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and Philosophy of Science

Kevin McCain *Editor*

# Believing in Accordance with the Evidence

New Essays on Evidentialism

 Springer

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Kevin McCain

Editor

# Believing in Accordance with the Evidence

New Essays on Evidentialism



Springer

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*For Evidentialists—past, present, and future*

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# Chapter 1

## Evidentialism: A Primer



Kevin McCain

**Abstract** This brief chapter provides a general overview of evidentialism by explaining evidentialism’s most fundamental claim about epistemic justification, that such justification supervenes on an agent’s evidence. Additionally, the chapter explains that evidentialism requires more clarification and detailing. Finally, short summaries of the other chapters included in this book are provided in this chapter.

**Keywords** Dogmatism · ES · Moral encroachment · Seeming · Explanationist evidentialism

A wise man . . . proportions his belief to the evidence – David Hume (1748/1955, 118)

According to Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, Evidentialism in its most fundamental form is a supervenience thesis. As they put it, the bedrock Evidentialist view is:

ES The epistemic justification of anyone’s doxastic attitude toward any proposition at any time strongly supervenes on the evidence that person has at that time. (2004, 101)

In slogan form, Evidentialism is roughly “believe according to the evidence.” Put this way, or in terms of Conee and Feldman’s ES, Evidentialism seems hard to deny. It seems so hard to deny that some have worried that it is trivially true.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Conee and Feldman confess that before writing about Evidentialism they thought it was “sufficiently obvious to be in little need of defense”, and so were amazed to find contemporary epistemologists defending incompatible theories (2004, 1).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Dougherty (2011).

<sup>2</sup>It is this amazement that led them to write their landmark “Evidentialism” in 1985.

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Given the considerable amount of disagreement over Evidentialism, it is safe to say that not everyone finds it obvious or trivially true. Part of this disagreement may lie in the fact that Evidentialism needs to be spelled out beyond what ES and other canonical presentations of it say.<sup>3</sup> In order to evaluate Evidentialism one needs to know what evidence is, what it takes to have evidence, when evidence supports believing a proposition, and so on. Plausibly, without answers to these questions Evidentialism is a schema for a theory of epistemic justification, or perhaps a family of theories, rather than a complete theory of epistemic justification.<sup>4</sup> That being said, Evidentialists have done much to flesh out the details of Evidentialism. And, in the process they have defended Evidentialism from numerous criticisms.<sup>5</sup> As a result, it appears that while Evidentialism is not so obvious as to be trivially true, it remains a viable theory of epistemic justification. But, the debate rages on.

The essays in this volume are the latest in the central debates about Evidentialism. They include discussions of the nature of evidence, how to understand Evidentialism, new ways of developing Evidentialist theories, as well as criticisms of Evidentialism. These essays, written by Evidentialists and Non-Evidentialists alike, are the cutting edge of research on this important epistemological theory.

The volume begins with four essays exploring the nature of evidence. Todd R. Long, in Chap. 2, examines how sensory and testimonial experiences yield evidence. Throughout the course of his exploration, he argues that Evidentialist theories are well-suited to account for justification in both kinds of cases. In Chap. 3, Matthew McGrath claims that Evidentialism fails to provide a satisfactory account of immediate justification. He argues that when it comes to immediate justification, acceptable accounts of what it is to have evidence in support of a proposition are incompatible with Evidentialism. The remaining two chapters of Part I focus on the role that seemings play in justification. Trent Dougherty argues in Chap. 4 that seemings constitute our basic evidence. More specifically, he defends “Reasons Commonsensism”, the idea that its seeming to S that  $p$  gives S an epistemic reason to believe that  $p$ . This part of the book closes with Berit Brogaard’s argument for another version of “seeming” Evidentialism in Chap. 5. Brogaard maintains that Evidentialism can bypass significant problems by taking evidence to consist of a certain kind of seeming. Specifically, she argues that Evidentialism should understand evidence to be constituted by seemings that are properly based on experiences.

The focus then shifts to how we should understand Evidentialism in Part II. Earl Conee and Richard Feldman kick things off in this part by exploring the nature of suspension of judgment (Chap. 6). They argue that there are a number of distinct states that are often referred to as “suspending judgment” or “withholding belief”. According to Conee and Feldman, Evidentialism makes good sense of the various states that occupy this “middle ground” between believing and disbelieving.

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<sup>3</sup>See Conee and Feldman (1985, 2004, 2008).

<sup>4</sup>This is a point I emphasize in my (2014).

<sup>5</sup>See Conee and Feldman (2011) and my (2014).

In Chap. 7 Matthew Frise argues that Evidentialism better accounts for the data we have in cases of ordinary memory retrieval than its chief rival, Reliabilism. In making his argument Frise helps clarify how memory and background beliefs serve as evidence within an Evidentialist framework. Michael Bergmann challenges the common assumption that Evidentialism is an internalist theory of epistemic justification in Chap. 8. According to Bergmann, Evidentialism can be understood in a variety of ways including some that are clearly externalist.

Part III contains three essays on social epistemology. In Chap. 9, William D. Rowley seeks to expand an Evidentialist approach to the epistemology of disagreement into a full-fledged social epistemology. He argues that both the epistemology of disagreement and the epistemology of testimony rest upon a principle of higher-order evidence. Jennifer Lackey continues the discussion of Evidentialism and social epistemology in Chap. 10 by challenging a prominent Evidentialist norm for ascribing credibility to speakers. During the course of her discussion, Lackey develops a non-Evidentialist norm of credibility which she argues better accounts for the role that credibility excesses play in testimonial injustice. In the final chapter of this part (Chap. 11), Georgi Gardiner defends Evidentialism from moral encroachment (the idea that beliefs which might wrong a person or group of people require more evidence for justification than similar beliefs lacking moral import). Ultimately, Gardiner argues that we can capture the moral properties of the sorts of beliefs used to motivate moral encroachment without accepting such encroachment or denying Evidentialism.

The essays in Part IV all pose challenges for Evidentialism. Michael Huemer begins the attack on Evidentialism in Chap. 12 by arguing that it fails to account for the justification that certain propositions have. In particular, he argues that propositions with an initially high probability are justified but not on the basis of any evidence. In Chap. 13 Clayton Littlejohn argues that, contrary to Evidentialism, one's justification does not supervene upon facts about one's evidence. According to Littlejohn, there are cases where one can form a justified belief without supporting evidence, and there are cases where the same type of evidential support does not result in the same justification. Continuing the attack on Evidentialism, Andrew Moon argues that three theses popular among Evidentialists are jointly inconsistent when paired with Evidentialism in Chap. 14. As a result, Moon concludes that Evidentialists must deny at least one of the following: we have justified beliefs while in dreamless sleep, ultimate evidence is experiential, and justification at  $t$  depends only upon the mental states that one has at  $t$ . Finally, in Chap. 15 Miriam Schleifer McCormick changes things up by attacking a different kind of Evidentialism. McCormick emphasizes that unlike the Evidentialism discussed above and in the other chapters, her target isn't a theory of epistemic justification. Rather, McCormick takes on the sort of Evidentialism that says only evidence can be a reason for belief. In the end, she concludes that this sort of Evidentialism starts with a false assumption that there are right, and wrong, kinds of reasons for belief. According to McCormick, no reason is the wrong kind of reason for belief.

Part V consists of essays that explore new directions for Evidentialism. In the first essay (Chap. 16), Sharon Ryan considers the challenge that hope poses for Evi-

dentialist theories of wisdom. Ryan maintains that Evidentialist theories of wisdom provide the intuitively correct pronouncements when it comes to hope—they permit virtuous hoping and forbid hoping when it fails to be virtuous. Next, in Chap. 17 Sarah Wright takes Evidentialism into the realm of virtue epistemology. In fact, Wright argues that epistemic virtues are an essential part of Evidentialism because they play a central role in the evidential support relation. Juan Comesaña wraps up this part of the book by exploring the prospects for combining Evidentialism and Reliabilism in Chap. 18. Comesaña maintains that the correct theory of epistemic justification does arise from combining Evidentialism and Reliabilism. However, he claims that the resulting theory is neither Evidentialist nor Reliabilist.

The volume concludes, in Part VI, with a discussion of Explanationist Evidentialism as it is defended in my book, *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification*. In the opening essay of this part (Chap. 19), Richard Fumerton raises two challenges for Explanationist Evidentialism. He argues that explanationist theories in general cannot account for the justification of introspective beliefs, and he charges that the explanatory reasoning that lies at the heart of Explanationist Evidentialism is not fundamental. Next, Jonathan Kvanvig takes aim at the ontology of evidence defended in *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification* in Chap. 20. In particular, Kvanvig argues that evidence should be understood to consist of propositions rather than mental states. In Chap. 21 Matthias Steup continues to press the case against Explanationist Evidentialism by questioning whether it actually provides a reductive account of evidential fit at all. He argues that Explanationist Evidentialism has to illegitimately sneak epistemic notions into the account of evidential fit it provides. In the final essay of this part, and of the book, (Chap. 22) I respond to the challenges raised by Fumerton, Kvanvig, and Steup. My overall conclusion is that while the considerations adduced by these philosophers are worth taking seriously and help improve understanding of Explanationist Evidentialism, they do not ultimately pose genuine problems for the theory.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Thanks to Kevin Lee for helpful comments on this chapter and for editorial assistance throughout the entire volume.

**Part I**  
**The Nature of Evidence**

# Chapter 2

## From Experience to Evidence: Sensory and Testimonial



Todd R. Long

**Abstract** Most evidentialists think that experiences, in some way or other, yield evidence for a person. Critics of evidentialist theories often make objections that depend on substantive assumptions about how experiences yield evidence for a person. A common set of objections turns on the assumption that a sensory experience all by itself is evidence for a person. For instance, it has been assumed that a visual experience of blood beside an unmoving naked body in a park is itself evidence that a crime has been committed. But, this assumption is false, as I will argue. Until I have additional experiences that give me reason to link the look of blood beside an unmoving body to a crime having been committed, my visual experience does not indicate to me that a crime has been committed. This point has implications across many discussions in epistemology, from theoretical discussions about whether and the extent to which there is any immediate *prima facie* justification given in experience, to debates about how testimony yields epistemically rational belief. Careful reflection on my argument both gives us reason to reject a number of epistemic theories and principles in the literature and motivates a powerful evidentialist case for an intimate relation between epistemic rationality and epistemic justification.

**Keywords** Epistemic reason · Evidence · Explanatory coherence · Rochester evidentialism · Testimony

### 2.1 Framing Examples and Introduction

*Blood Scenario:* You see a photograph of a public park in which lies an inert, naked human body with a large pool of blood beside it. Question: Do you thereby have good epistemic reason to believe that a crime has occurred?

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*Testimony Scenario*: Having just arrived in a city you've never visited before, you ask a stranger how to get to Novo, the city's famous restaurant. The stranger tells you to drive north for three blocks, turn left, and you'll see the restaurant on your right. Question: Do you thereby have good epistemic reason to believe the stranger's testimony?

Some philosophers have claimed to know—without any additional information—that the answer to the question in *Testimony Scenario* is 'yes': the speaker's testimony itself gives the hearer a good epistemic reason to believe the testimonial proposition.<sup>1</sup> This answer strikes me—as I expect it strikes many evidentialists—as a mistake. Here I will consider what one prominent version of evidentialism implies about *Blood Scenario* and then apply the lesson learned to *Testimony Scenario*.

The evidentialism I will discuss is the influential version from Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, who have developed the view in careers together at the University of Rochester.<sup>2</sup> We might usefully call it *Rochester Evidentialism* (or *RE*)<sup>3</sup> due to the nexus of epistemologists who have studied with Feldman and Conee and subsequently defended and developed aspects of the theory.<sup>4</sup> Because RE is a species of *explanationism*, much of what I have to say also goes for a number of broadly explanationist theories, including some coherentist theories (e.g., Poston 2014) and foundationalist theories (e.g., Moser 1989). My questions: according to RE, how do experiences figure in the evidence constituting the epistemic justification one might have for believing that *a crime has been committed* (in *Blood Scenario*) and that *following the stranger's directions will get me to the restaurant* (in *Testimony Scenario*)? The answers will reveal how well suited RE is to explain the traditional idea that epistemic justification is intimately related to epistemic rationality. I aim not only to add to our understanding concerning how RE deals with controversial matters such as those discussed in the epistemology of testimony literature, but also to provide some additional support for the reasonability of explanationism in general, and RE, in particular.

## 2.2 Preliminary Assumptions

Because I don't want to restrict my audience to professional philosophers, I will begin with some widely shared assumptions among mainstream epistemologists. In any case, they will help to clarify how I will use terms. *Evidentialism* in epistemology is a thesis about *epistemic justification*, which is a component of the traditional analysis of *propositional knowledge* (i.e., the kind of knowledge

<sup>1</sup>This view manifests "anti-reductionism" in the epistemology of testimony literature.

<sup>2</sup>For its main contours, see Conee and Feldman (2004, 2008).

<sup>3</sup>'RE' could also abbreviate "Richard-Earl" evidentialism or "Realistic Evidentialism".

<sup>4</sup>For my contributions, see Long (2010, 2012). RE remains general enough for some details to be worked out. For a recent detailed account, see McCain (2014).

expressed when we say “I know that \_\_\_\_”). You can get a feel for the kind of justification at issue by considering the goal for epistemically rational inquiry, which pertains to *rationality with respect to the truth* (as distinct from, say, rationality with respect to one’s prudential or practical concerns). Since Socrates, the traditional view has been that the distinctive *epistemic* kind of justification pertains to that which could serve as a truth-indicating reason for one to believe a proposition.<sup>5</sup> Now, *evidence* in epistemology means ‘an indication of truth to a person’. Evidentialists hold that only an indication of a proposition’s truth to a person can yield epistemic justification for believing that proposition. And, because one’s having an indication of the truth of a proposition is just the thing that could plausibly serve as a *good epistemic reason* to believe a proposition, evidentialism fits well with the idea that there is an intimate relation among epistemic justification and epistemic rationality.

Philosophers sometimes talk past each other by using terms in differing ways. Prominent examples include ‘rational’ and ‘reason’. The term ‘rational’ means “of or based on reasoning or reason” (Pearsall and Trumble 1996). Traditionally, a reason for belief is something a person *has*: it is a *consideration* one can make use of in thought (Conee 2004; Parfit 2001; Scanlon 2014, 44). But, in contemporary literature you will sometimes find philosophers extending ‘reason’ to mean ‘a cause of, or motivation for, belief’. However, there could be any number of causes or motivations for belief that one has no inkling about and are thus not the sorts of thing that could be *considerations* one can make use of in thought. We should beware of such extensions of the terms ‘reason’ and ‘rational’ in epistemology, especially when they are employed in an attempt to legitimize a novel view.<sup>6</sup> Because considerations about the relation among epistemic justification and epistemic rationality/reasonability will figure in my arguments, it will be helpful to clarify terms I will repeatedly use.

Your *reasons* for believing p are considerations you take as counting in favor of having a belief that p.<sup>7</sup>

Your *epistemic reasons* for believing p are considerations you take as indicating the truth of p.

Your *good epistemic reasons* for believing p are considerations, which indicate the truth of p, that you take as indicating the truth of p.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>In *Meno* (98a) Plato has Socrates say that knowledge is true belief plus an account of the reason why.

<sup>6</sup>Contemporary non-evidentialist theories of epistemic justification (e.g., process reliabilism and proper functionalism) do not *require* features of a person’s situation that could be used by someone as a *consideration* counting in favor of holding the belief; for example, one’s belief could be caused by a reliable process without one’s thereby having the slightest inkling, which could be used as a consideration in favor of belief, that the belief is caused by a reliable process.

<sup>7</sup>This allows for various kinds of reasons for belief: epistemic, prudential, moral, etc.

<sup>8</sup>Evidentialists sometimes use ‘epistemic reason’ in roughly the same way I here use ‘good epistemic reason’. One advantage of my distinction is that my use of ‘epistemic reason’ allows

Because ‘evidence’ means ‘an indication of truth to a person’, evidentialism is very well suited to explain how what I’m calling ‘an epistemic reason’ can be a *good* one: you have epistemic justification for believing *p* just when your total evidence indicates the truth of *p* to you; thus, what evidentialism says makes for epistemic justification is clearly something that could serve as a consideration, which indicates the truth of *p*, that you take as indicating the truth of *p*.<sup>9</sup> Evidentialists find it incredible that anything other than evidence could have this role.

One additional preliminary point will help us avoid misunderstanding. Evidentialists hold that *justifiedly believing* a proposition requires one to believe the proposition *on the basis of evidence* for that proposition. Because my arguments do not turn on how to understand this basis, I will ignore it.

What I *do* wish to say concerns what philosophers sometimes call ‘propositional justification’. The general evidentialist thesis is as follows:

Believing *p* is justified for *S* at *t* iff *S*’s evidence at *t* supports *p*. (Feldman 2003, 45).

It’s an open question how well a proposition must be supported by (or ‘fit’) one’s evidence for one to have *knowledge-level* epistemic justification. I suppose the standard is very (but not skeptically) high. Nevertheless, it’s very plausible that one can have epistemic justification for believing a proposition even when one’s evidence does not satisfy what I suppose is the very high standard for knowledge. After all, if one’s total evidence supports (or fits) *p* substantially better than it supports (or fits) not-*p*, then it seems nuts to think that *disbelieving* *p* or *suspending judgment* on *p* is epistemically justified for one. I will be concerned with propositional justification that we can usefully call *on-balance epistemic justification*: *S* is epistemically justified in believing *p* at time *t* if and only if *p* is supported by (or fits) *S*’s total evidence at *t* substantially better than not-*p*.

In considering how experiences give rise to evidence, I will be looking to tell an evidentialist story of how our experiences figure in our having on-balance epistemic justification for believing propositions in situations such as *Blood Scenario* and *Testimony Scenario*. Describing their most developed version of RE, Conee and Feldman (2008) write:

... a person has a set of experiences, including perceptual experiences, memorial experiences and so on. What is justified for the person includes propositions that are part of the best explanation of those experiences available to the person ...

The best available explanation of one’s evidence is a body of propositions about the world and one’s place in it that makes the best sense of the existence of one’s evidence. This notion of making sense of one’s evidence can be equally well described as fitting the presence of the evidence into a coherent view of one’s situation ... The coherence that justifies holds among propositions that assert the existence of the non-doxastic states

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us to do categorical justice to responsibilist/subjectivist theories of justification such as in Foley (1993).

<sup>9</sup>My point isn’t that evidentialism requires one to have a good epistemic reason (as indicated above) in order to have epistemic justification. Indeed, it’s plausible that young children have epistemic justification for believing propositions without thereby having *considerations* of any kind that they take in favor of *p*. The point is that what all evidentialists think is required for epistemic justification (i.e., an indication of truth to a person) just is what could serve as a good epistemic reason for belief.

that constitute one's ultimate evidence and the propositions that offer an optimal available explanation of the existence of that evidence. (98)

Conee and Feldman call this view an "explanatory coherence view of evidential support". According to RE, the most fundamental principle of epistemic justification concerns the best explanation available to a person of that person's experiences. It is intended to describe what it is for a proposition to be supported by (or fit) a person's evidence at a time. Hereafter it will serve as a deeper analysis of on-balance epistemic justification.

### 2.3 From Sensory Experience to Evidence

In *Blood Scenario*, you see a photograph of a public park in which lies an inert, naked human body with a large pool of blood beside it. Do you thereby have epistemic justification for believing that *a crime has been committed* (henceforth, 'CRIME')? On RE, the answer is: it depends on further facts about your epistemic situation. For instance, do you have information that could serve as a good epistemic reason to think that the photograph depicts a scene from a movie set in which actions are performed by actors under pretense? If so, then you will likely have good epistemic reason to think that the photograph depicts a fictional scene, and thus you will not have epistemic justification for believing CRIME. RE plausibly explains this fact: CRIME is not among the propositions about the world and your place in it that make the best sense of the existence of your evidence at the time that you have your visual experience of the photograph.

Do you have no information that could serve as a good epistemic reason to think that the photograph depicts a fictional scene? If the answer is 'yes', then you might have epistemic justification for believing CRIME; but, you might not. Whether CRIME is epistemically justified for you to believe depends on further facts about your epistemic situation. For instance, do you have the concept of crime? And do you have information connecting what you experience when you look at the photograph to the occurrence of a crime? Not all people do. To focus the point, consider the following case:

*Deathless Dylan*: Dylan is a five-year-old who has lived an unusually sheltered life. Meticulously guarding his exposure to harsh realities of the world, his parents have prevented him from learning about death. They have read to Dylan enough stories involving crimes that he has the concept of crime and can apply it in a range of cases. But, they have seen to it that he has not been exposed to information about bloody or deadly crimes, and it so happens that Dylan has not been exposed to blood or any information about blood.

Dylan has nothing that could serve as a good epistemic reason to associate dying with a large pool of blood beside an inert, naked human body. Indeed, he has nothing that could serve as a good epistemic reason to associate any portion of his visual experience, as he looks at the photograph, with a pool of blood. Thus, Dylan

has nothing to go on that could serve anyone in his situation as a good epistemic reason to believe CRIME. He is not epistemically justified in believing CRIME. RE plausibly explains these facts: CRIME is not part of the best explanation available to Dylan of his experiences at the time he views the photograph.

Examples such as *Deathless Dylan* remind us that the factors that make for external-world propositional justification are complex. To have epistemic justification for believing propositions about the external world, a suitable background must be in order, and that background must be suitably related to the sensory experience one is having at the relevant time. It is not easy to specify the details of such a background, but *that* such a background and such a relation is required is nevertheless very plausible, as our consideration of cases so far confirms.

What is often forgotten or ignored or merely given lip service (and thus practically ignored) in discussions about specific cases of epistemic justification, is the fact that many factors crucial for epistemic justification are *learned*. By ‘learned’ here I intend only to draw attention to the fact that, over time, we acquire information we can later rely on in cognition. To cite instructive examples, we do not come into the world knowing or being justified in believing (a) what a stop sign means, or (b) that smoke indicates fire, or (c) that water is H<sub>2</sub>O, or (d) that all bachelors are unmarried, or (e) that necessarily,  $2 + 3 = 5$ . With usual human development we learn by way of numerous experiences that some things, events, or states of affairs are signs indicating other things, events, or states of affairs. If we develop in a science-rich culture, we may learn to associate water with H<sub>2</sub>O. With enough conceptual and cognitive development, most of us have thinking experiences that allow us mentally to tell that some propositions (e.g.  $2 + 3 = 5$ ) are necessarily true. But, without the relevant experiences, we have nothing that could serve as a good epistemic reason to believe any of (a)–(e).

We can appreciate some salient implications of prior learning by considering the following case.

*Standard Sophie*: Sophie, a four-year-old who has by prior experiences acquired the concept of tree, is currently looking in the direction of a tree while having a visual experience, and she is correctly applying her concept of tree to the object before her. She believes *that is a tree* (henceforth ‘TREE’). In the past Sophie has, in many similar situations, believed of individual trees that they are trees, and the truth of those beliefs has consequently been corroborated by her parents, who have proven themselves worthy of her trust in a range of similar matters.

Sophie very plausibly has epistemic justification for believing TREE. After all, she currently has an indication of the truth of TREE, an indication that comes by way of her current visual experience *and* the background experiences referred to in the example. The background experiences link visual experiences, such as the one she is currently having, with confirmations of the presence of a tree. Thus, she credibly has epistemic justification for believing TREE. RE plausibly explains this fact: TREE is among the propositions comprising the best explanation available to Sophie of her experiences as she looks in the direction of the tree.

Suppose we remove from Sophie’s epistemic situation either her current visual experience *or* the background information I recently highlighted. If Sophie were to

lack her visual experience, then (on the assumption that she has no other inkling that a tree is nearby), she would obviously have nothing that could serve as a good epistemic reason to believe TREE. If Sophie were to have the visual experience but lack the background information I highlighted, then she would likewise have nothing that could serve anyone in *her* situation as a good epistemic reason for believing TREE.<sup>10</sup>

Considerations such as these reveal the philosophical advantage that explanationist theories such as RE have over non-explanationist evidentialist theories that attempt to explain the justifying evidence without acknowledging the justificatory role one's background information has with respect to propositions about the external world. For instance, consider James Pryor's immediate *prima facie* justification theory, which is designed to be a modest foundationalist theory that explains how we typically have justified basic beliefs about ordinary, external world propositions. According to Pryor (2000), our sensory experiences themselves epistemically justify belief in some propositions about the external world, because our sensory experiences have content that represent the world as being a particular way. The idea is that, when we have a sensory experience (such as a visual experience), we thereby have an experience as of some proposition *p*'s being the case. This supposed representational content might be considered to be *evidence* with respect to a proposition about the external world.

However, Pryor has the very difficult problem of spelling out the distinction between what is and is not perceptually basic in a way that allows the theory to achieve its goal: provide a skepticism-refuting, modest foundationalist explanation of justification for believing ordinary, external-world propositions. Richard Feldman (2003) exposes the problem with the following example:

*Three People in a Garden:* Three people, Expert, Novice, and Ignorant, are standing in a garden looking at a hornbeam tree. They have a clear and unobstructed view of the tree. The visual appearance present to each of the three people in the garden is exactly the same. (Minor differences due to their slightly different positions are irrelevant to the example.) Expert knows a lot about trees and can easily identify most trees,

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<sup>10</sup>This seems right whether or not visual experiences have propositional content. Suppose first that visual experiences do *not* have propositional content. If Sophie were to lack the highlighted background information (or something like it), then she would have nothing linking her current (non-propositional) visual experience to the nearby presence of a tree; thus, she would have nothing that could serve as a good epistemic reason to believe TREE. Now suppose that visual experiences *do* have propositional content. If Sophie were to lack the highlighted background information (or something like it), then the propositional content of her visual experience would not be 'that is a tree' (perhaps it would be 'that is a green and brown thing'). Now, someone might object that the content of her visual experience is not determined by the concepts she possesses; so, one might argue, the content of her visual experience could be 'that's a tree' even though she lacks the concept of tree. But, even if such a view is correct, it won't help to show that Sophie's visual experience by itself gives her what could serve as a good epistemic reason for believing TREE. Here's why: although on the proposed objection Sophie's visual experience has the content 'that's a tree', she is obviously not in a position to cognize this content; that is, even if her visual experience represents a tree, it doesn't represent a tree *to her*; thus, there is nothing that could serve anyone in her epistemic situation as a good epistemic reason for believing TREE.

including this one, immediately. Novice knows a little about trees but is unfamiliar with hornbeams. Ignorant does not know anything about trees. He does not know which of the things in the garden is a tree and which is a flower. (147)

Which proposition do the three people experience as of being the case? If we answer, “that’s a hornbeam tree”, then Pryor’s theory gets the wrong result that Novice and Ignorant are epistemically justified in believing that *that is a hornbeam tree*; and, if we answer “that’s a tree”, then the theory gets the wrong result that Ignorant is epistemically justified in believing that *that is a tree*. If we answer “that’s a puffy green thing above a brown cylindrical thing”, then Pryor’s theory does not explain how ordinary, external-world propositions (e.g., TREE) are epistemically justified.

Explanationist theories such as RE do not have this problem. Indeed, on RE, for a person to be epistemically justified in believing even that *that’s a puffy green thing above a brownish cylindrical thing* (henceforth ‘PUFFY’), a suitable background of information must be in order. After all, one does not come into the world knowing what a puffy thing is, what green is, what a cylindrical thing is, etc. One must *learn* such things, and when one does learn such things, they can be part of what makes some particular proposition part of the best explanation available to a person of that person’s experiences. It is very plausible that if Ignorant is epistemically justified in believing PUFFY, then part of the explanation of Ignorant’s justification is his background information, which he has previously acquired, concerning puffy, green, brown, and cylindrical things. Explanationist views such as RE are well suited not only to get the correct result in these examples but also to confirm what the examples make apparent: one’s background information is a crucial part of what yields epistemic justification for one to believe external world propositions.

The lesson learned: if you’re epistemically justified in believing CRIME, then your background information is part of the justificatory story. Your having a *good epistemic reason* to believe CRIME, then, requires your having a suitable background of information. Let us now consider how this lesson on background information applies to testimony.

## 2.4 From Testimonial Experience to Evidence

In *Testimony Scenario* a stranger in a city you’ve never visited gives you driving directions to a restaurant. What does RE imply about whether you are epistemically justified in believing the testimonial proposition? In answering this question, I aim to elucidate what I take RE to imply about a central question in the epistemology of testimony literature: Does a speaker’s testimony *itself* yield epistemic justification for the hearer to believe the proposition testified to by the speaker?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>For ease of presentation in discussing testimonial cases I’ll refer to the ‘speaker’ and the ‘hearer’, but readers should note that testimony does not require literal speaking or literal hearing.

Answers to our central question routinely get categorized in the philosophical literature by whether they fall under *reductionism* or *anti-reductionism*.<sup>12</sup> Philosophers have understood the distinction in several ways. Here is one: anti-reductionism is the view that the speaker's testimony *itself* yields epistemic justification for the hearer to believe the proposition the speaker asserts, whereas reductionism is the view that the speaker's testimony itself is insufficient.<sup>13</sup> For evidentialists, the issue is whether the speaker's testimony itself is, or is not, justifying evidence for the hearer to believe the speaker's testimony: an anti-reductionist thinks it is, whereas a reductionist thinks it isn't. For the reductionist—but not the anti-reductionist—the hearer's epistemic justification for believing the speaker's testimony is explained by epistemic factors in addition to the mere speaker's testimony.

I designed *Testimony Scenario* to be an instance of the sort of case that many who work on the epistemology of testimony find especially desirable. As Jonathan Adler (2015) puts it in his survey of this literature, desirable cases “isolate our dependence on the word of the speaker and whatever epistemic resources are available in ordinary conversational contexts”, contexts in which “the norm of truthfulness holds . . . . In these core cases, hearers generally have no special reason to doubt the speaker's word, as they would if the speaker's assertion is controversial or self-serving”.

Note well: the ‘core cases’ under discussion have a good deal of background information built into them. To appreciate this point, consider the following *non-core* case of testimony:

*Sheltered Shelly*: Five-year-old Shelly has been raised by overly protective parents who live in fear that Shelly will be harmed by outsiders. Her parents have proven themselves in Shelly's experience to be worthy of trust, and they have taught her to be especially wary of strangers on the grounds that most strangers lie in order to take advantage of little kids. While on a family outing at an amusement park, Shelly gets separated from her parents. Noticing her distress, a stranger tells Shelly, “Follow me. I'll take you to park helpers who will find your parents”.

It is very plausible that Shelly lacks epistemic justification for believing the stranger's testimony. Indeed, Shelly has been taught by her parents—who have been confirmed in her experiences to be worthy of trust—to associate stranger testimony with deceit. Thus, the evidence *she* has to go on supports the falsity of the speaker's testimony. Given her distress, she may *wish* the stranger's testimony to be true, and this wish may provide her with *some* kind of reason for believing the stranger's testimony; but, wishful thinking is regarded as a paradigm example of that which does not confer epistemic justification and does not serve as a good epistemic reason to believe a proposition.

<sup>12</sup>For recent discussions see the survey by Adler (2015) and essays in Lackey and Sosa (2006).

<sup>13</sup>In philosophical debates, the distinction is marked in various ways and applied to various epistemic concepts. One could debate whether some positive epistemic status a hearer has via testimony is conferred *apriori* (anti-reductionism) or *aposteriori* (reductionism); or whether some principle of testimony is a fundamental epistemic principle (anti-reductionism) or derivative from a more fundamental epistemic principle (reductionism).



Missing in *Sheltered Shelly*, but built into the ‘core cases’ of testimony, is a background of information that could, along with the testimony, serve as a good epistemic reason to believe the speaker’s testimony. Recall Adler’s point that core cases are in “ordinary conversational contexts” in which “hearers generally have no special reason to doubt the speaker’s word”. There are two very important questions for us to ask. The first question is this: what *could* give one a special reason to doubt the speaker’s word in an example that would otherwise be a ‘core case’? Suppose the testifier wears a red bandana, and the hearer, who is a normal adult, has been told—by people she has reason to believe are reliable about such things—that red bandana-wearing people in that particular city are gang members who regularly prey on strangers who ask for directions. Such a hearer would have background information connecting red bandana-wearing testifiers to dangerous testimonial deceit. This background information would serve as evidence to the hearer of the speaker’s untruthfulness, evidence that could serve a typical person as good epistemic reason not to believe the speaker.

The second question is this: in the core cases, what good epistemic reason *does* a hearer of testimony have to believe the testifier’s word? Recall Adler’s point that in a core case “the norm of truthfulness holds”. This ‘norm of truthfulness’ is supposed to indicate a context in which the testifier is *expected* to be truthful. The thing to appreciate is that this expectation is normally *learned* by those who have experiences that, over time, indicate to them that testifiers in particular contexts are usually truthful. The person who figures in a core case is typically a normal adult whose background information connects stranger testimony—in contexts core cases are supposed to manifest—to confirmations of the truth of that testimony. This background information explains why “the norm of truthfulness holds” in core cases. Without such background connecting information, either ‘the norm of truthfulness’ does *not* hold (as in *Sheltered Sally*) or ‘the norm of truthfulness’ yields nothing that could serve as a good epistemic reason to believe the speaker’s testimony.

According to proponents of RE, this background connecting information is part of the evidence that epistemically justifies believing when believing is justified for the hearer. Thus, RE seems to fall under reductionism rather than anti-reductionism (as I have marked the distinction). A speaker’s testimony alone is insufficient. The various cases presented in the literature bear this out when we pay attention to what the examples assume. In every case in which it is plausible that the hearer is epistemically justified in believing the speaker, the hearer has information connecting speaker testimony to the truth of the testimony. Without such information, the hearer would lack something that could serve as a good epistemic reason to believe the testimony. RE plausibly supports this distinction: when the testimonial proposition is part of the best explanation available to the hearer of that person’s experiences (including the experience of the speaker’s testimony), the hearer is epistemically justified in believing the testimonial proposition; but when the testimonial proposition is not part of the best explanation available to the hearer of that person’s experiences, the hearer is not epistemically justified in believing the proposition. Finally, it is plausible that the testimonial proposition is part of the best

explanation available to the hearer *only* when the hearer has background information linking testimony to the truth of testimonial propositions (as we find in the contexts manifested in core cases).

## 2.5 Challenges from the Epistemology of Testimony: Acceptance and Assurance

Challenges to reductionism appear in the literature. Here I will consider two much discussed—and especially instructive—anti-reductionist strategies, one based on an idea from Tyler Burge (1995) and another from Richard Moran (2005).

Burge’s anti-reductionist strategy depends on what he calls the “Acceptance Principle”: “*A person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so*” (281). Modifying the Acceptance Principle to be explicitly about epistemic justification would yield what I’ll call the Acceptance-Justification Principle:

*Acceptance-Justification Principle:* A person is epistemically justified in believing something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to the person unless there are stronger reasons not to do so.

Does the Acceptance-Justification Principle provide a good epistemic reason to accept anti-reductionism? No. Although it is plausible that in typical cases of testimony the testimony is presented as true and is intelligible to the hearer, it is implausible that these facts are sufficient to yield epistemic justification for a hearer to believe the testimonial proposition. After all, *every one* of your beliefs is presented as true and is intelligible to you. In any case, every one of your beliefs you *consider* is. As Alvin Plantinga (2000, 264) points out, “There is a certain kind of phenomenology that distinguishes entertaining a proposition you believe from one you do not: the former simply seems right, correct . . .”. But, it does not follow that you have epistemic justification for believing every proposition you believe unless you have stronger reasons not to do so;<sup>14</sup> for suppose that you believe *p* on the basis of wishful thinking without having any indication that *p* is true. By virtue of being your own belief that *p* is true, it presents itself as true and is intelligible to you; in any case, if you *consider* that belief, it is presented as true; but, in the absence of information indicating the truth of *p*, you lack what would be required for you to have a good epistemic reason to believe that *p*.

Another prominent anti-reductionist strategy is called the “assurance view”, which has recently been defended by Richard Moran (2005). According to Moran, “On the Assurance View, dependence on someone’s freely assuming responsibility for the truth of *P*, presenting himself as a kind of guarantor, provides me with

<sup>14</sup>Plantinga (2000, 264) calls this phenomenology “phenomenal evidence”, but as I (Long 2010) show, it is insufficient for on-balance epistemic justification. For objections to epistemological conservatism of the sort under discussion, see Feldman (2003, 143–4).

a characteristic reason to believe, different in kind from anything provided by evidence alone” (7). This characteristic reason to believe, Moran claims, “is categorically different from that provided by evidence” (4). Moran is keen to show that the assurance view is inconsistent with any reductionist evidentialism.

Moran claims that paying attention to what’s actually going on in testimony reveals a testimonial-specific, characteristic reason to believe, a reason that is more impressive than the mere fact that the testimonial proposition is presented as true to the hearer. So, let us ask: is this “characteristic reason to believe” an *epistemic* reason or a *non-epistemic* reason? If it is a non-epistemic reason, then it is irrelevant to our present concern. If it is an epistemic reason but not a *good* epistemic reason, then it is irrelevant to our present concern. If it is a *good* epistemic reason, then there is something about it that qualifies it as so. We will be looking to see whether the “characteristic reason” Moran discusses is suitable to confer epistemic justification and thus could serve as a good epistemic reason for a hearer to believe a testimonial proposition.

The gist of Moran’s “characteristic reason to believe” involved in testimony can be appreciated in these passages:

*Telling* someone something is not simply giving expression to what’s on your mind, but is making a statement with the understanding that here it is your word that is to be relied on. It is a common enough understanding, and commonly justified . . . (8)

If his utterance is to count as an instance of telling someone something . . . , the speaker must present his action as being without epistemic significance apart from his explicit assumption of responsibility for that significance. In this way he announces that the reason for belief offered here is of a different kind from that stemming from externally obtaining evidential relations. (14)

The speaker’s intent . . . is that for the audience, the very fact that this speaker is freely and explicitly presenting P as worthy of belief constitutes his speech as a reason to believe that P. (16)

Moran’s point is that nothing counts as the kind of telling that occurs in testimony unless the speaker’s presenting the testimonial proposition as worthy of the hearer’s belief is an action that constitutes the speaker’s assertion as the reason for the hearer to believe the testimonial proposition.

For the sake of my argument we can grant Moran’s point that, in any core case of testimony, the *speaker* presents the testimony as itself the sole reason for the hearer to believe the testimonial proposition. However—and this is the critical thing to see—nothing follows about whether the *hearer* has a good epistemic reason for believing the testimonial proposition. Indeed, in order for the hearer to have a good epistemic reason, the hearer needs an indication of the truth of the proposition asserted. For, how could considerations taken by the hearer as counting in favor of belief be *good epistemic reasons* without those considerations indicating the truth of the proposition? As we noted with respect to the Acceptance-Justification Principle, the mere fact that a proposition is intelligible and presented as true does not confer an epistemic justification for belief; nor would it do any good to add Moranian qualifications to such a principle.

*Moranian-Justification Principle:* A person is epistemically justified in believing something that is freely and explicitly presented by a speaker as worthy of belief unless there are stronger reasons not to do so.

This principle is implausible. The mere fact that a proposition is presented to you by a speaker as worthy of belief does not, by itself, indicate the truth of the proposition to you. And even if you take the proposition as presented to you by a speaker as worthy of belief and you believe the proposition on the basis of taking the proposition as so presented, it does not follow that you have epistemic justification for so believing. What is needed is for you to have something to go on that could figure in a reason to believe that the testimonial proposition is *true*. The plausibility of my claim is borne out by Moran himself in the following concessional passage:

Of course, as with any public assumption of responsibility, the appropriate abilities and other *background conditions must be assumed to be in place* for it to amount to anything. For the speaker to be able to do this it must be assumed *by both parties* that the speaker does indeed satisfy the right conditions for such an act (e.g., that *he possesses the relevant knowledge, trustworthiness, and reliability*). (16, italics added)

Now we're talking. This gets us near to the kind of thing, which, when included along with the hearer's experience of the speaker's testimony, plausibly yields epistemic justification for believing the testimonial proposition. As Moran says, background conditions must be in place, and these conditions pertain to assumptions about the speaker's relevant knowledge, trustworthiness, and reliability. Although I doubt that mere *assumptions* are sufficient, the hearer's having something to go on, by way of background information—which indicates the speaker's relevant knowledge or trustworthiness or reliability—credibly gets the hearer what is needed to be epistemically justified in believing the testimony.

Moran claims that such background conditions are necessary for the event to count as an instance of *testimony* (at least of the sort he has in mind), but he thinks that such background conditions are irrelevant to what he identifies as the characteristic *reason* to believe, which a hearer has in testimony; and, on this basis, he claims that the hearer's epistemic justification for believing the testimonial proposition is *non-evidential*. However, Moran's argument is unconvincing:

These background conditions can themselves be construed as evidential, or at any rate not at the behest of the speaker to determine, but they are not themselves sufficient for giving any epistemic significance to the speaker's words, for the relevance of these conditions only comes into play once it is understood that a particular speech-act is being performed with those words (i.e., an assertion or promise rather than something else) . . . . As far as relating to his words goes, the speaker's knowledge and trustworthiness are epistemically inert for the audience until the question of the particular speech-act or illocution is settled. (16)

Quibbles aside, some of what Moran says here is plausible, for just as the background information I have to go on in a typical case of sensory belief does not epistemically justify my believing the proposition, say, that *that is a tree* unless I am having some current sensory experience (e.g., the visual experience I have when I'm looking in the direction of a tree), so the background information I have to go on in a typical case of testimony does not epistemically justify my believing

the testimonial proposition unless I am having some current experience indicating that I'm being testified to (i.e., that a proposition is being asserted as true to me by the testifier).

Nevertheless, as we learned from *Deathless Dylan*, one is epistemically justified in believing the sensory proposition only if a suitable background is in place; and, as we learned from *Sheltered Sally*, one is epistemically justified in believing the testimonial proposition only if a suitable background is in place. This background must include information linking *for the hearer* the kind of experience the hearer is currently having (call it 'testimonial experience') to the truth. The thing to see here is that this combination of the hearer's background information and current testimonial experience is plainly *evidential*: the combination just is what the hearer has to go on with respect to the testimonial proposition in a core case of testimony. *Together* they indicate the truth of the testimonial proposition to the hearer. In isolation each does not. Together, then, they comprise *evidence* of the truth of the proposition to the hearer. Thus, Moran's argument fails to provide any good reason to think that a hearer has epistemic justification for believing the testimonial proposition in the absence of evidence. Indeed, reflection on the concessional passage quoted above—referring to the speaker's supposed trustworthiness and reliability—reveals the plausibility of thinking that evidence is both required and in play in any plausible case of epistemic justification via testimony.

## 2.6 Conclusion

We have seen that a current experience and a suitable background of information are plausibly required for epistemic justification in typically discussed examples of external world beliefs and testimonial beliefs. Explanationist theories such as RE are very well suited to explain these requirements. In a typical sensory case, the proposition believed is plausibly part of the best explanation available to the person of that person's evidence, which includes both the current sensory experience the person is having and a body of background information linking such sensory experience to the truth of the proposition. In a typical case of testimony, the proposition believed is plausibly part of the best explanation available to the person of that person's evidence, which includes both the testimonial experience the person is having as well as a body of background information linking such testimonial experience to the truth of the proposition.

Furthermore, the satisfaction of the two conditions I have been arguing for very plausibly yields just the sort of thing that could serve one as a good epistemic reason for belief. Thus, explanationist views such as RE very plausibly explain the traditional idea that epistemic justification is intimately related to good epistemic reason.<sup>15</sup>

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## Chapter 3

# The Evidence in Evidentialism



Matthew McGrath

**Abstract** Here I present a challenge for evidentialists, one I argue they cannot meet. The challenge is to explain the crucial notion of *having supporting evidence* in a way that is not only acceptable on its own, but acceptable when conjoined with evidentialism. This challenge asks the evidentialist to go beyond just sounding right. In Sect. 3.1, I consider the prospects for answering the challenge by taking what I call the **evidence-first** approach. Under this approach, having evidence supporting a proposition is explained in terms of there being evidence supporting the proposition. I argue that evidentialists taking this approach face a dilemma: embrace regress or embrace self-support, both of which I argue are seriously problematic. In Sect. 3.2, I consider the options for evidentialists if they abandon the evidence-first approach. I argue that it is more difficult than might initially appear to avoid the “regress or self-support” dilemma, and that the price for avoiding it is depriving oneself of the ability to explain how cases of both immediate and mediate justification involve the same unitary phenomenon of *having supporting evidence*.

**Keywords** Epistemic reasons · Evidence-first · Explanation · Having evidence · Probability raising · Evidence · Evidentialism · Justification

According to evidentialism, one is justified in believing a proposition just in case one’s evidence on balance supports that proposition. Evidentialists typically aim to defend an explanatory theory, not merely a biconditional. The evidentialism with which I will be concerned in this paper is therefore better formulated as follows:

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**Evidentialism:** Whether one is justified in believing a proposition is explained by whether or not one's evidence on balance supports that proposition.<sup>1</sup>

There is undeniable appeal to this theory of justification. It just *sounds* right. Here I will present a challenge for evidentialists, one I argue they cannot meet. The challenge is to explain the crucial notion of *having supporting evidence* in a way that is not only acceptable on its own, but acceptable when conjoined with evidentialism. This challenge asks the evidentialist to go beyond just sounding right.

To be clear, no evidentialist will take merely possessing evidence supporting a proposition to suffice for being justified in believing it. If I read the latest online news, I might come to have evidence that the President of the Philippines will visit the United States: President Trump invited him. I retain this evidence even after I subsequently learn that the President of the Philippines often refuses invitations such as this. At the later time, I still have evidence that the Philippine President will visit the United State but it is defeated; thus, I am only *prima facie* justified in believing that he will visit, not *ultima facie* justified. *Ultima facie* justification depends in addition on how things stand with respect to one's total evidence – what one's evidence supports “on balance.” Still, in this paper, I will assume that if evidentialism is true, then whether one is *prima facie* justified in believing a proposition is explained by whether or not one has evidence supporting it.

In Sect. 3.1, I will consider the prospects for answering the challenge by taking what I call the **evidence-first** approach. Under this approach, having evidence supporting a proposition is explained in terms of there being evidence supporting the proposition. I will argue that evidentialists taking this approach face a dilemma: embrace regress or embrace self-support, both of which I argue are seriously problematic. In Sect. 3.2, I consider the options for evidentialists if they abandon the evidence-first approach. I argue that it is more difficult than might initially appear to avoid the “regress or self-support” dilemma, and that the price for avoiding it is depriving oneself of the ability to explain how cases of both immediate and mediate justification involve the same unitary phenomenon of *having supporting evidence*.

### 3.1 The Evidence-First Approach

We often talk of searching for evidence. We say that the FBI is searching for evidence about whether members of a presidential campaign colluded with a foreign government. In saying this, we think of the FBI as searching for something which is already out there, already evidence supporting a certain “answer” to the question of collusion. We thus seem to think of the question of whether something is

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Conee and Feldman (2008, 83). This formulation neglects certain aspects of the evidentialist's explanatory ambitions, e.g., the explanation of justification for holding doxastic attitudes in general and not only belief. It also fails to distinguish pro tanto justification from justification good enough to make one justified in belief. Those matters lie outside the purview of the paper.



evidence for a proposition as one thing, and the question of whether anyone has this evidence as quite another. The evidence-first approach endorses this aspect of ordinary thought.

How, then, does having evidence relate to there being evidence? We'll start with the simple proposal that having evidence factors into something's being evidence and one's having it.

### 3.1.1 *The Simple Factoring Account*

As Schroeder (2008) points out, some relations of the form *having an F* are not plausibly factorizable into *there being an F* and *one's having that thing*. For example, we shouldn't explain your having a father in terms of someone's being a father and your *having* that person. But factoring seems more plausible in the case of *having evidence*. We can make sense of something being evidence for a proposition even if it is no one's evidence, as the FBI example attests. We can also give a respectable account of what it is for evidence to support a proposition: it is a matter of reliable indication.<sup>2</sup> And while it seems hopeless to appeal to a notion of *having* between persons in terms of which to explain *having a father*, it doesn't seem hopeless to appeal to a relation of *having* between persons and facts in terms of which to explain *having evidence supporting P*. The relevant relation plausibly consists in meeting an epistemic condition, such as knowledge, or at the least justification. In the morning, my child's having certain characteristic red spots is evidence that my child has measles – even before I see the child. I don't yet have any evidence that my child has measles (beyond evidence from my knowledge of the base rate). How do I get evidence he has measles? I see him and come to know he has the spots. This seems to give me evidence that he has measles, the evidence being the fact or true proposition *<my son has spots>*.<sup>3</sup> Knowing this fact seems to suffice for having the evidence. Merely believing it doesn't. As the evidentialist would remind us, having evidence for a proposition has a normative impact – it contributes toward making that proposition something one is justified in believing. Suppose I have no justification for believing my child has the measles spots, but I form a firm conviction that he has spots. *<My child has spots>* is not thereby transformed into something that makes a contribution toward making me justified in believing that my son has measles. Nor is it enough to add to my believing that my child has spots that I have some middling justification for that proposition. It appears that I need to at least be justified in believing that my child has spots.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Kelly (2016), Conee and Feldman (2008).

<sup>3</sup>I will not distinguish facts from true propositions.

<sup>4</sup>I rely on the assumption that knowledge requires justification.

These reflections encourage the following:

*The Simple (Factoring) Account:*

F1. E is evidence one has supporting P iff E is evidence supporting P and one has E.

F2. E is evidence supporting P iff E is a fact and E reliably indicates P.

F3. One has E iff one is (at least) justified in believing E.<sup>5</sup>

As with evidentialism, one should take F1-F3 to assert the explanatory priority of the right-hand-sides of each of F1-F3 to the left-hand-sides.

The Simple Account is too simple. Conee and Feldman (2008, 85) raise an objection concerning the right to left direction of F1: one can very well know a fact that is evidence for a proposition – is “scientific” evidence (in their lingo) for it – while having no reason to believe that proposition. If one has no reason to believe a proposition, they claim, one does not have evidence for it. Thus, F1 cannot hold if F2 and F3 hold. In their example, I might know a fact about the DNA of the killer, and it might reliably indicate that Lefty is the killer, even though I have no inkling of this reliable connection. For instance, I might know (and so be justified in believing) that DNA of a certain character was found on the murder weapon. But if I have no inkling of this connection, I have no reason to believe Lefty did it; and if I have no reason to believe Lefty did it, I have no evidence he did.

To cope with this sort of objection, one might modify F2, substituting for reliable indication some relation that can be known a priori, such as logical probability. However, I agree with Conee and Feldman that this will not solve the core problem. A logical truth will have a logical probability of 1 on any evidence, but if the person has no inkling of the connection between the evidence and that logical truth, the person has no reason to believe the logical truth and so has no evidence for it. However, there are ways to adjust F1 to avoid their objection.

### 3.1.2 *The Revised Factoring Account*

Conee and Feldman’s argument against the Simple Account is helpful in clarifying their own thinking about having evidence. As they see things, one has evidence for a proposition only if one has a reason to believe it. Let’s therefore consider a similar account of having reasons:

*Simple (Factoring) Account – Reasons:*

F1 R is a reason one has to  $\varphi$  iff: (i) R is a reason for one to  $\varphi$  and (ii) one has R.

F2 R is a reason for one to  $\varphi$  iff R is a fact which favors one’s  $\varphi$ -ing.

F3 One has R iff is (at least) justified in believing R.

This account faces the same problems the Simple Account has in the case of having evidence. In fact, taking  $\varphi$ -ing to be believing that Lefty is the killer and R to be

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<sup>5</sup>Maybe something stronger than justification is required, but I will stick with justification.

the fact that the DNA on the murder weapon was of a certain character, it looks like we can use the very same case Conee and Feldman use against F1-F3 in the case of evidence. Intuitively, the detective “has” what is a reason to believe Lefty did it, but still does not have a reason to believe Lefty did it – just as the detective “has” what is evidence that Lefty did it, but doesn’t have evidence Lefty did it.

Arguably, the problem is that an essential factor is omitted: appreciation of support. A person might know that a certain food is rich in vitamins, and this might be a good reason for the person to eat it. But it doesn’t follow that the person has a good reason to eat it. What’s needed in addition is for him to appreciate the support provided by the reason. We won’t examine the question of exactly what this appreciation requires. Knowing the reason supports the action or attitude is sufficient but may not be necessary; there may be ways to appreciate support which aren’t forms of propositional knowledge.<sup>6</sup> With the addition of the extra factor of *appreciation* in the account of having evidence, Conee and Feldman’s Lefty objection is avoided. Call the account that comes from the Simple Account by adding a requirement of appreciation the **Revised (Factoring) Account**.

Suppose that the Revised Account correctly specifies how having evidence supporting a proposition is explainable in terms of there being evidence for that proposition. What are the implications for evidentialism? I think it is clear that evidentialism is rendered unacceptable. For, reading F1-F3 as explanatory claims, and conjoining them with evidentialism, and substituting what is explained for what explains, we arrive at:

(\*) Whether one is justified in believing a proposition P is explained by whether or not one is justified in believing a proposition E.<sup>7</sup>

(\*) creates a problematic regress. Note that if one is justified in believing P because one is justified in believing E, E cannot be P. Being justified in believing P cannot explain itself. But if E cannot be P, we are launched on a regress. Start with P, which one is justified in believing. This leads us to E1, which one must be justified in believing, and which is different from P. One is justified in believing E1 because one is justified in believing something else, E2, and so on. Either the chain runs in a circle or it runs infinitely, neither of which possibilities seem at all plausible. To terminate the regress, immediate justification is needed, but it is ruled out by (\*).

This problem wouldn’t go away even if we loosened up the Revised Account by dropping the requirement of reliability for support and/or by dropping the requirement that evidence consists of facts.<sup>8</sup> The source of the problem is the epistemic condition on having evidence.

<sup>6</sup>See Boghossian (2014) for an argument that we need to appeal to a “taking condition” to explain inference.

<sup>7</sup>Here I assume that if one is justified in believing P in part because one has E and one has E in part because one is justified in believing E, then one is justified in believing P in part because one is justified in believing E. Even if explanatory relations in general are not transitive, this assumption is still plausible here.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Comesaña and McGrath (2014).

### 3.1.3 *Going Disjunctive*

The natural reaction to the regress problem from the last section is to go disjunctive, to claim that one can have evidence in two ways, one which consists in meeting an epistemic condition (e.g., justification) while the other doesn't.

What should the non-epistemic disjuncts be? A natural place to look are one's mental states. Perhaps a fact's bearing a special metaphysical relation – not an epistemic one – to one's mental states enables it to be part of one's evidence. There are two ways to go here. One is to take the privileged facts to be facts about one's being in certain mental states. The other is to take them to be facts that are the contents of those mental states. Call the first **state facts** and the second **content facts**. In the case of state facts, the claim would be that the mere obtaining of a state fact E is a way of having E as evidence. In the case of content facts, the claim would be that a fact E's being the content of a certain mental state is a way of having E as evidence.

A natural candidate for these mental states is perceptual experience. However, one needs to be careful. Arguably, my auditory experience can have the content that a certain tone has a pitch of C. This can be so even if I have no prima facie justification for believing it is a C. So, whether we think it's the state fact <I have an experience that this is a C> or the content fact <this is a C> which is the evidence possessed, we face a problem when we add in evidentialism. A better suggestion appeals to *seemings*, or at least to certain sorts of seemings, e.g., perceptual, memorial, introspective, or intuitional. If I have an auditory seeming that this tone is a C, arguably I do have prima facie justification to think it is a C. Perhaps we should insist that the seemings must meet certain further conditions – being non-inferential, or lack certain sorts of etiologies.<sup>9</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I will assume seemings are the relevant states.

So, let's explore the disjunctive accounts built around these ideas, **state-based** and **content-based disjunctive views**. I raise difficulties involving self-support for each when combined with evidentialism. I begin with state-based view.

Assume the state-based view is correct: one way to have E as evidence is for E to be the fact that you are in a seeming state. And assume evidentialism is true. Now, either you must be prima facie justified in believing your evidence or you needn't be. Suppose you needn't be. Then we could have the following sort of case. Suppose you enjoy a seeming that the tree before you is an oak tree. According to the state-based view, you then have as evidence the fact <*this seems to be an oak*>. There is a reliable connection between that fact and any disjunction formed using it as a disjunct. Let's pick a disjunction with something obviously false: <*either this seems to be an oak or  $2 + 2 = 5$* >. Call this DISJUNCTION. You know that the fact <*this seems to be an oak*> reliably indicates DISJUNCTION and so you appreciate the support. By state-based disjunctivism, <*this seems to be an oak*>

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Siegel (2012).

is evidence you have supporting DISJUNCTION. By evidentialism, it follows that you are *prima facie* justified in believing DISJUNCTION. But this is wrong. In the case as so far described, there is nothing to guarantee that you have this *prima facie* justification. You aren't *prima facie* justified in believing that the tree seems to be an oak (by assumption), nor in believing that  $2 + 2 = 5$ . Nor do you have evidence for DISJUNCTION which doesn't derive from evidence for the disjuncts. In fact, we can suppose that you have no other evidence for DISJUNCTION. Then you are *not prima facie* justified in believing DISJUNCTION.<sup>10</sup>

So, the evidentialist who accepts state-based disjunctivism will need to embrace the other alternative: that one must be *prima facie* justified in believing one's evidence. This doesn't necessarily reinstate the epistemic condition on having evidence. The idea might be that although I must meet this epistemic condition in order to have the relevant facts as evidence, the epistemic condition is a mere necessary condition of having the fact as evidence and is not explanatory of it. When E is a fact about my having a certain seeming, what explains why E is evidence I have is that E is a fact to the effect that I have a certain seeming. Recall that the epistemic condition was understood as explanatory of having evidence not merely modally required.

Note, incidentally: the modal requirement itself is quite bold. It asserts that whenever you have a seeming you are *prima facie* justified in believing you do, or in other words that facts to the effect that one has a certain seeming are self-presenting in Chisholm's sense. Self-presentingness is not the same as Williamson's (2000) notion of luminosity, as the latter is defined in terms of knowledge rather than justification. Still, worries about the luminosity of seemings might make us doubt their self-presentingness.

But let us look further. What explains the modal requirement? Why I must be *prima facie* justified in believing E in order for E to be evidence I possess? On some accounts of evidence, the answer is straightforward. For instance, consider Williamson's (2000)  $E = K$  account. Why is it that I must be *prima facie* justified in believing E for E to be evidence I possess? A Williamsonian could say that what it is to have E as evidence is to know E, and knowing E implies being justified in believing E, which in turn implies *prima facie* justification. Alternatively, one could say that what it is to have E (as evidence) is to be justified in believing E, and that is why one must be *prima facie* justified in believing E if E is one's evidence. These routes aren't available for the evidentialist who accepts state disjunctivism.

Why then? A natural response appeals to higher-order seemings purportedly involved in introspection. Why am I *prima facie* justified in believing that it seems to me that p when it does? Answer: because it seems to me (introspectively) that it seems that I have this seeming.<sup>11</sup> However, unless subjects have infinitely many

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<sup>10</sup>Why not just choose instead of DISJUNCTION simply the fact <*this seems to be an oak*>? Answer: to avoid the objection that one can be justified in virtue of self-supporting evidence; it is harder to object that one can be justified in virtue of "disjunction introduction."

<sup>11</sup>This view of introspective justification is endorsed by McCain (2013).

iterations of seemings, this only postpones the problem. Suppose my seemings run out at stage 2 – it seems to me that  $p$  and it seems to me that it seems to me that  $p$ , or for short,  $Sp$  and  $SSp$ . By state-based disjunctivism, the fact that  $SSp$  – i.e.,  $\langle SSp \rangle$  – is evidence that I have. Of course,  $\langle SSp \rangle$  implies a disjunction with  $2 + 2 = 5$ , and so by evidentialism I must be *prima facie* justified in believing that disjunction. The only way to guarantee this is for me to be *prima facie* justified in believing that  $SSp$ . But what supporting evidence underlies this? I lack any seeming that  $SSp$ . What's left but to appeal to  $\langle SSp \rangle$  as evidence for itself? But this seems problematic. Maybe self-support is possible. But it is difficult to see how possessing it could explain one's *prima facie* justification.

However, the evidentialist might not want to give up just yet. Maybe self-support isn't as epistemically impotent as it initially seems. Maybe it can explain *prima facie* justification. But as I'll now argue, when we look further the prospects seem dim.

First, self-support from one's evidence doesn't in general ground *prima facie* justification. I am justified in believing the weather report that it will rain tomorrow. We can't explain my *prima facie* justification for believing it will rain tomorrow even in part by saying that I have  $\langle it\ will\ rain\ tomorrow \rangle$  as evidence and appreciate the support this proposition gives itself. That is not a source of my justification, even if  $\langle it\ will\ rain\ tomorrow \rangle$  is true and does support itself. Rather, what explains my *prima facie* justification is my having as evidence something like  $\langle the\ weather\ report\ predicts\ rain\ tomorrow \rangle$  and my appreciating the support this provides for  $\langle it\ will\ rain\ tomorrow \rangle$ .

In reply to this point, the evidentialist might suggest that self-support from one's evidence explains *prima facie* justification only in cases of immediate justification. This is itself surprising. One would have thought that if having self-supporting evidence generates *prima facie* justification in some cases it ought to do so in all cases. Even putting this aside, though, unless the evidentialist is a classical foundationalist, she will think we can have immediate justification for propositions about our surroundings, e.g., that a certain thing is red. Consider a case in which I'm immediately justified in believing a certain object  $x$  is red. In such a case, our evidentialist will still want to explain my justification as arising from the support for  $\langle x\ is\ red \rangle$  provided by the evidence  $\langle it\ (visually)\ seems\ to\ me\ that\ x\ is\ red \rangle$ . Self-support does not seem to enter the picture.

The evidentialist might restrict further: it's only in cases of immediate justification *about* one's fundamental evidence – about one's seemings – that self-support is explanatory. But even this isn't restrictive enough. As mentioned above, one natural view about how one gets to be justified in believing that  $Sp$  in at least many cases is that one has a higher-order seeming. But intuitively in cases in which one has the higher-order seeming, then it is the fact that one has it – the fact  $\langle SSp \rangle$  – and not the fact that one has the lower-order one – the fact  $\langle Sp \rangle$  – which grounds one's justification for believing that  $Sp$ . A further restriction comes to the rescue: self-support from one's evidence  $E$  grounds justification for believing  $E$  but only when  $E$  is immediately justified,  $E$  is a fact that one has a seeming, *and one lacks other evidence supporting  $E$* .

Notice how peculiar this final restriction is. Self-support from E stops grounding justification the moment support from some other bit of one's evidence starts grounding justification. Why must self-support wither away to nothing when some other support comes along? I don't see a good way of answering this question. This is not how other sorts of supporting evidence functions epistemically.

To push this one step further: suppose we omitted mention of self-support in explaining one's prima facie justification to believe one has a certain seeming. It is hard to see how the explanation would be the worse for this omission. Compare: one is prima facie justified in believing one has a seeming because one does have it vs. one is prima facie justified in believing one has a seeming because (i) one has the seeming, (ii) the fact that one has the seeming is evidence that supports itself, and (iii) one appreciates this support. If anything, the first seems like a better explanation, since (ii) and (iii) seem to add nothing to improve the explanation. Contrast any uncontroversial case of prima facie justification in virtue of evidence, such as the measles case. In order to give a full explanation of one's justification in such a case, we need to mention support and appreciation of support.

The evidentialist who accepts state-based disjunctivism is committed, not merely to the self-presentingness of facts about seemings (which is problematic enough), but also to surprising and implausible claims about self-support:

1. Possession of self-supporting evidence sometimes but not always grounds prima facie justification; and when it does ground prima facie justification, it does so in a "fragile" way – as soon as one gains other evidence for the same proposition, one loses the self-supporting evidence.
2. Despite the fact that omission of mention of self-support seems not to weaken the explanation of one's prima facie justification in the relevant cases, it really does weaken the explanation.

In light of these problems, I conclude that whether or not one must be prima facie justified in believing one's evidence, the combination of evidentialism with state-based disjunctivism leads to problematic claims about self-support.

The evidentialist might hope to do better with content-based disjunctivism. The idea here is that having a fact seem to be the case makes that fact evidence one has. This is the non-epistemic way one can come to have evidence.

As the same considerations about DISJUNCTION make clear, the evidentialist who accepts content-based disjunctivism, too, must claim that we are prima facie justified in believing our evidence.<sup>12</sup> With content-based disjunctivism, admittedly, the claim that we are always prima facie justified in believing our evidence doesn't commit the evidentialist to the self-presentingness of facts about one's seemings. That is a plus. Still, there remain serious problems about self-support.

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<sup>12</sup>This is for the same reasons as before. E supports a disjunction  $E$  or  $2 + 2 = 5$ , and one appreciates the support. So, one is prima facie justified in believing this disjunction. But one can't be unless one is prima facie justified in believing E.

Let's ask, as before, what would explain why we must be *prima facie* justified in believing our evidence, when that evidence is had in the non-epistemic way, courtesy of being a content of a seeming. In the end, the only workable answer must appeal self-support, just as for the state-based view. Now, content-based disjunctivists needn't make self-support fragile, arguably, and so they needn't accept (1) above. They can claim that self-support grounds justification in core cases of immediate justification about the world, e.g., when you have a seeming that *x* is red, self-support –  $\langle x \text{ is red} \rangle$  supports  $\langle x \text{ is red} \rangle$  – makes you *prima facie* justified in believing that *x* is red. They might also allow that this self-support can combine with other evidence to enhance justification. For instance, if I also know that *x* seems red to me, this knowledge, along with self-support from  $\langle x \text{ is red} \rangle$ , might make me better justified (perhaps). So, fragility might be less of a problem for the content-based view.

Still, (2) is still a problem. Having self-supporting evidence seem explanatorily irrelevant to why I'm *prima facie* justified in believing *x* is red when it seems to me *x* is red. Compare this time these two explanations: I am *prima facie* justified in believing *x* is red because *x* seems red to me *vs.* I am *prima facie* justified in believing *x* is red because (i) *x* seems red to me, (ii)  $\langle x \text{ seems red to me} \rangle$  supports itself, and (ii) I appreciate this support. Again, the first explanation certainly seems no weaker, no less complete, than the latter. In fact, it seems better.

To make this more vivid, consider a contrasting example. Suppose members of a club can dine in the dining hall. The conditions for membership are being over 90 and living in St. Andrews or being green-eyed and red-haired living in St. Andrews. (It's an odd club.) Now, consider Griffin. Griffin is over 90. Intuitively, Griffin's being over 90 explains his being permitted to dine in the dining hall only because being over 90 is a way of being a member of the club, which more fundamentally is the explanation of why he can dine there. It doesn't work this way for my justification for believing that *x* is red, when it seems to me *x* is red. I am not justified in believing *x* is red because the seeming gives me self-supporting evidence; even if there was no such thing as self-support, its seeming to me that *x* is red would still make me justified in believing *x* is red.

The content-based view has a further unwanted implication for the evidentialist, again having to do with self-support. When I see a cubical figure from the side, it visually seems cubical to me, but my justification for thinking it is cubical improves when I walk around it, seeing it from other sides. Thus, it is best not to construe my original justification that the figure is cubical as maximal. But if my fundamental evidence supports itself, and I know it does, then if this provides *prima facie* justification it presumably provides maximal *prima facie* justification. What stronger sort of support could there be than that between a proposition and itself? The same problem arises for state-based disjunctivism as well, but is more pressing for content-based disjunctivism, since the justification in this case is about something external to one as opposed to one's own seemings.

In this section, we have explored ways of understanding what it is to have supporting evidence in terms of there being supporting evidence in accordance with the evidence-first approach. We can group the possibilities into two types: ones that



understand having supporting evidence to be explained at least in part in terms of meeting an epistemic condition and ones that do not; the ones that do lead to regress when combined with evidentialism; the ones that do not lead to problems with self-support when combined with evidentialism. I think we must conclude that the evidentialist cannot adequately meet our challenge, at least within the confines of the evidence-first approach.

## 3.2 Abandoning the Evidence-First Approach

Conee and Feldman argue against the evidence-first approach:

Evidentialism holds that a person's doxastic justification is a function of the evidence that the person has. One might think that the way to understand this is first to define, or characterize, what evidence is, and then to explain what it is for a person to have a particular bit of evidence. (2008, 88)

However, they think this is a mistake. They continue:

It is not the case that something just is, or is not, evidence. To see why this is true, consider, for example, your current perceptual experience. Is this experience evidence? The best answer seems to be that it is evidence for you, but it is not evidence for the rest of us. It is part of your evidence for the proposition that you are reading an essay on epistemology. But your experience itself is not evidence for the rest of us. Experiences we would have if you were to describe your experience could be part of our evidence, but our grasp of your experience is indirect. There is no correct non-relational answer to the question "Is it justifying evidence?" ... on our usage, evidence is always evidence someone has. (88)<sup>13</sup>

Better, they claim, to think of having supporting evidence in terms of *subject-relative* notions. To have evidence, E, supporting P is to (i) have E as evidence; and (ii) for E to support P for the subject, where neither (i) nor (ii) can be explained in terms of subject-independent notions of something being evidence and of its supporting a proposition simpliciter. In this section, we'll consider whether this approach enables the evidentialist to answer our challenge. I expect the reader will be suspicious from the start, but let us look into the details.

If it is agreed that one's evidence always consists of propositions, even if not always facts, the arguments from the previous section will go through with only slight revisions. Nothing in those arguments depends importantly on the difference between a fact and a proposition. However, many evidentialists, Conee and Feldman included, will not agree to this. Conee and Feldman tell us that our ultimate evidence consists of experiences and other mental states, not propositions. My experience as of something red before me is part of my evidence, they say.<sup>14</sup> It is this sort of evidence that stops the regress of justification, in their view.

<sup>13</sup>In response to Conee and Feldman, one might claim that any fact can be evidence, and that what a fact is evidence for depends on what it reliably indicates. Conee and Feldman, I suspect, would agree with this suggestion if it is offered as an account of scientific evidence, but not if offered as an account of the sort of evidence relevant to justified belief.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Conee and Feldman (2004, 2). Here and below I'll speak of "experiences" rather than "seemings" as it comports with Conee and Feldman's discussion, but what I say applies to both.

We now need to ask Conee and Feldman what it is for an experience to support a proposition. Williamson (2000) argues that non-propositions cannot support propositions. Support, after all, is plausibly understood either in terms of probability raising – E supports P iff E raises the probability of P – or in terms of explanation (as Conee and Feldman prefer) – P is the best available explanation of E. Whichever way it is understood, for E to support P, E must be a proposition, since only a proposition can raise the probability of another proposition and only a fact (a true proposition) can be explained. Williamson acknowledges that we speak of explaining things that are not facts or propositions, such as World War II. However, he takes it that what we have in mind are facts about World War II. It is such things that are the answers to the questions “why did it happen at all?”, “Why did it take place in part in North Africa?”, “how did it end?” etc. When we give explanations of World War II, then, we give explanations of facts about it. In the case of probability, something A can make something B probable only by facts or propositions about A making probable propositions about B.

Conee and Feldman (2008, 102) try to turn these points against Williamson. Experiences serve their evidential roles, they claim, by courtesy of propositions or facts about them serving those roles. Talk of probability-raising and of being explained by a hypothesis, they tell us, is “harmlessly understood” as amounting to talk of a proposition about the experience serving these roles. Applying the stratagem to evidential support, the idea would be that for an experience to support a proposition is for a proposition *about* the experience to support that proposition. I’ll use the lower case ‘e’ for the experience and the upper case for the relevant proposition about the experience. E might be, for instance “I have e.” I won’t worry what experiences are, e.g., whether they are seemings or something else. I assume, however, that they are not propositions or facts, and so not the sorts of entities that we can be justified in believing.

But now Conee and Feldman are in trouble. We can rerun our dilemma argument, with small adjustments. Let us ask: is my being justified in believing E part of what grounds an experience e’s being evidence I have supporting P? If so, adding in evidentialism, regress ensues. You are justified in believing P because you have evidence supporting P, which is in part due to the fact that you are justified in believing some E, distinct from P, and you are justified in believing that E because you have evidence supporting it, which is in part due to the fact that you are justified in believing some E’, distinct from E, and so on. Immediate justification is ruled out. On the other hand, if being justified in believing E isn’t part of what grounds an experience e being evidence one has supporting P, other problems arise. One must be at least *prima facie* justified in believing E. Otherwise, the account will over-predict *prima facie* justification when combined with evidentialism.<sup>15</sup> The difficulty,

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<sup>15</sup>Again, E supports a number of propositions. For instance, it supports DISJUNCTION, i.e., *either E or 2 + 2 = 5*. But if E supports DISJUNCTION, then e, too, supports it derivatively, insofar as experiences support propositions in virtue of propositions about them supporting those propositions. (This claim depends on an assumption, but I think a plausible one, namely that if what a non-proposition X supports is grounded in what a certain proposition P(X) supports, then

then, is to explain why one must be *prima facie* justified in believing E in order to have e as evidence. Again, the very same problems arise as under the combination of evidentialism and state disjunctivism. The best available story will appeal to implausible claims about self-support. When I have e, this is explained in terms of my having E, and E supports itself, and therefore I am *prima facie* justified in believing E.

By the same token, if E is taken to be a proposition which is the content of e (rather than a proposition about e itself) and if e's supporting P is again taken to derive from E's supporting P, then the same sort of problems we found for combining evidentialism with the content-based disjunctivism will rearise. Again, self-support is given a role it cannot plausibly play.

The evidentialist should see this as reason to beware of trying to turn the tables on Williamson. Perhaps the thing to do is to insist that experiences non-derivatively support propositions. The difficulty, though, is that we need to see how both immediate justification from experience and mediate justification from other justified beliefs can each be subsumed under a unitary notion of *having supporting evidence*. One cannot simply declare that having an experience is a way of having supporting evidence. One needs to give a story about how it could be. The evidentialist could of course stipulate a meaning for 'having supporting evidence' so that having an experience amounts to one way of having supporting evidence, while the other way requires evidence in the form of other justified beliefs. But while stitching together very different features to produce a disjunctive feature may help one achieve extensional adequacy; it is useless explanatorily. The evidentialist wants the possession of supporting evidence to *explain* or *ground* *prima facie* justification in all cases. But a disjunctive feature whose disjuncts are not similar cannot do this.

Conee and Feldman's (2011, 322) recent remarks about experiential support might inspire hope for the evidentialist. What is explained, they say in reply to Dougherty, is the experience and it isn't explained derivatively from an explanation of a proposition or fact. What is common to cases of immediate and mediate justification to believe P? Their answer is this: *P being part of the best explanation available to the subject of why the subject has the relevant evidence*. This initially seems to have the potential to do what we want done – to find something unitary that is common across cases of immediate and mediate justification.

Unfortunately, even if we grant that the experience is explained non-derivatively, the old issues reappear. Crucially, if what grounds the fact that the experience supports the proposition is the fact that it figures in the best explanation of the evidence available to the agent, it seems the agent must know or at least be justified

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if P(X) supports a proposition Q, so does X. The underlying principle is that grounds entail what they ground.) Moreover, I might well appreciate this support insofar as I know that the relevant experience type guarantees the truth of the disjunction. So it appears that I have evidence – the experience – which supports DISJUNCTION, in a way I appreciate, and so supports it *for me*. Adding in evidentialism, it follows that I am *prima facie* justified in believing this disjunction. But this is wrong: if I'm not *prima facie* justified in believing E, then I'm not *prima facie* justified in believing DISJUNCTION.

in believing that the evidence – in this case the experience – exists; for, otherwise, the agent will not thereby obtain justification for the target proposition. Suppose I have a tumor on my kidney, but I have no idea of it. I might know that such a tumor, if I had one, would be best explained by having a certain sort of cancer. But I am not now in the least justified in believing I have any form of cancer. In order for available explanations of a piece of (non-propositional) evidence to confer justification on the proposition figuring in the explanation, one needs at least to be justified in believing the piece of evidence exists.

So, I must be justified in believing I have the experience in order to gain justification for propositions figuring in the explanation of it. We then ask the by now familiar question: where, then, does the justification for thinking I have the experience come from? If it must be explained in terms of the availability of an explanation, it seems the only option is to appeal to “explanations” such as: *I have experience e because I have experience e*. Self-support has returned again. In any case, this is a lousy explanation, and so not one which could provide justification.

### 3.3 Conclusion

This paper challenges the evidentialist to explain what it is to have evidence supporting a proposition in a way that is not only acceptable on its own, but acceptable when conjoined with evidentialism. I have argued that the evidentialist cannot answer the challenge. Let me try to express the core problems in summary fashion.

An acceptable account of *having evidence E supporting proposition P* must impose at least two necessary conditions: one must bear the right relation to E, and E must bear the right relation to P. Call the relation to E the **possession relation**. Call the relation between E and P the **support relation**. With this in mind, here is the summary.

Evidentialists have a choice. They can claim that all evidence either consists of facts or propositions, or is grounded in having facts or propositions as evidence, or they may deny this. Suppose they claim it. Then they must take the possession relation to require prima facie justification in believing the evidence (or an associated proposition – a proposition about it, or its content). For otherwise the DISJUNCTION problem looms with its associated over-prediction of prima facie justification once we add in evidentialism. To give a suitably evidentialist explanation of how we can be guaranteed of this prima facie justification, one must appeal in the end to self-support. The choices for the evidentialist who takes support by facts or propositions as basic are *regress* or *self-support*. On the other hand, if evidentialists deny this claim, and so if they claim that some evidence is neither a fact, a proposition, nor grounded in the possession of a fact or proposition as evidence, the main obstacle is to explain how such phenomena amount to the genuine possession of supporting evidence, without lapsing back into an appeal to self-support (as Conee and Feldman’s own explanationist proposal does).

Evidentialism is plausible for cases of mediate justification. The reason it is difficult to explain in an evidentialist-friendly way what it is to have supporting evidence is that evidentialism aims to account for all cases of justification. It is better, I think, to admit that justification simply has different kinds of sources. In cases of mediate justification, one's justification is grounded in having supporting evidence. In cases of immediate justification, one's justification is grounded in a different way, via having appropriate experiences or seemings, where this is not a form of having supporting evidence. This is the sort of post-evidentialism I recommend.<sup>16</sup> There is much work to be done to flesh out such a view. In particular, there remains the task of explaining how the two grounds of justification interact, for example, in cases of defeat. But this will have to wait to another occasion.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>I am not the first to arrive at a conclusion like this. Pryor (2005) explicitly describes experiences as justification-makers not as evidence or reasons, as does Sosa (2007), Williamson (2000), and Comesaña (manuscript) to name only a few. However, where I think I add something original is in the challenge I raise concerning how to understand *having evidence supporting a proposition*. For a recent paper that arises at similar conclusions about the plausibility of evidentialism, understood as a thesis about explanation or grounding, see Beddor (2015).

<sup>17</sup>I am grateful for comments from Jessica Brown, Juan Comesaña, Brian Weatherson, an audience at Arché, and especially Stewart Cohen and Kevin McCain.

# Chapter 4

## Seemings, Reasons, and Knowledge: A Defense of Phenomenal Conservatism



Trent Dougherty

**Abstract** Most objections to evidentialism flounder upon a bad theory of evidence. It is very common for self-styled anti-evidentialists to assume a narrow theory of evidence and then proceed to show how evidentialism—on that theory of evidence—has this or that negative consequence. This doesn't mean that evidentialism is in the clear though. The real problem for evidentialism isn't that it's in danger of being false, but, rather, a mere truism. The action, really, is in the theory of evidence. This chapter defends a theory of evidence, Reasons Commonsensism, that avoids the problems leveled by anti-evidentialists.

**Keywords** Commonsensism · Reasons Commonsensism · Reliabilism · Seeming · *Sensus Divinitatis*

### 4.1 Introduction

Most objections to evidentialism of which I am aware flounder upon a bad theory of evidence. One prominent example is Alvin Plantinga's use of "evidence" to refer to the possession of arguments one is in a position to adduce.<sup>1</sup> But it is very common for self-styled anti-evidentialists to assume a narrow theory of evidence and then proceed to show how evidentialism—on that theory of evidence—has this or that negative consequence.<sup>2</sup> It's so common it's hard to even find motivation to read about objections to evidentialism. This doesn't mean that evidentialism is in the clear though. The real problem for evidentialism isn't that it's in danger of being

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<sup>1</sup>See Dougherty and Tweedt (2015).

<sup>2</sup>For example, John Greco assumes a reliabilist notion of evidence and then, unsurprisingly, finds that it is hard for internalists to explain knowledge based on evidence. See Greco (2005, 263).

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false, but, rather, a mere truism. The action, really, is in the theory of evidence. Here, it is evidentialists who must come somewhat under criticism.

In Conee and Feldman's (2004) landmark book *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*, there is surprisingly little on the nature of evidence (though much excellent fodder for reflection). They clear some ground by rejecting some theories of evidence in Dougherty (2011).<sup>3</sup> Yet not much is built on this ground. A few years earlier, they say the most they have ever said in one place in "Evidence" (2008).<sup>4</sup> There, they say in a section on "ultimate evidence" that "We take evidence to be what provides epistemic reasons" (2008, 87).<sup>5</sup> This is my main point of departure/inspiration for what follows. They go on to point out "Experience is our point of interaction with the world—conscious awareness is how we gain the evidence we have" (87). In what follows, I'll try to encapsulate this sentiment into a simple principle of basic evidence generation.

The principle I defend owes much to the Reidian tradition of common sense epistemology found in Chisholm (1966, 1977, 1989), Swinburne (2001), and Huemer (2001). However, I try to provide a version of commonsensism that makes less by way of commitment and has more by way of grounding than previous principles. I will structure my presentation around the work of hardcore externalist Michael Bergmann. One reason is that Bergmann has given more attention to common sense epistemology and phenomenal conservatism than any other externalist I am aware of. Another is that Bergmann is an admirably clear writer, so interaction with him is simple. Finally, it is an effective strategy for adding to my exposition a defense of the following theses.

1. A prominent externalist (Bergmann) endorses a principle of common sense epistemology that is unreasonable to endorse, and it is not the one I defend.
2. Although the principle I defend is consistent with externalism, there is a natural extension of it which Bergmann has attacked. The principle easily survives.

The truth of these two theses puts some pressure on externalists either to retreat from their commitments to common sense epistemology (as we see some doing<sup>6</sup>) or advance better arguments against extending the kinds of principles phenomenal conservatives defend, for phenomenal conservatives are on the march!

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<sup>3</sup>Primarily in their responses to Part VI Evidence.

<sup>4</sup>For some criticisms of what they say here, see Dougherty (2010).

<sup>5</sup>A few pages earlier (84–85), they use the notion of an epistemic reason to distinguish "justifying evidence" from "scientific evidence."

<sup>6</sup>See, for instance, Lasonen-Aarnio (2010).

## 4.2 From Commonsensism About Knowledge to Reasons Commonsensism

Bergmann defines commonsensism thusly.

**Commonsensism:** the view that (a) it is clear that we know many of the most obvious things we take ourselves to know (this includes the truth of simple perceptual, memory, introspective, mathematical, logical, and moral beliefs) and that (b) we also know (if we consider the question) that we are not in some skeptical scenario in which we are radically deceived in these beliefs.<sup>7</sup>

Note that what Bergmann endorses here is commonsensism about *knowledge* or what I'll call **Knowledge Commonsensism** (KC). I have some reservations about this thesis. Importantly, he notes that Moore—whom he presents as an archetype of commonsensism—“lists many perceptual, memory, and introspective beliefs” which count as knowledge.<sup>8</sup> It is not perfectly clear to me that true memory beliefs are clear cases of knowledge. For memories are to a degree removed from our present evidence in a way reminiscent of the way future events are, which seems to me to make both them and beliefs about the future (which are conspicuously absent from Bergmann's/Moore's list) not the best candidates for clear cases of knowledge. We often *talk* as if future events are known, but that kind of “ordinary language” evidence isn't very strong. Just as we might casually say we know we'll attend the conference next summer when that's not strictly speaking true, we might casually say we know we had tea with breakfast last Sunday when it's not strictly speaking true. If you ask people if they *strictly speaking* know these sorts of things, they often back down.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it doesn't always seem that in doing so people are just being bullied or falling prey to misleading linguistic cues. For the same people who back off of non-present external world knowledge claims typically stand up for introspective and present perceptual beliefs when pressed in the same way. This behavior suggests that people have less confidence in knowledge claims as they extend beyond present experience. I do not say it's *implausible* that memory and future beliefs are knowledge—though the more distant they get the less plausible it is—I only say that it is far less secure as a clear case of common sense epistemology about knowledge than sense perception and introspection.

What *does* seem clear is that distant future and past beliefs are not *as* clear cases of knowledge as introspective and ordinary-distance present-perceptual beliefs. Where the boundary lies is bound to be vague, and so one can't just naively include “memory” (unqualified) among the given sources of knowledge as Bergmann does.

<sup>7</sup>Bergmann (2012, 10) A natural question is how we know this principle is true, since it does not seem to fall under its own scope. Investigating this would be interesting, but will not be pursued here, since advocates of the principle usually don't argue that one must know that it is true in order for them to have knowledge. The principle just has to *be* true.

<sup>8</sup>See Moore (1959).

<sup>9</sup>For more on the sematic contribution of emphasis see in particular Stanley (2008) and Unger (1975).



A safer bet than Bergmann's KC is a weaker thesis about memory beliefs: memory impressions *give us reasons* to believe what they report. This is so even for very distant memory impressions, since reasons come in variable sizes. I have memory impressions from over 40 years ago, quite a span, but they give me *some* reason to accept their testimony. Even very old, very fuzzy memories give me *some* reason to accept their reports. The same seems true of perceptual "takings," what Hume called "the testimony of the senses" and introspective impressions as well as intuitions weak and strong.

Why am I talking about impressions? If we inquire about what Moore means by such terms as "perceptual, memory, and introspective beliefs," we will naturally call to mind what distinguishes them from one another. It can't be *content*, for I can see that the ball is red, remember that the ball is red, or, even in a synesthetic state, hear that the ball is red. Rather, such beliefs seem to be distinguished from one another by the kinds of phenomenal *inputs* which lead to those particular kinds of doxastic *outputs* (for a given kind of creature, under normal circumstances, etc.). That is, memory beliefs are produced by memory impressions, perceptual beliefs by sense impressions, and introspective beliefs by a certain kind of introspective impression the phenomenology of which is hard to describe but familiar to all.

What I said of the weaker thesis<sup>10</sup> that memory impressions give us *reasons* for our memory beliefs (weaker, that is, than the thesis that (true) memory beliefs are clear paradigms of *knowledge*) is true of perceptual and introspective beliefs as well. Such impressions don't always give beliefs deserving the status of *knowledge*, but they do give us (*pro tanto*) *reasons* to believe.<sup>11</sup> Sense impressions give us reasons for perceptual beliefs, and introspective impressions give us reasons for introspective beliefs, etc. This leads, then, to a form of commonsensism that is more plausible than knowledge commonsensism.

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<sup>10</sup>A colleague, and regrettably I now forget who it was, pointed out to me that one might think that my thesis is stronger in *one* respect, in that KC, as Bergmann has put it, only applies to *many* of our common sense beliefs whereas my principle says that *all* beliefs formed in a certain way have reasons for them. It may well be that in this one sense his thesis is not weaker, but I doubt it. For if he is to give a non-arbitrary account of which beliefs are and which ones aren't formed with reasons, he'll also have to provide some principle that will apply to all of a class, just as I do. Furthermore, for it not to be the case that an advocate of KC should accept Reasons Commonsensism (RC), it would have to be that the "many" things known wouldn't "line up" with the scope of a modified RC. The respect in which my principle is weaker is that it attributes a very weak positive epistemic status indeed—having a *pro tanto* reason—as compared with the very strong epistemic status *knowledge*, which has had a history of setting an impossibly high standard.

<sup>11</sup>I am working with the standard notion of a *pro tanto* reason for something as *a consideration that counts in favor of*. Reasons may be weak or strong. Weak reasons might be so weak as to be normally disregarded. My position is that the strength of reasons depends on—as Hume put it—the "liveliness" of the impressions or—as Descartes put it—their clarity and distinctness or simplicity and vividness. This is not the place to work out and defend a detailed theory of the strength of reasons, but I take it that something like this picture is correct. For one account with which I have a great deal of sympathy, see Swinburne (2001) Chapter 5, esp. 138–140. Even Plantinga seems to accept that the "vivacity or liveliness" of a belief is relevant to the strength of epistemic position (2000, 491–492).

**Reasons Commonsensism (RC')** If a basic faculty F reports that p, then we have a pro tanto reason to believe p.<sup>12</sup>

Notice that I've just quantified over basic faculties. I do this for three reasons. First, because it avoids having to enumerate an exhaustive list of basic faculties, and it's hard to know what the number should be. Second, information faculties surely vary from possible species to possible species, and I wish to describe a thesis that applies to all doxastic agents real and imagined. Third, I do so to avoid debates about whether such-and-such a proposed faculty really exists.

Some don't like talk of "faculties", but it's just a word. There is such a thing as memory and such a thing as sense perception, etc., and they all have a certain degree of independence. They each bear testimony to the world in a way that is at least semi-independent, like having the testimony of a number of individuals that is at least semi-independent. There may well be relations between them that keep them from being completely probabilistically independent, but they each speak with their own voice. Furthermore, they are for the most part transmitting different *kinds* of information: what happened in the past, what is happening right now, what things look like, what entails what, etc. All I intend to do with "faculty" is cover these sorts of independent sources of information. It's just a word. So, by "faculties" I stipulate that I mean *those kinds of things*, while thinking of memory, introspection, sense perception, and intuition.

Some might balk—for reasons I don't understand—at a faculty of intuition or insight or reason, which is the deliverer of a range of a priori truths. More will balk at an *oculi contemplations* or *sensus divinitatis* (Chisholm 1966, 68; 1977, 132–133 mentions the former, Plantinga 2000 discusses the latter throughout) which grounds immediately justified belief in God (under the right circumstances). But whatever the number and nature of the fundamental sources of reasons, RC' gathers them together and attributes to them reasons-giving power.

Common sense principles of reasons acquisition similar to RC' go back at least to Reid and the Scottish Commonsense tradition. The central idea, however, can even be traced back to Carneades (See Chisholm 1966, Chapter 2 for an account of this tradition). Accordingly, RC' or something very much like RC' seems to be an important form or facet of common sense epistemology. My position is that it is more plausible than KC, but the two are not necessarily in competition. In fact, they are logically unrelated without further assumptions (Though I think that many motivations for KC are also, or can be converted into, reasons for RC'. Also, since RC' is weaker, it will win any conflict by default without further reasons in support of KC).

Note that for one to endorse only RC' is not at all to endorse an internalist epistemology in general just yet. Perhaps—though I doubt it—there is perceptual

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<sup>12</sup>There are skeptical arguments which target RC' and similar principles, just as there are for knowledge commonsensism. It is no part of my thesis that there are skeptical worries for KC but not RC'. The thesis is that the degree of intuitive support for RC' is at least as good as that for KC.

knowledge which is knowledge (somehow) in the absence of reasons of any kind. RC' states a *sufficient* condition, not a necessary condition, so it has very little by way of entailments for major contemporary debates between internalists and externalists about knowledge all by itself. Someone may accept it but reject internalism as a theory of knowledge or justification. Robert Audi, for example, who suggests that knowledge and epistemic justification may not be conceptually related (1988, 27) nonetheless accepts such a principle (2001, 43). Arch-externalist about knowledge Alvin Plantinga accepts such a principle quite explicitly: "whenever it seems to you that something is so, you do indeed have evidence for it. By virtue of that very fact, you have evidence for it, and the stronger the seeming, the stronger the evidence" (Plantinga 1993: 192).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, RC' is not only compatible with a reliabilist (or other externalist) theory of knowledge but also with a reliabilist (or other externalist) theory of epistemic justification. RC' doesn't mention justification.<sup>14</sup> If one added the (very plausible) principle that one's justification was fully determined by one's reasons for belief or even the weaker principle that having epistemic justification entailed having *some reason* to believe, then there might arise a conflict between an externalist theory of justification and reasons commonsensism. I must say I find the claim that epistemic justification for some proposition p entails having some reason to believe p pretty obvious, but I won't insist on it just yet. So there is not necessarily any conflict between an externalist theory of knowledge or even justification and RC'. Later, I will discuss the question of the necessity of faculty reports for having reasons as well as defend the sufficiency thesis.

Audi (1998) refers to a canonical list of "sources of justification, knowledge, and truth": perception, memory, introspection, reason, and testimony. (I think testimony is derivative in certain respects<sup>15</sup> which need not detain us here, but, again, my point is not to insist on any particular list). For each of these sources, there's *something it's like* to have the various impressions which give reasons for different kinds of beliefs and there's something it's like for them to target and illuminate a proposition in the particular way they do. (Or perhaps the impression *just is* being in a certain phenomenal state.) We can use this fact to craft a more familiar and economical commonsense thesis about reasons.

Before crafting our more economical thesis, however, it must be noted that I am not insisting that the thesis that is to follow—namely, RC—is merely a "restatement" of RC' (though I suspect it is). Rather, it will share all or almost all the same motivations with very few additional encumbrances. I think this is true for other similar principles in the family that others have endorsed, and I think that any relevantly similar principle would serve my purposes roughly equally well.

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<sup>13</sup>He merely adds that evidence is not sufficient to turn true belief into *knowledge*, and I don't need to disagree with that (in fact, I don't know anyone who does.).

<sup>14</sup>A passage which is very instructive in this context is Conee and Feldman (2004, 15 esp. n 8).

<sup>15</sup>See Dougherty (2014).

