

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00687-4 - Reasons for Belief

Edited by Andrew Reisner and Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen

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REASONS FOR BELIEF

Philosophers have long been concerned about what we know and how we know it. Increasingly, however, a related question has gained prominence in philosophical discussion: what should we believe and why? This volume brings together twelve new essays that address different aspects of this question. The essays examine foundational questions about reasons for belief and use new research on reasons for belief to address traditional epistemological concerns such as knowledge, justification, and perceptually acquired beliefs. This book will be of interest to philosophers working on epistemology, theoretical reason, rationality, perception, and ethics. It will also be of interest to cognitive scientists and psychologists who wish to gain deeper insight into normative questions about belief and knowledge.

ANDREW REISNER is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at McGill University. He has published a number of articles on theoretical reason and normativity.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107006874

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First published 2011

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Reasons for belief / edited by Andrew Reisner and Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-00687-4

1. Belief and doubt. I. Reisner, Andrew Evan, 1975— II. Steglich-Petersen, Asbjørn. III. Title.

BD215.R39 2011

121'.6 – dc22 2011006849

ISBN 978-1-107-00687-4 Hardback

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Preface

This book contains a collection of new papers on the topic of *reasons for belief*, sometimes referred to in the literature as ‘theoretical reasons’. The papers in this volume address two broad themes: the nature of reasons for belief and the application of reasons for belief to other traditional problems in epistemology. The choice of these two themes reflects the rationale for putting together this volume.

For a period of roughly 35 years, practical philosophers have been appealing to *reasons* to do ever more work in their theorizing. Early debates in practical philosophy posed the question of whether one could have normative reasons for action – considerations that count in favour of an agent’s performing a particular action or actions – that were disconnected from an agent’s own motivations. Soon the value of thinking of broader problems in ethics in terms of reasons became apparent, and now appeals to reasons populate debates across normative ethics and metaethics alike. Reasons became a kind of common currency for consideration of the normative issues in practical philosophy.

Like those in ethics and other areas of practical philosophy, many of the problems studied in epistemology are also normative. Epistemologists have traditionally examined these problems through discussions of *justification* and *warrant*. Increasingly, however, philosophers interested in the problems of normative epistemology have appealed to reasons both to help explicate justification, warrant, and related concepts, and to address independently other concerns in epistemology. That this has occurred is not surprising; concentrating on reasons has proved valuable to moral philosophers in no small part because reasons provide a common normative currency, and the potential benefits of doing so for epistemology appear no smaller.

Because of the growth in work on reasons for belief, there are now many strands of research in epistemology that rely on using reasons. This volume brings together papers covering a broad swathe of these strands. Part of the aim in doing so is to allow someone new to the subject, or someone whose

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research has focused closely on just one or two of those strands, to take advantage of the common currency aspect of reasons. Developments in foundations of reasons for belief, for example, may be helpful to someone who is interested in how to use the concept of reasons for belief to better understand perceptual warrant. Bringing together papers on a wide variety of aspects of reasons for belief fulfils another aim of the volume, which is to provide a single source for scholars interested in reasons for belief to see the state of the art.

A collected volume is only as good as its papers, and in this respect we are happy to have an excellent volume. As editors, we are especially grateful to our contributors both for their contributions and for their patience with the volume's coming to fruition. In addition to the contributors, we owe special thanks to our editor at Cambridge University Press, Hilary Gaskin, and our production editor, Jodie Barnes. They have made the publication process as easy as it can be. The manuscript was substantially improved by a copy-editor, Jo North. Robert Stephens and Oran Magal have also been invaluable throughout the entire process of assembling this volume.

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