The sort of epistemic holism defended in this paper, I have argued, neither entails nor is entailed by coherentism, Quinean epistemic holism or Davidsonian holisms about the mental. Its distinct character makes it, I believe, all the more interesting and its hitherto absence in the epistemological literature all the more curious.

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¹⁸ This is a way of cashing out a fundamental insight mentioned above of Davidson’s, namely, that having a belief system requires having minimal rationality.

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