Consider the phenomenal character of the impression that something is true generated by a “faculty” or source of basic justification. Call the hosting of that character the having of a “seeming” state asserting some target proposition. In this case, saying that something “seems” to be the case is not a hedge, as in when we say “It seems like she’s upset, but I’m just not sure.” Rather, we are just acknowledging that this kind of state points or “testifies” to the truth of its content, but doesn’t guarantee it. Seeming states are non-factive evidence. If that phenomenal character is attached to some proposition  $p$  which  $S$  is considering, then it seems that  $p$  to  $S$ . Now we may formulate the new principle:

**Reasons Commonsensism (RC)** If it seems to  $S$  that  $p$ , then  $S$  thereby has a pro tanto reason for believing  $p$ .<sup>16</sup>

Let me pause here briefly to draw attention to two points regarding RC that need to be made before we move too far forward. First, I have stated RC in such a way to be the weakest such principle. One issue RC sets aside is, as Audi puts it, the difference between “basic sources of justification” and “sources of basic justification.”<sup>17</sup> For I suspect that our source of basic justification—the seeming to be true of propositions—is not a basic source in that it synthesizes the reports of various basic faculties.

Second, by its “seeming to  $S$  that  $p$ ,” I simply want to capture the phenomenology of what it’s like when a faculty reports something to one. For there is in fact something it’s like to receive such a report. For example, if one’s basic perceptual faculty reports to one that there is a red object before one, the consciousness of this will be what I mean by its seeming to one that one sees a red object. A relevantly similar phenomenon occurs for truths of reason. If one’s faculty of rational insight reports to one that no part could be greater than the whole of which it is a part, then one’s consciousness of this is what I mean by its seeming to one that no part could be greater than the whole. Thus, I really do take RC not to add much by way of commitment to RC’. However, the argument of this paper would go through just as easily, if less elegantly, with RC’. For, capturing just which part of conscious life constitutes the evidence is a very difficult matter.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>I wish to stress at the outset, that I present (RC) as what seems to me to be the best representation of the kind of generative epistemic principle I take to be an important facet of the commonsense tradition. It may well be that there is a better representative. If this is so, I strongly expect that all that I say here can be put in terms of that principle.

<sup>17</sup>See, in particular, Audi (1998) for more on this difference.

<sup>18</sup>Further complicating matters is that it is hard to distinguish a disposition or inclination to believe from the thing that evokes that inclination. Swinburne (2001, 139–151) endorses that inclinations can themselves be evidence (Byerly (2012) defends this thesis in detail, see Dougherty (2011, 294–296) for an argument against Swinburne’s version). Conee and Feldman (2004, 15, n8) indicates that it is better to identify the evidence with what evokes that response. Audi (2001, 241 n15) says that dispositions to believe are entailed by having evidence to believe. If so, they would always be present together which would further explain the difficulty of keeping them distinct in our minds. Moving from the evoking seeming to the disposition or even to the belief will become second nature, and casual phenomenology will blur the distinctions.

One way to get at the usage many commonsensists have in mind by “seems” when used, as I use it here, synonymously with a certain sense of “appears” is to distinguish it from “merely looks.” Consider a pencil half-submerged in a glass of water. We might say, with an air of paradox, that the pencil appears bent but it doesn’t appear to you that it is bent. That is, it seems *as though* it were bent (has the visual appearance it *would* have *were* it bent) but it doesn’t seem *that* it is bent. The subjunctive mood flags that we take the appearance to be contrary to fact.<sup>19</sup>

As I use the phrases, “seems *as though*” and “seems *as if*” refer to particular phenomenal features of our *sensory experience* which *cause* seemings under certain circumstances. “Seems *that*” denotes the propositional attitude which sensory (and other) experiences cause.<sup>20</sup> According to reasons commonsensism, our evidence consists in *seemings that*, not *seemings as though* or *as if*. Which propositions seem true to you in virtue of which sensory appearances will depend on one’s conceptual repertoire, past experiences, and beliefs. That is, the mapping from “perceptual scenery” inputs to doxastic outputs will go by way of these other features of your cognitive system. Beliefs themselves, by contrast, need not have any “feel” to them at all. In ordinary humans, they almost always do. However, this could fail to occur sometimes for normal humans and could never occur for some possible species. This is impossible with seemings. Ordinarily, a seeming will evoke an inclination to believe, but not always. In normal humans this will almost always occur, but it is not necessarily the case.

What I have said here of perceptual seemings—seemings generated by perceptual inputs—is also true of the other sources of basic justification. When I contemplate the naive comprehension axiom, it still “evokes a sense of non-inferential credibility” (Audi 2011, 314), yet it lacks the clear assertoric force of the experiences which actually cause me to believe a proposition. We might say, roughly following Audi, that this known-to-be-false axiom is “intuitive” but not one of my *intuitions*. By way of contrast, it seems *that* Russell’s paradox shows the axiom to be false.

Many philosophers have endorsed theses like RC. It bears closest resemblance to Michael Huemer’s principle PC of Phenomenal Conservatism (Huemer 2001, 99). But it’s also importantly similar to Richard Swinburne’s Principle of Credulity (Swinburne 2001, 140–142). Chisholm referred to his view explicitly as “commonsensism” (Chisholm 1989, 63) because one of his most basic principles was, in my terms,

(C) If S takes there to be an F (and is aware of no other considerations), then it is more reasonable to believe there is an F than to suspend judgment (this is actually a bit weaker than his principle on p. 65 of his 1989).

I will not rehearse these authors’ arguments for the kind of commonsensism of which RC is a species. I will only offer four further comments before moving on.

<sup>19</sup>Note the difference from Bealer (1996) here: he uses Mueller-Lyer lines. And from Huemer (2001). Epistemic seemings are propositional attitudes (see Huemer 2001, 99–100; Conee and Feldman 2004, 15; Audi 2011, 314; and Cullison 2010).

<sup>20</sup>Tucker (2010) makes a similar distinction.

First, I reiterate that RC is independent of any general theory of knowledge or epistemic justification. It places no conditions on a theory of knowledge or justification. It simply states one—possibly among others—sufficient condition for having a reason. I will defend sufficiency and even necessity below, but those defenses are logically independent of the principle itself.

Second, a virtue of the RC formulation over the first formulation—RC’—is that it is both more explanatory and more general. It is more explanatory because by using the term “seems” it suggests the *character* of the “faculty reports”, their assertive nature, generates reasons. It is more general because I suspect that our cognitive lives are more holistic than the first formulation might suggest. That is, things often seem true to us on the basis of complex explanatory connections which we cannot pin down to one discrete faculty, yet which are noninferential, immediate impressions of the way things are.

Third, RC is an excellent starting place to explain the plausibility of KC. All one needs to add is a plausible principle connecting reasons to knowledge. So, there is a reason for the friends of KC to be friends of RC.

Fourth, RC is logically weaker than any of the other principles of common sense I am aware of in the Reidian tradition (arguably the tradition from which the sort of proper functionalism that Bergmann defends emerged<sup>21</sup>). So, a rejection of RC and any similar principle would represent a wholesale rejection of an important facet of the commonsense tradition.

Now it is time to discuss explicitly the extended principle I mentioned earlier. RC only asserts the sufficiency of seemings for having reasons. But I think it is a natural development to also make them necessary. I won’t give a positive argument for necessity, but in what follows I will keep the promise made above to discuss necessity and sufficiency in greater detail. I shall do so by considering objections to those theses by Bergmann.

I began crafting RC in contradistinction from KC, a principle defended by Michael Bergmann. I showed that most anyone who was a fan of KC should be even more happy about RC, since RC is more secure and more explanatory. I also noted that RC, all by itself, is perfectly consistent with externalism (though at the cost of a divorce of knowledge from reasons). Since Bergmann has expounded a role for seemings in a theory of externalist justification (2013), it would be well to examine the reasons he offers for thinking that seemings are neither necessary nor sufficient for justification. For although I haven’t said *anything* about justification yet, one might think that his arguments against the necessity of seemings for justification could be transmogrified into arguments against the necessity of seemings for having reasons.

*Bergmann’s argument against the necessity of seemings for justification.*

Sadly, Bergmann’s argument against the general necessity of seemings for justification occurs in just a single sentence. Even more sadly, it makes essential appeal

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<sup>21</sup>See Plantinga (1993, vii and passim).

to a controversial and undefended assumption. First, he points out that even arch-phenomenal conservative Michael Huemer holds it is possible that there could exist beings who form beliefs not in response to seemings. I certainly accept this. For example, there could be beings whose naturally evolved belief formation process is some kind of random belief generator. After noting this concession, Bergmann comments:

[J]ust as our natural way of forming noninferential beliefs in response to seemings is rational for us, so also (given Contingency) their natural way of forming noninferential beliefs without basing them on seemings, could be rational for them (2013, 172).

The necessary assumption is the following:

**Bergmann's Principle** If a belief-forming process P is the natural one for a kind of being K, then beliefs formed by members of kind K via P are thereby justified.

Bergmann doesn't defend this principle, and I can't think of any reason to think it is true. Therefore, I conclude that his argument against necessity fails. It is very rare that phenomenal conservatives claim the necessity thesis—though I do—so even the success of Bergmann's argument would be a small victory.

*Bergmann's arguments against the sufficiency of seemings for justification.*

Since RC—and similar principles generally—are given as sufficiency claims, there is something substantial hanging on Bergmann's argument against this. Sadly, the entirety of Bergmann's case is based on a single example.

**Jack and Jill** Consider two humans, Jack and Jill. Suppose that, while grabbing a billiard ball, Jack has the tactile sensation we would expect a normal human to have in such circumstances. That tactile experience leads to a seeming that there's a hard spherical object in his hand; and that seeming then leads to the belief that there's a hard spherical object in his hand. Assume further that Jack has no defeaters for this belief. Now suppose that, like Jack, Jill has a seeming that there's a hard spherical object in her hand and, as a result, a belief that there's a hard spherical object in her hand. But, unlike Jack, Jill has no tactile experience of the sort that led Jack to have the seeming and belief about the hard spherical object. Instead, Jill's seeming about the hard spherical object was caused by an olfactory sensation she had that is phenomenally like one we'd have when smelling a lilac bush. (Jill has no hard spherical object in her hand—this is why she doesn't have the tactile experience Jack has—and she is standing near a lilac bush with a gentle breeze blowing the fragrance in her direction—which is why she has the olfactory sensation she does.) She didn't learn to associate this spherical-object seeming with this olfactory sensation. Instead, it was an automatic unlearned response that occurred as a result of brain damage. Jill too is without any defeaters for this belief. (Bergmann 2013, 173)

Bergmann's conclusion about this case is as follows: "Her seeming about the hard spherical object is improperly caused, and the result is that her corresponding belief about the hard spherical object is not justified" (2013, 174). My own conclusion is that Bergmann's conclusion is radically out of step with common sense.

Bergmann has already stated that which sensory states trigger which seeming states is a contingent matter, so a disconnect between the ordinary trigger and the ordinary response isn't a *logical* problem. And a causal problem, while a problem for *knowledge*, isn't a problem for justification. Consider the following example:

**Red and Blue:** Rod and Bill are both looking at a red ball in front of them in normal lighting. Rod's faculties are functioning properly, and so he hosts phenomenal red combined with spherical shape. This makes it seem to him that there is a red ball, which, in turn, causes him to believe there is a red ball in front of him. Bill, on the other hand, due to a brain lesion in his visual cortex caused by a burst of gamma rays from Alpha Centauri, hosts phenomenal blue with spherical shape. This makes it seem to him that there is a blue ball, which, in turn, causes him to believe there is a blue ball in front of him.

We have here a good case and a bad case, which can be broken up as follows.

**Good case:** "red" light waves enter eye in spherical shape → visual cortex generates image of red sphere → red sphere image associated with red ball → seeming that there is a red ball → belief in a red ball

**Bad case:** "red" light waves enter eye in spherical shape → visual cortex generates image of blue sphere → blue sphere image associated with blue ball → seeming that there is a blue ball → belief in a blue ball

In the bad case, the subject clearly has justification for believing. That's not a legitimate matter for debate. The causal error in the visual cortex can't rob Bill of his justification. It can, however, rob him of knowledge. Importantly, the lack of knowledge isn't just due to the fact that the belief is false. For consider this worse case:

**Really bad case:** "red" light waves enter eye in spherical shape → visual cortex generates image of blue sphere → blue sphere image associated with red ball → seeming that there is a red ball → belief in a red ball

In this really bad case, one has a justified true belief, but it still isn't knowledge, for the true belief is not properly based on the evidence that justifies it. Rather, there is a deviant causal chain from the evidence to the belief. Furthermore, it is surely no more than good fortune that two mistakes would cancel each other out as they do in the case.

In "Jack and Jill" the good case and bad case differ at different causal stages than in "Red and Blue." However, Bergman says nothing at all to suggest that the location of the improper cause matters. He just infers *Improperly caused, therefore unjustified*. As we saw in Red and Blue, that is a non sequitur.

Let us now generalize over the causal chains. We have something like this:

worldly input → neuronal processing → sensuous experience → seeming state → belief state

The belief forming module is only responsible for its proper causal input, which is a seeming state. It has done its job when the content of the belief state matches the content of the seeming state. Anything that goes wrong further upstream is someone else's problem. That may result in lack of knowledge, lack of understanding, or partake of some other negative epistemic status. Such an upstream problem may arise from a brain lesion caused by a burst of gamma rays from Alpha Centauri or it may be just a random glitch. There are a lot of ways things can go wrong to wreck knowledge. But justification is simple and lowly. If it seems to S that p, then S has a reason to believe p. A strong enough seeming would not just provide



a non-zero degree of justification, it could outright justify a proposition for belief. Bergmann has given us no reason to think otherwise. Thus, RC, my commonsense principle about epistemic reasons, is completely untouched by anything Bergmann says about seemings and justification.

In closing, I want to make a few brief remarks about the notion of justification I think emerges most naturally from RC. First, Bergmann speaks of justification as if it comes in degrees. The only sense I can make of such talk is that by saying one has “a lot of justification” for a belief, one has a lot of evidence. But if belief is taken in its binary sense, mode, or aspect, there doesn’t seem to be much praiseworthy for having way more evidence than one needs to believe. Suppose as I am getting ready for a party, I seem to remember you saying you were coming to the party tonight. I casually form the belief that I’ll see you there. This belief is justified. What would it mean to say it was *really* justified? That I called and asked 10 common friends if any of them heard you say this and nine said “yes”? What would this add? The belief was already justified. It is true that the belief would be “more justified.” But that is part of a different language game, a scalar one. The binary predicate “is justified” is *literally incapable* of encoding the extra content we are all aware is there.

Things make much more sense when we think about degrees of belief or degrees of firmness of belief or degrees of confidence. Take all the reasons we have for and against believing some proposition to be our evidence concerning that proposition. When we weigh those reasons, we will get a probability—a proportional weight of reasons—to assign to that proposition. Then when our degree of belief matches the weight of the evidence, the degree of confidence is justified. We might colloquially say that less mismatch is more justified, just as we might say an 87 degree angle is “more perpendicular” than a 67 degree angle, but this is just a manner of speaking. Both are strictly non-perpendicular.

I have argued both that we have good reason to think RC plausible and that Bergmann has failed to undermine the principle. Accordingly, I think one virtue of RC is that it provides a basis for thinking about belief and justification that not only avoids a lot of pitfalls of less careful talk, but also provides a foundation for more sensible ways of thinking and speaking about the justification of beliefs.

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# Chapter 5

## Phenomenal Dogmatism, Seeming Evidentialism and Inferential Justification



**Berit Brogaard**

**Abstract** Let ‘strong normative evidentialism’ be the view that a belief is doxastically justified just when (i) the belief is (properly) based on evidence in the agent’s possession, and (ii) the evidence constitutes a good reason for the belief. Strong normative evidentialism faces two challenges. One is that of explaining which kinds of evidence can serve as a good reason for belief. The other is to explain how inferential justification is possible. If a belief  $p$  is based on a belief  $q$  that justifies  $p$ , then it would seem that the subject would need to be justified in believing that  $q$  makes  $p$  likely. The problem for the evidentialist is to explain what justifies this belief about likelihood. I will argue that the evidentialist can respond to both worries by construing basic evidence as seemings and then adopt a version of phenomenal dogmatism – the view that seemings can confer immediate and full justification upon belief – that takes seemings to be good reasons when they are evidence-insensitive in virtue of their phenomenology. This view meets the first challenge by explaining what kinds of evidence constitute a good reason. It meets the second challenge by taking beliefs that one phenomenon makes another phenomenon more likely to be immediately and fully justified by memory seemings.

**Keywords** Circularity problem · Epistemic elitism · Evidence insensitivity · Evidentialism · Inferential justification · Phenomenal conservatism · Phenomenal dogmatism · Phenomenal seemings · Presentational phenomenology · Skeptical worry

### 5.1 Introduction

Evidentialism in its broadest formulation is the view that normative facts about what one is justified in believing supervene on or are entailed by facts about one’s

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evidence, at least in the absence of defeaters (Conee and Feldman 2004; McCain 2014). More simply put: evidentialism is the view that only evidence (as opposed to e.g. pragmatic considerations) can be a good reason to believe. Evidentialism thus implies that no two individuals could possess the same evidence yet fail to be equally justified, if they possess the same defeaters. Suppose Alice spots a crocodile snatch a puppy and drag it under water in a gated community in Miami while visiting friends. The next day Alice talks to her friend John. John argues that there are no crocodiles in South Florida but only alligators. Alice objects to this claim, and when John asks her for evidence, she says ‘a crocodile snatched a puppy and dragged it under water in a gated community in Miami yesterday’. According to evidentialism, the fact that a crocodile snatched a puppy and dragged it under water in a gated community in Miami is evidence in Alice’s possession which entails that her belief that there are crocodiles in Miami is justified, at least in the absence of defeaters.<sup>1</sup>

A popular alternative to evidentialism is reliabilism about justification (Goldman 1979). Whether something is a reliable process or not, however, is an empirical question. So, reliabilism treats the property of being justified as a naturalistic property. This, arguably, disposes of the normative character of justification (Fumerton 1995). To see this, consider Moore’s open question argument (Moore 1903). Even if we could pin down all the natural properties of a given action, Moore argued, it would remain an open question whether that action is morally good or bad. Likewise, one might argue, even if we could uncover all the natural properties of a given belief-forming process, there would still be a question as to whether the belief-forming process is epistemically good or bad. Since evidentialism analyzes justification in terms of evidence (which ordinarily has been treated in non-naturalistic terms), one advantage of this position compared to reliabilism or other kinds of externalism is that it preserves the normative character of justification.

One challenge for the evidentialist is to provide an answer to the question of which propositions or mental states constitute evidence.<sup>2</sup> Taking this challenge as his starting point, Alvin Goldman (2011) has provided the following circularity objection to evidentialism: Because evidentialists analyze justification in terms of evidence, they need to provide us with a theory of which propositions or mental states count as evidence. If it turns out that they can only offer an account of evidence in terms of justification, then their analysis is circular. If, on the other hand, they take evidence to be a proposition or mental state that is a reliable indicator of truth, then their view is a version of reliabilism and the claimed virtue that justification is not to be cashed out in reliabilist terms is lost.

Goldman’s objection, as formulated, assumes that evidentialists are in the business of offering a conceptual analysis of justification. But an evidentialist might

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<sup>1</sup>Not all evidentialists construe evidence in terms of propositions. Some construe it in terms of mental states (see e.g. Conee and Feldman 2004; McCain 2014). When so construed, Alice’s evidence may be, e.g., her belief that a crocodile snatched a puppy and dragged it under water in a gated community in Miami yesterday.

<sup>2</sup>I shall here set aside a reading of the word ‘evidence’ according to which it refers to a particular object, as in ‘Don’t touch the knife. It’s evidence’.

reject this assumption and argue that their thesis simply is that justification is metaphysically grounded in evidence. This, however, leads to another challenge, viz. that of explaining what grounds evidence (Beddor 2015). When a person has evidence, what are the underlying facts that make this the case?

One way of avoiding both Goldman's original challenge and the modified version of the challenge is to treat evidence as a good reason. Let 'strong normative evidentialism' be the view that a belief is doxastically justified just if (i) the belief is (properly) based on evidence in the agent's possession, and (ii) the evidence constitutes a good reason for the belief.<sup>3</sup>

This position does not by itself overcome Goldman's challenge because we are now faced with the problem of explaining what counts as a good reason. This challenge, I will argue, can be met. I will argue that a particular version of phenomenal dogmatism, the view that experience can fully and immediately justify belief, can help us preserve evidentialism without circularity. I conclude by showing how this view also helps protect against the skeptical challenge to evidentialism.

## 5.2 Phenomenal Dogmatism

One way to respond to Goldman's challenge is to take the seemings (appearances/looks) to which experience ordinarily gives rise to play the role of basic (or non-derivative) evidence. If a seeming is a good reason for a belief, then the belief is (foundationally or non-inferentially) justified. I shall return to which seemings are good reasons for belief below. On the proposed view, if I come to believe that the tomato in front of me is red on the basis of my visual experience of the tomato, my basic evidence for this belief is that it seems to me that the tomato is red – or alternatively: that the tomato looks or appears red to me. This is the sort of evidence I would ordinarily cite in favor of my perceptual beliefs. If asked why I think the tomato is red, a natural response would be that it looks that way to me.

One might worry that seemings, even if they can be reasons to believe, are not strong reasons to believe (Scanlon 1998; Comesana and McGrath 2016). The main argument against seemings being strong reasons to believe is that one could have exactly the same seemings, even if the world were not as it in fact is. For example, if I were a brain in a vat, it might still seem to me that there is a red tomato in front of me, even though there is nothing red in front of me.

This worry, however, begs the question against evidentialism, as it assumes that two subjects could have exactly the same evidence, yet fail to be equally justified (e.g., because one subject is in a world that appears as it is, whereas the other is a brain in a vat.) This sort of worry thus seems to run afoul of what is also known

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<sup>3</sup>I here assume a standard distinction between propositional and doxastic justification. Propositional justification requires having good reasons for one's belief, whereas doxastic justification requires (properly) basing one's belief on the good reasons one possesses.

as ‘the new evil demon problem’ (Cohen 1984; Pollock 1984). As the aim of this paper is not to provide an argument for evidentialism but to offer a viable version of evidentialism that meets the circularity and skeptical challenges to standard forms of evidentialism, I shall set aside this concern.

Phenomenal dogmatism gives us one way to cash out the idea that seemings can serve as good reasons for our beliefs. Phenomenal dogmatism is the view that seemings (perhaps of a particular kind) immediately and wholly justify belief in the absence of defeaters (Pryor 2000; Huemer 2001; Tucker 2010; Brogaard 2013; Chudnoff 2013, 2014). We can articulate the view as follows.

*Phenomenal Dogmatism*

If you have a seeming  $s$  as of  $p$  being the case, then in the absence of defeaters,  $s$  wholly and fully justifies the belief that  $p$ .

We can say that even in the presence of defeaters, seemings provide *prima facie* justification for belief. It is just that when a defeater is present, the justification is defeated. There are two kinds of defeaters: undercutting defeaters and rebutting defeaters (Pollock 1984). An undercutting defeater is a belief that informs the believer that the seeming she has is inaccurate. If it seems to me that it is raining, then that seeming justifies, or is evidence for, the belief that it is raining. But if a reliable witness tells me that the appearance of rain is due to a sprinkler system installed on the rooftop of the building, and I believe the witness, then that undercuts the evidence for my belief. So, while the belief is *prima facie* justified by the seeming, it is not *ultima facie* justified. A rebutting defeater is a belief that is inconsistent with the belief for which a seeming provides *prima facie* justification. For example, if a reliable witness tells me that it is not raining, and I believe the witness, then the appearance of rain does not provide *ultima facie* justification for the belief that it is raining. A lot more could be said about what counts as a defeater.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this paper suffice it to say that in order for a belief that  $p$  to count as an undercutting or rebutting defeater of a seeming that  $q$ , the belief that  $p$  must psychologically prevent the subject from forming a belief that  $q$  on the basis of the seeming that  $q$ .

Although phenomenal dogmatism might hold for all types of nonsensory experience, I shall here restrict the view to sensory appearances and memory appearances. Phenomenal dogmatism about memory appearances will become relevant below when we consider inferential justification.

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<sup>4</sup>This exposition does not exhaust the question of what counts as a defeater. The question remains whether holding a belief that defeats a seeming suffices for that belief having the status of a defeater. One might think that the belief would need to be justified in order for it to serve as a defeater. But even if the belief needn't be justified in order for it to count as a defeater, a worry remains. If it seems to  $S$  that  $p$  but  $S$  believes that not- $p$ , why think that the belief overrides the seeming (qua justifier)? I shall set aside this worry here. (For discussion and a solution, see McCain 2016. McCain suggests that one seeming  $p$  is a defeater of another seeming  $q$  just when  $p$  is the best explanation of the phenomenon in question. On this view, explanations must be available to the subject. This requires at a minimum that the subject has the disposition to have the appropriate sort of seeming about the explanation when reflecting on her evidence).

A word about the basing relation is in order here. Some thinkers equate seemings and experiences (see Tucker 2013; Chudnoff and Didomenico 2015; Moretti 2015). In that case, the basing relation is eliminable. If, however, seemings are derived from experiences, then we need some characterization of the basing relation. Some thinkers may want to allow for the possibility that experiences can have representational content that does not flow from the experience's phenomenal character.<sup>5</sup> A good candidate to play the role of content that does not flow from the phenomenology of experience is singular content (see e.g. Chalmers 2004; Schellenberg 2014, 2016). For example, you might think that an experience  $e_1$  of a white cup  $c_1$  and an experience  $e_2$  of a visually indistinguishable white cup  $c_2$  have the same phenomenology but different representational contents. In the envisaged scenario,  $c_1$  is a constituent of the content of  $e_1$ , and  $c_2$  is a constituent of the content of  $e_2$ . So, even if  $e_1$  and  $e_2$  have the same phenomenology, they have different contents. As the cups are visually indistinguishable, this sort of view may give us incentive to distinguish between experiences and seemings. For example, it might be argued that the seemings associated with the cup-experiences have the same content, whereas the experiences do not. After all, if we didn't know better, the cups would appear identical to us.

To accommodate this sort of view, let us introduce a notion of non-singular content of experience. Call it the 'phenomenal content of experience'. The phenomenal content of experience, we can say, is that part of the content of experience that flows from the experience's phenomenology. Given these stipulations, we can take a seeming  $s$  to be (fully) based on an experience  $e$  just when  $s$  is exhausted constitutionally by the phenomenology and phenomenal content of  $e$ .<sup>6</sup>

Seemings or looks, of course, cannot serve as evidence for all (empirical) propositions. For example, I might infer that some tomatoes are red from my belief that the tomato in front of me is red. In this case, the seeming that the tomato in front of me is red is not an immediate justifier of the derived belief, and hence what the world seems like to me is not direct evidence for my belief (McCain 2016). We can, however, take evidence for inferential beliefs to be the content of those beliefs that are properly based on seemings.<sup>7</sup> Call this sort of evidence 'derived evidence'.

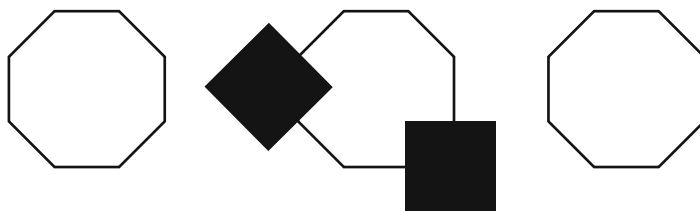
Phenomenal dogmatism is a form of foundationalism about justification. It should be contrasted with classical foundationalist views according to which experience or phenomenal seemings cannot provide immediate justification for belief (see e.g. McGrath 2016; Comesana and McGrath 2016). On these alternative foundationalist views, seemings can only provide mediate justification for belief.

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<sup>5</sup>I shall here assume a representational view of experience and seemings. For a defense of this sort of view, see Brogaard (2018).

<sup>6</sup>More precisely: a seeming  $p$  is properly based on an experience  $q$  just in case (i) the phenomenology and corresponding content of  $p$  is a subset of the phenomenology and corresponding content of  $q$ , and (ii)  $q$  has produced  $p$  exclusively as a result of a rule-based psychological (inferential) process.

<sup>7</sup>For a notion of proper basing with respect to belief that will suffice for our purposes, see McCain 2014.



**Fig. 5.1 Kanizsa amodal completion.** Despite the flanking cases of octagons, the occluded figure is not seen as a regular octagon. Pylyshyn (1999)

The fact that what's in front of me looks like a tomato can justify my belief that there is a tomato in front of me only when put together with background information about what tomatoes look like and the assumption that things are as they appear. Or to take another example: if it seems to you that it is raining (e.g., water is pouring down outside the window), this seeming can only justify your belief that it is raining *together with* your background information that when water is pouring down outside the window, it is normally raining, *and* your belief that things are normal.

Two disadvantages of this view immediately come to mind. First, this sort of view is prone to skeptical worries insofar as it raises the question of how these additional background beliefs are justified (see Fumerton 1995 for an argument for this). Phenomenal dogmatism avoids these worries (Brogaard 2016). I shall return to how the view circumvents these concerns below.

Second, the mediate-justification views fail to take into account that the visual system operates on the basis of past experience. As the brain matures and undergoes alterations in light of experience, it develops new perceptual capacities to recognize features and objects (Pylyshyn 1999). While these perceptual capacities rest on past experience, they work independently of beliefs or other cognate states regarding what things look like, sound like, taste like, etc. Consider the Kanizsa amodal completion illustration in Fig. 5.1.

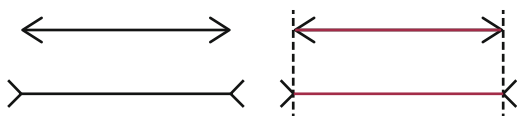
The occluded figure in the middle does not appear to have the same shape as the flanking octagons. The appearance that the middle figure has a different shape from the flanking octagons persists, even if we come to believe that it does indeed have the same shape (e.g. after temporarily removing the occluders). This appearance may well reflect the way our visual system has been shaped by past experience, especially during the maturation of the brain. But the fact that the middle figure appears the way it does is a result of a diachronic change to the visual system, not a result of standard cognitive inferences that rely on background information.

### 5.3 Epistemic Elitism

Given phenomenal dogmatism, Goldman's challenge becomes that of providing an answer to the question of which seemings can serve as immediate and full justifiers of our beliefs in the absence of defeaters. There are two answers to this question.



**Fig. 5.2 The Müller-Lyer illusion.** Even when you learn that the line segments on the left have the same length, they continue to appear as if they have different length



One is that all seemings can serve this role. The other is that only seemings that have a particular characteristic can play the part. Following Elijah Chudnoff (2016b), call the former view ‘epistemic egalitarianism’ and the latter ‘epistemic elitism’.<sup>8</sup> The two views can be articulated as follows<sup>9</sup>:

*Epistemic Egalitarianism*

If a seeming can immediately and fully justify believing that  $p$ , then  $p$  just needs to be part of its representational content.

*Epistemic Elitism*

If a seeming can immediately and fully justify believing that  $p$ , then  $p$  needs to meet some condition over and above being part of its representational content.

Elitism has the advantage over Egalitarianism that it explains what it is about seemings (or experiences) that make them immediate justifiers of beliefs.

In previous work, I have defended a version of Epistemic Elitism (e.g., Brogaard 2013). Immediate justifiers, I argued, are those seemings whose phenomenology ordinarily ensures that they will endure in the presence of information that the seemings are inaccurate (Brogaard 2018). Consider the Müller-Lyer illusion (Fig. 5.2):

In the the Müller-Lyer illusion (the figure on the left), your experience of the two line segments makes it visually appear as if the two line segments have different lengths. After measuring the two line segments (the figure on the right), we discover that they have the same length. However, even when we know that the line segments have the same length, the line segments in the initial figure continue to visually appear as if they have different lengths. It is in virtue of this evidence insensitivity that we have the inclination to believe that the lines have different lengths (absent defeaters). The reason we do not actually believe that they have different lengths is that we have a defeater (as shown in the figure on the right). Let’s call this constraint on the phenomenology of those seemings that can serve as evidence ‘evidence insensitivity’.<sup>10</sup>

Note that the notion of evidence insensitivity is to be analyzed in terms of the stability of the seeming that the experience upon which it is properly based generates

<sup>8</sup>Chudnoff formulates the two views in terms of experience rather than seemings. Nothing of substance hinges on this deviance.

<sup>9</sup>Huemer (2001) and Silins (2013) endorse forms of Egalitarianism. Pryor (2000), Brogaard (2013) and Chudnoff (2013, 2014) endorse forms of Elitism.

<sup>10</sup>Note that there is nothing circular about this constraint, as evidence insensitivity is insensitivity to a defeater.

in the subject and not in terms of some other seeming that is not properly based on the experience. If it were to seem to you that the two line segments in Fig. 5.2 had different lengths on the basis of verbal testimony, random guesswork or the work of an evil demon, then this seeming would not be properly (or fully) based on your visual experience and hence would not be doing any justificatory work. Suppose that you have an experience as of the two line segments on the left in Fig. 5.2 having the same length. Yet owing to verbal testimony, it comes to seem to you that the lines have different lengths. This sort of seeming would not be the kind of seeming that can serve as evidence for belief, because it is not properly grounded in your experience. Arguably, this sort of seeming would be a different kind of seeming, which could co-exist with the seeming that is properly based on your experience. We can call seemings that are properly based on experience ‘phenomenal seemings’, and the alternative kinds of seemings ‘epistemic seemings’ (Brogaard 2013). Unlike phenomenal seemings (characterized by their evidence insensitivity), epistemic seemings (characterized by their lack of evidence insensitivity) do not serve as immediate justifiers of belief and hence do not function as good (basic) reasons for belief.

It should be emphasized that evidence insensitivity is a subjective property of the phenomenology of seemings and not a dispositional property of seemings.<sup>11</sup> Suppose you have no defeater of the appearance that the line segments in the Müller-Lyer illusion on the left in Fig. 5.2 have equal length (imagine you are viewing the figure for the first time). Under normal circumstances, if you were to acquire a defeater (e.g., by being presented with the figure on the right in Fig. 5.2), it would still seem to you that the two line segments on the left have the same length. Let us imagine, however, that an evil demon is watching over you. So, if you were to acquire a defeater, then the demon would replace your actual seeming that the line segments have equal lengths with a seeming that they have different lengths. In this scenario, your actual seeming fails to retain its stability in the presence of a defeater owing to the counterfactual evil actions of a demon. What a demon would do in counterfactual circumstances, however, does not undermine the evidence insensitivity of your current seeming (after all, it’s phenomenology remains unchanged), and hence what this imaginary creature would do does not undermine your current seeming’s status as a good reason for your belief.

Because evidence insensitivity is a subjective property of the phenomenology of seemings, phenomenal dogmatism so construed is a version of strong access internalism – at least for beliefs based on seemings. Not only can a subject access her reasons for her perceptual beliefs (weak access), she can also, in principle, tell whether or not she is justified in believing what she does. Because external constraints cannot make a difference to whether a subject is justified in believing what she believes, the view implies that no two individuals could possess the same evidence yet fail to be equally justified (if they possess the same defeaters). The view thus satisfies the basic tenet of evidentialism.

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<sup>11</sup>Nor is evidence insensitivity a metacognitive feeling directed toward the seemings, as suggested by Chomanski and Chudnoff (2018) in their objection to this sort of view. It’s a property of the phenomenology of the seeming.

Given a seeming-based version of phenomenal dogmatism, the answer to Goldman's challenge is that (basic) evidence constitutes a good reason for a belief based on the available evidence just in case the evidence is a phenomenal seeming.

Phenomenal dogmatism, so construed, has a number of additional virtues besides the virtue that it provides an answer to Goldman's challenge to evidentialism. For example, it can be used to ward off traditional challenges to phenomenal dogmatism. I shall mention only one of these here, viz. the speckled hen problem (Chisholm 1942; Tucker 2010). Here is how Matthew McGrath formulates the problem for dogmatism:

When you look at the hen with exactly 48 clearly visible speckles, you aren't justified in believing it has 48 speckles, at least without counting. Nor do you seem to have *prima facie* justification that is somehow defeated. But each speckle is clearly visible and it might seem therefore that your experience represents the hen as 48-speckled. If this is right, we have a counterexample to the content-based account (2016: 5).

One could question whether the envisaged experience represents the hen as 48-speckled. It may be that all of the 48 speckles are represented by the experience, even if the property of being 48-speckled is not a constituent of the content of the experience. But let it be granted for argument's sake that the experience represents the hen as being 48-speckled. Even in that case, the experience is not associated with an evidence-insensitive seeming. A visual experience that the hen is 48-speckled would not make it phenomenally seem to any individual whose psychology is in the normal range that the hen has 48 speckles. So, if the experience represents the hen as 48-speckled, then this part of the experience does not make it phenomenally seem to the subject that the hen has 48 speckles.

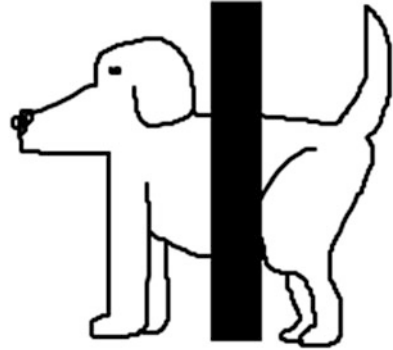
The seemings account of phenomenal dogmatism is not the only account that satisfies Elitism. Here I shall only look at one alternative, viz., the one defended by Chudnoff (2014, 2016a) and explain why it doesn't serve the evidentialist as well as the seemings account does.

On Chudnoff's version of phenomenal dogmatism, only experiences with presentational phenomenology can serve as immediate justifiers of belief. An experience that *p* has presentational phenomenology just when the experience makes it appear to the subject that she is aware of the truthmaker for *p*. Consider a case of an occluded dog (Fig. 5.3): Amodal completion ensures that our experience represents a complete dog behind an occluder as opposed to a dog that has no middle part. So, the experience of a dog has presentational phenomenology. Even though the experience represents a complete dog and hence represents a dog with a middle part, the part of the experience that represents the dog as having a middle part has no presentational phenomenology.

Although the notions of evidence insensitivity and presentational phenomenology are related, they come apart conceptually. Presentational phenomenology is an apparent awareness of a truthmaker for the content of one's experience, whereas evidence insensitivity is an apparent awareness of the epistemic robustness of one's experience. In principle, at least, two individuals could differ in their psychology in such a way that one individual has no apparent awareness of a truthmaker for

**Fig. 5.3 Occluded dog.**

Even though the occluded parts of the dog do not make an imprint on the retina, the visual system nonetheless generates a complete dog. This is also known as “amodal completion.” (This figure is borrowed from Elijah Chudnoff)



her experience but nonetheless has apparent awareness of epistemic robustness, or vice versa. This conceptual difference is unlikely to make any interesting difference in cases of low-level visual seemings or experiences. But it may well make a difference to which high-level visual experiences and non-visual experiences can play the role of immediate justifier of belief (see e.g. Brogaard 2017). For example, retrieved memory appearances may be evidence insensitive yet fail to make the subject seemingly aware of a truthmaker of their content. Suppose you retrieve a memory of Obama being the 44th President of the United States that is purely cognitive or semantic. That is to say, the memory does not come along with any memory appearances of how you acquired this memory (Harman 1986; Bernecker 2008). In this case, your memory may be evidence insensitive but it fails to have a presentational phenomenology insofar as there is no seeming awareness of a truthmaker for the content of the memory.

Even if your memory that Obama is the 44th President of the United States is accompanied by memory appearances pertaining to how you acquired the memory, your memory may not have presentational phenomenology. Suppose your memory consists in part of a retrieved image of you watching a documentary about a person named ‘Obama’ doing presidential stuff on television and the television displaying the text ‘Obama was the 44th President’. Assuming (reasonably) that the truthmaker for the proposition that Obama is the 44th President is not exhausted by what you were watching on television, this sort of memory appearance does not make you seem to be aware of a truthmaker for the proposition that Obama is the 44th President. So, your memory seeming does not have presentational phenomenology but it may nonetheless be evidence insensitive. So, phenomenal dogmatism construed in terms of evidence sensitivity fares better with respect to memory than phenomenal dogmatism construed in terms of presentational phenomenology. As we will see, this difference turns out to matter for whether phenomenal dogmatism can provide an adequate response to the skeptical worry about inferential justification. This is because the most natural reply to the skeptical worry about inferential justification relies on the view that memory seemings can serve as immediate and full justifiers for beliefs based on those seemings. I turn to this worry now.

## 5.4 The Skeptical Worry and Inferential Justification

I now turn to one of the most devastating worries for evidentialism and other forms of access internalism, viz., the skeptical problem. The skeptic argues that we do not have justification for our beliefs about the external world in two steps. The first step proceeds by showing that the basic, or non-inferential, evidence we claim to have in our possession for some claim  $p$  is equally good evidence for some alternative skeptical hypothesis  $q$ . For example, your perceptual evidence for thinking that the universe started billions of years ago is equally good evidence for the hypothesis that it started 5 min ago. If a deity had created the universe 5 min ago with its appearances of age and human beings rife with all their memories, then things would phenomenally seem exactly as they actually do. As we have the same basic evidence in the actual world and the skeptical scenario, we do not have non-inferential evidence for our beliefs about the past in the actual scenario. It follows that we do not have any non-inferentially justified beliefs about the past. This sort of skeptical threat with respect to the past can be extended to all our non-inferentially justified external world beliefs. For example, your perceptual evidence for your non-inferentially justified beliefs about the external world is the same regardless of whether or not you are subject to the evil-doing of a Cartesian demon who guarantees that none of your beliefs about the external world are true. So, if we have evidence for our beliefs about the external world, that evidence is non-basic or inferential. This is the first part of the standard skeptical argument.

Evidentialism (and phenomenal dogmatism) has a simple reply to this argument. It runs as follows. The main reason for thinking that we cannot be justified in the skeptical scenario is that all of our perceptual evidence is inaccurate. Perceptual evidence thus fails to be a reliable indicator of truth in the skeptical scenario. The evidentialist, however, will maintain that this argument rests on externalist considerations viz., the idea that evidence must be reliable. But this is exactly what the evidentialist denies. She will simply reply to the skeptic that the perceptual evidence that justifies us in holding beliefs about the external world in the actual world is equally good evidence for beliefs about the external world in the skeptical scenario. It's just that our beliefs fail to amount to knowledge in the skeptical scenario.

The real challenge emerges once we turn to inferential justification. Non-inferential justification cannot be the only good reasons or evidence we have for belief. Sometimes beliefs justify other beliefs that are properly based on those beliefs (McCain 2014, 2016).<sup>12</sup> The skeptic, however, has an argument against

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<sup>12</sup>One might hold that the basing relation is always inferential, consisting in either deductive, inductive or abductive inference. On this view, a belief that some tomatoes are red that is based on a belief that the tomato in front of me is red might be the result of deductive inference. A belief that the ravens we will spot this afternoon will be black that is based on a belief that all the ravens we have observed in the past have been black may be the result of inductive inference. Finally, a belief that it will rain that is based on a belief that there are dark clouds outside may be the result of abductive inference (inference to the best explanation). As noted above, I will not be able to

the thought that we can have inferential justification for our beliefs. It rests on the following principle (Fumerton 1995)<sup>13</sup>:

*Principle of Inferential Justification (PIJ)*

To be justified in believing one proposition  $p$  on the basis of another proposition  $q$ , one must be (1) justified in believing  $q$  and (2) justified in believing that  $q$  makes  $p$  probable.

PIJ has a high degree of prima facie plausibility. Consider the belief that water is pouring down outside the window ( $p$ ) and the belief that it's raining ( $q$ ). In order for the belief that  $p$  to justify the belief that  $q$ , PIJ states that you must be justified in believing  $p$ , and be justified in believing that  $p$  makes  $q$  probable.

The skeptic about the external world, however, will challenge the non-skeptic to explain how we come to have evidence for the claim that water pouring down outside the window makes it probable that it is raining.

In response, the non-skeptic might cite past correlations between our experiences of water pouring down outside the window and our experiences of rain. The skeptic, however, will now invoke the first clause of PIJ to shed doubt on the soundness of this sort of inductive argument.

She will point out that in order to be justified in believing that there are such correlations, we would need to have evidence for these correlations that is independent of experience. But we have no such experience-independent access to the physical world. So, we have no justification for our belief that there is a constant conjunction of water pouring down outside the window and rain.

The phenomenal dogmatist, however, has a way of responding to the skeptic's argument against inferentially justified beliefs. Consider a case in which it phenomenally seems to me that there are dark clouds in the sky. This seeming confers immediate justification on my belief that there are dark clouds in the sky. On the basis of this belief I infer that it is going to rain. According to PIJ, if I am justified in believing that it is going to rain, then I must also be justified in believing that the dark clouds in the sky make rain likely to occur.

The difficulty here is to pinpoint what the nature of my justification is for believing that dark clouds in the sky make rain likely.

It may seem that the dogmatist could say that her justification for the probability claim is itself inferentially based on conjoint occurrences of dark clouds and rain in the past. But saying this causes trouble. For, according to PIJ, in order to account for how we can be justified in believing the probability claim (viz., that dark clouds make rain likely), we would need to provide an account of our justification for believing that multiple instances of conjunction make the probability claim likely. That is, we would need to account for the following instance of the second clause of PIJ:

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provide an account of the basing relation for beliefs based on other beliefs in this paper, however. For a notion that will suffice for our purposes here, see McCain 2014.

<sup>13</sup>PIJ arguably does not present a problem for beliefs that are (accurately) deductively inferred from other beliefs. If you infer that some tomatoes are red on the basis of your belief that the tomato in front of you is red by following the rule of existential generalization, then your belief that the base makes the inferred belief probable (probability = 1) may be justified in virtue of you having an intellectual seeming that this rule is valid.

We are justified in believing that a constant conjunction of dark clouds and rain makes it probable that (dark clouds make rain probable).

We quickly face either a vicious circle or vicious regress. The phenomenal dogmatist who takes phenomenal seemings to be immediate justifiers of belief has an alternative way of responding, however. It phenomenally seems to me that in the past there has been a constant conjunction of dark clouds and rain. This seeming is a memory-based seeming that confers *prima facie* justification on the belief that dark clouds make rain likely. It may seem that I could not have a memory-based seeming of this sort without having performed an inference from individual instances of dark clouds conjoined with rain. This, however, is not the case. The first time I observe dark clouds and rain, the two experiences are stored separately in memory. When these observations are repeated, I form a memory association between dark clouds and rain. This is quite similar to the memory association you may have formed between the smell of lavender and your childhood friend, or the memory association that a dog may have formed between the sound of a bell and feeding. These memory associations are formed when the brain generates new synaptic connections between two types of stored information. If information about dark clouds and information about rain are neurally connected, then there is no more of an inference involved in associating dark clouds and rain than there is in associating the sound of a bell and feeding.

Let us return now to PIJ. To be justified in believing that it will rain on the basis of a belief about dark clouds, one must be (1) justified in believing that there are dark clouds, and (2) justified in believing that dark clouds makes rain likely. According to phenomenal dogmatism of the sort defended here, the belief about current dark clouds is, as we can imagine, justified by the visual seeming of dark clouds outside. The belief that dark clouds make rain probable, by contrast, is justified by the memory seeming that there is a constant conjunction between dark clouds and rain. It seems, then, that a version of phenomenal dogmatism that can accommodate memory seemings can meet the skeptical challenge with respect to both non-inferential and inferential justification.

Since a version of phenomenal dogmatism that takes immediate justifiers to be experiences with a presentational phenomenology cannot easily accommodate memory seemings, this form of phenomenal dogmatism does not seem to be able to avoid the skeptical problem about inferential justification. The same goes for classic foundationalist views, according to which experience can only justify belief together with background information (e.g. McGrath 2016). In fact, classical foundationalism is worse off than the various forms of phenomenal dogmatism, as all cases of justification turn into cases of inferential justification. Take the case where an apple in front of you looks red. According to the classical foundationalist, this seeming can justify your belief that the apple in front of you is red only in conjunction with background information such as information about what apples look like. But if the classical foundationalist adopts PIJ, which seems a natural thing for any internalist to do, then she will need to explain what justifies the belief that a thing looking thus-and-so makes it more likely that it is an apple than not.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Evidentialism faces two serious worries. One is the circularity problem raised by Alvin Goldman (2011). The problem is that of explaining what it is about evidence that makes it justify belief when it does. If evidentialists must appeal to justification to provide this sort of explanation, then they encounter a vicious circularity. If they appeal to the likelihood that the belief is true when the belief is based on evidence, then they are implicitly invoking reliability considerations, which takes away the main reasons for endorsing evidentialism in the first place.

Another worry facing evidentialism is that of accounting for inferential justification. Arguably, if a belief that  $p$  is (properly) based on a belief that  $q$ , the belief that  $q$  can serve as a justifier of the belief that  $p$  only if the subject believes (or has the information) that  $q$  makes  $p$  likely. The problem for the evidentialist is to explain what justifies the belief that  $q$  makes  $p$  likely.

I have argued that evidentialism can bypass these two worries by taking evidence to be constituted by seemings properly based on experiences. Seemings are good reasons for beliefs, I argued, when they are stable in the presence of defeaters in virtue of their phenomenology. This sort of view answers the circularity problem by providing an answer to the question of what kinds of evidence justify belief. It furthermore provides an answer to the question of what justifies beliefs that one phenomenon makes another likely. These types of beliefs, I argued, are memory-based. They are beliefs to the effect that one phenomenon typically is followed by a second phenomenon. What justifies them are memory seemings. On the view defended, memory seemings of the right kind can immediately and fully justify memory beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

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**Part II**  
**Understanding Evidentialism**

## Chapter 6

# Between Belief and Disbelief



Richard Feldman and Earl Conee

**Abstract** Sometimes instead of believing or disbelieving a proposition one does not take a stand on it. This essay explores that middle ground. We begin by distinguishing a variety of different attitudes or cognitive relations one might have to a proposition that one does not believe or disbelieve. We argue that identifying all of them as suspending judgment or withholding judgment neglects important differences. We then discuss epistemic evaluations of these attitudes and relations. Finally, we examine the implications of our findings for the attitudes that a philosopher might take toward contentious philosophical theses. Evidentialism, our preferred view of epistemic justification, is helpful in clarifying the issues and addressing the problems.

**Keywords** Counterbalanced evidence · Justified inconsistent beliefs · Nearly counterbalanced evidence · Suspension of judgment · Withholding · Evidentialism

Sometimes instead of believing or disbelieving a proposition one does not take a stand on it. This essay explores that middle ground. We begin by distinguishing a variety of different attitudes or cognitive relations one might have to a proposition that one does not believe or disbelieve. We argue that identifying all of them as suspending judgment or withholding judgment neglects important differences. We then discuss epistemic evaluations of these attitudes and relations. Finally, we examine the implications of our findings for the attitudes that a philosopher might take toward contentious philosophical theses. Evidentialism, our preferred view of epistemic justification, is helpful in clarifying the issues and addressing the problems.

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## 6.1 The Middle Ground

As Jane Friedman has noted in a series of papers about suspension of judgment, there are significant differences among the cases in which one fails to believe or disbelieve a proposition.<sup>1</sup> In this section we present several examples of cases without belief or disbelief that we think warrant scrutiny. We also critically examine Friedman's account of suspended judgment.

- (a) *Propositions one does not grasp.* If one does not comprehend a proposition, then one neither believes nor disbelieves it. Nor is one able to suspend judgment on it. Suspension of judgment is restricted to propositions that one is able to consider.
- (b) *Considered propositions about which one's evidence is counterbalanced.* If a coin one knows to be fair is about to be tossed, one knows that the chances that the coin will be heads are the same as that it will not be heads. One may intentionally use this equality of evidence to suspend judgment about the outcome of the toss.
- (c) *Propositions one sets aside, possibly for later exploration.* There are several varieties of this sort of setting aside that should be distinguished. To appreciate them, consider what might happen when a proposition is brought up in discussion. We'll use a simple example in which someone mentions (B), the proposition that a certain acquaintance's new car is blue. Here are variations that will be discussed.
  - (c1) One knows that the car is either blue or black, and dimly recalls that the acquaintance previously said something about her preferences for car colors but can't recall at the time what she said. If the topic is of interest, then one might not make a judgment at the time about (B), setting it aside as something to think about later.
  - (c2) The circumstances are as in (c1), but one does not care at all about the car's color. In this case, one might fail to believe or disbelieve (B) and set it aside permanently.
  - (c3) One has a dim recollection that the car owner expressed a mild preference for blue cars. Thus, the evidence that comes to mind slightly supports (B). Still, if one regards the question of (B)'s truth as an important one, then one might not form a judgment at the time, waiting until more evidence comes in. One does not form a belief because one's evidence on a question of significance is too nearly counterbalanced.
  - (c4) We often have relevant evidence that is less manifest to us than in the (c3) sort of case. It might be that one has no specific information about the car or the acquaintance's color preferences. One forms no belief about the car's color. Notably, however, one usually does have some general information bearing on such cases. For instance, one might well know that most cars are not blue. This seems to be evidence against (B).

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<sup>1</sup>See her (2013a, b, c), and (2017).

Finally, here is a somewhat different basis for setting aside a proposition.

(c5) The case concerns a question that is easy for one to answer by thinking for a few moments, but you lack all interest in it. In a conversation that one happens to overhear, someone raises the question of whether or not Syracuse is north of Oklahoma City. One has enough familiarity with the US to easily imagine a moderately detailed US map. Almost as soon as one did so, one would locate Syracuse north of Oklahoma City. But you are not interested at all and you don't bother to do this. One makes no attempt to answer the question.

The phrase “suspension of judgment” never applies to the (a) cases, the ungrasped propositions, since the phrase implies having some cognitive engagement with the proposition. We note, however, that one can have a way to refer to propositions one does not grasp, e.g., “the thing the physicists are debating”. Perhaps that is sufficient to enable one to suspend judgment about the debated proposition. Or perhaps that relation is insufficient for suspending judgment, and it rather enables one to suspend judgment on another proposition with content that is partially expressed by “the thing the physicists are debating.” In any event, as long as one cannot suspend judgment in cases in which one lacks even this indirect relation to a proposition, the middle ground between belief and disbelief includes more than suspension of judgment.

We take it to be best to include cases (b) and (c1) – (c5) as cases of suspension of judgment. Examples like (c4) and (c5) raise epistemological issues. In case (c4) the stored background knowledge that most cars are not blue might seem to justify disbelieving (B) and any other color attributions that are also unlikely. Yet adopting those beliefs rather than forming no belief seems unreasonable in some way. In case (c5) one suspends judgment on the question of whether or not Syracuse is north of Oklahoma City. Suspension of judgment seems initially both to be justified by one's state of mind and also to be unjustified according to evidentialism, in light of the telling evidence one has that the proposition is true. So these sorts of cases requires further attention. We examine them in Sect. 6.2 below.

We turn now to Friedman's view of suspension of judgment. Her view has it that suspension is a certain doxastic attitude. Roughly, in her view suspending judgment on whether P is true is equivalent to having an openness to inquire as to whether P is true (2017, 307). She also describes the attitude as being in an “inquiring state of mind” concerning P, by which she means that one has an aim or goal to determine whether P is true (2017, 308).

We think that such a state of mind is neither necessary nor sufficient for suspended judgment. Familiar cases show that aiming to determine whether a proposition is true is not sufficient for suspending judgment about it. Upon completing one's tax returns one might believe fairly confidently that a small refund is due. However, one might nevertheless decide to double check or to ask another person to review the return, given the potential consequences of filing an erroneous return. Hence, one believes that one will get a refund but one is also in an inquiring state of mind, at least in the sense that one seeks additional information on the topic. In general, one can actively seek to alleviate residual doubts about things one does

believe. This is especially common when the beliefs concern matters with important practical consequences.

Cases of lack of interest such as (c2) illustrate that an inquiring state of mind is not necessary for suspending judgment. Although it is true that in that case that one is *open* to getting more information on the topic, one is not *aiming* to get that information. If an inquiring state of mind is merely being open to receiving information, then such a state is virtually unavoidable. One generally can't help receiving information that comes along. We have this sort of openness even concerning propositions about which we have settled beliefs and are justified in thinking that we will never receive new evidence. For example, that might be the epistemic status for you of a proposition asserting the name of someone who you met briefly while you were alone in a distant country many years ago. You believe that the name was "Max" and you are not at all inclined to pursue the question. You do not plan any sort of inquiry or anticipate receiving any new information about the name. Still, your mind is not closed to receiving further information. Thus, this openness seems to have nothing to do with suspending judgment in particular.

Certain cases involving counterbalanced evidence provide an additional reason to think that one can suspend judgment about a proposition without being at all inclined to inquire further about it. Suppose that you have perfectly counterbalanced evidence concerning a proposition such as (C), the proposition asserting that the next landing of a quarter flipped somewhere in the US will be heads up. You therefore suspend judgment on (C). It is clear to you that it would be at best a thorough waste of time to look into that proposition's truth value in any way. It is also clear to you that adopting an attitude of leaving open inquiry into (C) would be at best a pointless exercise of your capacity for witting open-mindedness. Furthermore, any active pursuit of inquiry concerning (C) would be practically unjustified for you. Yet if you do consider (C), then you might just "leave it up in the air," that is, suspend judgment on (C), while simply lacking any inquiring inclination along the lines Friedman describes.

Having made these distinctions concerning cases involving neither belief nor disbelief, we turn to addressing more extensively some epistemic questions about the middle ground.

## 6.2 The Epistemology of the Middle Ground

Our view about epistemic justification is evidentialism, according to which justification is entirely a matter of evidence. We have formulated evidentialism as follows:

- (E.) Doxastic attitude D toward proposition p is epistemically justified for S at t if and only if having D toward p fits the evidence S has at t. (1985, 15)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>In that work this formulation of evidentialism was referred to as "EJ".

(E) is not explicit about when suspension of judgement is justified. The complexity of the middle ground makes it worthy of a more careful examination from an evidentialist perspective.

### 6.2.1 *Nearly Counterbalanced Evidence*

Evidentialism is a flexible doctrine, capable of elucidation in various ways. In addition to (E) we have stated the view as follows:

- (EC) Believing is the justified attitude when the person's evidence on balance supports a proposition, disbelieving the justified attitude when the person's evidence on balance supports the negation of a proposition, and suspension of judgment is the justified attitude when the person's evidence on balance supports neither a proposition nor its negation. (2004, 102)

(EC) differs from (E) in ways that bear on suspension of judgment. (E) leaves open which doxastic attitudes are justified. (EC) mentions belief, disbelief, suspension of judgment, and no others. If "degrees of belief" are also justified doxastic attitudes, then this is not a trivial difference. (We discuss degrees of belief briefly later in this section.) More specifically concerning the middle ground, the difference between (E) and (EC) is also significant if taking no attitude differs from suspending judgment. As we suggested above, "suspension of judgment," when most carefully understood, seems to require that any suspended proposition is grasped. Suppose that one does not grasp P and one's evidence supports neither P nor its negation. (E) requires taking a doxastic attitude toward P only if the attitude fits the evidence. (E) allows that suspension of judgment on P does not fit one's evidence. (E) thus allows that no doxastic attitude toward P is justified because none of them is justified when one's evidence does not include anything that permits grasping P. In contrast, just because one's evidence supports neither P nor its negation (EC) implies that one's suspending judgment on P is justified, despite one's not grasping P. This seems incorrect unless "suspension of judgment" is understood in a broad way that includes taking no attitude. That broad understanding is how we were thinking about (EC) when we first proposed it. But now that we are focused on the middle ground, it is worth noting this difference between (E) and (EC) concerning the distinction between suspending judgment and taking no attitude toward the proposition. (E) has the advantage of being more definitely neutral about this than is (EC). This is a place where neutrality seems preferable for maximum plausibility. ((EC) does have a conceptual advantage. (E) relies on the none-too-transparent notion of epistemic fittingness while (EC) does not invoke that notion.)

On the most natural readings of (E) and (EC), (E) leaves open another option that (EC) excludes. It is consistent with (E) that belief and disbelief are the fitting attitudes only when the evidence possessed supports one of those attitudes to some specified degree. At one extreme, belief and disbelief fit only with having conclusive evidence, that is, evidence sufficient for meeting the justification condition on

knowledge. At the other extreme, belief fits having evidence that minimally supports a proposition, while disbelief fits having evidence that minimally supports the negation of the proposition. (E) also allows an evidentialist to take a more moderate position according to which belief or disbelief requires more than a minimal balance of evidence. (EC), in contrast, implies that even slight support is sufficient to make belief justified. (EC) thus affirms the second of the extreme views just described.

Although we think that the flexibility of (E) is a valuable asset of evidentialism as a general approach, we endorse the extreme implication of (EC). We endorse the view that belief or disbelief is the fitting attitude whenever the evidence is not counterbalanced.<sup>3</sup>

Now we will argue for this position. Our argument begins with some general considerations about believing, withholding, and evidential support. Believing a proposition is assenting to the proposition. The assent need not be intentional, or even conscious. Belief can be an attribution of truth to the proposition. But it need not employ a concept of truth. Someone's attitude toward a proposition is belief just when the attitude is inwardly accepting it as true or otherwise assenting to it. The attitude must be genuine acceptance or assent; merely affirming it to oneself is not belief. One might inwardly affirm a proposition in a failing effort to get oneself to believe it. In contrast, whatever else withholding or suspending judgment on a proposition is, it requires *not* assenting to the proposition.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>It might seem that one's evidence could favor a proposition that one is currently unable to grasp. Yet one cannot take any attitude toward such a proposition. In light of that inability it might seem doubtful that belief is justified merely by having supporting evidence. In our view this support cannot occur. Part of any evidence that supports or opposes a proposition for anyone is the content of the proposition. So the person must grasp the proposition to have such evidence.

<sup>4</sup>Friedman denies this requirement. She holds that suspending judgment on a proposition is an attitude that is compatible with both believing the proposition and knowing it (2017). Her view as we understand it is that suspending judgment on a proposition is much like wondering whether the proposition is true or being inclined to inquire into its truth. We concur that one can have attitudes like that while believing. For a common sort of example, one can believe a fairly likely proposition while having some such interest in whether it is really true. We do not see, however, that any such attitude toward a proposition's truth-value is best counted as a suspension of judgment on the proposition. Friedman argues (Sect. 6.3) that inquiring entails suspending judgment. The argument seems unsuccessful. The argument addresses the complaint that her view allows a strange possibility: inquiring while knowing. The response Friedman gives is that although this is possible, it violates an epistemic norm to the effect that one ought not to inquire into P if one knows P. Friedman suggests that the explanation of why this norm holds includes that inquiring implies suspending judgment. She offers this explanatory function as a reason to accept that inquiring implies suspending judgment. But inquiring's purported implication of suspending judgment would not explain the negative character of the evaluations of the norm. Why is both knowing and inquiring something one ought *not* to do? The rest of the explanation would have to cite something that is always bad about the combination of knowing and inquiring. Friedman does not complete the explanation. We do not think that it could be done. The compossibility of knowing and inquiring makes available objections to the norm. One might have good reason to inquire while knowing (and thus to suspend while knowing if suspending were entailed by inquiring). For example, one might inquire further into a known proposition's truth in order to gain greater confidence, or one might inquire in order to enable one to know that one knows. In any event, suspending as we understand



Evidence that someone has for a proposition is a mentally available indication to the person that the proposition is true. When a proposition is on someone's mind and the person considers evidence for it, the evidence does this indicating to the person consciously. This evidential role can be conveyed by metaphors such as "siding with the correctness of the proposition" and "pointing to its truth." The doxastic attitude that goes along with the indication, the attitude that is "on the same side as the evidence," is accepting the proposition. Thus, there is a close affinity between the indicating by evidence of a proposition's truth and the acceptance of the proposition that is believing it. This affinity makes believing an evidentially supported proposition the attitude that is properly responsive to the evidential support for it. Describing this correctly aligned relationship in a few words we can say that belief fits the evidence. In a few other words we can say that the evidence justifies belief.

The meaning of "justify" offers some encouragement for these ideas. The word "justify" in its earliest English use expressed doing justice (Online Etymology Dictionary <https://www.etymonline.com/word/justify>). In our understanding of the word a trace of that meaning remains. The attitude that "does epistemic justice to" evidence indicating the truth of a proposition is accepting the proposition. The word "justify" also has the sense of placing in a linear alignment, though this sense is mostly limited to typesetting uses. Belief is the attitude that "epistemically lines up with" support by evidence.

We have reached the crucial point for our defense of the view that belief is the attitude that is justified by even slightly supporting evidence. The point is that whatever the strength of the support, the claims just made are true about belief fitting supporting evidence (and "doing justice to" supporting evidence and "being in alignment" with it). However slightly a person's evidence supports the proposition, it is indicative to the person that the proposition is true. Barely indicating truth is still indicating truth. Believing fits with this indication; withholding judgment does not. Thus, believing and not withholding is the attitude justified by minimal evidential support.

It might help to allay any lingering doubt about this minimal ground for justified belief for us to add a comment about strength of conviction. A person's strength of conviction is a specific attitude in a range of attitudes that vary in intensity. Each of them can be justified by fitting the evidence that the person has. We think that anyone who has some strength of conviction in a proposition both believes the proposition and has some confidence in the truth of the belief. But it may be that believing itself comes in degrees, so that having some stronger conviction is the same as having some higher degree of belief. In any case, the strength of conviction that does justice

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it clearly entails not believing. Believing is judging. If one believes a proposition, then one judges it in an affirmative way. It follows that one has not suspended judgment or withheld judgment. One can do something that is similar to suspending. One can refrain from using the belief in one's investigation, as though one does not have the belief, in order not to rely on it in the inquiry. But if that is what one does with the proposition, then during the inquiry one believes it. The judgment has been made, not suspended.

to some level of evidential support and aligns with it is the strength that matches the level of support. So although believing a proposition fits slightly supporting evidence, having some weak conviction is the fitting strength of conviction.

It is also worth noting here that our view about when belief is justified does not commit us to any view about the appropriateness of acting on beliefs for which only a minimal degree of conviction is justified. If anything of much value to one turns on an action, and one's evidence slightly favors the proposition that the action will have beneficial consequences, one is justified in believing that it will have those consequences. But one might also be wise, if the circumstances permit, to delay acting on that belief, at least until more evidence becomes available. To take up a different kind of case, one might be wise to act in a way that one is only slightly justified in believing is very unlikely to have some beneficial outcome, if the unlikely outcome is sufficiently valuable and otherwise unavailable. Our view that belief on the basis of nearly counterbalanced supporting evidence is epistemically justified does not conflict with the widely varying practical rationality of making choices concerning the proposition.

### 6.2.2 *The (c4) Cases*

Our view that beliefs are justified when one's evidence provides slight support has implications for cases in category (c4), such as the example about the unknown car color. Let's consider a case in which you will consider a case in which you know that an acquaintance's car is blue, red, or black. We assume that it is clear to you that the rest of your relevant evidence makes each of the three possibilities equally likely for you. So your balance of evidence supports each of these propositions:

- P1. The car is blue, red, or black.
- P2. The car is not blue.
- P3. The car is not red.
- P4. The car is not black.

Suppose that you reflect on these propositions sufficiently for you to know that the following proposition is true:

- P5. It is impossible for P1, P2, P3, and P4 all to be true.

We think that you have justification to believe any proposition supported even slightly by the balance of your evidence. Thus we are committed to the consequence that you have justification for believing each of P1–P5 despite your knowing of the inconsistency of P1–P4. Is this problematic?

We think not. One sort of concern about this commitment can be alleviated by separating out some practical considerations. Here is the concern. It is plausible that under typical circumstances, if you had the evidence just described about P1–P5, then there would be something unreasonable about your believing one or more of P2–P4. After all, for you there is a 1/3 chance that the car is the color that the belief

denies. So making an error in each of the three beliefs is much more than a remote possibility for you. Also, you do not stand to gain anything of practical value by believing one or more of P2–P4. And further, by believing all three you know that you are bound to be mistaken about one of them.<sup>5</sup> Not believing any of them seems cost-free to you. So it seems that it would be more reasonable for you to withhold judgment on P2–P4 than for you to believe any of them.

One way in which it is unreasonable to believe one or more of P2–P4 is the same as a way in which it is unreasonable for you to believe the great majority of propositions that are fairly probable on your evidence. If the believing takes a bit of time or effort, or it uses up a bit of your intellectual resources, then the believing has a slight cost to you with no compensating benefit. You slightly waste your effort or slightly clutter your mind. Believing a justified proposition about which you have no concern, interest or duty is not worth taking any trouble at all. In the present case, even supposing that you are interested in what color the car is, you need not be interested in what colors the car is not, and typically you would not be interested in that. If so, then P2–P4 hold no interest for you. Typically, you would have no other sort of practical gain available by believing any of P2–P4. If so, then it would not be worth troubling yourself in the least to believe any of them. In fact, if you have some awareness of the cost without gain, then it would be slightly unreasonable on practical grounds to believe any of them.

Here is another sort of practical ground not to believe any of P2–P4. You might have reason to think that you will find out the car's color. You might also have reason to think that adopting the false one of P2–P4 now could confuse you later, perhaps because you have evidence that an inclination to recall the false belief might linger at some later time long after you found out the truth. If so, then you have that potential confusion as a good practical reason not to believe any of P2–P4.<sup>6</sup>

This is all compatible with our view that belief in them is epistemically justified. Believing each of P2–P4 would be having three modestly justified beliefs. The propositions are not nearly well enough justified to be known. The epistemic status of a proposition as one that someone is justified in believing is, in our view, a fact about what attitude fits with the person's available evidence. It is not a fact that implies that the person gains any knowledge, benefit, or satisfaction.

It might be thought that if we were right that P2–P4 are epistemically justified for you, then you would have some epistemic duty to believe them. So you would have a duty to believe things that are jointly inconsistent with something you know. That seems problematic. But we hold that an attitude's being epistemically justified does not imply having any sort of duty or obligation to take the attitude. The closest fact about duty or obligation is that the attitude is obligatory *in order to have a justified*

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<sup>5</sup>On the general possibility of justified inconsistent beliefs, see Foley (1979).

<sup>6</sup>If your suspending judgment on P2–P4 under the circumstances is taken to be anything more positive than your not adopting an attitude toward P2–P4 – in particular, if suspending is anything like your also having an inquiring frame of mind about them, then your meeting that further condition may be unreasonable and not worthwhile for you, for the same reasons that your believing may be unreasonable and not worthwhile.

*attitude*. It is quite generally true that having justification for something does not imply having a duty to do it. This allows that there can be non-epistemic duties to have justified attitudes. These duties can result from making commitments to inquiry or observation as part of one's job or in some communal role. They can result from being subject to rules that impose the duties, as when some lawful authority requires them. These are moral, social, or legal duties. But people have no general duty, apart from such special circumstances, to hold the epistemically justified attitudes. Your refraining from believing the justified P2–P4 implies no failure of obligation.

### **6.2.3 *Puzzles About the Evidence One Has***

Some cases like (c1), (c2), and (c5) raise challenging questions about stored evidence. At the time a proposition is called to mind, previously learned information may fail to come to mind. Even if one thinks about the topic for a while, some of this information may not be recalled. The information may also fail to influence one's thoughts in any non-conscious way. Yet, it could be that with some appropriate prompting it would come to mind. A question that arises, then, is whether this sort of stored but unretrieved information is part of the evidence one has. It's clear that, in some sense, it is information one "has". But what is the best evidentialist position on the bearing such information has for the justification of beliefs?

It surely is an intellectually acceptable practice to set aside propositions about which one has no conscious evidence one way or the other, whether because of lack of interest or lack of time to consider them, even if one has relevant stored information that has not come to mind. On a very restrictive view about the relevant evidence for epistemic evaluation, a view according to which only information currently before one's mind is included in the relevant body of evidence, our evidentialism about how evidence bears on justified suspension implies that in such cases suspending judgment is the justified attitude. A more inclusive view of the relevant evidence, a view that includes some stored but unretrieved information, would yield different results in cases in which that stored evidence points in one direction or the other.

The very restrictive view risks rendering unjustified attitudes that seem to be justified. For example, when propositions reporting familiar historical facts are mentioned often one immediately accepts them. Such beliefs seem justified, even if one does not call to mind supporting evidence that one could retrieve with relative ease. (Of course, it's possible that the memorial sense of familiarity associated with the proposition is itself supporting evidence. We will not rely on that idea here, although we believe that it does have merit.)

The other extreme view risks making the epistemic status of attitudes dependent upon evidence provided by deeply buried information that one could not, under any realistic scenarios, call to mind. For example, one might have stored and nearly inaccessible information about highly improbable childhood experiences. One's readily accessible evidence goes against propositions asserting that one had the

experiences, and believing that they did not occur seems well-justified. Yet the most inclusive view about the evidence one has would imply that one is justified in believing that one had those experiences if even if the memories would be retrieved only in some highly unusual circumstances.

Each of the extreme views seems problematic, yet it's hard to find a reasonable moderate position. We think that the mental evidence that is available to someone, the evidence that the person has, is what justifies doxastic attitudes. But what can be reasonably regarded as the mental evidence that is "available" to someone, or "had" by the person, varies considerably. No one specific accessibility relation is uniquely correct. The version of evidentialism that best tracks considered judgments must allow some such variation. A simpler moderate evidentialist view would rely on just one sort of "availability." For example, it could be stipulated that the "available" evidence is the relevant evidence that the person is considering or can recall in 10 s without external prompting. But any version of evidentialism with some such stipulation would be partly arbitrary and revisionary. It seems best to us to take the "available" evidence, the evidence that is "had," to be vague and to have various reasonable specifications.<sup>7</sup> We think that in the difficult cases of what the "available" relevant evidence is, or what relevant evidence the person then "has", it is difficult to discern what is epistemically justified. This pairing of vagueness or indeterminacy between what evidence is available and what belief is justified supports evidentialism about what justifies.

In (c5) cases where quite easily recalled evidence seems decisive, the vagueness does not make any trouble. It is difficult to deny that justifying evidence is available. In the (c5) geography example, you have only to think briefly about whether Syracuse is north of Oklahoma City to be aware of excellent reason to think that it is. So it seems that according to evidentialism this proposition is justified for you. Yet you have not done that thinking. Simply to believe the proposition with no further thought would yield an unjustified belief. Thus, unless you do the thinking, then it seems that, contrary to evidentialism, withholding judgment would be more reasonable.

We have two responses to this problem. First, it is not actually clear that the proposition that Syracuse is north of Oklahoma City is justified for you. The evidence that you have is a readily available mental map that would display this fact to you by your imagining the map while focusing on the relation of Syracuse to Oklahoma City. That focusing would show you the truth of the matter. But in the example you have not done it. It is reasonable to think that the process would produce for you some decisive evidence that you do not have. You would have an imaginary display that highlights the north/south relation of the two cities. It is

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<sup>7</sup>It is also possible that the availability relation is a natural kind and that our uses of "have" and "available" are causally related to it sufficiently to make reference to it. If there is any such unique relation, though, it is not clear from our current evidence what it is. The reasonable specifications that we make are as close to identifying its extension as our evidence about it currently supports.

reasonable to think that without that evidence, what evidence geographical evidence you now have available on its own does not justify the proposition.

The second response starts by assuming that you do have available evidence that justifies the proposition. Changing the example a bit, suppose that you did once think about the Syracuse/Oklahoma City question. With a few moment's reflection you would recover the correct answer that your well-informed thinking led you to accept. But you do not give this proposition even that momentary reflection and so you do not recover that memory. We think that you *have* justification for the proposition. But we concur that believing it forthwith would not be justified. The belief would not be well-founded. A well-founded belief is one that is based on supporting evidence. Without the reflection to recover the memory, and with no other supporting evidence guiding your thinking, believing the proposition would be an arbitrary acceptance. It would not be based on justifying evidence.

### 6.2.4 *Borderline Cases*

Whatever one says about how decisive the evidence must be to make belief or disbelief the fitting attitude, there will be borderline cases. Perhaps we have two sources of testimony about the fairness of a coin. One source of known reliability avers that it is a fair coin while another source of seriously questionable reliability says that it might be one of a batch of coins, some of which are a bit biased towards heads. We do not know where either one is getting any information that they have about the coin. Do we have any good reason, on balance, to think that the coin is biased? If so, then imagine that we also detect a look on the second source's face that just might be a trace of a smirk. At some point the indication of the evidence seems irredeemably blurry. It seems possible that in such a case there is no fact of the matter. One response to this is permissive: the fitting attitudes are both suspension of judgment and belief (or disbelief). But we think that in the borderline cases it is indeterminate what the fitting attitude is.

Here is one reason to prefer our view. If suspension of judgment is a fitting and therefore justified attitude toward a proposition, *P*, then something makes the attitude of suspension fitting and therefore justified. But when one's evidence is indeterminate between supporting *P* and being balanced off concerning *P*, one's evidence does not definitely fail to indicate that *P* is true. Failing to indicate *P*'s truth is necessary for suspension to fit, however exactly suspension is understood. So suspension does not fit. Thus, it is not one's evidence that justifies suspension. Suspension is not definitely unjustified either, since one's evidence does not determinately indicate *P*'s truth. Nothing other than one's evidence seems to resolve the indeterminacy in an epistemically justifying way, at least given the evidentialist view that no other factor matters in determinate cases. We conclude that it is indeterminate what attitude is justified. Parallel considerations make it indeterminate whether or not belief is fitting and therefore justified. (Disbelieving *P* is determinately not fitting in such a case, since the evidence determinately does not indicate that *P* is untrue.)

One might object: “But if this indeterminacy of justification were true, then in such cases all doxastic attitudes would be epistemically unjustified. That seems impossible. There must be some way for the person not to be unreasonable about the proposition”. We reply: For reasons that parallel those that argue that suspension and belief are not definitely justified in the borderline cases, those attitudes are not definitely unjustified either. So taking either attitude is not determinately unreasonable. We do not see why there must always be a determinately reasonable attitude to have.

Second Objection: “When our evidence is indeterminate between supporting a proposition and being equi-balanced about it, suspending judgment is the safe option. Believing the proposition risks having a false belief when the evidence does not even determinately support the proposition at all. As a result, suspending is determinately more epistemically reasonable than believing. Thus, suspending is the justified attitude.”

We reply: The risk of false belief in such cases is symmetrical to the cost of missing out on a true belief. We think that there is nothing about epistemic justification that makes risking a false belief less well justified than lacking a true belief. The truth or falsehood of a proposition plays only an indirect justifying role, via our evidence about that. What justifies believing a grasped proposition is having on balance an indication of truth; withholding is justified by not having such a balance. Being safer from a risk of error can be someone’s goal. If it is, then in the sort of case in question that goal gives the person an instrumental reason to suspend. The same goes for the goal of wanting to take risks for true beliefs and having an instrumental reason to believe. The contingent matters of having either goal, or lacking it, do not affect the purely epistemic justification of the attitudes. The indeterminacy of the support by evidence leaves the justified attitude indeterminate between suspension and belief.

### 6.3 Philosophical Positions

We’ll assume that the existence of widespread known disagreement among philosophers about major philosophical positions renders a philosopher’s evidence regarding any one of the positions at least counterbalanced. If there are more than two competing positions on an issue and each is about equally well defended by our peers, then a philosopher’s evidence for the philosopher’s favored position is outweighed by the peer support for the disjunction of competing views. On the supposition that our evidence for our favored positions is counterbalanced or outweighed, evidentialism implies that our believing our favored positions is not justified. It might seem to follow that advocating for favored positions, including advocacy of evidentialism itself, is somehow problematic. We deny that this implication holds, as we’ll explain in this section. Our fundamental claim is that one can have good reason to believe a view that one finds attractive, or to advocate for it, even if believing it is not epistemically justified.

Two philosophers who have discussed the issues raised here are Sanford Goldberg (2013) and Zach Barnett (forthcoming). Goldberg argues that in many cases philosophers believe propositions about philosophical topics – we’ll call these beliefs “philosophical beliefs” – in the face of widespread disagreement. Philosophical beliefs are not justified and, he concludes, asserting them is “not warranted.” He describes this conclusion as an “unhappy one” (167). Much of his paper is devoted to defending the claim that knowledge of peer disagreement provides one with defeaters that render philosophical beliefs unjustified. We will not dispute this point here. Nor will we dispute Goldberg’s contention that philosophers do frequently assert philosophical positions, rather than merely speculate about them, or assert the plausibility, or make some other hedged claims about them. For example, we continue to assert that evidentialism is true even though we have encountered peer disagreement.

Goldberg’s response to the problem is to deny the claim that if a person does not know a proposition to be true, then the person is not warranted in asserting it (187–8). His idea is that although knowledge is the default norm of assertion, the standards can be raised or lowered depending upon the context. In situations in which knowledge is hard to come by, the norm may be lowered. Given philosophers’ mutual awareness of the difficulty of having philosophical knowledge, our discussion of philosophical propositions is a context in which lower, and satisfiable, norms are in place. Hence, assertion of these propositions may not violate the applicable norms and thus can be warranted.

Since we lack a clear understanding of what is meant by a “norm of assertion”, we find this solution difficult to assess. The difficulties about this “norm” should not be discussed at length here. But to illustrate one interpretive problem with the claim that knowledge is a “norm of assertion”, we can focus on a situation in which it would be pointlessly critical and insensitive to fault an assertion in any way. One sort of example is a generous deathbed assertion by a kindly person. Does the impropriety of making any criticism of the assertion, no matter how lacking in knowledge or justification the assertion might be, show that there is no universal “norm of assertion”? We do not see how to answer that question.

There is a simpler response to the problem Goldberg raises. Assuming that a warranted assertion is something like the assertion of a proposition that one is epistemically justified in believing, Goldberg’s conclusion is simply true: philosophical assertions are often not warranted in this sense. However, this does not imply that it is disreputable or problematic to assert them.

Warrant is one positive status that an assertion might have. There are others. Assertions can be beneficial to their hearers, as when one gives words of encouragement to a child struggling to complete a task, even if the encouraging statements – “You can do it” – are not warranted. Similarly, assertions of optimism can be helpful to a patient – “The pain will subside soon”. This kind of value has nothing to do with epistemic justification or warrant. A slightly different case, and one closer to the focus of our discussion, is that of a teacher or parent who makes provocative assertion to provoke thoughtful responses from students or children. In



all these cases, there is a practical value in asserting propositions for which one lacks epistemic justification.

In a similar way, assertions of philosophical propositions, along with arguments in their support, can advance discussion and provoke thought. It may be that believing the propositions makes defending them easier and more effective, while disbelieving or withholding judgment diminishes one's motivation to participate in inquiry about them. Evidence is relevant to the rationality of doing these things. We often have evidence that our continuing belief and advocacy of philosophical propositions motivates us to a more vigorous or extensive pursuit of their truth. We often have evidence that such persistence in inquiry has paid off in finding new and powerful considerations pro or con. The fact that the beliefs are not epistemically justified, or the assertions are not "warranted" in the present sense, in no way detracts from these other kinds of assets and it casts no doubt on our reasonably thinking that they do.

We suspect that Goldberg would agree with these claims about the value of asserting philosophical propositions. He does mention the character, and value, of the "speech exchanges" that occur in philosophical discussion. Where we differ is over the need to somehow explain these values in terms of a single contextually variable value that he calls "warrant". There can be multiple dimensions of evaluation. Philosophical beliefs can be epistemically unjustified, and their assertion can be unwarranted, yet they can have intellectual value in advancing thought and discussion. To think otherwise, we believe, places too great a burden on the epistemic evaluation of being justified, where this is having the sort of justification that is required (in sufficient strength) for knowledge. It is but one evaluation, albeit an important one. There is the different epistemic evaluation of what attitude would best assist one's further inquiry into the issue that the philosophical proposition addresses. Believing a philosophical thesis to which one is attracted might be the attitude that best furthers one's inquiry by encouraging perseverance in attempting to bear out its truth. In general, there is no good reason to try to modify the conditions for epistemic justification so that it encompasses such other worthy characteristics. It is unproblematic and less confusing for justification to be decided simply by evidential support.

Furthermore, we have a concern about how shifting standards of a single kind of epistemic evaluation are supposed to help with the problem at hand. Suppose it were true that the warranted assertability of a proposition varied with context. If philosophical propositions are counterbalanced at best when they are subject to widespread disagreement, then the standards have to sink so low that even counterbalanced propositions are warranted. The standards would have to sink even lower to allow warrant for philosophical positions for which the counterevidence outweighs the supporting evidence. In the counterbalanced case, a person would be equally warranted in asserting the denial of the philosophical propositions that she or he finds attractive. Yet even in cases in which there are more than two competing solutions to a philosophical problem, with adherents of each view, where one's evidence goes against the view one favors, it still can be valuable to assert the proposition. Of course its simple assertion would have negligible evidential value

in such disputes. But it might be usefully asserted as a conclusion of some argument that one finds helpful to make for it. If nothing else, the assertion by a philosophical peer gives an efficient and clear indication of the existence of continuing informed attraction to the truth of the proposition. In this sort of case assertability seems to have nothing to do with one's overall strength of evidential support. This provides an additional reason to distinguish the value of philosophical assertions from a single, contextually variable epistemic standard.

Turning to Barnett's work on philosophical disagreements, he provides a different defense of philosophical assertion. He suggests that in the case of philosophical disagreement, one segregate one's evidence into the evidence that comes from one's own reflection on a proposition and the evidence that comes from learning of peer disagreement concerning the proposition. By setting the disagreement evidence aside, one can identify a restricted evidential basis that supports the favored proposition. He thinks that this enables philosophers to sincerely advocate for the philosophical propositions that are subject to disagreement.

We believe that no special machinery such as evidence segregation is needed. Believing and asserting philosophical propositions can have various kinds of value even if they lack adequate epistemic support for belief to be justified. Reasonable and sincere advocacy can be based on having justification for believing that the propositions are worthy of further investigation and they are best investigated partly by engaging in partisan disputes with peers. There is no need to segregate one's evidence into the evidence that comes from disagreement and the rest of one's evidence and try to find a kind of attitude that is made rational by just the rest of one's evidence. This would be an attitude that Barnett identifies as one's "view". Equally, there is no need to try to find a kind of evaluation that is keyed to just the rest of one's evidence. As we have suggested, the beliefs and assertions can have intellectual value for philosophy in any case.

Furthermore, Barnett's way of defending philosophical advocacy may fail to provide support for cases that deserve support. Sometimes one comes up with objections to one's own favored philosophical theses. There can be a stage in one's thinking in which one has come up with an objection to which one lacks a clear response. At that point the philosophical thesis is not supported by the balance of one's non-disagreement evidence. That evidence justifies suspension of judgment if not disbelief. So by Barnett's standard the philosophical thesis is not one's view. The proposition, however, still seems to one to be correct. (Note that one's own objection to the proposition might be exactly the same as the objection that would arise in discussion with a disagreeing peer.) It still can be valuable to accept, and to advocate for, one's preferred position, inwardly or outwardly, although one's own evidence doesn't adequately support it. Belief and advocacy can still have rationally anticipated benefits.<sup>8</sup> There is no need to try to find a way to make the virtues

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<sup>8</sup>Of course, intellectual honesty would require acknowledging the objection. But it does not require ceasing to find sufficient plausibility in the proposition to seek support for it and to seek a refutation of the objection.

of these things determined purely by evidence for the proposition itself. Evidence about enhancing advocacy and improving inquiry can make the difference.

## 6.4 Conclusion

The middle ground between belief and disbelief is complicated. Some of its features raise interesting epistemic questions. We have tried to show that evidentialism thrives in the middle ground.

### A.1 Appendix

John Turri (2012) develops an epistemic puzzle. He offers an example in which the subject has no evidence for or against a proposition and yet, Turri argues, withholding judgment is not epistemically justified for the subject. We have been defending the evidentialist view that withholding judgment on a proposition is always epistemically justified for anyone whenever a person grasps a proposition and it is a determinate fact that the person's evidence supports neither the proposition nor its negation. So we should address Turri's argument.

Here is an example very much like Turri's, with a couple of small changes that are intended to strengthen its challenge to our evidentialist view.

P is a mathematical proposition that S understands. S has no evidence for or against P. S is polling 100 people about P, people who S knows to be both mathematicians and epistemologists who have studied the literature on epistemic justification. (We have added to Turri's example that the polled mathematicians have this epistemological expertise.) S polls the 100 about P as they leave a meeting room in which they have engaged in a discussion of P's truth value. In answer to S's inquiry about P each of the 100 tells S that S's withholding judgment on P is not epistemically justified (We have changed Turri's example so that the 100 assert that S's withholding is unjustified, where Turri has them saying that the withholding "is not the thing to do.") The mathematicians say nothing more to S about either P's truth value or the justification of any attitude toward P.

It is clear that after S's polling S still has no evidence for or against P. So in our evidentialist view neither believing nor disbelieving is justified for S. In our view under such circumstances S's withholding judgment on the proposition is epistemically justified.

Turri argues against the justification of S's withholding judgment:

I find it difficult to accept that in a case where all the evidence directly indicates that withholding is not the thing to do, withholding is nevertheless the thing to do. We seem to be owed some explanation of why this should be so, especially since it would constitute a dramatic deviation from the effects of expert advice in other cases. Other things being equal, we think we should follow the experts' advice when they recommend: believing, disbelieving, withholding, not believing, and not disbelieving. Why would *not withholding* be any different?" (2012, 363)

As a preliminary point we can now explain why we added to the story that the 100 have known epistemological expertise. We did so in order to have S know that their assertions about justification are well informed about both the math and the justification. So S has excellent reason to think that 100 people with ample relevant expertise assert that S's withholding judgment on P is unjustified. As Turri observes, when experts make judgments within their expertise, our justified response defers to those judgments unless we have some special reason not to do so. Turri asks what the special reason is in this case.

Suppose that S does not have epistemic expertise. In particular, S does not have good reason to think that the experts are mistaken in this case. With this additional supposition of S's having no independent epistemological evidence, S's deferring to the 100 experts is quite justified. The justified deference concerns S's attitude toward the contents of their testimony. That content is what their expertise supports. Their known expert testimony renders S justified in accepting what they tell S. S is justified in believing that S's withholding judgment on P is not justified.

It does not follow that what the 100 tell S is true. Not only does this not follow, but also the story gives no reason to think that the 100 are right. Turri says that "the evidence directly indicates that withholding is not [justified]" (363). It is important to recognize who receives this indication. The expert testimony indicates *to S* that S's withholding is not justified. But the story gives *those who consider it* no indication that this testimony is correct. The story simply stipulates that the relevantly knowledgeable 100 assert to S that S's withholding is not justified, without giving any reason to think that these assertions are true. In the story the 100 do not identify anything about S's withholding judgment that gives those who consider the story reason to think that S's withholding is unjustified. Nor does the story give us any evidence that the 100 assertions that S's withholding is unjustified are backed by some good evidence for that evaluation. The story does not provide any new information about what makes withholding justified or unjustified.

Evidentialism gives reason to think that S's withholding on P *is* justified. Throughout the story S lacks evidence for or against P. Withholding is the sensible attitude for S, in light of all S has to go on about both the truth value of P and the justification of S's attitude toward it. S's evidence does not make any other attitude even a little bit reasonable. Either belief or disbelief would be quite unreasonable for S in light of the equal probability that the proposition has the other truth value and S's lack of any higher order evidence in favor of either belief or disbelief in particular being justified. Withholding judgment on P is the noncommittal frame of mind that matches this lack of indication. It is fitting; it is justified. So in our view withholding judgment on P is the epistemically justified attitude for S.

Again, we think that in the story S is justified by the expert testimony in believing that the withholding is not justified. Thus our view has it that in this odd sort of case what someone is justified in believing to be the person's justified attitude toward a proposition conflicts with what the person's justified attitude actually is. This is unusual but not incoherent. S's justification for the proposition that S's withholding is unjustified is misleading expert testimony concerning which the epistemically uninformed S has no competing evidence. What makes it true

that withholding judgment on P is justified for S is S's lack of evidence for or against P. Misleading testimony can justify untrue epistemic beliefs in the presence of conflicting epistemic facts that are not apparent, just as misleading testimonial justification can justify untrue non-epistemic beliefs in the presence of conflicting non-epistemic facts that are not apparent. S does not see the epistemic facts. S's having justification for believing that S's withholding is not justified would be some excuse for S if S were to take some other doxastic attitude toward P in order to avoid what S has justification to think would be unjustified withholding. Nevertheless, S's withholding would be justified.

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# Chapter 7

## Metacognition As Evidence for Evidentialism



Matthew Frise

**Abstract** Metacognition is the monitoring and controlling of cognitive processes. I examine the role of metacognition in ‘ordinary retrieval cases’, cases in which it is intuitive that via recollection the subject has a justified belief. Drawing on psychological research on metacognition, I argue that evidentialism has a unique, accurate prediction in each ordinary retrieval case: the subject has evidence for the proposition she justifiably believes. But, I argue, process reliabilism has no unique, accurate predictions in these cases. I conclude that ordinary retrieval cases better support evidentialism than process reliabilism. This conclusion challenges several common assumptions. One is that non-evidentialism alone allows for a naturalized epistemology, i.e., an epistemology that is fully in accordance with scientific research and methodology. Another is that process reliabilism fares much better than evidentialism in the epistemology of memory.

**Keywords** Metacognition · Memory · Naturalized epistemology · Ordinary retrieval · Reliabilism

### 7.1 Introduction

Evidentialism roughly is the view that an attitude for a subject toward a proposition is justified just when the attitude fits the subject’s total evidence.<sup>1</sup> Many philosophers think that a chief rival to evidentialism is process reliabilism (hereafter *reliabilism*). Reliabilism states roughly that a belief is justified just in case it results from a reliable belief formation process, that is, a process that tends to yield

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<sup>1</sup>See Feldman and Conee (1985).

