

## STATEMENT OF RESEARCH INTERESTS

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The goal of my work as a philosopher is to defend the idea that the purpose of epistemology is to offer normative guidance to the individual knower.

This is sometimes identified as the “traditional” approach to epistemology—identified as such in contrast to the newer “naturalized” approach, which maintains that epistemologists seek only to explain our possession of knowledge as third-party scientific observers (a view I critiqued in my dissertation). But when it emerged in the Enlightenment, the guidance conception of epistemology was revolutionary, insofar as it called on people to sweep aside the dogmas of the past and adopt a first-handed approach to knowing. I defend what might be termed a “neo-Enlightenment” epistemology, retaining the elements essential to the guidance conception, but shorn of the errors I take to have lent ammunition to the critics of the Enlightenment.

Essential to Descartes’ and Locke’s epistemologies, for instance, were each of the following theses: *foundationalism*, the view that the justification of our beliefs depends on basic unjustified justifiers; *internalism*, the view that one’s beliefs are justified by facts of which one is consciously aware and therefore to which one is accountable; *voluntarism*, the view that the inquirer can responsibly craft his or her own beliefs in such manner as to be subject to evaluation; and *evidentialism*, the view that beliefs formed on a basis other than the known relevant evidence are unjustified. I have now written papers defending each of these components of the neo-Enlightenment approach, and I have more in development.

My defense of *foundationalism*, recently published in *Synthese* (2011), works by distinguishing foundationalism as such from the view as defended by early modern and 20<sup>th</sup> century empiricists. Their assumptions obscured how the senses could give data sufficiently rich to inform the foundations of knowledge, and failed to convey how concepts could package non-conceptual sensory data in a way cognitively relevant to the justification of beliefs. I argue that a direct realist account of perception, according to which we are directly aware of objects in the world rather than intermediate mental objects, points to perception as a rich form of awareness suitable to serve as an unjustified justifier. Anti-foundationalists assume that our conceptual life is not cognitively informed by the senses because concepts cannot be abstracted from the data of experience. I argue that it is precisely direct realism about perception (which anti-foundationalists like Sellars and McDowell otherwise embrace) which allows for a defense of abstractionism and furnishes a new, previously underappreciated case for foundationalism.

A guidance-oriented account of epistemology also needs to embrace and defend *internalism*, because our mental states can be meaningfully evaluated as justified or not only when they result from our knowing what we are doing. Critics of internalism say that knowers have insufficient conscious access to the justifiers of our beliefs, and contend that the guidance conception of epistemology is flawed. In “Internalism Empowered” (forthcoming in *Acta Analytica*), I argue that if direct realism is true, we have more access than externalists think. Not only do we have awareness of objects in the external world, but also because that awareness involves processing over time, memory constitutes genuine awareness of the past. Accepting this point opens up a raft of

justifiers previously thought to be inaccessible on internalist premises, because it helps us to see justification as the act of a responsible agent who endures over time.

Especially critical to the guidance conception is an affirmation of the knowing agent's power to guide his or her beliefs by choice. To defend doxastic *voluntarism*, my work has recently expanded from epistemology to action theory. Here the work of my friend Gregory Salmieri was an inspiration: he first argued for a version of voluntarism involving a *de re* notion of belief choice, according to which one can choose beliefs without full knowledge of their propositional contents. We decided to co-author a paper ("How We Choose Our Beliefs") arguing that by choosing to engage in an act of inquiry, one therein chooses to believe. In choosing to inquire using some method or other, one is conscious of the very mental acts that are epistemically relevant to the assessment of our beliefs, and so these acts are significant partial constituents of the beliefs themselves. In "The Elusiveness of Doxastic Compatibilism" I argue that the voluntariness of our beliefs cannot be reduced to the mere "reasons-responsiveness" of our beliefs, in part because reasons-responsiveness is proper to the *justified* use of our doxastic freedom, and cannot account for both justified and unjustified use of that freedom. In "Believing at Will and the Will to Believe the Truth" I defend voluntarism by arguing that voluntary control over the act of evaluating whether a given proposition is true constitutes believing at will, because like other acts at will it is an immediate response to a practical reason, the value of believing the truth.

Unlike some advocates of voluntarism, then, I support a version of the view that fully embraces *evidentialism* about justification. I have begun work to defend evidentialism on its own by defending it as applied to a hard case about which many of its more recent advocates have been apologetic. In "An Evidentialist Account of Epistemic Possibility" I argue that the evidentialist norm should be applied not only to our evaluation of the belief in or assertion of propositions but to the entertainment or consideration of propositions as well. Requiring evidence for the claim that *maybe* a proposition is true not only accounts for many of our investigative practices, but also coheres with an object-dependent semantic view that is otherwise implicit in the very theory of perception that is foundational to my overall approach in the first place.

It should be clear that of late my work on these four pillars of neo-Enlightenment epistemology has begun to coalesce. I am fascinated by the internal connections among the doctrines, and how the view that emerges is to be applied to other problems in philosophy—and beyond. Other research I've conducted applies this outlook to the philosophy of perception, the epistemology of testimony, and the philosophy of science. An undergraduate textbook on logic I am authoring, currently in draft form, also bears the marks of my overall project, aimed as it is at providing students with practical advice about their everyday thinking. I encourage you to sample samples of all of the above on my web site, [www.benbayer.com](http://www.benbayer.com).