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true beliefs rather than false beliefs.<sup>2</sup> In this paper I defend an argument favoring evidentialism over reliabilism:

*Retrieval Argument*

- P1. Evidentialism has a unique, accurate prediction in ordinary retrieval cases.
- P2. It is not the case that reliabilism has a unique, accurate prediction in ordinary retrieval cases.
- P3. If in cases *X*, H1 but not H2 has a unique, accurate prediction, then cases *X* support H1 better than H2.
- C. Ordinary retrieval cases support evidentialism better than reliabilism.

Let's clarify terms. A *prediction*, here, is a proposition that a theory (at least when paired with auxiliary hypotheses) entails, and yet this theory was not designed to entail it. A *unique prediction* is a proposition that one theory (and its auxiliary hypotheses) entails but which a specified rival theory does not entail. In Sect. 7.2 I will explain exactly what an *ordinary retrieval case* is. For now, think of it as a case in which it is intuitive to any non-skeptical epistemologist that a subject, upon recollecting information related to *p*, has a belief that *p* that is memorially justified. Not all cases of recollection fit this description. In cases where the recollecting subject has forgotten a defeater for *p*, for example, it is controversial whether the subject's belief that *p* is memorially justified.<sup>3</sup> But *all* non-skeptical epistemologists want their theory of justification to imply that the subject's belief in an ordinary retrieval case is justified.

The conclusion of the Retrieval Argument is modest. It does not propose that, all things considered, we should endorse evidentialism over reliabilism. It proposes that certain cases count in favor of evidentialism rather than reliabilism. I will defend P1 and P2 by looking at research on the role of metacognition during memory retrieval. First (in Sect. 7.2) I discuss this role, and then (in Sects. 7.3 and 7.4) I support each premise. I do not defend P3 here, as it is uncontroversial.<sup>4</sup>

But why should we care about my argument, given its modest conclusion? Here are three reasons. The reasons reveal that a successful defense of even *just* P1 or P2 is significant. First, allegedly, externalism is much friendlier to a naturalized epistemology than internalism is. Internalism is the view that epistemic justification supervenes on the mental; no feature in a subject's environment affects

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<sup>2</sup>See Goldman (1979). For two reasons, evidentialism and reliabilism are not in fact direct rivals. First, they theorize about different things. Evidentialism states conditions that justify a subject in having a doxastic attitude (propositional justification), and reliabilism states conditions in which a subject's doxastic attitude is justified (doxastic justification). With supplements, however, each does state conditions about both propositional and doxastic justification. Second, once supplemented, they can remain compatible (see Sect. 7.4). For simplicity, I take evidentialism and reliabilism to be direct rivals here.

<sup>3</sup>Feldman (2005: 282–3) and McGrath (2007: 4) argue that there can be memorial justification in such cases. Annis (1980: 325–6), Goldman (2009: 324), and Greco (2005: 266–8) argue otherwise.

<sup>4</sup>P3 follows from strong predictivism, from weak predictivism, and from the likelihood principle. See Harker (2013) and McCain (2012) for discussion of weak predictivism in epistemology.

her justification without affecting her mental life.<sup>5</sup> All justifying features are mental. Externalism is the denial of internalism. The sort of evidentialism I support here is internalist, while reliabilism is externalist.

According to Hilary Kornblith (2007: 51) certain data from cognitive psychology in particular threaten internalism. Even some philosophers who try to show that there is *some* affinity between internalism and naturalized epistemology, grant that there is this threat.<sup>6</sup> According to John Greco (2010: 61), the data threaten evidentialism specifically. Also, according to Kornblith (2007: 44), the typical manner of constructing externalist theories of justification is “thoroughly naturalistic” (cf. Kitcher (1992: 3)); externalist methodology resembles our investigation of natural kinds, in that it investigates not merely our concept of justified belief but the characteristics underlying actual beliefs that are clearly justified. Since Kornblith cites this credential on behalf of externalism, presumably he thinks internalism lacks it. Alston (2004: 50) goes so far as to claim that the “rise of externalism” is in part explained by its naturalistic methodology. If the Retrieval Argument succeeds, however, important data from cognitive psychology support a form of internalism over a leading externalist theory. What’s more, externalism’s naturalistic methodology may help the Retrieval Argument succeed. Philosophers in favor of naturalizing epistemology will have less reason to prefer externalism over internalism.

Second, allegedly, internalism and evidentialism fare poorly in the epistemology of memory, while externalism and reliabilism do well.<sup>7</sup> Joëlle Proust (2013: Chap. 9) uses data on metacognition in memory in particular to support this allegation, and her arguments have actually influenced some psychologists.<sup>8</sup> Other philosophers and psychologists, when discussing metacognition, simply assume that some form of externalism is correct.<sup>9</sup> My support for PI helps undermine the allegation against internalism and evidentialism. Also, the Retrieval Argument suggests that philosophers and psychologists should take internalism more seriously when exploring research on metacognition, and that this research in some cases supports internalism better. Internalism in the epistemology of memory becomes safer.

Third, my support for my argument importantly develops evidentialism and reliabilism. Conee and Feldman (2008: 93) count memory as a source of evidence,

<sup>5</sup>Conee and Feldman (2001). Some internalists would add that all justifiers are specially accessible by their subjects. The variety of evidentialism I defend here is compatible with, but does not entail, this addition.

<sup>6</sup>See, e.g., Wheeler and Pereira (2008: 317). Feldman (1999), however, argues that data from cognitive psychology is much less important to epistemological theorizing than many philosophers suppose.

<sup>7</sup>See Bernecker (2008, 2010), Goldman (1999, 2009, 2011), Greco (2005), Plantinga (1993) and Senor (2010). Cf. Frise (2017). For replies see Frise (2015, 2018) and Conee and Feldman (2001).

<sup>8</sup>Proust’s arguments, for example, have influenced Koriat and Adiv (2012: 1611).

<sup>9</sup>For philosophers, see Dokic (2014) and Michaelian (2012). For psychologists, see Reber and Unkelbach (2010).



but note that “Details about [it] and general theories about how [it works] would be extremely valuable.” They say memory provides justification “only when a suitable background is in place. Exactly what constitutes that background is a difficult matter we will not attempt to resolve here. Whatever that background is, it is a matter of evidence”. My defense of P1 helps complete evidentialism, theorizing about how memory works and about what this background consists partly in.

And my defense of P2 uncovers general problems for reliabilism. Reliabilism may lead to a kind of skepticism. Further, reliabilism’s overall testability turns out to be surprisingly limited. Reliabilism has not in fact already gathered all the trophies in the epistemology of memory.

## 7.2 Metacognition in Memory

An ordinary retrieval case is one in which it is uncontroversial that a subject justifiably believes that  $p$  after having a recollective experience related to  $p$ . Additionally, this justification is memorial rather than, say, perceptual or testimonial. There are different accounts of why there is memorial justification in these cases.<sup>10</sup> I remain neutral on them. Since there is memory justification outside of ordinary retrieval (e.g. for some non-occurrent beliefs), I am not commenting on memory justification *simpliciter* here.

In order to see what evidentialism and reliabilism do and don’t *accurately* predict in ordinary retrieval cases, we should first see what these cases are like. Suppose Smith, a typical American adult, is asked, “Who was the first postmaster general of the United States?”, and Smith thinks and has certain experiences, and then reports  $p$ , namely, that Benjamin Franklin was the first postmaster general of the United States. Let all of this happen in a fairly normal way, such that we find it intuitive that Smith believes that  $p$  justifiably. What of interest occurred between the asking and the reporting? To answer this, we needn’t merely appeal to armchair intuitions or personal experience. We can look at psychological research on metacognition in memory.

Metacognition is the monitoring and controlling of cognitive processes.<sup>11</sup> Cognition allows us to read the road signs outside the mind. Metacognition allows us to decipher some signs within. In an ordinary retrieval case, an information-producing cognitive mechanism (unsurprisingly) produces information, and both the *information* and its *production* are monitored. This monitoring is typically unconscious but becomes conscious in certain circumstances (when, for example,

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<sup>10</sup> Annis (1980), Bernecker (2008), and Goldman (1999, 2009, 2011) say memory merely *preserves* the justification from the past. Audi (1995), Conee and Feldman (2011), and Huemer (1999) say recollective experience sometimes *generates* some justification.

<sup>11</sup> On the psychological claims below, see Koriat (2002), Koriat and Helstrup (2007), and Unkelbach (2007). Arango-Muñoz (2013a, b), Arango-Muñoz and Michaelian (2014), Michaelian (2012), Nagel (manuscript), and Proust (2013) guide my interpretation of the psychology.

there is any of a variety of difficulties in processing). The monitoring involves and gives rise to an *epistemic feeling*.<sup>12</sup> It's controversial just what an epistemic feeling is. At minimum, it is a phenomenal, affective, non-emotional experience with intentional content. All epistemic feelings have these features, though other mental states might have them all too. What is special about an epistemic feeling is that it gives feedback having to do with cognitive processing. Examples of such feelings include feelings of knowing, of familiarity, of uncertainty, and of forgetting. The type of epistemic feeling elicited is determined by the features detected in both the information and its production. Detecting scant or undetailed information is more likely to elicit a feeling of uncertainty, while detecting a glut of detailed information is more likely to elicit the feeling of knowing—even before that detailed information is consciously accessed.

An endorsement mechanism then evaluates the type of feeling, the features detected in monitoring, and certain of the subject's background beliefs. In light of the evaluation, the endorsement mechanism controls the information-processing. This control either terminates or permits the retrieving of information. Control can initiate a different strategy for accessing the target information (e.g., using a different heuristic, looking the information up via an external source). The endorsement mechanism controls whether the subject endorses (i.e., occurrently believes) or suspends judgment regarding the retrieved information.<sup>13</sup> Typically the subject's epistemic feelings determine the subject's confidence in anything that becomes endorsed. A feeling of knowing correlates with higher confidence, while a mild feeling of uncertainty does not.

Smith's ordinary retrieval, for example, begins with unconscious information-production. Monitoring this information results in his having an epistemic feeling, like the feeling of knowing. This feeling precedes his endorsing  $p$ , and his producing  $p$  consciously. Next, Smith experiences *fluent* retrieval of  $p$ . That is, he might experience retrieving  $p$  relatively quickly; or, he might experience retrieving information corroborating  $p$ ; or,  $p$  might persist for a relatively long while or occur frequently in his thoughts. Or, some combination might occur. Smith will have learned to interpret (automatically and unreflectively) this experience of fluently retrieving  $p$  as  $p$ 's being familiar. As a result of monitoring, an endorsement mechanism will exert control. Smith will endorse  $p$  and cease his inquiry, and his confidence in  $p$  will be high, given the high fluency of his retrieval experience. This completes his ordinary retrieval.

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<sup>12</sup>Alternatively dubbed a *noetic* feeling (Proust 2013) and *metacognitive* feeling (Arango-Muñoz 2013b).

<sup>13</sup>Michaelian (2012: 288–90) assumes that one of these propositional attitudes is thereby *formed*. But it could be that the attitude was standing and just becomes occurrent.

### 7.3 Evidentialism

I have described an ordinary retrieval case. What might evidentialism accurately predict here? The defense of P1 begins with answering this. But answering requires us to get clearer on what evidentialism entails in *any* case of justified belief. According to evidentialism, if the justified attitude for S toward *p* is belief, then S's evidence supports *p*. Belief is the justified attitude for S toward *p* in an ordinary retrieval case. So, evidentialism entails that S has evidence for *p*. So long as evidentialism was not designed to entail this in ordinary retrieval cases, it counts as a prediction.

But what is *evidence*, and what is it for something to be evidence *for p*? Different versions of evidentialism answer these questions differently. On the version I discuss here—*explanationist evidentialism*—S's evidence includes S's experiences. The propositions supported by the evidence are the ones that are part of the best explanation available to S for why S has that evidence. For instance, for a typical adult, a reddish visual experience typically is for her evidence that something is red. This is because, on the best explanation of her experience available to her, something is red. She need not have assessed, or even ever thought about, this explanation or any other. It just must be the best available to her. I won't defend a theory of *availability*. I'll assume simply that *p* is part of the best explanation available to S for why she has certain evidence if the following is true: S is disposed to have a seeming that *p* is part of the best answer as to why she has that evidence.<sup>14</sup>

Now what, if anything, does evidentialism *accurately* predict in ordinary retrieval cases? It predicts that Smith, for instance, will have evidence for *p* (i.e., that Benjamin Franklin was the first postmaster general of the United States). More generally:

*Candidate 0.* In each ordinary retrieval case, the proposition justifiedly believed by the subject is part of the best explanation available to her for why she has her experiences.

Is this prediction accurate? Some philosophers would suggest not. Plantinga (1993: 62–4) considers our potential evidence for our memory beliefs, slipping back and forth between talking about 'present phenomena', 'phenomenal imagery', and 'beliefs about the present'. This evidence is either too rare or feeble to be what actually justifies our memory beliefs. He (1993: 188) concludes "There is nothing we can sensibly think of as evidence on the basis of which [a] memory belief is formed," because he seems to think *we have no* justifying evidence for the content of our memory beliefs.<sup>15</sup> Greco (2010: 61) concurs (cf. Bernecker (2010:

<sup>14</sup>McCain (2014: 65–70) defends the assumption about availability. Cf. Conee and Feldman (2008: 97–98).

<sup>15</sup>Apparently Plantinga assumes that a memory belief is based on evidence only if it is currently formed on the basis of conscious evidence. This overlooks the possibility that these memory beliefs were formed in the past and that currently they are just activated, and the possibility that their evidential bases are mental but non-conscious.

73)). If Plantinga and Greco are right, and if explanationist evidentialism correctly characterizes evidential support, then Candidate 0 is inaccurate. The subject in an ordinary retrieval case lacks evidence (from memory, at least) for her belief, since it is a memory belief.

However, Plantinga's survey of the potential evidence in ordinary retrieval cases is not exhaustive. He does not consider all 'present phenomena'. As I interpret the research on metacognition, Candidate 0 is accurate. Consider Smith. He has evidence, and it is evidence for  $p$ . His evidence includes (a) his epistemic feelings that bear on  $p$  (e.g., his feeling of knowing), (b) his experience of fluently retrieving  $p$ , and (c) his experience of automatically interpreting the fluently retrieved information as familiar.

Here is why (a), (b), and (c) are evidence for  $p$ : on the best explanation available to Smith of why these phenomena obtain,  $p$  is true. When asked, "who was the first postmaster general of the United States?", Smith could have experienced fluent retrieval of indefinitely many propositions other than  $p$  and had an associated feeling of knowing. Or, Smith could have retrieved nothing at all. On the best available explanation to Smith for why he experienced fluent retrieval or had a feeling of knowing regarding  $p$  *in particular*, Smith once learned  $p$  or some nontrivial support for  $p$ . Smith's memory supports this. As far as Smith is able to tell, what his feelings of knowing indicate is often correct and reasonable, not contentious. Also, that the feeling of knowing is a guide to the truth coheres well with Smith's other experiences, and with the fact that those experiences do not, from his perspective, tend to mislead.

A proposition that a subject fluently retrieves has likely been processed by that subject before. The fluency results from a kind of practice at processing. All else being equal, a previously processed proposition on a matter is more likely true than an incompatible unfamiliar one. The best available explanation of Smith's fluently retrieving  $p$  includes one or several previous representations to him of  $p$  as true—perhaps initially via testimony, then via further testimony, and then via recollection, and so on. There is only one true proposition about who the first postmaster general was, and indefinitely many falsehoods. Other things being equal, a proposition represented on multiple occasions as true is more likely true than false, in part since (roughly) a truth on the matter is more likely to be reencountered than a given falsehood is. Any number of falsehoods could be encountered, and so each is less likely to be reencountered than the truth is.<sup>16</sup>

And, part of the best available explanation of Smith's experience of *automatically* interpreting fluency as familiarity is that he has learned, perhaps unreflectively, this normally gets at the truth; whatever Smith fluently retrieves is likely true, and familiarity flags that truth-connection for Smith. Given what Smith can recollect and that Smith can tell that he is fairly normal and rational, he has reason to believe that his automatically interpreting fluency as familiarity results from good habituation. So on the best available explanation of Smith's experience of the automatic interpretation,  $p$  is true, since  $p$  feels familiar.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Reber and Unkelbach (2010).

The best explanations available to Smith of (a), (b), and (c)—individually, but also together—include  $p$ . They are best because they are more parsimonious or explanatorily powerful than the alternatives omitting  $p$ 's truth. Here are some alternatives: Smith feels he knows any proposition that comes to mind. Smith is disposed to have feelings of knowing toward propositions he typically never learned in the past. Smith fluently retrieves propositions independently of what he has learned or had reason to believe. Smith at random automatically interprets phenomena as familiarity. He never learned, as a way of getting the truth, to interpret fluency as familiarity. As they stand, these alternative kinds of explanations are ad hoc and not very powerful. They suggest that subjects in ordinary retrieval cases are typically misremembering. They leave it mysterious to Smith why he has managed to survive, to live a normal life, to cooperate with others and agree with them about the past, and to have a highly coherent set of experiences overall. They incline us to doubt that Smith's belief is justified even though, by stipulation of his case being ordinary retrieval, it is justified. The alternative explanations can become more explanatorily powerful only by sacrificing simplicity. They can posit ad hoc reasons for his surviving, cooperating, and experiencing coherently. But the reasons bloat the explanation. The commonsensical explanations that include the truth of  $p$  are better. So, Smith has evidence for  $p$ . Again, Smith need not have worked out how  $p$  is part of what best explains (a), (b), and (c). This best explanation simply must be available to him.<sup>17</sup>

More could be said in direct support of my claim that the best available explanation of (a), (b), and (c) includes  $p$ , but this sketch will suffice for now. If, as I claim, evidentialism accurately predicts Candidate 0, then we are halfway to establishing P1. To establish P1 we now just need to show that this prediction is unique, i.e., that reliabilism does not share it. The next section considers reliabilism's predictions.

First, a worry. Joëlle Proust doubts that a view she calls "internalism" explains how metacognition could play a justificatory role. Yet I've claimed that metacognition plays this role on an evidentialist internalism. Proust and I pick out importantly different views with "internalism", but it's still worth deflating the doubt. She (2013, 198–200) correctly notes that a subject's environment and past largely influence whether her epistemic feelings are reliable. She (2013, 200) says: "One can thus conclude that the existence and reliability of epistemic feelings *supervene in part on* the existence and quality of the feedback provided. Therefore, the internalist

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<sup>17</sup>For inchoate explanatory theories of memorial support, see Harman (1973: 189) and Peacocke (1986: 163–4). Jennifer Nagel (manuscript) argues that something like (c)—the interpretation of fluency as familiarity—is available to internalist accounts of the justification of "trivial beliefs". She says (manuscript: 2) a belief is a trivial belief "if and only if (1) its origin lies in testimony from a source whose identity is now unknown to the subject, and (2) the subject lacks topically related auxiliary beliefs that would suffice to support the target belief". My proposals go well beyond Nagel's. I discuss justification in ordinary retrieval cases, which often involve non-trivial beliefs. Also, Nagel does not argue that (a) or (b) helps justify, and she (manuscript: 19) thinks (c) itself justifies only "weakly". And, I state in detail why (c), on explanationist evidentialism, helps account for the relevant justification. Finally, I show that research on metacognition supports an internalist view *better* than a main externalist rival.

case for epistemic feelings as a source of epistemic intuition considerably loses in explanatory force and credibility.” She seems to mean that having relevant epistemic feelings is insufficient for having justification. Rather, epistemic feelings justify only in environments where they are reliable. So, she concludes that metacognition is uncongenial to internalism.

An unstated premise here is that any justifier is reliable. That is why, on Proust’s view, epistemic feelings do not justify in environments where they are unreliable. If there were reason to accept her premise, her conclusion would be hard to deny. However, it would then be unremarkable that metacognition is uncongenial to internalism. This is because, if her unstated premise were true, then internalism would be false. Internalism would tell the wrong sort of story about justification, since it omits environmental reliability constraints. There would be nothing special about internalism incorrectly explaining justification from metacognition. Now, one thing we should not do when evaluating how internalism and metacognition fit is assume that internalism is false. Proust’s evaluation requires that very assumption. So, we may set it aside.

## 7.4 Reliabilism

I will examine some leading candidates for what reliabilism might accurately, uniquely predict in ordinary retrieval cases. We will find nothing suitable. This will sufficiently support P2. I will then examine whether reliabilism predicts Candidate 0. We will find it does not. This will complete the defense of P1. Along the way we will uncover some general problems for reliabilism. I am silent on many details of reliabilism, so that the Retrieval Argument applies to any version of it.

It may seem obvious that reliabilism predicts:

*Candidate 1.* In each ordinary retrieval case the relevant process that forms the subject’s justified belief is reliable.

The justified belief is formed by indefinitely many types of processes, and some of these processes are reliable and some aren’t. The *relevant* process is the one whose reliability determines whether the particular belief is justified. But reliabilism does not predict Candidate 1. For there is a wrinkle to reliabilism.

Reliabilists distinguish belief-dependent and belief-independent belief formation processes. A belief-dependent process (e.g., an inferential process) includes beliefs among its inputs. A belief-independent process (e.g., a basic perceptual process) does not. Many belief-dependent processes are unreliable, yet they still have the virtue of being *conditionally* reliable—they satisfy the following:

CR1. A process R is conditionally reliable *iff* R mostly produces true beliefs when all of R’s belief inputs are true.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Comesaña (2010: 577), Goldman (2011: 278n.20), and Lyons (2013: 9) endorse CR1.

And reliabilists hold that the output of a belief-dependent conditionally reliable belief formation process is justified if the belief inputs to that process are justified. So, for example, belief in the conclusion of some reasoning is justified if all the premises are justifiedly believed and the type of reasoning typically yields true beliefs when the premises are true.

Now, in a typical adult human, if a process involves memory and metacognition in the formation of a belief that *p*, that process is belief-dependent. It has belief inputs. These include past beliefs with content relevantly similar to *p* or bearing on *p*, beliefs about how memory works, about memory experience, about epistemic feelings, about the feeling of familiarity, and so on. The belief-dependent nature of memory processing actually helped *inspire* Goldman's (1979: 13) notion of conditional reliability, shaping his original statement of reliabilism. So, reliabilism doesn't predict Candidate 1. Consider instead:

*Candidate 2.* In each ordinary retrieval case the relevant process that forms the subject's justified belief is *conditionally* reliable.

If reliabilism predicts Candidate 2 rather than Candidate 1, it has an asset. In particular, on Candidate 2, massive *perceptual* deception needn't threaten memory justification. Since perception feeds beliefs into memory, perceptual deception can make memory unreliable. Still, memory can remain *conditionally* reliable and able to justify. Memory justification is securer if reliabilism predicts Candidate 2.<sup>19</sup>

If reliabilism predicts Candidate 2, it does so uniquely. But is Candidate 2 accurate? In order to answer this question we must address two others: what determines which process is relevant? And, how do we confirm that the relevant process is conditionally reliable—that it satisfies CR1? The first of these questions introduces reliabilism's dreaded generality problem: we need a principled way to identify the relevant process that forms any particular belief, so that we can test reliabilism's implications about justification in each case against our intuitive judgments.<sup>20</sup> While no adequate solution to this problem has been defended, perhaps one exists. Still, I point out two main difficulties with predicting and confirming Candidate 2.

*Point 1:* Developing a predicted interpretation of Candidate 2 is not only challenging, but also methodologically *non-naturalistic* in a way. Here is why. In order to confirm that Candidate 2 is accurate, we must interpret it as specifying a particular process type as relevant in each type of ordinary retrieval case, so that we can confirm the conditional reliability of that process. A reliabilism that solves the generality problem entails a complete interpretation of Candidate 2. And we must be able to confirm that Candidate 2, so interpreted, is accurate.

<sup>19</sup>Goldman's (1979: 14, 2011: 278) reliabilism predicts Candidate 2. Lyons (2009: 177) however develops an untraditional reliabilism that predicts Candidate 1 instead. Unfortunately, his view robs reliabilism of the asset I mention above. Since Lyons' (2013) reliabilism keeps with tradition, however, I draw on that work below.

<sup>20</sup>See Conee and Feldman (1998) and Feldman (1985).

In the interests of making a prediction, the solution must not be *designed* to entail this complete interpretation of Candidate 2. (This makes solving the generality problem even harder.) But without this design we eschew a naturalistic methodology! Recall that, according to Kornblith, externalist methodology is naturalistic in that it investigates the characteristics underlying actual, clearly justified beliefs, and then uses some of the observed characteristics to construct a theory of justification. The theory is designed to entail that justified beliefs have the observed characteristics. It follows that the theory does not predict that the beliefs have the characteristics. If the characteristics were selected via examining ordinary retrieval cases, then the theory of justification does not make predictions about these cases.

Of course, it could be that a fairly general process type is relevant in ordinary retrieval cases, and that we can identify this process by looking at cases other than ordinary retrieval. But this is unlikely. It's not as if ordinary retrieval cases are simply instances of, say, *carefully believing*. Many beliefs in ordinary retrieval cases involve automatic endorsement, leaving no room for care. Beliefs in ordinary retrieval cases seem to constitute a special class that is not fruitfully subsumed under another.

In short, a reliabilist theory that solves the generality problem *by* examining actual justified beliefs will not predict an interpretation of Candidate 2, and thus will help establish P2. A reliabilist theory that solves the generality problem *without* examining actual justified beliefs loses some naturalistic credentials. There is tension between predicting Candidate 2 and pursuing certain naturalistic methodology. This is an unsettling result for the many reliabilists who value their theory's alleged special affinity with that methodology.

Now, supposing we can identify the relevant process in each ordinary retrieval case, which belief outputs can we look at in order to determine whether that process is conditionally reliable, and so assess Candidate 2's accuracy? Reliabilism's best hope is that the data from metacognition research supports the conditional reliability of each relevant process.

*Point 2:* Yet the data does not support this. Here is why. According to CR1, a conditionally reliable process is one that generally produces true beliefs when all belief inputs are true. Consequently, if a token belief-dependent process has a single false belief input, its true outputs are not evidence of the process' conditional reliability. Only outputs of processes where *all* belief inputs are true could be evidence of conditional reliability. So, only those token processes could be evidence for Candidate 2's accuracy.

In order to check whether there is this evidence, it would help to have a sense of what counts as a belief input. Few reliabilists offer guidance. When Goldman (1979: 13–14) originally introduces the ideas of conditional reliability and belief-dependent processes, he gives two examples of belief inputs: a stored memory belief, and a premise in an inference. But he does not characterize inputs in general. He does say (1979: 11) that “when we say that belief is caused by a given process . . . we may interpret that to mean that it is caused by the particular inputs to the process.” However, this states only that all inputs are causes of the output. It doesn't state which causal beliefs count as belief inputs.



Jack Lyons (2013: 12) characterizes belief inputs more explicitly: any belief, even a tacit belief, on which the output belief is causally or counterfactually dependent.<sup>21</sup> That is, suppose a belief-dependent belief formation process yields a belief that  $q$  for  $S$ , and the process wouldn't have if  $S$  had not (tacitly) believed  $r$ .  $S$ 's belief that  $r$  counts as an input to the process that formed  $S$ 's belief that  $q$ . Note that this counts an extraordinary number of beliefs as inputs in cases where there are any. If, for example, I didn't believe I exist, I wouldn't believe I am sitting. So my belief that I exist counts as an input to the process that formed my belief that I am sitting. And, for example, I would not believe that Ms. Tardy will be late to the party if I didn't (tacitly) believe that she is not already there, that she will be coming to the party at all, that she is still alive, that the party will continue, that I exist, etc.

Unfortunately for reliabilism, a non-trivial percent of our (tacit) beliefs are false. What's more, what we retrieve depends often on one or more particular false beliefs, namely, beliefs associated with various memory biases.<sup>22</sup> Given this and Lyons' extremely permissive view about which beliefs count as inputs, it is overwhelmingly likely that at least one input to any given token belief-dependent process is false. So the truth-value of the output beliefs in ordinary retrieval cases will not verify Candidate 2. On CR1, reliabilism does not imply that a conditionally reliable process with a false belief input still tends to have true outputs.

It might seem that we have *inductive* evidence of Candidate 2's accuracy. In observed ordinary retrieval cases the beliefs tend to be true, even though they typically result from a process with some false belief input. That gives us reason to suppose that in the unobserved ordinary retrieval cases—including those in which all belief inputs are true—the belief outputs tend to be true.

Perhaps it is *ordinarily* reasonable to conclude via induction that a process with mostly true outputs and with some false inputs is conditionally reliable. But the relevant process in ordinary retrieval cases is one that produces a belief by significantly altering the contents of its inputs, including its belief inputs. Memory alters these inputs considerably at three stages, and this often results in changes in truth-value (see Frise (2018) and Michaelian (2011)). Yet the alteration helps memory yield true beliefs. It's not at all clear what will happen if all the belief inputs are true. Are the output contents nonetheless adjustments of the input contents? If so, then the process may very well not tend to get the truth. Also, it could be that our false beliefs associated with our memory biases help us to get at the truth. These beliefs are typical inputs. Eliminating them may notably lower the ratio of true

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Lyons (2013: 28) and Conee and Feldman (1998: 26–7, n.13). I see no non-*ad hoc* reason to restrict input beliefs to those held *by the subject*.  $S_1$ 's forming a belief that  $p$  may be causally or counterfactually dependent on  $S_2$ 's belief that  $q$  (e.g., via testimony), and so it seems  $S_2$ 's belief that  $q$  would count as an input to the process that formed  $S_1$ 's belief that  $p$ . This has strange results.

<sup>22</sup> These beliefs concern *consistency* bias (whereby one reconstructs the past too similarly to one's view of the present), *change* bias (whereby one views oneself in the past too differently, in order to redeem an investment), *hindsight* bias (whereby one attributes present knowledge to one's past self), and *egocentric memory* bias (whereby one inflates one's present self-image by distorting one's past self-image); see Schacter (2001: Chap. 6).

outputs. So it is questionable to reason inductively about the conditional reliability of the relevant processes in ordinary retrieval. It is unclear what they would tend to produce, given all true belief inputs.

In the absence of a promising alternative view about what counts as a belief input, we have little reason to believe that Candidate 2 is accurate. Of course, we could replace CR1 with a more liberal view about conditional reliability. For example:

CR2. A process R is conditionally reliable *iff* R mostly produces true beliefs when *at least most* of R's belief inputs are true.

On CR2, even if it is likely that some belief inputs to a token process are false, we can still confirm the conditional reliability of that process type as long as *most* belief inputs are true and the output is true. And most belief inputs in the typical ordinary retrieval case are true. Since the output is typically true, it appears that, on CR2, we have strong evidence that Candidate 2 is accurate.

CR2 seems attractive. A process that manages to be truth-conducive even while disadvantaged by false belief inputs seems at least as good as a process that is truth-conducive only when all belief inputs are true. However, CR2 does not help reliabilism. On CR2, the wrong processes will (or won't) count as conditionally reliable, and therefore capable (or incapable) of justifying. Here is just one important example.

One process that should be capable of justifying is *moderate conjunction*. This process takes five or more beliefs as inputs, but not many more, and produces a belief in the conjunction of their contents. When the inputs are S's belief that  $p_1$ , S's belief that  $p_2$ , . . . S's belief that  $p_5$ , moderate conjunction produces in S a belief that ( $p_1$  and  $p_2$  and . . .  $p_5$ ). Unfortunately for reliabilism, CR2 counts moderate conjunction as conditionally unreliable. Suppose most belief inputs to moderate conjunction are true. If there are five input beliefs, at least three are true. More often than not, at least one of the remaining beliefs is false. After all, the two remaining beliefs could have several combinations of truth-values. On all but one combination, at least one belief is false. So, the output—the belief in the conjunction—will tend to be false, when most inputs are true. According to CR2 the process is conditionally unreliable, and therefore incapable of justifying. Yet, when all belief inputs are justified, moderate conjunction seems to be a paradigm of a justifying belief-dependent process of belief formation!

This may prompt us to look for an account of conditional reliability that lies between CR1 and CR2. But wherever the account lies, it faces problems. Suppose the account swings closer to CR1, and requires for conditional reliability that most outputs are true when at least 90% of belief inputs are true. As we near CR1, it becomes harder to see that actual instances of ordinary retrieval are evidence that the relevant process type is conditionally reliable. It's not clear that at least 90% of the inputs to the relevant process are true in actual cases of ordinary retrieval. So the account does not support Candidate 2's accuracy. And if the account swings closer to CR2 and selects a lower percentage, it becomes easier for moderate conjunction to fail to count as both conditionally reliable and capable of justifying, and so the account seems false. Accounts that swing toward the middle of the road and

select a percentage nearer to 75% face both problems to some extent. And accounts that concern instead the truth of all belief inputs of a certain quality—e.g., the *pertinent* ones—face a different problem. They must *predict* (entail without being so designed) which inputs have that quality, for any ordinary retrieval case. At any rate, it is significant if reliabilists must replace CRI.

In short, we have insufficient evidence that Candidate 2 is an accurate prediction. In too many ordinary retrieval cases, the process that forms the justified belief has some false belief as an input. On the best view of conditional reliability, only a process' performance, when all its belief inputs are true, matters. A general lesson here is this. To the extent that reliabilism theorizes about justification from content-modifying belief formation processes that usually have some false belief inputs, there is no clear way to confirm or to disconfirm reliabilism.

The preceding also shows that reliabilism does not even predict:

*Candidate 3.* Most of the justified beliefs in ordinary retrieval cases are true.

Reliabilism implies that justifying processes that involve metacognition and memory need only be conditionally reliable. So it is compatible with reliabilism that most justified beliefs in ordinary retrieval cases are false (if, e.g., most of the relevant processes producing the justified beliefs have a false belief input).

We might also consider:

*Candidate 4.* All belief inputs to the justified belief in an ordinary retrieval case are justified.

Reliabilism seems to predict this. On reliabilism, the output of a conditionally reliable belief-dependent process is justified when all belief inputs to that process are justified. Unfortunately for reliabilism, we have no test for Candidate 4's accuracy, not even from research on metacognition. One reason for this is our ignorance of exactly what *all* those particular belief inputs are in a given case. If Lyons' view of belief inputs is correct, in any ordinary retrieval case there are numerous (tacit) belief inputs, and we have too little information to determine that all are justified. Moreover, it seems doubtful that all the belief inputs are justified. This is because there are so many inputs, and we have a nontrivial amount of unjustified beliefs, and our beliefs associated with our memory biases appear to be regular unjustified inputs in ordinary retrieval. If this is correct, Candidate 4 seems false. And if Candidate 4 is false, reliabilism is false, since reliabilism predicts it. What's more, reliabilism leads to a kind of skepticism if Candidate 4 is false: few actual beliefs in ordinary retrieval cases are justified.

The failure of these leading candidates establishes P2. What about P1? Does reliabilism also predict Candidate 0? No defended reliabilist theory does. But one could change that. However, it is hard to see why one would, unless one simply wanted a theory with the same relevant implications that explanationist evidentialism has—a theory *designed* to entail Candidate 0. So, the theory would merely accommodate and not predict Candidate 0. Explanationist evidentialism still uniquely, accurately predicts it. P1 stands.

Reflection on Candidate 0 may raise a new doubt about P2, however. Some philosophers defend evidentialist versions of reliabilism. On these versions, all

subjects have evidence for their justified beliefs. The subject's belief is justified because it is based on certain evidence, and the process of basing that belief on this evidence is (conditionally) reliable.<sup>23</sup> Evidentialist reliabilism predicts:

*Candidate 0\**. In each ordinary retrieval case, the relevant process that forms the subject's justified belief is the process of basing that belief on the subject's evidence, and that process is conditionally reliable.

If Candidate 0\* is accurate, then P2 is false; a form of reliabilism would have a unique accurate prediction in ordinary retrieval cases. But Candidate 0\* is just an elaboration of Candidate 2, which states that in each ordinary retrieval case, the relevant process that forms the subject's justified belief is conditionally reliable. Candidate 0\* specifies the relevant process. But we failed to confirm Candidate 2. The data from metacognition does not confirm the conditional reliability of any relevant process, not even the process of basing belief on the subject's evidence. Likewise, we cannot confirm Candidate 0\*. So, P2 stands.

## 7.5 Conclusion

I conclude that ordinary retrieval cases support evidentialism better than reliabilism. This rebuts common but mistaken views about evidentialism and internalism's standing with respect to the epistemology of memory, data on metacognition, and naturalized epistemology.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>See Comesaña (2010) and Goldman (2011). Note that, even if we could confirm a unique prediction of evidentialist reliabilism, and so the Retrieval Argument failed, we would still have a significant result: generic evidentialism (rather than explanationist evidentialism) is still better supported by ordinary retrieval cases than all non-evidentialist versions of reliabilism are. Generic evidentialism states that the justified attitude for S toward *p* is the attitude that S's evidence supports. It leaves open what counts as evidence, and leaves open how evidence supports.

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# Chapter 8

## Externalist Versions of Evidentialism



Michael Bergmann

**Abstract** Evidentialism is typically viewed as a version of internalism. In this paper, I argue that this is a mistake: even views exhibiting fairly extreme forms of externalism can be evidentialist views. After saying what evidentialism is and identifying four grades of externalism, I argue that, for each of these grades of externalism (from the least external first grade to the most external fourth grade), there is a version of evidentialism exhibiting that grade of externalism.

**Keywords** Evidentialism · Externalism · Internalism · Mentalism · Proper Function

Evidentialism is typically viewed as a version of internalism. In this paper, I will argue that this is a mistake: even views exhibiting fairly extreme forms of externalism can be evidentialist views. After saying what evidentialism is and identifying four grades of externalism, I will argue that, for each of these grades of externalism (from the least external first grade to the most external fourth grade), there is a version of evidentialism exhibiting that grade of externalism.<sup>1</sup> I will conclude by briefly explaining where my externalist evidentialist sympathies lie.

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<sup>1</sup>That there are externalist versions of evidentialism isn't a new thesis. See McCain (2015a) and his discussion there of Alston (1989 [1988]), Comesaña (2010), and Williamson (2000). What is novel is the claim that for *each* of the grades of externalism identified in this paper, there is a version of evidentialism exhibiting it.

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## 8.1 What Is Evidentialism?

One can be an evidentialist about either propositional justification or doxastic justification.<sup>2</sup> My focus will be solely on evidentialism about doxastic justification, which can be stated as follows, using both an ‘if and only if’ claim and a supervenience claim:

*Evidentialism:* (I) S’s belief B is justified if and only if (a) S has evidence E, (b) B is based on evidence E, (c) B fits evidence E, and (d) S’s total evidence does not include defeaters for B.<sup>3</sup> (II) Justification supervenes on (a) one’s evidence (all the evidence one has) and (b) the basing relations that hold between one’s beliefs and one’s evidence.<sup>4</sup>

According to the versions of evidentialism on which I’ll be focusing, evidence a person has consists of mental states of that person such as beliefs, sensory experiences, memory impressions, and intuitions or seemings.<sup>5</sup>

## 8.2 Four Grades of Externalism

I will be distinguishing four grades of externalism, starting with the weakest (first) grade and moving to stronger grades.<sup>6</sup> Epistemologists differ concerning where to draw the line between internalism and externalism. The two main views are the *accessibilist* view, which says that only the *first* of these four grades of externalism is compatible with internalism, and the *mentalist* view, which says that only the first *two* grades of externalism are compatible with internalism. The four grades of externalism that I’ll consider are denials (in various ways) of the following four kinds of internalism: Strong Access Internalism (SAI), Weak

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<sup>2</sup>Roughly, propositional justification is something you have for a proposition in virtue of the evidence you have, whether you believe it or not and whether your belief is properly based (on your evidence) or not. Doxastic justification is something a belief of yours has in virtue of the evidence you have and of your belief being based on that evidence.

<sup>3</sup>A defeater here is thought of as a mental state of the believing subject, much like evidence is thought of as a mental state of the believing subject. Much of what I say below in the main text about evidence applies to defeaters as well. The main difference is that, whereas evidence for a belief contribute to that belief’s being justified, defeaters for a belief inhibit that belief from being justified.

<sup>4</sup>What I call ‘doxastic justification’ Conee and Feldman (2004 [1985]: 93) call ‘well-foundedness’. See also McCain (2014: 3).

<sup>5</sup>See Conee and Feldman (2004 [2001]: 59–61) and McCain (2014: 10–11).

<sup>6</sup>I’ll be working on the assumption that access internalism (which requires actual or potential awareness of some or all justification-contributors) is a stronger sort of internalism than mental state internalism (which requires that some or all justification-contributors are mental states). See Bergmann (2006: 9–13, 47–59, and 70) for some reasons for thinking access internalism is truer to the spirit of internalism (and, in that sense, a stronger sort of internalism) than mental state internalism.



Access Internalism (WAI), Strong Mentalist Internalism (SMI), and Weak Mentalist Internalism (WMI). The first two differ from each other over whether justification requires access to the satisfaction of *all* or only *some* of the conditions necessary for justification; the latter two differ from each other over whether the supervenience of justification on the subject's evidence and the holding of the relevant basing relations applies to *all* or only *some* cognizers.<sup>7</sup>

The first grade of externalism can be stated as follows:

*First Grade of Externalism (Denial of SAI):* A person S's belief B can be justified even if S is not aware of (or potentially aware of) the obtaining of *some fact* the obtaining of which is required for and contributes to the justification of S's belief B.<sup>8</sup>

This view seems externalist because it exhibits a common feature of externalist views. Externalists often say things such as "what matters for justification is that the belief *in fact satisfies* the condition in question (e.g., a reliability condition, a safety condition, a sensitivity condition, or a proper function condition), not that the subject *is aware* that this condition is satisfied". This is the sort of claim that internalists often find objectionable. So when the first grade of externalism says that *although it's required for justification that some fact obtain, it's not required that the subject is aware of this fact's obtaining*, it has the appearance of being an externalist view. At the very least, I think it makes sense to think of this as a grade of externalism (even if the lowest grade).

But although the first grade of externalism seems to be an externalist position, appearances are in this case misleading.<sup>9</sup> Alston (1989 [1988]: 233–4) and Fumerton (1995: 81) have pointed out that serious trouble attaches to SAI views—views according to which *S's belief B is justified only if S is aware (or potentially aware) of the satisfaction of each of the conditions necessary for B's justification*. The problem is that, if SAI is true, the list of conditions that are necessary for justification can never be completed. Once one thinks one has the full list, one must add the further condition that the subject is aware that all of the conditions on *that* list are satisfied. And that just adds another condition, which requires the addition of yet another requiring that the subject is aware of the satisfaction of the just added condition, and so on *ad infinitum*. As a result, few if any philosophers (including internalist epistemologists) endorse SAI. Hence, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, it's rare to draw the line between internalism and externalism so that views exhibiting this first

<sup>7</sup>I define these four kinds of internalism more carefully below in notes 8, 11, 15, and 16.

<sup>8</sup>SAI requires, for the justification of a belief B, that the subject is (potentially or actually) aware of the obtaining of *every* fact the obtaining of which is required for and contributes to the justification of B.

<sup>9</sup>It may seem strange to say that a view can exhibit the lowest grade of externalism without counting as an externalist view. But the idea is that there are degrees of externalism and that a position has to exhibit a sufficient degree of externalism before it counts as an externalist position, full-stop, without qualification. In a similar way, there are degrees of justification but a belief has to exhibit a sufficient degree of justification before it counts as being justified, full-stop, without qualification.

grade of externalism *must* count as externalist views.<sup>10</sup> Instead, endorsement of this first grade of externalism seems to be a simple consequence of requiring that views on justification not be confused or incoherent.

The second grade of externalism is:

*Second Grade of Externalism (Denial of WAI):* A person S's belief B can be justified even if S is not aware (or potentially aware) of the obtaining of *any of the facts* the obtaining of which is required for and contributes to the justification of S's belief B.<sup>11</sup>

WAI avoids the troubles Alston and Fumerton identify with SAI. As a result it has more supporters, and some people (myself included) think of WAI as definitive of internalism.<sup>12</sup> But there are others who seem to think that one can be an internalist even if one denies WAI. They want to emphasize not the internality of access but the internality of the mental.<sup>13</sup> According to them, if a view says that a belief's justification depends on the subject's mental states, then that view counts as an internalist view, even if that view doesn't require (for justification) access to those mental states or anything else relevant to the belief's justification (and, hence, even if that view denies WAI). Thus, these philosophers think that exhibiting the second grade of externalism is not yet enough to count as an externalist view.<sup>14</sup>

The third and fourth grades of externalism, which differ only in whether they apply to *some* cognizers or *all* cognizers, can be stated as follows:

*Third Grade of Externalism (Denial of WAI and SMI):* For *some* cognizer S, (a) S's belief B can be justified even if S is not aware (or potentially aware) of the obtaining of *any of the facts* the obtaining of which is required for and contributes to the justification of S's

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<sup>10</sup>Juan Comesaña suggests that views exhibiting this first grade of externalism shouldn't count as internalist views. He says (2005: 71):

No theory that allows an external factor such as [the fact that the belief is supported by the evidence on which it is based] to play a justificatory role is going to be internalist in any interesting sense. If internalism were simply the claim that all the factors that justify a belief are internal factors except those that are external, then it wouldn't be a theory worth considering.

But in light of the implausibility of SAI (for the reasons Alston and Fumerton draw to our attention), there must be at least one necessary condition of justification such that it is not necessary for justification that the subject is aware that that condition is satisfied. To put it in Comesaña's terminology: there must be at least one factor playing a justificatory role that is not an internal factor. Given that even die-hard internalists like Fumerton (who is an internalist if anyone is) acknowledge this, Comesaña seems mistaken to say that this isn't an internalism worthy of the name. As we will see in the discussion that follows, there are sensible ways to draw the line between internalism and externalism that differ from Comesaña's way of drawing the line.

<sup>11</sup>WAI requires, for the justification of a belief B, that the subject is (potentially or actually) aware of the obtaining of *some* fact the obtaining of which is required for and contributes to the justification of B.

<sup>12</sup>See Bergmann (2006: 9–13).

<sup>13</sup>See, for example, Conee and Feldman (2004 [2001]: 55–6) and Pollock and Cruz (1999: 132–5). I discuss these positions in Bergmann (2006: Chap. 3).

<sup>14</sup>I think this is a mistake, for reasons given in Bergmann (2006: 49–57 and 70).

belief B and (b) justification for S's beliefs does not supervene on S's mental states (and the basing relations holding between them).<sup>15</sup>

*Fourth Grade of Externalism (Denial of WAI and WMI):* For any cognizer S, (a) S's belief B can be justified even if S is not aware (or potentially aware) of the obtaining of *any of the facts* the obtaining of which is required for and contributes to the justification of S's belief B and (b) justification for S's beliefs does not supervene on S's mental states (and the basing relations holding between them).<sup>16</sup>

The differences between these two grades will become clearer when we consider (in Sect. 8.5) what a version of evidentialism would look like if it exhibited the third grade and not the fourth grade of externalism and (in Sect. 8.6) what a version of evidentialism would look like if it exhibited the fourth grade of externalism. Here I'll just note the following two things. First, virtually everyone thinks that if a view exhibits either the third or fourth grade of externalism, it counts as a version of externalism. Second, each of the higher grades of externalism entails each of the grades of externalism that are lower than it.<sup>17</sup>

### 8.3 Evidentialism Exhibiting the First Grade of Externalism

The standard versions of evidentialism unabashedly exhibit the first grade of externalism. As Conee and Feldman say, what matters for a belief's justification is that the person has evidence for it and that the belief fits that evidence. They explicitly deny that those holding justified beliefs must be aware (potentially or actually) of the fact that the belief in question fits the evidence. They acknowledge that the support relation that evidence stands in to a justified belief based on it (which mirrors the relation of fit that a justified belief stands in to the evidence on which it is based) is part of the explanation of the fact that the belief is justified. But they insist that "this does not imply that internalists are committed to the view that there must be some internal representation of this fact [about the support relation]" (2004 [2001]: 76). What matters is the fact that the evidence supports the belief (i.e., that the belief fits the evidence); this fact "may help to account for the justification without the person making any mental use of this fact" (2004 [2001]: 76).

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<sup>15</sup>SMI is the view that for *any* person S, justification for S's beliefs supervenes on S's mental states (and the basing relations holding between them). If a view denies WAI but affirms SMI, then it exhibits the second, but not the third grade of externalism.

<sup>16</sup>WMI is the view that for *some* person S, justification for S's beliefs supervenes on S's mental states (and the basing relations holding between them). If a view denies both WAI and SMI but affirms WMI, then it exhibits the third but not the fourth grade of externalism.

<sup>17</sup>Denying WAI entails denying SAI, so the second grade entails the first grade; denying WMI entails denying SMI, so the fourth grade entails the third grade; and denying both WAI and SMI entails denying WAI, so the third grade entails the second grade. None of this is intended to suggest that denying SMI entails denying WAI or that there can't be things other than mental states that are accessible on reflection.

But although Conee and Feldman's version of evidentialism isn't so extravagantly (and implausibly) internalist as to endorse SAI, it does seem to endorse WAI. For it requires for a belief's justification that the believer *has* good evidence for that belief and that evidence one has is something one has "some potential to retrieve" (2008: 89). Although they are reluctant to be more specific than this, it is clear that they have some kind of accessibility condition in mind when it comes to clarifying which of one's mental states can count as evidence.<sup>18</sup> So one's evidence is a contributor to the justification of one's beliefs and one's belief is justified in virtue of this evidence only if the believer is actually or potentially aware of it (i.e., only if she has some potential to retrieve it).<sup>19</sup> Thus, although Conee and Feldman's evidentialism exhibits the first grade of externalism, it does not exhibit the second grade of externalism.

It isn't only Conee and Feldman who endorse a version of evidentialism that seems committed to WAI, thereby opposing the second grade of externalism. Kevin McCain (2014: Chap. 3) defends the view that the only mental states that count as evidence relevant to a belief B are those the believer is currently aware of or disposed to bring to mind when reflecting on the question of whether B is true. Here too there is an emphasis is on accessibility.

What these positions have in common is that they endorse the following evidentialist view:

*EVI*: (I) S's belief B is justified if and only if (a) S has evidence E, (b) B is based on evidence E, (c) B fits evidence E, and (d) S's total evidence does not include defeaters for B. (II) Justification supervenes on (a) one's evidence (all the evidence one has) and (b) the basing relations that hold between one's beliefs and one's evidence. (III) One's evidence consists of one's accessible mental states.<sup>20</sup>

Because of clause (III), EVI avoids exhibiting the second grade of externalism.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup>See also Feldman (2004 [1988]) where he defends a more restrictive view according to which one's evidence consists of what one is currently aware of.

<sup>19</sup>So, despite the fact that (as I mentioned in note 13 and the text to which it is attached) Conee and Feldman want to define internalism by focusing on the internality of the mental and not on the internality of access, their own evidentialist view is internal on both counts.

<sup>20</sup>As mentioned at the end of Sect. 8.1, the focus here (and throughout Sects. 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6, and 8.7) is doxastic justification.

<sup>21</sup>Alston (1989 [1988]) is an externalist who endorses clause (I) and, perhaps, clause (III) of EVI but not clause (II). (I say "perhaps" in the case of clause (III) because Alston requires access (1989 [1988]: 237) not to one's evidence but to states of the same sort as one's evidential states.) Alston rejects clause (II) because he thinks justification supervenes not solely on the subject's accessible mental states and the basing relations between them but also on facts about whether the grounds for beliefs are reliable indicators of the beliefs based on those grounds (since it is, according to him, these latter facts about reliable indication that determine whether beliefs *fit* the grounds or evidence on which they're based). Alston comes close, then, to endorsing WAI—insofar as he comes close to endorsing clause (III)—so he comes close to avoiding externalism of the second grade and, instead, to endorsing externalism of the first grade only. Insofar as he also endorses clause (I), he also comes close to endorsing a kind of evidentialism, albeit not the usual kind that endorses a supervenience thesis like clause (II). All this to say that Alston comes close to being an evidentialist exhibiting externalism of the first grade, although not a standard version of such a

## 8.4 Evidentialism Exhibiting the Second Grade of Externalism

What distinguishes the second grade of externalism from the first grade is its denial of WAI. A simple way to develop an evidentialist view of this kind is to say that the mental states that constitute one's evidence include ones that are not accessible on reflection—i.e., mental states that we are not actually or potentially aware of. So long as we are capable of basing our beliefs on such mental states and so long as our beliefs can fit (and be supported by) such mental states, the following position, which differs from EV1 only in its third clause, counts as an evidentialist view:

*EV2:* (I) S's belief B is justified if and only if (a) S has evidence E, (b) B is based on evidence E, (c) B fits evidence E, and (d) S's total evidence does not include defeaters for B. (II) Justification supervenes on (a) one's evidence (all the evidence one has) and (b) the basing relations that hold between one's beliefs and one's evidence. (III\*) One's evidence consists of one's mental states, including some that are not accessible on reflection.

Does anyone endorse this sort of evidentialism? Perhaps a variant of Timothy Williamson's  $E = K$  view could fit this description. Williamson holds the following three theses: evidence consist of propositions not psychological states, knowledge is a mental state, and  $E = K$ .<sup>22</sup> If we think of  $E = K$  as the claim that one's evidence consists of one's knowledge, then these three statements are inconsistent since evidence is propositional (not psychological or mental) whereas knowledge is a mental state. Propositions are not mental states and if E is the former and K is the latter, it's false that  $E = K$ . The usual "solution" to this apparent difficulty is to think of  $E = K$  as the claim that the propositions that count as one's evidence are the propositions one knows. But a variant of the Williamsonian view could insist that evidence is psychological and that it consists of those mental states that are instances of knowledge.<sup>23</sup> On this view, there is an important sense in which one's evidence is not internal in the access sense. Consider you and your demon victim twin to whom things seem exactly as they seem to you—the difference being that your demon victim twin is being deceived in all its perceptual beliefs and in most of its memories given that it came into existence with fake memories matching yours only a few minutes ago. Your demon victim twin doesn't know via perception and memory what you know via perception and memory. It's natural to think that, since your demon victim twin cannot tell on reflection whether it has perceptual and memory knowledge, the perceptual and memory knowledge states you are in do not count as accessible on reflection either. Indeed, because knowledge states are *factive*, they are often thought of as being external in the access sense. If we grant that knowledge states are not (in general) accessible on reflection, then—because it says

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view, given his rejection of clause (II) of EV1. See note 25 for a brief discussion of a similar view developed by Comesaña.

<sup>22</sup>The first and third of these three theses are defended in Williamson (2000: Chap. 9) and the second is defended in Williamson (2000: Chaps. 1 and 2).

<sup>23</sup>For a response to some of Williamson's reasons for thinking evidence is propositional rather than psychological, see Conee and Feldman (2008: 100–104) and McCain (2014: 13–16).

that one's evidence consists of all and only one's knowledge states—this variant of the Williamsonian view could be developed in accord with EV2. (Williamson himself suggests that something like clause (II), shared in common by EV1 and EV2, is correct.<sup>24</sup>) Insofar as this view, so developed, says that whether one's beliefs are justified depends on whether they are based on knowledge states rather than on the knowledge-mimicking mental states of a demon victim—and acknowledges that this is something we cannot tell on reflection—it seems to deny WAI and, thereby, to be exhibiting the second grade of externalism.<sup>25</sup>

## 8.5 Evidentialism Exhibiting the Third Grade of Externalism

It is sufficient for exhibiting the third grade of externalism that a view allows that the following can be true.

*JWE1 (Justification without Evidence, Example 1):* An alien cognizer was designed (by God or evolution) to form beliefs about its environment without the causal mediation of any of the cognizer's mental states. This cognizer was designed to form the belief that there is water nearby when water is, in fact, nearby and, in the normal case for this cognizer, the causal chain leading from the presence of water in its environment to the formation of the belief about water being nearby included (by design) no mental states as causal intermediaries. In forming beliefs in this way, this cognizer is forming beliefs about water in the way that it is supposed to—both in the proper function sense of 'supposed to' and in the epistemic sense of 'supposed to'. As a result, these water beliefs of this cognizer are (epistemically) justified.<sup>26</sup>

According to JWE1, it is possible for a cognizer to have justified beliefs that are not based on mental states of that cognizer. And, given that evidence is to be understood

<sup>24</sup>See Williamson (2000: 2007–8) where he says:

Could belief be *epistemically* justified except by evidence? . . . It is far from obvious that any belief is justified in the truth-directed sense without being justified by evidence . . . evidence plausibly suffices for all truth-directed justification. . . . If we are aiming at the truth, we should proportion our belief to the evidence.

<sup>25</sup>Comesaña (2010) defends what he calls 'evidentialist reliabilism,' some versions of which endorse clauses (I) and (III) of EV2 (since some versions are accessibilist about evidence and some are not). But, like Alston (see note 21), Comesaña's version of evidentialism denies clause (II) because he thinks justification supervenes not solely on the subject's mental states and the basing relations between them but also on facts about whether the process type *producing a belief B based on evidence E* (where B is the belief whose justification is at issue and E is the evidence on which B is based) is reliable (since it is, according to him, these latter facts about the reliability of such processes that determine whether beliefs *fit* the evidence on which they're based). Versions of evidentialist reliabilism that deny accessibilism are also instances of evidentialism that exhibit the second grade of externalism. Versions of evidentialist reliabilism that affirm accessibilism are, like Alston's view discussed in note 21, instances of evidentialism that exhibit the first grade of externalism only—though, like Alston's view, these versions of evidentialist reliabilism differ from standard versions of evidentialism by denying clause (II) of EV1.

<sup>26</sup>This example was originally proposed in Bergmann (2006: 64).

in the psychological sense as consisting of mental states of some kind or another, this means that it is possible for a cognizer to have justified beliefs that are not based on evidence. Clearly, this conflicts with EV2. It also conflicts with SMI, which requires that for *all* cognizers, justification supervenes on one's mental states and the basing relations holding between them.<sup>27</sup> And on natural ways of filling out JWE1, it conflicts with WAI as well, given that facts about proper function, about water in one's environment, and about the causal relations between water in one's environment and one's beliefs are typically not accessible on reflection alone.<sup>28</sup> Thus, a view that endorses the possibility of JWE1 exhibits the third grade of externalism.

Can such a view also be an evidentialist view? I think so. Here's an example of a view that shares (III) in common with EV1 but differs from both EV1 and EV2 in its first and second clauses as well as in the addition of a fourth clause:

*EV3: (I\*) If S is human, then S's belief B is justified if and only if (a) S has evidence E, (b) B is based on evidence E, (c) B fits evidence E, and (d) S's total evidence does not include defeaters for B. (II\*) Justification for the beliefs of any human S supervenes on (a) S's evidence (all the evidence S has) and (b) the basing relations that hold between S's beliefs and S's evidence.<sup>29</sup> (III) One's evidence consists of one's accessible mental states. (IV) JWE1 is possible.*

The following points provide a fuller explanation of EV3:

1. Justification for a cognizer's beliefs depends on what counts as proper function for that cognizer—i.e., on what it's design plan is.
2. Proper function for humans in fact requires (a) that their beliefs are based on and fit their evidence *and* (b) that what counts as a fitting response to evidence is just the sort of thing that standard evidentialists (and the rest of us) typically think counts as a fitting response to evidence (for humans).<sup>30</sup>
3. Proper function for a cognizer is, of necessity, tied to that cognizer's natural kind.
4. Every human is, of necessity, of the natural kind *human*.

The reason that clause (I\*) of EV3 is true is that, as (1) says, justification depends on proper function and, as (2) says, proper function for humans requires that their beliefs are based on and fit their evidence, just as is specified in (I\*). The reason

<sup>27</sup>See note 15 for a statement of SMI.

<sup>28</sup>See note 11 for a statement of WAI.

<sup>29</sup>What (II\*) is intended to say is that, in cases where S is human, if you hold fixed that it is S's beliefs we're talking about and you also hold fixed S's evidence and the basing relations that hold between S's beliefs and S's evidence, then you will thereby be holding fixed the facts about which (if any) of S's beliefs are justified.

<sup>30</sup>Three things are worth noting here. First, although philosophers disagree about what counts as a fitting response to evidence (for humans), there is also a lot of agreement on this matter and the point here is to focus on this wide agreement. Second, although this is what proper function requires for humans, it isn't what proper function requires for all possible cognizers. Third, the idea that fittingness depends on proper function is a view I explore and defend in Bergmann (2006: Chap. 5).



that clause (II\*) of EV3 is true is that if proper function for a human cognizer, S, *in fact* makes the justification of S's beliefs depend on what evidence S has and on the basing relations holding between S's beliefs and S's evidence,<sup>31</sup> then—given (3) and (4)—it's true *of necessity* that the justification of S's beliefs depends on what evidence S has and on the basing relations holding between S's beliefs and S's evidence. The reason that clause (IV) of EV3 is compatible with clauses (I\*) and (II\*) is that, as (1) says, justification depends on proper function and the design plan for humans can differ from the design plan for alien cognizers of the sort described in JWE1.

In virtue of clauses (I\*) and (II\*), EV3 (plausibly) counts as an evidentialist view. In virtue of sharing clause (III) with EV1, EV3 is more similar to standard evidentialism (in one important respect) than is EV2. And in virtue of clause (IV), EV3 exhibits the third grade of externalism. Hence, EV3 is an evidentialist view exhibiting the third grade of externalism.

## 8.6 Evidentialism Exhibiting the Fourth Grade of Externalism

According to EV3, although it is possible (in the way suggested in JWE1) for justification not to be determined by evidence or the mental or what is accessible, it is also the case that for some actual cognizers (i.e., humans) justification *is* determined by evidence and the mental and what is accessible. In this way, EV3 rejects the fourth grade of externalism. For the fourth grade of externalism says not merely (as does the third grade) that for *some* person S, the justification of S's beliefs does not supervene on S's mental states and the basing relations holding between them, but in addition that this failure of supervenience holds for *any* person.

It is sufficient for exhibiting the fourth grade of externalism that a view allows that the following could be true.

*JWE2 (Justification without Evidence, Example 2):* Each possible cognizer is such that it could be designed or re-designed by God to form theistic beliefs *because* God exists—not due to the causal mediation of any of that cognizer's mental states but rather due to God directly causing that person to believe that God exists. (In particular, it is possible for a cognizer to at first have a design plan that does *not* include this feature and for that cognizer to come to have—by being re-designed—a design plan that *does* include this feature, without changing the fact that it remains a cognizer. Moreover, it is possible for a cognizer after being re-designed to be identical to the cognizer before being re-designed because the cognizer's design plan is among the features of a cognizer that can change over time.<sup>32</sup>) In forming beliefs in this way, this cognizer would be forming beliefs about God in the way that it is (given its design or re-design) supposed to—both in the proper function

<sup>31</sup>In part by determining which beliefs fit which evidence.

<sup>32</sup>In considering whether design plans can be contingent features of cognizers, it's worth keeping in mind that design plans for cognizers typically don't specify a response for *every possible* circumstance in which the cognizer might find itself. So a design plan that included more details than a previous one—by focusing on more circumstances (including ones the cognizer hadn't been in before but that it will be in in the future)—counts as a new design plan. For related discussion,



sense of ‘supposed to’ and in the epistemic sense of ‘supposed to’. As a result, these theistic beliefs of this cognizer would be (epistemically) justified.<sup>33</sup>

According to JWE2, it is possible for *any* cognizer to have justified beliefs that are not based on mental states of that cognizer. And, given that evidence is to be understood in the psychological sense as consisting of mental states of some kind or another, this means that it is possible, for *any* cognizer, to have justified beliefs that are not based on evidence. Clearly, this conflicts with EV2, EV3, SMI, and WMI.<sup>34</sup> And on natural ways of filling out JWE2, it conflicts with WAI as well.<sup>35</sup> Thus, a view that endorses the possibility of JWE2 exhibits the fourth grade of externalism.

Is there a version of evidentialism that goes beyond EV3 by exhibiting the fourth grade of externalism? Again, I think there is. Consider the following view, which shares clause (III) in common with EV1 and EV3 but differs from EV3 in its fourth clause and from EV1-EV3 in its first and second clauses as well as in the addition of its fifth clause:

*EV4: (I\*\*)* If S is a human in condition C, then S’s belief B is justified if and only if (a) S has evidence E, (b) B is based on evidence E, (c) B fits evidence E, and (d) S’s total evidence does not include defeaters for B. *(II\*\*)* Justification for the beliefs of humans in condition C supervenes on (a) S’s evidence (all the evidence S has), (b) the basing relations that hold between S’s beliefs and S’s evidence, and (c) on S’s being a human in condition C. *(III)* One’s evidence consists of one’s accessible mental states. *(IV\*)* JWE2 is possible.<sup>36</sup> *(V)*

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see Plantinga (1993: 22–4) where he distinguishes between design plans and max plans (or mini-max plans).

<sup>33</sup>This sort of example was originally proposed in Bergmann (2006: 52 and 63–4). Note that the proposal here isn’t *merely* that it’s possible for God to design or redesign cognizers to come to have beliefs in this way. In addition, the proposal is that in believing in accord with this design plan, such beliefs would be justified. This is compatible with it’s also being the case that there are some plans for belief formation that couldn’t be plans for *justified* belief formation, so that even if God made beings that formed beliefs in accord with those design plans, those beliefs wouldn’t be justified. Plausibly, a design plan that required beings to often recognize but always ignore defeating evidence for one’s beliefs and to hold those beliefs anyway, would be a design plan that does not yield justified beliefs, even if the believer is *supposed to* hold those beliefs (in the proper function sense of ‘supposed to’) and even if (unbeknownst to these beings) the environment for which these beings were designed and in which the designer always placed them was such that all recognized defeaters they encountered and ignored were misleading in ways the beings couldn’t detect. See Bergmann (2006: Chap. 6) for further discussion.

<sup>34</sup>See notes 15 and 16 for statements of WMI and SMI.

<sup>35</sup>Again, see note 11 for a statement of WAI.

<sup>36</sup>As an objection to including in EV4 the claim that JWE2 is possible, one might argue that someone in whom God directly caused the belief that God exists would be likely to have a defeater for that belief arising as one thinks to oneself “that belief seemed to come out of nowhere and I don’t seem to have any good reason to think it’s true”. (See BonJour (1985: 42) for suggestions along these lines.). As was mentioned in note 33, I think this is an important objection insofar as I think believed defeaters are defeaters, regardless of a cognizer’s design plan (see Bergmann (2006: Chap. 6) for further details). But what matters here are the answers to the following two questions: (i) would the person in whom God directly caused the belief that God exists in fact have such potentially defeating thoughts arise? (ii) is it the case that they epistemically should have such potentially defeating thoughts arise? If the answer to both questions is ‘no’ in a particular case,

As far as we can tell, all humans have always been, currently are, and are likely to remain in condition C until they die.

I won't describe condition C in any detail but it includes the following: (i) conditions most widely acknowledged to be conditions in which humans have always been, currently are, and are likely to remain until they die, (ii) the falsity of any claims that God has designed or re-designed any human to form the belief that God exists in the way described in JWE2 (or to form other beliefs in similar ways—i.e., ways that don't involve believing in response to one's evidence), and (iii) *not* having one's standard design plan revised.

The comments just made about condition C, together with the following points, provide a fuller explanation of EV4:

- (1) Justification for a cognizer's beliefs depends on what counts as proper function for that cognizer—i.e., on what it's design plan is.
- (2\*) Proper function for humans *in condition C* in fact requires (a) that their beliefs are based on and fit their evidence *and* (b) that what counts as a fitting response to evidence is just the sort of thing that standard evidentialists (and the rest of us) typically think counts as a fitting response to evidence (for humans).<sup>37</sup>
- (5) The design plan for a cognizer can change.

The reason that clause (I\*\*) of EV4 is true is that, as (1) says, justification depends on proper function and, as (2\*) says, proper function for humans in condition C requires that their beliefs are based on and fit their evidence, just as is specified in (I\*\*) of EV4. The reason that clause (II\*\*) of EV4 is true is that (II\*\*) follows from (I\*\*) together with the fact that being in condition C involves having the standard human design plan, which dictates which beliefs fit which evidence.<sup>38</sup> The reason that clause (IV\*) of EV4 is compatible with clauses (I\*\*) and (II\*\*) is that, as (1) says, justification depends on proper function and, as (5) and the description of condition C indicate, the design plan for any human *not* in condition C can differ from the design plan for humans in condition C (i.e., their standard design plan), including in the ways described in JWE2.

But does EV4 really count as a version of evidentialism? After all, it's focus is not on *all* beliefs or even *all possible human* beliefs. And the claim is that justification for the beliefs in question (i.e., human beliefs in condition C) supervenes not on one's evidence and the relevant basing relations but on those things together with

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then these worries about defeat aren't a problem in that case. (See Bergmann (2006: Chap. 6) for further discussion of the importance of these two questions.) And given that these possible cases described in JWE2 include God's involvement in human belief formation and in the human design plan, there's no reason to think that the answer will not be 'no' to both questions in many possible cases of this kind.

<sup>37</sup>Although this is what proper function requires for humans in condition C, it isn't what proper function requires for all possible cognizers or for humans in all possible conditions. See also note 30.

<sup>38</sup>Hence, if we hold fixed that S is a human in condition C (as the supervenience claim in (II\*\*) of EV4 recommends), we thereby hold fixed facts about which beliefs fit which evidence.

facts pertaining to whether those beliefs are *human beliefs in condition C* (which includes the cognizer in question having the standard human design plan). And on top of all that, it isn't *asserted* with any confidence that clauses (I\*\*) and (II\*\*) of EV4 apply to all actual human beliefs; the claim instead is just that *as far as we can tell* they apply to all actual human beliefs, suggesting that we may, at any moment, discover that they don't.

All of this is true. Nevertheless, in virtue of sharing clause (III) with EV1, EV4 (like EV3) is more similar to standard evidentialism (in one important respect) than is EV2. And, most importantly, the combination of clauses (I\*\*), (II\*\*), and (V) of EV4—understood as developed above—implies that, as far as we can tell, the following evidentialist insight is true:

*The Evidentialist Insight:* the justification of all actual human beliefs in fact depends on their fitting the believer's overall evidence, including the evidence on which they're based.

These points together are arguably enough for EV4 to count as a version of evidentialism.<sup>39</sup> And, in virtue of clause (IV\*), EV4 exhibits the fourth grade of externalism. Hence, EV4 is, plausibly, an evidentialist view exhibiting the fourth grade of externalism.

## 8.7 Are Any of These Evidentialist Views True?

I tentatively endorse EV4. My reasons for endorsing it are the following. First, I endorse the proper functionalist account of justification on which it depends—i.e., point (1) from the previous two sections. In Bergmann (2006: Chaps. 3 and 5), I defend this account and argue for its superiority over the evidentialism of the EV1-sort. I won't repeat those arguments here. Second, I'm very sympathetic to the Evidentialist Insight mentioned at the end of the previous section. Standard evidentialists (those of the EV1-sort) find the Evidentialist Insight obvious on its face. That is, they think it is obvious that every actual justified human belief *in fact* fits the believer's overall evidence (including the evidence on which it is based) and that every actual human belief *epistemically should* fit the believer's overall evidence, including the evidence on which it is based.<sup>40</sup> While I don't find this is

<sup>39</sup>They also explain why views like EV1 can *seem* true even if they're false and EV4 (as developed above) is in fact the truth.

<sup>40</sup>In their (2004: 1), Conee and Feldman say:

... the two of us saw evidentialism as sufficiently obvious to be in little need of defense. When we noticed to our amazement that prominent contemporary epistemologists were defending theories that seemed incompatible with evidentialism, this prompted us to write our first paper explicitly on this topic, "Evidentialism" ... We have been defending it ever since. We remain mildly amazed.

McCain (2014: 2), mentioning this passage, says he shares their amazement. In the quoted passage, Conee and Feldman are speaking of something like EV1, which is *stronger* than (and entails) the Evidentialist Insight.

as obvious as standard evidentialists find it, I do find it plausible, largely because, in thinking about all actual cases of justified human belief that come to mind, none of them strikes me as being a clear case of a belief that is not based on evidence consisting of accessible mental states.<sup>41</sup> While I differ from standard evidentialists in thinking that cases of justified belief like those described in JWE1 and JWE2 are *possible*, I don't think they are *actual* (for humans).

I say that I “tentatively” endorse EV4. This is because I'm quite open to being persuaded that there are sufficiently clear cases of actual (rather than merely possible) justified human beliefs that are not based on evidence (or on any mental states at all—accessible or not). Thus, I take quite seriously alleged cases of clearly justified actual human beliefs that are not based on evidence, cases such as (i) the one proposed by Andrew Moon (2012) of the person who knows (and, therefore, justifiably believes) the law of non-contradiction while dreamlessly sleeping without any mental states (such as intuitions or intellectual seemings or memory impressions) that could count as evidence for that belief and (ii) the cases of forgotten evidence proposed by Alvin Goldman (1999, 2011), where a person holds a belief (justifiably) but no longer has any idea what evidence led her to that belief. However, I also take seriously replies to these alleged counterexamples—e.g., replies to (i) by McCain (2014: 146–9 & 2015b) and replies to (ii) by Conee and Feldman (2001, 2011) and McCain (2015a)—and find them persuasive enough to conclude that we don't have any *clear* cases of actual justified human beliefs that are not based on evidence.

If I became persuaded that there are sufficiently clear cases of actual (rather than merely possible) justified human beliefs that are not based on evidence (or on any mental states at all), then I might—depending on what the cases were that persuaded me to give up clause (V) of EV4 or (2\*)—try to continue endorsing an even weaker version of evidentialism, one that restricted the application of the Evidentialist Insight to *paradigm cases* of actual justified human beliefs. But if I became persuaded that even that was false, I'd give up evidentialism altogether. For now, however, I cautiously endorse externalist evidentialism of the EV4 variety.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Though, of course, I don't find standard evidentialism of the EV1-sort plausible. However, because I find the Evidentialist Insight plausible, I can see why it's tempting (even if, in my view, mistaken) to endorse EV1.

<sup>42</sup>Thanks to Jeff Brower, Kevin McCain, and Josh White for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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**Part III**  
**Evidentialism and Social Epistemology**

# Chapter 9

## An Evidentialist Social Epistemology



William D. Rowley

**Abstract** Historically, it has not been uncommon to find discussions of evidentialism clustering around puzzles about the evidence of perception, introspection, memory, intuition, and inference. Evidentialists have given less attention to social epistemology, with the important exception of the epistemic significance of peer disagreement. Taking its cue from this literature, in this essay I will sketch the outlines of a unified evidentialist social epistemology. At its center is a principle about higher-level evidence from the literature on disagreement, the “evidence of evidence principle,” which links our higher-level evidence about the evidence others possess for particular propositions with our own object-level evidence. I will argue that this principle is not only fruitful for understanding the effect of discovering peer disagreement, but that it also accounts for our having evidence from both group and individual testimony. The social epistemology on offer seems to accommodate the common-sense extent of our testimonial evidence, providing an insight into what is unique about social sources of evidence and what is not, as well as pointing ahead to interesting problems for evidentialists in social epistemology.

**Keywords** Disagreement · Evidence of evidence · Higher-order evidence · Peer · Social evidence · Testimony

Our interactions with others raise epistemological questions.<sup>1</sup> One is the epistemological significance of revealed peer disagreement:

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Q1. Supposing that some  $S_1$  is justified in believing  $p$  and  $S_2$  is his peer, how (if at all) does finding out that  $S_2$  disagrees about  $p$  change  $S_1$ 's justification for  $p$ ?

Another is:

Q2. Supposing that some  $S$  receives testimony that  $p$ , how does this change  $S$ 's justification for  $p$ ?

Evidentialism answers both in the same way: in each case, believe, disbelieve, or withhold in accordance with the evidence. In the broadest terms, this is all the social epistemology evidentialists need offer. Any principle about epistemic justification that called for adopting an attitude other than that which fits the evidence would be non-evidentialist. But it remains relevant to ask questions about how our interactions with others affect our evidence. For example:

Q3. How does learning about peer disagreement (or any disagreement for that matter) about  $p$  affect one's total evidence?

or

Q4. How does receiving testimony that  $p$  affect one's total evidence?

Evidentialists might vary widely about the answers to (Q3) and (Q4). The answers to (Q3) and (Q4) could be said to constitute part of an evidentialist's "social epistemology."

This paper shows how an evidentialist approach to the epistemology of disagreement can be expanded into a full-blown evidentialist social epistemology, enabling (Q3) and (Q4) to be answered in terms of higher-order evidence. This "Higher-Order Social Epistemology" (or "HOSE" for short) has a variety of virtues to recommend it to the discerning evidentialist. First, it is an example of "experience-first" epistemology and is compatible with mentalist evidentialism.<sup>2</sup> Second, HOSE is a unified social epistemology. A higher-order evidence principle, "the evidence of evidence principle," unites our epistemic reliance on others. Separate epistemic principles for testimony and disagreement are not needed. Third, HOSE is fruitful. By thinking in terms of higher-order evidence, an additional source of "social evidence" that is easily overlooked is incorporated into this social epistemology. Fourth, the approach is plausibly compatible with commonsense views about the extent of testimonial justification. A full defense of HOSE is beyond the scope of this paper, but offering some reasons for thinking it a defensible evidentialist social epistemology will suffice for the present.

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<sup>2</sup>See Dougherty and Rysiew (2013).



## 9.1 Preliminaries

Evidentialism is a thesis about epistemic justification. As formulated by Earl Conee and Richard Feldman:

EJ Doxastic attitude  $D$  toward proposition  $p$  is epistemically justified for  $S$  at  $t$  if and only if having  $D$  toward  $p$  fits the evidence  $S$  has at  $t$ .<sup>3</sup>

A few comments are in order. First, EJ concerns *epistemic* justification for having doxastic attitudes as opposed to moral or prudential justification. Second, justification is determined by fit with  $S$ 's *total* evidence. EJ, therefore, gives conditions for *ultima facie* justification. Third, EJ concerns *propositional* justification rather than *doxastic* justification. Being propositionally justified in believing  $p$  does not entail that  $S$  believes  $p$ .<sup>4</sup> To be doxastically justified in that case,  $S$  must base his belief that  $p$  on evidence that, when taken together with the rest of  $S$ 's evidence, justifies belief that  $p$ .<sup>5</sup> As I am understanding the concepts here, in order for an individual to know  $p$ , a very confident belief must be justified together with the truth of the proposition and satisfaction of the ever-elusive de-Gettiering condition. Propositional justification is therefore a precondition on both doxastic justification and knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

## 9.2 Feldman's Higher-Order Account of Disagreement

In work on peer disagreement, Richard Feldman has argued for what I will call the "Higher-Order Account of Disagreement".<sup>7</sup> Succinctly:

In virtually every case of a [disclosed peer] disagreement, one gets evidence that one's peer has evidence for the conclusion the peer believes, and having evidence that one's peer's evidence supports their conclusion entails that one has some evidence in support of the peer's conclusion.<sup>8</sup>

The rest of this section will make a case for Feldman's account.

<sup>3</sup>Feldman and Conee (2004, 83).

<sup>4</sup>I understand doxastic attitudes to be representable as  $n$  on a scale of  $1 \leq n \leq 0$ . Confidence above 0.5 corresponds to belief (the higher, the more confident with 1 representing certain belief), confidence below 0.5 to disbelief (the lower, the more confident one's disbelief, with 0 representing certain disbelief), and 0.5 corresponding with withholding. Disbelief that  $p$  will be equivalent to belief that  $\neg p$ .

<sup>5</sup>Feldman and Conee (2004) call this "well-founded belief," 93.

<sup>6</sup>For the sake of simplicity, in what follows, "justification" stands for "*ultima facie* propositional justification" unless stipulated otherwise.

<sup>7</sup>See Feldman (2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2014)

<sup>8</sup>Feldman (2014, 292).

If  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are peers, then they are epistemically on par. I will understand peerhood as follows:

$S_1$  and  $S_2$  are *epistemic peers* with respect to  $p$  at  $t$  iff, at  $t$ , they are (roughly) equal to one another in reasoning ability, intelligence, intellectual virtues, and in the evidence, background information, and concepts they possess that are relevant to determining whether or not  $p$ .<sup>9</sup>

Peerhood is thus to be understood as proposition-relative. Two individuals  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  disagree just in case their doxastic attitudes toward a proposition differ. David Lewis and Peter van Inwagen could be peers with respect to compatibilism without Lewis having any evidence about the location of van Inwagen's car keys.<sup>10</sup> Having (roughly) equal evidence relevant to  $p$  allows for small differences in evidence between peers. Small differences in perspective need not preclude two people with a good view of a bird from being peers with respect to its species (provided that it makes no difference to the availability of relevant "marks" by which it may be recognized). As I am understanding the dimensions of peerhood listed above, each ultimately boils down to equality in obtaining evidence that reflects how the world is and forming a doxastically justified belief on the basis of that evidence.

The typical progression in peer disagreement cases starts with peers forming beliefs in isolation and then considers the consequences of having the disagreement disclosed to one or both of the peers. David Christensen's "Dividing the Check" case is typical in this respect:

Suppose that five of us go out to dinner. It's time to pay the check, so the question we're interested in is how much we each owe. We can all see the bill total clearly, we all agree to give a 20 percent tip, and we further agree to split the whole cost evenly, not worrying over who asked for imported water, or skipped desert, or drank more of the wine. I do the math in my head and become highly confident that our shares are \$43 each. Meanwhile, my friend does the math in her head and becomes highly confident that our shares are \$45 each. How should I react, upon learning of her belief?<sup>11</sup>

Christensen *might* be justified in retaining his original confidence if he knows that his friend is bad at math or if his friend is drunk, tired, or impaired in some other way that would prevent his friend from being his epistemic equal. But no such luck in the case. She is his peer (and he knows it).<sup>12</sup> Christensen thinks, and I agree, that it is intuitive that in this case he should become less confident that the correct share of each member of the party is \$43 and become more confident that the correct share is \$45 than he was previously.<sup>13</sup>

The schematic case of disagreement constructed here will therefore have two stages: ISOLATION and DISCLOSURE.<sup>14</sup> In ISOLATION, at a time  $t_i$ , some individual  $S_1$  starts with strong evidence that some other individual  $S_2$  is her peer with respect

<sup>9</sup>Adapted from Matheson (2009, 270).

<sup>10</sup>van Inwagen (2010).

<sup>11</sup>Christensen (2007, 193).

<sup>12</sup>Christensen (2007, 193).

<sup>13</sup>Christensen (2007, 193).

<sup>14</sup>The language of 'isolation' and 'disclosure' come from Feldman (2005, 219 & 220).

to a proposition  $p$ . In DISCLOSURE, at a later time  $t_d$ ,  $S_1$  finds out about  $S_2$ 's disagreement about  $p$ .

### Stage 1: Isolation

At time  $t_i$ :

1.  $S_1$  believes  $p$  on the basis of some evidence  $e_1$  and  $e_1$  supports  $p$ .
2.  $S_1$  has evidence  $e_2$  and  $e_2$  supports the proposition  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are peers about  $p$ .
3.  $S_1$ 's total evidence contains no further evidence about  $p$  beyond that mentioned in 1 and 2.

ISOLATION focuses on the epistemic situation of just one individual,  $S_1$ , before disagreement is disclosed. Given (1)–(3),  $S_1$ 's belief that  $p$  is not only propositionally justified, but doxastically justified. Suppose, however, that  $S_1$  finds out that  $S_2$  disagrees about  $p$ .

### Stage 2: Disclosure

At time  $t_d$ , (1) and (2) are true and:

4.  $S_1$  has evidence  $e_3$  and  $e_3$  supports  $S_2$  believes  $\neg p$ .
5.  $S_1$  believes on the basis of  $e_3$  that  $S_2$  believes  $\neg p$ .<sup>15</sup>
- 3'.  $S_1$ 's total evidence contains no further evidence about  $p$  beyond that mentioned in (1), (2), (4), and (5).

In DISCLOSURE,  $S_1$  has found out about  $S_2$ 's disagreement while retaining the evidence from ISOLATION.

Is  $S_1$  still justified at  $t_d$ ? In DISCLOSURE,  $S_1$  has received no new evidence about  $p$  except that provided by her evidence that  $S_2$  disagrees.<sup>16</sup> Given that  $S_1$  is justified in believing that  $S_2$  has a different attitude toward  $p$  and that she is justified in believing  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are peers about  $p$  (per (1) above) the following is true:

6.  $S_1$ 's  $e_2$  supports: *If  $S_2$  takes some attitude D toward  $p$ , then the attitude D is just as likely to be supported by some evidence  $e_4$ , as it is that  $S_1$ 's attitude toward  $p$  is justified by  $S_1$ 's evidence.*

Given (6) and  $S_1$ 's own evidence about her justification for believing  $p$ , her evidence at  $t_d$  supports the conclusion that whatever  $S_2$ 's attitude toward  $p$ , it is based on

<sup>15</sup>It is sometimes added that peers share their bases for belief thoroughly. This may be added, but is unnecessary if it is stipulated that  $S_1$  has strong evidence that  $S_2$  is her peer.

<sup>16</sup>I am only concerned here with the evidential impact of the fact of disagreement. But other features of the disagreement are often important to how we understand the a case. For example, the fact that Christensen and his peer both came to the conclusions that the share was \$43 and \$45, respectively, does not defeat Christensen's evidence that they are peers about whether or not \$43 is the share. But if, as he describes in another case, the friend arrives at the conclusion that the shares are \$450 each (a figure vastly larger than the bill itself), there is independent evidence that it is more likely that the friend errs than that Christensen does so. That a share of a bill cannot exceed the total amount would be further evidence about  $p$  in the schematic case beyond (199).

comparable evidence to her own.<sup>17</sup> Thus, because  $S_1$  has had  $S_2$ 's disbelief disclosed to her:

7.  $S_1$ 's  $e_2$  and  $e_3$  together support that  $S_2$  has evidence  $e_4$  that supports  $\neg p$ .

Thus, in (7)  $S_1$  has some higher-order evidence that  $S_2$  has evidence in support of  $S_2$ 's conclusion about  $p$ . Any instance of the schematic case will involve the individual instantiating  $S_1$  coming to have evidence that her disagreeing peer has evidence for his doxastic attitude. If sufficiently many cases of disclosed peer disagreement are like the schematic case, ED will be true.

Feldman's Higher-Order Account of Disagreement includes both ED and a claim about higher-order evidence. To infer that  $S_1$ 's evidence about  $S_2$  changes  $S_1$ 's evidence about  $p$  requires appeal to a principle linking higher-order evidence with object-level evidence, such as Feldman's "evidence of evidence principle":

Evidence that there is evidence for P is evidence for P.<sup>18</sup>

Or as it will be understood here,

If S has evidence,  $E_1$ , supporting the proposition that there is someone who has evidence that supports P, then S has some evidence,  $E_2$ , that supports P.<sup>19, 20</sup>

The evidence of evidence principle should not be understood to imply that  $S_1$  comes to have  $S_2$ 's evidence or that  $S_1$  has yet another "piece" of evidence in addition to his evidence about his peer's evidence.

Some initial worries about Feldman's principle can be set aside by noting that Feldman rejects the assumption that acquiring evidence for  $p$  always increases the overall support  $p$  enjoys on one's evidence.<sup>21</sup> First, one might worry that Feldman's evidence of evidence principle has the consequence that lying about  $p$  increases one's own evidence for  $p$ . If you have evidence that someone else has testimonial evidence for  $p$ , the principle entails that you have some evidence for  $p$ , even if the testimony is known to be deceptive. While Feldman's principle entails that one has some evidence for  $p$  in this scenario, the support this evidence confers on  $p$  is defeated so long as you remember that you lied to them. On Feldman's view, defeated evidence is still evidence.<sup>22</sup> A similar answer can be offered for the worry

<sup>17</sup>(6) does not conflict with (3') because it is not new evidence, just a spelling out of what  $S_1$ 's evidence supports. Likewise with (7) below.

<sup>18</sup>Feldman (2006, 223). To my knowledge, the evidence of evidence principle is first mentioned here. An earlier principle about reasons in John Hardwig's "Epistemic Dependence" is similar (1985, 336), especially as later formulated by Frederick Schmitt as "the principle of testimony": If  $B$  has good reasons for believing  $A$  has good reasons for believing  $p$ , then  $B$  has good reasons for believing  $p$ . (1988, 298).

<sup>19</sup>Feldman (2014, 292).

<sup>20</sup>Those interested in further explanation and defense of the principle should see Feldman (2009, 2014), Barnett (2016), and Rowley (2016).

<sup>21</sup>Feldman (2014).

<sup>22</sup>Feldman (2014).

that the evidence of evidence principle allows easy bootstrapping. Repeated (and remembered) acts of introspection will cause one to have more evidence for  $p$ , but in a way akin to reading the same newspaper over and over again. One has more evidence, but no more support when the evidence is taken together with the rest of one's evidence. As understood by Feldman, evidence is not "additive."<sup>23</sup> I will call evidence  $e_1$  and  $e_2$  redundant just in case  $e_1$  and  $e_2$  both individually support  $p$  to the same degree but, when taken together without any other defeaters, they do not support  $p$  to a greater degree than they do individually. Feldman's principle does not guarantee that the evidence one acquires by having some evidence of evidence is neither redundant nor defeated.

Return to the schematic disagreement.  $S_1$  has evidence that  $e_4$  exists and supports *not-p*. By the evidence of evidence principle, (8) follows:

8.  $S_1$ 's total evidence at  $t_d$  contains evidence supporting  $\neg p$   $S_1$  lacked at  $t_i$ .

In cases where  $S_1$ 's evidence for  $\neg p$  is neither redundant nor defeated,

9.  $S_1$ 's total evidence at  $t_d$  supports  $\neg p$  more than  $S_1$ 's total evidence at  $t_i$  (and, equivalently, supports  $p$  less).

Hence, any instantiation of the schematic disagreement involves  $S_1$  acquiring evidence for holding a different attitude toward  $p$  from the one held in ISOLATION and in many cases  $S_1$ 's retaining her original attitude toward  $p$  will be unjustified.<sup>24</sup>

### 9.3 Beyond Ideal Disagreements

The same general approach Feldman advocates for peer disagreement can be applied to non-ideal cases of disagreement. Considering non-ideal disagreements will make connections between disagreement and testimony more visible.<sup>25</sup>

To start, consider a case in which those who disagree are not peers, but one is in a superior epistemic position to the other:

#### Mechanic Case

I have just arrived to pick up my car after it has had its oil changed by Fred the mechanic. I've taken my two previous cars to Fred and have had a lot of experience with him. He's

<sup>23</sup>Feldman (2014).

<sup>24</sup>For simplicity, I am assuming the truth of the uniqueness thesis (UT), that is, "for any body of evidence E and proposition P, E justifies at most one doxastic attitude toward P" (Matheson (2011), 360). Without UT, the same conclusion follows in cases in which  $S_1$  has evidence that  $S_2$ 's attitude toward  $p$  is outside the range of permitted doxastic attitudes toward  $p$ .

<sup>25</sup>Kvanvig (2010) comes the closest so far in outlining a view like the one that I describe in the following pages. My view differs from his in a number of ways, especially in that my view is developed without assuming that higher-level evidence is not evidence or with his emphasis on "closure of inquiry" as part of the problem of disagreement (52–53). Also see discussions in Elga (2007) of expert and novice disagreement.

always given me what seems to me to be good advice, sometimes even suggesting that I take my import to a specialist when he thinks they could do a job more quickly and cheaply than he can. I have plenty of friends who have taken their cars to Fred for a long time and none have ever complained. Fred knows a lot about cars. I, on the other hand, don't. My car hasn't recently made strange noises or odd smells, so I dropped off my car, I believed that, other than needing its oil changed, my car was free of mechanical problems. However, when I arrive, Fred tells me, "your car has some serious mechanical problems." He goes on to explain that the engine mounts are cracking and, though not yet affecting performance, it needs immediate repair. I immediately believe him (inwardly groaning about how much this is going to cost).

Even though I start by believing (with a modest degree of confidence) that *d*, *my car is free of mechanical problems*, the obvious rational response in the case is to change my doxastic attitude about *d*, even going so far as to disbelieve *d*.

This is obviously not an instance of the schematic case. Consider the stage right before I discover that Fred disagrees, ISOLATION<sub>M</sub>:

M1. I believe *d* on the basis of some evidence  $e_1$  and  $e_1$  supports *d*.

Here,  $e_1$  stands for my observations of my car and my background evidence that, generally, cars that seem to function properly don't have mechanical problems.

M2. I have some evidence  $e_2$  and  $e_2$  supports the proposition *Fred is an expert with respect to cars and now has better evidence about the state of my car (which includes whether or not d) than I do*.

Here things are significantly different from the schematic case. We aren't peers. Fred has training and experience. Given that he's just been working on my car, he will have gained evidence that I lack about its current state. For simplicity, allow that

M3. My total evidence contains no further evidence about *d* beyond what is mentioned in (M1) and (M2).

As described, I start justified in believing with at least moderate confidence that *d*.

Things change when Fred's disagreement is disclosed to me through his testimony that *d* is false. In DISCLOSURE<sub>M</sub>, the evidence from (M1) and (M2) has not been lost, so I retain  $e_1$  and  $e_2$ . But some changes occur:

M4. I have evidence  $e_3$  and  $e_3$  supports *Fred believes  $\neg d$* .

M5. I believe on the basis of  $e_3$  that *Fred believes  $\neg d$* .

M3'. My total evidence contains no further evidence about *d* beyond that mentioned in (M1), (M2), (M4), and (M5).

In the schematic case, evidence of peerhood enables us to infer that  $S_j$  has some evidence against her original attitude. In MECHANIC CASE, there is no evidence of peerhood. Instead, the evidence about Fred's evidence is stronger than in a standard peer disagreement case:

M6. My evidence  $e_2$  and  $e_3$  support: *If Fred believes  $\neg d$ , then his belief is very likely to be supported by some evidence  $e_4$ , which supports  $\neg d$  to a much greater degree than  $e_1$  supports  $d$ .*

From (M6) and the evidence of evidence principle it follows that I have evidence that  $\neg d$ . Further, given the superiority of Fred's epistemic situation with respect to  $d$  and that my evidence of his disagreement with me is strong evidence, I acquire strong evidence for  $\neg d$ . In this case, abandoning my original attitude will be justified and believing  $\neg d$  to some degree will be justified (given that the evidence is not defeated or redundant). Approaching this case of non-ideal disagreement along similar lines to the Higher-Order Account of Disagreement offers the intuitive answer in this case. I acquire evidence that  $\neg d$  is true. Given that my evidence in favor of  $d$  was weak and only justified moderate confidence and my evidence that if Fred has an attitude about  $d$ , his is based on strong evidence, conciliating by believing  $\neg d$  will be justified.

Evidence about the content of someone else's evidence may have an effect on the justified attitude one should have after discovering disagreement with someone in a much better epistemic position. Evidence that the problem with my car is (presently) not the kind of problem that would affect performance (that I would notice) will tend to further undercut my evidence for  $d$ . Evidence that Fred accidentally inspected the wrong car will, for all of his expertise, defeat my higher-order evidence for  $\neg d$ . Also, for any  $S_1$  with evidence  $e$  that  $S_2$  has evidence  $e^*$  that  $p$ , the strength of  $S_1$ 's evidence for  $p$  will vary by the degree of support for  $e$  and  $e^*$ .

A further point: I intend MECHANIC CASE to be mundane, commonplace. We run into similar cases of disagreement regularly, hardly noticing the disagreement, perhaps with a feeling of surprise, and often revise our doxastic attitudes as the higher-order view sketched here recommends. Our evidence about our disputant is that they have evidence that more strongly supports their conclusion than we have toward ours. Many similarly mundane cases can be offered. Here are three:

- Jane thinks she filled out the form correctly. The lady at the DMV window judges that she hasn't and informs her of this fact. Jane loses her original belief and goes back to correct the form.
- Javier counts out \$2.60 to pay for coffee as he has done many times before. The barista says that the price has gone up a little, so he owes \$2.75. He believes it and fishes for more change in his pocket.
- Ji-Woo believes witch trials were common in the Middle Ages. A history-buff friend tells him that they were not common until the Modern period. Ji-Woo believes his friend.

Our background evidence about people's jobs, interests, habits, character, etc., will affect the strength of our evidence about the evidence they have. This way of thinking about disagreement makes sense of our reliance on experts (and indications of who is an expert and who is not). Experts have evidence that we lack and that might be difficult or impossible to acquire first-hand. Consulting previously

unknown expert opinions offers us an opportunity to improve our epistemic situation without becoming experts ourselves because by doing so, we acquire higher-order evidence.

Cases of asymmetrical disagreements like Mechanic Case, in which one has evidence that the other party is an expert with respect to  $p$ , are intuitively ones in which deference is warranted. A higher-order approach to these cases similar to the Higher-Order Account of Disagreement accommodates these intuitions. Furthermore, other categories of cases will admit of similar treatment. Cases which reverse the asymmetry, where an expert discovers non-expert disagreement (imagine Fred discovering my disagreement about  $d$ ) will yield many cases in which it is intuitive that the expert changing her attitude would be irrational. In the case of Fred, for example, if he is aware of my relative ignorance and is not only aware that he has evidence that I have *weaker* evidence for  $d$  than he does for  $\neg d$ , but that my observations of my car are of a kind that would entirely *miss* the evidence he acquired for  $\neg d$  undercuts the support  $d$  might otherwise receive from his evidence of my evidence.<sup>26</sup>

#### 9.4 Extending the Higher-Order Account of Disagreement to Testimony

There is another kind of doxastic mismatch that is not disagreement, and like cases of disagreement discovering its presence can provide you with evidence. Consider Fred's testimony that the problem with my car is that the engine mounts are cracking. Call this  $d^*$ . Allow that my mechanical mindlessness means that I've never even considered the possibility that engine mounts *could* crack. I didn't believe  $d^*$ . But it also seems wrong to say that I disbelieve or withhold  $d^*$ . I simply had no attitude at all toward it. But for the same reasons as with  $d$ , the reasonable thing, given my evidence about Fred, will be to believe  $d^*$ . I have evidence that Fred has evidence for  $d^*$  and nothing about my evidence prevents that higher-level evidence from making my overall evidence on balance support  $d^*$ . Having no attitude toward  $p$  does not mean that one's evidence does not make an attitude fitting toward  $p$ . It only means that I have adopted no attitude toward  $p$ .

It will be useful to have a term for this mismatch; I will call it "difference":

For all individuals  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ ,  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  differ about  $p$  (at  $t$ ) iff  $S_1$  has doxastic attitude  $A$  toward  $p$  and  $S_2$  does not have  $A$  toward  $p$ .

"Difference" includes disagreements along with other forms of doxastic mismatch. Michael Bergmann has identified a number of ways in which one might fail

<sup>26</sup>It might be objected that in such a case, Fred might have some miniscule residue of undefeated evidence for  $d$  based on the very unlikely event that he erred in his judgment that  $\neg d$ . If so, I concede it. The defeat might not be complete. But the change in attitude would be so slight that, unless Fred is doing epistemology, he would describe his attitude as unchanged.



to have any doxastic attitude toward a proposition: having never considered  $p$ , being in the process of considering  $p$ , and never having completed consideration whether  $p$  without forming a judgment (perhaps having been interrupted).<sup>27</sup> Note that this is not the same as withholding  $p$ , which involves taking a doxastic attitude with respect to  $p$ , just one that is neither belief nor disbelief. They differ at least in this: withholding belief that  $p$  can be based in the evidence; lacking any doxastic attitude with respect to  $p$  cannot.

A higher-order approach to disagreement easily adapts to difference. Any  $S_1$  finding out that  $S_2$  believes some  $p$  that  $S_1$  has never actually adopted a doxastic attitude toward may be treated in almost the same way as disagreement.  $S_1$ 's evidence about  $S_2$  will determine whether  $S_1$  acquires higher-order evidence and how strong any evidence  $S_1$  thereby acquires for  $p$  is. The existence of defeaters or redundancy will affect the degree to which this evidence changes the doxastic attitude  $S_1$  is justified in adopting.

This augmented higher-order approach can be applied to testimony. The Higher-Order Account of Testimonial Evidence is as follows. Let 'H' name one individual (the hearer, though testimony need not be received audibly) and 'S' be another individual (the speaker, though again, this person could be a writer, a telegraph operator, a semaphore signaler, a user of sign language, etc.):

H has testimonial evidence for  $p$  at  $t$  iff at  $t$ , for some S,

- a. H has evidence that S testifies that  $p$  and.
- b. H has evidence that S's testimony is based on evidence S has that supports  $p$ .

The object-level evidence we acquire through disagreement and the evidence we acquire through testimony, in this picture, is nothing over and above higher-order evidence. Testifying, on this account, signals of our possession of evidence and invites others to rely upon that evidence.

A full defense of this account's ability to accommodate common sense is not possible here. But an objection should be addressed. Testimony is the source of many beliefs common sense takes to be justified or knowledge. I am not alone in finding it highly plausible that common sense does not greatly overstate the extent of our testimonial justification and knowledge. One might worry that while the Higher-Order Account of Testimonial Evidence accommodates the intuition that testimony provides us with evidence when we know the speaker, it may be unable to account for evidence from unfamiliar testifiers.

I will attempt to address this concern by examining how the Higher-Order Account of Testimonial Evidence deals with Jennifer Lackey's Chicago Stranger case:

Having just arrived at the train station in Chicago, Morris wishes to obtain directions to the Sears Tower. He looks around, approaches the first adult passer-by that he sees, and asks how to get to his desired destination. The passer-by, who knows the city extraordinarily well, provides Morris with impeccable directions to the Sears Tower by telling him that it is

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<sup>27</sup>See discussion in Bergmann (2005).

located two blocks east of the train station. Morris unhesitatingly forms the corresponding true belief.<sup>28</sup>

Lackey's Chicago Stranger case is frequently discussed in the literature about testimony as a case of testimonial knowledge or justified testimonial belief that comes about on the basis of scant background knowledge about the testifier.

The Higher-Order Account of Testimonial Evidence can accommodate the claim that Morris acquires evidence and justification for the true belief he forms, though a little interpretative quibbling is required. I will set aside the question about whether Morris knows. Lackey thinks he does, and says, "it is nearly universally accepted that a situation such as Morris's not only can but often does result in testimonial knowledge."<sup>29</sup> I'm less confident that Morris *knows*, but on a natural way of filling in under-described elements of the case, it is plausible that Morris has testimonial evidence justifying him in believing what he has been told about the location of the Sears Tower.

If we suppose that Morris has more or less the same kind of background evidence and cognitive faculties the average American interstate traveller would have and that the stranger's response is in line with what Morris would expect (given his background evidence) of a competent and sincere speaker, then it seems intuitive indeed that he is justified in believing the directions. But in such a case, we have reasons to think that he has evidence that the stranger has evidence behind her testimony. That the stranger stops, listens, and offers a relevant reply that seems credible and does not trigger mental "alarm bells" for Morris is significant. The stranger's willingness to stop and listen will be evidence about the stranger's disposition toward Morris, especially if facial expressions, tone, body language, vocabulary, and other indicators offer further confirmation. Assuming, then, that Morris's evidence initially supports belief in the stranger's cooperation, the stranger will not give an insincere or ignorant response. This will include willingness to say only what she believes and will qualify her response based on the quality of her evidence.

Much more needs to be said to explain how Morris might come by background evidence that the speaker is being cooperative and that she is saying what her evidence supports. However, my primary goal in this section is only to point out that even in the Morris case, spelling out the case so that it is plausible that Morris really is justified in believing what the stranger says will tend to give us reason to think that Morris has background evidence that, combined with his experiences in the interaction, yield higher-order evidence that supports the content of the testimony. If we typically have evidence about whether or not we have cooperative interlocutors, it will follow that we typically have testimonial evidence in similar cases, according to the Higher-Order Account of Testimonial Evidence.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Lackey (2007, 352).

<sup>29</sup>Lackey (2007, 352).

<sup>30</sup>I have noted that I am dubious that Morris knows. It becomes much easier for me to imagine him knowing, however, as he proceeds. His belief may be confirmed as he starts to see signs indicating

But how do we acquire the background evidence just relied upon without either (a) abandoning the Higher-Order Account of Testimonial Evidence and allowing that some testimony enjoys the same status as ultimate evidence that perception enjoys or (b) rejecting common sense about the extent of testimonial evidence and justification for some form of radical testimonial skepticism? The solution may be found in a few different places. First, as I have defended elsewhere, certain views on pragmatic implicature may help. If understanding and making implicatures relies on some form of background mental calculation that includes a version of H. P. Grice's Maxim of Quality, our continued success may constitute evidence that others say what their evidence supports.<sup>31</sup> One advantage of this line of reasoning is that it allows that we can rely on our social competence in addition to our observations of testifiers for judging who is cooperating and who is not. Another approach makes use of principles of inference to the best explanation. A case may be made for the superior virtues of a simple causal story from evidence to true testimony than for its rivals in many cases like Morris's. The difficulties for rival explanations like intentional deception or varieties of speaker error are the need for intentional or accidental simulation of evidence-based sincere testimony.<sup>32</sup> More needs to be said about each of these strategies and how they might be combined, but these seem to be promising approaches.<sup>33</sup>

## 9.5 Mind-Reading Evidence

The Higher-Order Social Epistemology outlined above takes testimony and disagreement to provide important higher-order evidence. As was noted above, though, there are cases in which higher-order evidence may be acquired that involve no testimony. There are also cases in which higher-order evidence can be acquired without evidence that there is disagreement. Consider a new variant of Mechanic Case in which I start with no attitude at all toward the proposition that my car has any mechanical problems. I watch Fred work on the car and infer by his behavior that he has evidence of a problem under the hood. This case involves neither disagreement nor testimony. Still, I acquire higher-order evidence that could justify some degree of belief that there is a problem with my car.

I will call higher-order evidence acquired by observing non-testimonial behavior "mind-reading evidence":

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that the Sears Tower is ahead or spots what looks like it might be the Sears Tower between the other skyscrapers. In this case, the initial testimonial belief is supplemented by other experiences and the knowledge is not strictly testimonial.

<sup>31</sup>See Rowley (2012, 2016).

<sup>32</sup>See especially chapter 4, "Replying to the Not Enough Evidence Objection" in Rowley (2016).

<sup>33</sup>Especially to respond to Malmgren (2006), who raises a problem for the explanatory strategy. See Chapter 5, "Problems of Innocence and Experience" of Rowley (2016) for a response.

*H* has mind-reading evidence for *p* at *t* iff at *t*, for some *S*, *H* observes *S*'s non-testimonial behavior<sup>34</sup> and *H*'s observations are evidence that *S* has evidence for *p*.<sup>35</sup>

Mind-reading evidence, understood this way, cuts across the distinctions between disagreement, other forms of difference, and agreement. Such evidence frequently helps us navigate the conversations in which testimony is received. Consider a simple discussion between friends over which restaurant to go to. If Juan proposes that we go to Joe's, and notes from Cindy's body language that she's never heard of it, then he may attempt to explain his reasons for proposing Joe's. If her eyes widen in surprise, as though she can't believe he would propose such a thing, he may try to address what he takes to be the reason for her disbelief or inquire about it, if he can't think of an explanation. We watch for evidence of how what we say is taken by others and condition our cooperation by what we learn. This kind of evidence frequently goes unnoticed because it is frequently supplemented by or superseded by testimonial evidence. Xi might get some evidence from Cindy's expression that she has evidence that Joe's may not be the best of the options Juan proposed. When Cindy actually *says*, "Joe's is not the best of those options," Xi now has evidence that Cindy not only has evidence that this is the case, but she thinks that it is strong enough to be worth *saying* under the circumstances.

Additionally, though I have focused entirely on social epistemological issues having to do with individuals in communication with one another, there is no reason why what I have been proposing should not apply to an individual learning from groups. One can "read a group's mind." I might observe the behavior of individuals working together as a group and come to have evidence about the possession of evidence by members of that group, even if I do not know precisely how that evidence is distributed within it.<sup>36</sup> For example, if I have been seeing cars from Gino's Uranium Prospecting Corporation in the local hills, I may have explanatory

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<sup>34</sup>That is, other than the mere fact that *S* testifies to the truth of some proposition. The manner of testifying may serve as mind-reading evidence for other propositions, such as "I would like to hurry up and finish this conversation so that I can go to the bathroom" or "I'm enjoying this restaurant." Thanks to Earl Conee for bringing this point to my attention.

<sup>35</sup>I have intentionally left open the possibility that *S* is not an individual, but a group. A worry: do groups have evidence in the same sense of "evidence" that individuals do? A way in which they might is by virtue of some member possessing evidence and that evidence contributing to the observed actions of the group. If we understand a group having evidence as entailing possession of the evidence by one or more members, then having mind-reading evidence applies to groups. If we understand groups having "evidence" in some other way, then mind-reading evidence may need restriction to individuals.

<sup>36</sup>There is a growing literature on the epistemology of groups (see Lackey (2014)). I am assuming a minimalist approach to collective epistemology which reduces the evidence possessed by groups to evidence possessed by its members. A more robust collective epistemology that would allow groups to possess evidence would make it even easier to account for group testimonial and mind-reading evidence.

evidence that someone in that corporation has evidence that there is uranium in the hills.<sup>37</sup>

## 9.6 Conclusion

The preceding sections have shown how Higher-Order Social Epistemology (HOSE) unites three sources of higher-order evidence: disagreement, testimony, and mind-reading. Ultimately, that list may be shortened when it is observed that all higher-order evidence from disagreement depends on either testimony or mind-reading evidence. HOSE understands mind-reading in terms of mind-reading evidence and testimony in terms of the Higher-Order Account of Testimony. They all may be called “social evidence.”

There are limits to this project. HOSE attempts to offer an account of only mind-reading and testimonial evidence, along with the propositional justification thereby conferred on some of our beliefs. Issues involving doxastic justification that concern basing and further issues having to do with knowledge are still unaddressed. Further, I have only pointed in the direction of solutions to concerns about how it is possible that sufficient background evidence can be acquired for the view to accommodate common sense.

A last consequence of HOSE should be noted. It is sometimes argued that the distinction between reductionism and non-reductionism is commitment to the claim that testimonial knowledge is in some respect epistemically distinctive.<sup>38</sup> HOSE does not point us to a way in which testimonial knowledge is distinctive, but it does not preclude that possibility.<sup>39</sup> But it does point to the uniqueness of our *social evidence*. Persons<sup>40</sup> retain a special kind of epistemic authority in virtue of the evidence they possess. This distinguishes social evidence from “instrument evidence.” Believing on the basis of testimony or mind-reading involves reliance on a mind whereas reading a thermometer relies on mere regular covariation

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<sup>37</sup>Baker and Clark (2018) have an interesting argument along similar lines, arguing that the ability to “pass the buck” is not distinctive of testimonial knowledge.

<sup>38</sup>For discussion, see Greco (2012). Goldberg (2006) is an interesting objection to this claim, recently replied to in Baker and Clark (2018).

<sup>39</sup>It might be that the distinctiveness of testimonial knowledge does not lie in the evidence. Goldberg (2006) argues that being able to pass the buck is distinctive of testimonial knowledge, though Baker and Clark (2018) suggest that this may only be distinctive of what I have called “social evidence.” Another source of the distinctiveness of testimony suggested in Moran (2006) might be in special responsibilities that testifiers have for the truth. If this is an epistemic property, it is not ruled out by HOSE.

<sup>40</sup>Perhaps we might say “minds,” because, though social epistemologists may focus on our relationships with other humans, we interact with non-human animals that possess comparable organs of perception to our own and may thereby have comparable evidence.

between an object and the environment.<sup>41</sup> HOSE puts epistemic authority where evidentialists should expect it to be: in evidence.

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<sup>41</sup>Not everyone thinks that this distinction is of great epistemological importance (see Sosa (2006)). It does not rule out some uses of others as instruments, where bodies (without the interference of minds) may be used as instruments. For example, sweat might indicate warmth or goosebumps might indicate cold, even if the individual never actually felt either (e.g., if sedated).

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# Chapter 10

## Credibility and the Distribution of Epistemic Goods



Jennifer Lackey

**Abstract** What is the norm governing our credibility assessments of others? According to Miranda Fricker, the answer is “obvious”: we should match the level of credibility attributed to others to the evidence that they are offering the truth. In this paper, I will show that this evidentialist norm of credibility assessments is seriously wanting. In particular, I will identify and develop two kinds of testimonial injustice, which I call *distributive* and *normative*, and argue that this norm is fundamentally incapable of ruling them out. Finally, I will develop and defend an alternative norm—what I call the *Wide Norm of Credibility*—that not only avoids the problems afflicting the evidentialist version, but also makes vivid both the relational and normative dimensions of our credibility assessments.

**Keywords** Distributive testimonial injustice · Normative testimonial injustice · Norms of credibility · Testimony · Wide norm of credibility

When someone tells us something, it might involve matters as mundane as how to get to a grocery store or that one owns a cat and as urgent as whether one was assaulted by a co-worker or committed the murder in question. Whether we believe what we are told depends, in large part, on how credible we take the speaker to be. Assessing people’s credibility, then, is found in just about every corner of our existence, from navigating the world to making decisions that are quite literally the difference between life and death.

What should guide us in our evaluations of the credibility of others? Otherwise put, what is the norm governing credibility assessments? According to Miranda Fricker, “there is no puzzle about the fair distribution of credibility, for credibility is a concept that wears its proper distribution on its sleeve. Epistemological nuance aside, the hearer’s obligation is obvious: she must match the level of credibility she

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attributes to her interlocutor to the evidence that he is offering the truth” (Fricker 2007, p. 19). More precisely:

*Evidentialist Norm (of Credibility)*<sup>1</sup> [EN]: A hearer, H, should match the credibility judgment of a speaker, S, to the evidence that S is offering the truth.

According to Fricker, then, a broadly evidentialist norm governs our assessments of the credibility of others. In particular, we should match our beliefs about the credibility of other persons to the evidence in the same way that we do with respect to our beliefs about, say, coffee cups and computers.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I will show that the “obvious” evidentialist norm found in EN is seriously wanting, both in epistemic and moral ways. In particular, I will identify and develop two kinds of testimonial injustice, which I call *distributive* and *normative*, and argue that the EN is fundamentally incapable of ruling them out. While my discussion focuses on the EN, my main aim here is to expand the discussion of credibility and its relation to testimonial injustice rather than to challenge Fricker’s specific view. Given this, though I will identify the ways in which my arguments directly challenge the EN, my overall goal is to point toward a way of understanding credibility that has not been properly appreciated—one where credibility excesses play a far more central role in testimonial injustice. Finally, I will develop and defend a norm of credibility—what I call the *Wide Norm of Credibility*—that not only avoids the problems afflicting the EN, but also makes vivid the relational and normative dimensions of our credibility assessments, and the extent to which credibility can be a finite epistemic good that can wrong knowers through both deficits and excesses.

## 10.1 Evidentialist Norm of Credibility

As presented, the EN is a distinctively epistemic norm and, if it is the only norm of this sort governing belief, then a subject is in the epistemic clear, so to speak, when it is followed. But the EN has also been taken to have deep moral significance. According to Fricker, for instance, “[a] speaker sustains...testimonial injustice if and only if she receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer; so the central case of testimonial injustice is identity-prejudicial credibility deficit” (Fricker 2007, p. 28). A speaker suffers a credibility deficit when the credibility that she is afforded by a hearer is less than the evidence that she is offering the truth, and a hearer has the relevant kind of identity prejudice when she has a prejudice

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<sup>1</sup>For the sake of ease of expression, I will speak simply of norms of credibility. But this should be understood as the norms governing our assessment of speakers’ credibility and the corresponding acceptance of their testimony.

<sup>2</sup>For different answers to this question, though ones unlike that defended in this paper, see Jones (2002) and Maitra (2010).

against the speaker in virtue of the latter's membership in a social group.<sup>3</sup> Prejudice here is being understood in terms of not being properly responsive to evidence. A prejudicial stereotype, for instance, is a generalization about a social group that fails to be sufficiently sensitive to relevant evidence.<sup>4</sup> Where this prejudice "tracks" the subject through different dimensions of social activity—economic, educational, professional, and so on—it is systematic, and the type of prejudice that tracks people in this way is related to social identity, such as racial and gender identity. Fricker argues, then, that when a hearer violates the EN by giving a speaker a credibility deficit in virtue of, say, her race, the speaker is wronged "in her capacity as a knower," and is thereby the victim of testimonial injustice. What this means is that a speaker is also in the moral clear when she satisfies the EN, at least with respect to committing an act of, and a hearer suffering an instance of, testimonial injustice.

There are, however, at least two different readings of the EN that should be distinguished. On the one hand, it might be understood *categorically* as follows:

Categorical EN: For every speaker, S, and hearer, H, H should match the credibility judgment of S to the evidence that S is offering the truth.

According to this categorical reading, hearers are required not only to have their credibility judgments of speakers track the available evidence, but also to make such judgments in the first place. The problem, though, is that this demands too much, as there are many instances in which hearers need not have any beliefs at all about the credibility of speakers. As I walk down the street, I have no obligation—epistemic or moral—to judge the credibility of all of the random passersby that I overhear, nor am I required to form beliefs about the reliability of every source on the internet that comes across my computer screen. This is even clearer when one's attention is better focused on activities of greater epistemic and moral value. A surgeon, for instance, need not assess the credibility of nurses talking about the weather while she is removing her patient's appendix. In all of these cases, hearers aren't failing in any of their truth-related aims, nor are they harming speakers by their actions. This shows that an entirely categorical reading of the EN is untenable.

Given this, perhaps it is best to understand the EN *conditionally* in the following way:

Conditional EN: For every speaker, S, and hearer, H, if H makes a credibility assessment of S, then H should match it to the evidence that S is offering the truth.

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<sup>3</sup>Anderson (2012) identifies structural epistemic injustices that may have locally, non-prejudicial causes, and require structural remedies. I am convinced by Anderson's arguments, and hence I do not think that all instances of testimonial injustice require a local, prejudicial origin. Nevertheless, I will, for the most part, grant this aspect of Fricker's view in what follows.

<sup>4</sup>Fricker elsewhere adds that the prejudicial stereotypes that are relevant to testimonial injustice are those that also (i) have a negative valence, and (ii) stem from an "ethically noxious" motivation. Fricker (2007, p. 34) (i) and (ii) have been challenged on both empirical and philosophical grounds (see, for instance, Munroe (2016)), and so I will not focus on them in what follows.

Unlike the categorical reading, this version requires that credibility assessments of speakers track the available evidence only when hearers form the relevant beliefs, thereby permitting the complete absence of such assessments in the first place. Otherwise put, it is only when one forms a belief about the reliability of a speaker that one is required to have it match the available evidence. This clearly avoids the objection facing the Categorical EN that it requires too much of hearers. The problem here, however, is that this conditional version of the norm demands too little, as there are many cases in which hearers fail to form beliefs about the credibility of speakers when they ought to—epistemically and/or morally. For instance, suppose that a group of scientists is collaborating on a research project but the men don't form any beliefs at all about the reliability of their women co-workers because they have no intention of relying on their testimony. This is due to a deep-rooted though unconscious sexism to which all of the men subscribe. As a result, they not only miss out on crucial data that would dramatically alter their beliefs about the scientific results, they also harm the women by unjustly blocking their participation in the research. Here, it is clear that the men have failed to fulfill both epistemic and moral obligations, despite their satisfaction of the Conditional EN. In particular, they do not consider evidence that they should have—namely, the testimony of the women scientists—and they fail to regard their co-workers as even possible contributors to the domain of inquiry, which clearly wrongs the women in their capacity as knowers.

Indeed, it is arguable that the most pernicious forms of testimonial injustice result from failures to make credibility assessments in the first place. Suppose that members of a despised racial group are regarded by some as so outside the realm of personhood and agency that they are not even appropriate candidates for such assessments. The problem here is not that they are afforded credibility deficits, even massive ones, but that they are regarded as lying outside the realm of knowers altogether. This shows that an entirely conditional reading of the EN is indefensible.

The upshot of these considerations is that concealed in the EN are two distinct norms, both of which are important. For not only are there epistemic and moral wrongs that come with failing to match our credibility assessments of hearers to the evidence, so, too, are there such wrongs with failing to make such credibility assessments in the first place. This same point might be expressed in terms of the questions that need to be asked: not only do we need to ask what should ground our judgments of speakers' credibility when we make them, but we also need to ask when we are required to make such judgments at all. Thus, a complete account of our obligations as consumers of testimony, and the corresponding injustices that follow with our flouting them, needs to flesh out both the categorical and the conditional readings of the EN.

For our purposes here, however, I will restrict my attention to the Conditional EN, according to which hearers ought to make credibility judgments of speakers

that match the available evidence, should they make such judgments.<sup>5</sup> Assuming that a hearer satisfies both the antecedent and consequent of this norm, it purportedly follows that (i) the hearer is not subject to epistemic criticism, (ii) the hearer is not wronging the speaker in her capacity as a knower, and (iii) the speaker thereby does not sustain testimonial injustice. Let us now turn to whether this is correct.

## 10.2 Hearer-Excess Testimonial Injustice

To begin, consider, again, a group of scientists collaborating on a research project, though instead of the men failing to form any relevant beliefs about the reliability of their women co-workers, suppose they appropriately judge them in accordance with the evidence. Since the evidence indicates that all of the women are highly credible in the domain in question, the men form the corresponding beliefs that they are reliable sources.

Despite this, suppose that the men do not accept any of the testimony offered by their female co-workers. This is because while they take the women to be reliable with respect to what they are reporting, the men are sexists and, as a result, always illegitimately take themselves to be *more* reliable than women. More precisely, while the men give the women the right level of credibility—that is, the amount that they are due, given the evidence—they invariably give themselves a *credibility excess* relative to women, despite there being no evidence to support this. There are at least two different ways in which this credibility excess might affect the men's beliefs despite their appropriate credibility judgments. First, while they might take the women to be reliable in the domain in question<sup>6</sup> and they might have no beliefs to the contrary, their inflated senses of self might make them regard it as outrageous that the women could know something that they don't.<sup>7</sup> Second, the men might take the women to be reliable in the domain in question, but they might be antecedently committed for no good reason to a belief that conflicts with what the women report. Given that the men are ignoring relevant evidence in the formation of their beliefs, they clearly are violating an epistemic norm. Moreover, since the women are not believed when offering testimony because of the men's sexist attitudes, they are wronged by the men in their capacity as knowers and are thereby the victims of testimonial injustice. While the men undeniably satisfy the EN, then, (i)-(iii) are nonetheless false. This shows that the satisfaction of this norm is clearly inadequate at rendering hearers in the epistemic and moral clear when it comes to testimonial injustice.

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<sup>5</sup>I will drop the “conditional” in referring to the EN in what follows. I will also assume that the hearers in question are making judgments of speakers' credibility when they should be.

<sup>6</sup>Of course, reliability is not the same as infallibility, so it is possible to regard someone as reliable even in a very narrow domain and yet still consistently reject a number of her reports.

<sup>7</sup>I am grateful to Kathryn Pogin for this way of putting this point.

It is worth pausing here to reflect on the notion of credibility excess in greater detail, especially as it relates to testimonial injustice. It is standard to think of injustices targeting groups as always grounded in certain kinds of unwarranted dispositions or beliefs about the *deficiencies* of their members. Indeed, this is the very heart of Fricker's notion of testimonial injustice, which she understands as necessarily involving "a credibility *deficit* owing to identity prejudice in the hearer." But what we have seen is that there can be testimonial injustices when, rather than the speaker suffering a deficit, the hearer receives an illegitimate *excess* relative to the speaker. For the sake of ease of expression, let's call these two different forms of testimonial injustice *speaker-deficit* and *hearer-excess*, respectively. Though I have never seen a discussion of the latter phenomenon in this context, it has important consequences, not only for our understanding of the norms governing credibility assessments, but also for the epistemic and moral impact of violating them.<sup>8</sup>

To see this, notice that, typically, when we judge someone to be reliable with respect to whether *p*, we are inclined to believe that *p* on the basis of her testimony that *p*. This is most likely why discussions of testimonial injustice have focused exclusively on the assessment of speakers: if I judge you to be a reliable epistemic source based on the available evidence, then the appropriate belief should simply come along for the ride. Hearer-excess testimonial injustice, however, provides a clear way to drive a wedge between such a judgment and the corresponding acceptance of testimony. Indeed, in the case described above, the sexist scientists are such that they invariably regard themselves as more reliable than women, and hence the disconnect between their credibility judgments of the women and the corresponding acceptance of their testimony is *systematic*. That this is not only a case of testimonial injustice but paradigmatically so should be clear, as a failure to be believed, even if given the proper degree of credibility, surely harms speakers both epistemically and morally. In fact, it is arguable that a credibility deficit with testimonial acceptance is, in most ways, less harmful than an appropriate credibility assessment without testimonial acceptance. This is even clearer as the stakes go up: if I refuse to believe you when you report to me that you're suicidal, or are being stalked, or have been raped, then the harms that may come to you are many and severe, no matter my satisfaction of the EN. This omission from the norm governing testimonial acceptance and, therewith, from the account of testimonial injustice is, then, no small oversight.

Notice, too, that it won't do for the EN to require not only the proper credibility assessment of speakers, but also the corresponding attitudes. In particular, it is not enough to modify the EN as follows:

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<sup>8</sup>José Medina (2011) has insightful and compelling work on credibility excesses, but he does not discuss them specifically in relation to hearers themselves, which I regard as one of the most important forms of such excesses. I will say more about this below. Davis (2016) also discusses how credibility excesses can lead to testimonial injustice, but she focuses on phenomena such as typecasting and compulsory representation.

EN1: For every speaker, S, and hearer, H, if H makes a credibility assessment of S, then H should match it to the evidence that S is offering the truth, and believe, disbelieve, or withhold accordingly.

The reason that the EN1 is inadequate is because there are two separate epistemic and moral wrongs in cases of hearer-excess testimonial injustice—the lack of acceptance with respect to the speaker’s testimony, and also the very credibility excess that the hearer gives to himself—and yet this norm captures only the former. For instance, while the sexist male scientists discussed above violate the EN1 by virtue of failing to form beliefs on the basis of the testimony offered by their female co-workers, such a norm leaves open the possibility that it can be satisfied even when they continue to illegitimately give themselves a credibility excess.<sup>9</sup>

One reason the focus in the philosophical literature might have been solely on speaker-deficit testimonial injustice is because many people are aware of implicit bias and its effects. We know, for instance, that we have relatively unconscious attitudes toward blacks, women, Latinos, and members of other underrepresented groups, and we know that these attitudes impact our other attitudes and actions. Thus, when we reflect upon our assessments of speakers, it is natural to wonder whether implicit bias is affecting the amount of credibility we assign. But recent work in cognitive psychology has drawn increased attention to our unwarranted *assessments of ourselves*. The Dunning-Kruger effect, named after Cornell psychology professors David Dunning and Justin Kruger, is a [cognitive bias](#) in which incompetent individuals incorrectly rate their abilities much higher than they are. This bias is attributed to a [metacognitive](#) inability of the incompetent to recognize their own incompetence—that is, a metaignorance or ignorance of ignorance.<sup>10</sup> This

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<sup>9</sup>There is a further objection to EN1 to note here. To see this, consider again the sexist male scientists, and suppose that not only do they give their female co-workers the appropriate level of credibility, they also believe accordingly. In particular, the men believe the women to be reliable and they believe that *p* when the women report that *p*. At the same time, suppose that the male scientists always illegitimately take men in general, rather than just themselves, to be more reliable than women and, as a result, do not believe that *p* *because* the women testified that *p*, but, rather, because their fellow male scientists believe that *p*. This is the case, despite their not having any good reason to prefer one source to the other. Here there is the right credibility assessment of S, the right belief (that *p*), but a route to belief that is epistemically and morally deviant. This deviant route renders the men open to epistemic and moral criticism—for ignoring relevant evidence and wronging the women in their capacity as knowers—and subjects the women to testimonial injustice—for not being believed due to the systematic prejudices of their co-workers. In particular, even though the men share the same beliefs as the women, they do not share them because the women testified to them. And not being believed simply because one is a woman, even when one’s hearer shares one’s belief, clearly wrongs one as an epistemic agent. At a minimum, then, the EN1 will need to be modified as follows:

EN1\*: For every speaker, S, and hearer, H, if H makes a credibility assessment of S, then H should match it to the evidence that S is offering the truth, and believe, disbelieve, or withhold accordingly on a basis that includes S’s testimony.

In what follows, I will leave it implicit that the speaker’s testimony needs to be part of the basis for the hearer’s relevant doxastic state.

<sup>10</sup>See Dunning and Kruger (1999).

overconfidence that we have in ourselves is not only widespread and prevalent—hence the title of Dunning’s recent piece in *Pacific Standard*, “We Are All Confident Idiots”<sup>11</sup>—it is also potentially harmful in both global and local ways. According to Daniel Kahnemann, it is the bias that “leads governments to believe that wars are quickly winnable and capital projects will come in on budget despite statistics predicting exactly the opposite,”<sup>12</sup> and thus, it is the one he says he would most like to eliminate if he “had a magic wand.” But it is not difficult to see that such overconfidence is also likely to lead to hearer-excess testimonial injustice, for it is precisely a bias in favor of ourselves that lies at the heart of such a phenomenon. The Dunning-Kruger effect, then, makes clear both how prone we are to committing acts of hearer-excess testimonial injustice and how harmful such acts can be.

While Fricker doesn’t consider cases of hearers giving themselves a credibility excess, she does discuss their doing so with respect to speakers. She writes, “I do not think it would be right to characterize any of the individual moments of credibility excess that such a person receives as in itself an instance of testimonial injustice, since none of them wrongs him sufficiently in itself” (Fricker 2007, p. 21). The idea here is that the only sense in which a credibility excess can give rise to testimonial injustice is cumulatively. For instance, over time, someone who is given more credibility than he deserves is likely “. . . to develop such an epistemic arrogance that a range of epistemic virtues are put out of his reach, rendering him closed-minded, dogmatic, blithely impervious to criticism, and so on” (Fricker 2007, p. 20). But this long-term testimonial injustice is importantly different from what Fricker takes to be the immediate, “in itself” wrong that comes with a credibility deficit. Even José Medina, who is otherwise critical of Fricker’s views about credibility excess, seems to agree with this general point when he writes, “The fact that no epistemic harm can be detected in this immediate [“in itself”] way only shows the short-sightedness of an analysis that focuses exclusively on the individual moments of testimonial exchanges among particular subjects” (Medina 2011, p. 16).

I want to push back against this conclusion in two different ways. The first can be seen by focusing on social identity prejudices that lead to what we might call *content-specific credibility excesses*. Standard stereotypes often involve a variety of beliefs: women are thought to be naturals in the kitchen and with young children, Muslims in America are feared for potential connections with terrorism, blacks are regarded as disproportionately prone to violent crime, and so on. Each of these stereotypes can, and often do, lead to credibility excesses that wrong speakers immediately and “in themselves.” If I take a black man to be highly knowledgeable about, say, guns or drugs simply because he is a black man, then he has been wronged as a knower just as much as if I take him to be completely ignorant of Shakespeare. Being regarded as highly knowledgeable about domains that are

<sup>11</sup>Source: <https://psmag.com/we-are-all-confident-idiots-56a60eb7febcb#.s4dkyy2lr>, accessed on 5 August 2015.

<sup>12</sup>Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/18/daniel-kahneman-books-interview>, accessed on 5 August 2015.

stigmatized or devalued can be insulting to a speaker *qua* knower, regardless of any long-term disadvantages that might be accrued. We can, for instance, imagine the black man who is turned to as the expert about drugs in a conversation reacting with horror or indignation at being regarded as knowledgeable about such a topic. This is not merely because he is worried about, say, being passed over for professional opportunities in the future because of this credibility excess, but also because he rightly finds it disrespectful with respect to his epistemic identity.

According to Fricker, "...credibility deficit can constitute...a wrong [as a knower], but while credibility excess may (unusually) be disadvantageous in various ways, it does not undermine, insult, or otherwise withhold a proper respect for the speaker *qua* subject of knowledge; so in itself it does her no epistemic injustice, and *a fortiori* no testimonial injustice" (Fricker 2007, p. 20). As should be clear, I disagree with Fricker here. In many contexts, for instance, being considered an expert on drugs simply because one is a black man is, without qualification, insulting, and this is so even if one is not also regarded as ignorant about topics of value. Specifically, being regarded as knowledgeable in stigmatized domains can be an affront to one's epistemic dignity—it says, "you are the sort of person who should know about *x*, where *x* is, for instance, shameful or disgraceful." Such a credibility excess clearly undermines or withholds a proper respect for the speaker *qua* subject of knowledge.

The second way in which I want to resist the conclusion that only credibility deficits lead to immediate epistemic wrongs is through the phenomenon of hearer-excess testimonial injustice. Let's return to the case from above: when the male scientists give themselves a credibility excess relative to the women, despite there being no evidence to support this, they are wronging the women as knowers in two immediate ways: first, they fail to give the women the epistemic standing in the community that they deserve and, second, they fail to believe the women's testimony, despite giving them the proper amount of credibility. Both of these are wrongs in themselves, even if they do not beget further long-term negative consequences for the women down the road. Let's begin with the former: even though the women get their due relative to the evidence, they do not get their due in relation to their colleagues, and one's standing in a community can be even more important to one's identity as a knower than is receiving exactly the right amount of credibility. Suppose, for instance, that the male scientists give the women a slight credibility deficit, but give themselves an even greater deficit. Surely, this is less insulting or undermining to the women as knowers than is receiving their due, but always being regarded as nonetheless unworthy of belief in their community. This brings us to the latter point: not being believed can, in and of itself, be immediately and profoundly disrespectful and undermining. Indeed, following Bernard Williams and Edward Craig, many regard the very purpose of knowledge attributions to be to "flag reliable informants," where an informant is one who "gives information



to another.”<sup>13</sup> But when one fails to give information to others through the total absence of testimonial acceptance, then in a deep and important sense, one is not regarded as a knower at all. And when this failure is illegitimate, it clearly wrongs one as a knower.

### 10.3 Distributive Testimonial Injustice

While hearer-excess testimonial injustice is worth highlighting in its own right, especially as it relates to the Dunning-Kruger effect, it is in fact an instance of a broader phenomenon, which we might call *distributive testimonial injustice*.

To see this, notice that the evidentialist norms discussed earlier focus exclusively on our judgment of a *single speaker*, but leave out our evaluations not only of ourselves, *but also of the other members of the conversational context or community in question*. Even if the sexist scientists we’ve been considering appropriately judge a female colleague’s credibility and have the corresponding attitudes about her, they might still be subject to both epistemic and moral criticism if they give a credibility excess to others in virtue of their sexism. The initial epistemic failure is obvious: the scientists’ beliefs about, say, their male colleagues are wildly out of synch with the evidence. So even if their beliefs about the female scientists match the evidence, their credibility assessments about the male ones do not. Moreover, this has an obvious impact on the epistemic status of their other relevant beliefs. For instance, given their credibility assessments, they almost certainly regard the male scientists as more reliable than the female ones, believe that their female colleagues are less capable than the male ones, and so on. So this initial epistemic failure begets further epistemic failures.

There are also clear moral wrongs that follow from this credibility excess. Even if you appropriately judge me on the basis of the available evidence and believe accordingly, if you illegitimately regard everyone else as better than I am, I am still the victim of an injustice. Indeed, if others receive a credibility excess, then a credibility deficit to me and an appropriate assessment of my credibility might be functionally equivalent. If this ungrounded asymmetrical treatment pertains specifically to our reports, then I am the victim of testimonial injustice in particular. Moreover, as was the case in the epistemic domain, this initial wrong begets further wrongs. If you regard my colleague as more reliable than I am, then you will listen to him over me when we disagree, offer him rather than me professional opportunities, and so on. To distinguish this form of distributive testimonial injustice from the hearer-excess kind identified earlier, let us call this *peer-excess* testimonial injustice.

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<sup>13</sup>See, for instance, Williams (1973), Craig (1990), Neta (2006), and Greco (2007). I should note that I reject this view as a general account of knowledge attributions, but I can still grant that one of the purposes of some knowledge attributions is to “flag reliable informants.” See Lackey (2012).

In addition, there is a further kind of distributive testimonial injustice that is worth discussing, as it is importantly different from either hearer-excess or peer-excess. I will call this type of testimonial injustice *expert excess*.

We typically think of any extra weight that an expert's testimony might be afforded, especially in relation to a novice's, as epistemically warranted. Indeed, a certain kind or amount of epistemic deference on the part of novices might be built directly into the very notion of being regarded as an expert. However, I want to suggest that there are also cases where distributive testimonial injustice arises because experts are given unwarranted credibility excess in virtue of the very fact that they are taken to be experts. I will quote at length a passage from Deborah Tuerkheimer's *Flawed Convictions: "Shaken Baby Syndrome" and the Inertia of Injustice* to illustrate this:

In their standard formulation, Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) prosecutions rested entirely on the claims of science—which meant, as a practical matter, that they depended on the testimony of medical experts. Doctors came to court and explained that, notwithstanding the absence of any other signs of abuse, shaking could be proved by three neurological symptoms: bleeding beneath the outer layer of membranes surrounding the brain, bleeding in the retina, and brain swelling. The relationship between these three symptoms—"the triad"—and shaking was described as pathognomic, meaning that shaking was the only causal explanation possible. The science could also rule out an accidental jostle, given how forceful the shaking must have been to generate these injuries. The science could even identify a perpetrator—the caregiver last with the lucid baby—since the infant's loss of consciousness would necessarily have been immediate. Remarkably, the state could present the testimony of doctors and use it alone to establish the guilt of the accused.

SBS was a prosecution paradigm, a category of cases involving functionally similar facts.

[Audrey] Edmunds's case fell squarely within the paradigm. Her trial took place in 1996, when SBS-changes were becoming increasingly common. The caregiver consistently maintained her innocence. No witness purported to have seen her shake the baby. There were no apparent indicia of trauma. Yet solely on the basis of expert testimony regarding the triad, Edmunds, a mother of young children, was found guilty of reckless homicide. The triad convicted her, and she was sent to eighteen years in prison. (Tuerkheimer 2014, pp. xi–xii)

Tuerkheimer goes on to detail how challenges to the view that the triad could be caused only by SBS first emerged in 2001, with research that shows that these three symptoms can result from non-traumatic origins, such as infection or an illness like sickle-cell anemia. In addition, doctors learned that there can be a delay of days or even hours between the time of an injury and the point at which the baby loses consciousness, thereby undermining the legitimacy of identifying a perpetrator of abuse merely by locating the lucid baby's last caregiver. Nevertheless, the criminal justice system has failed to track these developments, with previous convictions on the basis of the triad not being revisited and new cases still being prosecuted based on the debunked science.

What I want to do here, though, is highlight how SBS cases provide a powerful example of expert-excess testimonial injustice, especially those prosecuted prior to the doubts being raised in 2001 to the science. First, it is clear that there are SPS cases where the experts are given an unwarranted credibility excess. Indeed, no

matter how much evidence is stacked on the side of the defense—the defendant may consistently and steadfastly maintain her innocence, she may have years of working with children with no history or incidents of violence, there may be a multitude of character witnesses, no signs of trauma on the purportedly shaken baby, and so on—it is utterly *swamped* by the testimony of a single “expert.” Indeed, the “expert’s” testimony is taken as so decisive that the defense mounted by the defendant’s team seems doomed at the outset. In such a case, beliefs about the scientist’s expertise and, therewith, her excess of credibility are not only insensitive to relevant evidence, they are *epistemically resilient* in the strongest sense. Short of a massive paradigm shift involving the debunking of the science, there is no amount of counterevidence that the defense could produce that would show the defendant to be innocent in the face of the triad.<sup>14</sup> Of course, this is not to say that expert testimony ought not be weighed heavily; instead, problems arise when such testimony screens off all other evidence, and produces what we might call *epistemic tunnelvision*, where one, and only one, option is singlemindedly pursued without proper regard to the overall body of evidence.

Second, it is also likely that many of the unwarranted credibility excesses in SPS cases are the result of the social identity of the testifying scientists.<sup>15</sup> *Qua* experts, they are immediately afforded a massive amount of credibility, no matter how much evidence conflicts with what they report. Otherwise put: if, say, 20 pieces of exculpatory evidence are outweighed by a single piece of expert testimony, what is doing the work, at least in many of the cases? The fact that the testimony is made by a purported expert. Change this feature of the cases, and have the same testimony be offered by a non-expert—even one with the same degree of reliability as the “expert” has with respect to the proposition in question—and there almost certainly would be different verdicts. Indeed, many SPS cases involve defendants who do not belong to the social groups that are typically targeted for credibility deficits, and yet their testimony is still swamped by the “expert’s.” This provides reason for thinking that unwarranted credibility excesses are entirely at issue in at least some cases of SBS convictions.<sup>16</sup>

While I focus here on scientists, there are many different kinds of experts, and similar considerations would also seem to arise in the case of authorities. We might, for instance, think that unwarranted credibility excesses are afforded in some cases

<sup>14</sup>I’m excluding evidence ruling out that the defendant was the last person with the lucid baby.

<sup>15</sup>I should make clear that my conception of social identity here is broader than Fricker’s, including features like expertise in addition to race, gender, and so on. Given this, she might deny that this is an instance of testimonial injustice in her sense. Since my central purpose in this paper is to expand the notion of testimonial injustice, rather than to specifically argue that Fricker’s view is inadequate, I am less interested in showing that Fricker is wrong about having such a narrow conception of social identity and more focused on developing notions of testimonial injustice that have clear epistemological and moral significance.

<sup>16</sup>There are similarly vivid cases of expertise-excess testimonial injustice involving arson. See, for instance, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/09/07/trial-by-fire>

to correctional officers, religious leaders, company CEOs, and so on—not because of any sort of expertise, but simply in virtue of their social status as authority figures.

What distributive testimonial injustice reveals is that there is a deep and important social dimension to the norm at issue here. In particular, it cannot be applied only to my assessment of you, completely independent of other members of the relevant context, including myself. This is because it matters both epistemically and morally not only how I judge you, but also how I judge you in relation to myself and other members of your community. To think that a subject can satisfy such a norm, and thereby be immune to epistemic and moral criticism, simply by giving a single speaker an appropriate credibility rating—in isolation from the assessment of, say, her peers—is quite implausible. We are social creatures, and how we are judged in relation to others has clear epistemic and moral significance.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the only way to avoid the credibility excess problem is to understand the norm governing such assessments as applying to a subject both in her assessment of herself and of other members of her community.

Distributive testimonial injustice, then, occurs, when credibility is improperly distributed among members of a conversational context or community due to prejudice. If we want to retain Fricker's emphasis on the importance of social identity, we could follow her and say that the unfair distribution has to be specifically the result of identity prejudice. I commit an act of such injustice, then, if, for instance, I give the men in my department a credibility excess because they're men, even if I give the women their due. I am the victim of distributive testimonial injustice if, for instance, all of the men in my department are given a credibility excess because they're men, even if I get my due. At the heart of this notion of testimonial injustice is that credibility assessments need to be understood *relationally*: whether my credibility assessment of you is just—epistemically and morally—can only be characterized in relation to my assessments of other members of the relevant conversational context or community.

Now Fricker herself flatly rejects such a distributive conception of testimonial injustice. While she never considers this phenomenon in relation to the hearer receiving a credibility excess, she does do so with respect to whether giving a speaker more than her due can be unjust. Here is her response:

On the face of it, one might think that both credibility deficit and credibility excess are cases of testimonial injustice. Certainly there is a sense of 'injustice' that might naturally and quite properly be applied to cases of credibility excess, as when one might complain at the injustice of someone receiving unduly high credibility in what he said just because he spoke with a certain accent. At a stretch, this could be cast as a case of injustice as distributive unfairness—someone has got more than his fair share of a good—but that would be straining the idiom, for credibility is not a good that belongs with the distributive model of justice. Unlike those goods that are fruitfully dealt with along distributive lines (such as wealth or health care), there is no puzzle about the fair distribution of credibility, for credibility is a concept that wears its proper distribution on its sleeve. Epistemological nuance aside,

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<sup>17</sup>Medina (2011) makes a similar point in defending his "proportional view of testimonial injustice," though he arrives at this conclusion through quite different arguments.

the hearer's obligation is obvious: she must match the level of credibility she attributes to her interlocutor to the evidence that he is offering the truth. Further, those goods best suited to the distributive model are so suited principally because they are finite and at least potentially in short supply . . . . Such goods are those for which there is, or may soon be, a certain competition, and that is what gives rise to the ethical puzzle about the justice of this or that particular distribution. By contrast, credibility is not generally finite in this way, and so there is no analogous competitive demand to invite the distributive treatment. (Fricker 2007, pp. 19–20).

According to Fricker, while speakers are not subject to testimonial injustice so long as they are given their “due” in terms of credibility, this cannot be understood along distributive lines<sup>18</sup> but, rather, must be wholly determined by the available evidence. This is because credibility (i) is a concept that wears its proper distribution on its sleeve,” and (ii) is not finite in a way that lends itself to a distributive treatment.

I have already argued that the first of Fricker's reasons against conceiving of credibility in distributive terms fails, as hearer-excess testimonial injustice makes clear that simply matching assessments of speakers to the evidence is not enough. So let's consider her second reason. Suppose, for instance, that it is somehow an objective fact that each U.S. citizen is owed a \$10,000 tax break, and while blacks receive such a break, whites get a \$20,000 one simply because of their race. Even if blacks are somehow getting their due in terms of tax breaks, they are still being treated unjustly as citizens by virtue of how whites are being treated. Justice requires that we look not just at what people are due narrowly, but also at the distribution of goods within the broader social structure of which they are a part. This is true not only of goods like tax breaks, but also with epistemic ones like credibility. Moreover, as mentioned above, when some members get more than their due of certain goods, this often begets downstream injustices. Just as whites will have greater purchasing power because of the larger tax break, so, too, men will have greater epistemic power because of the excess in credibility. If, for instance, there is disagreement between a woman and a man, the latter will systematically be believed over the former, and so women will ultimately fail to get what they are owed in terms of credibility—it will just be in a more circuitous route.

This last point is worth pursuing in greater detail, for it makes clear how credibility can be, and often is, finite in ways that make its distribution essential

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<sup>18</sup>Medina agrees: “Credibility is indeed not a finite good that can be in danger of becoming scarce in the same way that food and water can . . . .” (Medina 2011, p. 19). Similarly, he writes, “The credibility excess assigned to some can be correlated to the credibility deficits assigned to others not because credibility is a scarce good (as the distributive model wrongly assumes), but because credibility is a comparative and contrastive quality, and an excessive attribution of it involves the privileged epistemic treatment of some (the members of the comparison class, i.e. those like the recipient) and the underprivileged epistemic treatment of others (the members of the contrast class, i.e. those unlike the recipient). An excessive attribution of credibility indirectly affects others who are, implicitly, unfairly treated as enjoying comparatively less epistemic trust. In my view, this is due to a disproportion in credibility an authority assigned to members of different groups. Credibility is not a scarce good that should be distributed with equal shares, but excesses and deficits are to be assessed by comparison with what is deemed a normal epistemic subject” (Medina 2011, p. 20).

to matters of justice. Suppose that a woman reports having been raped by an acquaintance during the only sexual encounter the two ever had, while the man reports that they had consensual sex on a number of occasions. Barring very unusual circumstances, this sort of disagreement cannot be explained away in terms of, say, one of the parties misremembering or even exaggerating the events in question. One person is telling the truth, and the other is not; accordingly, there is only a limited amount of credibility to go around here. To believe the man is to not believe the woman, and vice versa; thus, to assess the man as credible on this occasion is to thereby assess the woman as not credible. In this sense, then, credibility is clearly finite, and its proper distribution is of paramount importance.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, this scenario is not at all unusual, as many instances of disagreement are such that giving credibility to one party is to take it away from another.

It is worth emphasizing that the mere fact that two people disagree, even about matters of fact, does not by itself require that credibility be finite between them. I may tell you that a local restaurant is open while someone else tells you it's not. That we offer competing reports here does not require that only one of us be deemed worthy of trust or belief: you can be credible, even if wrong on a particular occasion, and I can lack credibility, even if right in a one-off case. Many disagreements are the product of innocent mistakes or lack of information, and so there can still be enough credibility to go around. It's precisely when someone's credibility itself is on the line that its finitude rears its head. False confessions provide a clear case here: when someone confesses to murder and then recants shortly thereafter, there are no errors or gaps in evidence to explain the disagreement away. To give credibility to the confessing self is *ipso facto* to deny it to the recanting self. Credibility becomes scarce.<sup>20</sup>

Another area where the finitude of credibility is clearest is with respect to expertise. If everyone were an expert, the concept would lose its force, for it is only against the backdrop of there being novices or laypersons that expertise gets a foothold. Otherwise put, not everyone can be an expert, and so for some to be credited with this epistemic status is for others not to be. For instance, suppose that in the scenario we've been envisaging, only five of the scientists are to be regarded as experts on the question of their research. Given the credibility excess that the men are given, it is likely that they will also be regarded as the five experts, while the women scientists will be denied this status despite getting their "due" with respect to the evidence. Thus, if credibility is tied to expertise, then there is only a limited amount of the former to go around, as there is only a limited amount of the latter to go around. Once again, then, any reasons stemming from the finitude of credibility for rejecting the distributive conception of testimonial injustice introduced here are misguided.

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<sup>19</sup>Of course, by *proper* distribution I do not mean *equal* distribution. When I develop my Wide Norm of Credibility later in the paper, I will make clear how I think credibility should be distributed.

<sup>20</sup>I develop this in greater detail in Lackey ([unpublished](#)).

Distributive testimonial injustice also provides the resources for addressing a further question of interest here: do the asymmetries between persons and non-persons make a difference to the norms governing our corresponding beliefs, either epistemically or morally? We have seen that credibility assessments have to be construed relationally, as whether my credibility assessment of one person is epistemically or morally just can only be understood in relation to my assessments of other members of the relevant conversational context or community. But the same considerations don't arise with respect to non-persons. In particular, there is no barrier of this sort to a straightforward evidentialist norm for the beliefs that I form about, say, coffee cups and computers, as giving my coffee-beliefs their due is sufficient for being in the epistemic and moral clear, even if I give my computer-beliefs more than their due. Indeed, questions of justice simply don't arise in our evaluations of most non-persons, particularly non-persons such as coffee cups, and so it should not be that surprising that there is an asymmetry of this sort. Thus, distributive testimonial injustice gives us a reason to conclude that differences between persons and non-persons affect the norms governing our corresponding beliefs, both epistemically and morally.

#### 10.4 Normative Testimonial Injustice

I have thus far argued that the EN1 faces a number of problems posed by distributive testimonial injustice, where hearer-excess testimonial injustice is a particular instance of it. In this section, there is another serious objection that I would like to raise to this norm.

To begin, notice that, according to the EN1, subjects satisfy their credibility-assessment obligations by virtue of matching their relevant beliefs to the evidence they *have in their possession*. Crucially, however, we are evaluated not only with respect to the evidence that we do have, but also in terms of the evidence that we *should have*. If my daughter tells me that she inadvertently left our cat outside overnight in the winter and appeals to the fact that she didn't know he was there to justify her actions, this ignorance might get her off neither the epistemic nor the moral hook. For instance, if it is her responsibility to make sure that he is in every night, and she simply failed to check where he was because she was texting her friends, then her belief that he was in the house last night is surely not epistemically justified. Were it to be, then we could end up with all sorts of justified beliefs simply by dramatically limiting the evidence to which we are exposed. Moreover, despite my daughter's ignorance of our cat's whereabouts, she is nonetheless morally culpable for, say, his getting frostbite because she should have known he was outside overnight.

This concept of evidence that we should have is at the heart of the notion of what I have elsewhere called a *normative defeater*, which can be either *rebutting* or

*undercutting*.<sup>21</sup> A normative defeater is a doubt or belief that S ought to have that indicates that S's belief that *p* is either false (i.e., rebutting) or unreliably formed or sustained (i.e., undercutting). Thus, if I believe that the animal in my backyard is a bobcat by seeing one there, I might get powerful evidence that such a belief is false by your telling me that bobcats have never lived in my state or that my basis is a poor one by my optometrist reporting to me how much my vision has deteriorated. Even if I reject the testimony in both cases, I am still on the hook for this counterevidence if I do so for no good reason at all. Why? Because it is evidence that I should have.<sup>22</sup> The justification that my bobcat-belief might have initially enjoyed, then, has been normatively defeated.

It should further be clear that some of the greatest epistemic and moral failings come about from beliefs formed on the basis of insufficient evidence, where such a basis is the result of colossal irresponsibility. Racists, sexists, and bigots often believe in accordance with the evidence that they have in their possession precisely because they surround themselves with likeminded people and news sources that support everything they already want to believe. This limiting of the available evidence has the result that important considerations that challenge or undermine one's beliefs are deliberately excluded from one's evidential base. Surely, however, one's beliefs are not justified via this intentional ignorance, and the reason for this is that we are evaluated—epistemically and morally—in terms of evidence both that we do, and that we should, have.

It might be objected that the evidentialist can accommodate these sorts of cases by arguing that the subjects in fact have relevant evidence that can capture the epistemic deficiencies in question. In particular, they have *evidence that there is evidence* that should have been gathered, and this provides them with a defeater for the target beliefs without needing to invoke the concept of normative defeat. For instance, it might be said that the reason my daughter is still on the epistemic hook in the above case is that she has evidence that there is evidence that she should have acquired; namely, despite the fact that she believes that our cat is in the house, she knows that it is her responsibility to check that he is, and yet she didn't. Thus, she has evidence that she should have had more evidence concerning the cat's specific location.<sup>23</sup>

By way of response, notice, first, that it isn't obvious that this response works even in the case of my daughter and the cat, which is arguably the sort of scenario for which it is best suited. Sure, if my daughter believes that the cat is in the house and also believes that she didn't check on him last night, then she clearly has evidence

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<sup>21</sup>For discussions involving what I call normative defeaters, approached in a number of different ways, see BonJour (1980, 1985), Goldman (1986), Fricker (1987, 1994), Chisholm (1989), Burge (1993, 1997), McDowell (1994), Audi (1997, 1998), Williams (1999), Lackey (2008), BonJour and Sosa (2003), Hawthorne (2004), and Reed (2006). What all of these discussions have in common is simply the idea that evidence can defeat knowledge (justification) even when the subject does not form any corresponding doubts or beliefs from the evidence in question.

<sup>22</sup>For a very nice development of the notion of "should have known," see Goldberg (2015).

<sup>23</sup>I'm grateful to Kevin McCain for pressing this objection.



that there is relevant evidence that bears on her belief. But I'm imagining a case in which my daughter believes that the cat is the house, and is too distracted with her texting to remember that she failed to check on him. In such a case, the absence of the relevant memorial belief means that my daughter doesn't have evidence that there is evidence that she failed to gather. Nevertheless, my claim is that her belief is nonetheless epistemically unjustified because there is *evidence that she should have*.

To my mind, this point is even clearer in cases where people make life choices that severely restrict the evidence in their possession but aren't aware of all of the relevant consequences that follow from their choices. When white supremacists are surrounded by only sources that support their preferred racist views, they might be so insulated that they are unaware that there is in fact specific evidence that they have failed to gather. Of course, in a broad sense they might be aware that there is evidence "out there" that conflicts with their beliefs. But surely this isn't sufficient for their having evidence that there is evidence that they should have since this is arguably true of each one of us. I know right now that there is evidence "out there" that conflicts with many of my beliefs, yet this by itself doesn't prevent them from being justified. If it did, there would be very little knowledge of any kind. What we think is the problem with the racist beliefs of the white supremacists is that there is evidence they *should* gather, regardless of whether they are aware that it exists. When the white supremacist says, "I had no idea that there was evidence that challenged my beliefs of white supremacy," this might mean that he lacked the higher-order evidence, but it does not render his beliefs free from normative defeat. This is why evidence that one should have cannot be fully captured by evidence that one in fact has, even when higher-order evidence of the sort considered here is factored in.

Let us say, then, that *normative testimonial injustice* occurs when credibility is improperly assigned due to ignoring evidence that should be taken into account, and the ignoring of this evidence is the result of prejudice (perhaps specifically of identity prejudice, if we wish to follow Fricker). So, for instance, I commit an act of normative testimonial injustice if I give the women in my department a credibility deficit because my sexism leads me to culpably fail to possess evidence that they are just as reliable as the men. Perhaps I refuse to read their work, or engage them in conversation, or listen to positive recommendations about them. I am the victim of normative testimonial injustice if, for instance, I am given a credibility deficit because my being a woman leads a hearer to reject relevant evidence that speaks to my reliability.

Now, it might be tempting to think that ruling out normative testimonial injustice involves a simple modification to evidentialism, one that leaves the view intact in spirit, even if not in letter. But I think this is mistaken. Evidentialism is a paradigmatic instance of what Sarah Moss calls "time-slice epistemology," where the core thesis of such a view is that "what is rationally permissible or obligatory for you at some time is entirely determined by what mental states you are in at that time. This supervenience claim governs facts about the rationality of your actions, as well as the rationality of your full beliefs and your degreed belief states" (Moss 2015,

p. 172). Normative defeaters fly in the face of time-slice epistemology by virtue of making epistemic justification a matter, not only of one's mental states at a given time, but also of the mental states one should have at a time. Moreover, according to Moss, there is an important connection between time-slice epistemology and the view that "all fundamental norms of rationality are temporally local" (Moss 2015, p. 172). Thus the evidentialist clearly endorses a *temporally local* version of the norm of credibility, according to which one's obligations concerning credibility assessments are exhausted by temporally local facts. In contrast, the view that I am defending here is *temporally non-local*, understanding the obligations in question as involving facts that go beyond the evidence that is represented in the hearer's present psychology.

## 10.5 Wide Norm of Credibility

We have seen that straight evidentialist norms of credibility are fundamentally incapable of ruling out both distributive and normative testimonial injustice.<sup>24</sup> We have also seen that our credibility assessments must be both relational—including not only the speaker in question, but also the other members of the relevant conversational context or community—and temporally non-local—taking into account not only evidence that hearers have but also evidence that they should have. For the sake of ease of expression, I will say that both of these features are subsumed by the norm being *wide*. In contrast, the evidentialist norms are *narrow*, being attuned to only one speaker and taking into account only the evidence that is represented in the hearer's present psychology.

I propose, then, the following:

*Wide Norm (of Credibility)* [WN]: For every speaker,  $S_i$ , and hearer, H, if H makes credibility assessments of the relevant members of a conversational context or community,  $S_1, \dots, S_n$ , then H should match them to the evidence that H not only has but should have that  $S_1, \dots, S_n$  are offering the truth, and believe, disbelieve, or withhold accordingly.

As should be clear, satisfaction of the WN is incompatible with distributive testimonial injustice, as this norm requires that credibility assessments include all of the relevant members of the conversational context or community in question, including ourselves. Thus, even if I give a speaker her due in light of the evidence, I am failing in my epistemic and normative obligations if I also illegitimately give others or myself a credibility excess. Credibility is a good, and its proper distribution matters in our normative assessments.

The WN also rules out normative testimonial injustice by virtue of making evidence that both is, and should be, in a hearer's possession relevant to her

<sup>24</sup>This is not to say that these are the only forms of testimonial injustice that fail to be appropriately handled by the evidentialist norm. See, for instance, Dotson (2011), Peet (2015), and Munroe (2016).

corresponding credibility assessments. In this way, hearers cannot get off the normative hook by simply avoiding exposing themselves to evidence that conflicts with, say, their otherwise sexist or racist beliefs.

In terms of understanding which conversational context or community, and which members in it, are relevant to the assessment of a speaker's credibility in WN, the answer will depend on the content of the testimony in question. If you are a scientist testifying about your recent finding in the lab, then the relevant community will include your fellow scientists rather than, say, your family members and neighbors. If, on the other hand, your testimony is about a childhood trauma, then the relevant community will include those family members and friends around at the time of the event. The parameters of the relevant contexts and speakers, and which ones bear on which assessments, will necessarily be imprecise, but this is a topic that has been widely discussed with respect to other topics and I will not add to it here.

One significant consequence of the WN is that we need to be attentive not just to our attitudes toward individual speakers, but also to the broader social environments in which we find ourselves. Our credibility assessments of individual speakers often reverberate throughout our communities, bringing about direct and indirect consequences for many others in their wake. This is especially true in cases of disagreement or in attributions of expertise, where credibility is finite and its proper distribution is of critical importance. Imagine a court of law: the evidence being presented from the prosecution is often in direct opposition to that offered by the defense. To side with one is necessarily to side against the other. To regard one witness as an expert is often to find the other a crank or puppet of the opposing side.

To see this vividly, consider the recent case of Lara McLeod, a woman who was raped by her older sister's fiancé, Joaquin Rams.<sup>25</sup> After reluctantly reporting it to law enforcement, she was arrested and charged with making a false report, while her sister was charged with obstructing justice for "aiding Lara's alleged deceit." The charges were ultimately dropped against the sisters and, with the gift of hindsight, the police now admit that mistakes were made. But what I want to point out here is the way in which attributions of credibility led to the charges in the first place. There is no doubt that a credibility deficit was at work with regard to the testimony of both Lara and her sister, Hera. For instance, while "the chief of police admitted the department bungled aspects of the investigation . . . he stressed that women do lie about rape, so it was important for officers not to be too credulous . . . 'It is not uncommon for people to make false, malicious, salacious allegations of sexual assault,' he said. 'That does happen.'" There is, however, also no doubt that a credibility excess was operative in the evaluation of Joaquin's reports and the evidence he provided. Indeed, it was this very excess that led the police to go on the offensive and bring charges against Lara and Hera, for it is only their accepting Joaquin's version of events that explains how both Lara and Hera could be accused of lies and deception. This is supported by what the chief of police now says about

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<sup>25</sup>For an extended discussion of this case, see <http://www.buzzfeed.com/katiejmbaker/the-police-told-her-to-report-her-rape-then-arrested-her-for#.avG329Yj8>

the case: “One of the shortcomings in this case is the fact that they didn’t do further investigation on the specific charge against you,” he said to Hera. “To leap to the conclusion that you needed to be charged at the time you did I thought was cut short.”

This case makes clear the sense in which credibility can be finite: between Lara, Hera, and Joaquin, there is only so much of it to go around. Somebody is telling the truth and somebody is lying, and where the truth is said to fall is *ipso facto* to point the finger of falsehood at the other. Hence, the very credibility that the police gave to Joaquin’s testimony by virtue of accepting his version of events justified the charges of lies and deception brought against Lara and Hera. Otherwise put, the unjustified credibility excess given to Joaquin provided the very basis for the credibility deficit suffered by Lara and Hera.

So far I have focused on the benefits of the relational component of the WN, but such a norm also makes clear that we are obligated to assess speakers in terms of both the evidence that we do have and the evidence that we should have. Given this, it is to our advantage both epistemically and morally to pay close attention to our social environment. In particular, since much of the evidence that might be functioning as normative defeaters is socially disseminated, our epistemic and moral status will be directly impacted by the information that is “out there.” For instance, the sort of work that has been done by feminists conceptualizing sexual harassment and silencing has expanded the scope of testimonial injustice. Questions about whether our words are sexually harassing or silencing others is one that cannot be evaded, no matter how much we try. Similarly, we now have specific knowledge from psychologists about phenomena like implicit bias and the Dunning-Kruger effect, and this makes it the case that it is inappropriate for us to ignore the possibility that these sorts of features are shaping our current beliefs.

It is also worth noting that recent work in psychology supports the central theses in this paper. Greenwald and Pettigrew (2014), for instance, argue that prejudice is best understood in *differential* terms, which favors viewing credibility assessments relationally rather than individually. Moreover, there is substantial empirical work showing “that discrimination occurs more often as differential favoring [of ingroup members] than as differential harming [of outgroup members]” (Greenwald and Pettigrew 2014, p. 670). For instance,

Hodson, Dovidio, and Gaertner (2002) . . . observed White subjects’ evaluations of two presumed college applicants, one White and one Black, whose qualifications differed. Although the two applicants were otherwise matched, one applicant was higher in high school grades and the other was higher on a standardized aptitude test. The two applicants therefore deserved, objectively, to be treated as approximately equally qualified. Hodson et al.’s noteworthy finding was that, in comparing the White and Black applicants, subjects who scored relatively high on a measure of prejudice attributed greater predictive weight to the measure on which the White applicant was superior. (Greenwald and Pettigrew 2014, p. 675).

This is just one of many, “well-established empirical paradigms, including laboratory studies of minimal group and similarity-attraction paradigms, field experiments using unobtrusive observations of helping behavior, and field audit

studies of police profiling and of treatment accorded to potential job seekers, apartment renters, and home buyers,” all of which support the conclusion that ingroup favoritism is more significant as a basis for discrimination in the United States than is outgroup-directed hostility (Greenwald and Pettigrew 2014, p. 679). Moreover, it is important to note that ingroup favoritism is conceptually and causally distinct from outgroup hostility: one does not cause or include the other.<sup>26</sup> This makes clear not only the role of credibility excesses in interpersonal interactions, but also how prevalent and harmful they are in terms of discriminatory behavior. In particular, if favoring ingroups—such as giving fellow whites an excess of credibility—is a more powerful and prevalent cause of discrimination in the U.S. than is hostility toward outgroups—such as giving blacks a deficit of credibility, then distributive testimonial injustice identified in this paper ought to be a central focus of future discussions.

## 10.6 Conclusion

Credibility is a good, one that grounds and shapes our identities, is integral to relationships and successes, and can be necessary for our literal survival. But contrary to what is widely thought, it is not a limitless good. When some get too much of it, others often get too little. Justice demands, then, that we look at its proper distribution not just individually, but relationally as well. Moreover, our obligations with respect to credibility assessments are not exhausted by our current psychological states but, rather, involve facts that are temporally non-local. In both of these ways, standard evidentialist norms fail.

The Wide Norm of Credibility developed and defended in this paper is sensitive to these relational and normative dimensions of our credibility assessments and, in so doing, rules out its satisfaction being compatible with both distributive and normative testimonial injustice. In this way, the extent to which we are social creatures whose obligations reach members of our communities and features of our broader social environment is not only made vivid, but is also respected.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>See Brewer (1999).

<sup>27</sup>For very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper, I'm grateful to Kevin McCain, Baron Reed, and audience members at the Social Norms and Epistemology Conference at St. Louis University, the Epistemic Norms Conference in Leuven, Belgium, the Institut Jean Nicod, the Intellectual Humility and Public Deliberation Workshop at the University of Connecticut, Western Michigan University, the University of Groningen, Miami University, and the 2017 Bled Epistemology Conference.

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# Chapter 11

## Evidentialism and Moral Encroachment



Georgi Gardiner

**Abstract** Moral encroachment holds that the epistemic justification of a belief can be affected by moral factors. If the belief might wrong a person or group more evidence is required to justify the belief. Moral encroachment thereby opposes evidentialism, and kindred views, which holds that epistemic justification is determined solely by factors pertaining to evidence and truth. In this essay I explain how beliefs such as ‘that woman is probably an administrative assistant’—based on the evidence that most women employees at the firm are administrative assistants—motivate moral encroachment. I then describe weaknesses of moral encroachment. Finally I explain how we can countenance the moral properties of such beliefs without endorsing moral encroachment, and I argue that the moral status of such beliefs cannot be evaluated independently from the understanding in which they are embedded.

**Keywords** The ethics of belief · Epistemic duty · Epistemic partiality · Epistemic permissibility · Epistemic normativity · Moral encroachment

### 11.1 Friendship and Evidence

In her essay ‘Epistemic Partiality in Friendship’ Sarah Stroud argues that sometimes friendship requires that our beliefs not fit the evidence. Being a good friend, Stroud argues, can require epistemic partiality.<sup>1</sup> On hearing a disturbing anecdote about our friend, Stroud suggests, friendship demands we sometimes resist believing what the available evidence indicates. Instead we should disbelieve the story or re-interpret it

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<sup>1</sup>See also Keller (2004), Hazlett (2013, 2016), and Piller (2016). For discussion see Ryan (2015), Kawall (2013), and Crawford (forthcoming). I do not think Stroud (2006) establishes that the norms of friendship conflict with orthodox epistemic norms, but I do not evaluate this claim in this paper.

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to reflect less poorly on our friend. We should think well of friends and give them the benefit of the doubt. This duty to our friends does not extend to non-friends. In short, Stroud argues, we ought to be epistemically biased towards our friends. Stroud writes,<sup>2</sup>

Friendship positively demands epistemic bias, understood as an epistemically unjustified departure from epistemic objectivity. Doxastic dispositions which violate the standards promulgated by mainstream epistemological theories are a constitutive feature of friendship. Or, to put the point as succinctly—and brutally—as possible, friendship requires epistemic irrationality.

If epistemic norms of impartiality—norms demanding that doxastic attitudes reflect available evidence—genuinely conflict with the demands of friendship, what ought we do? Stroud articulates three broad options<sup>3</sup>: Perhaps, given the indispensability of friendship for a good life, when epistemic norms conflict with the requirements of friendship, ‘so much the worse for epistemic rationality’.<sup>4</sup> According to this first option, we have most reason to be epistemically irrational; demands of friendship override the demands of epistemic rationality. The second option maintains that when the norms conflict there is no overriding ought—there is nothing that all-things-considered you should do. There are simply two conflicting norms: what you should do as a friend and what you epistemically should do.

The third option Stroud considers holds that the tension between epistemic demands of friendship and the orthodox view of epistemic normativity indicates the received understanding of epistemic norms is inadequate. We epistemically should be partial to our friends; we are not committing an epistemic error when we believe against the evidence in favour of friends. According to the third option, epistemic norms ought to reflect the distinctive, partial epistemic demands of friendship. Stroud writes,

If standard epistemological theories condemn as irrational something which is indispensable for a good life—so that we have compelling reason *not* to comply with the demands of those theories—then perhaps we should question whether those theories offer an adequate account of epistemic rationality after all. Why accept a conception of epistemic rationality on which it is something which we have very strong reasons to avoid. It might be better to rethink the assumption that epistemic rationality requires the kind of epistemic objectivity or impartiality from which friendship seems necessarily to depart [...] [R]ather than concluding that friendship is epistemically irrational, we could instead conclude that our previous ideas of epistemic rationality were too narrow.<sup>5</sup>

The third option holds that if something is indispensable to the good life, epistemic norms must answer to the epistemic demands of that domain. In some cases it is

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<sup>2</sup>Stroud (2006: 518).

<sup>3</sup>See also Hazlett (2013), Heil (1983), Aikin (2006), Preston-Roedder (2013), and Enoch (2016) for discussion of how to understand conflict between epistemic norms and the requirements of friendship or morality.

<sup>4</sup>Stroud (2006: 519).

<sup>5</sup>Stroud (2006: 522, emphasis in original).

*epistemically* permissible or required to not proportion belief to the evidence, and instead believe in a way that promotes flourishing, friendship, or some other ideal.

Stroud doubts the third option is viable, and dubs it ‘unattractive’ and ‘dubiously available’.<sup>6</sup> Epistemic norms, Stroud holds, seem to answer to attaining the truth and avoiding falsehood, reflecting evidential considerations, and aiming at knowledge and understanding. The epistemic domain is independent from other pursuits, such as friendship or happiness.<sup>7</sup>

Although Stroud doubts the viability of the third option—that epistemic norms answer to the demands of domains such as friendship—she notes a virtue of the option. If epistemic norms genuinely conflict with the demands of friendship, then—given the indispensability of friendship—epistemic norms relinquish their claim to overriding authority about what we ought to do and believe. Sometimes we ought not be epistemically rational. Forgoing the priority of epistemic norms represents a substantial cost, Stroud notes, since epistemic norms are usually taken to be authoritative. The third option preserves the overridingness of epistemic norms.

Committed evidentialists might at this juncture emphasise the availability of a fourth option, mirroring the first: if there is a genuine conflict between the norms of epistemic rationality and the epistemic demands of friendship, well, so much the worse for friendship. Perhaps friendship, like frenemies and nemeses, are things that we overall ought not cultivate. This fourth option, whilst unappealing, retains the overridingness of epistemic norms.

## 11.2 Recent Challenges to Evidentialism

Although Stroud was skeptical about its prospects, recently several theorists have endorsed the third option. These theorists re-interpret epistemic norms to reflect perceived normative demands from other domains. If friendship, morality, or agency require particular doxastic attitudes, these attitudes are epistemically permitted or required. There is nothing *epistemically* improper about other considerations influencing belief. This flood of views opposes evidentialism, which holds that epistemic justification depends solely on the available evidence, and kindred ‘intellectualist’ positions that maintain epistemic justification depends solely on truth-related factors.<sup>8</sup>

Berislav Marušić (2015), for example, advocates the following principle,

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<sup>6</sup>Stroud (2006: 519–22).

<sup>7</sup>See Adler (2002), Shah (2006), Kelly (2002), and Chignell (2010). This view is widely regarded as orthodoxy, although see Grimm (2011).

<sup>8</sup>I am not committed to evidentialism; in this paper I defend evidentialism against a family of arguments pressed by advocates of moral encroachment. Moral encroachment denies the strong evidentialist claim that the justificatory status of a belief depends only on evidential factors. Some versions of moral encroachment—such as that advanced by Schroeder (forthcoming)—are consistent with the weaker evidentialist claim that only evidence can contribute to the justification

If we should sincerely promise or resolve to  $\varphi$ , it is rational to believe that (we will  $\varphi$  if we sincerely promise or resolve to  $\varphi$ ).

Marušić claims a person should believe she will successfully fulfil her promises and resolutions despite evidence indicating she will fail. A person should believe she will stop smoking, for example, even if the available evidence predicts relapse. On Marušić's view such beliefs are not beholden to evidential considerations; evidential considerations are the wrong standards for evaluating beliefs about one's own promises or resolutions.<sup>9</sup>

Clayton Littlejohn (2012) argues a special class of normative beliefs cannot be both justified and false. This means some beliefs—such as beliefs about what one morally ought do—cannot be epistemically justified if they are morally mistaken. Since a non-moral belief that was evidentially supported to the same degree would be epistemically justified, Littlejohn's view opposes the evidentialist principle that whether a belief is epistemically justified depends solely on whether the belief fits the evidence. Moral considerations bleed into epistemic normativity.<sup>10</sup>

Rima Basu (Submitted b) argues there is a moral error with treating people as subjects to be studied and predicted. Basu invokes Sherlock Holmes as exemplifying this error. Holmes makes observations, inferences, and predictions about others with a scientific or disinterested perspective. Basu argues this is a moral mistake, even when the resulting belief is neutral or positive, such as inferring what the person ate for breakfast based on arcane clues or predicting an interlocutor has likely read *The New Jim Crow* because she is an African American scholar. Basu holds this moral mistake bears on the *epistemic* rationality of such beliefs.<sup>11</sup>

Mark Alfano (2013: chapter four) suggests attributing virtues to others in the absence of evidence can be epistemically permissible because such attributions can be self-fulfilling. The attribution causes the person to conduct themselves in ways consonant with the virtue possession, and so contributes to its own truth. Crucially for Alfano's opposition to evidentialism, attributions of vice do not share this permissibility: if the epistemic permissibility stems wholly from evidence concerning self-fulfilling prophecies, and vice attributions were also self-fulfilling, attributions of vice would also be epistemically permitted. Alfano's view opposes

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of a belief; Schroeder holds that moral factors can influence the threshold of evidential support required for a belief to qualify as justified.

<sup>9</sup>See James (1956/1896) and Aikin (2008) for discussion of a related Jamesian idea: that antecedent beliefs concerning a prospective friendship might be necessary conditions for the success of the friendship, before the evidence supports those beliefs. The (evidentially unsupported) beliefs are thus necessary for their own (future) truth.

<sup>10</sup>Thanks to Clayton Littlejohn for helpful discussions on this topic.

<sup>11</sup>Thanks to Rima Basu for helpful discussion of these issues. Armour (1994: 795) suggests 'race-based predictions of an individual's behaviour insufficiently recognize individual autonomy by reducing people to predictable objects rather than treating them as autonomous entities' but, unlike Basu, Armour does not claim this is a distinctively epistemic error.

evidentialism because he claims moral facts influence what one epistemically ought believe. In Alfano's words, one ought 'to speak and to think what ought to be'.<sup>12</sup>

Mark Schroeder (*forthcoming*) agrees with Stroud that how we should evaluate evidence concerning loved ones depends on whether the evidence reflects well or poorly on them, and argues we should interpret their behaviour partially. But unlike Stroud, Schroeder argues this is required by *epistemic* normativity. Given the high stakes of such beliefs, Schroeder argues, it is an epistemic error to form beliefs about loved ones impartially. The importance of our loved ones in our lives provides epistemic reason to withhold belief and interpret evidence in a partial manner.<sup>13</sup>

### 11.3 The Challenge from Moral Encroachment

For the remainder of this essay I focus on one family of recent opposition to evidentialism, namely the challenge from moral encroachment. In Sects. 11.3 and 11.4 I articulate the putative conflicting demands that motivate moral encroachment. I then, in Sect. 11.5, survey some problems with moral encroachment, which provide motivation to deny the view. In Sects. 11.6 and 11.7 I explore how evidentialism, and kindred views, can explain the apparently conflicting normative demands without eschewing evidentialist commitments.

Several theorists have recently argued that in some cases if a claim concerns a morally significant subject matter we epistemically ought to be more inclined to suspend judgement. If a belief might wrong a person or group, the threshold for justified belief is higher than for a belief that is morally neutral. More evidence is required to justify the belief. These theorists advocate *moral encroachment*: moral features of a belief can affect whether the belief is epistemically justified.<sup>14</sup>

**Moral encroachment.** What it is epistemically rational for a person to believe can, in at least some cases, be affected by moral factors.

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<sup>12</sup>Alfano (2013: 108).

<sup>13</sup>For further examples of recent theorists arguing that factors deemed non-epistemic by orthodox epistemology bear on the epistemic status of a belief, see Rinard (2015, 2017), McCormick (2015), Pace (2011), Dotson (2008, 2014), Ross and Schroeder (2014), Stanley (2005, 2015, especially chapter six), Fantl and McGrath (2002), Guerrero (2007), and Buchak (2014). These theorists either argue that epistemic norms answer to norms in other domains, or deny there are distinctively epistemic norms. For further discussion, see also Hazlett (2016), Fritz (2017), Natalie Ashton (2015), Ashton and McKenna (*forthcoming*), and Arpaly (2003: chapter 3).

<sup>14</sup>Advocates of moral encroachment include Basu (*Submitted a, b, c, d*), Schroeder (*forthcoming*), Basu and Schroeder (*forthcoming*), Moss (*forthcoming*), Bolinger (*Submitted*), and Pace (2011). See also Munton (*Submitted*), Fritz (2017), and Enoch (2016) for discussion. See also Arpaly (2003: chapter 3) for related discussion. Note that Arpaly's discussion concerns the normativity of *false* morally relevant beliefs; in Arpaly's view morally wrong beliefs also exhibit orthodox epistemic error.

Advocates of moral encroachment deny that epistemic reasons for or against belief are exhausted by considerations pertaining to evidence and truth.<sup>15</sup> Moral considerations can bear on epistemic justification.

To illuminate the position, consider the following three examples:

**The Cosmos Club.** Historian John Hope Franklin hosts a party at his Washington D.C. social club, The Cosmos Club. As Franklin reports, ‘It was during our stroll through the club that a white woman called me out, presented me with her coat check, and ordered me to bring her coat. I patiently told her that if she would present her coat to a uniformed attendant, “and all of the club attendants were in uniform,” perhaps she could get her coat’. Almost every attendant at the Cosmos Club is black and few members of the club are black. This demographic distribution almost certainly led to the woman’s false belief that Franklin is an attendant.<sup>16</sup>

**Administrative Assistant.** A consultant visits an office. He knows that few people visit the office who are not employees of the firm and that almost every woman employee is an administrative assistant. The consultant sees a woman walking down the corridor and forms the belief ‘she is an administrative assistant’.<sup>17</sup>

**Tipping Prediction.** Spencer works as wait staff at a restaurant. He sensed that white diners tipped more than black diners. He researched the trend online, and read about a well-documented social trend that black diners tip on average substantially lower than white diners. Spencer weighs the evidence before reaching his belief about the social trends. A black diner, Jamal, enters Spencer’s restaurant and dines in a booth outside of Spencer’s area. Spencer predicts Jamal will tip lower than average for the restaurant, and later discovers his prediction was correct.<sup>18</sup>

Advocates of moral encroachment argue these beliefs are morally wrong despite being based on evidence that renders the claim likely true and, in the third vignette, being true. But, they argue, this does not exemplify a tension between moral requirements and epistemic permissibility. Since the relevant belief or evidence is a kind that can morally wrong, it is either the wrong kind of evidence to support belief or the evidence fails to justify the belief because of the high stakes. The belief based on merely demographic, statistical, or weak evidence is epistemically faulty, and this is because of the moral significance of the belief.

Just as there are several variants of pragmatic encroachment, there are also several varieties of moral encroachment. Some theorists maintain the belief is

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<sup>15</sup>Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)) specifies that on his view there are only non-evidential epistemic reasons *against* belief; there are no non-evidential epistemic reasons *for* belief.

<sup>16</sup>See Franklin (2005: 4; 340) and Gendler (2011). Gendler invokes this example to illustrate a putative tension between the demands of morality and the demands of epistemic normativity. Basu ([Submitted a](#)), Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)), Basu and Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)), and Bolinger ([Submitted](#)) have since invoked Franklin’s experience to motivate moral encroachment. See also the similar ‘Mexican restaurant’ case in Basu ([Submitted b](#): 5). This kind of error is ubiquitous. As Obama observes in Westfall (2014), ‘there’s no black male [his] age, who’s a professional, who hasn’t come out of a restaurant and is waiting for their car and somebody didn’t hand them their car keys.’

<sup>17</sup>Adapted from Moss ([forthcoming](#)).

<sup>18</sup>Adapted from Basu ([Submitted a](#): 3).

epistemically wrong because it fails to eliminate a salient relevant alternative, such as the woman's not being an administrative assistant or that Jamal will leave a large tip. The relevant alternative is rendered salient, on this view, by its moral import. Since the person fails to eliminate relevant alternatives the belief is not epistemically justified.<sup>19</sup> Some theorists maintain the belief has high stakes. The costs of being wrong—or the accumulated costs of error when many people commit the same error—contribute to systemic marginalisation. Given the high stakes, more evidence is required.<sup>20</sup>

Basu (Submitted b) maintains one should refrain from believing based on facts that are due to racism or sexism, and these cases exemplify this error. Basu writes,

[The woman in the Cosmos Club vignette] ignores a relevant moral feature of her environment: the fact that she relies on—the South's racism—makes her ignorant to the way in which she wrongs by forming beliefs about individuals on the basis of facts that are due to racism. Whereas facts may not themselves be racist, they can be the result of racism and racist institutions and policies, thus when forming beliefs on the basis of them it seems appropriate to ask for more moral care. (p. 12)

and,

It is *the history of racism at the Cosmos Club* that makes relying on race, despite it being the best indicator and the strongest evidence that someone is a staff member (in the context of the Cosmos Club), problematic. That is the moral stake in question that an epistemically responsible agent must be sensitive to. If the best evidence that someone is a staff member is a consequence of an unjust and racist policy, then you still need to look for more evidence. (p. 14, emphasis in original)

Renee Bolinger and Sarah Moss focus on the epistemic wrong of forming beliefs about individuals based on purely statistical evidence, and argue that moral factors render such beliefs epistemically flawed.

Details aside, the key to the criticism of evidentialism and kindred views is that evidence that would normally suffice for belief is rendered epistemically insufficient by moral features. These claims are in tension with evidentialist claims that what one epistemically ought believe is solely a function of evidential considerations, and that epistemic justification supervenes on strength of available evidence. The claims oppose any 'intellectualist' position that holds epistemic justification depends solely on truth-relevant factors. In what follows I focus mainly on the moral encroachment view advocated by Basu and Schroeder, but draw on ideas advanced by Bolinger and Moss.

This recent tide of anti-evidentialist thought takes as its starting point the indisputable fact that society is structured by racist institutions. Given this, advocates of moral encroachment argue, some of our evidence will be racist or will support racist

<sup>19</sup>See for example, Moss (forthcoming) and Bolinger (Submitted). For the role of relevant alternatives in epistemology, see Lewis (1996) and Dretske (1970).

<sup>20</sup>Basu (Submitted a, c), Schroeder (forthcoming), Basu and Schroeder (forthcoming), and Fritz (2017). Bolinger (Submitted) also emphasises the epistemic significance of the harms of error, including the aggregate harms of many people committing the same errors based on demographic evidence. For more on the role of stakes in pragmatic encroachment, see Fantl and McGrath (2002) and Stanley (2005).

conclusions. If we believe according to this evidence, as evidentialism and other orthodox epistemological views require, our beliefs will thereby be racially biased. The same applies *mutatis mutandis* for sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and other such prejudiced beliefs.<sup>21</sup> Schroeder articulates a challenge: He writes,

Gendler argues that in cases like [the Cosmos Club] there is a conflict between epistemic rationality and avoiding implicit bias—given underlying statistical regularities in the world, many of which are directly or indirectly caused by past injustice, perfect respect for the evidence will require sometimes forming beliefs like the woman in the club. But the belief that the woman forms is racist. I hold out hope that epistemic rationality does not require racism. If it does not, then the costs of [the woman’s] belief must play a role in explaining why the evidential standards are higher, for believing that a black man at a club in Washington, D.C. is staff. And I believe that they are—a false belief that a black man is staff not only diminishes him, but diminishes him in a way that aggravates an accumulated store of past injustice. (Schroeder [forthcoming](#), p. 15)

The challenge Schroeder articulates is to explain how—despite widespread inequality and oppression in society—epistemic practices can rationally respond to evidence and yet not thereby be morally amiss. If epistemic normativity is not affected by moral considerations, how can one countenance the normativity of the above vignettes? Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)) and Basu and Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)) argue that endorsing moral encroachment on belief satisfies this challenge, and in the above quote Schroeder avers that evidentialism cannot satisfy the challenge.<sup>22</sup>

## 11.4 The Inadequacy of Merely Statistical Evidence

The vignettes in Sect. 11.3 describe outright beliefs about a person based on statistical demographic evidence. Spencer outright believes ‘Jamal will tip less than average’, rather than the qualified belief ‘Jamal will *probably* tip less than average’.

<sup>21</sup>See especially Basu (Submitted a, b, c), Basu and Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)), Bolinger ([Submitted](#)), and Gendler (2011) for statements of this view. The racist structure of society also plausibly affects the epistemic rationality of non-racist beliefs based on race. Charles Mills (2003: 43) writes,

Especially in a time period [...] of blatant racial domination [...] whites were socialized to be racist, looked down on people of color, and treated them accordingly. So in their relations to their nonwhite fellow-humans, most whites were indeed “bad”—and a generalization [...] to this effect would be perfectly reasonable on Bayesian grounds. Indeed, we would be justified in questioning the rationality of a black person who, in the depths, say, of turn-of-the-twentieth century Mississippi, expected fair treatment from whites!

<sup>22</sup>Strictly speaking Schroeder suggests that evidentialism should embrace moral encroachment by allowing that, even though only evidence can justify a belief, what qualifies as sufficient evidence for justification can vary depending on the moral stakes. I will not evaluate whether the resulting view can qualify as a species of evidentialism, but it certainly differs from how evidentialists have hitherto understood the view.

One response to Schroeder's challenge holds these vignettes thereby exhibit an epistemic error. By concluding a fact from evidence that merely probabilifies the fact, the person has gone beyond the evidence. Evidentialism decrees we should apportion belief to the available evidence; the beliefs violate the decree. If there is an orthodox epistemic fault the accompanying moral fault does not impugn evidentialism: moral error and misfit with evidence align. This defence of evidentialism against the moral encroachment challenge accords with orthodox views of racism, sexism, and similar prejudices, which hold that orthodox epistemic error is central to the nature of the fault.<sup>23</sup>

Two considerations support this response. Firstly, we can compare the vignette's beliefs with morally neutral beliefs. Plausibly in morally neutral cases similar kinds of evidence do not support outright belief; the evidence only supports credences or beliefs about what is likely. Suppose, for example, you know 95% of the birds in the aviary are yellow, and one bird has just died. This evidence typically licenses the qualified belief that '*probably* a yellow bird died'. But it does not license the outright belief that 'a yellow bird died'.<sup>24</sup> (Or perhaps the evidence licenses a weak and easily unseated species of outright belief. I return to this point in Sect. 11.6.)

Secondly, comparison with other kinds of evidence arguably also indicates the epistemic (and accompanying moral) fault is basing an outright belief on merely statistical evidence. In the original vignettes the beliefs are based on highly-probabilifying statistical evidence. The beliefs are not based on non-statistical individualised evidence. Consider a revised vignette, in which the statistical evidence is considerably weaker and not playing a significant epistemic role. The beliefs are instead based on non-statistical individualised evidence. The individualised evidence is less probabilifying, so that in the revised vignette the overall evidence is more likely to lead to a false belief.

Suppose, for instance, that the racial demographics at the Cosmos Club are more equitable, and the woman instead bases her belief on weak testimony. Someone told her Franklin was staff, but the woman later realises the testifier seemed ignorant about the club in general or did not check carefully who he was pointing towards. The visiting consultant—who in this revised case has no particular sense of the demographic distribution within the office—was expecting an administrative assistant to approach around that time, as arranged, and assumed the person approaching was the appointed person. Spencer's belief that Jamal will tip less than average is based wholly on snippets of misheard and misinterpreted conversation. Jamal was charismatically explaining that his teacher used to rail against high tipping rates and 'tip inflation', and Spencer thought Jamal was voicing his own views.

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<sup>23</sup>See, for example, Appiah (1990), Begby (2013), Mills (1997, 2003, 2007), Ikuenobe (2011), Clough and Loges (2008), Gordon (1995, 2000), Shelby (2002, 2016), Memmi (2014), Lengbeyer (2004) Arpaly and Schroeder (2014), Arpaly (2003), Fricker (2007) and the discussion of 'restricted accounts' in Basu (Submitted a). See also Munton (Submitted), who describes an underappreciated epistemic error commonly infecting racist beliefs about statistics.

<sup>24</sup>This example is inspired by Moss (forthcoming).



Each of these three revised cases is under-described. There are many additional epistemically significant, evidentially-relevant factors, such as the office layout and how frequently people walk the office corridors. We can fill in the details so the revised vignettes exhibiting non-statistical, individualised evidence are more likely to lead to false beliefs than the original vignettes, in which the beliefs are supported by highly-probabilifying statistical evidence. The reasoning in the revised vignettes, although slightly hasty, is not particularly irresponsible or unusual. I contend that in these revised cases the moral error seems less significant, even though the chances of the beliefs being false are higher than when they were based on highly-probabilifying merely statistical evidence.

This suggests an error exhibited by the original vignettes is that outright beliefs were based on *statistical* evidence. The beliefs supported by ‘less probabilifying’, individualised evidence (that is, evidence that is less likely to lead to accurate beliefs and that supports lower credences) are not as improper as the beliefs supported by highly probabilifying statistical evidence (that is, evidence that supports higher credences). If correct this suggests the original examples, rather than supporting moral encroachment, instead exemplify the proof paradox.<sup>25</sup> The cases do not illustrate that the higher stakes mean a higher degree of evidential support is required for justified belief. Instead the cases indicate that merely statistical evidence does not typically support an outright, unqualified belief.<sup>26</sup>

Basu’s argument that moral requirements affect the demands of epistemic rationality—that is, her case against evidentialism—requires a ‘rational racist’. A rational racist is someone whose beliefs align with the evidence, yet whose corresponding belief is racist.<sup>27</sup> Basu holds that Spencer qualifies. I have argued that Spencer’s belief is epistemically flawed in virtue of going beyond the available evidence.

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<sup>25</sup>For background on the proof paradox and the inadequacy of merely statistical evidence, see Thomson (1986), Gardiner (forthcoming, Submitted), Bolinger (Submitted), Buchak (2014), and Smith (2010). See also the related lottery paradoxes (Kyburg (1961), Harman (1968)), Nelkin (2000), and Hawthorne (2004)). If belief aims at knowledge and beliefs based on merely statistical evidence fail to be knowledge, this might explain the fault of outright belief based on merely statistical evidence: even if correct the belief cannot (in principle) be knowledge on that kind of evidential basis. Beliefs with faults such as poor testimony, misidentifying an anticipated greeter, or misinterpreting anecdotes do not share this flaw. See also Moss (forthcoming: 166). Note the beliefs might well be flawed in more than one way. A belief might be faulty because based on statistical evidence and also faulty because the evidence is insufficient given the high stakes. Thanks to Sarah Moss for emphasising this point.

<sup>26</sup>Perhaps extremely-probabilifying statistical evidence can support outright belief. Perhaps, for instance, believing your ticket did not win the national lottery is epistemically justified. But purely statistical demographic evidence on this order does not typically arise. Cases about gender, race, sexuality, and so on with this kind of extreme statistical evidence are rare, and I am not sure we have good intuitions about these cases. Normal cases have much weaker and more complicated demographic evidence. I return to this in Sect. 11.6.

<sup>27</sup>See also Basu and Schroeder (forthcoming).

Thus we can reconsider the original three vignettes, but replace the unqualified belief with a corresponding belief about what is likely: Spencer believes that Jamal will *likely* tip lower than average. The consultant believes the woman is *probably* an administrative assistant. The woman at the Cosmos Club believes Franklin is *probably* staff. Perhaps in these cases the person simply believes according to the evidence. (In Sect. 11.6 I cast doubt on the claim that the beliefs about what is probable are supported by the available evidence.)

Some theorists maintain that even beliefs about what is likely, if based on merely statistical evidence, can be morally wrong. Correspondingly, they hold, such beliefs are thereby epistemically impermissible.<sup>28</sup> Beliefs about likelihoods can pigeonhole individuals based on demographic data, even if also allowing that the person might diverge from the relevant statistical regularities. Moss ([forthcoming](#)) suggests such beliefs violate a moral demand that we bear in mind that a person might differ from arbitrary members of their relevant reference classes.

In Sect. 11.5 I articulate some reasons to resist the conclusion that moral considerations affect epistemic justification in such cases. In Sects. 11.6 and 11.7 I articulate some strategies evidentialists can employ to meet Schroeder's challenge and so explain how believing in accordance with the evidence can be morally appropriate despite widespread inequality and oppression. Some of my comments apply to both qualified beliefs about what is likely and outright beliefs, others apply only to the former.

## 11.5 Objections to Moral Encroachment

Moral encroachment suffers from many of the same weaknesses that afflict other versions of pragmatic encroachment, such as the counterintuitive consequences of holding that considerations that do not bear on the truth a belief can affect its epistemic justification.<sup>29</sup> Below I articulate some worries that apply to moral encroachment.

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<sup>28</sup>See Moss ([forthcoming](#), especially section 10.4), Armour (1994), and Basu ([Submitted d](#)). Note Moss discusses the normativity of belief in a probabilistic content (that is, a set of probability spaces), rather than beliefs concerning likelihoods given certain contextually determined information. Some of Schroeder and Basu's motivations for moral encroachment extend to moral encroachment about beliefs representing what is likely. Basu argues, for example, that believing someone shoplifted based on statistical evidence is wrong because it hurts (Basu [Submitted a](#): 11). But similarly believing someone probably shoplifted on this evidence also hurts. Basu and Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)) argue that you should not believe on weak evidence that your spouse has fallen off the wagon, given the high stakes, even if the same evidence would license belief about a stranger's drinking. But presumably similar considerations apply to the belief that your spouse *probably* fell off the wagon. Bolinger ([Submitted](#)) and Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)) discuss, but do not endorse, moral encroachment on credences.

<sup>29</sup>See for example Eaton and Pickavance (2015), Ichikawa et al. (2012), Worsnip (2015), and Munton ([Submitted](#): 28–9). Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)) emphasises that his version of moral

One reason to resist moral encroachment is the risk of tensions amongst the epistemic statuses of related beliefs. Advocates of moral encroachment typically hold it is morally and epistemically permissible to believe something about a person based on statistical evidence if the moral stakes are low. Moss ([forthcoming](#): 233) suggests that believing that ‘someone probably has brown eyes, on the grounds that most people have brown eyes’ is typically morally neutral and so is epistemically justified. On this view we can believe of a person selected randomly from the world population that they probably have brown eyes. But now consider the world’s incarcerated population. Given systemic racism, brown-eyed people are overrepresented in prison populations. If believing of a randomly selected person that they probably have brown eyes is licensed by the evidence, surely believing of a randomly selected inmate that they probably have brown eyes is also licensed, since it is better supported by the same kind of evidence. But being incarcerated is a morally significant property. The moral stakes are raised. Moral encroachment suggests we should not believe of a randomly selected prison inmate that they probably have brown eyes, since this belief has high moral stakes. This example illustrates two problems for moral encroachment. Firstly, moral encroachment renders unjustified the better-supported belief, whilst endorsing the less supported belief. Secondly, there seems to be a tension amongst believing that an arbitrarily selected person probably has brown eyes, that brown-eyed people are overrepresented in prisons, and not believing that an arbitrarily selected prisoner probably has brown eyes.

Most advocates of moral encroachment hold that more evidence is required if the belief contributes to, or accords with, the disadvantage of socially disadvantaged groups. The stakes are lower if the target belief asperses historically advantaged groups or commends members of disadvantaged groups.<sup>30</sup> But this asymmetry might also vindicate tensions amongst beliefs. To illustrate, suppose the evidence Spencer marshals justifies race-based beliefs about how specific customers will likely tip. (I articulate doubts about this in Sect. 11.6.) And suppose in accordance with moral encroachment, Spencer believes on this evidence that non-black diners will tip higher than average, yet believes of no diners that they will tip lower than average. (He believes his evidence indicates the patrons will tip less well than average, but he refrains from this belief.<sup>31</sup>) In this case Spencer’s beliefs seem

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encroachment posits beliefs that are stable over time, and holds that he thereby avoids many objections that encroachment views typically confront.

<sup>30</sup>Basu ([Submitted a, c](#)), Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)), and Basu and Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)). Bolinger ([Submitted](#)) also emphasises that moral considerations arise particularly when beliefs contribute to overall patterns of oppression. Idiosyncratic beliefs about an individual based on statistical evidence, such as the belief that a black person likely cannot draw well based on their race, are less harmful than stereotypical beliefs, such as that black people consume more narcotics. See also Anderson (2010) and Armour (1994).

<sup>31</sup>Reflecting on this case also raises the concern that the edicts of moral encroachment are not psychologically possible, since it is not possible to suspend judgement despite compelling evidence. I will not evaluate in this essay the psychological availability of suspending belief despite evidence, in part because I think the evidence in these cases is weaker than usually appreciated.

epistemically amiss: A teacher who believes of half his class that they will perform better than average while withholding belief about the other half might be ‘kind’ or ‘sweet’, but they are not exhibiting epistemic rationality. Perhaps Spencer and the teacher are being laudable in some way, but they are not conforming to an epistemic ideal. This objection highlights that moral encroachment endorses such doxastic attitudes as an *epistemic* ideal.

If moral encroachment were true, one might gain evidence for a claim, but thereby learn the claim has morally high stakes, and so be less justified in believing the claim. Gaining the new evidence undermines one’s epistemic justification for the claim.<sup>32</sup> Illustrations of this idea are a little difficult to articulate, since whether the illustration succeeds depends on details of the particular version of moral encroachment. But nonetheless an example might help convey the structure of the worry.

Bolinger holds that beliefs about individuals based on statistical inference are permitted if there is a ‘permissible signal’ underwriting the relevant reference class. Permissible signals include features such as attendant’s uniforms, but do not include features such as race. On Bolinger’s view, whether the signal is permissible affects the epistemic justification of a belief without being truth-relevant. The epistemic significance of permissible signals is thus a non-evidentialist feature of Bolinger’s view.

Suppose you learn a gang distributes drugs in a particular area. You see someone who looks like he might be a gang member selling drugs, and base your belief that he is a gang member on ‘permissible signals’ such as clothing and behaviour. You do not have negative attitudes towards drug selling or gang membership, and your belief seems fairly well supported by evidence. Suppose you learn the gang is Asian, and all gang members are Asian. The person you see is Asian. Assuming that the base rate of Asian people in the area is not very high, the person’s race is plausibly further evidence for your belief.<sup>33</sup> Yet this evidence might—depending on particular details of the moral encroachment view—render the belief morally high stakes, since it is now a belief partially based on race. Thus gaining further supporting evidence for the belief can alter its status from epistemically justified to unjustified.

In many cases it is not straightforward whether a belief has moral valence, or whether the valence is positive or negative. Consider claims such as gay men are more likely to be promiscuous than gay women. Most white people with dreadlocks have attended a drum circle. Lesbian women are often less ‘ladylike’ than straight women. Most women are paid less than most men. The moral significance of these kinds of claims is controversial. If whether a belief is justified depends on the moral properties of the belief, this uncertainty and complexity bleeds into whether the belief is epistemically justified. It can underwrite contextualism about epistemic justification: perhaps homophobic people require more evidence before endorsing

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<sup>32</sup>See also Eaton and Pickavance (2015).

<sup>33</sup>Thanks to Renee Bolinger for pointing out that the base rate of Asian people in the area bears on the evidential significance of race in this example.

statistical inferences about sexual orientation and behaviour, for example, whereas non-homophobic people require less evidence.

The moral significance of a belief can also depend on who the belief is about. And so according to moral encroachment if a community is marginalised one might require more evidence to justify beliefs about their behaviours than for non-marginalised groups, even with the same behaviours and same evidence. But this seems implausible. It seems counterintuitive that the belief that ‘unemployed people smoke more cannabis on average than employed people’ requires more evidence than, for example, the belief that ‘wealthy youths smoke more cannabis on average than less wealthy youths’. Plausibly, given their similarity, these beliefs require the same amount of evidence to justify. Moral encroachment risks making epistemic justification contingent on myriad complex social factors that are intuitively irrelevant to epistemic justification.

Further reasons to resist moral encroachment stem from considerations of social justice. Black people are overrepresented in the US prison population, and acknowledging this fact matters for social justice. An important feature of this claim about demographic distribution is how it affects particular individuals. A person’s skin colour makes it more likely they—the individual—will be incarcerated. If we ought to acknowledge that a person is disproportionately likely to be imprisoned if they are black, we also ought to acknowledge that a randomly selected black person is more likely to be incarcerated than a randomly selected white person. The injustice is not simply systemic injustices concerning overrepresentation; central to the injustice is the effect on individuals’ life chances. Particular *individuals* are more likely to be imprisoned.

When a particular person is incarcerated, underemployed, participating in crime, and so on, one potential source of injustice is that their race, gender, or other social category means the outcome was more likely.<sup>34</sup> And these are social facts we ought to acknowledge.

In some cases acknowledging base rate facts about someone can help frame their accomplishments. It is relatively rare, for instance, for a first-generation college student to become a professor in America. If Ali is a first-generation college student who became a professor then plausibly she merits particular praise, since there is a higher chance she overcame distinctive obstacles. If so, the reason is not simply that first-generation students are underrepresented amongst the professoriate. This does not explain the particular accomplishment of Ali as an individual. The relevant fact is that Ali was less likely to become a professor (relative to her colleagues), given she was a first-generation college student.

Recognising how base rates bear on individuals can help interpret behaviour. Suppose, for example, that on average black people tip less than white people.<sup>35</sup> Basu (Submitted a) holds that believing of an individual that they will (or probably

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<sup>34</sup>The effect of social group on likelihoods can be indirect. A person’s race might affect their likely economic circumstances, for example, which can affect the probability they are incarcerated.

<sup>35</sup>Basu (Submitted a).

will) tip less based on demographic evidence morally wrongs the individual. But we might instead bear in mind that salaries and wealth in black populations are considerably lower than in white populations, which can create a financial barrier to the practice of casual over-tipping.

Tipping rates are conventional, moreover, and are not highly probative of moral character. If people in your community tip at around 10%, for instance, it does not reflect poorly on your character if you tip 10%; if people tend to tip at 20% in your community it does not indicate lack of generosity if you tip 20%. One follows conventions, which might vary across time and culture. When Americans dine in Europe many European wait staff predict they will receive a higher than normal tip. But the staff do not thereby deem American diners morally praiseworthy. The Americans are simply conforming to their own conventions. Diners at Florida yacht clubs leave higher tips than average owing to wealth and convention. Similarly if members of a culture tip less well on average, it is remiss to think poorly of individuals when they conform to the convention.

These background facts about economic inequality and the conventional status of tipping rates can illuminate race-based differences. Suppose we see a black person tipping less than average. Drawing on accurate beliefs about statistical likelihoods allows us to interpret the individual's decisions in light of social base rates. We can understand individual behaviours better when we can accurately socially situate those behaviours. I return to the importance of embedding beliefs in a broader, anti-racist understanding in Sect. 11.7.

If tipping rates are lower in African American communities, as Basu suggests, this pattern affects the income of black wait staff. Wait staff in predominantly black areas might be epistemically justified in believing that many of their customers tip below the national average. The truth of this belief is yet one more reason to move towards wage-based, rather than tip-dependant, remuneration for service industry employment.

Perhaps the central reason to resist moral encroachment is that epistemic normativity answers solely to considerations pertaining to evidence, truth, reliability, comprehension, and so on. This reason is perhaps both the most and least compelling reason. It is the most compelling reason since the idea that epistemic justification depends solely on how a person responds to evidential and other truth-relevant considerations is a central motivation for people who deny encroachment. It is the least compelling since this is precisely what advocates of encroachment deny. Plausibly, though, there is a strong default in favour of the view that epistemic justification depends on considerations pertaining to evidence, truth, and so on. The burden of proof falls squarely on those who argue that the moral stakes influence epistemic justification.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Kim (2017: 7) and Piller (2016). As Ichikawa, Jarvis, and Rubin (2012) comment, 'The most widely discussed argument to date against pragmatic encroachment is that it is counterintuitive.' Although see Grimm (2011) and Marušić (2015) for nuanced discussions of the burden of proof concerning pragmatic encroachment.

I do not deny that common epistemic practices are morally faulty, and that widespread epistemic practices contribute to systemic inequality, disadvantage, and oppression. What I hope to resist is that the epistemic justification of belief is influenced by moral or political considerations.<sup>37</sup> Instead my hope is that impartial epistemic practices, including impartial evaluation of the available evidence, are morally permissible. There is no tension between epistemic and moral norms because tracking the truth accurately cannot be morally wrong.

## 11.6 Resisting Moral Encroachment

In this section I articulate some strategies for defending evidentialism and kindred views against moral encroachment.

Many real life beliefs are morally problematic. Sexism, racism, and other prejudice are widespread. But these real life beliefs also exhibit myriad epistemic errors.<sup>38</sup> People are poor at statistical reasoning. They overestimate patterns, extrapolate too readily from limited and biased sources of information, and engage in motivated reasoning. Confirmation and availability biases contribute to the epistemic faults of such beliefs. If the morally wrong belief is also epistemically unjustified according to orthodox epistemology, the moral wrong does not impugn evidentialism. Arguments for moral encroachment need to abstract away from the myriad, ubiquitous flaws of real life beliefs and insist that a belief with no epistemic flaw of this kind is also immoral; my contention is that advocates of moral encroachment have failed to do this.

It would be impossible to articulate here all the ways that such beliefs commonly err epistemically. Below I sketch some ways most relevant to the examples used to motivate moral encroachment.

Crime data provide common examples of the putative tension between epistemic and moral demands.<sup>39</sup> But the differences in base rates among social groups for the relevant kinds of social facts are typically low, and the overall percentage of people who actively commit crime is very small. People overestimate these differences and overestimate overall rates. Very few people commit robbery, for example. So even if commission of robbery is higher amongst black men than white men, this says almost nothing about the chances concerning any particular black man. Given the tiny proportion of people who commit robbery, and the small differences in rates amongst races, any association between a person and robbery based on base rates is

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<sup>37</sup>Racists, sexists, and so on would delight in the idea that their opponents resisted impartial evaluation of the evidence when adjudicating facts about individuals based on race and other social categories, and that they did not aim to maximise true belief concerning crime, education level and so on.

<sup>38</sup>Kahneman (2011), Kunda (1990), Arpaly (2003, especially chapter three), Munton (Submitted), and Gendler (2011).

<sup>39</sup>See, for example, Munton (Submitted), Basu (Submitted d), Gendler (2011), and Armour (1994).



a flagrant epistemic error. Even *if* an arbitrary black person is more likely than an arbitrary white person to commit robbery, they are still extremely unlikely, and the difference is minute. Any association forged between a particular person and crime risk is based on racial prejudice and irrational fear.<sup>40</sup>

Secondly, we overestimate the epistemic significance of race, gender, and similar social categories when we estimate likelihoods. The inappropriate salience of race as a reference class is exhibited in the Cosmos Club case, where the customer should have instead relied on the more probative reference class of whether Franklin was wearing a uniform or dinner attire. In the administrative assistant vignette the consultant knows that most women in the office are administrative assistants. But this belief does not license the judgement that a particular woman is likely an administrative assistant. This belief is legitimate only if her being a woman is the canonical reference class from which to extrapolate.<sup>41</sup> The consultant might instead judge the likelihood of her being an administrator based on other reference classes she belongs to: the fact she is an older woman, an older person, a person in a business suit, a woman exiting a private office, or a person walking down the hallway talking into a mobile phone. These different reference classes alter the probability that the person is an administrative assistant. But people tend to focus on gender and race as salient reference classes, even if they are less probative than alternative reference classes. Perhaps, in other words, the consultant's all too human focus on gender led him to neglect the fact that the woman was wearing a power suit, hiring someone via mobile phone, and asking her assistant to bring coffee. Or perhaps the consultant neglected his belief that the administrators are almost all young, and this person is older, or she exits a door labelled 'laboratory' and is wearing a lab jacket.

Advocates of moral encroachment compare morally significant beliefs like 'the woman is likely an administrative assistant' with morally neutral beliefs like 'a yellow bird has likely died'. They argue that, given their similarities, any epistemic difference between the beliefs must arise from moral differences. But the reference class problem indicates an important difference between these cases. When we learn that most birds in the aviary are yellow and one has died, it is very likely that we draw on all available evidence when we conclude that likely a yellow bird died. (Some ornithologists might have relevant beliefs about avian life

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<sup>40</sup>To further illustrate the trouble with everyday statistical reasoning concerning crime: infamously when some white people see a black person nearby they worry about crime. (Consider, for instance, the phenomenon of women pulling their purses closer.) But most crime is committed by people of the victim's race. This statistic indicates white people should be more suspect of other white people. But, then, this statistic is largely underwritten by the pattern that people commit crime near where they live, and American housing is not very integrated, so one 'should' correct for that... The 'reasoning' could continue. My point is not to estimate which demographics one should associate with crime risk. My point is instead that almost every association between an individual and behaviour such as crime based on a social category such as race commits basic epistemic mistakes. See also Armour (1994: 792–3).

<sup>41</sup>See Bolinger (Submitted, especially the appendix), Leslie (forthcoming), Moss (forthcoming), Hájek (2007), Venn (1866), Reichenbach (1949), and Munton (Submitted). See also Armour (1994: 791; 809–14).



expectancy to draw on.) But in the consultant's case it is extremely unusual that the information described in the original vignette exhausts the consultant's information. He would have substantial supplementary evidence about mannerism, bearing, clothing, actions, and so on. And he would likely, given widespread cognitive biases, overestimate the epistemic significance of gender.

In real life cases our evidence is shifting, complex, nuanced, and varied. And new evidence is in many cases readily available if we inquire. These details cast doubt on whether the person draws on all available evidence in forming their belief. The Cosmos Case, often used as a central motivating case for moral encroachment, exemplifies this: the woman ignored the counterevidence of clothing, and any 'mannerism' evidence that would have likely been available given Franklin's evening plans. Since he was hosting friends at his club, he would likely have been acting differently from staff. And Franklin was 80 years old at the time, so he would have appeared extremely old for a club attendant.<sup>42</sup> Thus it is unlikely that the total available evidence supported the woman's belief. If the belief exhibits epistemic errors according to orthodox epistemology—such as failing to respond to the available evidence—the cases do not impugn evidentialism. The evidentialist can explain the moral error without revising epistemic normativity. The kind of epistemic error committed—narrowly focusing on features such as race and gender and failing to countenance other individuating features of the person—plausibly underwrite the kind of moral error the person commits.<sup>43</sup>

Jessie Munton (Submitted) addresses the sense of moral unease we can feel when considering social statistics such as 'Black Americans commit disproportionately more violent crime than white Americans'. These beliefs can be true and well supported by evidence, yet generate moral discomfort. Munton does not endorse moral encroachment, and so does not hold that moral considerations provide an epistemic reason to withhold belief in these cases. (Munton (Submitted) also does not examine applying general social statistics to individuals.)

Instead Munton highlights an underappreciated epistemic error that often accompanies beliefs about true social statistics. People can believe the statistic but fail to accurately understand the appropriate reference class. They will thus misinterpret the counterfactual properties of the statistic and misapply the statistic to novel cases. People might falsely believe that the statistic indicates that black people are more criminally inclined by nature, for example, rather than appreciating that the statistic indicates that social marginalisation and oppression leads to increased crime rates. Munton notes that although the epistemic error might be more typical and troubling concerning social statistics, the error can also arise concerning morally neutral

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<sup>42</sup>Franklin (2005: 4). Of course similar errors happened when Franklin was younger. But my point is to illustrate that there is usually counterevidence in these real life case that are not represented in artificial, oversimplifying vignettes. This counterevidence contributes to the affront. If the person were not prejudicially associating 'Black' with 'staff' she would likely heed the counterevidence.

<sup>43</sup>There may also be a moral and an epistemic flaw in persistent attention to particular facts. This flaw might also be exhibited in the vignettes marshalled by advocates of moral encroachment. I owe this suggestion to Jessie Munton and Dan Greco.

beliefs, such as statistical claims concerning tree heights. This error, Munton argues, might underwrite the sense of moral unease the social statistics generate.

Munton emphasises that an effective way to correctly identify the relevant reference class is to *understand* what *explains* the statistic. Munton writes,

One way of ensuring that the domain of the statistical belief is appropriately circumscribed is to hold a set of associated beliefs that offer an explanation of the regularity in question [...] I am arguing that even a simple statistical belief may draw on a rich web of further belief and behavior. [...] But an important upshot of this account is that the most naturally reported description of [the avowed statistical belief] is really the tip of an iceberg, in the sense that it is a small part of a network of beliefs which provide additional implicit, sometimes explanatory, content. The epistemic good-standing of a belief depends on what is going on 'under the water', that is, on the broader belief structure. (p. 14)

In Sect. 11.7 I return to the importance of the understanding in which the beliefs are embedded for illuminating the normativity of the vignettes that advocates of moral encroachment use to motivate their view.

Many of these examples exhibit, or readily bring to mind, other wrongs in addition to epistemic errors. The woman at the Cosmos Club behaves rudely. Spencer seems to disapprove of or resent poor tippers.<sup>44</sup> Describing the consultant's belief about administrative assistants and gender, without any context for why he focuses on this, suggests he might disdain administrators. Or perhaps we simply project perceived *normal* opinions onto Spencer and the consultant.<sup>45</sup> Relevant real life cases will typically include similar moral flaws. The anti-evidentialist strategy pursued by Basu (Submitted a, c) and Basu and Schroeder (forthcoming) relies on a person whose beliefs and epistemic character impeccably follow the evidence, and whose moral behaviour is faultless, and yet who morally wrongs another in virtue of his beliefs. But if the examples exhibit—or conjure images of—other wrongs this complicates the anti-evidentialist strategy. Perhaps the sense of wrong can be (partially) explained by these adjacent wrongs.

The ubiquity of (flawed) beliefs about people based on weak or merely demographic evidence might generate the sense that respecting the evidence is morally problematic. And so it might generate a sense that we ought to revise epistemic normativity in light of this ubiquitous wrong. But if these ubiquitous beliefs also always include epistemic errors—errors countenanced by orthodox epistemology—this undermines the threat to orthodox epistemology.

Another evidentialist strategy for responding to Schroeder's challenge emphasises that the beliefs licensed by demographic evidence are easily unseated. The person should readily revise the belief in light of new evidence. Suppose the consultant's total evidence supports the belief that the woman is, or probably is, an administrative assistant. Perhaps the consultant sees a woman's name on an employee roster, for example, and so possesses no additional individualising

<sup>44</sup>Spencer's noticing the trend, his keenness to find evidence, and his applying the generalised belief to Jamal might be evidence of prejudice. See Arpaly (2003) for related discussion.

<sup>45</sup>See Gardiner (2015) for more about how we interpret vignettes by applying our understanding of how they would normally be fleshed out. See also Ichikawa and Jarvis (2009).

evidence. Evidentialism and kindred views should emphasise that the belief licensed by the evidence is a working hypothesis, or tentative belief, one that could be easily dislodged. Advocates of moral encroachment, by contrast, tend to emphasise the ‘settled’ nature of belief. Schroeder ([forthcoming](#)) writes,

[S]ince forming a belief is taking on an ongoing commitment into the future, it will be rational to form the belief that *p* up front only if the strategy of counting on *p* in reasoning is one that is expected to bear good fruits *over time*. In the simplest case, in deciding whether to believe that *p*, you are deciding whether to *always* be disposed to count on *p* in reasoning. (p. 11, emphasis in original)

Schroeder thus emphasises a conception of belief as stable and not easily unseated. Similarly Basu talks of ‘settling on a belief’ ([Submitted a, c](#)). Bolinger ([Submitted](#)) writes,

[T]o accept that *p* is to add *p* to the stock of propositions that you are ready to act on without further consideration. When an agent accepts *p*, she dismisses the possibility that *p* is false from consideration, and takes *p* as a premise in her practical reasoning [...] Accepting that *p* involves deciding to move from an epistemic partition including at least some  $\sim p$  spaces with  $> 0$  probability to one without. Deciding to accept *p* is deciding to give  $\sim p$  no cognitive space in future deliberation [...] Accepting *p* has a variety of downstream effects on *S*’s behavior as an epistemic agent. She’ll consider the question whether *p* closed, stop being attentive for further evidence whether *p*, and be disposed to act as if certain in (pp. 2, 9)

Plausibly there is something morally wrong with firmly settling on a judgement about a person on weak or merely statistical evidence. But this is consistent with the moral permissibility of forming a readily-revised belief about a person based on this evidence.<sup>46</sup> Evidentialists can emphasise the role of this kind of belief in responding to weak or statistical evidence in general.

Another potential response emphasises that belief is often inappropriate when more evidence is readily available. Plausibly one should not form a belief on weak or merely statistical evidence when stronger or individualised evidence is easily obtainable, and this feature of epistemic normativity underwrites the epistemic error in many cases. I am sympathetic to this idea. It is not, however, compatible with some stricter forms of evidentialism. It is plausibly compatible with the evidentialist idea that whether a doxastic attitude is epistemically justified depends solely on

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<sup>46</sup>I was writing this book chapter in a coffee shop when two young men approached and asked how my homework was coming along. I explained that I was writing a book chapter, so it wasn’t homework exactly, but that I was enjoying thinking about the topic. I do not think they wronged me by assuming I was doing homework. Perhaps most people in a cafe who look relatively young, wear informal attire, and make notes in books and papers are doing homework; not many are writing book chapters. The base rates favour their initial belief. Plausibly their belief simply accorded with the evidence. But my interlocutors couldn’t shake their initial belief. They assumed they misheard me (‘You are writing *about* a book chapter, you say?’) They acted extremely surprised, and it took a number of rounds of questioning before they revised their belief, such as skeptically asking for the book title. Plausibly being committed to their initial belief, and reluctant to revise this belief in light of new evidence, was morally poor treatment. But evidentialism can countenance this thought. One of the young men, who was about to enrol at a local community college, offered me some writing advice: ‘Use examples’ he suggested, ‘to explain your points’. I hope, dear reader, you appreciate the example.

evidential considerations. But it is incompatible with stricter evidentialist claims such as whether a doxastic attitude is epistemically justified depends solely on the strength of one's currently possessed evidence.<sup>47</sup>

## 11.7 Understanding

Consider the following example,<sup>48</sup>

Joan notices four young men together in an alley in Baltimore. It appears they are using their bodies to shield their activity from people in the street. It looks like they are exchanging money and packages.

This evidence is inconclusive, but it suggests the people are engaged in the sale of controlled substances or contraband. Suppose Joan forms the belief that 'those people are selling illegal drugs' or 'those people are probably selling illegal drugs'. (In my view in almost every such case only the latter belief is epistemically warranted, but perhaps I am unusually diffident.) What can we say about Joan's belief, morally?

My contention is that we cannot yet tell; we lack sufficient information. It depends on what else Joan believes and how she integrates her judgement with existing beliefs.

Joan's observation might remind her of her background beliefs that drug traffickers on the street are selfish, ruin communities, are violent, carry guns, and endanger law abiding citizens. Or she might start reflecting on her beliefs about the economic inequality that leads people to sell drugs, the social pressures to participate in the activity, and the way that young people in poorer areas have more financial responsibilities than wealthier peers. She might consider these social pressures whilst bearing in mind the individual choices and agency involved. She might integrate her observational belief with her recollection of a newspaper article articulating how members of upper socioeconomic groups exchange drugs in privately owned, secluded places whereas members of lower socioeconomic groups tend to do so in exposed public places. Seeing the group might make her worry about how the activity will affect future social prospects of the participants, and she might connect this to her beliefs about racism in the criminal justice system. She might be angry and unsympathetic, since she views drug dealers as preying on poor marginalised individuals. Or she might be relieved, since she intends to buy drugs. In short, the moral character of Joan's belief depends on the broader understanding in which it is embedded. This understanding comprises Joan's beliefs and the connections between them.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup>For discussion of the epistemic significance of readily available evidence, and how this relates to evidentialism, see McCain (2014), Conee and Feldman (2004, 2011), and DeRose (2011).

<sup>48</sup>To target versions of moral encroachment that focus on the distinctive wrong of forming a belief about a person based on statistical evidence, instead consider a relevant 'base rate' example.

<sup>49</sup>Joan's understanding might also include (connections to) her relevant emotional reactions.

Similar approaches apply to other beliefs discussed. Consider the consultant's belief that the woman is probably an administrator, which is based on demographic base rates. His belief might be embedded in an understanding according to which it is appropriate that women occupy lower status jobs, since they ought to be servile and pursue less ambitious careers. Or it might be embedded in ideas about women's oppression and the systemic challenges that women face in the workplace. Or he might view the underrepresentation of women in management as a lamentable business inefficiency; a waste of potent human resources. Or the consultant might view administrators as the true experts in how to improve a company since they have the clearest perspective on the weaknesses and strengths of the organisation. Plausibly it is the understanding the belief is embedded in—or that we take the belief to be embedded in—that explains much of the perceived wrong in the beliefs described in the vignettes. (As noted in Sect. 11.6, many of these beliefs plausibly exemplify other wrongs, such as not responding properly to evidence.)

In Franklin's anecdote about the Cosmos Club the woman behaves poorly. This rude behaviour complicates the probative value of the vignette as a motivation for moral encroachment, since the poor behaviour (and poor response to evidence, given Franklin's clothing and advanced age) might explain the moral error. The poor behaviour also indicates her understanding was unenlightened. She seems to lack an anti-racist understanding. This understanding taints the moral value of her belief that Franklin is an attendant.

If the understanding the beliefs are embedded in explains the moral fault, one can explain the wrongness of such beliefs without appeal to moral encroachment.

Perhaps some beliefs are evaluable as morally wrong regardless of the understanding they are embedded in. These beliefs might include 'women should be subjugated by men', 'black people are all bad at their jobs', and so on. But these beliefs are manifestly not supported by evidence, and so they do not threaten evidentialism and kindred views. Part of the moral wrong, moreover, includes the deplorable understanding these beliefs are embedded in.

Holding that the moral valence of the belief depends on the person's broader understanding is compatible with also holding that moral encroachment explains an additional moral and epistemic error. The explanations are compatible, and advocates of moral encroachment might well endorse my emphasis on understanding. My argument is that if focusing on understanding can illuminate moral faults of evidentially-supported beliefs, this undercuts the motivation to endorse moral encroachment. Moral encroachment is not needed.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Thinking about understanding can play a further role in accounting for the epistemic normativity of these kinds of beliefs. When we form beliefs there is a chance to gain true belief, which is valuable, and a risk of false belief, which is disvaluable. One question moral encroachment seeks to answer is how to weigh these competing considerations. Moral encroachment replies that the relative weight depends on the moral stakes. If the moral stakes are high, we should be risk averse in belief, and so seek more evidence. (Although see Worsnip (2015) for an objection to encroachment as a response to weighing the relative risks of error.) Wayne Riggs (2003) instead proposes that the relative values of attaining truth and avoiding error can be weighed by how beliefs contribute to,

Note too this explanation can illuminate the potential moral wrongs of beliefs that are exceedingly well supported by evidence. If the error of Spencer's belief is he lacks sufficient evidence given the high moral stakes, as Basu holds, then the error should disappear if Spencer possesses sufficient evidence. But if the moral evaluation of Spencer's belief depends on whether his overall understanding disdains black people for tipping less on average, the wrong will remain regardless of how well supported the belief is. If a person's overall understanding is racist, a problem remains despite the evidence they collect in support of individual beliefs.

This difference is important since some of the putatively problematic beliefs advocates of moral encroachment discuss are true beliefs. If the belief is true, then typically the belief will be well-supported by further evidence. If someone is racist or sexist, but they collect further evidence for their true beliefs, this does not abate the moral error. The way to abate the moral error is to alter one's understanding—towards a more accurate understanding—so that it is no longer sexist, racist, or otherwise morally wrong.

To illustrate consider the following fictional circumstance. Suppose that girls' scores on standardised maths tests are on average lower than boys' scores.<sup>51</sup> We could learn this fact and embed it in a non-sexist understanding: the difference in test scores indicates girls receive inferior educational opportunities, or girls' mathematical acumen is not well-measured by current testing methods. We might connect the result to our understanding of the pressures of gendered cultural expectations. We embed the fact in a framework of beliefs and attitudes that does not denigrate girls, even if they perform less well on average on maths tests. Suppose we later learn that girls are simply less good on average than boys at maths. (Remember this example is fictional, and is provided to illustrate that *if* such beliefs were true, then believing them would not be sexist *if* they were embedded in the right understanding.) We should then embed this new information in a non-sexist understanding: since women have equal moral status to men, this result means mathematical acumen is irrelevant to moral status. We might think about strategies to help support girls in maths education and we might recalibrate how we credit people for individual accomplishments in maths. That girls are less good than boys at maths on average would be as morally irrelevant as that women are on average shorter or that men are on average more susceptible to disease and early death.

Moral encroachers and I share the view that if there is a moral mistake then there is also an epistemic mistake. According to moral encroachment the moral error grounds the epistemic error. On my view—which I think accords with the orthodox

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or impede, understanding. If Riggs's proposal is fruitful it provides a second way that theorising about understanding undermines a motivation for moral encroachment.

<sup>51</sup>Note that the relationship between group averages and individual scores is often misunderstood and misinterpreted.

view of both epistemic normativity and the nature of racist belief—it is the epistemic error that gives rise to the moral error.<sup>52</sup>

To forestall a potential confusion: One can appropriately believe something about a person that reflects a moral problem with that person. I do not doubt this. In some cases it is true that the person has a significant flaw. One might believe truly of Fred that he is a domestic abuser, and this belief might be morally and evidentially appropriate. My view holds that there cannot be a justified belief about someone that reflects a moral problem with that person, where that belief is based on demographic information such as race or gender. Any such belief is either making an epistemic error, such as those discussed in Sects. 11.6 and 11.7, or the property of the person that is taken to be bad is not in fact bad. The latter is explored in the maths scores example above. The latter error is commonly exemplified when, for instance, sexist people take the fact that women are physically weaker on average to show that women are inferior to men, or when racist people take the double negation of Black American English to show there is something wrong with the dialect. They misunderstand the normative significance of the property.

Advocates of moral encroachment aim to describe a person whose beliefs are epistemically impeccable—well supported by the evidence and conscientiously considered—yet morally wrong because racist or sexist. My contention is that no such belief can exist. If a belief is morally wrong then there is some corresponding prior epistemic error. The belief is not well supported by the evidence and/or it is not interpreted through a morally appropriate understanding, and that understanding is not epistemically well supported. If a belief is epistemically well supported it cannot be racist since no true claim is genuinely racist. With the right background understanding we see that since everyone is equal, any differences based on gender, race, and so on are morally insignificant.

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<sup>52</sup>We agree that moral faults, such as sexism, can cause orthodox epistemic errors such as misevaluating available evidence. But I hold that if a belief is morally amiss it must also exhibit an orthodox epistemic error, such as reflecting evidence poorly or being embedded within a faulty understanding of the world.

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**Part IV**  
**Challenges for Evidentialism**

# Chapter 12

## A Probabilistic Critique of Evidentialism



Michael Huemer

**Abstract** Evidentialism holds that all epistemic justification derives from evidence. This thesis can apparently be refuted from the following three premises: (1)  $e$  is evidence for  $h$  only if the epistemic probability of  $h$  given  $e$  is higher than the prior probability of  $h$ ; (2) epistemic probability satisfies the axioms of mathematical probability theory; (3) a proposition is epistemically justified whenever it is sufficiently probable. Given any threshold for “sufficiently probable” and any coherent probability distribution, some propositions must have a sufficiently high prior probability to count as justified. Given premise (1), this prior probability is not itself evidence for the proposition in question, nor does it reflect evidence for the proposition, nor do the facts explaining the high prior probability constitute evidence for the proposition. Hence, it represents a form of non-evidential epistemic justification.

**Keywords** Epistemic probability · Evidence · Prior probability · Propositional justification · Non-evidential epistemic justification

### 12.1 The Probabilistic Argument Against Evidentialism

Evidentialism holds that all epistemic justification is evidential: one has justification for  $h$  only if one has evidence for  $h$ , and one’s evidence for  $h$  constitutes the entire source of one’s justification for  $h$ .<sup>1</sup> This thesis is difficult to reconcile with any probabilistic conception of justification, as I shall explain presently.

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<sup>1</sup>Conee and Feldman (2008, p. 83), Dougherty (2011b, pp. 6–7). For general defenses of evidentialism, see Conee and Feldman (2004), McCain (2014). I take evidentialism primarily as a thesis about propositional justification. Hereinafter, claims about epistemic justification should be taken as concerning propositional justification.

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It seems that if  $e$  is evidence for some proposition  $h$ , then the probability of  $h$  given  $e$  must be greater than the prior probability of  $h$ .<sup>2</sup> If  $h$  were equally likely to be true regardless of whether  $e$  holds – or if  $h$  were even *less* likely to be true if  $e$  holds – then it would be difficult to see how  $e$  could be described as supporting  $h$ ; it seems that we should rather say that  $e$  undermines or is evidentially irrelevant to  $h$ . This principle fits paradigm cases of evidence. For example, police trying to solve a murder find a bloody glove at the crime scene. Suppose the blood's DNA turns out to match the DNA of suspect  $S$ . This would be *evidence that*  $S$  committed the crime. Or consider the asteroid-impact theory of the extinction of the dinosaurs. In the 1970s, geologists discovered an enormous crater under the Yucatan peninsula – a crater that, as it turned out, could be dated to about 66 million years ago, the same time as the dinosaur extinction. This is *evidence that* the extinction event was caused by an asteroid impact. In these and other paradigm cases, evidence that  $h$  is a fact or event in light of which  $h$  is more likely to be true.

Another plausible assumption in a probabilistic conception of justification is this: if a proposition is sufficiently epistemically probable, then it is justified. “Sufficiently probable” means passing some threshold level of probability. We need not here try to specify the threshold, nor need we claim that passing some threshold is *necessary and sufficient* for justification. We need only say that there is *some* threshold probability, such that passing the threshold suffices for justification.<sup>3</sup> This is compatible with the view that the threshold is 1. At the very least, if some proposition is 100% certain (or: it has a 100% epistemic probability for some subject  $S$ ), then it is epistemically justified (for  $S$ ).

Now notice that, on any coherent probability distribution over a sufficiently rich set of alternatives, there must be propositions with prior probabilities as high as one likes. Thus, suppose that the threshold for justification is 0.9, so all propositions with epistemic probability greater than or equal to 0.9 are justified. Then just divide up some space of possibilities into at least ten mutually exclusive alternatives. Of these, let  $m$  be the alternative with the lowest prior probability (or an arbitrarily chosen one of the propositions tied for lowest probability). Then  $m$  has a probability of at most 0.1. Therefore,  $P(\sim m)$  must be at least 0.9. So  $\sim m$  is justified. Notice that this argument does not depend upon the Principle of Indifference; the argument works for any coherent probability distribution. A parallel argument can be constructed for any chosen justification threshold less than 1, whether it be 0.9, 0.99, or  $(1 - 10^{-100})$ . In the special case where the threshold for justification is 1, divide some logical space into a continuous infinity of possibilities. Then any coherent prior probability distribution must assign a probability of zero to some (in fact, infinitely many) of the possibilities. The *negations* of these possibilities must therefore have probability 1.

<sup>2</sup>Conee and Feldman (2011, p. 297) endorse an interpretation of likelihood in terms of evidence or justification, which would seem to support the principle I have stated in the text.

<sup>3</sup>But see Sect. 12.2 below, where I further qualify this premise.

Thus, however exacting our standard of justification, there must be some propositions that start out at or above the threshold for justification. Let  $h$  be some proposition that is justified in this way.  $h$ 's justification does not derive from *evidence* for  $h$ , since evidence for  $h$  would consist of information that raises the probability of  $h$  above its prior probability;  $h$ 's having a high prior probability is not itself a matter of there being information that raises its probability above the prior probability.

In particular, it is not the case that  $h$ 's having a high prior probability is evidence for  $h$ . This cannot be evidence for  $h$  because it is not the case that  $h$  has a *higher* probability, given that it has a high prior probability, than the actual prior probability of  $h$ . Suppose, for example, that the prior probability of  $h$  is 0.9, and that this suffices for justification. It is not the case that  $P(h|[P(h) = 0.9]) > P(h)$ . Rather,  $P(h|[P(h) = 0.9]) = 0.9 = P(h)$ . The fact that  $P(h) = 0.9$  does not raise the probability of  $h$ , so it is not evidence for  $h$ . The facts that explain why  $h$  has a high prior probability (if there are such facts) also do not constitute evidence for  $h$ , for the same reason: they do not raise the probability of  $h$  above its prior probability.

There may *be* facts that raise the probability of  $h$  above its prior probability – that is, there might be evidence for  $h$ . But  $h$ 's justification does not *depend upon* there being such evidence, since  $h$ , by hypothesis, has a sufficiently high prior probability to be justified even if there were no evidence for it.

To summarize the argument:

1. Some propositions are justified by virtue of having high initial probabilities.  
For:
  - (a) Propositions with high probabilities are thereby justified.
  - (b) Some propositions have high initial probabilities.
2. Justification by virtue of high initial probability is non-evidential. For:
  - (c) Evidence for  $h$  raises the probability of  $h$  above its initial probability.
  - (d) Justification for  $h$  by virtue of high initial probability does not depend on anything that raises the probability of  $h$  above its initial probability.
3. Therefore, some justification is non-evidential.

So, on a probabilistic conception of evidence and justification (per 1a and 2a), evidentialism cannot be true.

For the remainder of this paper, I address objections to this argument. As we will see, the argument requires some modifications, and its success depends on how we interpret evidentialism. Nevertheless, a version of the argument succeeds against the most interesting forms of evidentialism.

## 12.2 Justification Through Initial Probability

Premise 1 claims that some propositions are justified by virtue of having high initial probabilities, as opposed to merely having high probabilities given some evidence. There are two chief objections to this premise. The first objection claims that there are no such things as a priori probabilities, and that all rational probability assessments depend on evidence. The second objection claims that a high probability does not suffice for justification; thus, even if there are propositions with high initial probabilities, they are not thereby justified.

### 12.2.1 *A Priori Probabilities*

Perhaps what is wrong with my argument is that it assumes that propositions have ultimate priors – that is, probabilities prior to all evidence. The evidentialist might say that a proposition can have a *relative* prior – that is, a probability prior to some particular piece of evidence – but there is no such thing as a proposition’s probability prior to *all* evidence, because probabilities must always be based on evidence. Indeed, one might be tempted to say that premise 1b (“some propositions have high initial probabilities”) begs the question against evidentialism, because epistemic probabilities are just degrees of justification, and therefore, if one holds that all justification is based on evidence, surely one must also hold that all probabilities are based on evidence.

I agree with part of the thinking behind this objection. When we say that some piece of evidence renders *h* more likely, we mean that it raises *h*’s probability relative to some default probability that is relevant in the context. This default probability is typically a probability on some background knowledge, rather than an a priori probability. For instance, when I see footprints with a certain shape on the table top, I can say that this is evidence that a cat has walked on the table, because the sight of the footprints raises the probability that a cat walked on the table, *given* certain background knowledge (about cats, footprints, and so on) that is appropriately taken for granted in the context. It need not be the case that the footprints raise the probability of a cat having walked on the table relative to a purely a priori prior probability distribution.

Nevertheless, I hold that there are such things as ultimate, a priori probabilities, and this suffices for maintaining premise 1 (one need not also claim that these a priori probabilities are commonly invoked in ordinary evidence-ascriptions). There simply is no coherent view on which all probabilities are based on evidence.

To explain why I say this, I need to introduce an interesting theorem of probability. Let us start with a form of Bayes’ Theorem:

$$P(h|e) = \frac{P(h) \cdot P(e|h)}{P(h) \cdot P(e|h) + P(\sim h) \cdot P(e|\sim h)} \quad (12.1)$$

As commonly understood by Bayesians,  $P(h|e)$  is the credence we should assign to some conclusion  $h$  when  $e$  is our total evidence relevant to  $h$ . Equation 12.1 exhibits this credence as a function of four other quantities,  $P(h)$ ,  $P(e|h)$ ,  $P(\sim h)$ , and  $P(e|\sim h)$ , some of which are dependent on each other.

This is a bit unwieldy. It will be easier to see what's going on if we can express  $P(h|e)$  as a function of, say, just two quantities that are independent of each other. In fact, this can easily be done. We can define a quantity  $L$ , "the likelihood ratio," as  $P(e|h)/P(e|\sim h)$ ; intuitively, this represents how much more strongly  $h$  predicts the evidence than  $\sim h$  does. The higher this ratio is, the better for  $h$ . With a little algebraic manipulation, we can transform Equation 12.1 to the following:

$$P(h|e) = \frac{Lp}{Lp + 1 - p} \quad (12.2)$$

where  $p$  is the prior probability of  $h$  and  $L$  is the likelihood ratio.<sup>4</sup> This makes it possible to show the effect of evidence on the probability of  $h$  with the sort of graph in Fig. 12.1. The curves in Fig. 12.1 show the relationship between  $P(h|e)$  and  $P(h)$ , given different assumed likelihood ratios. When the likelihood ratio is greater than 1 (i.e.,  $e$  would be more likely if  $h$  were true than if  $h$  were false), the posterior probability of  $h$  ( $P(h|e)$ ) is greater than the prior probability, so the graph curves to the upper left. When the likelihood ratio is less than 1, the posterior probability is less than the prior, and the graph curves to the lower right.

Now here is the important point about Fig. 12.1: each of the curves maps the interval  $[0,1]$ , one to one, onto the interval  $[0,1]$ , which means that, whatever the value of  $L$ , one can obtain any desired posterior probability by choosing an appropriate prior. The value of  $L$  does not constrain the posterior probability. There is just one exception: if the likelihood ratio is exactly zero (so  $P(e|h) = 0$ ) then the posterior probability is either 0 or (if the prior was 1) undefined. And this exception is of little import, since it is hardly ever the case that the hypothesis one is considering conclusively rules out (that is, confers probability zero on) the evidence one receives.

Now let  $h$  be some belief that you intuitively think we have evidence for, and let  $e$  be the total body of evidence we have that might bear on  $h$ . From what we have just said, it is impossible to determine the probability of  $h$  given  $e$ , without knowing the prior probability of  $h$ . If the prior is completely indeterminate or inscrutable, then the posterior is also *completely* indeterminate or inscrutable. By stipulation,  $e$  includes all the evidence relevant to  $h$ . Therefore, the probability of  $h$  cannot be determined by evidence alone.  $h$  must have a probability independent of  $e$ , which

<sup>4</sup>Proof: Start with Equation 12.1. Substitute  $(1 - P(h))$  for  $P(\sim h)$ , and divide both the numerator and the denominator on the right hand side by  $P(e|\sim h)$ . Finally, write " $h$ " for  $P(h)$  and " $L$ " for  $P(e|h)/P(e|\sim h)$ .



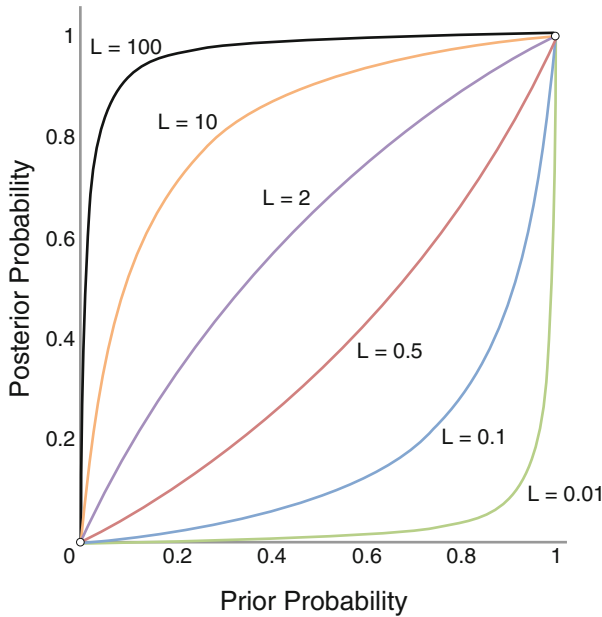


Fig. 12.1 Effect of evidence on the probability of *h*

would have to be an “ultimate prior.” If *h* does not have this ultimate prior, then it can never have a probability in the light of evidence either.<sup>5</sup>

### 12.2.2 How Probability Justifies

According to premise 1a, propositions with high probabilities are thereby justified. But this seems overly liberal: for a proposition to be justified, it is not enough that it has a high probability. Two sorts of cases suggest this. First, lottery cases: You own one ticket in a lottery with a large number of tickets. You know that exactly one ticket will win. So it is overwhelmingly probable that you will lose. Nevertheless, most intuit that you cannot thereby (merely in virtue of knowing the low odds of winning) know that you will lose. Some even deny that you are *justified in believing*

<sup>5</sup>For further discussion, see my (2009, pp. 26–9; 2016b). It is possible to maintain that the ultimate prior of *h* merely has some *range* of rationally acceptable values (less than the full range from 0 to 1); in that case, the posterior probability of *h* will typically have a narrower range of possible values. But if the range of acceptable priors is the full range from 0 to 1, then the range of acceptable posteriors is also the full range from 0 to 1, as shown by Fig. 12.1. Also, if the posterior is to have a unique permissible value, then the prior must have a unique permissible value.

that your ticket is a loser; you may justifiably believe that your ticket is *probably* a loser, but not simply that it *is* a loser.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the case of non-obvious theorems.<sup>7</sup> Suppose Sue comes to wonder whether it is always possible to color the territories on a map using just four colors, in such a way that no two territories with an extended border are the same color. Unbeknownst to Sue, this proposition has been proved; it is known as the Four Color Theorem. Sue cannot intuitively see that the Four Color Theorem is true, and she has no idea how it might be proved either (in fact, to this date, the Theorem has only been proven with computer assistance because the proofs are so complicated). Intuitively, then, Sue lacks justification for believing the Four Color Theorem. Yet the Four Color Theorem, like all provable necessary truths, has a prior probability of 1, according to the laws of probability theory.

What should we say about these cases? The lottery case is open to reasonable disagreement, regarding whether the subject is justified in believing that the ticket is a loser. Nevertheless, it seems that everyone should agree at least that the subject has *some* justification for the claim that the ticket is a loser. Therefore, we may simply modify premises 1 and 1a to read as follows:

- 1'. Some propositions are justified *to some degree* by virtue of having high initial probabilities.
- a. Propositions with high probabilities are thereby justified *to some degree*.

The rest of the argument then continues as before.

Let us turn to the case of non-obvious theorems. Let us grant that for a proposition to be justified, it is not enough that the proposition in fact have a high probability. Intuitively, the subject must also have access to this fact, or be justified in ascribing a high probability, or be aware of the facts in virtue of which the proposition has a high probability, or something else in this neighborhood.<sup>8</sup> The exact formulation of this condition is not important for our argument; let us suppose the condition is that we must have access to the high probability. Then we must revise premises 1, 1a, and 1b as follows:

- 1//. Some propositions are justified to some degree by virtue of having high initial probabilities *that we have access to*. For:

<sup>6</sup>E.g., Nelkin (2000), Sutton (2005), Bird (2007).

<sup>7</sup>This sort of case is discussed by Feldman (2004, p. 115) and Conee and Feldman (2008, pp. 94–5).

<sup>8</sup>We could resist this idea by insisting that probability (in one relevant sense) just is degree of justification; hence, by definition, nothing more than high probability is needed for justification. If, however, we understand “probability” in a logical (or other non-epistemic) sense, then high probability does not suffice for justification. We will discuss these interpretations of probability in Sect. 12.4.4 below. For now, let us simply concede as much as we reasonably can to the objection under consideration.

- a. Propositions with high probabilities that we have access to are thereby justified to some degree.
- b. Some propositions have high initial probabilities that we have access to.

The rest of the argument can still go through, since there are in fact propositions with high prior probabilities that we have access to (or that we are aware of, have justification for ascribing, etc.)

Suppose, for instance, that I am about to meet a person about whom I initially know nothing (apart from my general background knowledge about persons), and I am interested in what this person's height will be. Assume that human height, in feet, can take on any real-number value between 2 and 8. What is the probability that this person's height,  $H$ , is *exactly* 5.5 feet? The answer, in standard probability theory, is zero.<sup>9</sup> So the probability that  $[H \neq 5.5]$  is one. Furthermore, I have access to this fact, since I understand probability theory. I thus have some justification for believing that  $H$  is not exactly 5.5. This suffices to instantiate premise 1//.

### 12.3 What Is Evidential Support?

According to premise 2a, evidence raises the probability of whatever it is evidence for; this is the key to why justification by initial probability must be non-evidential. But the plausibility of premise 2a depends on how we interpret "evidence." It seems to me that the following readings of "evidence" are worth considering:

- D1. Evidence for  $h$  = (whatever is meant by "evidence" in ordinary English).
- D2. Evidence for  $h$  = something from which  $h$  could be rationally inferred.
- D3. Evidence for  $h$  = any condition that confers justification on  $h$ .
- D4. Evidence for  $h$  = something that guarantees a high probability for  $h$ , i.e., some  $e$  such that  $P(h|e)$  is high.
- D5. Evidence for  $h$  = something that raises the probability of  $h$ , i.e., some  $e$  such that  $P(h|e) > P(h)$ .

Each of these interpretations is problematic in one way or another: each of the five meanings of "evidence," when used to interpret evidentialism, results in a thesis that is false, trivial, or simply not what evidentialists appear to be talking about. In my view, D5 represents the least unsatisfactory interpretation of "evidence," closest to the ordinary meaning of the term, though it is one on which evidentialism is false.

Some say that "evidence for  $h$ " simply means *good reason(s)* to believe  $h$ .<sup>10</sup> Even if we accept this, however, we can still ask what is meant by a reason to believe  $h$ , and the plausible interpretations of "reasons" appear to be a proper subset of the plausible interpretations of "evidence." Perhaps (the right-hand sides of) D2–D5

<sup>9</sup>If you don't like this, see the discussion in Sect. 12.4.5 below.

<sup>10</sup>McCain (2014, p. 10), Kelly (2014, Sect. 12.1), Feldman (2003, p. 41), Conee and Feldman (2008, p. 87).

above are plausible interpretations of “reason for *h*.” I know of no *other* plausible readings of “reason for *h*.” So the “good reasons” construal of “evidence” does not expand the range of interpretations of evidentialism that we must consider, beyond the range provided by D1–D5 above.

### 12.3.1 *The Ordinary English Sense of “Evidence”*

In epistemological discourse, evidence is commonly taken, by evidentialists and others, to consist of either mental states or propositions (especially propositions *about* mental states).<sup>11</sup> For instance, most evidentialists would say that the main evidence I have for the proposition [there is a table in front of me] consists of *my sensory experience* representing the table, or *the proposition* that I have a sensory experience representing a table in front of me.

By way of contrast, consider the evidence ascriptions in the following story:

The police examine the scene of a murder, looking for evidence. They find some important evidence: some fingerprints and a bloody glove. The glove gets tagged and taken to the evidence locker, so that it may later be introduced into evidence at trial. But before the trial, someone breaks into the locker and steals the evidence! The defense accuses the prosecution of having fabricated evidence, while the prosecution accuses the defendant of destroying evidence.

All of these, I take it, are perfectly ordinary, correct uses of “evidence” in English. The evidence in this story consists of fingerprints and a glove. It does not consist of propositions or mental states – the police did not find any propositions or mental states at the crime scene; nor did they lock such things in the evidence locker, hoping later to introduce them at trial; nor did anyone steal, fabricate, or destroy any propositions or mental states. Indeed, each of these suggestions is so bizarre on its face that it is hard to believe that anyone using the ordinary sense of “evidence” could think that evidence consists of propositions or mental states.

My point here is not that this refutes evidentialism, or that philosophers who construe evidence in terms of propositions or mental states are horribly misguided. My point is that the use of “evidence” in epistemology, and in particular its use by evidentialists, is evidently not in the standard English sense of the term; rather, evidentialists are using a technical sense of “evidence.”<sup>12</sup> This technical sense is not completely unrelated to the ordinary sense; nevertheless, it appears sufficiently different from the ordinary sense that it requires exposition. Evidentialists cannot reasonably refuse to explain their sense of “evidence,” as they perhaps could if they were simply following established usage. Hence the need for interpretations D2–D5 above.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Mittag (2016, section 2b), Williamson (2000, pp. 194–200).

<sup>12</sup> Conee and Feldman (2008, pp. 84–5) come close to acknowledging this, where they distinguish “scientific evidence” from “justifying evidence,” though I find their text ambiguous.

Admittedly, there are some cases in which *facts*, rather than physical objects or events, are said to constitute evidence. For instance, the fact that a sample of water can be converted into hydrogen and oxygen using electrolysis is evidence that water is a compound of hydrogen and oxygen. This use of “evidence” is closer to the philosophical use. But it also seems clear that in this case, the evidence satisfies the probabilistic constraint that  $P(h|e) > P(h)$ : it is more likely that water is a compound of hydrogen and oxygen, given that water can be decomposed into these elements, than it would be if water could not be decomposed into these elements. So this use of “evidence” does not represent a genuine alternative to my favored interpretation of evidence (D5), nor does it provide a basis for objecting to my premise 2a (“evidence raises the probability of whatever it is evidence for”). To object to my argument, what the evidentialist needs is an ordinary use of “evidence” in which the evidence for a conclusion is a proposition that does *not* raise the probability of the conclusion.

### 12.3.2 Evidence as Logical Support

Suppose we understand “evidence” for  $h$  as consisting of justified beliefs from which one could rationally infer  $h$ . This would be a natural interpretation, given that some evidentialists have proposed to define “evidence” as “good reasons.” Good reasons, one might think, are the sort of things that can figure as premises in good reasoning, and the sort of things that can figure as premises in good reasoning are justified beliefs.

On this interpretation, however, evidentialism would directly contradict foundationalism. This is a problem since, first, foundationalism is by far the leading (and also the best) account of the structure of justification in the history of epistemology.<sup>13</sup> Second, evidentialists do not in fact intend for their thesis to conflict with foundationalism, and some explicitly endorse foundationalism.<sup>14</sup> We therefore should not characterize “evidence” in this way.

Some believe, however, that it is possible to have non-doxastic “reasons” for a belief. For instance, perhaps sensory experiences constitute reasons for beliefs about the external world. Or perhaps a pain constitutes a reason for believing that one is in pain.<sup>15</sup> If one is tempted by this view, one might wish to modify the preceding interpretation of “evidence” by relaxing the condition that evidence consist of beliefs. In addition, since the word “infer” might be too closely tied to beliefs, we may relax the condition that evidence be something from which one

<sup>13</sup>For general defenses of foundationalism, see my (2003) and (2010).

<sup>14</sup>Mittag (2016, section 2d), Feldman (2003, pp. 192–3). Trent Dougherty, upon reading a draft of this paper, was scandalized by the suggestion that evidentialism might conflict with foundationalism.

<sup>15</sup>Note that it is not the proposition that you’re in pain, or the belief that you’re in pain; it is just the *pain* that’s supposed to be a reason. I consider this to be a very strange philosophers’ use of “reason.”

could *infer* a conclusion. Thus, one might say that evidence for  $h$  is simply anything that *supports*  $h$ . It is natural, however, to retain the requirement that there be some sort of logical or quasi-logical support relation between evidence and whatever the evidence is evidence for, since otherwise the notion of a “reason” seems to have been drained of its content.

But if there is a (quasi-)logical relation between evidence and what it supports, it seems that this relation must be either a deductive support relation or a probabilistic support relation. Thus, it looks as though we are left with something like the following interpretation:

D2'. Evidence for  $h$  = something that either entails  $h$  or raises the probability of  $h$ .<sup>16</sup>

Now, if this is how “evidence” is to be understood, then we can simply modify premises 2, 2a, and 2b in the main argument to read as follows:

2'. Justification by virtue of high initial probability (that we have access to) is non-evidential. For:

- a. Evidence for  $h$  either entails  $h$  or raises the probability of  $h$ .
- b. Justification for  $h$  by virtue of high initial probability (that we have access to) does not depend on anything that either entails  $h$  or raises the probability of  $h$ .

The new premise 2'a comes directly from the proposed interpretation of “evidence.”

What about 2'b? Justification for  $h$  by virtue of high initial probability does not in general depend on evidence that entails  $h$ . Evidence that entails  $h$  would confer on  $h$  a probability of 1. But in fact, most propositions with *high* initial probabilities do not have probability 1; nonetheless, they may have some degree of justification by virtue of their high initial probabilities (that we have access to). Therefore, it cannot be that their having this justification depends on something that confers probability 1 on them.

Justification for  $h$  by virtue of high initial probability also does not depend on evidence that raises the probability of  $h$ . This is for reasons explained in Sect. 12.1. By hypothesis,  $h$ 's initial probability is already high enough for  $h$  to count as (to some degree) justified; therefore,  $h$ 's justification does not depend on anything raising its probability above that initial probability.

So when  $h$  has a high initial probability, it has some degree of justification not dependent on anything that either entails  $h$  or raises the probability of  $h$ . On the present interpretation of “evidence,” this amounts to non-evidential justification.

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<sup>16</sup>Below in Sect. 12.3.4, we will discuss why it is not satisfactory to construe  $e$ 's supporting  $h$  as a matter of  $P(h|e)$  being high.

### 12.3.3 Evidence as Justification Source

Here is another interpretation: perhaps “evidence” is simply that which confers epistemic justification.<sup>17</sup>

This definition of “evidence” turns evidentialism into a trivial thesis: all epistemic justification derives from . . . whatever confers epistemic justification. Who could disagree with that? Even a reliabilist could agree: if justification for  $h$  is conferred by one’s having a reliable belief-forming process that generates the belief that  $h$ , then one’s having such a process would constitute “evidence” that  $h$ .

My complaint here is not merely that evidentialism would turn out to be a *tautology*; after all, many tautologies are worth stating, particularly those that require non-obvious derivations – for example, “Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory is independent of the Continuum Hypothesis.” But if it turns out that, as soon as one plugs in one very simple definition, evidentialism immediately turns into a truism as obvious as “all justification derives from that which confers justification,” then I think we should all lament the enormous amount of time that has been wasted by the literature devoted to this thesis.

Be that as it may, I certainly am not contending against this uncontroversial version of evidentialism. I aim only to object to *interesting* versions of evidentialism.

Here is a similar interpretation, which, however, avoids triviality: perhaps evidence for  $h$  is to be understood as *mental states* that confer justification on  $h$ , or *things of which the subject is directly aware* that confer justification on  $h$ . In that case, evidentialism would be a non-trivial thesis, since it rules out externalist conceptions of justification.

To this version of evidentialism, I again have no objection. I agree that all justification is conferred by mental states that confer justification. I note only that this interpretation does not appear to match what evidentialists such as Conee and Feldman intend. For they seem to portray *mentalism* (the thesis that all our evidence consists of mental states) as an *additional* thesis, going beyond evidentialism proper.<sup>18</sup> That is, they portray their mentalism as a particular version of evidentialism, rather than as identical to evidentialism.

### 12.3.4 Evidence and High Probability

Perhaps evidence for  $h$  is simply information that establishes a high probability for  $h$ , whether or not that probability is *higher than* the prior probability of  $h$ . That is, perhaps  $e$  is evidence for  $h$  whenever  $P(h|e)$  is sufficiently high.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Kelly (2014, Sect. 12.1).

<sup>18</sup>Conee and Feldman (2008), McCain (2014, p. 4).

But of course, this won't do. Imagine a lottery in which one picks six numbers. To win, all six of your chosen numbers must match the six numbers randomly selected by the Lottery Commission's machine. Now suppose I have just learned that my first chosen number matches the first number selected by the machine. (I don't yet know about the other numbers.) Even given this information, it is still overwhelmingly probable that I will lose. That is,  $P([I \text{ lose}]|[My \text{ first number matches}]) \approx 1$ . But surely the fact that my first number matches is not evidence that I am going to lose! Intuitively, the reason is that, however unlikely a win still is, it is now at least *more* likely than it was before I learned that my first number was a match.

### 12.3.5 Evidence as Confirmation

Finally, we come to the standard Bayesian interpretation of "evidence": evidence for  $h$  is something that raises the probability of  $h$ .

Jonathan Vogel has objected to this view. Suppose that  $e$  is some piece of evidence that supports  $p$ , perhaps by raising the probability of  $p$ . Now consider the proposition  $(p \vee \sim e)$ . Vogel holds that  $e$  provides a reason for accepting  $(p \vee \sim e)$ , because it provides a reason for accepting the first disjunct,  $p$ .<sup>19</sup> But  $e$  must always probabilistically undermine the second disjunct  $(\sim e)$  at least as much as it supports the first disjunct  $(p)$ . As a result,  $e$  cannot raise the overall probability of the disjunction  $(p \vee \sim e)$  (this is a general theorem of probability). Thus, letting  $h = (p \vee \sim e)$ , it looks as if we can say:  $e$  supports  $h$ , but  $e$  does not raise the probability of  $h$ . Assuming that this support is evidential, we have a counterexample to premise 2a ("Evidence for  $h$  raises the probability of  $h$ ").

I am not in fact persuaded by this sort of example. I think that  $e$  fails to provide evidence for  $(p \vee \sim e)$ , precisely because it fails to raise the probability of  $(p \vee \sim e)$ . Nevertheless, in a spirit of cooperation, suppose that we grant Vogel's view about this sort of case. Even Vogel, however, would not say that probability-raising has *nothing to do* with evidential support. Rather, it seems that the way  $e$  supports  $(p \vee \sim e)$  is by raising the probability of a *part* of  $(p \vee \sim e)$ , that is, raising the probability of one of the disjuncts in the disjunction. Thus, it is plausible to maintain that a proposition may qualify as evidence for  $h$  either by raising the probability of  $h$  or by raising the probability of at least one disjunct in a disjunction that is logically equivalent to  $h$ . Similarly,  $e$  may qualify as evidence *against*  $h$  either by lowering the probability of  $h$  or by lowering the probability of some conjunct in a conjunction that is logically equivalent to  $h$ .

<sup>19</sup>Vogel (2014). I have altered what Vogel says for ease of exposition. Actually, Vogel starts with the idea that  $e$  is evidence *against*  $(e \ \& \ \sim p)$ . So it is evidence *for*  $\sim(e \ \& \ \sim p)$ , so it is evidence for  $(\sim e \ \vee \ p)$ . I have replaced " $h$ " in Vogel's text with " $p$ " to avoid confusion with the " $h$ " used in my own arguments.



This principle accommodates Vogel's cases, yet it still permits our argument against evidentialism to succeed. We may revise premises 2, 2a, and 2b as follows:

2//. Justification by virtue of high initial probability (that we have access to) is non-evidential. For:

- a. Evidence for  $h$  entails or raises the probability of  $h$ , or entails or raises the probability of some disjunct in a disjunction that is equivalent to  $h$ .
- b. Justification for  $h$  by virtue of high initial probability does not depend on anything that entails or raises the probability of  $h$ , or entails or raises the probability of some disjunct in a disjunction that is equivalent to  $h$ .

It is highly plausible that 2//b remains true; it is very implausible that the explanation for how propositions with high initial probabilities are justified, in general, involves an appeal to disjunctions in which we have evidence for one disjunct but not the other.

In sum, every interpretation of "evidence" we have found either (i) fails to correspond with what evidentialists seem to mean by the term, (ii) renders evidentialism trivial, or (iii) lends itself to a plausible version of premise 2, facilitating our objection to evidentialism. There does not seem to be any interpretation on which evidentialism is an interesting truth that can plausibly be read as what actual, self-described evidentialists take themselves to be saying.

## 12.4 Miscellaneous Questions and Objections

I have defended premises 1 and 2 in the main argument against evidentialism, against the most important objections. The rejection of evidentialism deductively follows from those two premises. In this section, I turn to a series of miscellaneous further questions and objections.

### 12.4.1 Making Room for Self-Evidence

We have been considering a strong form of evidentialism, on which all justified beliefs are justified entirely by evidence. What if we weakened the thesis, to claim only, say, that all justified beliefs are *either* justified by evidence *or* self-evident?<sup>20</sup> This modification is independently motivated, since it would enable evidentialism to accommodate a class of cases that obviously needs to be accommodated. For example, it seems that we are justified in believing that  $3 = 3$ , but it is unclear what we could aptly call the "evidence" that  $3 = 3$ . It is more natural to say that

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<sup>20</sup>For discussion of this version of evidentialism, see Forrest (2014, Sect. 12.2).

the proposition is simply self-evident and thus that we do not need evidence for it. (Contrary to what might be suggested by the term “self-evident,” I assume that no proposition may be the evidence for itself.) Does my argument apply to this weakened version of evidentialism?

Yes, it does. The counterexamples I have raised to evidentialism consist of propositions with high initial probabilities (that we have access to), which I have argued, do not depend on evidence for their justification. The weakened form of evidentialism would accommodate these examples, *if* one could claim that these propositions are all self-evident.

But the propositions with high initial probabilities are not in general self-evident. To take an earlier example, let  $H$  be a variable with a continuous infinity of possible values. Prior to gathering any evidence, we have justification for expecting that  $H$  does not have a value of precisely 5.5, simply because there are infinitely many other possibilities. But intuitively, we would not say it is *self-evident* that  $H \neq 5.5$ . One explanation for this is that traditionally, self-evident propositions are necessary truths. But the proposition [ $H \neq 5.5$ ] is contingent. Additionally, a self-evident proposition is traditionally understood to be a proposition that is justified merely by virtue of one’s understanding of the proposition.<sup>21</sup> But our justification for [ $H \neq 5.5$ ] requires more than mere understanding of the proposition; it also requires an understanding of probability, and it may require some amount of reasoning.

Perhaps a self-evident proposition is simply a proposition whose justification does not require evidence. But this would render evidentialism trivial: evidentialism, on the present account, would amount to the view that all justified beliefs are either justified by evidence, *or* justified in a way that does not require evidence.

Or perhaps a self-evident proposition is simply one that is non-inferentially justified. But the propositions with high initial probabilities need not be non-inferentially justified; some of them require inference for their justification. One might then insist that this inferential justification counts as evidential, so that there would still be no counterexample to evidentialism. But this would only be because we have again made evidentialism into a trivial thesis: the thesis that all justification is either non-inferential or inferential.

### 12.4.2 *Subjectivism About Probability*

Subjective Bayesians hold that there is no objectively correct prior probability for any contingent proposition. Any set of ultimate priors is rationally permissible, as long as the set satisfies the axioms of probability theory. Whatever one’s priors, one is rationally constrained to update one’s beliefs upon acquiring new evidence by conditionalizing on the evidence.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup>This is a simplification of Audi’s (1999) account.

<sup>22</sup>de Finetti ([1937] 1980), Savage (1954), Jeffrey (1983).

I confess that this is not my view; I hold that there are constraints on rational prior probabilities that go beyond the standard axioms of probability theory.<sup>23</sup> Fortunately, we need not settle that dispute here, for even subjectivists should agree with my probabilistic critique of evidentialism.

The essence of my argument is that propositions with high prior probabilities are justified in a way not dependent on evidence. Subjectivists have no reason to deny this. They should merely add that since prior probabilities are subject-relative, justification is also subject-relative. That is, which propositions are justified can vary from one subject to another, even without variations in the subjects' evidence, because the subjects can have different prior probability distributions. Evidentialists will hate this idea.

You might question whether having a high prior probability should count as a way of being "justified," given that prior probabilities are so radically subjective. The subjective Bayesian could hold any of three views:

- (i) Any coherent prior credences are justified, even though they are subjective. In this case, evidentialism is false since prior credences are not based on evidence.
- (ii) Prior probabilities are never justified (perhaps they are unjustified or perhaps the notion of justification just does not apply); nevertheless, they affect the justification for other beliefs, since they affect posterior probabilities in the light of evidence. In this case, evidentialism is false since justification does not supervene on one's evidence.
- (iii) Prior probabilities are never justified, and therefore no beliefs or degrees of belief are ever justified. But I assume that evidentialists do not want to say that their thesis is *vacuously* true; evidentialists want to say that some beliefs are in fact justified by evidence. So this view is also bad news for evidentialism.

Of course, all three of the above views are counter-intuitive. That, I take it, is a reason for rejecting subjectivism. Be that as it may, there is no help for evidentialism here.

### 12.4.3 Access and Evidence

In Sect. 12.2.2, I conceded that a proposition's having a high probability does not suffice for its being justified; to have justification for believing the proposition, we must also have epistemic access to this high probability. The evidentialist might say that this access depends on evidence for the target proposition. For example, perhaps to gain epistemic access to the high initial probability of  $h$ , I must have an intuition that  $h$ , where this intuition counts as evidence for  $h$ .

Now consider a case where a proposition has a high initial probability simply because that proposition occupies a relatively large portion of the range of logical

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<sup>23</sup>Huemer (2009).

possibilities. For instance, if a variable has a continuous infinity of possible values, then for some arbitrarily chosen value, it probably does not take that precise value. Understanding these facts, one would have justification for believing that it fails to take on that value. But what could we plausibly describe as “the evidence” of the variable’s failing to take on that value? For instance, in our example from Sect. 12.2.2, what is my evidence – before observing, interacting with, or hearing anything at all about some person – that the person is not 5.5 feet tall?

What might the evidentialist say? Perhaps that the evidence is my understanding of probability theory, together with my knowledge that 5.5 is only one of many possible values of  $H$  (hereafter, call this “my grasp of probability theory”).

But these things do not seem to me to qualify as “evidence that” [ $H \neq 5.5$ ]. They are too different from standard examples of evidence. First and most importantly, in standard cases of evidential support, as I have been insisting, evidence raises the probability of the target proposition above its prior probability. But my grasp of probability theory does not raise the probability of [ $H \neq 5.5$ ] above its prior probability, since the prior probability is 1.

Second, in standard cases, when one speaks of evidence for some contingent claim about the physical world, this evidence is something that would not hold – or at least would be less likely to hold – if the claim were false. For instance, the presence of suspect  $S$ ’s fingerprints at the crime scene is evidence for  $S$ ’s guilt, because his fingerprints would be more likely to be at the crime scene if  $S$  were guilty than if  $S$  were innocent. But it is not the case that my grasp of probability theory would be more likely to exist if  $H$  were not 5.5 than if  $H$  were 5.5. On the contrary, my grasp of probability theory would still be exactly as it is if  $H$  were 5.5. This makes it very strange to claim that my grasp of probability theory is evidence against  $H$  being 5.5.

Third, in standard cases, we do not count *understanding* of a theory or related concepts as part of the evidence for the theory, even when such understanding is required for justification. For instance, part of how biologists became justified in believing the theory of evolution was by examining the fossil record, which reveals gradual change in certain animal species over time. Of course, for the scientists to become justified in believing in evolution in this way, the scientists had to understand the content of the theory of evolution. They also had to grasp the concept of change, the concept of time, and various other concepts. But if asked what evidence scientists have for the theory of evolution, it is correct to cite the fossil record, or scientists’ observations of the fossil record; it is not correct to cite scientists’ understanding of what the theory says, or their possession of the concepts of time and change. Similarly, it is strange to cite my understanding of the concepts of probability theory or my grasp of the proposition [ $H \neq 5.5$ ], as belonging to my evidence for that proposition.

One *could* just insist that my understanding of probability theory counts as “evidence” for [ $H \neq 5.5$ ] because my grasp of probability theory *explains why I am justified* in believing [ $H \neq 5.5$ ]. But then we have simply returned to the trivializing interpretation of evidentialism.

### 12.4.4 Evidence for Necessary Truths

When we last met Sue (Sect. 12.2.2), she was wondering whether a certain proposition, which we know as the Four Color Theorem, is true, namely, that any map can be colored with at most four colors, with no adjoining territories sharing a color. The Four Color Theorem is in fact a necessary truth and thus has a prior probability of 1, according to probability theory. Nevertheless, it seems that Sue could gather empirical evidence for this truth. For instance, she could examine a large and varied collection of maps and could succeed in finding a way of coloring each of them using at most four colors.<sup>24</sup> But on my account, it seems, one could not have evidence for the Four Color Theorem, since the Four Color Theorem has a prior probability of 1, and thus it is impossible for anything to raise its probability.

How should we think about this? Is this a counterexample to the premise that evidence for a proposition must raise its probability?

It is hard to deny that Sue acquires evidence for the Four Color Theorem, since what she does in this case is so perfectly parallel to what one might do in standard cases of gathering evidence for a generalization. For instance, by examining a large and varied collection of hedgehogs and finding each to be brown, we would gather evidence, in a perfectly ordinary, paradigmatic sense, for the conclusion that all hedgehogs are brown.

But we should also note that the intuitive view of the Four Color Theorem case is surely *not* that it is a counterexample to the principle that evidence raises the probability of what it supports. The intuitive view is that – just as in the hedgehog case – as Sue examines more and more maps, it becomes for her more and more likely that the Four Color Theorem is true. So the case seems rather to be a counterexample to the principle that the probability of a necessary truth is always 1.

This sort of case motivates us to distinguish between logical probability and epistemic probability. The logical probability of a proposition is a purely objective fact about it, which can exist independent of us, independent of our understanding or epistemic access. And logical probability satisfies the laws of mathematical probability theory. Epistemic probability, on the other hand, is a matter of the degree of justification one has for a proposition, which may depend upon one's understanding of the logical facts. Thus, we can say that the Four Color Theorem always has a logical probability of 1, but it initially has a much lower epistemic probability for Sue. As Sue examines more and more maps and successfully colors them using only four colors, the epistemic probability of the Four Color Theorem increases for her.

So far, so good; we have managed to maintain premise 2a (“Evidence for *h* raises the probability of *h*”), where “probability” is understood in the epistemic sense.

But now one might worry that some other part of my argument no longer goes through, because we can no longer assume that epistemic probability satisfies the

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<sup>24</sup>For a similar example, see Dougherty (2011a, p. 141).

laws of probability theory. Indeed, we have just granted that epistemic probability violates the crucial axiom that the probability of a necessary truth must be 1.

Is this a problem? The four basic premises of my original argument are as follows:

- 1a. Propositions with high probabilities are thereby justified.
- 1b. Some propositions have high initial probabilities.
- 2a. Evidence for  $h$  raises the probability of  $h$  above its initial probability.
- 2b. Justification for  $h$  by virtue of high initial probability does not depend on anything that raises the probability of  $h$  above its initial probability.

On the epistemic interpretation of probability, 1a is extremely plausible; indeed, it appears tautologous. 2a, as we have noted, is untouched, as is 2b.

The only premise that might now seem problematic is 1b. We have granted that, notwithstanding mathematical probability theory, the epistemic probability of a necessary truth need not be 1. This makes 1b slightly harder to defend; 1b could not be defended, for example, by simply saying that any necessary truth has an initial probability of 1. Nevertheless, 1b is an extremely weak and plausible assumption. Bearing in mind that we are only aiming to maintain that some propositions have *at least some degree* of non-evidential justification, we only need there to be *at least one* proposition whose initial epistemic probability is *greater than 0.5*. Even if epistemic probability fails to satisfy all the laws of mathematical probability theory, it would be very odd to maintain that every initial epistemic probability is less than or equal to 0.5. Note that, in order to avoid our having non-evidential justification for *rejecting* some propositions, one would presumably also have to deny that any initial epistemic probability is *less* than 0.5. That is, the evidentialist would have to claim that every proposition initially either has an epistemic probability of exactly 0.5, or fails to have any epistemic probability.

And that really is not intuitively plausible, nor is it supported by examples such as that of the Four Color Theorem. Granted, one can very plausibly deny that the Four Color Theorem should start out with an (epistemic) probability of 1. But what about a proposition such as  $[3 = 3]$ ? Is there any sense in which *that* proposition has an initial probability of 0.5? Or in which it fails to have any initial probability?

The evidentialist could dig in his heels and insist that  $[3 = 3]$  fails to have a high initial probability, on the following grounds:

The initial probability of a proposition is just the degree of justification it has independent of the evidence. But on our view, there cannot be any justification independent of evidence. *Therefore*, the proposition  $[3=3]$  cannot have an initial probability above 0.5.

But there is no intuitive plausibility to the claim that  $[3 = 3]$  cannot have a high initial probability, so it seems that the evidentialist should provide some reason for accepting this counter-intuitive claim. If the evidentialist cannot muster any motivation for making this counterintuitive claim other than to simply deduce it from evidentialism, then all he demonstrates is the ability to dogmatically cling to a theory by accepting whatever it entails.

### 12.4.5 *Extreme Probabilities for Contingent Propositions*

Recall the earlier example in which one has justification for believing  $[H \neq 5.5]$  because the prior probability that  $H$  is exactly 5.5 is zero. Some people find the assignment of probability *zero* counterintuitive in this case. I think there are two reasons for this.

First, one might think that to have probability zero is to be impossible; but  $[H = 5.5]$  is clearly possible, so it can't have probability zero. This is a mistake.  $[H = 5.5]$  has probability zero, not because there are *no* possible worlds in which it holds, but because the set of worlds in which it holds is a measure-zero subset of all the possible worlds. Compare an analogous question: what is the spatial volume of a single geometric point? Because a point lacks extension, its volume is zero. But there is nevertheless a difference between a single point and *no* points.<sup>25</sup> That is like the difference between something that is possible but has probability zero, and something that is impossible. The proposition with probability zero is like a point in the space of possibilities; the impossible proposition is like the empty set of points.

Second, one might worry that if  $[H = 5.5]$  has an initial probability of zero, then it is in principle impossible for it to be confirmed.<sup>26</sup> Referring to Fig. 12.1 from Sect. 12.2.1 above, notice that every curve on the graph maps 0 onto 0, and maps 1 onto 1. That is, regardless of the value of  $L$ , if the prior probability of  $h$  is 0, then its posterior probability is also 0. Some find this counterintuitive.

This is, however, a correct result. It is in fact impossible to confirm a hypothesis such as  $[H = 5.5]$ , which assigns a precise value to a continuous variable. When, in ordinary life, we speak of such things as “measuring someone’s height to be five and a half feet,” what we mean is measuring their height to be approximately five and a half feet – no one ever measures the *exact* value of a continuous variable. One can, for example, measure a real-valued variable with two-decimal-place accuracy, or eight-decimal-place accuracy, or 100-decimal-place accuracy. But no one can measure a variable to infinitely many decimal places. And this is not a defect of our current measuring practices (as is, for example, our inability to measure a variable to 100 decimal places); it is in principle impossible to measure to infinity decimal places.

Nevertheless, there are some sophisticated people who would deny that the probability of  $[H = 5.5]$  is zero. They would maintain, instead, that the probability is *infinitesimal*, where an infinitesimal number is understood as a special kind of number greater than zero but less than any positive real number. There is a consistent mathematical theory of infinitesimal numbers, devised by Abraham Robinson.<sup>27</sup> I myself consider these to be purely fictitious numbers. Fortunately, however, it doesn't matter whether you accept the standard analysis or the infinitesimal analysis.

<sup>25</sup>This assumes that geometric points exist, which some philosophers deny Whitehead (1917, pp. 157–78), Arntzenius (2008), Huemer (2016a, pp. 162–75).

<sup>26</sup>Kevin McCain has expressed this worry in comments on this paper.

<sup>27</sup>Robinson (1966).

This doesn't matter because the only claim I need for my argument is that  $P(H \neq 5.5)$  is high, and this is true on anyone's view. In the standard analysis,  $P(H \neq 5.5)$  is exactly 1; in the nonstandard analysis, it is infinitesimally close to 1. Either way, it is a positive instance of premise 1b, "Some propositions have high initial probabilities."

### 12.4.6 *Triviality and Semantics*

In discussions of the ideas in this paper, it turns out that one common response by evidentialists is to happily embrace triviality: "Yep, our thesis is trivial," they say (my paraphrase). "By 'evidence,' we just mean 'source of justification,' so we're just saying that justification comes from sources of justification."<sup>28</sup>

As I have complained, this renders evidentialism uninteresting. But one might also complain that this paper is itself uninteresting, for the central argument of this paper is, perhaps, only an argument against forms of evidentialism that no one holds. Furthermore, if evidentialists really just mean "source of justification" by "evidence," then the main difference between myself and the self-described evidentialists is semantic: I use "evidence" in a different sense, such that evidence must raise the probability of whatever it is evidence for. If the evidentialists and I are only differing in how we use a word, then who cares about this debate?

So now I want to give some reasons why I think the paper you are presently reading is not a waste of your time.<sup>29</sup> First, if the dominant response by evidentialists to my argument turns out to be to embrace triviality, this would be a valuable development in the discourse. For until now, evidentialists have *not* embraced triviality; they have not in fact said that their thesis is merely that justification derives from justification-sources. Conee and Feldman have called evidentialism "obvious" and expressed surprise that anyone denied it – but they have not gone so far as to identify it as a very simple tautology.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it is hard to believe that evidentialism would have attracted the amount of discussion that it has if it were generally recognized as trivial. So if it is trivial, it at least is not *obviously* trivial.

How can a thesis be trivial but not obviously so (that is, non-trivially trivial)? This can happen if the defenders of the thesis are not clear about their own meaning. This, I suspect, is the case with evidentialism: its defenders have not in fact had a determinate understanding of the key term "evidence." As we have seen, there are

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<sup>28</sup>Variations on this response (with more sophisticated-sounding phraseology) have been offered by Trent Dougherty, Kevin McCain, and Matt Skene in informal communications.

<sup>29</sup>This is assuming you are interested in epistemology. If you're not, then you are really wasting your time. Sorry.

<sup>30</sup>Conee and Feldman (2004, p. 1).



perhaps five different ways of understanding “evidence.” I suspect that evidentialists have failed to distinguish these meanings, and thus have employed a sort of amalgam of two or more different meanings as their concept of evidence – perhaps evidence as a thing from which a conclusion can be inferred, evidence as a justification-source, and evidence as a probability-raiser. This would explain why evidentialists should have so far failed to explicitly note the triviality of their thesis, and why they come to embrace triviality only in response to my argument. For it is arguments like mine that force them to choose a determinate meaning for “evidence.” Faced with falsehood or triviality, they choose triviality.

Second, I think there is philosophical value in thinking about the meaning of “evidence,” and in fact I think my interpretation of the term is better than that of the evidentialists (assuming their interpretation is “evidence = any source of justification”). There is wisdom in ordinary language: its terms usually express important and useful concepts. When we abandon ordinary usage for a technical usage, the result is often to elide important distinctions. And that, I believe, is precisely the case here. “Evidence” in ordinary English denotes a particular, very important and interesting *kind* of justification-source. By changing the word’s use so as to denote justification-sources in general, evidentialists elide crucial distinctions among kinds of justification. My own use of “evidence” is better because it is closer to the ordinary usage and does not obscure these distinctions.

Consider the following examples of justified beliefs:

- (i) Sue is curious about the color range of hedgehogs. She starts traveling the world, observing hedgehogs in different countries. Every one she sees is brown. As her collection of brown hedgehogs grows, she becomes increasingly justified in the belief that all hedgehogs are brown.
- (ii) Colombo wants to know who murdered Stoolie. He gathers fingerprints from the scene of the murder. He discovers that many of the fingerprints from the crime scene match suspected hit man Lefty. This makes Colombo suspect that Lefty is the killer.
- (iii) Scientists discover that water can be converted into hydrogen and oxygen by electrolysis. This leads them to believe that water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen.
- (iv) Sally has a headache. She knows that she is in pain.
- (v) Mike wonders about the value of a random variable,  $H$ . He reflects that its value is probably not exactly 5.5, since there are infinitely many other possible values.
- (vi) Daisy thinks about the number three. She notes that it is equal to itself.

Cases (i), (ii), and (iii) are examples of what ordinary people would describe as someone gathering evidence for a conclusion. Cases (iv), (v), and (vi) are not; they are examples of *different* kinds of justification. Now, one could simply stipulate that all the cases are going to be called cases of “having evidence” since they all involve justified belief – but then one is eliding the very large and important epistemological differences among the cases. We will then need to invent some other term for the

kind of justification that is present in cases (i), (ii), and (iii) but absent from (iv), (v), and (vi).<sup>31</sup>

It would be easier to keep the ordinary use of “evidence” and admit that not all justification is evidential.

## 12.5 Conclusion

My critique of evidentialism applies only to an interesting, distinctive evidentialist thesis; it does not apply to a version of evidentialism that is trivial, nor does it apply to a version on which “evidentialism” is simply a new name for epistemological internalism. I think the trivial version of evidentialism as well as the version on which evidentialism is identical to internalism are both true; they simply represent unfortunate misuses of language, which cause us to elide important epistemological distinctions.

With that limitation understood, and taking into account the modifications and qualifications introduced in earlier sections, here is the central argument again:

1. Some propositions are justified to some degree by virtue of having high (greater than 0.5) initial probabilities that we have access to. For:
  - a. Propositions with high probabilities that we have access to are thereby justified to some degree.
  - b. Some propositions have high initial probabilities that we have access to.
2. Justification by virtue of high initial probability that we have access to is non-evidential. For:
  - a. Evidence for  $h$  either entails  $h$  or raises the probability of  $h$  above its initial probability, or entails or raises the probability of some disjunct in a disjunction that is equivalent to  $h$ .
  - b. Justification for  $h$  by virtue of high initial probability that we have access to does not depend on anything that entails  $h$ , raises the probability of  $h$  above its initial probability, or entails or raises the probability of some disjunct in a disjunction that is equivalent to  $h$ .
3. Therefore, some justification is non-evidential. (From 1, 2.)<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>The distinction is not, by the way, covered by Conee and Feldman’s (2008, pp. 84–6) distinction between “scientific evidence” and “justifying evidence.” Their distinction seems to be between an externalist notion and an internalist notion; that is, it concerns whether evidence must be identifiable as such to the subject. That is not my distinction. All of my cases (i)–(vi) are cases of internal justification accessible to the subject.

<sup>32</sup>I would like to thank Trent Dougherty, Kevin McCain, and Ted Poston for their helpful comments on a more confusing and less convincing version of this paper, as a result of which the present completely convincing version was born.

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# Chapter 13

## Standing in a Garden of Forking Paths



Clayton Littlejohn

**Abstract** According to the Path Principle, a thinker has the propositional justification that she does because of the evidence she has and the support relations this evidence provides. Whenever a thinker properly added a belief to her belief set, this is (in part) because her evidence provided her a path that took her to this belief. Whenever a thinker cannot properly add a belief to her belief set, this is because her evidence does not provide her with the right path. Epistemic standing, on this view, is largely determined by the paths provided by a thinker's evidence. If we can give an account of evidence, its possession, and evidential support in non-normative terms, we could then use the Path Principle to give a nice, reductive account of justification. It might appear that the Path Principle is platitudinous, but appearances are sometimes misleading. I'll raise two kinds of problems for the Path Principle.

**Keywords** Epistemic standing · Evidential support · Path Principle · Propositional justification · Doxastic justification

### 13.1 Introduction

A thinker's evidence supports some of the conclusions that they've drawn but probably not all of them.<sup>1</sup> (Even the most rational thinkers have the odd irrational belief.) It supports some conclusions that they've never drawn and infinitely many that they never will. (Nobody can or should believe all the obvious consequences

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of the things they know.<sup>2</sup>) There are also some conclusions that aren't supported by a thinker's evidence now and never will be supported by it. (I would wager that nobody will have sufficient evidence to believe that the number of stars is even.) When there is no path that takes us from our evidence to a conclusion by means of good reasoning, it would seem there is no justification for drawing that conclusion. When a path is present, however, it seems to ensure that there is justification for what we believe even if, because of bad luck, our conclusions are mistaken.

One way to think of the normative significance of evidence is in terms of these paths of evidential support.<sup>3</sup> The presence of a path means that in principle a thinker could reason from the evidence they have now in such a way that they would always have justification to believe the conclusions the path takes them to. On the other hand, when there is no path that takes them from their current evidence to a conclusion via good reasoning, they either need to acquire new evidence or refrain from drawing this conclusion. Relations of evidential support provide us with paths that we might permissibly follow but we cannot justifiably believe anything if a path doesn't take us there from where we are now.

This is a tempting picture. It suggests that something like this principle must be true:

The Path Principle: The types of support relations that hold between a thinker's evidence and the propositions she grasps wholly determine whether there is propositional justification for believing these propositions.

The principle tells us something negative and something positive. The negative point is that there is no way to have justification to believe something without a path that takes you to that belief that's provided by supporting evidence. The positive point is that the presence of such a path is all you need for justification to draw a conclusion.

While I can understand the temptations to buy into this picture, this gives us a distorted picture of what justification is. We often speak of the available evidence as 'a justification' where we mean that it is something that we would cite in support of our belief. We also speak of 'a justification' as a kind of normative status that

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<sup>2</sup>It should be obvious that nobody can believe the obvious consequences of what they know. If 'ought' or 'should' imply 'can', it would be wrong to say that a thinker should believe every obvious consequence of what they know. A thinker may believe whatever she sees follows from what she knows, but I haven't seen a good case for believing that a thinker ought or should believe whatever she has adequate reason to believe.

<sup>3</sup>How should 'support' be understood? How should 'adequate support' be understood? The title was chosen because I'm interested in normative standing or status and how it is determined. I shall assume that my opponent is someone who thinks that support is something that is itself non-normative and that it potentially has a normative upshot. I won't assume much of anything about what kind of non-normative relations would have to be in place to ensure that a belief could attain some kind of positive standing. If readers are attracted to a view of support on which evidence supports by raising the probability of something and characterizes adequacy of support in terms of a degree of support that crosses a threshold, so be it. If instead they think we cannot say much of anything informative about the kind of support except to say that it is there iff something 'fits' the evidence, that should be fine, too. The support relations might be primitive but I shall assume that support, however characterized, satisfies the weak constraints outlined below.

is like a permission or entitlement. It is something we have only when our beliefs conform to the epistemic norms or standards that govern belief. The relationship between them is messy.<sup>4</sup> I do not think that there are always evidential paths that necessarily take us from where we are to beliefs that conform to these norms. The connection between following the paths of evidential support and conforming to epistemic norms is contingent. Talk of ‘sufficient’ evidential support obscures this because it suggests that there is something in the evidential support relations that would be sufficient to ensure that our beliefs are justified. There is not.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the presence of an evidential path is not always necessary for justification. There are situations where we can justifiably add a belief to our belief set even though there is no path that leads us there. There is both more and less to justification than evidential support.

My target in this paper is the evidentialist view that is presupposed by the Path Principle. It is the view that says that facts about what a thinker has justification to believe (i.e., a right or permission to believe) are wholly determined by facts about a thinker’s evidence (e.g., what is included in her evidence, what support relations hold between her evidence and the propositions that she grasps). I’ve argued previously that justification does not supervene upon the evidence.<sup>6</sup> The connection between a thinker’s justification or her reasons and the resultant normative status of her beliefs is contingent, not necessary. In this paper, I shall provide additional arguments against this supervenience thesis and an argument against a stronger determination thesis, an argument that shows that the Path Principle would be false even if a kind of supervenience thesis were true.

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<sup>4</sup>Among other things, it is possible that a thinker has ‘a justification’ in one sense without having ‘a justification’ in the other because the justification the thinker has is not up to the task.

<sup>5</sup>Recall Clifford’s suggestion that it is wrong to believe without sufficient evidence. What could he mean by ‘sufficient’? I don’t think he could have meant that a thinker has sufficient evidence for her beliefs if it isn’t wrong for her to hold those beliefs. The idea had better be that there’s some way of understanding what it takes for the evidential support to be sufficient that isn’t cashed out in terms of what is or is not wrong to believe that accounts for the fact that some beliefs are wrongfully held and others are not. To get a fix on the relevant notion, it’s helpful to start with some examples where there is all the evidential support we could hope to have (e.g., the evidential support that is present in paradigmatic cases of knowledge) and then think about ways of understanding how this kind of support could be present or absent in other cases (e.g., cases where a thinker would seem to have all the same evidence). The sufficiency of support should be common when we’re dealing with thinkers who have identical evidence or evidence that has all the same kinds of support relations. The argument against the Sufficiency Thesis is an argument that there is no notion of sufficiency that suits the evidentialist’s needs (i.e., is a non-epistemic or non-normative property that is sufficient for some epistemic or normative property).

<sup>6</sup>See my (2012), especially Chap. 6.

## 13.2 Setting the Stage

Let's say that 'evidentialism' picks out a theory of a kind of normative standing: propositional justification. I take propositional justification to be a kind of normative standing because when a thinker has it, it is acceptable, proper, or permitted for the thinker to believe some proposition. Our discussion will focus on the justification of full belief. This is the kind of belief that is required for knowledge and is presupposed by propositionally specified reasons explanations of the agent's actions and affective responses. If readers wish to draw any lessons about partial belief, they will need to import assumptions about full and partial belief that are not presupposed in this discussion. In short, evidentialism is a theory about the justification of this kind of attitude.

Evidentialism is the view that a thinker's evidence (at a time) wholly determines whether there is sufficient justification for this thinker to believe *p* (at that time).<sup>7</sup> To allow for various kinds of defeat, we should be open to the idea that the thinker's total evidence or some large portion of it determines whether there is sufficient justification for the thinker to believe a proposition (i.e., the justification of a belief turns on more than the thinker's justification for holding that belief even on the evidentialist view). While evidentialism implies that a certain supervenience thesis is true, the thesis is more interesting than any supervenience thesis. Supervenience is cheap.<sup>8</sup> It does not imply that any interesting kind of dependence or determination thesis holds. All the necessary truths supervene upon the contingent truths about cheese and clocks, but nobody thinks that this tells us anything about metaphysical priority. It also does not imply that any interesting kinds of patterns of generalizations would hold. Even if justification supervened upon a thinker's evidence it could be that, say, two thinkers with very similar bodies of evidence could differ radically in terms of what they would have justification to believe.<sup>9</sup> Evidentialism isn't supposed to be cheap in these ways. It tells us that some non-epistemic facts (i.e., facts about evidence and evidential support) are prior to some epistemic facts (i.e., facts about propositional justification) and it implies that interesting patterns hold.

The Path Principle is supposed to capture three important dimensions of evidentialism. First, it tells us that there is a decisive reason not to believe when there is no evidential path that takes a thinker from where they are now to a new belief:

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<sup>7</sup>This fits Conee and Feldman's (2004) characterization. See also McCain (2014).

<sup>8</sup>Comesana (2005) reminds us of this fact and turns it into an argument for externalism.

<sup>9</sup>It could be that Agnes' evidence supports her belief that Hesperus shines and that this belief of hers is justified. It could be that Agatha's evidence differs from Agnes' only in that Agatha knows that two is the smallest prime. If there is just this difference in their evidence, the supervenience of justification on evidence could hold and yet Agatha could fail to have justification to believe that Hesperus shines. It would seem that such differences shouldn't have any bearing on what justification Agatha has. It certainly doesn't seem to have any bearing on what her evidence supports, how much support her evidence provides, etc. Thus, there had better be more to evidentialism than a supervenience thesis that allows for these kinds of differences.

The Dependence Thesis: There is no situation in which it is appropriate for a thinker to believe  $p$  where the thinker does not possess evidence that provides the right support for believing  $p$ .<sup>10</sup>

Second, it tells us that certain non-epistemic evidential support relations are all that matter for propositional justification:

The Sufficiency Thesis: There is no situation in which a thinker's evidence provides the right support for believing  $p$  if there is a situation where this type of evidential support relation fails to provide sufficient support for believing a suitable counterpart of  $p$ .

If, say, Agnes' evidence differs from Agatha's only at the level of sense (e.g., Agnes thinks of Venus as Hesperus and Agatha thinks of Venus as Phosphorus), they should have the same paths open to them since the kind of support that Agnes' evidence provides for her beliefs about Hesperus are just the kind of support that Agatha's evidence provides for her beliefs about Phosphorus.<sup>11</sup>

Third, the Path Principle reminds us that the order of dependence runs from evidential support to justification:

The Determination Thesis: The propriety or impropriety of believing  $p$  is always determined by something more basic: the evidential support relations that hold between this content and the thinker's evidence.

This rules out views on which we'd say that there's a path open to Agnes because she's in a position to know or justifiably believe  $p$ . The evidentialist thinks that she's in a position to justifiably believe something because of the presence of a path of suitable evidential support. Notice that these theses are neutral on how evidential support should be understood, provided that the support relation is characterizable in terms that don't make essential use of normative concepts from epistemology (e.g., rationality, responsibility, justification, or knowledge).

We will look at two problems for the Path Principle. The first problem has to do with the Dependence Thesis. However we understand evidence and its possession, there are some cases of justification without evidential support. The second problem has to do with the Sufficiency Thesis. Even when there is evidence that supports a proposition that a thinker justifiably believes, that type of support might hold in other cases and fail to justify a thinker's beliefs.

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<sup>10</sup>There is one wrinkle to consider. As I understand it, the Dependence Thesis tells us that if a thinker justifiably believes  $p$ , there is adequate evidence that supports the thinker's belief in  $p$ . Does this mean that there is something that is evidence that the thinker has that supports the thinker's belief in  $p$ ? That is unclear. Suppose the thinker has nothing in her body of evidence. Some would say that the thinker's evidence (which includes no pieces of evidence) could still provide maximum support for a logical truth. I shall assume, contrary to this, that a thinker cannot have adequate evidence for believing  $p$  unless there is something that is a piece of evidence that supports  $p$  that could figure in some kind of recognizably good reasoning that leads to this conclusion.

<sup>11</sup>Clearly it matters that the relations among their different thoughts are sufficiently similar. If we don't hold those fixed, one thinker could infer surprising empirical truths from tautologies.



### 13.3 The Dependence Thesis

Cases of non-inferential belief cause trouble for the Dependence Thesis. To see why, let's consider an argument against the Dependence Thesis:

- P1. There is some non-inferential knowledge.
- P2. Non-inferential knowledge is either evidentially based or it is not.
- P3. Non-inferential knowledge is not evidentially based.
- C1. Thus, some knowledge is not evidentially based.
- P4. Whatever we know we have justification to believe.
- C2. Thus, there is justification that is not evidentially based.

Foundationalists accept (P1) unless they accept a virulent form of skepticism that denies the possibility of all knowledge. Evidentialists should spot us the weak foundationalist and anti-skeptical assumptions needed for (P1). The main point of contention is not (P4). Remember that the relevant notion of justification is a normative one. Few would defend evidentialism by arguing that the relevant cases are cases of knowledge where the thinker shouldn't hold the belief in question. The contentious premise is (P3). If this premise is true, the argument is sound.

Because our evidence is our knowledge, (P3) is true. Because non-inferential knowledge is possible, it's possible for a thinker who doesn't have any *evidential* basis for believing *p* to come to know *p*. They would therein come to have a justified belief in *p* without having had an evidential path that could take them from where they were before believing *p* to where they are now.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence of coming to know *p*, the subject could acquire evidence that entails that *p*: the fact that *p*. This fact, however, is not the evidential basis that supports the belief. The presence of this evidential basis is a consequence of coming to know and coming to have a new justified belief, not the means by which it is possible to attain the relevant belief or for that belief to attain its epistemic status.

If  $E = K$  is correct and non-inferential knowledge is possible, it should be possible to construct counterexamples to the Dependence Thesis.<sup>13</sup> We might

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<sup>12</sup>Could the evidentialist say that there are cases of knowledge or justified belief without evidential grounding? Perhaps, but they would then be committed to an absurdly permissive view. If we thought that someone who had no evidence for *p* or for  $\neg p$  could nevertheless justifiably believe *p*, the Sufficiency Thesis would tell us that there would be a general permission for those who lacked evidence to believe what they had no evidence to believe. (Why? Because we would have admitted that the evidential support relation that holds between evidence that provides no support for a belief is sufficient to justify that belief. That, in turn, would generalize across similar cases.)

<sup>13</sup>These cases are also challenges to uniqueness since the differences in what Agnes and Agatha have justification to believe would show that certain uniqueness theses are false. Uniqueness tells us that Agnes and Agatha should have justification to believe the same things if their evidence is the same, but the example shows that one has justification to believe something that the other thinker should not believe. On my view, we should think of being in a position to justifiably believe as something like being in a position to know—something that can be sensitive to evidence but not something that supervenes upon the thinker's evidence. For a defense of  $E = K$ , see Williamson (2000).

suppose that at  $t$ , Agnes and Agatha are evidential duplicates. Agnes and Agatha open their eyes and look out their respective windows. Agnes sees rain clouds. Agatha sees blue skies. As a consequence, Agnes is in a position to know that it is cloudy and that the skies aren't blue. Thus, she has justification to believe that it is cloudy and does not have justification to believe that the skies are blue. Agatha, however, is in a position to know that the sky is blue. She has justification to believe this and does not have justification to believe that it is cloudy.<sup>14</sup> This difference is not a consequence of the evidence they had at  $t$  prior to coming to believe anything about the weather.

Because they have the same evidence at  $t$ , they should have the same evidential paths at  $t$ . However, at  $t'$ , Agnes justifiably believes something that Agatha could not justifiably believe (and vice versa). If what Agnes knew at  $t$  constituted an adequate evidential path that supported her beliefs at  $t'$ , it should have given a path to Agatha, too. Either the evidentialist will give them too few paths (i.e., they'll say that neither Agnes nor Agatha could both justifiably believe that it was cloudy or that it was sunny) or too many paths (i.e., they'll say that neither could have any justified beliefs about the weather). Thus, we can use  $E = K$  to show that (P3) must be true.

Obviously this argument will not persuade everyone.  $E = K$  is a contentious thesis. I don't offer this argument because I think it will show the evidentialists the error of their ways. I offer it for two reasons. The first is that it brings out one of the ways that a commitment to the Dependence Thesis can force us to take on commitments we would prefer not to. Some evidentialists say that the view is obvious or that its core commitments are relatively unproblematic. I don't see how they can be obvious or obviously unproblematic if combining them with independently motivated epistemological views leads to unpalatable consequences. The second is that a perfectly natural way to test the Dependence Thesis is by embedding it in a framework of independently motivated claims to consider its consequences. If the consequences are problematic, we have to wonder whether the source of the problem is the Dependence Thesis or something else. If we combine the thesis with any propositional view of evidence on which possession of propositionally specified evidence requires belief in the proposition, we get the result that non-inferential justification and knowledge are impossible. I think this highlights a potentially serious problem with the thesis. We have good reason to think that evidence is propositionally specified and to think that the possession of such evidence requires belief.

Here is why  $E = K$  causes trouble for the Dependence Thesis. To accommodate the Dependence Thesis, the evidentialist offers an account of justification that contains three distinct parts:

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<sup>14</sup>Remember that  $E = K$  tells us that the differences in evidential pathways that emerge will emerge as a result of coming to know different things. They are not the means by which there are interesting differences in what these thinkers are permitted to believe in light of their experiences if their experiences do not constitutively involve belief. (Even if they did constitutively involve belief, such beliefs would then be counterexamples to the Path Principle since they would not be evidentially based.)

Target: the state of the world (understood broadly) that we aim to represent accurately.<sup>15</sup>

Attempt: the propositional attitude about this state that can be assessed for accuracy and evaluated epistemically.

Support: something distinct from both the target and the attempt that provides rational support for the attempts by virtue of being evidence of the relevant target states.<sup>16</sup>

If the only support that we had for our beliefs came from the things that we knew, we couldn't have support for our prospective non-inferential beliefs because the possession of such beliefs would be necessary for the possession of the relevant support. To formulate a view that accommodates the Dependence Thesis we need an account of support on which the possession of the support for some attempt (e.g., Agnes' belief about the weather) does not require the attempt itself. E = K rules this out.

The literature is filled with alternative accounts of what constitutes a thinker's support (e.g., facts that the thinker knows or believes, propositions that are the contents of the thinker's mental states, mental states or events, etc.). This was just an opening gambit. Naturally someone who is attracted to the Dependence Thesis will want to offer an alternative account of support and its possession. Crucially, they will want an account on which the possession of the support we have for our non-inferential knowledge of *p* does not require the belief that *p*.<sup>17</sup> There are two very different models of non-inferential support in the literature. On the first, having support is really just a matter of having some kind of propositional or representational state of mind or mental event.<sup>18</sup> The support might be the state itself or the content of the state, but the account involves two features. First, the support plays the support role it does, in part, because of the relationship between the content of the attempt and the content of the support. Second, the thinker must occupy the non-doxastic state or undergo the relevant mental event to have this support but the

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<sup>15</sup>This has to be understood broadly enough that it covers every potential object of thought. Thus, it includes the external world and everything internal to the mind that we can form beliefs about.

<sup>16</sup>There are some important ground rules that we need to remember as the discussion proceeds. First, little if anything of interest about the kind of support we have follows from facts about targets. Similarly, the presence of support implies little if anything about what the targets are like. Moreover, these three types of item should be understood as distinct existences. Your attempt to settle the question whether *p* is not support for that attempt and it is not the target. (If there are special cases where this breaks down, we have to see whether the exception to the general pattern is something that helps or harms the evidentialist cause.)

<sup>17</sup>If the possession of the support required the attempt in question, there would be no evidential path that would permit the thinker to make the attempt in question.

<sup>18</sup>For a defense of the statist view on which the support consists of mental states with appropriate contents, see Conee and Feldman (2008), Gibbons (2014), McCain (2014), and Mitova (2015). Abstract is required. Please provide abstract in one paragraph without headings. For a defense of the propositionalist view on which the support consists of the propositional contents of these states, see Fantl and McGrath (2009). Neta (2008) makes a convincing case for the view that evidence is specified propositionally and not in terms of mental states or events.

thinker need not be aware of the state or event for it to provide support. We'll call this the 'occupational' view of support because the thinker has the support by being in some state or undergoing some experience.<sup>19</sup> On the second approach, the support is something that the thinker accesses or is aware of in some way.<sup>20</sup> The support (and the possession condition for it) would not need to have a representational content of any kind but would be something like a mark, clue, indication, or sign of the target states that could justify a belief about these target states only if the support is somehow made available to the thinker. We'll call this the 'awareness' view of support. It's important to distinguish these approaches because a lack of clarity about support can help to shield the weakness of the evidentialist view. Neither approach will give us an adequate account of non-inferential justification because there are clear cases of non-inferential knowledge without support as these views conceive of it.

### 13.3.1 *The Occupational View*

Some proponents of the non-occupational view would say that the possibility of perceptual knowledge provides no support for (P3). On this approach, the problem with  $E = K$  is not with the idea that support needs to be understood in terms of propositions that we have in mind, but with the idea that the relevant propositions have to be believed to provide support.<sup>21</sup> In the case of perceptual knowledge, the beliefs that constitute this knowledge would count as evidentially based by virtue of the fact that the subject's experiences have propositional contents that stand in the right kinds of rationalizing relations to the subject's doxastic attempts.

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<sup>19</sup>A crucial feature of this approach is that there are non-doxastic antecedents to belief that are sufficiently like belief to have contents that stand in interesting support relations to beliefs.

<sup>20</sup>If Fumerton (1995, 2013) can be classified as an evidentialist, he is an advocate of this approach. On his view, the rational support that we have for our non-inferentially justified beliefs involves acquaintance with certain things (facts, thoughts, and a correspondence relation between them) where the acquaintance relation is not intentional or representational. One reason to worry about lumping Fumerton in with the evidentialists is that his view implies that when we have non-inferential justification to believe  $p$ , the justification derives from acquaintance with the fact that  $p$  (and acquaintance with further things), so his view implies that we often have no evidence for believing  $p$  to be a fact distinct from the fact that  $p$ .

<sup>21</sup>Versions of this idea can be found in Brueckner (2009), Dougherty (2011), McDowell (1994), Schellenberg (2011), and Schroeder (2011). Is this a view that Conee and Feldman defend? It is difficult to say. In some places they seem to think of evidence as the information that a thinker 'has to go on'. In other places, they seem to think that a subject's evidence is constituted by her experiences. This doesn't really tell us whether they think experiences have contents or whether their contents play an interesting epistemological role.

The success of this response rests on a few controversial assumptions. The first is that a subject might possess a propositionally specified reason without believing the proposition specified as the reason.<sup>22</sup> The second is that a subject's experience can have a representational content that we specify using that-clauses.<sup>23</sup> While I think that both assumptions are false, we don't have to enter into these debates now. We can bracket the question as to whether the occupational model works for perceptual knowledge and take up the more pressing question of whether it can account for our intuitions about all cases of non-inferential knowledge. If not, the argument would rule out one version of the Dependence Thesis even if the occupational view were right about perceptual justification.

There seem to be a number of problem cases for the occupational view's handling of non-inferential knowledge. We should look for the cases where it seems there is no sign that anything that could play the support role as the occupational view conceives of it is present. Consider, for example, the knowledge that you have that you are thinking about Agnes, the knowledge that Agnes has that there is a pain in her knee, the knowledge that Agnes has that she is making a pie or trying to chop the apples, the knowledge that Agnes has that her legs are crossed under the table, and the knowledge that Agnes has that it seems that the housing market is heating up again. In none of these cases does it seem that there is anything that plays the support role as understood by the occupational view. There is no state of mind that is distinct from both the target and the attempt that has a content that could rationally support the attempt in question.<sup>24</sup> We don't know about our own pains (e.g., their apparent locations, their intensity, that they are a pain rather than a tickle), say, because betwixt the intense sensation and the belief about it and its properties is a further state of mind that represents the properties of the pain. The same holds for the other cases of self-knowledge, too. We don't know that we're thinking about epistemology because in addition to the first-order attitudes in virtue of which we're thinking about epistemology there is some further set of

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<sup>22</sup>Unger (1975) observed that propositionally specified attributions of reasons entail corresponding knowledge claims, so the linguistic data points decisively against non-doxastic accounts of the possession of propositionally specified reasons. While some would prefer to ignore the linguistic data, there are good philosophical reasons for being concerned about non-doxastic accounts of the possession of propositionally specified evidence. See the subsequent note. For a helpful discussion of the ontology of reasons generally, see Alvarez (2010).

<sup>23</sup>While many people now think that experiences have representational or propositional content, Brewer (2011) and Travis (2013) have made a convincing case against this idea.

<sup>24</sup>It is helpful to control for controversies about the nature of pain. Hyman (2003), for example, identifies them with modes of sensitive parts of our bodies. Tye (1995), however, insists that they are representational states of mind. The epistemology of knowledge about our representational states of mind might look very different than the epistemology of states of the body or non-representational aspects of our mental lives. (The issue is further complicated by the fact that there might be no unified approach to pain that is adequate. See Corns (2014).)

propositional attitudes about these attitudes that support the higher-order belief that we're thinking about epistemology.<sup>25</sup>

One reason that these cases seem like trouble for the occupational view is that it seems implausible that there is something that has the right features to play the support role that is necessary for the justification of our attempts to get the targets right. There does not seem to be any representational state of mind that, say, represents Agnes as believing that it is raining that justifies her belief that this is what she believes. Why would the mind need this third representational state? The mind would need some way to classify first-order mental states as being a certain type of state (e.g., a belief, a desire, a hope, etc.) and as having a certain content. I see no reason to think that the mind could only get its work done and lead to knowledge if it took in some sort of input and then spit out some kind of output that had a representational content like the second-order belief that was distinct from the belief itself. If Agnes knows that she's thinking about Agatha, she does not settle this question correctly because there is, in addition to the thought, a representational state of mind that justifies her belief that represents her as thinking about Agatha.<sup>26</sup> It seems that this is all that is required to do justice to the phenomenology and all that is needed for higher-order knowledge of our own mental lives.

There are two ways to press the objection. First, if there is no non-doxastic representational state of mind distinct from the attempt and the target, the occupational view implies that these aren't cases of knowledge. Since these seem to be paradigmatic cases of knowledge, the occupational view seems to deliver the wrong verdicts. Second, even if, say, our best cognitive scientists agree that there are suitable non-doxastic states in each case, it's troubling that we don't believe that there are suitable non-doxastic states in these cases. By that I mean, our intuitions about such cases aren't triggered by the belief that such states are present because

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<sup>25</sup>Having looked for evidentialist discussions of the justification we have for beliefs about our own thoughts and actions, it looks as if the evidentialists have confined their discussions to the justification of introspective beliefs about our own experiences. (See, for example, Feldman's discussion of the speckled hen in Conee and Feldman (2004).) In these discussions, it certainly looks as if the proposals dispense with any support that would be distinct from the target and the attempt.

<sup>26</sup>Kevin McCain raised an important question at this point. Suppose at *t*, Agnes believes that it is raining but isn't reflecting on this belief. Her attention is elsewhere. Suppose at *t'*, however, she is reflecting on her belief. The differences might matter to the epistemology of self-knowledge. Couldn't the evidentialist say that the difference in what Agnes has justification to believe or is in a position to know is a difference that is due to a difference in evidence? Perhaps, but this is where matters get tricky. On the occupational view, the relevant difference-making mental state would be a representational state of mind distinct from the first-order target and the second-order attempt. I see no reason to think that the relevant shifts in attention are due to the onset or acquisition of such states or to think that the ability to acquire the self-knowledge that Agnes can have at *t'* is itself due to the presence of such states rather than, say, a method, ability, or process that involves attention as part of its normal function. When it comes to the Cartesian self-verifying judgments (e.g. this thought is about such and such), it seems implausible that there is, in addition to this judgment, a distinct state of mind that represents the judgment in light of which we can work out that it is true. We use an infallible skill, method, or ability.

we don't assume that they are. We're either agnostic or believe that they're absent, but we still think that the relevant cases are cases of knowledge. If we don't believe that such states are present, but we think that these cases are paradigmatic cases of knowledge, the occupational view does not mesh with our intuitions. By our lights the thing that the view says is essential for justification isn't present, but we think justification is present.

### ***13.3.2 The Awareness View***

The problem with the occupational view is that it takes justification to depend upon the presence of representational states of mind that we don't have any reason to believe in. If such states don't exist, some of the epistemic assessments that we are most confident of would turn out to be false. Until we know that such states exist, we cannot rationally stand behind these assessments. Since it seems pretty clear that we know what we're thinking and doing and seem to have no real reason to question these assessments, the best thing we can say about the occupational view is that it clashes with intuition. Happily, there is an alternative view, the awareness view.

The key difference between these views is that the awareness view doesn't take the support that is purported to determine whether our attempts at getting our targets right to involve any kind of content or representational state of mind. We are somehow able to access some things that play the support role by means of some non-representational mode of awareness.<sup>27</sup> One helpful case to consider by way of illustration might be the case in which various things are observed and we form a belief about some targets by means of inference to best explanation (e.g., we observe some crumbs, the hole in the wall, hear the squeaks, and infer that a mouse is present). The observables needn't be representational states of mind or have content to play the support role here. Perhaps we can construct a similar model for a wider range of beliefs, such as beliefs about the observable things in our environment where we take the evidential basis to be, say, aspects of a thinker's subjective mental life and model the support relation on something like inference to best explanation.

How far can we extend this model? Let's bracket concerns we might have about using this model to account for the justification of beliefs about the things we perceive in our surroundings because the interesting cases will be similar to those discussed above. The key difference between these models appears to be that neither

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<sup>27</sup>Fumerton (1995) defends something in the neighborhood of this approach because he thinks that we have non-inferential justification when we have awareness of a truth-maker, the thought that's true because of the truth-maker, and the truth-making relation between them. On his view, awareness is not conceptual or representational.

the evidence possessed nor the possession of it requires a representational state of mind distinct from the attempt or the target. The view should thus avoid the objection to the occupational view (i.e., that it makes certain forms of non-inferential knowledge contingent upon the presence of states of mind we have no good reason to believe in).

Unfortunately, it is hard to have much confidence in this approach since it is hard to see how awareness that involves no representational element could help with the full range of cases. Consider the case of knowledge of our own beliefs. Thought contents are conceptual and they individuate our attitudes. How could a non-representational mode of access to anything ground knowledge of states individuated by their conceptual contents? I don't see how the same kind of non-conceptual awareness that is involved in, say, the knowledge we have of the intensity of sensation could be something that grounds knowledge of the conceptual contents of our thoughts (e.g., that it grounds the knowledge that Agnes has when she knowingly reports that she's been thinking about economics, not poetry). If such awareness is not representational or intentional, it is properly reported and fully characterized in terms of extensional reports (i.e., those reports that allow for the substitution of co-referential expressions *salva veritate*). This kind of awareness that involves no exercise of conceptual capacities could not bring before the mind something non-representational that tells us that we believe as opposed to hope or tell us that our beliefs about, say, water or Hesperus as opposed to H<sub>2</sub>O or Phosphorus. If the goal is to determine whether you yourself have a belief that pertains to some target, a clue or piece of evidence that does not involve the same conceptual capacities exercised in that thought will be worthless.<sup>28</sup>

A proponent of this view might say that the discussion overlooks a view that somehow sits between the occupational and awareness view. The idea would be that simply being in some state of mind is enough to have evidence even if this state of mind isn't itself representational and doesn't have content and even if we don't have access or awareness to this state. This proposal might seem to avoid some problems, but it seems to face one significant problem of its own. Williamson's (2000) anti-luminosity argument shows that the mere fact that some mental state obtains or some such event occurs is not sufficient to ensure that a subject is in a position to know that it obtains. This means that when a subject is in a position to know that the state obtains, it is a special case and something has to distinguish this case from the case where the subject isn't in a position to know. The relevant difference maker will not be evidence the thinker possesses, not on the present understanding of what that

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<sup>28</sup>It's not just knowledge about states with conceptual content that are problematic for this view. See Anscombe's (1962) discussion of knowledge without clues in connection with our knowledge of the positions of our own limbs.



could be. The difference maker could be an ability, process, method, but it would not be a tool that we take from the evidentialist kit.<sup>29, 30</sup>

Once we see that some non-inferential knowledge is not evidentially based, we can see that the Path Principle is mistaken and why it is mistaken. We see that it is mistaken because the principle implies that when a thinker has no evidence that supports believing  $p$  or believing  $\neg p$  the thinker could not have justification to believe  $p$  and fail to have justification to believe  $\neg p$ . This implication runs counter to intuitive verdicts about cases where we think, pre-reflectively, that a thinker knows whether  $p$  but does not have anything that could play the roles of evidence as understood by the two approaches discussed above. The problem with the principle is that it overlooks the possibility that evidential support is but one way amongst many for a belief to attain positive epistemic status. In the case of non-inferential knowledge (or, more cautiously, some such cases), the crucial factors that determine whether there is justification to believe will not be evidence, but some process, mechanism, method or ability that doesn't simply operate on or process evidence that yields true beliefs without the need for supporting evidence.

### 13.4 The Sufficiency Thesis

Our discussion has focused on non-inferential justification and knowledge. Readers might wonder whether evidentialism might be right about inferential belief. While we might allow that there are some beliefs that can be justified without the need of supporting evidence, we might think that those that do need supporting evidence

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<sup>29</sup>Kevin McCain asked whether these are tools that the evidentialist can take on board or claim were already in their kit. I think not. The full range of abilities, capacities, skills, and methods will not supervene upon a thinker's evidence, so at best they would figure in an account of doxastic justification by playing some role in basing a belief on the evidence. We have no reason to think that such things, however, operate *on* evidence in the full range of cases. Indeed, we have good reason to think that they will not, not if such things are modes of awareness that are not representational. Such modes of awareness would not come into contact with anything that would serve as the appropriate input into a process that could be counted on for determining what content some first-order attitude had precisely because it would not involve the exercise of the conceptual capacities necessary for grasping the content of this attitude.

<sup>30</sup>It is helpful to consider an extreme test case for the view, cases of what Burge (1988) calls 'basic self-knowledge'. In the case where a thinker knows that she is thinking (with this very thought) about water, the thinker's knowledge is itself the thought that the knowledge is about. The thinker can have this knowledge even if there was nothing antecedent to this thought or the subject's use of the infallible method for determining that she has this thought that could be the thinker's evidence for this belief. The Path Principle would imply that because there was nothing prior to the thinking of the thought that could have provided evidential support for the relevant belief that the relevant belief could not have been justified. The belief is justified and constitutes knowledge because of the use of a good method or process, not because of a response to independently possessed evidence that supports belief.

to be justified would be those that show that the Path Principle, suitably restricted, might be correct.

There is an argument that shows that the Path Principle fails even for the inferentially justified beliefs that need evidential support to be justified:

- P1. A belief is justified iff it conforms to the norms that govern belief.<sup>31</sup>
- P2. A thinker's belief conforms to these norms iff it constitutes knowledge.<sup>32</sup>
- C1. A thinker's belief is justified iff it constitutes knowledge.
- P3. Two thinkers with precisely the same evidence for their belief in *p* can differ in that only one of them was in a position to know *p*.
- C2. Thus, two thinkers with precisely the same evidence can differ in that only one of them has a justification to believe *p*.

The guiding idea is that justification is a normative notion and that the presence of it turns on whether the thinker's beliefs conform to the norm that governs belief. This norm is the knowledge norm, or so I assume. Because we all agree that being in a position to know *p* would be necessary and sufficient for being in a position to conform to the fundamental epistemic norm if (P1) is true and agree that being in a position to know does not supervene upon a thinker's evidence, we get our desired result. A thinker's evidence does not wholly determine whether there is a path from the thinker's evidence at any particular time that wholly determines whether the inferential beliefs she formed on the basis of that evidence. If the thinker draws an inference and therein comes to know, the inferential belief couldn't fail to be justified. If a thinker in the same evidential situation draws that inference and comes to believe without knowing, she couldn't have a justified belief. This kind of luck is unavoidable.

I don't offer this argument to persuade evidentialists. It is the opening gambit. Just as the Path Principle does not mesh with live options in debates about the nature of evidence and its possession, it does not mesh with live options in debates about the identity of the norms that govern belief. Because of this, it's fair to press the evidentialist for a defense of the Path Principle. I should note at this point that I have never seen any argument for the Sufficiency Thesis in the literature. In conversations with those sympathetic to evidentialism, I've been told that while there is no such argument in the literature, the strongest case for the core commitments of the view is indirect. The idea is that the evidentialist will try to show that their view does the best job accounting for cases and vindicating intuitions. We've already seen some reason to think that the view fails to do this since it struggles to handle some cases

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<sup>31</sup>The norms are formulated in terms of what the agent should not believe. If the thinker violates no norm, it is not the case that the agent should not believe what she does. In other words, the belief is permitted, justified, etc. For a discussion of this normative conception of justification, see Littlejohn (2012).

<sup>32</sup>For defenses of the knowledge norm, see Littlejohn (2017), Steglich-Petersen (2013), Sutton (2007), and Williamson (2000).

of non-inferential knowledge. In this section we shall also see that it clashes with some intuitions about rational belief.

It is clear that the Sufficiency Thesis would be false if (P1) and (P2) were correct. If the justification of belief depended upon whether it constituted knowledge, justification would not supervene upon the evidence because facts about what a thinker is in a position to know do not supervene upon the thinker's evidence. If we combine (P2) with the Path Principle, we get the result that there is no adequate path of evidential support that would take a thinker to *p* unless every thinker with just her evidence would be in a position to know that *p*. For many things that we know, no such paths exist. Cases of inductive knowledge come to mind here. Even if you accept  $E = K$ , for example, you'd have to acknowledge that a complete description of a subject's evidential paths wouldn't determine whether the thinker would have justification to believe *p* because the truth of the conclusion of an inductive inference does not supervene upon a thinker's present knowledge.

This might convince some people that they ought to reject (P2). It might seem obvious to some people that a complete description of the thinker's evidence must determine whether it would be appropriate to use the evidence by drawing an inference from it or basing a belief on it. If you think that this is the right thing to say, you might replace (P2) with something that would allow for justification without knowledge:

(P2') P2. A thinker's belief conforms to these norms iff it is based on sufficient evidence.

If we substitute this evidentialist thesis for (P2) in the argument, it's clear that the argument's conclusion cannot be reached. While I won't argue here for the conclusion that (P2) is preferable, we will see that (P2') suffers from the same kind of problem that (P2) is alleged to. Given some plausible assumptions about what rationality requires from us, there will be situations analogous to the situations taken to be problematic for (P2): pairs of thinkers who have the same evidential support for their respective beliefs can differ in that only one thinker has sufficient justification for her beliefs.

Let's start by considering a putative rational requirement that many of us take to be intuitively compelling, the requirement that says that it's irrational to fail to *V* when you believe that you ought to *V*. This requirement, which is known as the 'Enkratic Requirement', states that it is irrational to be akratic and it seems that on its best formulation it is a wide-scope requirement (i.e., one that says that rationality prohibits a certain combination). When formulated as a wide-scope requirement, we don't face problems with bootstrapping or irrational beliefs putting rational pressure on a thinker to *V*. While we formulate this as a wide-scope requirement, Titelbaum has shown us how to derive a narrow-scope requirement from it, one that says that whenever rationality prohibits *V*-ing, it is not rational to believe that *V*-ing is required. The upshot of this is that rationality prohibits a certain kind of mistaken normative belief, one that represents *V*-ing as required when *V*-ing is prohibited. According to the Fixed-Point Thesis, this putative rational requirement is a genuine one.

The Fixed-Point Thesis is a surprising consequence of the Enkratic Requirement.<sup>33</sup> If the Fixed-Point Thesis is correct, we can use it to attack the Sufficiency Thesis. First, let's suppose that Jermaine is in the good case and he knows that he ought to V. He thus has sufficient evidence to believe that he ought to V. (Why think that? Remember that we're assuming that Jermaine's belief is justified if it constitutes knowledge and that a thinker cannot fail to have adequate evidence if the thinker has a justified belief.<sup>34</sup>) On the evidentialist view, there must be something that plays the evidence role that provides adequate support for Jermaine's belief.<sup>35</sup>

Next, let's stipulate that Jack has evidence that provides the same type of support for his belief that he ought to V'. Because of this and because Jermaine's belief is justified, the Sufficiency Thesis tells us that Jack should have adequate evidence and justification to believe that he ought to V'. However, we should be able to stipulate that Jack ought not V'. The Fixed-Point Thesis implies that Jack's belief is not justified. Thus, there is a clash between the Sufficiency Thesis and the Fixed-Point Thesis. In turn, there is a clash between evidentialism and the Enkratic Requirement.

The Fixed-Point Thesis implies that Jack cannot rationally believe that he ought to V'. If it is not rational for him to believe that he ought to V', even though he has evidence that provides the same type of support for his normative beliefs as Jermaine's evidence provides, we should reject the Sufficiency Thesis. Although the contents of their normative beliefs differ and different things are included in their respective bodies of evidence, the same *type* of support relations hold between their respective normative beliefs and their evidence. If such relations wholly determined the justificatory standing of Jermaine's beliefs, they should ensure that Jack's beliefs were justified, too. They do not do that. Jack's normative belief is not justified. Thus, there is something *further* that matters to the justification of normative belief.

Notice that the argument is perfectly general. In arguing against the Sufficiency Thesis, we only assumed that a kind of fallible support relation is sufficient for justification and then pointed out that this relation should hold in the relevant good case/bad case pair. We didn't assume that sufficiency should be understood in terms of strength, high probability, or anything of the sort. Whatever support relation helps to make the good case good might be present without preventing things from going bad in the bad case and leading our thinker astray. For a special class of targets, it

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<sup>33</sup>Titelbaum (2015a) shows us how to derive the Fixed-Point Thesis from the Enkratic Requirement. The proof is not particularly complicated and the assumptions needed for the derivation are not particularly controversial. In Littlejohn (2012), I argued that something like the Fixed-Point Thesis supported a form of externalism about justification that was incompatible with evidentialism and argued that we needed this kind of externalism to understand how there could be categorical requirements that applied to all rational agents.

<sup>34</sup>In this context, a thinker can have adequate evidence even if there is nothing in her body of evidence that supports the target proposition if, say, the proposition is one that the thinker can justifiably believe without evidence.

<sup>35</sup>We don't have to worry about what this evidence might be. It could be seemings or appearances, propositions that are the contents of the thinker's mental states, facts that the thinker knows, or facts about the thinker's mental states.

turns out that a certain kind of error is sufficient to ensure that the failed attempt is a rational failure, not some mere mistake. Since irrationally held beliefs are not justified, we have our counterexample to the Sufficiency Thesis: if evidential support were sufficient for justification, Jack's beliefs and Jermaine's beliefs would have the same status.

The evidentialist might consider one of two lines of response. First, they might try to show that evidentialism is actually compatible with the Enkratic Requirement.<sup>36</sup> It seems that they are incompatible because it seems, crudely put, that whatever target we attempt to get right, it's always possible for the support we have to lead us astray. Suppose, for example, that you take the support that Jermaine has for believing that she ought to V to be an intuition or a seeming with a certain content: that she ought to V. If this, given Jermaine's total evidence, makes it the case that she can justifiably believe that she ought to V, it should be possible for someone like Jack to have a body of evidence that includes the seeming that he ought to V' and be suitably modified so that the same support relations hold between Jack's supporting evidence and his belief. Thus, we'd expect the evidentialist to say that their beliefs have to have the same justificatory status. This assumption can be challenged. Some might say that there is some sort of necessary connection between the normative truths and what a body of evidence can support.

One way to understand the proposal is by thinking about an analogy with logical truths.<sup>37</sup> Whatever evidence a thinker has, it's a consequence of the probability-raising conception of evidential support that a thinker has maximal support for the truths of logic. This is not because every thinker has some premise or set of premises that could figure in her reasoning that could lead her to reason well to the conclusion that these truths are true, however. Perhaps something similar could be said about normative truths. The idea is not that every thinker has a premise or set of premises that could figure in good reasoning that would lead them to see the light; rather, the idea is that every body of evidence (including one free of any pieces of evidence) provides maximal support for some truths (e.g., logical truths and (perhaps) normative truths).

As interesting as this proposal is, I don't think that it accounts for the relevant data. This idea that we all have maximal evidential support for truths about the requirements of rationality is not plausible if we're talking about truths about particular cases where the reasoning that leads us to conclusions about what rationality requires rests on some empirical assumptions. When it comes to particular

<sup>36</sup>I agree with Coates (2012), Field (2017), and Lasonen-Aarnion (Forthcoming) that evidentialism is incompatible with the Enkratic Requirement. See Littlejohn (2018) for a defense of the requirement.

<sup>37</sup>See Titelbaum (2015b) for some discussion of the analogy. Some authors (e.g., Smithies (2012), Ichikawa and Jarvis (2013)) seem to think that we have a special kind of evidential support or justification for believing the logical truths as well as the truths about the requirements of rationality. (It is unclear whether these authors distinguish propositional justification from adequate evidential support.) In Dutant and Littlejohn (2016), we present a number of problems for views on which facts about the requirements of rationality satisfy some kind of epistemic constraint.

judgments about particular cases, however, this loses plausibility because such judgments rest on assumptions about the particular case that often can only be known through observation. (Contrast the judgment that we should be conciliatory in a case of peer disagreement and the judgment that I should be conciliatory when Agnes tells me that I've miscalculated the tip.) The important point is that our intuitions about rationality extend to particular cases where we think it would be irrational for someone to fail to *V* when they've judged on the basis of a mix of apriori and empirical considerations that they ought to *V*. Thus, a complete explanation of the relevant intuitions about rational combinations of mental states needs tools that the evidentialists don't have.

The evidentialist could, of course, just deny the Fixed-Point Thesis, but they'd have to deny the Enkratic Requirement, too. That comes with the obvious cost that we'd be rejecting a widely shared intuition about rationality (i.e., that we should avoid the incoherent clashes that constitute epistemic akrasia) to preserve a principle about the relationship between evidence and justification that we have no good reason to accept. If we don't have evidence for the Sufficiency Thesis, it wouldn't be in keeping with the spirit of the view if we cleaved to it when faced with arguments against it.

Discussion of the Enkratic Requirement reveals something important about the tempting idea that a complete description of a thinker's evidential support should wholly determine whether they have justification to believe a proposition. Because (P2) conflicts with this idea, it is tempting to reject it and replace it with an evidentialist view that supports (P2'). If the Enkratic Requirement is correct and there are fixed-points in Titelbaum's sense, we have to abandon the idea that the type of evidential support we have for believing some normative propositions wholly settles whether there is justification to believe them. In these special cases (at least), certain kinds of mistakes cannot be rationally made whatever support we have for believing the mistaken proposition. The requirement shows that a complete description of a thinker's evidence support does *not* wholly determine whether they have justification to believe. The precise nature of that type of support does not matter. The point generalizes to every notion of support that can be characterized in non-normative terms and allows for a non-skeptical view on which it's possible to know and justifiably believe some things about the requirements of rationality.

Notice, too, that the problems that these fixed-points generate show something interesting about the supervenience of justification upon evidence. Suppose the relevant fixed-points are necessary truths about the requirements of rationality, such as requirements about how we should respond to disagreement, what we should think about lottery cases, or general requirements concerning logical consistency. These truths will supervene upon any body of evidence because they are necessary truths. Thus, we do not need to point to conditions that fail to supervene upon a thinker's evidence to show that the Sufficiency Thesis is false. Even if justification did supervene upon a thinker's evidence, the type of evidential support relations that hold between the thinker's beliefs and the propositions they believe would still not determine whether the thinker had adequate justification to believe. Thus,

while I think that justification does not supervene upon a thinker's evidence and does not supervene upon a thinker's non-factive mental states, we can construct counterexamples to the Sufficiency Thesis without begging the question against those who insist that these theses are true.

### 13.5 Conclusion

I have pointed to two problems with the Path Principle. It's possible to acquire knowledge and justified belief without supporting evidence. Thus, the absence of a path of evidential support is itself not a decisive reason to think that a thinker could not have a justified belief about some matter. In some cases of non-inferential knowledge, the methods by which our beliefs are formed are methods by which we acquire knowledge and thereby acquire evidence. The methods do not themselves need to operate on anything that we would recognize as evidence. It is also possible for thinkers to have beliefs that differ in justificatory status when their respective beliefs receive the same type of evidential support. Thus, the type of support relations that hold between a body of evidence and a proposition does not completely settle whether a thinker has justification to believe the proposition just as this evidence and the support it provides does not completely settle whether a thinker is in a position to know the proposition.

Once we reject the Dependence Thesis and the Sufficiency Thesis, we do not need a further argument against the Determination Thesis. This seems like a good place to stop.

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# Chapter 14

## Evidentialism, Time-Slice Mentalism, and Dreamless Sleep



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**Abstract** I argue that the following theses are both popular among evidentialists but also jointly inconsistent with evidentialism: (1) *Time-Slice Mentalism*: one's justificational properties at  $t$  are grounded only by one's mental properties at  $t$ ; (2) *Experience Ultimacy*: all ultimate evidence is experiential; and (3) *Sleep Justification*: we have justified beliefs while we have dreamless, nonexperiential sleep. Although I intend for this paper to be a polemic against evidentialists, it can also be viewed as an opportunity for them to clarify their views. Furthermore, the paper is not only relevant to evidentialists. For example, the arguments of this paper could give Time-Slice Mentalists a reason to deny evidentialism.

**Keywords** Evidentialism · Time-slice · Epistemic justification · Evidence · Experience

### 14.1 Introduction

Earl Conee and Richard Feldman define 'evidentialism' as follows:

*ES*: The epistemic justification of anyone's doxastic attitude toward any proposition at any time strongly supervenes on the evidence that the person has at the time. (2004, 101)

*ES* is prominent and well-defended.<sup>1</sup> It is a theory of *propositional justification*, which is, roughly, one's justification *for* believing  $p$ , even if one doesn't actually

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<sup>1</sup>See Conee and Feldman (2004, 2008, 2011) for influential essays in defense of evidentialism. Long (2012), McCain (2014), Poston (2014), and many others have defended versions of evidentialism.

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believe  $p$ . According to ES, what one is justified in believing – whether or not one actually believes – is determined solely by one’s evidence.

Evidentialists also affirm a theory of *doxastic justification*, which is, roughly, a property of a belief and often exemplified when the belief is *based on* one’s evidence.<sup>2</sup> Suppose I have good evidence that the butler committed the crime. I might be (propositionally) justified in believing he did it, even if I resist believing this because of my friendship with him. When I come to actually believe that he did it on the basis of this evidence, then my belief is (doxastically) justified. Stating evidentialist necessary and sufficient conditions for doxastic justification is unwieldy and difficult; I will not try to do it here.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, all evidentialists will agree to the following simple, necessary condition for doxastic justification:

*Evidence Dependence:* If  $S$  has a (doxastically) justified belief that  $p$ , then  $S$  believes  $p$  on the basis of  $S$ ’s evidence.<sup>4</sup>

I’ll use the term ‘evidentialist’ to refer to someone who holds *at least* to ES and Evidence Dependence.

Evidentialists will often hold to more specific theses about evidence and justification. Here are three of them:

*Time-Slice Mentalism:* One’s (propositional) justificational properties at  $t$  are grounded only by one’s mental properties at  $t$ .

*Experience Ultimacy:* All ultimate evidence is experiential.

*Sleep Justification:* We have (doxastically) justified beliefs while we have dreamless, nonexperiential sleep.

In this paper, I argue that these three theses, though popular among evidentialists, are also jointly inconsistent with evidentialism. Evidentialists should make a decision about which one to reject.

Although I intend for this paper to be a polemic against evidentialists, it can also be an opportunity for them to clarify their views. Furthermore, since I am

<sup>2</sup>Bergmann (2006: 4, 63–64, 109–142) argues that a belief can be doxastically justified even if it is not based on evidence, so long as the belief meets certain externalist conditions (e.g., being formed by properly functioning faculties). Evidentialists, however, will not consider this a live possibility because of their commitment to Evidence Dependence, to be introduced below. Silva (2015) has argued for claims that would entail that basing is irrelevant to doxastic justification. If he is right, then evidentialists should understand any claims about doxastic justification in this paper to be about what Oliveira (2015, 389–390), in his response to Silva, calls *rich doxastic justification*, which does require basing.

<sup>3</sup>For an example of the unwieldiness, see Conee and Feldman’s (2004, 93) lengthy definition of doxastic justification (or ‘well-foundedness’).

<sup>4</sup>That evidentialists affirm Evidence Dependence is also made clear when opponents of evidentialism attack it. Evidentialists do not say, “You misunderstand us. We don’t think that doxastically justified belief [or knowledge] requires evidence.” They instead try to defend Evidence Dependence. This is true of McCain’s (2014, 148–149) response to my (2012a, 312) sleep case; Conee and Feldman’s (2011, 465–468) response to Goldman’s (2011, 400) Ichabod case; Todd Long’s (2012, 252–254) response to Bergmann’s (2006, 63–64) God-caused belief case; and Conee and Feldman’s (2004, 64–67) response to Plantinga’s (1996, 359) arithmetic knowledge case.

arguing for an inconsistency, this paper is not only relevant to evidentialists. For example, there's recently been a growth of interest in Time-Slice Mentalism. Those who affirm Time-Slice Mentalism must choose between Experience Ultimacy, Sleep Justification, and evidentialism; they cannot accept all three.

In Sect. 14.2, I explain the three theses and argue that they are popular among evidentialists. In Sect. 14.3, I argue for the inconsistency. In Sect. 14.4, I examine costs of rejecting each of the theses.

## 14.2 The Theses and Their Popularity

I will not argue that *all* evidentialists endorse all three theses; some may not. However, it will become clear that some prominent evidentialists – namely, Conee, Feldman, and Kevin McCain – endorse, or at least think favorably, of all three.

Let us first discuss Time-Slice Mentalism. The idea is that *only* one's mental properties at a time, such as one's current beliefs and experiences at a time, ground (or determine) what one is justified in believing at that time. According to this view, non-mental properties – such as the property of *being in a well-lit room* – or past mental properties – such as *its having seemed that p five minutes ago* – are not *directly* relevant to the justification of one's present belief that *p*; at most, these properties can only be *indirectly* relevant by virtue of affecting one's present mental properties. Views in the spirit of Time-Slice Mentalism have been explicitly affirmed or defended by Feldman (2004, 219), Moon (2012b, 357–359), Smithies (2014, 120), McCain (2014, 119), Moss (2015), and Hedden (2015).<sup>5</sup>

In the following paragraphs, I'll explain why I think that McCain, Conee, and Feldman would affirm Time-Slice Mentalism. McCain writes,

[M]ental states that S once had, but no longer has, and mental states that S does not yet have, but will come to have, do not make a difference to what is justified for her *now* . . . propositional justification strongly supervenes on the non-factive mental states that one has at a particular time (2014, 119).

The first sentence rules out past and future mental states from grounding justificational properties, while the second sentence indicates that only present mental properties do. Furthermore, in all of McCain's examples throughout his book, it is always mental states at *t* that are grounding one's justification at *t*. So, McCain would likely affirm Time-Slice Mentalism.

Conee and Feldman do not *explicitly* endorse Time-Slice Mentalism, but they do endorse mentalism,

Mentalism: "The justificatory status of a person's doxastic attitudes strongly supervenes on the person's occurrent and dispositional mental states, events, and conditions" (2004, 56).

<sup>5</sup>Note that my formulation of Time-Slice Mentalism is in terms of grounding and not as a supervenience thesis. This avoids some potential problems raised by Kelly (2016, 47–49). The 'only' is meant to exclude mental states at other times from also grounding justification now.

I think Conee and Feldman would endorse Time-Slice Mentalism because of how they defend mentalism (2004, 58–61). They argue by appealing to cases. Whenever two individuals are mentally identical – i.e., identical with respect to their beliefs, experiences, and other mental properties – it seems that they are justificationaly identical. But whenever they use cases to support mentalism, they *only* appeal to mental states the person has at the time to explain the person’s justification at that time. They never appeal to mental states outside that time. This is evidence that they are assuming that Time-Slice Mentalism is true.

There is additional reason to think that Feldman specifically would affirm Time-Slice Mentalism. Feldman affirms ES, that justification is solely a matter of the evidence one has. And in his paper “Having Evidence”, he defends, “a restrictive account that limits the evidence a person has at a time to the things the person is thinking about or aware of at that time” (2004, 219).<sup>6</sup> So, Feldman would likely affirm Time-Slice Mentalism.

The second thesis is *Experience Ultimacy*, which states that all ultimate evidence is experiential. *Derived evidence* is evidence in virtue of something else that is evidence; *ultimate evidence* is evidence, but not in virtue of anything else that is evidence. The following quotes by some evidentialists will both help explain Experience Ultimacy and also illustrate its popularity. Trent Dougherty and Patrick Rysiew write:

Our experiences (broadly construed to include what it’s like to have intuitions and rational insights, etc.) are our basic evidence, in the light of which all else that is evident is made evident. . . . Experience is what ultimately justifies belief, for it is ultimately to your experience that your beliefs must be called into account (2013, 17–18).

Conee and Feldman write,

Some philosophers have argued that only believed propositions can be part of the evidence one has. Their typical ground for this claim is that only believed propositions can serve as premises of arguments. Our view differs radically from this one. We hold that experiences can be evidence, and beliefs are only derivatively evidence. . . . Experience is our point of interaction with the world—conscious awareness is how we gain whatever evidence we have (2008, 87).

Commenting on this passage of Conee and Feldman, McCain writes,

Now this is not to say that only experiences are evidence. It is quite plausible that things such as beliefs are evidence too. However... it must be a justified belief. That is, it must be a belief for which S has good evidence. This good evidence could itself consist of other justified beliefs or experiences, but if we trace back the evidence far enough, it is reasonable to think the evidence will bottom out in experiences of some sort (perceptual, introspective, memorial, intuitive, and perhaps others). So, beliefs can be genuine evidence, but one might think that they are not “ultimate” evidence. It is plausible that all ultimate evidence is experiential, and all other evidence is evidence in virtue of bearing appropriate relations to ultimate evidence (2014, 19–20).

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<sup>6</sup>Feldman seems to back away from this view in Conee and Feldman (2011, 465–468). However, even there, he is still only appealing to mental states at the time as part of one’s evidence.

So, a number of evidentialists find Experience Ultimacy to be plausible.

Here are a few clarifications. First, to say that all ultimate evidence is *experiential* is to say that all ultimate evidence involves an *actual* experience. The above evidentialists talk about our *experiences*; they do not talk about our *dispositions to have experiences* or our being *causally related to experiences*.<sup>7</sup> Second, when the above proponents of Experience Ultimacy use the word ‘experience’, they are speaking of something that has *phenomenal character*, a *something it is like* to undergo the experience. This is how contemporary philosophers generally use the word ‘experience’. Candidates for ultimate evidence will be things like *being appeared to redly* or *having a conscious seeming that something is red*, both of which have phenomenal character. Lastly, although the above authors seem to make the strong claim that the ultimate evidence is *identical* with the experience, I will interpret “all ultimate evidence is experiential” as the logically weaker thesis that all ultimate evidence *at least has experience as a component or constituent*, leaving the identity claim open.<sup>8</sup>

The third thesis is *Sleep Justification*, which states that we have (doxastically) justified beliefs while we have dreamless, nonexperiential asleep. Sleep Justification is held not just by evidentialists, but by philosophers generally. Most will agree that when we dreamlessly sleep, we are not undergoing experiences. There is *nothing it is like* to be dreamlessly asleep, just as there is *nothing it is like* to be a rock. And most will agree that we *know* propositions when we dreamlessly sleep. (For example, we still know our names.) And many of those same people will think that we also *justifiedly believe* propositions when we dreamlessly sleep, either because they think that knowledge entails justified belief, or because they just find it to be independently plausible. This leaves open questions about what the best theories of justification and belief are and how, according to those theories, we might have justified beliefs while dreamlessly asleep. Philosophers will disagree about *these* questions. But it is hard to get past the intuitive force of the claim that we *do* know (and have justified beliefs about) our names while dreamlessly asleep. Most philosophers will agree with that.

McCain is one of those philosophers. His response to a case of mine illustrates how he implicitly endorses Sleep Justification. I will present the whole case because I will use it later in the paper:

Tim, a freshman college student enrolled in an introductory logic course, is asked to consider for the first time the law of noncontradiction, the proposition that *for any proposition p, it is not the case that p and p*. The proposition seems clearly true to him and he comes to believe it. Tim immediately lies down and falls asleep from all of the excitement (Moon 2012a, 312).

<sup>7</sup>In Sect. 14.4.3, I will examine a revision of Experience Ultimacy that appeals to dispositions to have an experience.

<sup>8</sup>Also, perhaps the experience isn’t *identical* to the phenomenal character; the experience might have *both* phenomenal character *and* representational content. Thanks to Raja Rosenhagen for helpful conversation.

In context, I was arguing against the view that *S* knows that *p* only if *S* believes that *p* on the basis of evidence. I argued that Tim's knowledge of the law of noncontradiction (LN), while he dreamlessly sleeps, is not based on any evidence. I will not address the merits of my earlier argument.<sup>9</sup> I will instead note that McCain (2014, 148–149) does not deny that Tim knows LN while he dreamlessly sleeps and instead tries to find good candidates for evidence that Tim's knowledge might be based on. Other evidentialist responses to me have followed this pattern.<sup>10</sup> And such philosophers, including McCain (2014, 2), think that knowledge entails justified belief; hence, McCain would likely regard such cases of knowledge as cases of justified belief.

One might object that some remarks by Conee and Feldman (2004, 67–68) indicate that they would not affirm Sleep Justification. They suggest that stored beliefs are not justified in “the most fundamental sense of ‘justified’,” saying that such beliefs “are dispositionally justified.”<sup>11</sup> Is this a denial of Sleep Justification? I do not think so. Even if such beliefs are merely “dispositionally justified,” it does not follow that those beliefs are not justified *simpliciter*. Conee and Feldman never say that being dispositionally justified is not sufficient for being justified; they also never say that being fundamentally justified is necessary for being justified. In general, it is unclear how the property *being justified* relates to either of the properties *being dispositionally justified* and *being fundamentally justified*. It is also unclear exactly what these two latter properties are and whether they are just species of the genus *being justified* or they are two entirely different types of positive epistemic evaluation (or something in between). Since it's unclear, it is also unclear what inferences to draw from their remarks.

Perhaps more important are their remarks in their more recent paper, Conee and Feldman (2011, 467), in which they respond to a case by Alvin Goldman (2011, 400) that is similar to the case of Tim. They take for granted the existence of justified beliefs like that of Tim's. So, this is evidence that their latest position on the topic is in support of Sleep Justification.

In this section, I have argued that the three theses are popular among evidentialists. Although evidentialists rarely endorse them all in one breath, at least McCain (2014) speaks favorably of all of them in his recent, book-length defense of evidentialism, *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification*. If I need an actual person to be my target, he is it. Furthermore, Conee and Feldman have endorsed these theses, at least indirectly, in their various works. However, regardless of who holds what, an inconsistency between these theses and evidentialism will be of interest to many epistemologists. I will demonstrate that inconsistency in the next section.

<sup>9</sup>However, see footnotes 21 and 22 for discussion. I later learned that my case is similar to one developed by Thomas Senor (1993, 470), who also examines cases of unconscious belief without evidence. This paper moves discussion of such cases forward.

<sup>10</sup>E.g., see section 3.a.iii and 3.b of Frise (2016) and Madison (2014, 52–57).

<sup>11</sup>Feldman (2004, 236) suggests a similar view.

### 14.3 The Theses Are Inconsistent

I will demonstrate that the following theses are inconsistent:

*Evidence Dependence:* If  $S$  has a (doxastically) justified belief that  $p$ , then  $S$  believes  $p$  on the basis of  $S$ 's evidence.

*Time-Slice Mentalism:* One's (propositional) justificational properties at  $t$  are grounded only by one's mental properties at  $t$ .

*Experience Ultimacy:* All ultimate evidence is experiential.

*Sleep Justification:* We have (doxastically) justified beliefs while we have dreamless, nonexperiential sleep.

Note that Evidence Dependence, not ES, is the component of evidentialism that is inconsistent with the other three theses.

Here is my argument for the inconsistency. Suppose Sleep Justification is true. We can imagine Tim napping dreamlessly at 2:00 pm with his justified belief that LN is true. By Evidence Dependence, he must believe LN on the basis of his evidence. Call this evidence 'E'.

I will now defend the following conditional: if Time-Slice Mentalism is true, then E exists at 2:00 pm. According to Time-Slice Mentalism, nothing outside 2:00 pm can ground Tim's justification for believing; only mental states at that time can play that role. These mental states must be what constitute or ground Tim's evidence.<sup>12</sup> So, E must exist at 2:00 pm. Therefore, the conditional is true.

Now, E is either ultimate or derived. Suppose E is ultimate. Then by Experience Ultimacy, E is experiential. But this contradicts Sleep Justification. At 2:00 pm, Tim is engaged in a nonexperiential nap.

Suppose that E is derived. Then E will be evidence in virtue of some of Tim's other evidence, which is ultimate. Call this ultimate evidence, 'E\*'. E\* either exists at 2:00 pm, or it exists at some other time. Suppose it exists at 2:00 pm. Then by Experience Ultimacy, E\* is experiential. This contradicts Sleep Justification. Again, at 2:00 pm, Tim is engaged in a nonexperiential nap.

Suppose E\* exists at some other time. This contradicts Time-Slice Mentalism. According to Time-Slice Mentalism, nothing outside 2:00 pm, including E\*, can

<sup>12</sup>This follows from the plausible assumption that what grounds one's propositional justification at  $t$  also constitutes or grounds the evidence that determines one's doxastic justification at  $t$ . Call this assumption 'Unity', since it claims a unity to what grounds propositional and doxastic justification at a time. Unity is also assumed in the last step of the argument. I think that most evidentialists will find Unity plausible. However, it can be denied. Perhaps one's doxastic justification at  $t$  is *also* determined by what grounds one's propositional justification at times other than  $t$ . (Thanks to Declan Smithies for suggesting this possibility.) I will note that (1) evidentialists who are Time-Slice Mentalists will probably not find this plausible, (2) even if they do, an interesting result of my argument is that one must deny Unity in order to avoid the inconsistency, and (3) the resulting view of doxastic justification ends up looking like the one I examine in Sect. 14.4.4. For discussion of that view, and for more on Unity, see footnote 23.

ground Tim's justification for believing. This completes my argument that the theses are inconsistent.<sup>13</sup>

## 14.4 Weighing the Options

There are costs to rejecting one or more of the theses. I'll use the following labels for the people who take the various options: bullet-biters, compromisers, dispositions-appealers, and past-lookers.<sup>14</sup>

### 14.4.1 *The Bullet-Biters*

The bullet-biters deny Sleep Justification. Now, this is not so easy. It is very intuitive that we both know and justifiedly believe propositions while dreamlessly asleep. Hence, they are biting a bullet. No evidentialist I know of has explicitly denied this in print.<sup>15</sup>

The bullet-biter might try to assuage our worries by saying that we are speaking loosely when we say we have knowledge or justified belief when we dreamlessly sleep. This is what leads our intuitions astray. In reply, it does not appear that we are speaking loosely when we make such claims. Suppose someone says that the door sensor knows that we passed through. If I asked that person, "C'mon, does the door sensor really have *knowledge*? Does it really have a *justified belief* that we passed through?" The person would probably say, "No." This is not the case when we say that a person knows his name or has justified beliefs about his name while dreamlessly asleep. If we asked, "C'mon, does Fred really know his name while he's asleep? Does he really have *knowledge*? Does he have a *justified belief* about what his name is while he's asleep?" We would likely say, "Yes."

There are further costs to rejecting Sleep Justification.<sup>16</sup> The following thesis is very intuitive:

*Awake Unconscious Justification:* While *awake*, we have (doxastically) justified beliefs that are not conscious beliefs.

A *conscious belief* is a belief that is, in some sense, brought to mind. When you see your friend and form the belief that *there's my friend*, at that moment, the belief is conscious. However, plausibly, one can go for days without bringing one's phone

<sup>13</sup>Thanks to Peter Markie and Pamela Robinson for helping me formulate this argument.

<sup>14</sup>Thanks to Simon Goldstein for help with both the categorizations of options and their names.

<sup>15</sup>However, Matthew Frise (2018, sect. 3.1), an evidentialist, accepts that such justified beliefs do not exist *if* representationalism, a popular theory of belief, is true. However, he does not accept representationalism. Jon Matheson, an evidentialist, has shared with me in personal correspondence that he denies Sleep Justification, and he has given me permission to share this information in this paper.

<sup>16</sup>Thanks to Kevin McCain, Danny Forman, Simon Goldstein, Chris Willard-Kyle, Jasmin Contos, and Michael Bergmann for helpful conversation about the points in the following three paragraphs.



number to mind. Awake Unconscious Justification allows for the possibility that we continue to have a justified, unconscious belief that our phone number is X during those times (when we are awake). Now, one who accepts Awake Unconscious Justification but not Sleep Justification is saddled with the view that when we sleep, we have no unconscious, justified beliefs, but we suddenly do have them once we wake up. This seems implausible. It seems that if one rejects Sleep Justification, one should reject Awake Unconscious Justification as well.

But suppose someone is willing to bite another bullet and also reject Awake Unconscious Justification. There is a further cost. It seems that we must posit the existence of justified, unconscious beliefs in order to explain the justification of some of our conscious beliefs and actions. Suppose Connie has formed many justified beliefs about Max: he is a criminal, he is dangerous, he wants to take her life, and more. Now, suppose Connie is at a convenience store and sees Max. She quickly reasons as follows: “That’s Max; I had better get out of here before he sees me.” She then sneaks out of the store. None of those unconscious beliefs about Max become conscious; it all happens in a flash. Intuitively, she arrived at a *justified* belief that *I had better get out of here*, and her sneaking out of the store was a *rational* action. A very good explanation for why that belief is justified, and why that action was rational, includes her justified, unconscious beliefs about Max. On the other hand, suppose Connie\* was in the same situation as Connie but *did not* have all of those justified, unconscious beliefs about Max. If Connie\* saw Max, reasoned, “That is Max; I had better get out of here before he sees me,” and quickly sneaked out of the store, then it seems that Connie\*’s conscious beliefs and actions would be irrational, even if her conscious states during that episode were identical to Connie’s.<sup>17</sup>

So, rejecting Awake Unconscious Justification is costly. It seems that justified, unconscious beliefs justify some of our conscious beliefs and actions. But then it seems that there are justified, unconscious beliefs even when they are not actively justifying some of our conscious beliefs and actions, both when we are awake and when we are asleep. So, rejecting Sleep Justification is a hard bullet to bite.

### 14.4.2 *The Compromisers*

The compromisers reject Evidence Dependence. I call them ‘compromisers’ because Evidence Dependence is so much a part of the heart and soul of evidentialism. Of the theses, I believe it is the least likely to be abandoned.

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<sup>17</sup>Plantinga (1993, 100–101) gives additional argument that background beliefs play a justificatory role in many of our perceptual beliefs. For a reply to Plantinga, see Markie (2004, 552–553). Feldman (2004) and Moon (2012b, 349–352) have argued that unconscious beliefs play no role in justifying conscious beliefs. McCain (2014, Chap. 3) has replied to those arguments, and I have replied to McCain in Moon (2015). So, my current considered view is that unconscious beliefs do not play a justificatory role in our conscious beliefs. That said, I think this will be a hard pill to swallow for most evidentialists.

Compromisers could object by saying that the following weaker thesis is still in the spirit of the original and can also help to avoid the inconsistency:

*Revised Evidence Dependence:* If  $S$  has a conscious, justified belief that  $p$ , then  $S$  believes  $p$  on the basis of evidence.

The inconsistency is avoided because the evidentialist can say that Tim's unconscious belief that  $p$  does not need to be based on evidence in order to be justified.

In an earlier paper (2012a, 325–326), I argued that making this sort of move involves costs. For example, the person who endorses Revised Evidence Dependence but denies Evidence Dependence must accept,

1. Believing on the basis of evidence is not necessary for a belief to be justified if the belief is unconscious, but believing on the basis of evidence is necessary for a belief to be justified if it is conscious.

If believing on the basis of evidence is not *required* for justification when the belief is unconscious, then what could make it so that it is required when a belief is conscious? It seems that there is no plausible factor. This proponent of Revised Evidence Dependence must also deny,

2. If an unconscious belief has whatever it takes to be justified when unconscious, then it will not lose whatever it takes to be justified *merely* by becoming conscious.

However, it seems implausible that a belief could lose a necessary condition for justification *merely* by becoming conscious.

So, although an evidentialist could replace Evidence Dependence with Revised Evidence Dependence, it comes with counterintuitive results. Furthermore, even if the evidentialist could find a way to lessen the oddity of accepting (1) and denying (2), sacrificing Evidence Dependence alone is still a sacrifice. It is more in the spirit of evidentialism to say, “All beliefs must be based on evidence in order to be justified,” than to say, “All beliefs *except* \_\_\_ must be based on evidence in order to be justified,” however one might fill in the blank. W.K. Clifford (1879, 186), a hero of evidentialism, famously said, “It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.” He did not add, “*Unless*, that is, you are asleep. Then it's okay.” That would be a compromise for the evidentialist.

### 14.4.3 *The Dispositions-Appealers*

Suppose the evidentialist gives up Experience Ultimacy.<sup>18</sup> This evidentialist can then say that the ultimate evidence that Tim's belief is based on is some nonexperi-

<sup>18</sup>I was helped with this paragraph by Kevin McCain and Matthew McGrath. Ted Poston (2014, 92–95) has recently defended a coherentist version of evidentialism that rejects Experience Ultimacy.

ential state. However, this nonexperiential ultimate evidence could still be thought to be *suitably related* to an experience, even if it itself does not involve an experience. For example, perhaps this ultimate evidence upon which Tim's belief is based is a *disposition to have an experience*.<sup>19</sup> For example, Tim might have a disposition to have a conscious seeming that LN is true. The evidentialist could then adopt,

*Dispositional Experience Ultimacy*: All ultimate evidence involves either an experience or a disposition to manifest an experience,

as a general principle to support this claim about Tim. I call those who make this sort of move 'Dispositions-Appealers'.

Here are two reasons to doubt that Tim's ultimate evidence is a disposition to have an experience. First, Tim's belief in LN does not seem to be *based on* the disposition to have a conscious seeming that LN is true (or any other disposition to have an experience). In his discussion of the case of Tim, McCain writes, "Some might doubt that a disposition is the sort of thing that a belief can be based on because it is not clear how an un-activated disposition can cause a belief to form or to be sustained" (2014, 148). On many views, basing requires causation, and Tim's belief does not seem to be causally related to the disposition in question.

One might say that the following counterfactual is true: if Tim didn't have the disposition to have a conscious seeming that LN is true, then he wouldn't have the belief that LN is true. The objector might say that this indicates that the disposition is a cause of the belief.<sup>20</sup> In response, this counterfactual would be true even if the belief was the cause of the disposition, or the belief and the disposition did not cause each other but shared a common cause, or the disposition was itself a constituent of the belief. Each of these possibilities seems somewhat likely, and at least none is obviously false. So, even if that counterfactual is true, it would be only weak evidence that the disposition is the cause of the belief.

There is a second reason to doubt that the disposition is the ultimate evidence upon which Tim's belief is based. The mere disposition to have an experience is not the sort of thing that is *evidence* upon which a belief is based. This is because it does not have content. Consider some mental states that are reasonably regarded as evidence. I can see how its seeming to me *that* something is red could be evidence for me that something is red. I can see how a conscious memory *of* Sally's having been at the party could be my evidence that she was at the party. I can see how my justified or warranted beliefs *that* all men are mortal and *that* Socrates is a man could be my evidence that *Socrates is mortal*. (Justified) beliefs, perceptual experiences, and memories seem to be the *sorts of things* that are evidence because they have *content*; they are *about* things. While a conscious seeming that *p* has content, a

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<sup>19</sup>This dispositional view is based on Conee and Feldman's (2011, 465–468) response to Goldman's (2011, 400) Ichabod case. Frise (2017) critiques Conee and Feldman's dispositional view, after which he (2018, sect. 3.2) provisionally defends his own dispositional view. What I say in the rest of the section counts against both Frise's and also Conee and Feldman's dispositional views.

<sup>20</sup>Thanks to Matthew Frise for this objection.

mere *disposition* to have a seeming that *p* does not have content; it is thereby not the sort of thing to count as evidence.<sup>21</sup>

I have mostly been criticizing Dispositional Experience Ultimacy, which is a candidate replacement of Experience Ultimacy. Furthermore, I will note that rejecting Experience Ultimacy is itself a cost for the evidentialist. Evidentialists have traditionally said that ultimate evidence consists in actual experiential states, like *being appeared to redly* or *sensory experiences* or *conscious seemings*. It is the *experience*, something with phenomenal character, that is at least part of the ultimate evidence for our beliefs. As McCain said above, these confer justification to basic beliefs, which in turn can confer justification to nonbasic beliefs. It is an attractive picture of the structure of justification, and it is not clear that a mere disposition to have an experience, or *any* other nonexperiential mental state, can capture this intuitive picture that originally moved evidentialists to accept Experience Ultimacy in the first place.<sup>22</sup>

#### 14.4.4 The Past-Looker

The past-looker rejects Time-Slice Mentalism. She will say that Tim's *past seeming* (or some other past mental state) is what grounds the justification of Tim's current belief in LN. Note that this position is compatible with regular mentalism, which holds, without any relativization to a time, that one's justification supervenes on one's mental states.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>McCain (2014, 148) and Madison (2014, 56) appeal to Tim's *memories* as the evidential basis for his belief. I agree that memories are the *sorts of things* that could be evidence. However, I argued that Tim's belief is not based on memories in Moon (2012a, 319–323), which neither McCain nor Madison address in their 2014 replies to me. McCain (2015, 371–372) does address my argument. However, he only notes that it assumes that basing requires causation, which is a plausible assumption that he and I both accept. So, I do not take that to be an objection. In fact, McCain (2014) develops a sophisticated causal theory of basing in Chap. 5 of his book. For more on McCain's (2015) reply to my argument, see the next footnote.

<sup>22</sup>Interestingly, McCain (2015, 372–373) posits to Tim the existence of mental states, with content, that “make it so that he has LN stored in the particular way he does” (372). These mental states “explain why Tim is disposed to recall LN as something he knows rather than as something he merely believes” (373). (Note that McCain is not *identifying* these mental states with the disposition; rather they are what *explain* the disposition.) I am skeptical that any such mental states both exist and are Tim's evidence for LN, but space prevents me from both laying out McCain's full argument and also criticizing it. Here, I will simply note that if McCain wants to accept Sleep Justification, Experience Ultimacy, and Time-Slice Mentalism, then he must also make the further claim that these mysterious mental states have phenomenal character. That is extremely dubious. As I said above, there is *nothing it is like* to dreamlessly sleep just as there is *nothing it is like* to be a rock.

<sup>23</sup>The past-looker affirms, from footnote 12, *Unity*, the view that what grounds one's propositional justification at *t* also constitutes or grounds the evidence that determines one's doxastic justification at *t*. However, in footnote 12, I also discussed a view, call it ‘V’, that affirms Time-Slice Mentalism but rejects Unity by affirming that one's doxastic justification at *t* is *also* determined by what grounds one's propositional justification at times other than *t*. V holds in common with the past-

But could the evidentialist accept mentalism, reject Time-Slice Mentalism, and still endorse ES? Recall that ES states that one's justification at  $t$  supervenes on one's evidence at  $t$ . Here is the most natural option for the evidentialist. She could just drop ES and turn to,

ES\*: The epistemic justification of anyone's doxastic attitude toward any proposition strongly supervenes on the person's evidence.

ES\* is identical to ES, but without the time index. McCain could then say that Tim's past seeming is the ultimate evidence upon which Tim's belief in LN is based.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, even though Conee and Feldman use ES to define 'evidentialism', it does seem that ES\* is still very much in the spirit of evidentialism. (Although I would call the one who replaces Evidence Dependence with Revised Evidence Dependence a 'compromiser', I would not do the same for the one who rejects ES for ES\*. ES\* seems enough in the spirit of evidentialism.)

Unfortunately, I believe that many evidentialists will balk at this option, simply because they think it implausible that a past mental state could be directly relevant to justification. Perhaps this is because they think that something counts as one's present evidence only if it is accessible, and past mental states are inaccessible.<sup>25</sup> This is a sort of internalist requirement on evidence that many evidentialists are inclined to accept. So, rejection of evidence accessibility will be a stumbling block for evidentialists who are considering this option.

## 14.5 Conclusion

If you are an evidentialist, you should think about which thesis you will reject. Will you be a bullet-biter, a compromiser, a dispositions-appealer, or a past-looker? Or maybe you think that there is another viable option that I have overlooked. Regardless of which option is chosen, I hope that I have helped move the discussion on evidentialism forward, and I hope that evidentialists will engage in productive debate about which thesis to reject.<sup>26</sup>

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looker's view the claim that factors at times other than  $t$  are relevant to one's doxastic justification at  $t$ . My criticism of the past-looker's view in this section will also apply to V. The past-looker's view and V only differ in their affirmation or rejection of Unity and their affirmation or rejection of Time-Slice Mentalism. I think the evidentialist should hold fast to Unity since that will keep a tight connection between one's propositional justification at  $t$  and one's doxastic justification at  $t$ .

<sup>24</sup>Marshall Swain (1981, 74) defends a view like this. See section 2.3 of Moon (2012a) for discussion.

<sup>25</sup>Although Tim's past seeming *token* is no longer accessible, perhaps it is enough that a present seeming *type* is accessible now. Tim, by reflection, could bring about a seeming that LN is true. I am not sure if evidentialists will be satisfied with this option. Thanks to Peter Markie for the idea behind this suggestion.

<sup>26</sup>Thanks to Brian Cutter, Declan Smithies, and Philip Swenson for helpful conversation and to David Black, Patrick Bondy, Matthew Frise, Kolja Keller, John Komdat, Peter Markie, Kevin

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# Chapter 15

## No Kind of Reason Is the Wrong Kind of Reason



Miriam Schleifer McCormick

**Abstract** A reason is said to be “of the wrong kind” when, although it counts as a consideration broadly in favor of (or against) having an attitude, it seems to *not* bear on the object of the attitude in a way that is relevant to determining whether the attitude is appropriate. When applied to belief it is often taken as a datum that the only genuine or “right” reasons for belief are those that bear directly on the question of “whether p”; such reasons are often called “evidential” “epistemic” or perhaps “truth-directed” or “alethic.” Wrong kinds of reasons may have the appearance of reasons but are not *genuine* reasons. The challenge, or what is sometimes called “the wrong kind of reason problem” is to find some criterion which will delineate the right kind from the wrong kind such that only evidential reasons end up as the right kind. Many solutions have been offered and rejected, but there is a general consensus that there is a real distinction here and the challenge is to construct a theory which captures it. I argue that there is no distinction to capture, at least in the case of reasons for belief.

**Keywords** Epistemic reasons · Evidential reasons · Practical reasons · Right kind of reason · Wrong kind of reason (WKR)

### 15.1 Introduction

A reason is said to be “of the wrong kind” when, although it counts as a consideration broadly in favor of (or against) having an attitude, it seems to *not* bear on the object of the attitude in a way that is relevant to determining whether the attitude is appropriate. For example, it seems to count in favor of admiring a bowl of mud that a demon offers me a huge sum of money to do so or threatens to kill me if I do not, but such considerations tell me nothing about the qualities of the bowl

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of mud that speak to its being admirable. When applied to belief it is often taken as a datum that the only genuine or “right” reasons for belief are those that bear directly on the question of “whether p”; such reasons are often called “evidential” “epistemic” or perhaps “truth-directed” or “alethic.” Considerations about whether it would be good or worthwhile to believe something, what I will term “practical reasons” may be reasons for another kind of attitude but, many contend, are not reasons for belief; they are the “wrong kind of reason” (WKR) for belief. Wrong kinds of reasons may have the appearance of reasons but are not *genuine* reasons. The challenge, or what is sometimes called “the wrong kind of reason problem” is to explain why these are the wrong kind of reasons, to find some criterion which will delineate the right kind from the wrong kind such that only evidential reasons end up as the right kind. If the wrong kind of reasons problem could be solved it would also reveal the truth of a position that is sometimes referred to as “evidentialism,” which states that the only reasons for belief are evidential and contrasts with “pragmatism” which states that there are at least some non-evidential reasons for belief.”<sup>1</sup>

Many solutions have been offered and rejected, but there is a general consensus that there is a real distinction here and the challenge is to construct a theory which captures it. I will argue that there is no distinction to capture, at least in the case of reasons for belief. If I am right this would help explain the problem’s seeming intractability. I will consider, in turn, three general strategies for showing why practical reasons are the wrong kind of reasons for belief and argue that none of them succeed. The first appeals to the nature of reasons; this is a highly generalized approach to the WKR problem that can then be applied to belief. The second appeals to the nature of belief, arguing that it is built in to what is it to be a belief that practical reasons are of the wrong kind. The third appeals to the nature of the basing relation between a belief and a reason, arguing that this relation rules out practical reasons being reasons for belief. As we will see the division between these approaches is not a sharp one; there is much overlap between them but there is a clear difference in their emphases. Other papers which criticize possible solutions to the WKR problem end by suggesting we have more work to do and perhaps offer a direction to take in finding a successful solution. I end with a different suggestion; perhaps what is taken as a datum in need of explaining has been incorrectly identified. The distinction between good and bad reasons provides us

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<sup>1</sup>Nishi Shah defines evidentialism this way, namely as the view that “only evidence can be a reason for belief” and the pragmatist as one “committed to the existence of at least some non-evidential reasons for belief.” (Shah 2006, 482) Evidentialism is often used to describe a position about *justification*, and argues that beliefs are only justified if they are based on evidence; those opposed will offer examples where it appears that a belief can be justified without evidence. But anti-evidentialists of this kind are often also anti-pragmatists and so evidentialists in Shah’s sense. How these two kinds of evidentialism are connected is an interesting question, one I hope to pursue in future work. It should also be noted that some who are committed to evidentialism as a theory of justification can allow that non-evidential reasons exist, but that these are not relevant when we are evaluating belief from an *epistemic* perspective, and that believing for such reasons will lead one away from rationality. This is, for example, Richard Feldman’s (2000) view. I discuss and critique this view in Chap. 2 of *Believing Against the Evidence*.

with all the resources we need to make sense of cases that are used to motivate the WKR problem. There is no need to delineate a kind with feature  $x$  such that any reason which possesses feature  $x$  is thereby of the wrong kind.

## 15.2 The Nature of Reasons and Standards of Correctness

One way to diagnose the WKR problem, is to claim that it is primarily generated by a particular view about the nature of reasons, and to argue that an alternate view of reasons can offer a way out. Pamela Hieronymi's discussion is most explicit in taking this approach. A common way of understanding what it means for something to be a reason for an attitude is that it is a consideration that "counts in favor" of that attitude. But if this is all that it takes to be a reason, it is hard to see how paradigmatically "wrong" kind of reasons, such as monetary incentives to believe something false, or to admire a bowl of mud, do not count in favor of believing or admiring. Hieronymi argues instead that a reason is better understood as a consideration that "bears on a question." We can sort reasons into different "kinds" by distinguishing between the kinds of questions on which different considerations can bear. In general, we can distinguish between questions concerning the content of the attitude and questions which ask directly whether the attitude in question would be good to have, e.g. whether  $x$  is admirable vs. whether it would be good to admire  $x$ .<sup>2</sup> In the case of belief, it seems two different kinds of questions can be asked, one that bears on the content of the belief and one that bears on whether the belief would be good to have: "a consideration can count in favor of  $p$  by bearing on whether  $p$  or by bearing on whether the belief that  $p$  is in some way good to have." (2005, 444).

Hieronymi rightly points out that the content/attitude distinction is not sufficient to do the kind of sorting needed to deal with the WKR problem. Questions about content can bear on the questions about whether the attitude is good to have and vice-versa. This can be seen most clearly when we think that in establishing whether  $p$  is true we also often find out that it would be a good belief to have (for having true beliefs is generally a good thing). A further distinction is needed to be able to properly sort reasons, according to Hieronymi, and she argues, that the relevant distinction is between reasons that are "constitutive" and those that are "extrinsic." In the case of belief, reasons which one takes show that the content of a belief is true are "constitutive;" finding such reasons convincing amounts to having the belief. These reasons are taken to settle the question "whether  $p$ " and, in settling that question, one believes  $p$ . All remaining reasons for believing  $p$ —those which (are taken to) count in favor of believing  $p$  independently of whether  $p$ —are "extrinsic." Finding these convincing does not amount to believing  $p$ . Considering that it would save your life if you believed the butler did it does not, according to Hieronymi, provide you with a reason to believe the butler did it. Rather, "by finding these

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<sup>2</sup>This distinction is often put in terms of state given reasons and object given reasons.

reasons convincing, you form a second-order belief about the belief that butler did it: you believe it would be good to believe he did... This distinction between constitutive and extrinsic reasons for a belief that *p* marks the distinction between the “right kind” and the “wrong kind” of reasons for believing *p*. The right kind of reasons for believing *p* are those that (are taken to) bear on whether *p*—that is, those that (are taken to) bear on the question, the settling of which amounts to believing. Extrinsic reasons are not “really” reasons for believing *p*, we can say, because they are not the kind of reasons which, simply by finding convincing, one would believe *p*.” (448).

If I take a consideration to bear on whether *p*, that is if I take a consideration to show it more or less likely that *p* is true, then, on this taxonomy it is the “right” kind. But is there any reason that just by its nature or content is excluded from bearing on whether *p*? And in particular, why are practical reasons excluded as ones that can be taken to bear on whether *p*. If I take it that the fact that it would save my life makes it more likely that the butler did it then it would be a right kind of reason for belief. The inference “Believing the butler did it will save my life and so the butler did it” is probably a very bad inference, but we know people are capable of very faulty reasoning.<sup>3</sup> Some argue that such inferences are psychologically or conceptually impossible but nothing Hieronymi says rules them out.<sup>4</sup>

Further, a consideration can bear on the truth of *p* without settling the question of whether *p*. In Hieronymi’s initial characterization it sounds like a reason must be convincing for it to count as a right kind of reason, that only those reasons which actually settle the question of whether *p* are real reasons. But what if I am still deliberating? I see a consideration as making *p* more likely but I also see another one which puts *p* in question. We have been presented with the counterfactual that says if we find reasons convincing and settle the question that *p*, then those reasons are constitutive. But what are we to say of considerations discarded in the process of deliberation? They seem to bear on whether *p* because if I ever were to settle the question I would then believe, but what if, in the end, my settling the question did not take these into account at all? Do they lose their status as reasons, or reasons of the right kind? And what if I never settle the question, or the question that concerns me is fundamentally unsettle-able?

These considerations suggest that if one were not already convinced that certain type of reasons (usually called “evidential”) were the right kinds and that another type (often called practical) were the wrong kind, this constitutive/extrinsic distinction need not capture the same distinction. It remains open that practical reasons can help settle the question whether *p*, and it also seems that evidential considerations still count as reasons even if they bear on questions that can never be settled.

Mark Schroeder has criticized Hieronymi’s approach, as well as many others, to the WKR problem by arguing that their scope is too narrow. Schroeder views the

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<sup>3</sup>The reasoning may not be as bad as it appears. Something like “The only way that believing the butler did it will save my life is if the butler did it” could be a suppressed premise.

<sup>4</sup>We will see an example of such an argument when discussing Nishi Shah’s view.

problem as one that is very general, that arises for any state or activity governed by standards of correctness, and so a solution, he thinks, should also be very general. Hieronymi is clear that her approach only applies to what she terms “commitment-constituting” attitudes, that is attitudes that one can form or revise simply by settling for oneself a question. One is “committed, in the sense that if one has the attitude, one is answerable to certain questions and criticisms—namely those questions and criticisms would be answered by the considerations that bear on those relevant question(s). So, for example, if I believe  $p$  then I am committed to  $p$ , that is I am answerable to questions and criticisms that would be answered by the considerations that bear on whether  $p$ .” (450).

These attitudes include intentions and beliefs, and Hieronymi is inclined to think they could include much more. But this distinction cannot be drawn, she says for all attitudes or rational activity; it cannot be drawn in the case of “ordinary actions”; one does not act simply by settling the question whether to act. Schroeder thinks one can generate the same kind of problem for all kinds of actions, for example, the activity of tying a knot. Since my discussion here is limited to reasons for belief, I am only interested in what his solution tells us about reasons for believing, and if it does, in fact, rule out practical reasons for belief as being “genuine” reasons. Schroeder thinks it is important to note that “wrong kinds of reasons” are almost always relativized to a particular subject and context (often involving evil demons or eccentric billionaires) and so are “idiosyncratic” whereas right kind of reasons are universal in some sense. Here is his characterization of a right kind of reason (RKR):

The right kind of reasons with respect to any activity, A, are all and only those reasons which are shared by necessarily every able person engaging in A, because they are engaged in A, together with all reasons which are derivative from such reasons. (2010, 39)

The idea is that if an activity has standards of correctness, these standards provide reasons for anyone engaged in that activity; “only the ‘right’ kind contribute to standards of correctness.” If, for example, you are engaged in the activity of playing chess then you have a reason to move your bishop diagonally and not horizontally, and if you are trying to execute a particular endgame you have reason to move your rook one way and not another: “Placing one’s rook in the third rank is an incorrect way to execute the Lucena endgame position, but it is the correct way to throw the match – so the very same action can be the correct way of doing one thing but an incorrect way of doing another.”

What does it mean for a reason to “contribute” to a standard of correctness? In executing an endgame you have a reason to move your rook one way rather than another because doing so will help you succeed in the execution. In the activity of tying a knot, you have a reason to manipulate the rope or string in such a way that they cohere together; you must have a minimal aim that these pieces of rope or string achieve at least some cohesion, and anyone engaged in tying knots will “share any reasons that arise from this aim.” (40) This is why the eccentric millionaire’s offer of a huge sum of money to just lay one rope on top of the other does not provide you

with a reason to tie knots that way; it is not a “tying knot” reason. No such incentive affects the correct way to tie a knot.

In these cases, that of executing endgames and tying knots, it is clear that standards of correctness are tied to aims; the standards are there to help achieve specific aims, and the right kind of reasons are the ones that, in principle, help us achieve these aims. But Schroeder’s approach is supposed to apply to mental states as well. Do these all have standards of correctness, and if they do, can they be tied to aims in a way that allows us to make sense of reasons which “contribute” to those standards and those that do not? Schroeder considers the case of admiring, realizing that figuring out standards of correctness will be more complicated than in the case of an intentional activity like tying a knot. He argues, however, that “there are going to be some important reasons shared by anyone who is engaged in admiring.” (42) Remember these reasons need to be tied in some sense to standards of correctness, and so we need to say something about what it *is* to admire such that one can do so correctly or incorrectly. Schroeder considers a couple of ways we might do this. The first appeals to facts about admiring; perhaps it is a fact that if one admires someone, one is motivated to emulate that person and so anyone engaged in admiring only has a reason to admire someone if it would not be bad to emulate them. Or maybe we have standing reason to not have false mental representations and “if admiration is an attitude which represents its objects as being in a certain way . . . then we can take the view that having the attitude of admiration triggers these reasons not to have false representations, by giving you reasons not to admire people who lack the feature that admiration represents people as having.” (42).

While Schroeder says that his initial characterization, and solution to the WKR problem, leaves open which activities have standards of correctness, what they are, and how they generate reasons, his brief discussion of the attitude of admiring suggests that while his approach works for actions (as Hieronymi’s does not), it is far from straightforward how it applies to attitudes which is where the WKR problem is generated. When it comes to admiring, the only shared reasons he has suggested are reasons *not* to admire; one has a reason not to admire someone it would be bad to emulate or not to admire someone who lacks feature *x*; this sounds very close to saying one has reason not to admire someone who is not admirable. But are there any shared reasons *to* admire for anyone engaged in the “activity” of admiring in a way analogous to there being shared reasons to manipulate string a certain way for anyone engaged in the activity of rope-tying? Many of these may well be idiosyncratic which was supposed to be a hallmark of the wrong kind of reasons. Given *my* desires and preferences it seems I may have a reason to admire someone who you do not, even if we share reasons not to admire someone wholly despicable.<sup>5</sup>

Schroeder says he conceives of believing as an activity and mentions it as one of those to which the WKR problem arises but he does not discuss it directly as one of his examples. How would the standard of correctness for belief need to be

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<sup>5</sup>For discussion and criticisms of Schroeder’s view along similar lines see Sharadin (2013)

characterized such that practical reasons were necessarily the wrong kind of reasons for belief? While one may question whether the attitude of admiration even has a standard of correctness, beliefs clearly do. A belief's standard of correctness is truth. But what does this standard tell us about reasons for belief? It can tell us we have a reason not to believe falsehoods. Taken in one way this is a platitude which any believer accepts, and in some sense *must* accept. If I believe something I take it that what I believe is true; I cannot believe what I take to be false. But this is a long way from ruling out a class of considerations as reasons to believe. Again, as was the case when thinking about Hieronymi's solution, it is useful to think about doxastic deliberation; when I am trying to figure out what to believe is when I am most clearly considering reasons for and against the belief, not when I am already fully committed. Nothing about belief's standard of correctness alone dictates what the content or nature of a reason for belief must be. And what we often find is a mixture of different kind of considerations when engaged in such deliberation. Consider this example:

Referee: Geoff, an experienced referee, is refereeing a high school soccer match. He blows his whistle, declaring that a player is offside. He can see from the reactions of both teams, and the fans, that they think the call was mistaken. Based on this new evidence he asks himself "What should I believe? Should I believe I made a mistake? Should I revise my belief that the player was off-side?" In the process of this deliberation, Geoff considers that if he were to revise his belief or now believe he made a mistake, he would both (a) replay the past event in his head to try check if he made a mistake and (b) overanalyze future events. The former increases the chances he will miss crucial evidence in the future while the latter increases the chances that he will draw the wrong conclusion from the evidence he does collect. In either case, he will be a poorer judge or collector of the evidence as the game proceeds, thus making him both an inferior epistemic agent, as well as worse referee. He continues to believe the call was correct and the player was indeed off-side.

The considerations that bear on whether Geoff should maintain his belief (even from Geoff's perspective) are not all evidential; he is also thinking about whether it would be good for him to maintain his belief and bad for him to revise it; the fact that it would make him a worse referee if he were to revise is salient in his deliberation, but this is clearly a non-evidential reason. If he is right that he also has reason to maintain his belief because doing so will allow him to form more true beliefs in the future, then some of the non-evidential reasons may be what Brian Talbot has called "truth promoting non-evidential reasons for belief." (Talbot 2014) If this is the case then we can see even more clearly that belief's standard of correctness will not decide, in a simple way, that only considerations of a certain kind count as reasons for belief. Now if one is already committed to the view that the only genuine reasons for belief are evidential, one will find a way of re-describing this case (and others like it) that does not undermine that view. But another kind of argument is needed to show that practical reasons are reasons of the wrong kind.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>In (2017) I discuss the Referee example as well as some other cases where it appears agents have practical reasons to believe. There are many ways that one can re-describe this case to preserve the idea that only right kind of reasons for belief are ones that raise the probability of the belief

### 15.3 The Nature of Belief

Both Schroeder and Hieronymi are interested in getting a deeper understanding of the nature of reasons in general, but others have argued that one can grasp why only certain kinds of reasons are reasons for belief by thinking more specifically about the nature and norms of *belief*. These solutions may not be able to address wider issues generated by the WKR problem, but that is not my concern here.

I have discussed this approach at length elsewhere<sup>7</sup> and so will be fairly brief in my discussion here. We saw that there is a straightforward way to tie reasons to standards of correctness in the cases of activities that have aims. While the idea of admiring having an aim seems odd, it is quite common to find talk of the aim of belief, and most construe the aim as truth. If beliefs (or believing?) have an aim, this could provide a way of revealing which reasons are of the right kind and which are not, depending on whether they help achieve the aim. While Bernard Williams (1973) was the first to explicitly introduce the idea of beliefs aiming at truth, this idea has been expanded and elaborated in many ways more recently. One common way of making sense of Williams's idea that beliefs "aim at truth," is to argue that beliefs are governed by, and only by, truth-related norms. "Normativism" about belief has become very widespread; on this view it is built into what it is to be a belief (as opposed to some other sort of mental attitude) that beliefs are subject to certain norms, and, while there is some disagreement of how to characterize these constitutive norms, it is agreed that they are alethic, or epistemic.<sup>8</sup> Further, on this view, the only reasons for believing *must* be reasons that relate to the truth. In some sense, these accounts bring together Hieronymi's observations about constitutive reasons, and Schroeder's ideas about standards of correctness.

While one can find many examples of discussions of the nature of belief which purport to explain why practical reasons are not really reasons for belief, Nishi Shah's (2003, 2006) discussion is the most explicit in its defense of this view. Further, I emphasized that when thinking about what kinds of considerations count as reasons for belief, we should think about considerations that arise in the context

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being true. One could say that the non-evidential reasons are not reasons which bear on whether or not to revise one's belief but instead bear on one's broader epistemic goals. Or one might suggest that these are reasons which bear on Geoff's action, namely the making of the call. I present cases like this not as way of demonstrating that they conclusively show that practical reasons can be genuine reasons for belief, but to try to show that in a very natural way of thinking about doxastic deliberation, non-evidential considerations are salient. If there are independent reasons for thinking that such cases cannot exist, then the motivation for such re-descriptions are clear. But whether such independent reasons have been given is exactly what I am questioning.

<sup>7</sup>In (2015) and (2017)

<sup>8</sup>For a helpful discussion of normativism about belief see Nolfi (2015). Among those Nolfi cites as endorsing normativism are Jonathan Adler, Allan Gibbard, Peter Graham, Peter Railton, Nishi Shah, Ernest Sosa and Ralph Wedgwood. Stephanie Leary (2016) argues that the strategy of appealing to the constitutive standards of correctness of belief to rule out non-evidential reasons for beliefs fails.



of doxastic deliberation, and Shah agrees. Yet he thinks that reflecting on such deliberation will help to reveal why only evidential considerations can be reasons. Shah begins with what he takes to be a fact about doxastic deliberation. He says that when we reason, or deliberate, about what to believe, only truth-related questions matter; we are concerned only with evidence. Shah calls this phenomenon “transparency”; the question *whether to believe that p* collapses into the question of *whether p is true*. He first introduces this idea when contrasting beliefs formed in a deliberative context and when they are not, posing what he calls the “teleologist’s dilemma.”

In many contexts in which we form beliefs, or are caused to have beliefs, non-evidential processes such as wishful thinking are responsible. If the teleologist, weakens the disposition to form true beliefs to allow for cases of wishful thinking and other non-evidential processes, then they cannot explain why evidence plays an exclusive role in reasoning about what to believe. To account for this, the teleologist would have to strengthen the aiming-at-truth disposition so as to exclude influence of non-truth-regarding considerations. Shah’s problem is summarized as follows: “We need an account that explains why deliberative belief-formation is regulated solely by a disposition to be moved by alethic considerations, but doesn’t require non-deliberative instances of belief-formation to be also solely regulated by such a disposition.” (2003, 467) His way out of the dilemma is to emphasize the *conceptual* necessity of truth being the standard of correctness for belief; built into the concept of belief is the idea that a correct belief is a true one. Here is a clear statement of what he takes that to imply: “To say that it is a conceptual rather than merely metaphysical matter that truth is the standard of correctness for belief is to say that a competent user of the concept of belief must accept the prescription to believe *p* only if *p* is true for any activity that he conceives of as belief-formation.” (2003, 470) This understanding of the connection between belief and truth offers a way out of the teleologist’s dilemma. According to Shah, when one applies the concept in one’s reasoning, truth-relevant considerations must be applied; but in non-deliberative contexts where the concept is not *exercised*, one’s cognitive activity need not be regulated by truth-relevant dispositions.

Shah further argues that reflection on transparency can help to show the truth of evidentialism. Evidentialism, he argues, is “built in” to the nature of doxastic deliberation. Although transparency does not immediately imply evidentialism (namely, the view that only evidence can serve as a reason for belief), it is so implied when coupled with what Shah calls “the deliberative constraint on reasons.” This constraint tells us that something can be a reason to *X* only if it is *possible* for it to function as a premise in deliberation to *X*. When this constraint is applied to belief, the following holds:

*R* is a reason for *X* to believe that *p* only if *R* is capable of disposing *X* towards believing that *p* in a way characteristic of *R*’s functioning as a premise in doxastic deliberation.

Given that transparency shows that questions related to the truth of *p* are the sole focus of our attention in doxastic deliberation, when it is combined with the deliberative constraint, pragmatic considerations for believing are shown to be



impossible. Practical reasons focus on the attractiveness of doing something but nothing about the *attractiveness* of believing (aside from whether it is true), if we accept transparency, can serve as reason for believing from the perspective of the believer.

From my discussion so far, it should be clear that I am questioning what is often taken as unquestionable fact (either a contingent, but universal one, or a conceptually necessary one), namely that “the deliberative question *whether to believe that p* inevitably gives way to the factual question *whether p*.” This characterization does not exhaust the ways in which we consider the question *whether to believe p*. Non-alethic considerations can be part of even first-person doxastic deliberation. Further, even if there is a sense in which the question *whether to believe p* ends up collapsing into the question *whether p*, it is not clear that all the considerations opposed to or in favor of *p* are strictly “evidential.”

In thinking about the Referee case, Shah could allow that non-evidential factors enter into the *causes* of Geoff’s belief, what is precluded by his account is that Geoff could view such non-alethic considerations as *reasons* to believe. But why can’t such practical considerations be reasons for belief? The deliberative constraint on reasons says a consideration can only be a reason to *x* if it is capable of “functioning as a premise” in deliberation to *x*. Now, if deliberation is characterized as a kind of deductive *argument* with premises and conclusions, it would certainly be very odd for a practical consideration to function as a premise in whether to believe something. To say I am hungry and tired and, *therefore*, the witness is innocent is very bad reasoning, though, again, not obviously impossible. But, is deliberation really best understood as an argument with the conclusion being an action or belief?

In thinking about practical deliberation, it seems we deliberate when it is not immediately clear what to do; it is usually when there are reasons supporting different, often conflicting, actions. I have to decide whether I should stay home and grade, or go see my friend’s band play. What goes on when I deliberate about this? It seems I make a kind of list of considerations in favor and opposed to each course of action. Some people even transfer this mental list on to actual paper to assist in their deliberation. If, in the end, I decide to stay home and grade, it seems anything that came up in that list can be a *reason* for my staying home and grading. But did it function as *premise*? Would it make sense to think of my deliberative process along these lines:

If I don’t grade tonight it will just make things worse for me tomorrow. Things being worse for me tomorrow is something I should avoid. Therefore, I should grade.

One can reconstruct practical reasoning in such a way, though it bears little resemblance to what I think actually goes on in such deliberation. And its conclusion is not an actual action but a normative statement. If weak-willed actions are possible, I may go through that process and still go out to the show. This way of thinking about deliberation fails to capture, for example, all the considerations that were rejected that supported another course of action. Now Shah is not committed to saying something can only be a reason if it actually functions as a premise in deliberation; it must only be *capable* of doing so. But it seems all considerations that arise during

the course of deliberation, even if they are rejected or overshadowed, should count as possible reasons, though it is hard to see how to reconstruct such complex, and somewhat messy, thoughts into argument form.

In addressing the question of what is going on when it *seems* as if practical considerations function as reasons in deliberation about whether to believe something, Shah considers a number of explanations. One is that an agent can be mistaken about what counts as evidence. If someone takes it as a general principle that if something is good for him, it is probably true, then it is possible that when thinking about whether to believe something, such a person would think that facts about his good provide him with reasons to believe. Shah says such a person is not mistaking a practical consideration for an evidential one, but is accepting an unwarranted evidential principle. So, though a third-person perspective can indicate that his belief is not based on evidential reasons, from a first-person perspective, the agent mistakenly sees desirability as an indicator of truth. What Shah thinks these examples usually reveal, however, is a conflation of the question of whether to bring about the belief, and the question of whether to believe. This brings us back to Hieronymi's way of distinguishing between the two kinds of reasons by thinking about the questions upon which they bear and, once again, I question whether there is a class or kind of considerations that can be delineated which bears on one, but not the other.

## 15.4 The Basing Relation

Evidentialists tend to not be fazed by examples (like Referee) which purport to show that practical reasons can be reasons for belief.<sup>9</sup> All will admit that non-evidential considerations, in fact, can contribute causally to what one believes. Many (though not all) will even say that such considerations can count as reasons for these subjects *to* believe and, again, such reasons may partially cause the beliefs. What they deny, however, is that these non-evidential reasons are reasons *for which* these subjects believe; beliefs, they say, cannot be *based* on such reasons. To try to articulate what it means for a belief to be based on reason, as opposed to the reason simply being one of the causes of the belief is not simple and philosophers disagree on the nature

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<sup>9</sup>See footnote 6 for some ways of responding to these cases. Another strategy is to argue that practical reasons could not be the kinds of reasons that determine whether one has knowledge and only reasons that are genuine reasons are those such that if one has a true non-Gettiered belief that one would have knowledge. This kind of view is very much like the one that appeals to the truth aim or norm, but instead appeals to knowledge as belief's aim or norm. But again, what rules out that such considerations could bear on knowledge in a significant way? Any theory which allows for pragmatic encroachment on knowledge is allowing that practical considerations are not wholly irrelevant to whether one knows. Further, such a view seems to commit one to a particular view of knowledge which precludes that one can have a perfectly reasonable belief even when one is not in a position to know.

of the relationship. The Referee example is supposed to provide a case where one's beliefs are, at least partly, so based. As I said, if one is already convinced that such reasons are ruled out, then one will try to explain cases like this away. We have seen that some argue that the proper way to think about reasons rules them out, and others think that careful reflection on the nature of belief rules them out. Still others think understanding what it means for a belief to be *based on a reason* reveals that beliefs cannot be based on practical reasons, and if this true, this reveals why they are not *really* reasons.

To assess whether it is the case that there is a whole class of reasons on which beliefs cannot be based, we need some understanding of the basing relation. But providing a characterization of this relation has proved extremely difficult, though there is much recent (and current) work being done trying to clarify it. It should be noted that the motivation to gain a clearer understanding of the basing relation is usually that doing so will help us understand what kind of relationship is required between a belief and a reason so that one is doxastically justified in holding the belief. Often these discussions assume that there are reasons *to* justify the proposition believed (and this is termed "propositional justification") but for the attitude of belief to be justified by this reason, it must be *based* on this reason, but what does it mean to be so based?<sup>10</sup>

The relationship cannot be simply causal as many causes of beliefs may not be reasons at all, let alone reasons *for which* one believes. As Korcz puts it "given that in principle anything can cause anything, a causal account of the basing relation will allow beliefs to be based on reasons which seem completely unrelated to them. For instance, one's belief about having ridden a zebra once might, in principle, cause one to believe that Queen Elizabeth was a member of the Mafia." (2000, 545).

In trying to provide an account of the relation, some stick to a general causal story but try to articulate the *appropriate* kind of causation so as to rule out deviant causal chains while others have abandoned that approach in favor of what are sometimes termed "doxastic" accounts which state that a belief is only based on a reason if one has a meta-belief that the appropriate relation holds. Still others are searching for an alternative to either of these general approaches. I do not have space here to discuss and evaluate all these accounts. Instead I will present a number of alternative representative accounts and argue only pure doxastic accounts are likely to show that the basing relation rules out a particular category of reason. Now if one is already convinced that such reasons are the wrong kind of reasons for belief, that doxastic theories can show why this is so, will count in their favor. But such accounts have been criticized on many grounds and if one rejects them in favor of any kind of causal or dispositional account, then one will not be in a position to designate a class of reason as being reasons of the wrong kind by appeal to the nature of the basing relation.

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<sup>10</sup>The distinction is also sometimes made in terms of a belief being *justifiable* and beliefs being *justified*. This is, for example, how Korcz (2000) introduces his discussion. For helpful discussion of what the relation is trying to identify see also McCain (2012) and Neta (Submitted)

Kurt Sylvan (2016) has recently presented a helpful survey and discussion of recent accounts of the basing relation, and some of what follows is indebted to his way of carving up the terrain. The first amendment to a simple causal view is to state that a belief is only based on a reason if the reason “causally sustains the belief.” The central idea of such a view, and which many more complicated theories retain, is that if the reason upon which the belief is based is lost, then so is the belief. But just as causes can seem unrelated to the beliefs they cause so can causal sustainers. As John Turri points out, we can imagine “that through some random quirk—the result of a neural assembly malfunctioning—Wilt’s belief that the lettuce wilted [causally sustains] his belief that the Patriots will win twelve games this season.”

To avoid non-deviant causes, Turri introduces the idea of a cognitive trait; a reason non-deviantly causes your belief if it manifests your cognitive traits. He ends with this account of the basing relation: “R is among your reasons for believing Q if and only if R’s causing your belief manifests (at least some of) your cognitive traits.”

Sylvan points out that it is unclear that the cognitive trait requirement blocks all deviance counterexamples, however. He considers this example modified from Boghossian (2014: 4). “A pessimistic character might be regularly caused to think ‘Yet so much food is bad’ whenever he thinks ‘Some food is good’. The fact that this transition manifests his pessimistic character makes no difference to the intuition that he doesn’t base his belief that so much food is bad on his belief that some food is good.”

To overcome the problem of causal deviance (as well as others) many recent theories have tried to articulate a way in which an agent must “treat” the consideration that causally sustains her belief as a reason. This “treating condition” can be characterized in many ways. One way is in terms of an agent’s dispositions. Ian Evans (2013) has recently argued for a dispositional account, characterizing the basing relation as follows:

S’s belief that p is based on m iff S is disposed to revise her belief that p when she loses m.

On such a view your dispositions reveal whether you “treat” a consideration as a reason. More complex accounts of what it is to “treat” something as a reason are found in Lord and Sylvan (Submitted) and Neta (Submitted). Sylvan summarizes such views of the basing relation as follows:

It is true that S believes q for reason p because “S treats p-like considerations as normative reasons to believe q-like propositions and as a manifestation of that fact, S’s belief that p explains why S believes that q.”

Most views which incorporate a “treating” condition do not rule out practical reasons as being reasons for which one can believe. In Neta’s discussion he provides examples to help illuminate the connection between the agent and the reason so that it provides what is needed, and he says:

[I]t is possible for an agent to C for the reason R even when she doesn’t know what her reason for C’ing is: this is quite common for mature humans, and even more common for the less mature. There might be reasons for which I am angry at my parents, but I might

not know what those reasons are: I can represent an explanatory relation even if I fail to represent some of its relata, just as I can represent a whole even if I fail to represent its parts. Also, my account of the basing relation is consistent with an agent's C'ing for the reason R even when she also believes that R is not a good reason for C'ing . . . It's possible for an agent to represent an explanatory relation between her reasons and her RDC [rationally determinable condition, e.g. belief] even when she is not attentively representing it: when acquiring a skill (e.g., speaking a language, playing a musical instrument, or using Kung Fu), we learn to do various things for various reasons, and to do so quickly and without deliberation or attentive reflection . . . The musician might not know why she plays a passage in just the way she does, and the Kung Fu expert might not know exactly why she moves in just the way she does, but either expert might come to know the reasons for which she does these things if she reflects skillfully upon those reasons. (Submitted, 35–56)

The only candidates for accounts of basing which rule out practical reasons as being genuine reasons are those which require one to have fully conscious meta-beliefs about the normative status of these reasons. Such views have been criticized for having an overly intellectualist view of what is required for a belief to be based on a reason, and they also seem to commit one to a very strong kind of internalism; in fact this has been seen by some as one of their virtues. Further, one may wonder if one needs to have meta-beliefs about those meta-beliefs, and further meta-meta beliefs, leading to an infinite regress of higher order beliefs.<sup>11</sup> Now it may be that even such views do not rule out practical reasons for belief. It is possible in certain cases for agents to recognize their non-evidential reasons for believing.; you can see that some of the considerations sustaining your belief that your lover is faithful are non-evidential. But that one needs to be able to recognize one's reason for believing once one believes seems an overly demanding constraint on what is required to believe for a reason. Consider an ordinary case of believing for an evidential reason. You believe the match will go ahead and the reason you believe this is that it is sunny. If we accept Shah's strong constraint on reasons, namely that for a consideration to be a reason for you to  $\Phi$ , it must be a consideration from which you could reason to  $\Phi$ -ing then what makes the fact that it is sunny outside a reason for your belief is that this fact is used in your reasoning to the conclusion that the match will go ahead. Again, in the cases I have presented, the agents do just that. What gives this constraint plausibility is that reasons should guide us. But to add the further constraint that for a consideration to be a reason one *must* have full conscious awareness of the reasons for which one  $\Phi$ s would imply that we rarely believe (or act for that matter) for reasons. You form the belief that the match will go ahead and so go to the match. If you do not maintain full consciousness of why you so believe, do you thereby no longer believe for a reason?<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>McCain (2016) brings up this objection, as well as many other problems with doxastic accounts in Chap. 7.

<sup>12</sup>Jonathan Way (2016) has argued that for the constraint on reasoning to preclude non-evidential reasons for belief it needs to be this very strong constraint, but unlike the weaker constraint that just says it needs to be capable of motivating or of operating in deliberation or reasoning "the condition looks gerrymandered to support an argument for evidentialism." (812) Susanna Rinard (2015) has recently argued that the characterizations of the basing relation which rule out non-

## 15.5 Conclusion: Good and Bad, Not Right and Wrong

For all I have said here it may be the case that practical reasons are never good reasons for beliefs; perhaps beliefs based on such reasons are always improperly based.<sup>13</sup> But an account of the basing relation should not only explain when beliefs are properly based. In Ram Neta's recent discussion he argues that one of the conditions that a theory of the basing relation should meet is that it can explain the difference between proper and improper basing. On his view, for example, one can be mistaken in one's representation of a consideration as a reason. Korcz makes a similar point when discussing deviant causes. He argues that there is no principled way of ruling out the reasons causing one's Queen Elizabeth belief as being different in kind from what we often take to be very bad reasons. He summarizes his point as follows "any account of the basing relation which denies a mental state the status of being a reason simply because it seems to be a very bad one is likely to face serious counter-examples (545)."

If there were a way to rule out practical reasons as being genuine reasons for belief then there would not be any need to ask the further question as to whether it can ever be permissible to believe for such reasons. Jonathan Adler, for example, was explicit in taking this approach in his *Beliefs' Own Ethics*. One of his central contentions is that it is a mistake to appeal to "normative notions" in assessing what to believe. He refers to such approaches as "extrinsic," and he argues that this notion is based on a faulty assumption, namely that the concept of belief alone does not fix the ethics of belief. Beliefs, he maintains, have their own "ethics," discovered by a clear analysis of the concept of belief. And such an analysis, he claims, shows that we *must* believe according to the evidence and that any mental state based on practical reasons is not really a belief.

If I am right that there is no way, in principle, to rule out practical reasons for belief, except perhaps by adopting some very contentious views, then the argument between evidentialists and pragmatists must be conducted at the level which we find in the classic debate between Clifford and James. The evidentialist must show that even if one *can* believe for non-evidential reasons, we *ought* only believe according to the evidence.

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evidential reasons for belief rule out a lot more, namely they rule out non-evidential reasons for action as well.

<sup>13</sup>I argue against this view in (2015), especially Chaps. 2 and 3. I do not there, however, offer an account of the basing relation so that we could sort reasons into good and bad ones, and so distinguish between cases where a belief is properly based on a practical reason and when it is not. This is the main topic of a forthcoming paper "Can Beliefs Be Based on Practical Reasons?"

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**Part V**  
**New Directions for Evidentialism**



# Chapter 16

## Evidentialism, Hope, and Wisdom: Are Evidentialist Theories of Wisdom Hopeless?



Sharon Ryan

**Abstract** Wisdom is an important epistemic virtue. Do wise people follow the demands of evidentialism? W.K. Clifford, one of the most influential defenders of evidentialism, tells us to believe all and only what our evidence supports. Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, more moderate contemporary evidentialists, tell us to believe all and only what our evidence supports *when our goal is to have epistemically justified beliefs*. What if our goal is to achieve wisdom? Should we believe all and only what our evidence supports? Although having justified beliefs seems to be a requirement for wisdom, wisdom also seems to involve more epistemic boldness, intuitive insight, hope, and faith than evidentialism allows. That is, evidentialism seems far too cautious and confining for wisdom. This paper will explore the apparent tension between the demands of evidentialism and the achievement of wisdom. I will show that the demands of evidentialism, once properly understood, are essential to wisdom.

**Keywords** Epistemic virtue · Evidentialist theory of wisdom · Hope · Positive attitudes · Wisdom

### 16.1 Introduction

As a theory of epistemic justification, evidentialism tells us that believing  $p$ , disbelieving  $p$ , or suspending judgment on  $p$  is epistemically justified or rational for a person if and only if doing so fits the person's evidence.<sup>1</sup> Some evidentialists take the view a step further and believe that we have an epistemic obligation to

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Feldman and Earl Conee (1985).

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believe all and only what our evidence supports<sup>2</sup>. There are other evidentialists, including me, who believe that we have both an epistemic obligation and a *prima facie* moral obligation to believe all and only what our evidence supports.<sup>3</sup> And, then there's W.K. Clifford, in the far extreme position, arguing, "It is wrong, always and everywhere, to believe anything on insufficient evidence."<sup>4</sup> If evidentialism, in any of the above versions is true; if epistemically justified beliefs play an important role in understanding reality; and if understanding reality is one aspect of wisdom; then it seems that any acceptable theory of wisdom should include an evidentialist component.

Yet wisdom, given its guidance for living well, seems to require intellectual boldness, open-mindedness, faith, hope, and optimism, for example. Wisdom, therefore, seems to permit, if not demand, an abundance of attitudes that ignore or defy one's evidence.

Therefore, evidentialism, with its insistence upon being bound strictly by one's evidence, seems far too cautious for the pursuit of wisdom. Since wisdom seems to be an important, if not supreme virtue, this is an interesting problem for both evidentialism and evidentialist theories of wisdom.

## 16.2 Evidentialist Theories of Wisdom

This paper will focus on the problem that positive attitudes, such as hope, pose for evidentialist theories of wisdom.<sup>5</sup> The fine details of such theories can be ignored for the purposes of this discussion because the focus will be on the evidentialist roots of all such theories. Let's consider any theory of wisdom that requires being epistemically rational, or having doxastic attitudes that fit with one's evidence, an evidentialist theory of wisdom. Thus, any theory that endorses the following thesis will be characterized as an evidentialist theory of wisdom:

(EW1): If S is wise, then the vast majority of S's doxastic attitudes fit her evidence.<sup>6</sup>

(EW1) uses 'the vast majority' in order to allow real human beings to be wise. One need not be perfectly epistemically rational to be wise. Moreover, since wisdom is an achievement that comes in degrees, it is to be expected that some of its conditions reflect that fact. Of course, any plausible theory of wisdom will require much more than epistemic rationality, but again, those additional features are not important

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<sup>2</sup>Feldman (1988, 2000).

<sup>3</sup>Sharon Ryan (2015).

<sup>4</sup>William Kingdon Clifford (1987, p. 25).

<sup>5</sup>Ryan (2017) is one such evidentialist theory of wisdom.

<sup>6</sup>The wording isn't perfect here since just a few, or even one, *very important* or *extremely irrational* belief could be enough of a problem to rule one out as a wise person. The point is just to tie wisdom to evidentialism and avoid an unreasonably high demand of doxastic perfection.

for the purposes of this discussion. Although I believe all of the positive attitudes mentioned above pose interesting challenges to evidentialist theories of wisdom, in this paper, I will focus exclusively on the problem posed by hope.

### 16.3 The Problem of Hope As an Objection to Evidentialist Theories of Wisdom

Here is a statement of the basic argument, which I will call The Problem of Hope:

#### The Problem of Hope

1. Hope requires one to make intellectual and emotional leaps beyond, or despite, one's evidence.
2. If (1) and (EW1), then wise people infrequently hold positive attitudes such as hope.
3. But wise people frequently do hold positive attitudes such as hope.
4. (EW1) is false.

Every premise in this argument is complicated because the concept of hope is complicated (and so is the concept of wisdom). Hope is an ambiguous concept and there is no one correct definition that captures all legitimate uses of the term. To begin, we need to focus upon the sense of hope that looks like trouble for evidentialist theories of wisdom. There is a sense of hope that is totally consistent with staying within the confines of one's evidence, so we need to distinguish this non-problematic sense from the allegedly problematic sense. Suppose you are planning a party with a bunch of incredibly fun people. You are taking advantage of favorite recipes; a local brewery is supplying a vast array of exquisite craft beers; the flowers in your garden are gorgeous and abundant; you've got a great playlist ready to go; and it is a bright and sunny day. What more could you ask for? Given all that's in place, you are epistemically justified in believing your party will be fun. In addition to your well-justified belief, you could certainly *also* hope the party will be fun. There would be nothing logically or psychologically odd about that combination of cognitive attitudes. Hope, in this sort of case, simply captures your strong desire for the party to be fun. You are hoping for something good to occur, and you have every reason to think things will turn out the way you want them to turn out. This sort of hope is obviously no threat to evidentialist theories of wisdom, and this is not the kind of hope the argument hinges upon. It is important to note, however, that we already see that evidentialists are able to be hopeful while believing all and only what their evidence supports.

### 16.4 What Is Hope?

The type of hope that is at work in this argument, and that is allegedly a problem for evidentialist theories of wisdom, is best understood through examples that highlight the positive attitude we might resort to precisely when we lack sufficient evidence.

Imagine your son, who has never had a serious job in his life and just flunked out of college, is applying for his first job. The job ad clearly states that strong preference will be given to college graduates with related work experience. If he wants the job and the job really suits his interests, you might think, “I sure hope he gets this job,” knowing full well that he almost certainly won’t get the job. If there is at least a slight possibility for him to get the job, you might hope that he will get the job. This is the sort of hope this argument is about.

Or imagine that you are diagnosed with a serious illness and the prognosis is grim. Rather than allowing yourself to accept, straight on, the stark reality, you ignore all the evidence and hope for the best. Suppose also, that a hopeful attitude will at least make life with your illness slightly less difficult for you. This is the kind of hope this argument is about.

Or suppose you believe our world has too much hate and violence, and although you have no reason whatsoever to think things will get better, you still hope that things will get better. You mindfully model the virtues of peace, love, and compassion, and refuse to be dragged down with the cynics. This is the kind of hope this argument is about. That’s because a wise person, according to evidentialist theories of wisdom, should be realistic, follow his or her evidence, and face the facts. But, many of us would regard adopting a hopeful attitude under these and similar circumstances to be wise.

This argument will focus on a kind of hope that is captured by the following definition:

- (H) S hopes that/for p iff (i) S lacks adequate evidence for believing p, (ii) S believes it would be very good if p were to obtain, (iii) S wants p to be true, (iv) S believes p is possible, and (v) S is positively personally invested in p being true.

The first three conditions come directly from the examples above. The fourth condition is included because if a person doesn’t even think something is possible, it seems impossible for that person to take up the attitude of hope. The fifth condition is included so we focus on hopes that have emotional importance to us, cause feelings of disappointment if they don’t come to pass, and have a motivational impact on the way we live, thereby keeping relevant and in the forefront, questions about wisdom. Trudy Govier uses the term ‘involvement’ to capture something along the lines of what I am trying to capture in the fifth condition in (H).<sup>7</sup> Miriam Schleifer McCormick makes a similar point about hope, insisting that a “condition is needed that speaks to hope’s affective and motivational role, to try to explicate its potential power in one’s mental life.”<sup>8</sup> Philip Pettit notes that, “To have hope is to have something we might describe as cognitive resolve.”<sup>9</sup> Adrienne Martin defends something similar to condition five contending that “the hopeful person takes a

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<sup>7</sup>Trudy Govier (2011).

<sup>8</sup>Miriam Schleifer McCormick (2017, p. 129).

<sup>9</sup>Philip Pettit (2004, p. 159).

“licensing” stance toward the probability she assigns the hoped-for outcome—she sees that probability as licensing her to treat her desire for the outcome and the outcome’s desirable features as reasons to engage in the forms of planning, thought, and feeling. . . .”<sup>10</sup> Again, we need to acknowledge that there are many different types of hope, and what I’m attempting to clarify here is just one type of hope that is particularly interesting when thinking about evidentialism, wisdom, and rationality. I’ll proceed with this discussion, with (H) in mind when speaking about the apparent conflict between hope and evidentialism.

## 16.5 Explanation of the Problem of Hope Argument

Condition (i) of (H) supports the first premise of The Problem of Hope. The type of hope we are concerned with here is defined as an attitude that people sometimes adopt when they lack sufficient evidence for taking up the attitude of belief.<sup>11</sup>

Premise (2) simply notes that because of condition (i) of (H), such hope reaches beyond one’s evidence, and that reach goes against the restriction made in (EW1). Wise people don’t often reach beyond their evidence because it is epistemically irrational to do so, and epistemic rationality is one key component of wisdom.

Premise (3) takes note of the virtue of hope and its role in the pursuit of wisdom. Life can be rough, and the wise are the ones who understand how best to navigate the choppy waters. Hope plays a powerful role in making for a good person and a good life, all of which are essential for wisdom. Almost everyone has to put considerable effort into relationships, projects, and activities that are deeply meaningful. Hope helps to motivate and inspire us to put in the effort, even when we lack sufficient evidence for thinking things will turn out the way we want them to. Adrienne Martin believes hope helps us to be able to imagine creative strategies.<sup>12</sup> Without hope, many of us would throw in the towel. A hopeful attitude can be the difference between being successful or failing to bring about the future we desire. Sometimes, hope is the difference between life and death. Wise people understand that a hopeful attitude makes you a more attractive person to spend time with than Negative Nelly or Debbie Downer. Barack Obama inspired millions of people in his rally cry for hope. “Hope is that stubborn thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and to work for it, and to fight for it. Hope is the belief that destiny will not be written for us, but by us, by the men and women who are not content to settle for

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<sup>10</sup>Adrienne Martin (2013, p. 35).

<sup>11</sup>We can imagine an analogous way of thinking about one type of faith. One might adopt the attitude of faith rather than belief when one lacks sufficient evidence to justify belief. Of course, faith is just as ambiguous as hope, but this could be one of the many instances of faith.

<sup>12</sup>Adrienne Martin (2011, p. 157).

the world as it is, who have the courage to remake the world as it should be.”<sup>13</sup> If you want to have positive relationships, accomplish difficult and meaningful tasks, make a difference in the world, and be happy, you need hope. Adam Kadlac notes in his defense of the virtue of hope, “. . . evidence about what will happen in the future is rarely sufficient to justify confident beliefs about that future, at least when we are concerned with the highly contingent matters that so dramatically affect our daily lives; illness, employment, relationships, and the like.”<sup>14</sup> These are the circumstances where wisdom is needed. Our epistemic limitations, according to Kadlac, make hope essential for a good life. Thus, because of its connection to understanding how to live a good life, wisdom seems to require the bold virtue of the type of hope specified in (H).

On the basis of these premises, the argument concludes that (EW1) should be abandoned, and along with it, all evidentialist theories of wisdom. Despite the initial appeal of the Problem of Hope, I don’t think evidentialist theories of wisdom are defeated by this argument. I think there are several defensible objections to The Problem of Hope.

## 16.6 Objections to the Problem of Hope

The first objection an evidentialist could make is against premise (2). (EW1) is a thesis about doxastic attitudes – the attitudes of belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment. Although hope has a cognitive dimension, hope is not a doxastic attitude. Thus, evidentialist theories of wisdom do not, through (EW1) alone, rule out hope. (EW1) is silent about hope and other non-doxastic, cognitive attitudes. Therefore, an evidentialist can retain (EW1) and simultaneously embrace the virtues of hope.

This objection is a good objection to premise (2), but there is still plenty for evidentialists to worry about. After all, recall the story of Clifford’s ship owner. After receiving a thorough inspection report citing many serious safety problems and a strict warning that the ship was unsafe to sail without a mechanical overhaul, the ship owner convinces himself that his ship will be fine for one last, lucrative cruise. He sends the ship out on another voyage, the ship sinks, and all of the passengers perish at sea. Clifford condemns the ship owner for sailing the ship, but also for believing, despite very strong evidence to the contrary, that the ship was seaworthy. Although many philosophers object to Clifford’s full-blown ethics of belief,<sup>15</sup> everyone agrees that the ship owner’s belief is epistemically irrational and his behavior is morally despicable. Would we be any less outraged if the ship owner had the right belief but nevertheless hoped the ship would make the journey, crossed

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<sup>13</sup>Barack Obama (2012).

<sup>14</sup>Adam Kadlac (2015, p. 343).

<sup>15</sup>In Ryan (2015), I argue that Clifford’s view has been unfairly dismissed in the recent ethics of belief literature.

his fingers, said some prayers, and let it sail? NO! Actually, that situation seems even worse. (Consider the public outrage and legal punishment following the 2010 mining disaster at Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia, where greed prevailed over known safety issues, and 29 coal miners died in an explosion caused by owner authorized practices that were clear violations of safety regulations.) What if the ship makes the journey despite all the mechanical problems? Would our judgments about the ship owner change? We'd be relieved if the ship made the journey, but we'd still be outraged by the ship owner's decision, his irrational beliefs and/or hopes. Anyone with evidentialist leanings will find hope problematic in cases like this. Thus, I think an evidentialist wisdom principle ought to be much stronger than (EW1), and a stronger wisdom principle will not so easily escape the Problem of Hope.

## 16.7 Evidentialism About Doxastic and Non-Doxastic Cognitive Attitudes

Here is a stronger principle that might be, and I contend should be, a component of an evidentialist theory of wisdom:

(EW2): If S is wise, then most of S's cognitive attitudes that are subject to rational evaluation fit with S's evidence.

(EW2) is admittedly rough. It is meant to expand the attitudes relevant to evidential considerations from doxastic attitudes to other mental states. However it is obviously not meant to include all mental states since there are mental states that are not open to judgments of rationality. So, in addition to doxastic attitudes, (EW2) includes attitudes such as hoping, deciding, having faith, trusting, hating, and forgiving, to name a few. It would not, however, include mental states such as imagining, perceiving, hearing, etc. It would be ideal to have a clear guideline that distinguishes mental states that are rationally evaluable from those that are not rationally evaluable. I do not have a developed answer, but I think the basic idea is pretty intuitive. Mental states that are rationally evaluable are mental states for which justifying reasons could be offered and challenged. Kate Nolfi suggests that a mental state that is open to rational evaluation "paradigmatically involves being answerable – being responsible, in some normatively significant sense of the term – for being in that state."<sup>16</sup> In the case of hope, one's answer to a justificatory challenge might involve claims about the value of the hoped for event, the likelihood of the event, and the role hope may have in bringing about a situation. In the case of forgiveness, one could cite justifying reasons including, for example, that the wrongdoer has acknowledged and adequately made up for the wrongdoing. For our purposes here, I am satisfied with these basic and intuitive ways of understanding

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<sup>16</sup>Kate Nolfi (2015, p. 39).

what makes a cognitive attitude subject to rational evaluation, and I feel comfortable including hope in that category of cognitive states.

(EW2) allows for plenty of hope, but only when it fits with one's evidence. Your hope for a fun party in the example described earlier will, of course, be acceptable. The hope of Clifford's ship owner is not acceptable. But will all the hopes we promised to focus upon, as outlined by (H), be excluded by evidentialism? And if they are excluded, would that be such a bad thing? Are (H) hopes really required for wisdom? Let's return to the argument, substituting (EW2) for (EW1) and see if there is any way for an evidentialist to deal with the new version of the argument.

The Problem of Hope's second premise will be revised to:

(2\*): If (1) and (EW2), then wise people infrequently hold positive attitudes such as hope (H).

Premise (2\*) is not open to the easy objection raised against premise (2) in the original argument. And now, it certainly appears that any hopes of the sort outlined in (H) are, by definition, ruled out by evidentialism. If you lack adequate evidence for cognitive attitude A, as is stipulated by (H) hopes, A does not fit your evidence. Thus, you are not, according to (EW2), justified in adopting A. Premise (3) remains as strong as ever. If you are convinced that hope can be a wise attitude for a person even when what's hoped for is not supported by one's evidence, you will accept (3). I will come back to take a more careful look at premise (3) in Sect. 16.9 of this paper. For now, however, we will accept (3) and I will propose an objection to (2\*).

Depending on what it takes for a cognitive attitude to "fit one's evidence," an evidentialist might have the resources to work up an interesting objection to (2\*). In working out the details of this objection, it will help to focus carefully on (H):

(H): S hopes that/for p iff (i) S lacks adequate evidence for believing p, (ii) S believes it would be very good if p were to obtain, (iii) S desires p, (iv) S believes p is possible, and (v) S is positively personally invested in p.

An evidentialist could note an array of examples of wise hope that are consistent with (H) and (EW2) by thinking more carefully about *what it takes for a cognitive attitude to fit one's evidence*. Here is one such example. Suppose Regina is not getting married for 2 years and she would especially like her 87-year old grandfather to dance with her at her wedding. Her ideal wedding day includes dancing with her grandpa. Because of his age, her evidence does not adequately support believing p: 'Grandpa and I will dance at my wedding.' Nevertheless, she might take time to select the perfect song, feel excitement when discussing the dance with him, and imagine how wonderful it would be if she's fortunate enough to have that dance. Regina's attitude toward the future satisfies all of the conditions of (H). She hopes p will be true, and she is planning for it, all the while failing to believe that she will dance with her grandfather at her wedding. The *doxastic attitude* she adopts is suspension of judgment, and that's what her evidence supports. She adopts the attitude of hope specified in (H). She lacks adequate evidence for believing p; she believes it would be fantastic if the future unfolds with the dance; obviously she desires this future; she does believe it is possible; and her planning, and how crushed



she will feel if he is not around for her wedding, reveals that she is positively personally invested.

Regina's attitude seems wise. If this were her basic approach to such possibilities in her life, and she satisfies other conditions for wisdom, she'd seem very wise. If she did not respond this way, we'd think her to be unwise. Suppose she reacts to her situation by thinking, "Well given my evidence I'll suspend judgment, rein in my hope and enthusiasm, and do nothing for now. I'll throw something together on the wedding day if he should happen to still be alive." That is not a wise attitude. Regina's situation is not unusual. We have enormous uncertainty about the future in many areas of life for which we have enthusiastic hopes, dreams, and concerns. Although no young person already knows what the economy will be like when they reach retirement age, it is nevertheless wise to come up with a thoughtful financial plan for the future and hope that things turn out well. Hope and the actions it inspires for financial planning are, for example, marks of wisdom.

Regina's situation might well be compatible with an evidentialist theory of wisdom. It all depends upon how we understand the fitting relation for non-doxastic cognitive states. On one interpretation of 'fit', which I will propose below, Regina's hopeful attitude does not violate (EW2). Although her evidence does not support believing  $p$ , it does not support believing  $\sim p$ /disbelieving  $p$  either. Her evidence about the future is pretty weak. As long as an evidentialist is willing to endorse the view that non-doxastic, rationally evaluable, cognitive attitudes "fit" one's evidence in such a situation, an evidentialist can reject premise (2\*) of the Problem of Hope. What I'm suggesting is the following account of the fitting relation for non-doxastic cognitive attitudes:

(FIT)  $S$ 's evidence fits a rationally evaluable non-doxastic cognitive attitude  $A$  iff either (i)  $S$ 's total evidence supports  $A$  or (ii)  $S$ 's total evidence supports neither  $A$  nor  $\sim A$ .

In other words, adopting a hopeful attitude fits your evidence, and is acceptable, as long as your evidence does not weigh against that hope. Since (FIT) is restricted to non-doxastic states it does not yield the unacceptable view that believing  $p$  is justified when your evidence is balanced or neutral. (FIT) allows for suspending judgment under such circumstances. The view I'm proposing retains the standard evidentialist view for doxastic attitudes, but a more relaxed view for other cognitive attitudes such as hope.

Condition (i) of (FIT) will not be utilized for the types of hopes that arise in The Problem of Hope. Condition (i) is needed for the type of rational hope discussed in the party planner case, where the party planner hopes for precisely what her evidence strongly supports. Condition (ii) is doing all the work for the hopes raised in the Problem of Hope. Condition (ii) is permissive. As long as your total evidence does not go against what you are hoping for, your hope will qualify as fitting with your evidence on this version of evidentialism.

I will call the combination of (EW2) & (FIT) 'permissive evidentialism.' A permissive evidentialist would have the following to say about some of the attitudes Regina could take toward  $p$ . Belief is not the justified doxastic attitude for her to

take toward  $p$ ; suspending judgment is the justified doxastic attitude for her to take towards  $p$ . Given her very weak evidence about the future, hope is an attitude that fits with her evidence, since it obviously does not clash with her evidence.<sup>17</sup> So, if fitting is to be understood as something like not being undermined by one's evidence, premise (2\*) is false.

Let's turn back to some of the other examples of hope mentioned earlier to see how permissive evidentialism handles them. What does permissive evidentialism imply about the parent hoping that her son will get the job he is pathetically unqualified for? In that case, hope does not fit her evidence. She has overwhelming reason to believe he will not get the job and not a stitch of evidence in favor of him getting the job. If this mother adopts such hopeful attitudes with any frequency, she'll be excluded as a wise person. Should an evidentialist be concerned about excluding her? I don't think so. Such hope is irrational and unwise. Of course, (EP2) & (FIT) do not imply that she should feel totally hopeless about all aspects of her son's future job prospects. She could still hope that her son will realize that he needs a college education in order to be a serious candidate for certain types of jobs. She could rationally hope that he will apply for other types of jobs that he would be more qualified for and enjoy. In fact, she probably has the power, through a heart-to-heart conversation with her son, to influence the likelihood of several of those futures coming to be. Those alternative hopes, and many more, probably fit with her evidence and would be allowed by permissive evidentialism.

How about patients who receive devastating medical diagnoses? Whether or not hope is allowed or excluded by permissive evidentialism will depend on the patient's total evidence, the details of the diagnosis, and what exactly the patient is hoping for. Does the patient, in addition to the diagnosis, have evidence that she nevertheless fits the profile of survivors? For example, perhaps most people with the disease die in 3 months, but those who are non-smoking, exercising, vegans like her, fare well. Would being hopeful put her in the category of likely survivors? That is, does she have evidence that adopting a hopeful attitude, all by itself, will make it likely that she will survive? If so, because of its positive impact on her evidence, hoping would be allowed. However if she has strong evidence that she will not survive, no matter what other factors are taken into consideration, then hope will be excluded by (EW2) and (FIT). Should evidentialists be bothered by this consequence? I don't think so. Such hope is irrational and unwise. Her life, and the lives of those who love her, would be better served by accepting the diagnosis and living what's left of her life realistically. Her hope should be reserved for other, more realistic, positive desires she may have. It would be wise for her to focus on coming up with a meaningful and satisfying end of life plan and hope that the rational plan works out.

How about people who adopt the sort of hope for the future that Obama inspired? Again, of course, the permissibility of such hope will depend on the evidence. What

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<sup>17</sup>If her wedding date is 15 years away, or if her grandfather is seriously ill, hope would not fit with her evidence.

Obama said is interesting, and I only quoted a portion of his main idea above. Here's the full quote:

And tonight, despite all the hardship we've been through, despite all the frustrations of Washington, I've never been more hopeful about our future. I have never been more hopeful about America. And I ask you to sustain that hope. I'm not talking about blind optimism, the kind of hope that just ignores the enormity of the tasks ahead or the road blocks that stand in our path. I'm not talking about the wishful idealism that allows us to just sit on the sidelines or shirk from a fight. I have always believed that hope is that stubborn thing inside us that insists, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us so long as we have the courage to keep reaching, to keep working, to keep fighting.

The quote begins with a caution against a kind of irrational hope. Obama endorses a hope that involves the belief that "something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and to work for it, and to fight for it. Hope is the belief that destiny will not be written for us, but by us, by the men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is, who have the courage to remake the world as it should be." A hopeful person might very well have good evidence supporting the view that *if* we work and fight, *then* we will likely achieve a better future. Thus, I think that in situations such as those described by Obama, our evidence about the future does not undermine hope for an evidentialist. If, however, there's no counterbalancing evidence in favor of the future hoped for, then this kind of hope will be ruled out. But hope under such circumstances should be ruled out; a person nurturing such groundless hope would not be wise. He or she would be adopting what Obama calls "blind optimism" or "wishful idealism" and not rational hope. The important thing to note is that evidentialism, as understood, is pretty hopeful. It allows for all hopes that are supported by one's evidence and it also allows for all other hopes that do not clash with one's evidence.

## 16.8 Are Evidentialist Theories of Wisdom Too Hopeful?

If (EW2) and (FIT) are acceptable, we have an interesting evidentialist solution to The Problem of Hope. But is permissive evidentialism a reasonable view? One might think there's reason to worry about that. Consider the following example, designed to be a case in which a kind of hope not covered under (H) satisfies (FIT) but will strike evidentialists as irrational. Imagine Maeve lacks confidence in her intellectual abilities. Suppose she has an upcoming logic exam for which she's extremely well prepared. She's taken numerous practice exams, found them to be easy, and scored 100% on every one of them. The trustworthy professor tells her students that the actual exam is very similar to the practice exams. Maeve considers *p*: 'I will get a good grade on my logic exam.' Her lack of confidence rears its ugly head and she suspends her judgment on *p*, *merely hoping* for *p*. Maeve's hope is licensed by (FIT) because her evidence does not clash with her hope. In fact, she's in the same epistemic situation as the party planner described earlier. But,

Maeve's *mere* hope seems irrational given her evidence. She should believe *p*, with confidence, and not resort to mere hope.

A permissive evidentialist is definitely stuck with the view that Maeve's hoping that she passes the exam fits with her evidence, and is therefore acceptable. Although this seems problematic, the permissive evidentialist has the resources to explain why Maeve's cognitive outlook is nevertheless irrational. Her lack of confidence, if pervasive, will prevent her from achieving wisdom. If her lack of confidence gets in the way of forming epistemically justified beliefs, she'll fail to satisfy (EW2). So, although the permissive evidentialist does not have the resources to criticize Maeve's hope in this case, the permissive evidentialist does have the resources to criticize her cognitive outlook in virtue of her epistemically unjustified doxastic attitudes. I think that is a satisfactory response, and I think permissive evidentialism is an attractive component of an adequate theory of wisdom.

## 16.9 Caution About Hope

Before concluding, it is important to take another look at premise (3). Are wise people frequently hopeful? Hope, like many virtues, can be rational and irrational. Hope has the power to contribute to a well-lived and wise life. However, it would be naïve to conclude that hope is always wise. Hope can lead us into a lot of trouble. For example, a hopeful version, rather than an accurate version, of people can lead to unhealthy and unhappy relationships. We owe it to ourselves, and to those whom we befriend, to understand them for who they are, not some fantasy we project upon them. Hope can cloud our vision of the facts that are standing clearly in front of us. Focusing on the facts available is essential for wisdom and when hope gets in our way, we need to push it aside. Thus, although some kinds of hope are important for wisdom, it is important to not overestimate the role of hope, and the other positive attitudes mentioned earlier, in the achievement of wisdom. Thus, premise (3) is acceptable, but to be accepted with caution about the extent that hope contributes to wisdom.

## 16.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, The Problem of Hope is an argument that attempts to show that evidentialist theories of wisdom are hopeless. Evidentialism, with its insistence of confining one's beliefs to one's evidence, appears to rule out various alleged virtues, including hope. I have argued that when hope is virtuous, it is not ruled out by evidentialist theories of wisdom. When hope is not virtuous, it is ruled out by evidentialist theories of wisdom. Therefore, the Problem of Hope is solved and we see that evidentialist theories of wisdom are not hopeless.

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# Chapter 17

## A Central Role for Epistemic Virtues in Evidentialism



Sarah Wright

**Abstract** Evidentialism and virtue epistemology might be taken to present two competing theories of epistemic justification. However, Jason Baehr has recently argued that evidentialism gives its best account of justification when it is grounded in the epistemic virtues. Baehr is thus arguing that epistemic virtues are an important adjunct to evidentialism. I push this connection further by arguing that epistemic virtues play an essential role in a plausible account of the evidential relation. Thus, epistemic virtues are essential to the very heart of evidentialism.

**Keywords** Epistemic virtue · Evidential relation · Reliabilism · Responsibility · Skill · Virtue epistemology

What roles can epistemic virtues play within an evidentialist account of epistemic justification? Jason Baehr has recently argued that we need to supplement evidentialism with a virtue-based constraint on the ways we collect and use evidence. His argument depends on a number of examples constructed so that the evidence available to the central character supports a conclusion that would be undermined had that character collected or used evidence in a more virtuous way. The structure of these cases can be seen by looking at the first, and most simple case of what Baehr calls “defective inquiry.”

**Case 1.** George represents the epitome of intellectual laziness, apathy, and obliviousness . . . He lacks any natural curiosity and is almost entirely tuned out to the news of the day . . . Given his extremely narrow and practical focus, George is oblivious to all of the well-publicized research indicating the hazards of secondhand smoke. In fact, George has positive evidence in support of his belief. He recalls having learned from a reliable source some years ago that a considerable amount of research had been conducted concerning the effects of exposure to secondhand smoke and that this research had failed to establish any correlation between such exposure and any serious health problems. And, as far as George

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knows, the research on this topic has not changed. Nor, we may suppose, does he have any reason to think that it might have changed. (2011, 70)

Baehr asks us to consider George's belief that secondhand smoke poses no health risks. Is this belief justified? Baehr thinks it is clear that it is not. We should not accept that George's belief is justified, even though it might be supported by his limited evidence. But what must the evidentialist say about cases like these? Baehr points out that they seem to be committed to saying that George's belief is justified. Here is a recent expression of the central claim of evidentialism as expressed by Conee and Feldman:

E: S is justified in believing p at t iff S's evidence at t on balance supports p (2008, 83)

At t, George has limited evidence about the dangers of smoking. The evidence that he has is limited to his memory of having learned from a trusted source that secondhand smoke is not dangerous, along with the lack of any reason to think that the research has changed. This small body of evidence on balance supports George's belief secondhand smoke does not pose any health risks. So the evidentialist is driven to the problematic conclusion that George's belief is justified. Baehr argues that this case, along with others, reveals a problem with simple evidentialism; there must be something other than the support by evidence required for justified belief.

Baehr anticipates that the evidentialist might respond by clarifying their focus is on propositional, as opposed to doxastic justification. While there are many questions related to justification, the evidentialist focuses on the question that they take to be central. What is a person justified in believing on the basis of the evidence that the person has now? Baehr argues that even if this is a coherent conception of a kind of justification, it is a form of justification that lacks epistemic value. Simply believing in accordance with one's evidence is not sufficient for generating a kind of justification worth having. Rather, he thinks that a valuable kind of epistemic justification must, at minimum, ensure that the evidence relevant to justification be gathered in a non-vicious way. He proposes a way to include just such a restriction in the basic claim of evidentialism, updating it to:

(E\*) S is justified in believing P at T if and only if S's evidence at T appears to S to support P, *provided that* if S's agency makes a salient contribution to S's evidential situation with respect to P, S functions, qua agent and relative to that contribution, in a manner consistent with intellectual virtue. (Baehr 2011, 82)

While this updated version of evidentialism is more stringent, its requirements are not as high as one might think. In particular, Baehr's restriction on evidentialism does not require the individual to be virtuous or to exercise virtues in their gathering of evidence. It only requires that they act as the virtuous person would.

Baehr's modified evidentialism uses intellectual virtues to restrict the way we collect (or forget) evidence. His addition of a virtue-linked constraint is not intended to touch the fundamental nature of evidentialism, but rather to act as an important adjunct to it. It does not affect the nature of propositional justification, but rather questions the value of bare propositional justification and suggests that the more

robust sort of non-vicious justification is a more fitting object of positive epistemic evaluation.

I want to extend Baehr's argument by pointing out ways that there might be a role for epistemic virtue in our evaluation of evidence. Or, even deeper, a role for epistemic virtues to play in constituting what is evidence. If epistemic virtues play these roles, then they would be required even for the most purely evidentialist propositional justification.

## 17.1 Epistemic Virtue

Following Jason Baehr I will be using a responsibilist model of the epistemic virtues. Responsibilist and reliabilist views can be contrasted on the basis of what each believes makes the virtues virtuous. Reliabilist virtue epistemologists focus on the output of a natural ability or developed skill, judging it to be a virtue only if it reliably produces true beliefs; they are willing to class good eyesight and open-mindedness together as epistemic virtues. Responsibilists on the other hand characterize the epistemic virtues in a way that is more parallel with traditional accounts of the moral virtues. Though good eyesight is a good source of true belief, we neither praise nor blame someone for their eyesight; good vision does not make a person a better person. Epistemic virtues, on the other hand do make a person a good person. Baehr insists that the responsibilist epistemic virtues should be limited to those character traits that are reflected in the evaluation of the person who possesses them.<sup>1</sup> This excludes eyesight, but includes open-mindedness insofar as the possessor of that trait has developed it as part of their overall character.

Historically, Aristotelians about moral virtue have drawn a distinction between virtues and skills. This distinction has been adopted by some responsibilist virtue epistemologists, notably Linda Zagzebski.<sup>2</sup> But Aristotelian virtue theory is an outlier in insisting on a strong division between virtue and skill; much ancient discussion of moral virtue takes practical skills (*techne*) as an appropriate model for the virtues. Julia Annas (2014) is one of a number of virtue ethicists who has argued for a return to the skill model of virtue. This skill model can be used in virtue epistemology as well.<sup>3</sup> It provides a natural explanation for the positive evaluation we give those with virtues. If virtues are skills that have been carefully developed, they have the capacity to reflect well on their possessor. Thus the skill and positive evaluation elements of the moral and epistemic virtues have a natural connection. This is the model of the epistemic virtues that I will be using in this paper. Epistemic virtues are developed cognitive skills that are reflected in our evaluation of the person who possesses them.

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<sup>1</sup>Baehr (2011), particularly Chaps. 6 and 7.

<sup>2</sup>Zagzebski (1996).

<sup>3</sup>As I have recently argued in Wright (2018).



Finally, I want to point out that I am not working with a canonical list of named epistemic virtues. Much work has recently been done in exploring individual epistemic virtues about which we have a robust and distinctive conception. Accounts have been given of open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and intellectual humility. This work has helped to develop our understanding of the particular virtues and the nature of epistemic virtues generally. However there may well be epistemic virtues for which we do not have names or clearly demarcated conceptions. I want to be open to this possibility and insist that we count any developed cognitive skill which contributes to the positive evaluation of the possessor as an epistemic virtue, regardless of whether we have a clear label for that virtue.

## 17.2 Sleeping Beauty Problem and the Role of Cognitive Skill in Evaluating Evidence

In exploring the role of the epistemic virtues in evaluating evidence, we may find puzzling and paradoxical cases a good entry; they are cases in which the evaluation of evidence is not straightforward, and so the mechanisms of evidence evaluation may be better revealed than in simple cases. I think that the Sleeping Beauty Problem is a puzzling case that is helpful to consider here.

Here is the set-up of the Sleeping Beauty problem<sup>4</sup>: On Sunday night, experimenters will put Beauty to sleep for two days. At the same time, the experimenters will flip a coin. If the coin comes up heads, then the experimenters will awaken Beauty just for a few hours on Monday. If the coin comes up tails, then they will also awaken Beauty for a few hours on Monday; then they will use an amnesia drug to erase her memory of this waking; they will awaken her again on Tuesday in a circumstance subjectively indistinguishable from the circumstance in which she awoke on Monday.

Now, the commonly asked question is, when Beauty awakens, what probability should she assign to the claim (TAILS) that result of the coin flip was tails? There are two *prima facie* plausible answers to this question.

One answer is that Beauty should assign probability  $\frac{1}{2}$  to TAILS. In favor of this answer one might note that in most circumstances one would say that this coin has probability  $\frac{1}{2}$  of coming up tails when flipped, and one might reasonably doubt that there is anything special about Beauty's case which would call for her to make a different attribution. David Lewis (2001) has defended this answer.

An alternative answer has it that, when Beauty awakens, she should assign probability  $\frac{2}{3}$  to TAILS. Two general lines of argument have been offered in support of this answer. First, Elga (2000) observes that over many repetitions of the scenario the ratio of tails-wakings to total-wakings would be 2:3. In addition, several authors have argued that this position follows naturally from commonly accepted

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<sup>4</sup>This problem was presented by Adam Elga in his 2000.

Bayesian claims about how one should update one's probabilities in light of new information.

Part of the debate between those who give the  $\frac{1}{2}$  and those who give the  $\frac{2}{3}$  answer in this puzzling case has to do with how Beauty should treat her own awakening. Is it evidence that tells in favor of TAILS? Those who answer  $\frac{2}{3}$  think so. After all, since she will awaken two times if the coin comes up tails, awakening seems to be evidence that the coin came up that way. But those who answer  $\frac{1}{2}$  argue that while Beauty does have some new self-locating evidence upon waking ("It is now either Monday or Tuesday"), she doesn't gain any new evidence about the coin flip. Being awakened by the experimenters was something she anticipated, and she knew it would happen regardless of whether the coin came up heads or tails. Thus awakening doesn't provide Beauty with new evidence about TAILS.

My aim here is not to defend a particular answer to the Sleeping Beauty Problem, but rather to note that it represents a case in which uncovering which propositions are evidence for other propositions is difficult. Though the different participants in this debate clearly see the evidential relations in a particular way, those ways are in conflict and there is no knock-down argument in favor of one side over the other. Rather, the choice of what counts as evidence in this case requires refined judgement on the part of the person assessing that evidence. Even if one is forced to make a choice, the argument for the other position can still be persuasive. The choice, based on arguments, requires the use of developed cognitive skills, or epistemic virtues.

Another way to think of the lesson of the Sleeping Beauty Problem is to characterize it as an issue of partitioning or of deciding which predicates are projectable. The  $\frac{1}{2}$  answer to the Sleeping Beauty Problem focuses on ways that the world might be: either the coin came up heads or it came up tails. The  $\frac{2}{3}$  answer focuses on where in the narrative Beauty might be: she could be waking on Monday in a world where the coin came up heads, waking on Monday in a world where the coin came up tails, or waking on Tuesday in a world where the coin came up tails. A technical way to talk about this difference would be to say that the  $\frac{1}{2}$ 'er is focusing on possible worlds while the  $\frac{2}{3}$ 'er is focusing on centered possible worlds. The argument takes a very different turn depending on which of these kinds of worlds one chooses as their focus.

While the choice in the case of the Sleeping Beauty Problem between worlds and centered worlds may seem esoteric, it is only a particularly pointed example of a choice in focus that we make whenever we reason in accordance with the evidence. Emmie observes the color of an emerald at time  $t_1$ . Does her observation provide evidence for the claim that all emeralds are green? Or rather does it provide evidence for the claim that all emeralds are *grue*? Though counterintuitive, the *grue* hypothesis fits her evidence equally well as the green hypothesis. When we reason as we ordinarily would from the observation to the green generalization we are making a choice in the way we partition the world. Though we don't often notice it, we are

always facing a choice about which predicates to use in our reasoning.<sup>5</sup> That choice of predicates then influences the evidential relations between our observations and our theories.

The choice of the correct projectable predicates is itself a skillful judgement. This judgment cannot be determined by evidence alone, since the evidence that someone has at a particular moment could always be related to a slightly different set of predicates in the same evidential support relation. Instead there must be judgment about what is the best set of predicates to use, and this judgment goes beyond a mere following of evidence. Instead the selection of predicates is a skill, one that we develop through practice. While the developed cognitive skill is often so natural that we fail to notice that we are using it, we can reveal the existence and necessity of this skill when we consider puzzling cases where its work is more difficult and hence easier to examine.

So far I have given some general considerations to think that developed cognitive skills play an ineliminable role in our evaluation of evidence. Next I turn from the general to the specific, and show how explanationism, as a version of evidentialism, depends essentially on the skillful evaluation of what is the best explanation.

### 17.3 The Explanationist Version of Evidentialism

As we have seen above, the central claim of evidentialism connects justification and evidential support. While this connection clearly defines a class of views, until a more detailed account of evidential support is given this claim won't be able to pin-point a fully developed version of evidentialism. Kevin McCain has recently been working to develop just such an account of evidential support. His account follows suggestions by Conee and Felman that we should understand evidential support in terms of the best explanation; a proposition is supported by the evidence when that proposition is part of the best explanation for why the epistemic agent has that evidence.<sup>6</sup> Building on this suggestion, McCain develops what he calls "Explanationist Evidentialism." This version of evidentialism is intended to capture the spirit of the "best explanation" account, while at the same time avoiding objections that have been raised to it. McCain's most recent presentation of explanationism is as follows.

Explanationism: A person, *S*, with evidence *e* at time *t* is justified in believing *p* at *t* if and only if at *t* *S* has considered *p*, and: (i) *p* is part of the best explanation available to *S* at *t* for why *S* has *e* or (ii) *p* is available to *S* as an explanatory consequence of the best explanation available to *S* at *t* for why *S* has *e*. (2016, 163)

<sup>5</sup>In Schmidtz and Wright (2004) we argued that a choice about how to partition world-states is a pre-requisite to applying any formal decision theory.

<sup>6</sup>Conee and Feldman (2008).

Clause (i) captures the heart of this account while clause (ii) allows McCain to avoid objections that center around evidential relations that follow explanations in the opposite direction. The angle of the sun may explain the length of the shadow (and not vice versa) but the length of the shadow is still evidence for the angle of the sun. While avoiding these technical pitfalls, the theory still needs to provide an account of *availability* of an explanation. McCain emphasizes that availability requires being able to construct an explanation without seeking out further information, and he connects this phenomenon with our general ability to understand a theory.<sup>7</sup>

## 17.4 How Duhem Presents Three Potential Problems for Explanationist Evidentialism

David Stump has recently argued that Pierre Duhem is best understood as presenting a virtue epistemology in response to the problems facing empirical testing that he is well-known for.<sup>8</sup> Rather than suggesting that the work of the physicist can be governed by rules of evidence, Duhem instead argues that scientists must depend on their *bon sens* or good judgment. Duhem argues that pursuit of truth, “calls for moral qualities: rectitude, probity, detachment from all interest and all passions.”<sup>9</sup> It is these connections to skilled reasoning and moral virtues upon which Stump interprets Duhem as favoring what would now be called a virtue epistemology. We can see the role of the epistemic virtues most clearly when we divide the problems that Duhem identified in scientific testing into three categories, show why each might present a problem for the evidentialist (particularly the explanationist), and then look to the virtue-based solution that Stump finds in Duhem’s work for each.

The first problem that Duhem recognized was that of generating hypotheses that fit the existing data. While we may naturally be led into particular ways of generalizing from existing cases, those who advance science need to be able to generate novel hypotheses, and this requires creativity. While Duhem recognizes this as a challenge in science, it is important to realize that we face the problem of generating novel hypotheses whenever we are looking for an explanation for a set of evidence; generating hypothesis and having them available is an essential part of the explanationist picture.

Consider an ordinary case of explanation and prediction. Lenny believes that his favorite local baseball team, the Isotopes, are going to win the championship this year. He believes this on the basis of positive evidence: the Isotopes won last year’s championship, they have a history of being the dominant team in the region, and they won their first few games this season. However, since then the Isotopes have

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<sup>7</sup>McCain (2016, 165).

<sup>8</sup>Stump (2007).

<sup>9</sup>Duhem (1991, 43).

lost every game they have played. Lenny's love of the Isotopes makes it impossible for him to even consider the possibility that they won't win the championship this year; the only explanation of the existing evidence that is available to him is that they will win.<sup>10</sup> And this hypothesis does explain the evidence; pick a point in the season where there is still a robust set of evidence consistent with the claim that the Isotopes will win. Still, imagine that, if Lenny were able to consider the hypothesis that they might lose, his evidence would better support that hypothesis.

Is Lenny justified in believing the Isotopes will win? His evidence supports this hypothesis and he has no other available hypothesis. Yet, like George in Baehr's example, Lenny is maintaining the relationship between his hypothesis and the evidence only through what looks like epistemic vice. George's intellectual laziness limits his evidence so that it supports the wrong conclusion; Lenny's closed-mindedness limits his available explanations so that his preferred explanation is best supported by the evidence. In both cases, the belief is not justified even though it is the available explanation that best fits the evidence. The quality of the evidence and the explanations available matter to justification, in addition to the bare relation of evidential support. Since availability of explanations depends on the creativity and open-mindedness of the believer, the epistemic virtues have a role to play in justified belief, even on an explanationist evidentialist theory.

Note that this is a result of explanationism introducing a personal element into the heart of evidentialism and even into propositional justification. For the explanations that are available to one person may not be available to another. This difference between two people might be explained by the theories they have been exposed to; someone with a richer theoretical background will have more building blocks at their disposal in constructing an explanation. A difference in background information can lead to a difference in justification, and this is not surprising. What might be more surprising is that ability also seems to play a central role here. Even two individuals with all the same evidence, including the theoretical background that they can access, might still differ in the explanations available to them. The more skilled reasoner might be able to put together information in more complex ways, and as a result the explanations that she is able to generate might go far beyond the explanations available to the more limited reasoner. This perfectly ordinary observation, when combined with explanationism yields the result that even pure propositional justification does not depend on evidence alone. This account of justification is not subject independent. Note that this subjective element does not depend on any subjective evaluation of the goodness or badness of an explanation, but can come directly from the requirement of *availability* of explanations.

What then of the evaluative component of explanationism which requires that the proposition justified be part of the *best* explanation of the evidence? This

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<sup>10</sup>Note that Lenny has the conceptual apparatus to consider the possibility of the Isotopes losing; he understands the nature of the game and the concept of losing the championship. His inability to consider the hypothesis that the Isotopes will lose is a psychological one. It is because his limitation is psychological, not conceptual, that he seems to be criticizable (see the next paragraph) for not considering a relevant hypothesis.

evaluative element seems a natural home to look for the influence of epistemic virtues. Contrarily, if the comparative evaluation of explanations could be carried out in an objective or algorithmic manner, that would seem to leave little room for a more subjective or skill-based element of evaluation. However, the hope of such an algorithm of evaluation is undermined by the problem of underdetermination of theory by evidence.

This is the second problem that Stump identifies Duhem as addressing in empirical testing. Underdetermination of theory by evidence means that there will always be multiple theories compatible with the existing evidence. Our further testing may be able to falsify individual theories, but this will never lead to a winnowing down to a single best theory fitting the evidence. Those who are creative in their generation of hypotheses can always make a plurality of hypotheses that fit the existing evidence equally well, but which make different predictions for future evidence. Our ability to multiply theories in this way means that we cannot find a single theory, or even class of theories, that best fits the evidence.

Underdetermination of theory by evidence presents a potential problem for the explanationist evidentialist. What if there is no one best explanation? McCain's proposed version of explanationism is ready to address this issue. He explicitly notes that he is not requiring that there is a single best explanation, but rather allowing that there might be one or more explanations that are equally good. If there are competing best explanations,  $p$  will be justified by  $e$  only if  $p$  is part of *all* the best explanations of  $e$ .<sup>11</sup> In many cases, competing explanations may be trivial variants of each other; if so, then  $S$  is justified in believing all the statements upon which the variants agree. When such convergence happens, we have a happy outcome;  $S$  is justified in believing a number of propositions. But when the competing explanations are radically different, this will leave few beliefs justified by evidence. While we might hope for convergence in hypotheses, underdetermination shows us that we cannot guarantee it on the basis of the evidential fit alone.

As an example consider Lenny when he was looking at the Isotopes' record near the end of last year's season. He might reasonably see a pattern of many wins through the season and might predict, on that evidence, that the Isotopes would win the championship this year. This hypothesis seems to explain his total evidence well, and so be justified on the basis on that evidence. However, if he were sufficiently creative, he might recognize that there are a wide range of hypotheses equally consistent with this track record: perhaps each one of the Isotopes' wins this year was just lucky, perhaps they have only been playing low-ranked teams, perhaps the team members are all poised to "choke" in their play for the rest of the season, etc. Lenny only needs to generate a single alternative hypothesis that explains his evidence at least as well as the hypothesis that the Isotopes will win in order to undermine his justification for his belief. This example shows that explanationism when limited to considerations of simple evidential fit and paired with a robust

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<sup>11</sup>McCain (2016, 164).

underdetermination thesis runs the risk of leading to skeptical conclusions about much of our justified belief.

What is needed to address underdetermination and the skepticism that it can generate is a recognition of the role of developed judgment in evaluating explanations. This judgement may involve not just sensitivity to the evidence, but also considerations of simplicity, explanatory power, and scope; it is undermined by the *ad hocness* of particular hypotheses that are simply constructed to take advantage of underdetermination. This judgment cannot be carried out by an algorithm. As Duhem notes, the good judgement of the scientist plays an ineliminable role here. Stump highlights Duhem's claim that:

No doubt the physicist will choose between these logically equivalent theories, but the motives which will dictate his choice will be considerations of elegance, simplicity, and convenience, and grounds of suitability which are essentially subjective, contingent, and variable with time, with schools, and with persons . . . (Duhem 288)

These features of theories are often identified as theoretical virtues in part because, like moral virtues or epistemic virtues, they are positive evaluations that resist codification; while we might share our judgements about the virtues of theories, there is no way that we can explicitly spell out the requirements of an injunction like, "Choose the simplest theory." Furthermore, we don't value hypotheses only on the basis of a single theoretical virtue; rather the evaluation of a hypothesis requires balancing the demands of a number of competing theoretical virtues. This balance requires both the skillful recognition of the theoretical virtues and the skillful balancing of this value in one's overall evaluation. How can we make these judgments?

As Stump notes, Duhem's good judgment generally shares a number of relevant features with current conceptions of the epistemic virtues. In addition, we might note that the skill of balancing the demands of different theoretical virtues bears a strong resemblance to the role of *phronesis* in balancing the demands of the moral virtues. Although *phronesis* is less discussed in the literature on epistemic virtues, it is clear that something like *phronesis* will be required to help us understand the ways that the epistemic virtues work together. Something like *phronesis* will also be required to help us understand the relationship between theoretical virtues. The person with practical wisdom will be able to make good judgements in evaluating competing hypotheses on the basis of their interrelated theoretical virtues. The person with the epistemic virtues, including practical wisdom, is then in the best position to evaluate explanations; as a result, she is more likely to be able to pick out a single hypothesis (or set of closely related hypotheses) as the best explanation(s). The person with practical wisdom is thus in a position to avoid the skepticism that results from underdetermination.

Turning to the third problem that Stump finds in Duhem's work, we see the holism that generates the problem that we now call the Quine-Duhem (Q-D) thesis. This thesis makes the problem of underdetermination of theory by evidence even more thorny. Underdetermination is compatible with the possibility that we might still falsify any number of theories. This is a kind of progress, as we are at least

able to know which theories we must abandon, even if we cannot reach a unique theory to embrace. But, as Duhem noted "... the physicist can never subject an isolated hypothesis to experimental test, but only a whole group of hypotheses."<sup>12</sup> Once we recognize the role of auxiliary hypotheses in generating predictions from theories, we can also see a way to protect any desired theory from falsification. We can instead reject or modify our auxiliary hypotheses. The Q-D thesis shows us a kind of holism about the way that our theories confront evidence. This holism cannot be resolved through the introduction of further rules about evidence. Sometimes, perhaps most often, the appropriate response to contrary evidence is to change one's beliefs and theories. Yet there are other times when the appropriate response involves a search for sources of error, a questioning of one's calculations, or the inspection of a potentially problematic assumption. Duhem believes that we need good judgement to make the decision between these two responses, as both are rational and consistent with the evidence.

The holism of the Q-D thesis presents the basis for an even more profound kind of skepticism for the explanationist. It generates underdetermination not just of the theory by evidence, but also of the evidence itself. Continuing our earlier example we noted above that the Isotopes' record in their good season was compatible with hypotheses that predicted their losing. But what if we question that evidence itself? A holist set on rooting against the Isotopes might insist that we question our auxiliary hypotheses, such as the way we are receiving information: perhaps the referees were paid to record only wins for the team despite the fact that they lost, perhaps the local paper has been mis-reporting the outcomes of these games, perhaps the Isotopes have been replaced by a set of ringers playing a joke on the local populous, etc. Once we recognize that evidence confronts hypotheses in a holistic way, we may question our auxiliary hypotheses, allowing an even wider range of explanations to be compatible with the evidence. Some of these explanations will be worse than others, but if we remember that holistic explanations can make use of any relevant information in forming the auxiliary hypotheses, we can construct more plausible holistic explanations. If the local paper has a bad track record and a recent scandal, the more plausible auxiliary hypothesis may be that the scores were mis-reported; if a local business owner had a large bet on the earlier games of the season, the more plausible auxiliary hypothesis may be that the Isotopes were replaced by ringers. So long as we can generate an equally good, but competing holistic explanation of the evidence, explanationism would be forced to an even more widespread skepticism on anything about which these explanations don't agree.

Duhem's own attitude to this problem was not skeptical, but rather hopeful. Stump points out that Duhem believed that consensus in science will emerge even though we face the problems of holism.<sup>13</sup> This optimism can only be based on

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<sup>12</sup>Duhem (1954, 187).

<sup>13</sup>Duhem's optimism even in the light of the problems of holism demonstrates that he does not think that underdetermination or holism present convincing arguments for anti-realism. (McCain



an important role in theory choice for the scientists of good judgement. Holism brings in more variables to the choice between theories, requiring us to consider the theoretical virtues of each hypothesis and each auxiliary hypothesis. It also introduces new theoretical virtues such as fit with the best theories in a range of sciences. Even the most simple hypothesis in one field may face a problem if it conflicts with well-established theories in another discipline. As a result, the task of weighting and balancing the values of the theoretical virtues becomes a difficult one; this difficulty calls for even more practical wisdom if it is to be resolved. And Duhem thought that the confusion that the complexity of holism engenders could be resolved.

In any event this state of indecision does not last forever. The day arrives when good sense comes out so clearly in favor of one of the two sides that the other side gives up the struggle even though pure logic would not forbid its continuation. (Duhem 1954, p. 218)

The skilled judgment of the scientist is then needed to resolve the problems engendered by holism. Duhem was explicit that logic alone cannot play this role. Even complicated algorithms weighing the benefits of hypotheses cannot do this work. At the end of the day the scientist must make a judgment, and doing so well depends on his having developed his cognitive skill in doing so. The scientist in his most difficult weighing of evidence depends on the epistemic virtues, particularly that of practical wisdom.

## 17.5 Conclusions

Do the examples and problems discussed here show that epistemic virtue needs to be added as an adjunct to evidentialism to make it a complete theory of epistemic justification – as Baehr argues? Or do they reveal a more central and foundational role for the epistemic virtues in evidentialism? I believe that the issue of how we can address the Sleeping Beauty problem in addition to Stump’s interpretation of Duhem as a virtue epistemologist should lead us to the more radical conclusion. The epistemic virtues are an essential component of the evidential relation itself. Rather than the epistemically virtuous person simply being good at picking out an evidential relationship in the world, the epistemic virtues themselves partially constitute the evidential relation. In cases of underdetermination of the theory by evidence and holism, there is no rule-based answer to the question “Which theory does this evidence support?” Rather the relationship of evidential support is one that is generated by the reasoning and skills of the epistemically virtuous person.

This conclusion should be weakened a bit by noting, as Baehr has, that we need not require that all those reasoning on the basis of complex evidence possess the

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addresses anti-realist underdetermination arguments in his 2016, 266–269.) Rather than a reason to go anti-realist, Duhem’s characterization of these problems instead invites us to recognize the role of the judgment of the scientist in theory choice.

epistemic virtues themselves. But reasoning well in light of one's evidence means reasoning as the epistemically virtuous person would do. This, we might conclude is the role of the expert scientist in Duhem's picture of empirical testing; we can't all be experts, but we can aspire to reason as they do.<sup>14</sup>

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# Chapter 18

## Whither Evidentialist Reliabilism?



Juan Comesaña

**Abstract** Evidentialism and Reliabilism are two of the main contemporary theories of epistemic justification. Some authors have thought that the theories are not incompatible with each other, and that a hybrid theory which incorporates elements of both should be taken into account. In this paper I review the reasons for adopting this kind of hybrid theory, paying attention to the case of credences and the notion of probability involved in their treatment. I argue that the notion of probability in question can only be an epistemic (or evidential) kind of probability. I conclude that the theory that results from the right combination of Evidentialism and Reliabilism is neither Evidentialist nor Reliabilist.

**Keywords** Credences · Epistemic probability · Evidentialism · Evidential probability · Hybrid theory · Reliabilism

### 18.1 Introduction

Evidentialism and Reliabilism are two of the main contemporary theories of epistemic justification. Some authors have thought that the theories are not incompatible with each other, and that a hybrid theory which incorporates elements of both should be taken into account.<sup>1</sup> More recently, other authors have argued that the resulting theory is well-placed to deal with fine-grained doxastic attitudes (credences).<sup>2</sup>

In this paper I review the reasons for adopting this kind of hybrid theory, paying attention to the case of credences and the notion of probability involved in their

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<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, Comesaña (2010a, b), and Goldman (2011). An important precursor is Alston (1988) (although Alston doesn't explicitly discuss Evidentialism).

<sup>2</sup>See Dunn (2015), Tang (2016b) and Pettigrew (ms).

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treatment. I argue that the notion of probability in question can only be an epistemic (or evidential) kind of probability. I conclude that the resulting theory will be incompatible with Reliabilism in one important respect: it cannot deliver on the reductivist promise of Reliabilism. I also argue that attention to the justification of basic beliefs reveals limitations in the Evidentialist framework as well. The theory that results from the right combination of Evidentialism and Reliabilism, therefore, is neither Evidentialist nor Reliabilist.

## 18.2 Evidentialism

Evidentialism has been defined by Conee and Feldman (1985) as follows:

**Evidentialism:** Doxastic attitude D toward proposition p is epistemically justified for S at t if and only if having D toward p fits the evidence S has at t.

Three questions need to be answered before we have a full understanding of Evidentialism: what kinds of things can *be* evidence?; what is it for subject to *have* some evidence?; and what is it for a body of evidence to *fit* a doxastic attitude?

Conee and Feldman themselves have a conception of evidence and its possession according to which two subjects in the same total (non-factive) mental states cannot differ in what evidence they possess. But one can combine Evidentialism with other conceptions of evidence and its possession and end up with a package of views which denies the supervenience of epistemic justification on (non-factive) mental states. For instance, if one thinks of evidence as consisting of true propositions or facts and its possession as consisting in knowledge, then two subjects can be in the same (non-factive) mental states and yet differ on what evidence they have.<sup>3,4</sup> A third option is to say that evidence consists of propositions, and that experiences

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<sup>3</sup>The equation of evidence with knowledge is from Williamson (2000), and the parenthetical regarding non-factive mental states is designed to make room for Williamson's own conception of knowledge as itself a mental state. In what follows I omit the qualification.

<sup>4</sup>Supervenience may be too weak a notion to capture the essence of Evidentialism. The traditional definition of supervenience, applied to our case, is simply that there cannot be a difference as to what attitudes are justified for some subjects without there being a difference as to which evidence those subjects have. Combined with a mentalist conception of evidence and its possession, this yields the further supervenience thesis to the effect that there cannot be a difference as to which attitudes are justified for some subjects without a difference in the mental states they are in. But, plausibly, the Evidentialist and the Mentalist want more than mere supervenience: they may want not just the existence of a mere co-variation, but a *constitutive* relation between justification and evidence. If it turns out, say, that justification and mental states co-vary in the requisite way only because they in turn co-vary with a third condition, the resulting view need not be particularly friendly to Evidentialism. An analogy may help bring the point home. Suppose that we define Physicalism as the thesis that every fact supervenes on physical facts. That thesis is compatible with Cartesian substance dualism, as long as the non-physical stuff exists necessarily. Maybe the supervenience thesis is interesting in its own right, but conceiving of physicalism as compatible with substance dualism does not get the spirit of the view right. Analogously, one would have

(even when non-veridical) provide these propositions as evidence.<sup>5</sup> This is in fact the position I favor, and I will come back to it below.

One kind of mentalist Evidentialism (at least inspired by Conee and Feldman), then, would answer our three questions as follows: evidence is constituted by mental states, in particular by justified beliefs and experiences; a subject has some evidence just in case he is in the relevant mental state; and the fitting relation between bodies of evidence and doxastic attitudes is a primitive, non-reducible epistemic fact.<sup>6</sup> Notice the apparent circularity in the answer to the first question: Evidentialism has it that justification supervenes on evidence, and we are told that justified beliefs can be evidence. This circularity is benign provided that one thinks justification has a recursive structure. In very rough terms, the idea is that experience (together perhaps with ostensible memories) provides us with *prima facie* non-inferential justification, and beliefs thus justified by experience can combine to produce further justified doxastic attitudes. I come back to this issue below.

Evidentialism is a theory of *propositional* justification—of what it is for a doxastic attitude to be justified for a subject, independently of whether the subject adopts that attitude. We also need a theory of *doxastic* justification—of what it takes for an attitude to be justifiably adopted. It won't do just to say that an attitude is doxastically justified just in case it is propositionally justified and adopted: subjects may adopt the right attitudes for the wrong reasons. Conee and Feldman themselves propose the following theory of “well-foundedness” to add to their Evidentialism:

S's doxastic attitude D at t toward proposition p is well-founded if and only if:

- (i) having D toward p is justified for S at t; and
- (ii) S has D toward p on the basis of some body of evidence e, such that
  - (a) S has e as evidence at t;
  - (b) having D toward p fits e; and
  - (c) there is no more inclusive body of evidence e' had by S at t such that having D toward p does not fit e'.

Notice that Conee and Feldman are relying here on the notion of basing an attitude on a body of evidence. The Evidentialist notion of well-foundedness is thus importantly different from the Evidentialist notion of justification. To see the difference, consider the Williamsonian theory of evidence briefly alluded to earlier: items of evidence are facts, and they are possessed by a subject when they are known by that subject. That Williamsonian theory of evidence, as we said before, is compatible with at least the letter of Evidentialism. On the Williamsonian view, a

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thought that Evidentialism would have to be incompatible with non-evidential facts determining epistemic justification, even when they obtain necessarily.

<sup>5</sup>For a development of this view, see Comesaña and McGrath (2014, 2016).

<sup>6</sup>Conee and Feldman themselves hold that there is no such thing as unpossessed evidence. They seem to think of evidence, then, as *token*, instantiated mental states, rather than uninstantiated types—see Conee and Feldman (2008).

proposition can be justified for a subject by either being sufficiently supported by the evidence the subject has or by being part of that evidence (in which case it trivially counts as being sufficiently supported by the evidence).<sup>7</sup> There will therefore be no difference in the justificatory status of any proposition for any subjects without a difference in the evidence possessed by those subjects. Suppose, however, that we add to that kind of the theory the claim that one can be justified in believing the propositions which are part of one's evidence even if one does not base that belief on any evidence. Indeed, barring controversial cases of higher-order evidence, justification for believing the propositions which are part of one's evidence will in general require that one *not* base those beliefs on any evidence. Rather, those basic beliefs will be the result of direct knowledge by different modalities, for instance by looking. When you know that there is a snowball in front of you because you see it, it is part of your evidence that there is a snowball in front of you, and you are justified in believing that there is a snowball in front of you, but your belief that there is a snowball in front of you is not based on any evidence you have (your belief is certainly not based on itself, and you may have no other relevant evidence). The resulting view, however, is not compatible with the well-foundedness theory of basing, for that theory requires that all of one's justified beliefs be based on evidence. I return to this important issue below.

Why the need for clause (ii)(c)? Conee and Feldman's idea here is that even if the part of the subject's evidence on which he bases his attitude does indeed fit that attitude, there may be other parts of his evidence which don't. Suppose, for instance, that I believe that Fred is older than 9, and that I base this belief on the evidence that I have that Fred has gray hair. Compatible with all that, it may also be part of my evidence that Fred suffers from a condition that may cause premature greying of the hair. Moreover, what matters is which attitude my *total* evidence justifies—for it may also be part of my evidence that Fred goes to college. In that case, my belief would be well-founded only if based on those three relevant pieces of evidence, and it wouldn't be if based only on the color of Fred's hair.<sup>8</sup>

One advantage of evidentialism and the accompanying notion of well-foundedness is that it applies to doxastic attitudes in general, and not just to beliefs. Thus, our evidence can fit disbeliefs and suspensions of judgments as well as beliefs, and they may also fit degrees of beliefs (credences).

One can have misgivings about different aspects of this kind of Evidentialism. The main worry that I am interested in now focuses on its primitivism, on the fact that it doesn't have much to say about why certain bodies of evidence "fit" certain doxastic attitudes. Reliabilism promises to deliver on precisely that front, but it faces problems of its own.

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<sup>7</sup>Williamson has recently added to his epistemology the claim that a body of evidence fully justifies a proposition only if it entails it—see Williamson (2013) and Williamson (forthcoming a), and cf. Cohen and Comesaña (2013, forthcoming) and Comesaña (2017).

<sup>8</sup>Depending on one's account of the basing relation, one may hold that the belief need not be based on an all three items of evidence. In any case, the main point is that the belief will not be justified if based only on the fact that Fred has gray hairs.

### 18.3 Reliabilism

Goldman (1979) is responsible for establishing Reliabilism as a theory of epistemic justification. A rough version of such Reliabilism has it that a belief is justified if and only if it is produced by a reliable belief-forming process. A bit less roughly, a belief is justified if and only if it is produced by a belief-independent belief-forming process and that process is reliable, or it is produced by a belief-dependent belief-forming process (i.e., a process some of whose inputs are the contents of some of the subject's beliefs) and that process is conditionally reliable (i.e., it tends to produce true beliefs given that its belief-dependent inputs are true).

Such Reliabilism is subject to three different kinds of objections. First, the objection that reliability is not necessary for justification. Second, the objection that reliability is not sufficient for justification. Third, the objection that we have no principled way of measuring the reliability of a belief-forming process. The first objection arises from Cohen's "new evil demon" problem (Cohen 1984), the second from BonJour's clairvoyant cases (BonJour 1980), and the third from Conee and Feldman's "generality problem" (Conee and Feldman (1998)—the problem was already noticed by Goldman (1979)).

The generality problem is more fundamental than the other two, because even formulating the other two problems presupposes an answer to the generality problem. The generality problem arises from the fact that any token belief-forming process will belong to an indefinite number of belief-forming process-types. It is usually assumed that reliability can only be defined for types, because types (but not tokens) are repeatable.<sup>9</sup> But if any token belongs to indefinitely many types, and if those types differ in reliability, then we need a principled way to select a type for each token. For instance, if I believe that it is precipitating based on my belief that it is raining, then the token process instantiates the type of believing a proposition on the basis of another proposition which entails it, but also the type of believing a proposition about the weather on the basis of another proposition about the weather, and the reliability of those two types differ substantially.

Once we have a solution to the generality problem (that is to say, once we have a principled way of associating each token belief-forming process with a type to be assessed for reliability) we need to figure out how the reliability of that type is evaluated. This will be the task of a later section.

Cohen's new evil-demon problem and BonJour's clairvoyant problem assume that we have a solution to the generality problem and an answer to the question of how to assess the reliability of belief-forming process-types. In particular, Cohen's new evil-demon problem assumes that the beliefs of a victim of an evil-demon are not produced by reliable belief-forming processes, and, given that they are justified, concludes that reliability is not necessary for justification. BonJour's clairvoyant problem assumes that the beliefs of a genuine clairvoyant are reliably produced,

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<sup>9</sup>Comesaña (2006) argues against this assumption that we can make sense of the reliability of a token process, but also notes that this will not help Reliabilists avoid the generality problem.

and, given that they are not justified, concludes that reliability is not sufficient for justification.

A different kind of objection is that whereas Reliabilism as developed can account (perhaps) for the justification of beliefs, it is not clear how to adapt it to other doxastic attitudes. Within the realm of coarse-grained epistemology, we could try the following: just as a belief is justified if the process that produced it is reliable, so too disbelief is justified if the process is anti-reliable (or, equivalently, if the process which produces the belief in the negation of the relevant proposition is reliable), and suspension of judgment is justified if the process is neither reliable nor anti-reliable. And within fine-grained epistemology, we could perhaps try the following: a degree of belief (or credence) is justified if and only if it matches the degree of reliability of the process that produced it. Those options might well work,<sup>10</sup> but they raise the same issue we touched upon above: how to measure the reliability of a belief-forming process-type. Before tackling that issue, however, we need a solution to the generality problem.

## 18.4 How to Solve the Generality Problem

Alston (1988) proposes a version of reliabilism according to which a belief is justified just in case it is based on an adequate ground, where the adequacy of a ground is a matter of its reliability. In place of Alston's grounds, we can invoke the notion of evidence. This will give us a principled way of selecting a type for each belief-forming process-type: the type *believing that p on the basis of e*. Remember that Evidentialists themselves appeal to this notion of basing in their account of well-foundedness. It is *that type* which should be assessed for reliability. This is what I proposed in Comesaña (2006). My proposal was the following:

**Well-Founded Reliabilism (first pass):** A belief that *p* by *S* is epistemically justified if and only if:

- (i) *S* has evidence *E*;
- (ii) the belief that *p* by *S* is based on *E*; and
- (iii) the type producing a belief that *p* based on evidence *E* is a reliable type.

That proposal, however, ignores the reasoning behind clause (ii)(c) of the evidentialist definition of well-foundedness. Recall the reason: if I base my belief on a subset of my evidence which justifies it, but ignoring some other evidence which I have which does not justify it, then my belief is not well-founded. Taking that into account yields the following refined version of well-founded reliabilism:

**Well-Founded Reliabilism:** A belief that *p* by *S* is epistemically justified if and only if:

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<sup>10</sup>Although see Tang (2016a) for more on how Reliabilists should capture suspension of judgment.



- (1) *S* has evidence *E*;
- (2) the belief that *p* by *S* is based on *E*;
- (3) the type *producing a belief that p based on evidence E* is a reliable type; and
- (4) there is no more inclusive body of evidence *E'* had by *S* at *t* such that the type *producing a belief that p based on evidence E'* is not a reliable type.

Notice that if we bracket clause 2, what is left is a definition of propositional justification for Reliabilism.

When assessing Evidentialism, we said that the theory needed an account of evidence and its possession. Well-founded Reliabilism inherits those needs, and the same options canvassed earlier are available here as well. In fact, however, a further development of Well-Founded Reliabilism will provide us with an argument for a specific account of evidence. I turn to that development next.

## 18.5 How to Measure Reliability

We have a solution to the generality problem insofar as we have a principled way of selecting a process-type for any token process of belief formation. But this doesn't yet give us a complete reliabilist theory, for we need to figure out how to measure the reliability of a process type.

One possible answer is to think of the reliability of a process as the truth-to-falsity ratio of its outputs. There are two varieties of this truth-ratio conception of reliability: reliability as actual high truth-ratio, or reliability as counterfactual high truth-ratio. The first one counts a process as reliable if and only if the ratio of truths to falsehoods within its actual outputs is sufficiently high, whereas the second one concerns not just actual truth-ratios but counterfactual ones as well. A counterfactual conception is preferable insofar as there may be processes which, although intuitively justification-conferring, do not have many actual outputs, and so their actual truth-ratio may be coincidentally low. Going to a counterfactual account of reliability is not without issues, however, because one needs to restrict the relevant range of counterfactual applications in order to not trivialize the account. This issue with the counterfactual account is reminiscent of the generality problem, for we need to decide which of the counterfactual applications of the process are the relevant ones to measure reliability.

A different measure of reliability has also been proposed by Alston (and used in Comesaña 2009): reliability as high conditional probability. The idea here is that a type of the form *believing that p based on e* is reliable if and only if, for some suitable probability function *Pr* and some suitable threshold *r*,  $Pr(p|e) \geq r$ . Two immediate questions about that approach are: what is a suitable probability function, and what is a suitable threshold? A third issue has to do with Carnap's distinction between confirmation as firmness and confirmation as increase in firmness.<sup>11</sup>  $Pr(p|e)$  can be greater than *r* even if *e* doesn't raise the probability of *p*—indeed,

<sup>11</sup> See the preface to the second edition of Carnap (1950).

for  $r < 1$  it can happen that  $r < Pr(p|e) < Pr(p)$ . If this is the case, then we can hardly say that it is  $e$  which justifies the subject's belief that  $p$ . This need not be a problem for the Reliabilist who appeals to the notion of evidence only to solve the generality problem, and who doesn't take himself to be elucidating the notion of evidential justification, but only justification simpliciter. It may, however, be an issue for the Evidentialist—we'll come back to this point later.

Let us leave those questions aside for the moment, and formulate the resulting version of reliabilism:

**Probabilistic Evidentialist Reliabilism:** A belief that  $p$  by  $S$  is justified if and only if:

- (1)  $S$  has evidence  $E$ ;
- (2) the belief that  $p$  by  $S$  is based on  $E$ ;
- (3)  $Pr(p|E) \geq r$ .
- (4) There is no more inclusive body of evidence  $E'$  had by  $S$  such that  $Pr(p|E) < r$ .

The resulting theory is called “Probabilistic Evidentialist Reliabilism” to honor the three components that play a crucial role in it: evidence, reliability, and probability. One issue with relying on the notion of probability is the problem of logical omniscience. Consider the fact that one of the axioms in the usual Kolmogorov presentation of the probability calculus states that all tautologies receive maximal probability. This means that a subject will automatically be justified in being certain of any tautology whatsoever, even those too complicated for the subject to even parse. Different approaches to the problem of logical omniscience have been attempted, but I will not adjudicate between them here. I will here just note that my own opinion on this issue is that the problem of logical omniscience is serious, and it does show that epistemic justification simply cannot have a probabilistic structure. However, that does not mean that we cannot appeal to probabilities in our theories, but just that we must be careful in what it is that we are modeling with them. Of course logical omniscience is not rationally required, but if what we are interested in a particular context is not the epistemology of logic, then we can safely bracket issues having to do with logical omniscience and rely on a probabilistic structure for epistemic justification.<sup>12</sup> The reader can verify that none of the arguments that follow trade on so bracketing those issues.

## 18.6 What Is Pr?

The theory we have arrived at is very similar to one recently proposed by Tang (2016b), which in turn, as noticed by Pettigrew (ms), is at least extensionally equivalent to a theory proposed by Dunn (2015) (at least when Dunn's theory is

<sup>12</sup>See Williamson (forthcoming b) for a development of this kind of view.

supplemented as we have done here to deal with the generality problem) as well as to Pettigrew's own theory. The theories answer a question that we have so far not considered: namely, what is the probability function in whose terms we defined justified credence? All three of Tang, Pettigrew and Dunn answer that it is an objective, non-evidential probability which is in question. It is objective because it does not measure the actual degrees of belief of any particular agent. But it is not an evidential probability function, because it is not a measure of the degrees of belief it is rational to have. Or, more precisely, it will turn out to be an evidential probability function in the end (after all, the theories are all theories of justified credence), but only because the theories have it that the evidential probability function just coincides with a non-evidential one. The theories are trying to explain evidential probabilities, and they do so by appealing to a non-evidential type of probability.

Pettigrew is the most explicit about this. He says:

Given Jenann Ismael's distinction between single-case objective probabilities and general objective probabilities, our notion falls under the latter heading (Ismael 2011). They are what Elliott Sober (2010) calls macro-probabilities; they are what David Albert (2000) finds in classical statistical mechanics. For Ismael, single-case probabilities tend to be unconditional, and assign values to particular token events, such as this particular die landing six on this particular roll. They are sometimes called chances, and they are the sort of probabilities we find in quantum mechanics. They are the objective probabilities that propensity accounts and best-system analyses aim to explicate. General probabilities, in contrast, tend to be conditional, and they take as arguments a pair of event types, such as dice of a certain sort landing six given that they are rolled. These are the sorts of probabilities that are found in statistical mechanics and evolutionary biology. They are what frequentist accounts attempt to explicate.

And he goes on to provide some examples:

Crucially, for our purpose, non-trivial general probabilities are possible even in deterministic worlds, whereas non-trivial chances are not—indeed, it is part of what it means for a world to be deterministic that the chance of an event at any time is either 0 or 1. Thus, in such a world, any particular roll of any particular die either is determined to come up six or is determined not to come up six. Nonetheless, it is still possible in such a world that the general objective probability of a die with certain general physical properties landing six given that it is rolled is 1/6. Similarly, while it is determined by the deterministic laws whether any particular egg in any human reproductive system will survive to reproductive age or will not, there is nonetheless a non-trivial probability that an egg will survive to reproductive age, given that it is a human egg—and this is a general probability. And while it is determined by the deterministic laws whether any particular block of ice in warm water will or will not melt, there is nonetheless a non-trivial (though very high) probability that a block of ice will melt given that it is in warm water—again, this is a general probability.

Given that this is the nature of the probability function  $Pr$ , however, it is quite clear that it will render all of the theories that appeal to it materially inadequate—they will all have clear counterexamples. Moreover, the counterexamples will not be easily brushed-off as marginal or somehow not terribly relevant—they strike at the heart of the theories, and show that they are, simply put, wrong.

BonJour's clairvoyant counterexample to Reliabilism was designed to show that reliability is not sufficient for justification. I argued (in Comesaña 2009) that a kind of Reliabilism that incorporates evidentialist themes is not vulnerable to

BonJour's counterexamples. However, I think now that counterexamples of the same kind can be given even against sophisticated reliabilist theories that incorporate evidentialist notions, provided that they appeal to the kind of objective probability that Pettigrew is alluding to. BonJour's counterexamples rested on the fact that blind reliability doesn't provide justification. Adding the notion of evidence to Reliabilism, I thought, provided a cure to the blindness. But measuring reliability in terms of general objective probabilities blinds Reliabilism once again, even when inoculated with evidence.

Suppose that you know by seeing that a certain leaf has shape  $S$ . As it happens, the general objective probability of its being the leaf of an oak tree given that it has shape  $S$  is  $n$ . You, however, are no botanist, and know nothing about oaks and their leaves. Even if, by chance, you happen to assign credence  $n$  to the proposition that the leaf is an oak leaf, that credence will in no way be justified. Or suppose that you know that a certain patient has symptoms  $S$ . As it happens, the general objective probability of a person's having disease  $D$  given that they exhibit symptoms  $S$  is  $m$ . You, however, are no physician, and know nothing about disease  $D$  and its symptoms. Even if, by chance, you happen to assign credence  $m$  to the proposition that the patient exhibiting symptoms  $S$  has disease  $D$ , that credence will in no way be justified. Moreover, those credences will not be justified even if your assignment of credences is done on the basis of the evidence in question. Suppose that you base your credence about the leaf coming from an oak on the fact that it has shape  $S$ , and you base your credence in the patient's having disease  $D$  on the fact that he exhibits symptoms  $S$ . Far from this making your credence assignments rational, it just highlights the role that blind luck is playing in your credence assignments—a kind of luck incompatible with justification.

Now, it may be replied that if you have no idea about the connection between the leaf shape and its provenance, or between the symptoms and its causes, then you are not really basing your credence assignments on the evidence. At best, the evidence is playing a merely causal role in those credence assignments—but even advocates of causal accounts of basing need to grant that the existence of a causal relation is not *sufficient* for epistemic basing. Perhaps the subject also needs to somehow appreciate the connection between the evidence and the doxastic attitude it justifies.

But this response cannot help the Evidentialist Reliabilist who appeals to an objective type of probability. To begin with, it has a decidedly internalist flavor which no reliabilist worth the name (not even an evidentialist one) should be comfortable with. But, more seriously, if we buy the idea that basing requires an appreciation of the bearing of the evidence on the target doxastic attitude, not any old appreciation will do—it will have to be a *justified* appreciation. For instance, if you also just happen to think that  $n\%$  of leaves with shape  $S$  belong to oaks, that will in no way make your credence assignment more justified. And if your appreciation of the bearing of the evidence has to itself be justified, then this launches a regress that ends either with some evidence giving you doxastic justification even absent appreciation of its bearing, or with some such appreciation being justified non-evidentially. But if the regress is resolved the first way that just leaves the theory open to the original objection. For now we will have a case where the subject assigns

a credence  $n$  to a proposition  $p$  on the basis of some evidence  $E$ , and while it is true that  $Pr(p|E) = n$ , interpreting  $Pr$  as a general objective probability, the subject has no idea about the connection between  $E$  and  $p$ . On the other hand, if the regress is resolved the second way, by saying that justified appreciations of the bearing of evidence on doxastic attitudes may themselves be non-evidentially based, that is just incompatible with the theories, which have the consequence that all justified attitudes are evidence-based.

Cohen's new evil demon objection to reliabilism was designed to show that reliability is not necessary for justification. I argued (in Comesaña 2002) for a solution to that objection based on a two-dimensional semantics for "reliable." But the theories of Dunn, Tang and Pettigrew do not incorporate that detail of my position. As such, they are vulnerable to Cohen's objection—or a similar one at least. For suppose that a subject lives in a counter-inductive environment. For instance, suppose that the environment puts evolutionary pressure on bird species to have different colors.<sup>13</sup> In that case, the general objective probability of the hypothesis that all ravens are black diminishes as the number of observed black ravens grows. Nevertheless, it would be irrational for a subject to become more and more convinced that not all ravens are black the more black ravens she observes.

Behind these specific counterexamples lies a more fundamental problem with appealing to this kind of objective probability, and that is that it is a contingent kind of probability. The value of a particular conditional probability of this kind depends on the contingent regularities that obtain in the world. As such, it will only be rational to match one's credences to those probabilities after one learns about the correlations. But learning is itself an epistemic achievement, and involves rational belief. Therefore, the rationality of the doxastic attitudes cannot be explained in terms of that kind of probability.

## 18.7 Evidential Probability

If  $Pr$  cannot be the kind of objective probability function that Dunn, Tang and Pettigrew take it to be, then what is it? One obvious answer (one which I hinted at in Comesaña 2009) is: the evidential probability function. The evidential probability function determines two things: what credence it is rational to assign to different hypotheses in the absence of any evidence for or against them, and (via the conditional evidential probability function) what credences it is rational to assign to propositions given certain evidence. It is also an objective kind of probability, but not contingent. It is the kind of probability that Carnap (1950) tried (in vain) to define in purely syntactic terms. Since then, many philosophers have equated the failure of the Carnapian project with a refutation of the existence of such an evidential probability function. But, of course, the failure of the Carnapian project

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<sup>13</sup>Compare Titelbaum (forthcoming) on the "Hall of different-colored birds".

does nothing of the sort: it just shows that the difference between, say, “green” and “grue” is not syntactic.<sup>14</sup>

It is hard to find explicit formulations of that kind of skepticism in print, but Titelbaum (2010) is an exception. In that paper, Titelbaum explains and generalizes the problem that Goodman’s grue example (Goodman 1979) poses for the existence of the evidential probability function. Titelbaum’s argument explicitly involves the rejection of the claim that the shape of the evidential probability function can be gleaned *a priori*. But if the argument of the previous section against appealing to contingent probability functions is on the right track, then the right probability function could only be gleaned *a priori*. Titelbaum would then apply Modus Tollens and conclude that, therefore, there is no such evidential probability function. Titelbaum ends his paper with a nod towards subjective Bayesianism according to which there is no unique evidential probability function, but any probabilistically coherent credence distribution is acceptable. Not to put too fine a point on it, that kind of subjectivism allows for *any* reaction to the evidence to be rational. That is, in my case at least, literally unbelievable. But I agree with Titelbaum on the options here: either we embrace the existence of an evidential probability function which cannot be determined syntactically, or we go full subjectivists—that is to say, relativists—about epistemology. This kind of epistemological relativism is particularly vulnerable to the self-undermining objection that most relativisms must face. That is to say, if Titelbaum is right, then his argument for the correctness of his position should command rational assent only for those who share Titelbaum’s priors. There is of course, vastly more to say about these issues, and I say a little more in the next section.

The theory we have arrived at, then, is the following. First, the evidence a subject has at  $t$  is provided the undefeated experiences the subject has (more on this in the next section). Second, the credences a subject is justified in assigning at  $t$  are those determined by  $Pr(-|E)$ , where  $Pr$  is the evidential probability function and  $E$  is the subject’s evidence at  $t$ .

Let us now see how the appeal to evidential probabilities can answer the problems for reliabilism that we argued cannot be answered by appeal to an objective probability function. BonJour’s style of counterexample focused on cases where reliability is allegedly not sufficient for justification. But if reliability is measured in terms of the evidential probability function, then this kind of counterexample is impossible. For, simply put, if a subject is not justified in believing a proposition  $p$  despite having evidence which makes  $p$  sufficiently likely according to a probability function  $Pr$ , then  $Pr$  is not the evidential probability function. Similarly, Cohen’s counterexamples require a situation where a subject is justified in believing a proposition  $p$  even though the subject’s evidence makes  $p$  unlikely according to

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<sup>14</sup>I speak of “the” evidential probability function, thus committing myself to the uniqueness thesis in epistemology. As far as I can tell, however, the issues discussed here do not depend on this thesis.

*Pr*—but, again, that is only possible if *Pr* is not the evidential probability function. More generally, as I argued in the previous section, both Bonjour's and Cohen's counterexamples to reliabilism rely on measuring reliability according to a function whose values are contingent. But the values delivered by the evidential probability function are not contingent.<sup>15</sup>

Now, in one respect, the fact that measuring reliability according to the evidential probability function relieves Reliabilism of its problems with counterexamples is, of course, a welcome feature. In another respect, however, it might seem that the appeal to the evidential probability function makes the reliabilist answer to alleged counterexamples *too easy*. Relatedly, there is a circularity worry here: we are trying to give an account of epistemic justification, and we end up appealing to the evidential probability function, which just encodes under what conditions doxastic attitudes are justified. Moreover, we are not giving an independent specification of the evidential probability function, but just appealing to it, whatever it is. How, therefore, is this progress? I come back to this question below. First, however, we need to reconsider the role of evidence in Evidentialist Reliabilism.

## 18.8 Evidence and Credences

As mentioned before, Conee and Feldman themselves have a mentalistic conception of evidence. The rough idea seems to be that certain special mental states—experiences paradigmatically, but perhaps also apparent memories and other non-factive mental states—“start the ball rolling,” in that they are the foundations of all justified belief. More specifically, mentalism has it that these mental states are themselves evidence, and they give rise to evidentially (but non-inferentially) justified beliefs, which in turn can inferentially justify further beliefs. In what follows I talk of experiences exclusively, but I mean to leave it open that other mental states can also provide basic justification.

My worry about such a conception of evidence is that it is simply not plausible that the fact that a subject is undergoing a certain mental state is evidence for propositions about things completely unrelated to that subject and her mental states. Suppose that you know nothing about a certain subject, and I tell you that she is undergoing a certain mental state and ask you whether that is evidence (for her, presumably, but there is here an interesting question about the privacy of evidence

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<sup>15</sup>In Comesaña (2010a) I argued that the mere appeal to evidence could answer Bonjour's counterexample. To be more precise, I granted that maybe Bonjour's counterexamples did show that reliability is only necessary for justification, but I didn't comment on the fact that this just means that Reliabilism thus conceived was at best only a partial account of evidential fit. In that same paper I adopted my previous answer to Cohen's new evil demon problem presented in Comesaña (2002). In effect, my proposal there is one way to make contingent reliable connections into necessary ones. Given the necessity of evidential probabilities, this more roundabout solution is not necessary.

under the mentalist construal) for the proposition that there is a snowball in a certain spatiotemporal position (right in front of the subject, say). Knowing nothing of the subject and the nature of her mental states, the experience is completely irrelevant to the existence of snowballs. It is just as if I told you that there is a certain sentence written in the sand, and asked you whether that sentence is evidence that there is life on Mars. The obvious answer is that the sentence is evidentially irrelevant to the existence of life on Mars. Now, I am leaving aside something which many philosophers will find deeply relevant to our question, which is the fact that experiences have *content*. Some philosophers, of course, will deny this—but I don't. But even if I tell you that the experience that the subject is undergoing has a certain content, and even if I tell you that the content just is that there is a snowball right in front of her, you should not take that to be evidentially relevant to whether there is indeed a snowball in front of her. After all, even if I told you that the sentence written in the sand is "There is life on Mars," you wouldn't take that to be evidentially relevant to whether there is life on Mars. Of course, if I told you that someone who knows a lot about the issue wrote that sentence down with the intention to inform people, then that would of course be evidence that there is life on Mars. Similarly, if I told you more about this subject, perhaps for instance that she belongs to a species that has evolved in and is well adapted to her environment, or perhaps if I just told you that her experiences are very reliable, then that might indeed be good evidence that there is a snowball in front of her. But the resulting theory of evidence is not mentalism, but rather something closer to classical foundationalism.<sup>16</sup> The resulting theory has it that a pair of propositions, namely that a subject has an experience with the content that *p* and that the subject's experiences are reliable, are evidence for *p*. The mentalist account has it that the experience itself, not propositions about it, are the evidence.<sup>17</sup>

An alternative is that mental states like experience can provide, but do not consist of, evidence. One version of this alternative adopts Williamson's equation of evidence with knowledge and has it that the experience provides the subject with the proposition that is its content as evidence when the subject knows the proposition on the basis of that experience. Another version, which I prefer, has it that truth is irrelevant to whether the experience provides the subject with evidence, and that it does so as long as it provides her with justified belief. Call this account of evidence, "Propositionalism."<sup>18</sup> Now, this might seem to be viciously circular. After all, we started out with the objective of giving an account of justified belief, and we ended up with a theory that bottoms out in evidence which is provided by experiences when they give rise to justified belief. But if there is any circularity here, it is of a kind that every theory under consideration here shares. Consider

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<sup>16</sup>Which is not to say that some self-avowed evidentialist would not be happy with a theory like this—see, for instance, McCain (2018).

<sup>17</sup>The argument in this paragraph is developed in more detail in Comesaña (2015).

<sup>18</sup>For more on this, see Comesaña and McGrath (2014, 2016), Comesaña (2015), and the article by McGrath in this volume.



first the mentalist conception of evidence. It holds that experience provides *prima facie* justification for a belief in its content, which turns into all things considered justification when undefeated. Williamson's view has it that an experience provides the proposition that is its content as evidence when it provides knowledge—and that would happen, of course, only if the experience provides justification for belief in its content. So both mentalism and  $E = K$  have it that experiences provide or consist of evidence when they justify belief in their contents. We are all, therefore, in the same boat when it comes to the project of specifying why and under what conditions experiences provide justified belief in their contents, and none of the three views should be judged to be viciously circular for holding that the evidential chain begins when that happens. Every view, then, needs some kind of account of when an experience with the content that  $p$  results in a justified belief that  $p$ . I use “results” as a term that is neutral between the mentalist account of evidence—according to which the experience itself is evidence for the belief—and the Williamsonian and Propositionalist accounts, according to which experience provides us with, but does not consist of, evidence. Let us say that, when an experience results in a justified belief, the experience is undefeated. Everyone, then, needs an account of when experience is undefeated. Fortunately, we need not wait to have such a complete account before we use the notion of undefeated experience in our theorizing, for we understand perfectly well what that notion means. Now, maybe Reliabilists have a legitimate complaint here, because they would say that an experience provides the subject with a justified belief in its content just in case there is a reliable connection between the subject's having the experience and the truth of its content. But this is at best a Reliabilist account of undefeated experience—and likely not a correct one. Goldman (1979) himself attempted to provide a reliabilist account of defeat in general, but it is not at all clear that he succeeded.

The theory we have arrived at is the following: experiences provide the subject with an initial corpus of propositions as evidence, and they do so provided that they justify the subject in believing their contents; this initial corpus of evidence can then justify belief in a further proposition when the conditional probability of that proposition given a suitable subset of the initial corpus is high enough. A natural thought here would be to think that propositions justified downstream of experience can then join forces with the basically justified propositions and justify still more propositions, the edifice of justified propositions growing under its own steam, so to speak. But although this picture is a very traditional one, I do not think that it withstands scrutiny.<sup>19</sup>

Suppose that a subject possesses some corpus of propositions  $E$  as basic evidence (at a given time). Suppose, in addition, that  $1 > Pr(p|E) \geq r$ , so that  $p$  is justified for  $S$  by  $E$  but not to the maximal degree. Finally, suppose also that although

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<sup>19</sup>Sosa (2016) criticized Evidentialist Reliabilism precisely on the basis that it, together with Evidentialism, assumed that all beliefs are evidentially justified. As the theory of evidence deployed here and developed further in the articles cited in the previous footnote show, I agree with Sosa.

$Pr(q|p) \geq r$ ,  $Pr(q|E) < r$ , so that whereas  $q$  is justified for  $S$  if  $p$  is part of her evidence, it is not if it is merely  $E$  that is part of  $S$ 's evidence. In that case, the rational credence for  $S$  to have in  $q$  is clearly  $Pr(q|E)$ —to assign it  $Pr(q|p)$  would be irrational overconfidence.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, this irrational overconfidence in  $q$  can lead to irrational actions. Therefore, we shouldn't treat propositions justified by our basic evidence as themselves being part of our evidence. Our evidence, therefore, consists of those propositions which are justified for us, but not evidentially justified.

The resulting theory can be formulated as follows<sup>21</sup>:

**Coarse-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism:** A belief that  $p$  by  $S$  is justified if and only if:

Either:

- (1)  $S$ 's undefeated experiences provide him with  $p$ ; or
- (2a)  $S$ 's undefeated experiences provide him with  $E$ ;
- (2b) the belief that  $p$  by  $S$  is based on  $E$ ;
- (2c)  $Pr(p|E) \geq r$ .
- (2d) There is no more inclusive body of evidence  $E'$  had by  $S$  such that  $Pr(p|E) < r$ .

I call the resulting theory "Coarse-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism" because it accounts only for the rationality of coarse-grained doxastic attitudes, and not of fine-grained ones. In that respect, it is inferior to plain old Evidentialism, which applied to all doxastic attitudes. There is a very natural way, however, to transform Coarse-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism into a theory that applies to credences:

**Fine-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism:** A credence  $x$  in  $p$  by  $S$  is justified if and only if:

Either:

- (1)  $S$ 's undefeated experiences provide him with  $p$ ; or
- (2a)  $S$ 's undefeated experiences provide him with  $E$ ;
- (2b)  $S$ 's credence  $x$  in  $p$  is based on  $E$ ;
- (2c)  $Pr(p|E) = x$ .
- (2d) There is no more inclusive body of evidence  $E'$  had by  $S$  such that  $Pr(p|E) \neq x$ .

What of the complain, raised before, that the theory conflates justification as firmness with justification as increase in firmness? The complaint doesn't apply to Fine-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism because it does not deal with a threshold notion of justification. What we gained by having a theory that applies to credences,

<sup>20</sup>The issues here are intimately related to the "easy knowledge" problem—see Cohen (2002).

<sup>21</sup>The definitions are implicitly relativized to a time. That doesn't mean that the theory is a version of "time-slice" epistemology, according to which which doxastic attitudes are justified at a time supervenes on the subject's mental states at a time, for it leaves it open that past experiences may provide subjects with present evidence.

however, we lost in that it no longer applies to full beliefs. Obviously, however, we can join both theories just by adding that a justified credence  $x$  in  $p$  counts as justified belief in  $p$  if and only if  $x \geq r$ . This makes it even more explicit than it was before that the conception of justified belief implicit in Coarse-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism follows the Lockean thesis according to which justified belief just is justified credence above a threshold. An alternative is to say that the only propositions the subject is justified in fully believing (and not just in assigning some high credence) are those that are part of her evidence. This also has obvious costs, but this is not the place to deal with them.<sup>22</sup>

## 18.9 Conclusion

Is Fine-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism well named? It is in the sense of honoring its ancestry, but the resulting view is, in important respects, neither Evidentialist nor Reliabilist. (The name is also, of course, more than a mouthful.)

Starting with Evidentialism, the most fundamental difference between the views is that Fine-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism embraces the possibility of non-evidentially justified beliefs.<sup>23</sup> Relatedly, Fine-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism has it that a subject's evidence is constituted exclusively by those propositions provided as evidence by his undefeated experiences (remember that we are treating "experiences" as somewhat of a placeholder for all non-factive mental states which can provide evidence). For the Evidentialist, remember, there are two fundamentally different kinds of evidence: evidence can consist of propositions, which are had as evidence only if justifiably believed, or of experiences, for which there is no distinction between evidence and its possession. Fine-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism, on the other hand, has a unified conception of evidence and its possession. Conversely, whereas for the Evidentialist all propositions are evidentially justified, for the Fine-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilists some propositions are justified but not on the basis of any evidence. Both kinds of theory therefore posit some kind of bifurcation: one in the notion of evidence and its possession, the other on the ways beliefs can be justified. I have briefly alluded at the arguments for preferring the second kind of bifurcation. In his contribution to this volume, Matt McGrath concentrates on precisely this issue, and mounts an argument against Evidentialism on it.

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<sup>22</sup>Christensen (2004) argues that, given those problems, we should just abandon coarse-grained epistemology in favor of fine-grained epistemology. Pragmatic encroachment à la Fantl and McGrath (2002) might help deal with some of the problems, but it is of course itself a very controversial theory.

<sup>23</sup>That said, if an Evidentialist is happy with saying that the item of evidence is the content of the experience, and that it is possessed in virtue of the subject's undergoing the experience, then so be it. I have no problem with calling my view "Evidentialist", but I want to make clear what conception of evidence and its possession I am arguing for.

Fine-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism replaces the Evidentialist notion of fit with an appeal to the evidential probability function. So, in this respect, while Fine-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism might not be better off than Evidentialism, it clearly isn't worse off. I conceived of the Reliabilist part of Evidentialist Reliabilism as providing an answer to the question of fit, but I didn't pay sufficient attention to the question of how to measure reliability. If we measure reliability by an objective probability function, then the old counterexamples to Reliabilism come back with a vengeance, and the admixture of Evidentialism will not help. Therefore, while the versions of Reliabilism advocated by Dunn, Tang and Pettigrew do indeed provide us with a non-circular account of justification, that account is simply materially inadequate. Moreover, its material inadequacy can be traced back precisely to the fact that they conceive of *Pr* as a contingent function, and as such the only justified way to match our credences to it is by learning about those contingent correlations. But part of what we need to explain when we explain epistemic justification is precisely how it is that we are justified in learning about those correlations.

An explicit part of Goldman's project in epistemology is to provide a *reductivist* account of epistemic justification. Insofar as the kind of Evidentialist Reliabilism defended here appeals to the notion of evidential probability, it cannot fulfill that promise. As I see it, however, reductivism of that kind comes at the cost of material inadequacy.

Fine-Grained Evidentialist Reliabilism is a theory with its own theoretical commitments, and, I think, well worth exploring.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Many thanks to Kevin McCain for helpful comments on a draft of this paper.

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**Part VI**  
**Explanationist Evidentialism**

# Chapter 19

## Evidentialism and Explanatory Fit



**Richard Fumerton**

**Abstract** In this paper I'll focus first on the general idea of evidentialism and then on the explanationist's suggestion as to how we understand the content of a belief fitting evidence. I'll argue that, in general, evidentialists have difficulty understanding foundationally justified belief. Further, I'll argue than an explanationist will need something other than best explanation so that the view can account for the idea that we discover explanda that are in need of an explanans.

**Keywords** Epistemic fit · Evidential fit · Explanationist · Doxastic justification · Propositional justification

### 19.1 Introduction

In what follows I begin with some general comments on evidentialism as an epistemic theory. I'll begin by defending the view against the worry that at a very abstract level the thesis of evidentialism is trivially true—so broad a thesis as to be compatible with virtually any account of epistemic justification/rationality. I'll then argue that attempts to flesh out the critical notions of evidence and fit upon which the abstract thesis of evidentialism relies simply take us back to familiar debates between internalists and externalists. I'll conclude by making some comments about the idea that we should understand evidential fit in terms of explanatory fit.

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## 19.2 Evidentialism

There are statements of evidentialism that make it seem almost trivially true. Consider Conee and Feldman's original statement of the view (1985, p. 83)

Doxastic attitude  $D$  towards  $p$  is epistemically justified for  $S$  at  $t$  if and only if having  $D$  towards  $p$  fits the evidence  $S$  has at  $t$

To evaluate the thesis we will obviously need an account of evidence and an account of what it is for a belief to fit evidence. In providing such an account its defenders may or may not try to be guided by ordinary language or philosophical tradition. Consider, for example, the term "evidence." In my philosophical youth, it was unusual for foundationalists in epistemology to describe foundationally justified beliefs (noninferentially justified or basic beliefs) as beliefs that owe their justification to evidence. To be sure, some would describe my belief that I am in pain as *self-evident* where that might suggest that my pain itself is somehow the evidence that supports the belief that I am in pain. But others would insist that, at the very least, one needs an account of *why* my being in pain can be evidence for my believing that I am in pain, while my being born in Canada can't be evidence for my believing that I was born in Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Ordinary language is probably even more restrictive with respect to what can naturally be called evidence. With his customary wit, J. L. Austin (1962, p. 115) made sport of the radical empiricists who sought to understand the evidence we have for believing what we do about ordinary truths about the physical world when the epistemic conditions for forming such beliefs are optimal:

The situation in which I would properly be said to have *evidence* for the statement that some animal is a pig is that, for example, in which the beast itself is not actually on view, but I can see plenty of pig-like marks on the ground outside its retreat. If I find a few buckets of pig-food, that's a bit more evidence, and the noises and the smell may provide better evidence still. But if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; its coming into view doesn't provide me with more evidence that it's a pig, I can now just see that it is, the question is settled. And of course I might, in different circumstances, have just seen this in the first place, and not had to bother with collecting evidence at all.

The verdict of ordinary language might not be as clear as Austin suggests. In a footnote to the passage quoted above, even he acknowledges that one might not complain too much if someone talks about the "evidence of my own eyes." And even if non-philosophers would be genuinely puzzled when queried as to their evidence for thinking that they are seated in a chair (when they are), their puzzlement might have as its source their view that the answer to the question is so obvious that it would be decidedly odd to ask the question in the first place. In any event most of the prominent evidentialists I talk to seem uninterested in defending a view either

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<sup>1</sup>Goldman (2011) discusses this and related issues, pp. 257–59.



about how the term “evidence” is customarily used, or how the term “evidence” has historically been used by epistemologists.

Richard Feldman, for example, has assured me on a number of occasions that his version of evidentialism is meant to be perfectly consistent with the idea that there are foundationally justified beliefs. And I believe he would also concede that it might even be an idiosyncratic use of the term “evidence” to suggest that when I am in severe pain, I form my belief that I am in pain on the basis of evidence. The evidentialist can, however, and probably should expand the idea of evidence to include *whatever* it is that justifies a person in believing a given proposition. But now the thesis of evidentialism really is in danger of becoming a tautology. I daresay no-one will quarrel with the thesis that there is epistemic justification for S to believe P at t just in case one’s epistemic situation is such that it justifies S in believing P at t. To be sure, it is better to be trivially true than obviously false, but to have an *interesting* thesis one will need to say a great deal more about precisely what sorts of factors can justify someone in believing a given proposition.

The evidentialist might at this point push back. The evidentialist’s thesis surely gets some purchase on controversy by virtue of the temporal reference. You will recall that the evidentialist claims that what one is justified in believing at a given time depends solely on the evidence one has *at that time*. In Goldman’s (1999) powerful challenge to internalism, he makes a great deal of the fact that our intuitions about whether or not a belief is now justified often seem to depend on the causal *history* of that belief. We often had really good evidence for believing some proposition, have long since forgotten the evidence, but retain the belief. And Goldman thinks that the belief’s pedigree still makes it justified. It would be surprising from the perspective of armchair evolutionary theory if that sort of situation weren’t common. It’s always seemed to me that there is only so much “room” for storage of information and once one has formed a true belief it often wouldn’t serve much purpose to remember the details of the occasion on which the true belief was formed. So when the evidentialist insists that one’s justification for a given belief at t depends solely on the evidence one has at t, hasn’t the evidentialist advanced a thesis that is not only controversial but, according to some, highly implausible?

The issue can easily be blurred by terminological issues of a sort that (I think) often plague ability to think clearly about such metaphysical issues as presentism. On one crude understanding of the controversy the issue is whether everything that exists does so only in the present. An obvious response is that there are obviously past states of the world. If there weren’t, then what would make true such propositions as that Caesar crossed the Rubicon before I typed this sentence? I have heard presentists strike back at this alleged truism by arguing as follows: Relations can *now* obtain only if their relata now exist. But Caesar’s having crossed the Rubicon doesn’t now exist and, therefore, can’t now stand in any sort of relation to something that does exist. The obvious response, however, is that relations can “now” obtain between past states of the world and present states of the world. It might be unclear as to what tense the verb should take in describing the obtaining of such relations, but that’s only because we have two events about which we want

to make an assertion—one past and one present. In any event, just as relations can “now” obtain between what is past and what is present, so also, one might argue, there can be facts *at t* about how a belief came about. And if the evidence for a belief held at *t* involves facts about the causal history of that belief, we can still describe that causal history as part of the evidence that the believer has at *t*. It is true at *t* that the belief was formed in a certain way and causally sustained throughout its history.

All this might be too cute by half, however. If the evidentialist wants a thesis with bite—one that rules out the relevance of the causal history of a belief—there is surely a way to state the claim. We can distinguish between properties that are essentially “temporal”—that have a temporal component—and properties that don’t. So the property of having been born in 1949 is a paradigm of a property that is essentially temporal. The property of being 6 feet tall is not. If we are liberals about what counts as a property (essentially allowing that any well-formed predicate expression can pick out a property), we can say of me both that I have (present tense) the property of having been born in 1949 and that I also have the property of being 6’ tall. I have both those properties “now.” But the former is a temporally defined property while the latter isn’t. And I take it that Conee and Feldman (on most natural interpretations of what they are suggesting) want to claim that the justification a person has for a given belief at a time *t* depends solely on the non-temporal properties exemplified by that person at *t*. The property of being a belief caused in a certain way is ruled out by this thesis as the kind of property exemplification of which is relevant to the epistemic status of a belief.

It is probably worth stressing at this point that the evidentialist thesis we are trying to make precise is a thesis about the conditions necessary and sufficient for the *propositional* justification *S* has at *t* for believing *P*. Almost all epistemologists will distinguish there being justification for me to believe *P*, and my having a justified belief that *P*. The former is the propositional justification for me to believe *P*; the latter is the property of a belief that constitutes the belief’s being *doxastically* justified. Note that the term “propositional justification” is infelicitous. It might suggest that the justification we are talking about is a property of a proposition. But that is misleading at best. Propositional justification must be relativized to a person. That there is justification *for me* to believe *P* is still a property of me. But I might not respond to the fact that there is justification for me to believe *P* by believing *P*—I might in fact disbelieve *P*. Or if I do believe *P*, it might not be the fact that there is justification for me to believe *P* that caused me to believe *P* (or is causally sustaining my belief that *P*). When the causal connection isn’t present, then most philosophers will reject the idea that my propositionally justified belief is doxastically justified. All this is controversial, in part because it is not clear to some that the relevant basing requirement for a belief’s being doxastically justified can be spelled out in terms of the causal origin of the belief. But suppose for now that we can understand *S*’s having a doxastically justified belief that *P* in terms of *S*’s belief that *P* having been caused (in the right way) by the fact that there is propositional justification for *S* to believe *P*. The property of having been caused in a certain way is a temporal property. Put another way, the causal *history* of a belief *is* relevant to the question of whether or not the belief is *doxastically* justified. But that causal history may not

be relevant to the question of whether there is justification for S to believe P. And it *better not* be relevant if the evidentialist described above is correct.

So with the emphasis on the idea that the propositional justification S has for believing P at t depends solely on the non-temporal properties S exemplifies at t, the evidentialist has advanced a non-trivial view about the nature of justification. As we noted above, many prominent philosophers take the causal history of a person's present circumstances to be critical to an evaluation of whether there is now epistemic justification for a person to believe P.

Note, however, how awkward it is to even characterize a view that takes a person's history to be relevant to the *propositional* justification that person has to believe P. Process reliabilists like Goldman have a relatively easy time describing the kind of conditions that they take to be relevant to doxastic justification. As we have already noted, they look to the causal history of the belief. But if there is propositional justification for S to believe P when S doesn't even believe P, how are we supposed to incorporate the relevant causal history into our account? We might try to talk about what would be the case were certain elements of S's history to result in S's belief that P. But this doesn't seem to get things right from a reliabilist's perspective. Perhaps S would have had a wonderfully reliably-formed belief had he been caused by certain factors in his experience to believe P, but S is just too dumb to appreciate the evidential import of those features of his experience. Or to put it in language more amenable to the reliabilist's way of thinking of such matters, S might not be *able* to process in a reliable way the relevant features of his experience. So if there is propositional justification for S to believe P when S doesn't believe P, the reliabilist would seem to need a way of talking about an unexercised capacity S has to process information at his disposal—data there ready to be processed by someone who is perfectly capable of processing it. But it is not clear how this story of unexercised capacities will go. In his seminal paper introducing reliabilism Goldman (1979) talks about a person who stubbornly trusts his apparent memory despite there being available to him ample evidence (a doctor's testimony—misleading as it turns out) to believe that his apparent memory is unreliable. The availability of that evidence is supposed to render unjustified a belief that nevertheless was reliably produced (the evidence, again, was misleading). But the most natural reading of the story is such that the believer was *unable* to reject apparent memory. So in what sense were these other data *available* to be processed in order to reach an alternative conclusion?

Evidentialists have an easier time explaining our intuitions about this and other relevant situations. We need only imagine the person stubbornly relying on apparent memory as someone who does see the relevance of the doctors' testimony but who simply isn't caused to believe what he should believe (isn't caused to believe that to which the evidence points). Of course here we are relying on the natural idea that certain propositions stand in evidential relations (make probable) certain other propositions, a fact that has nothing to do with belief-forming processes.

I'm not about to settle the disputes between what we might call historical accounts of propositional justification versus what we might call presentist accounts of propositional justification. There are strong cases to be made for both views.

Given that we lose the present to the past very quickly, there simply isn't much in present consciousness to justify the huge edifice of beliefs that most take to be justified.<sup>2</sup> Goldman is probably right about how most people will describe the belief that was originally well formed, but now survives only as a disposition to believe occurrently when triggered by the right sort of stimulus. Most will describe that belief as justified. But as Goldman has always acknowledged, the evil demon scenario cuts the other way. Most people I talk to think that our beliefs about our physical surroundings would be just as justified were we to form our beliefs on the basis of demon-induced vivid hallucinations rather than veridical experiences caused in the way we take them to be caused.

To be sure, there have been heroic efforts to understand reliabilism in such a way that we can get the desired conclusion in the demon scenario. We can talk about what would have been reliably believed were the world normal (Goldman 1989). We can try to define the relevant reliability that dictates the epistemic status of a belief in a possible world as the reliability of the way the belief was formed in the actual world (Comesaña 2002). We can suggest the relevant reliability we need to think about in assessing the epistemic status of a belief is "transworld reliability"—to be justified the belief in question needs to be produced by a process that will get you mostly true beliefs in most possible worlds (Henderson and Horgan 2006). But I'm convinced that none of these work, and that the reliabilist is probably better off simply biting the proverbial bullet. And the internalists might have their own bullets to bite, including perhaps the reluctant acceptance of fairly comprehensive skepticism with respect to the possibility of achieving ideal epistemic justification (the kind of justification that satisfies the intellectual curiosity that drives people to think about philosophical epistemology).

Presentists might try to bolster their stock of evidence in the struggle to avoid skepticism by including as evidence various current dispositions to form various beliefs and apparent memories. And it is important to realize that one can seem to remember generic states of affairs. I can seem to remember, for example, learning how to ride a bike, even if I don't seem to remember the details of any specific occasion on which my Dad ran alongside me as I tried to gain my balance. But that, by itself, doesn't negate the potential epistemic import of the apparent memory, vague though its content might be. How much relying on data that is unconscious will help the presentists depends, of course, on the presentists' motives for embracing their view. One strain of the view starts from the alleged insight that if something is to justify me in believing some proposition, I must have some sort of direct access to the potential justifier. Once I make the previously unconscious conscious, I can get the relevant access, but I'll need *all* of the relevant justification to be objects of my current conscious awareness if I'm in a position to

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<sup>2</sup>See Poston (2016) for a powerful presentation of this concern. As Kevin McCain has pointed out to me, however, it should be noted that if one doesn't require that evidence be evidence of which one is aware, there might at any given time be a great deal in one's subconscious or one's dispositions to believe that could be brought to mind. The question then becomes whether this would satisfy the internalist moved by the desire to include access conditions for justified belief.

draw appropriate conclusions. On one version of access internalism, I'll also need to become aware of the evidential connection between the totality of the relevant evidence and the conclusion in question. And to Goldman's point, that might be a tall order. One can "bring to consciousness" this or that "stored" memory or belief, but it is hard to bring all of the relevant data to consciousness at once. This might be a real problem, particularly if it is true (as I think it is) that even the most mundane of our ordinary beliefs about the world around us rely critically for their justification on a very complex network of background beliefs and suppositions, all of which need to be justified if we are to have justification for the "output" beliefs they generate.

The moral, however, might be that internalists should never have made their case based on considerations of access—particularly the kind of access that involves direct awareness. The intuitions primed by consideration of demon-induced hallucination don't directly involve considerations of access or awareness. The thought experiment simply asks us to compare two individuals who are identical with respect to their current internal mental states (both conscious and unconscious). And again, most people find it almost irresistible to reach the verdict that whatever justification the one person has, so also does the other.

A full discussion of these issues would require us to consider many additional complex issues. The internalism/externalism controversy in epistemology is paralleled by an internalism/externalism controversy in the philosophy of mind with respect to how to understand intentional content. Very crudely, content externalists (as they are called) take the history of *some* current internal states to determine what the state is "about." At least foundational thought is about its object only because there is the "right" sort of causal interaction that resulted in the thought. If one embraces such a view, one might take the hard line that a victim trapped in a demon world can't have the same thoughts and experiences we have (if we assume, for the moment, that experiences themselves are intentional states). I've argued elsewhere (2003) that content externalism is unable to give an account of intentional states.

To try to accommodate externalist intuitions in the case of forgotten evidence, one would do well to insist on making subtle decisions. As Alston (2005) once pointed out, we can distinguish many quite different valuable characteristics of beliefs and believers. If I retain a belief that was formed appropriately, even if I have forgotten how it was originally formed, I still surely get some credit for my past decision. After all, athletes get honored for success they achieved decades ago. And if you can earn praise for having formed beliefs in the right way, you may also need to live with blame that you still deserve for having reached an irrational conclusion years ago. As almost everyone agrees, however, past mistakes, even past epistemic mistakes, shouldn't confuse our evaluation of a belief now held. A long time ago, Foley and I (1982) argued that one can have a perfectly justified belief despite the fact that the limited evidence one possesses is the result of a kind of pathetic indolence with respect to the gathering of evidence. Blame me for being indolent. Blame me for not having acquired a large enough body of evidence to form an important conclusion. But acknowledge that the belief I form on the basis of my limited evidence might still be perfectly rational (from the epistemic perspective).

### 19.3 Varieties of Evidentialism

We have tried to find an evidentialist thesis that is interesting and controversial. And I think we have succeeded. The view still leaves open radically different approaches to understanding justification. The kind of acquaintance theory I defend, epistemic conservatism,<sup>3</sup> phenomenal conservatism,<sup>4</sup> and most versions of a coherence theory of justification, can also latch on to a presentist constraint on epistemic justification. The views are radically different. Each has its strengths. And each encounters difficulties. The acquaintance theory that I defend, replete with the requirement that to be inferentially justified in believing P I need awareness of probabilistic connections holding between propositions foundationally justified and P, has the most difficulty avoiding skepticism. Views that take mere belief that P to constitute prima justification for believing P, or its seeming to one that P as constituting prima facie justification for believing P, obviously have a leg up when it comes to refuting the skeptic. The coherence theory faces all sorts of problems. Coherence without awareness of coherence seems insufficient to do the relevant epistemic work. As BonJour noted, however, the task of becoming aware of your entire edifice of belief seems Herculean. Moreover, it is not clear how the *coherentist* will ever understand the critical notion of awareness that access coherentism needs. And lastly, as Foley (1979) pointed out years ago, it just isn't plausible to suppose that coherence among one's beliefs is even necessary for the beliefs to be justified. This is the appropriate lesson to be learned from the epistemic questions that arise when thinking about the preface and lottery "paradoxes".

Because there are so many versions of evidentialism and because the challenges they face are so different, I suspect at this point it is best for the radically different evidentialists to simply part ways and work on developing and defending their own specific views concerning how to understand epistemic justification.

### 19.4 Epistemic Fit

The other key term that finds its way into statements of evidentialism is this idea of fit. The evidentialist is committed to the thesis that justified beliefs *fit* the relevant evidence. And we can again expect to get radically different forms of evidentialism depending on how this notion of fit is developed. In this last section of the paper, I'll discuss briefly one fairly popular approach to understanding fit—the view that is sometimes called explanationism.

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<sup>3</sup>Roughly the idea that the mere fact that I find myself believing P gives me prima facie justification for the belief.

<sup>4</sup>Huemer's (2001) view. Roughly, the idea that when it seems to me that P (where this is supposed to be something different from mere belief) that fact gives me prima facie justification for believing P.

The crude idea is that some proposition I believe, say P, fits my evidence, when P best explains my evidence.<sup>5</sup> We earlier noted that the evidentialist (at least Feldman) has a very expansive notion of what counts as evidence. If there is something at t that justifies me in believing P at t, that will count as my evidence that P. I worried that this is a strained notion of evidence, and it is certainly going to exacerbate any natural understanding of “fit.” And this worry will only increase when we try to understand fit as explanatory fit.

McCain (2014) discusses an issue closely related to the one I am interested in here on p. 73 when he considers an objection raised by Goldman (2011, p. 277) to the idea that a belief is justified when it fits one’s evidence, where one goes on to understand fitting one’s evidence in terms of the belief’s content being the best explanation of one’s evidence. Goldman is concerned with just how this model accommodates introspectively justified beliefs.

So let’s consider again my belief that I am in pain when I am introspectively aware of the pain. Such beliefs have always seemed to me the best examples of noninferentially justified empirical beliefs—the kind of beliefs that don’t owe their justification to the having of other justified beliefs. So what *does* justify this belief that I am in pain? We earlier noted that one could say that when one is in pain it is the pain itself that justifies one in believing that one is in pain—the pain itself is the evidence for the belief that “fits” the evidence. But that by itself doesn’t seem to be the right story. I’m in all sorts of “states” right now, of which I have no knowledge. My body temperature, my blood pressure, my glucose level, neurons firing here and there, for examples, are facts about me now, facts which make true all sorts of propositions, none of which I know or justifiably believe. It’s not the mere fact that I’m in pain that justifies my believing that I’m in pain. It is, rather, the fact that I am directly aware of being in pain. I don’t stand in that *relation* to most of the other properties I exemplify right now. Or so this how I would mark the relevant distinction. The process reliabilist will make a similar critical distinction but understand the relevant difference between pain and other states of my body this way: I’m so constituted that when I’m in pain that causes (without the mediation of any other beliefs) the belief that I’m in pain. The phenomenal conservative might argue that I am so constituted that when I am in pain that causes me to seem to be in pain, where it is the seeming to be in pain that does the epistemic work of justifying me in believing that I am in pain.

I’m not even sure how an explanationist story will go with respect to paradigmatic noninferential justification. Part of the problem is that one isn’t even in a position to seek explanations until one has found oneself with a potential explanandum—something that needs explaining. If the proposition that I’m in pain is an explanation, what does it explain? Is it supposed to be explaining the fact that I believe that I’m in pain, or the fact that it seems to me that I’m in pain, or the fact that I’m bleeding profusely and screaming profanities at the top of my lungs? All this

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<sup>5</sup>Or is explained by something that explains my evidence, or is entailed or probabilistically implied by something that explains my evidence. The permutations of the view can get very complicated.

seems wrong—almost comically wrong. A person who needs to wait to hear what comes out of his mouth (or his veins) before reaching a conclusion about his severe pain has serious problems. And I don't postulate the pain to explain the belief or the seeming (if seeming really is something other than belief). It is surely the other way round. My belief is caused by the fact that I notice (am directly aware of) the pain itself.<sup>6</sup> You can still talk about fit, if you like. The belief that I am in pain when I am directly aware of that searing pain certainly fits my epistemic situation. But that's just because we have identified what constitutes the noninferential justification for believing that I'm in pain. The belief that I am in pain is noninferentially justified by what justifies it!

There is a more abstract problem that should have become apparent from the above discussion. Regress threatens. I'm in the business of explaining once I find something that I'm interested in explaining—the potential explanandum of an explanation. But how do I come to know that which I want explained? Is it too a posit justified on the basis of *its* explanatory power? If it is, I'll need to find some other data for it to explain, something that will require me to scurry around to find another explanandum, and so on *ad infinitum*. Explanationism would seem to face the very regress foundationalists have always sought to end.<sup>7</sup>

## 19.5 Inferential Justification

One needn't embrace reasoning to the best explanation as a global account of epistemic justification. More modestly, one might insist that explanatory fit is the best story of inferential justification. Or more cautiously still, one might argue only that explanatory fit will be one source of inferential justification. To defend either of these theses one will, of course, need a detailed account of explanatory fit, something that will in turn require an account of what it is for one thing to explain another. McCain has a very expansive conception of explanation. He'll call C an explanation of E just in case C is a correct answer to the question "Why did E occur?" where he would be willing to concede that there might be many different kinds of "Why" questions.

However we understand what it is for C to be a correct explanation of E, there are important points to make about the relationship between successful explanation and epistemic justification. We can illustrate these points by taking as one paradigm of explanation, causal explanation. Crudely, one successfully causally explains some

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<sup>6</sup>Kevin McCain suggested to me that it is the awareness of pain that might be the explanandum where the pain is the explanans. But we will still need an epistemic account of how we get the data that we are aware of pain. We need to start somewhere.

<sup>7</sup>It is perhaps for this reason that McCain (2014, p. 120) seems ready to incorporate coherentist insights into his account. Phenomenal seemings also seem to play a critical role in terminating regresses. As we see later, if it is either coherence or seemings that do the epistemological work, we will have located *there* the source of the relevant justification.



state of affairs E when one identifies the cause of E. There are a plethora of refinements needed to any story of causal explanation. As Mackie (1965) pointed out, there are indefinitely many antecedent conditions that are in some sense causally relevant to the occurrence of E, most of which we would not identify as the, or even a, cause of E. When my house burns down and I want to know what caused that to happen, I won't find amusing the suggestion that it was the presence of oxygen (a *sine qua non* of the burning). Which of the causally relevant factors gets pride of place as the/a cause of E probably has something to do with *changes* (e.g. a bolt of lightning hitting the house) as opposed to static conditions (e.g. the presence of oxygen). In the case of identifying human action as causes, it often probably has a great deal to do with where we want to assign blame. If I stop at a red light and you run into me from behind, it's your negligent action that will be identified as the cause of the collision—not my stopping at the light.

Any philosophical account of causal explanation will need an account of causation itself. Generality theories take the existence of causal connections to be parasitic upon the existence of lawful connections, and if one endorses that approach one might be led to accept some version of Hempel's famous D-N model of explanation.<sup>8</sup> But the issues I want to raise here don't depend on any specific account of explanation.

The first point to make about explanation and epistemic justification is that it can't possibly be true that there is epistemic justification for someone S to believe C whenever C is the best explanation of some phenomenon E. As we noted earlier, one first needs justification to believe that E actually occurred. Second, even if C is the/a correct explanation for E, that wouldn't create justification for S to believe C unless S was *justified* in believing that C is the correct explanation for E. So if one is trying to locate the source of the propositional justification S has for believing C one needs to locate the source of the justification S has for believing E and the source of the justification S has for believing that C is the correct explanation for E. To find a plausible evidentialist thesis about justification, even if that justification has something to do with justified beliefs about explanation, one needs to identify why one is justified in believing that C is the correct explanation for E.

This might be an appropriate time to underscore that to be justified in believing C one will need more than justification to believe that C is the most likely of the possible explanations for E. Crazy Legs might have the best chance of winning the Kentucky Derby, but Crazy Legs might still have only a 1 in 4 chance of winning. To be justified in believing that Crazy Legs will win, one needs justification for believing that it is more likely that Crazy Legs win than that he will lose. The most likely explanation for C might still be decidedly unlikely.

There are obviously deductively valid arguments whose premises assert causal connections and whose conclusion assert that C is the case. Consider the following:

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<sup>8</sup>A model that needs a great deal of refinement to be even *prima facie* plausible.

1. E occurred
2. There is a causal explanation for E
3. C is the correct causal explanation for E

Therefore,

4. C occurred

It is equally obvious that there are legitimate non-deductive arguments whose premises make assertions about causal connections and whose conclusion is that C occurred:

1. E occurred
2. There is a causal explanation for E
3. It is more likely that C caused E than it is not the case that C caused E

Therefore,

4. C occurred

No-one should have any quarrel with the possibility that one could reason from the premises of these two arguments to their conclusions. The rub, of course, is that one needs reason to believe the premises of the respective arguments. There isn't much upon which epistemologists agree, but almost everyone endorses the principle: garbage in; garbage out. One can't get a justified belief in the conclusion of an argument based on its premises unless one has a justified belief in the premises of the argument.

Hume was surely right in suggesting that in reaching conclusions about the world around us, we often rely on inferences from cause to effect and effect to cause. But that leaves open the structure of the *reasoning* we employ. If we characterize reasoning as causal because the *premises* of our argument describe causal connections (or the likelihood of causal connections), we can, if we like, describe the reasoning as causal. But by parity of reasoning, if we reach a conclusion about the temperature outside based on our reading of a thermometer, we can describe that as thermometer reasoning. And if we reach a conclusion about the whereabouts of the President by reading a newspaper, we can describe that as newspaper reasoning. From the perspective of an epistemologist, the more interesting question, however, is the *structure* of the reasoning. And on this point I'm not at all sure that there is such a thing as reasoning to the best explanation. Put another way I'm not sure that reasoning to the best explanation is distinct from inductive and deductively valid reasoning.

If we arrive at conclusions about the existence of causal connections based on inductive reasoning, or based on what seems to us to be the case, or based on the way a given causal hypothesis coheres with the rest of what we believe, then our hopes of arriving at justified belief in these ways rest on the legitimacy of relying on inductive reasoning, seemings, or coherence. And if any of these is the *source* of our justification for believing what we do about the likelihood of this causing that, there may be nothing special about inferences from premises describing explanations and

their probability to conclusions about causes. The same sort of reasoning could be used to generate justified beliefs about non-causal matters.

I have argued elsewhere (1980, 1996, 2017) that enumerative induction is a powerful mode of reasoning and can allow us to reach conclusions even about so-called theoretical or unobserved entities—at least when the entities that are unobserved are species of a genus of things that has been observed. I won't rehearse those arguments here. To find the sorts of fundamental reasoning that are legitimate, we need to examine the structure of various sorts of candidates for fundamental reasoning. Clearly none of the following have a chance of making the cut:

A)

1. The valuables in my house are missing  
Therefore,
2. My house has been robbed

B)

1. There are footprints on the beach
2. If someone walked on the beach recently, then there would be such footprints  
Therefore,
3. Someone walked on the beach recently

C)

1. Litmus paper turned red in this solution  
Therefore,
2. The solution was acid

A) and C) have the structure: P, Therefore, Q. B) has the structure of paradigmatic fallacious reasoning. All three, arguments, are probably best viewed as enthymematic, and we can fill out the suppressed premises in a number of different ways. *After* one adds the necessary premises one can try to discover the underlying structure of the reasoning.

While A), B) and C) clearly don't display forms of legitimate reasoning, there are indefinitely many other candidates for legitimate reasoning that at least some philosophers take seriously. Consider the following:

D)

1. It seems to S that P  
Therefore,
2. P

E)

1. P coheres with the rest of what S believes  
Therefore,
2. P

F)

1. S seems to remember that P

Therefore,

2. P

G)

1. Jones sincerely testified that P

Therefore,

2. P

I'm not inclined to think that any of the above represent legitimate reasoning, but if they did, they would represent genuine alternatives to deductively valid and enumerative inductive reasoning. I'm not convinced that one can lay bare a form of causal reasoning that even looks as if it is a fundamental candidate for legitimate reasoning, though I stress again, there are obviously all sorts of legitimate arguments whose premises make assertions about causes and their probabilities.

## 19.6 Fit one More Time

In the case of inferential justification, when does one's conclusion fit one's evidence? When the premises describing one's evidence make probable one's conclusion. If giving that answer makes me an evidentialist, I'm happy to endorse the label. On the other hand, I don't know who wouldn't endorse such a view. The hard work is to figure out what it is for one proposition to make probable another (a metaepistemological project), and to figure out which propositions do, in fact, make probable others (a normative epistemological project).

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# Chapter 20

## Propositionalism and McCain's Evidentialism



Jonathan L. Kvanvig

**Abstract** McCain's evidentialism embraces Statism—the view that identifies evidence with mental states—over its denial, where the denial is identified as Propositionalism the two positions in question offer quite different prospects for addressing Sellars' Problem about the *intelligibility* of believing on the basis of experience. In Sellars' mind, this problem provides fodder for a regress argument against experientially-based foundationalism, but that's not only a bad argument, it skirts the fundamental worry. The more fundamental worry is about adopting a kind of "black box" epistemology on which the only connection between experience and belief is a functional one, the internal workings of which are opaque and mysterious. Propositionalism, by design, is formulated to avoid such limitations. It is designed so that the link from experience to belief *makes sense* from the perspective of the person whose belief is in question. I argue that Statism, at best, contorts to try to do so.

**Keywords** Having evidence · Propositionalism · Statism · Token mental state · Type of mental state

### 20.1 Introduction

A central issue faced by any version of evidentialism is the question of the *relata* of whatever relation is taken to be fundamental to an evidentialist theory. We might suppose that evidentialists intend to offer a complete epistemology, but it is possible that an evidentialist insist that the view only characterizes a particular part of the epistemological landscape, leaving appeal to other theoretical perspectives available for other tasks. So, when evaluating evidentialism, we want to know what the intended target of the theory is, and what the fundamental *relata* are for that target. In usual incarnations, the target is a theory of justification, and I will begin examining

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the view from this assumption. After discussing a crucial dispute concerning the *relata* of the evidential relation within the theory of justification, I'll argue that generalizing evidentialism to focus on other parts of the epistemological landscape depends crucially on the resolution of the dispute I favor.

The dispute in question involves two views about the nature of evidence, and thus about the first *relatum* of the evidence relation. One view, defended recently by Kevin McCain, is a position we can label 'Statism'—the view that identifies evidence with mental states. The standard opponent of this view McCain terms 'Propositionalism'.<sup>1</sup> As I see things, this issue is one of the most important issues in epistemology. The two positions in question offer quite different prospects for addressing Sellars' Problem about the *intelligibility* of believing on the basis of experience. In Sellars' mind, this problem provides fodder for a regress argument against experientially-based foundationalism, but that's not only a bad argument, it skirts the fundamental worry. The more fundamental worry is about adopting a kind of "black box" epistemology on which the only connection between experience and belief is a functional one, the internal workings of which are opaque and mysterious. Propositionalism, by design, is formulated to avoid such limitations. It is designed so that the link from experience to belief *makes sense* from the perspective of the person whose belief is in question. Or, to be more careful, Propositionalism *can* be constructed so as to yield this sense-making result. As we will see, Statism, at best, contorts to try to do so.

## 20.2 McCain Pro Statism

Propositionalism, in its most generic form, is the view that the distinction between the evidence and being in possession of it is determined by content: the kind of content that mental states have or can have. So to have evidence for  $p$  is to be in a mental state that has some content that counts in favor of the truth of  $p$ , and it is in virtue of the content of the state that it epistemically supports the belief in question. So the content is the evidence and the mental state the having of evidence.

Given the historical setting in which we live, the common way to identify such content is in terms of propositions, but that characterization should be more controversial than it is. I'll have more to say about this point later, but all we need at this point is to notice the perhaps excessive simplifying device being employed when we pretend that any mental content must be a proposition.<sup>2</sup> Once we agree to

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<sup>1</sup>McCain uses the term 'Psychologism' rather than 'Statism', but since I want to be able to talk about defenders of the views in question, I prefer to use the terminology of Statism rather than Psychologism, because then I don't have to refer to defenders of the view as Psychologists! Still a bit of awkwardness in calling them 'Statists', but perhaps a bit less of it.

<sup>2</sup>The argument that mental content outruns propositional content is this: the only way it could be otherwise would be for all parts of a proposition to be things with which the person in question is directly acquainted, in the strong form involved in Russellian epistemology. If there are

this point, it is a bit of a misnomer to use the label "Propositionalism" for the view that identifies the evidence with informational content, but I will continue to do so in spite of the misleading character of the term.

Central to this view is the distinction between the having of evidence and the evidence itself, and one thing to notice in McCain's discussion of reasons for preferring Statism (or Psychologism) to Propositionalism is that this distinction is not clearly honored. He writes, for example,

Your experience of being in pain is evidence for you that you are in pain. Your experience of being hungry is evidence for you that you are hungry. Your experience of a book looking blue is evidence for you that the book is blue. ... As Conee and Feldman aptly note, "Experience is our point of interaction with the world—conscious awareness is how we gain whatever evidence we have" (2008, 87). (McCain 2014, p. 19)

McCain's discussion here is meant to support the idea that it is the experiences themselves that are the evidence, for that is what Statism claims. Yet, it is instructive to note that the Conee/Feldman quote clearly is about the *having*, the *acquiring* of evidence: experience is the way we gain whatever evidence we have. As such, it isn't a claim about what evidence is, but rather a claim about what evidence one *has*. It is easy to get confused on this point, for it is easy to confuse the question of what evidence is with the question of what *one's evidence is*. If I ask myself what my evidence is, that's a question about what evidence I have, not a question about the nature of evidence itself.

Note as well that McCain's characterization of the experiences of being in pain, being hungry, and the blue look of a book is not in terms of evidence, but in terms of evidence *for you*. A natural way to understand that distinction is that the evidence is one thing, and whatever evidence you possess is your evidence, is evidence for you. So what is evidence for you is best thought of in terms of the having of evidence, not what the evidence itself is, and the Conee/Feldman quote fits well with that understanding. So, pretty clearly, the data cited isn't a good argument for Statism.

McCain's official argument for Statism, however, is found elsewhere. He turns to Turri's Master Argument for Statism (Psychologism), and here is McCain's summary of that argument:

When we want to understand S's reason for believing something, it is necessary to be aware of both the particular non-factive mental states that S has and how these mental states are related to another. As Turri explains, "If I report that Jeb believes he will win the election because he's ahead in the polls, but Jeb isn't even aware that he's ahead in the polls, then my report is obviously false" (504). Awareness of the appropriate non-factive mental

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singular propositions, then *Mark Twain was born in Missouri* is the same proposition as *Samuel Clemens was born in Missouri*, but the first belief-report is not the same as the second. And even if there aren't any singular propositions, it is a hard view to defend that propositional content is always and everywhere narrow content, for reasons concerning the opacity of the semantic content of terms picking out natural kinds. Moreover, if narrow content is understood in intensional terms, it still isn't fine-grained enough, for mental content is, pretty clearly, hyperintensional. We need not pursue these issues here, however: merely noting them is enough to make clear that a Propositionalist need not endorse the view that all mental content is propositional.



states and their relations is also sufficient for understanding S's evidence for believing something. Again, Turri makes this clear: "Consider Barry. Barry has an ordinary visual experience as of a bear in his yard, which in conjunction with his habit of taking experience at face value causes him to believe that there's a bear out there. That description allows you to understand Barry's reasons" (504). Psychologism offers a very good explanation of why being aware of S's having the appropriate non-factive mental states related in the appropriate ways is necessary and sufficient for understanding her evidence. S's evidence *just is* her non-factive mental states. Propositionalism unduly complicates the explanation by introducing something beyond what is necessary and sufficient for explaining S's reasons for believing something. All we need is information about her non-factive mental states. Thus, Psychologism provides a superior explanation. (McCain 2014, p. 20)<sup>3</sup>

Notice that all of this discussion is couched in terms of S's evidence rather than in terms of evidence itself. As noted in discussing the prior quote above, it is one thing to identify S's evidence with her non-factive mental states; it is quite another to endorse Statism. To identify S's evidence with her non-factive mental states is to endorse the claim that the evidence that S *has* is limited to a certain group of mental states. But our question is about the evidence itself, not what evidence a person has. You can't address the first question by answering the second. In light of this fact, at least this version of the argument for Statism should be rejected.

Notice here the flexibility of Propositionalism. Propositionalism is compatible with the view that our basic evidence is always evidence gleaned from experience, and thus that basic evidence cannot exist without being possessed by some cognizer in the form of experiential states. The reason is simple: the having of the evidence is one thing (experiential evidence cannot exist except when possessed by some experiencer or other), but the evidence that is thereby possessed is another.

Propositionalists can accept this claim about when basic evidence comes into existence, even though the informational content in question clearly exists prior to and independent of the experience. The way to do so is to maintain that the informational content of an experience doesn't have the right status to count as evidence until and unless that content is captured in the mode of experience. Not that they have to say this, but they can. The idea is that there is a content to the experience of, e.g., the blueness of the book, and this content wouldn't meet the appropriate requirements for being evidence that the book is blue unless encoded in the mode of experience. This point is akin to something Propositionalists might say about evidence that could be encoded in the mode of belief. For some, no content can be evidence unless true; for others, the claim might be that no proposition is evidence unless warranted (for someone). And there are other options as well. The point to note, however, is that the existence of informational content need not by itself sufficient for content to be evidence, for Propositionalists. What constraints are imposed in order for content to be evidence will vary, depending on the particular version of Propositionalism in question, but one such version agrees with Statism that there is no basic evidence that is not encoded in the form of experience. The difference between the two views would then come down to the Statist claiming that

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<sup>3</sup>The article to which McCain refers is Turri (2009).

the evidence is identical to the experience while the Propositionalist holds that the evidence is the content of the experience and the experience itself is better identified with the having of the evidence.

Other versions of Propositionalism will demur here, maintaining that the evidence for basic beliefs (i.e., those justified directly by experience), is the proposition that it seems to the person in question that, e.g., the book is blue. Such a version of Propositionalism is free to require that such a proposition isn't evidence for anything unless it is true, but that point, by now, is banal.<sup>4</sup>

### 20.3 Contra Statism

What is your evidence that arithmetic is incomplete? What is your evidence that my shirt is orange? If, as a Statist, you are inclined to answer the second question by citing your experience, you might say, "the look of it." That answer is nicely ambiguous between the content of your experience and the experience itself, so suppose we press you to disambiguate, at which point, you say, "my evidence is my experience of (what appears to be) your shirt being (apparently) orange." As above, we can press you to distinguish the evidence itself from your having of it, but there's no need to become repetitious.

So, what of the first question? If you are an expert on the subject, I expect you'll produce a proof. Let's suppose you do. We're impressed, but we also know you are a Statist, and what you are citing isn't mental states. So we ask you about that, at which point you resort to the language of the mind: your evidence, you now say, is that you believe  $p$ ,  $q$ ,  $r$ , and  $s$ , and you believe that the conjunction of these claims entails that arithmetic is incomplete. Methinks the evidence not all that impressive anymore. What I liked about the first answer is that the experts are those who have entailing evidence that arithmetic is incomplete, and your answer fit with being such an expert. The evidence itself is entailing, and you are master enough of the material to be in possession of it, in the form of mental states. The states are the evidence you possess, not the evidence itself.

The same point can be generated from probabilistic and statistical examples as well. Bayesianism offers an impressive theory of confirmation, but it wouldn't be impressive if the conditional probabilities that guide updating—the ones that inform you how much confidence to place in a claim given the relevant evidence for it—conditioned on your evidence, as Statists conceive it. One conditions on,

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<sup>4</sup>There is a qualification here that needs to be made, but making it will complicate things to no purpose related to the topic we are discussing. The qualification concerns how to talk about the role of experience for versions of coherentism that insist that experience plays a role in justification, in spite of justification remaining a holistic fact about an entire system of information. There are ways to qualify the claim in the text to accommodate such views (see, e.g., Kvanvig and Riggs 1992 and Kvanvig 1995), but the adjustments will not affect the general point just made, even though the specific language used clothes the view in foundationalist garb.

e.g., Obama having won the general election, and one derives a high unconditional probability for him soon being President from the conditional probability of that claim on his having won the general election. Most decidedly, one does not condition on one's *believing*, or *having an experience*, of the relevant sort. My subjective probability from 2008 for Obama's impending Presidency, given his win, was quite high; my subjective probability from 2008 for his Presidency, given a belief or experience of mine regarding the outcome of the general election was not nearly so high, maybe not high at all.

I take considerations such as these to be the core of the Williamsonian argument that it is informational content that drives explanation, probability, and logical consistency. One can fault the details of his particular version of this idea, as McCain rightly does, but the general point is that if one always answers questions about confirmation, evidence, and proof in Statist terms, the evidence cited will fail to coincide with the epistemological reality. Not only are the support relations misconstrued, it also misaligns with reasoning itself: when we reason well, we reason from the contents of our mental states. And we shouldn't allow Statists to cheat here by claiming that it's OK to do so even though the evidence isn't really what is being used in reasoning. Reasoning, done well, involves the use of premises that are evidence for the conclusions drawn. The heart of the argument, an argument that I take Williamson to be angling for, is that Statists must fudge this point, and it is too much a platitude to be fudged with. Or whatever other F-word you prefer. It is precisely for this reason that it is more plausible to identify the evidence itself with the content of such states, reserving the states themselves for the vehicles needed for one to be in possession of the evidence.

## 20.4 The Metaphysics of Statism Conceived as Incompatible with Propositionalism

This conclusion becomes even more plausible when we consider carefully what Statism about evidence actually involves, so as to be a view to be contrasted with Propositionalism. Propositionalism claims, in slogan form, that if  $e$  is evidence,  $e$  is a proposition, while Statism claims that if  $e$  is evidence,  $e$  is a mental state.

But this attempt to characterize the difference between the views isn't good enough. The claim that  $e$  is a mental state is ambiguous and we need to know whether Statism is the view that evidence must be a token mental state or a type of mental state.

The bottom line is that the Statist needs to identify evidence with token mental states in order to be offering a position that contrasts properly with Propositionalism. Note, to begin, that if the view resorts to the type level, the Propositionalist will reply that there are infinitely many ways to type the states in question, and will press the Statist on which typing is to be preferred. The obvious answer will be that the typing will be in terms not merely of attitude type (e.g., cognitive states including both

beliefs and experiences) but also in terms of content. If one types the states in any other way, one renders unintelligible the connection between the evidence and what it is evidence for. For example, suppose we individuate purely functionally, focusing on the disposition of the experiences and beliefs to generate the belief in question. Then to have evidence for a given claim is to token a type of mental state that disposes one to form a certain specific belief in the claim in question. The problem here is that typing in this way makes it an utter mystery how reasoning is connected with evidence. "What's your evidence that it is raining? Oh I get it: a mental state functionally tied to forming a belief that it's raining. Thanks for enlightening me!"

What should one say here, to avoid such utter unintelligibility between evidence and reasons for belief? That's not exactly clear, but it isn't terribly hard to get close to the correct idea. What we need in an account of reasoning, at least for those with the internalist sensibilities, is something that makes sense from the perspective of ordinary folk (at least those who are competent reasoners) having the evidence in question. Some of us will want more restrictions here than others, but we can ignore that complication for the moment, focusing instead on the intelligibility criterion itself: if I have evidence for  $p$ , it makes sense from my perspective to believe  $p$  on the basis of that evidence, for purposes of getting to the truth and avoiding error (or whatever else the purely theoretical or cognitive goal might be).

Once typing of mental states is done in terms of attitude type plus content, we are in a position to turn some screws on the Statist. The Statist has endorsed a typing scheme that, we might say, turns it into a version of Propositionalism with a free wheel in the mechanism. That is, the Propositionalist will say that the typing scheme employed shows that the theoretical work is being done by informational content. It is in virtue of being typed by content that the state in question—an abstract state-type, recall—constitutes evidence for some claims and not others. In order for you, an actual person, to actually have evidence, you have to be in a token mental state that involves that informational content. You can't have the evidence without having the token mental attitude in question. So all the explanatory work is being done, in the story, by the token believing or experiencing, plus the informational content in question, leaving the type-level attitude appealed to by the Statist as a free wheel in the mechanism. As such, Statism isn't really incompatible with Propositionalism, it is just Propositionalism encumbered with a gratuity.

A side point is worth making here as well. Even the language that is appropriate here favors the Propositionalist: if the distinction were between type and token mental states, the appropriate language would be to distinguish between the evidence itself and the instancing of it, not the having of it. For to *have* the evidence, on the assumption that it is a mental state type, would be to be in a state that contained the evidence as a component. But the natural way for that to be the case would be for the token mental state to *have* the mental state type as content, not for the token mental state to *instance* the mental state type. Moreover, the distinction we are after is precisely the distinction between the evidence and the having of it, so there is a nice linguistic point to be made on the side of Propositionalism here.

To avoid this difficulty of being just a version of Propositionalism with a free wheel in the mechanism, we should understand Statism to be a token-level view, not

a type-level view. Once this point is granted, however, a further difficulty emerges for the view.

One platitude about evidence that any decent theory of evidence ought to be able to explain or accommodate is the lamentable fact that there is nearly always evidence that we do not possess. It is the bane of our intellectual lives as fallibilists: we have to come to grips with the idea that it is (nearly) always possible (in some relevant epistemic sense) that further learning could undermine current opinion, and we must nonetheless have the intellectual courage to make cognitive commitments that involve closure of inquiry even though this possibility remains. So the platitude isn't something trite and banal, but is rather a profound and poignant aspect of any realistic epistemology. It is a constitutive element of the human condition, given the fallibility that pervades our lives.

In order to incorporate this platitude into a full epistemology, two things are required. One addresses the issue of how and when closure of inquiry can be legitimate in spite of the near certainty that there is more evidence to be found. The second is an implication of the first: you better not adopt a theory of evidence that is inadequate to the task of explaining what it is for there to be evidence one does not possess.

Notice that the first of our competitor theories has an easy time saying what it is for there to be evidence one does not possess. If evidence is informational content that can be encoded in one's cognitive states, it is easy to see how there could be such information that is in fact not encoded. It is the utterly banal distinction between possibility and actuality at work.

But if evidence is always and everywhere in the form token psychological states, the only evidence one does not possess is evidence that it is impossible for one to possess—namely, the token psychological states of other people and those of one's past or future selves that are not current. There are, of course, possible tokens that make for possible evidence one doesn't possess, but the bane of our intellectual life is not about merely possible evidence we don't possess but rather about actual evidence we don't possess. Moreover, none of the actual token mental states just listed factor into the legitimization of closure of inquiry on a given matter, since there is nothing one could do to come to be in those states. Factors that affect whether closure of inquiry is legitimate are factors about states that one is not in, but could come to be in if one investigated further.

There is, of course, possible evidence that no one possesses, in the form of non-actual but possible token mental states. As already noted, however, such possibilities are no help here, since the issue concerns evidence one doesn't possess, not merely possible evidence one doesn't possess. Merely possible evidence is simply not evidence, in the same way that merely possible brothers of mine are not in fact my brothers. The fallibilist concern is not about the possibility that the total evidence might be different than it actually is. What evidence exists is a contingent matter, and if this contingency were the cause of concern, the only ointment to salve it would be a defense of the view that the total evidence for any claim is the same across all worlds in which the claim is true (and similarly for all worlds in which the claim is false). Clearly, however, the central fallibilist concern is not about the

contingency of the total evidence that exists, but rather about the gap between the total evidence there is and the evidence that we possess. The fallibilist concern is that the evidence we have might be a misleading part of the total body of evidence that exists, so that what our evidence supports might not be the same as what the total evidence supports. That fundamental fallibilist concern cannot be addressed by talking about non-actual circumstances in which the total evidence that exists is different from what it actually is.

So, if Statism is a token-level view, it can't accommodate the worry about evidence one does not possess that is central to fallibilist epistemology. And if it is a type-level view, it's just a masked version of Propositionalism: an account where all the work is done by informational content, but with a few bells and whistles added to distract the observer from seeing how the machine actually works.

## 20.5 McCain Contra Propositionalism: The Circularity Objection

In order to cement the case for Propositionalism, it is not enough to cast aspersions on an alternative view. In particular, it is important to address important objections to the view, and our discussion to this point has left out the major objection to Propositionalism that McCain borrows from Turri (2009). If being hungry is evidence that one is hungry, it looks like the evidence is the same claim as the conclusion if, instead of the state of being hungry, we think in terms of the proposition that one is hungry. And the same for the other cases: being in pain is a state of affairs that can be identified with the claim that one is in pain; and the blueness of the book, put in propositional form, is just the claim that the book is blue. But then it looks as if the evidence is just the same as what it is evidence for, and that is circular.

This circularity concern is important but not compelling. We should first remind ourselves that the term 'Propositionalism' is a misnomer for the position in question: it is too procrustean. The position in question isn't that evidence is propositional unless propositional content is all there ever is in terms of informational contents by which we type mental states and which we use in reasoning. Since such informational content is not restricted in this way, the term 'Propositionalism' is a misleading label for a position that identifies the evidence with informational content and the having of evidence with being in a relevant mental state with that evidence as content. Second, we should acknowledge the fact that modes of presentation are unavoidable in a good story about evidence, and that these modes of presentation have to be fine-grained enough to explain good reasoning. The result is that modes of presentation for belief states will have to be hyperintensional and will also have to be different from those for states of fear or hope as well as different from those of appearance states.

Even so, when pressed to produce one's evidence for a given claim, one has no recourse except to use a sentence with a conventionally associated propositional content. The total informational state underlying such use of a sentence includes information involved in modes of presentation, but there is no conventional link to modes of presentation as there is to propositional content. So the informational state in question is richer in content than propositional content. This result is sufficient to show that the argument here is no more circular than is an argument for the conclusion that my truck is red on the basis of the premise that it is crimson.

One might worry here that the circularity objection is now avoided only by committing to the view that evidence gleaned from experience entails what it is evidence for, thinking that such a claim is surely too strong. Some evidentialists will be happy with such a result (think of Disjunctivists here) while others will cringe. I'm on the side of the cringers, and so want a different approach to the circularity objection than the one just given. Seeing a sketch of such an alternative will be important in another way as well, because evidentialism is a more powerful theory if it is capable of addressing other aspects of the epistemological landscape in addition to the theory of justification. In particular, one would expect evidentialism to be capable of extension to a theory of (incremental) confirmation more generally, and perhaps to a theory of inductive logic as well. Taking a look at how such a view might be developed will help us see another way past the circularity objection, one that doesn't require that experiential evidence entails what it is evidence for.

## 20.6 Evidence in the Context of Confirmation Theory

Suppose we think about what it is for an experiment to confirm a hypothesis. We will want to understand that relation as one that centrally involves something we learn from the experiment—call it '*e*'—to count as evidence for the hypothesis *h*. Suppose we also agree to be Russellians about propositional content, so that a proposition is a structured entity composed out of *n*-place relations and objects (plus whatever additional elements are needed for modal and other intensional contexts). Against such a backdrop, we know already that the evidence relation will be hyperintensional, since not every necessarily true axiom of a mathematical system is evidence for every theorem of that system. Hence, *e* and *e'* can be logically equivalent and yet only the former is evidence for hypothesis *h*.

We also know, given the backdrop in question, that the evidence relation is not simply a relation between propositions. Lois Lane doesn't acquire evidence that a bad possibility will be averted by learning that Clark Kent has arrived but she does by learning that Superman has arrived. By Russellian standards, the propositional content for the two distinct learning episodes is the same, and yet what Lois learns is, in an important sense, not the same. What she learns is not just the truth of a proposition, but rather some construction that is a function of propositional content plus mode of presentation: in one case, the central figure is presented in the guise of Superman, in another in the guise of Clark Kent. What she learns, we might say, is

the truth of a proposition under a guise. So, if the evidence relation is a two-place relation between the evidence and what it is evidence for, the evidence itself isn't a proposition  $e$ , but rather this proposition under a guise:  $g[e]$ .

In some cases, the guise in question can be thought of as conceptual in nature: one and the same substance can appear under the guise of being water or under the guise of being  $H_2O$ . In the case of Lois, the guise is at least partially conceptual in nature: Lois conceives of one and the same person as Clark Kent or Superman. So the conceptual element that constitutes the guise is something having to do with the property or concept of being identical to Clark Kent or being identical to Superman. If we want to be hardcore Russellians about these properties (or concepts), insisting that they are themselves identical because of the identity of Clark Kent and Superman, we'll have to introduce some other kind of conceptuality into the story in order to preserve the fact that Lois has to learn that Superman has arrived in order to have evidence for the claim that a bad possibility will be averted. So perhaps we need to introduce guises into properties or concepts as well: maybe the property of being water is the same property as that of being  $H_2O$ , but then we'll need guises for properties as well as for objects and for propositions, more generally.

Regardless of the details, however, what we see is that, where  $g[e]$  is evidence, it doesn't follow that it is evidence for  $e$ . In this respect, evidence is not only hyperintensional, it is a kind of hyperintensional relation that involves opacity as well. Perhaps there is a special type of guise for each proposition so that the proposition in question under this guise does constitute evidence for  $e$ , but it is of the nature of guises in general to create opaque contexts which prevent the propositional content that is presented under that guise from always being evidence for the claim in question. Given this point, we should conclude that  $g[e]$  doesn't entail  $e$  either, at least to the extent that we wish to hold that entailment relations often generate a distinctive and special kind of evidential connection. Suppose, then, that there is a special guise  $\gamma$  which leaves a transparent context, so that  $\gamma[e]$  entails  $e$ . In such a case,  $\gamma[e]$  will (often? typically?) be evidence for  $e$ , on much the same grounds as we have for holding that conjunctions provide evidence for their conjuncts.

What goes for guises that are constituted conceptually goes as well for guises that are constituted in part by experiential acquaintance or awareness. Our evidence can either be a proposition under a guise that is purely conceptual, or a proposition under a guise that is also at least in part experiential. To have an experience as of Clark Kent having arrived is to have a Russellian proposition as constituent of the evidence, presented under a guise that is at least partly experiential, if the evidence is acquired by ordinary perception. So we have at least two distinct categories of guises: those involving some experiential mode or other and those involving only conceptual elements.

The task, then, for a theory of evidence is to take these two distinct types of evidence and determine the conditions under which each kind of evidence is evidence for a given proposition. In principle, the task is the same for both kinds, for we should reject the idea that a proposition under a guise is, always and everywhere, evidence for that very proposition. This point is the central one in responding to the



circularity objection above, for given this point, an evidentialist shouldn't affirm that a proposition under a guise entails that proposition itself nor that it always constitutes evidence for that proposition. It, of course, includes that proposition itself, but it is the nature of opaque contexts for inclusion to come apart from entailment as well as confirmation. It thus has a content that is both richer and poorer than its propositional content: it is poorer because a proposition under a guise doesn't entail that proposition, and it is richer because the content involved in a mode of presentation typically goes beyond what is involved in the propositional content itself. The way to understand this latter point, to avoid conflict with the former, is simply to note that guises create opaque contents. So  $g[e]$  is richer in content than  $e$  itself, in the same way that *I believe it is raining* is richer in content than *it is raining* without the former entailing the latter in spite of including it.

A further complication here arises when we ask exactly what something like  $g[e]$  is, and how it can be involved in logical relations at all with propositions independent of guises. Perhaps the solution here is to take the evidence relation to be a relation between propositions under guises, so that  $g[e]$  is evidence for  $g'[h]$  rather than  $h$  itself. Regardless of what we say here, though, the important point to notice is that we will want to embrace a clear distinction between logical and evidential relations. We can then think of logical relations as *abstractions* from such evidential relations, where we abstract away from modes of presentation entirely. A pleasing side benefit to thinking in this way about the connections between justification, confirmation, and logics both inductive and deductive is that we'd have a good story to tell as to why logic can have an air of artificial abstractness to it: it does, precisely because it is an abstraction from a messier real-world phenomenon where all learning involves claims whose significance is masked by ubiquitous modes of presentation that generate opacity in our efforts to rightly discern the nature of reality. The theory of evidence, we might say, is both hyperintensional and opaque, in a way that masks the evidential significance for any given propositional content of any and all learning.

None of the above yields an answer to the question about how to understand the connection between an entailment relation between propositions and the relevant evidential relation between these propositions under guises. If there is a special guise for each proposition, where a special guise for a proposition is one that generates no opacity whatsoever, we'd have an answer available: we get entailing evidence when our evidence involves such transparent guises. We need not pursue that idea here, however, since giving a complete account isn't needed in order to appreciate the possibility of such an account that refuses to make all evidence entailing evidence, even in the realm of experience, and perhaps refuses to allow that any evidence is ever entailing evidence. Deferring on the details leaves open the possibility that the project collapses on closer inspection, but that possibility afflicts all of our efforts, regardless of the level of detail achieved or pursued. What we can say, however, is that we've seen enough detail to make plausible a way to avoid the circularity objection without making evidence entailing evidence, whether or not in the realm of experience.

## 20.7 Conclusion

Propositionalism is designed to allow the sensibility of trusting our senses when it comes to believing on the basis of experience. Our senses allow us to gather evidence, and the evidence we thereby have is evidence for what we believe because of the content of the experience. We thus trust our senses by *trusting what they tell us*.

To refuse this account is to try to explain the connection between experience and belief in a way that, from the perspective of the believer, won't make sense of why one believes a specific content on the basis of experience. One could only say something like, "that experience causes such a belief unless blocked by interventions of some sort," but no such answer makes the connection mysterious from the perspective of the person in question.

One can say the right things here while also identifying a given person's evidence with their mental states. For, if one is inclined toward mentalism, it is in virtue of being in such states that one has the evidence one has. But the evidence is one thing and the having of it another, and recognizing this point yields the benefit of leaving open the possibility of a suitable response to the intelligibility problem. To do so, one need only endorse Propositionalism about evidence itself, leaving to mental states the theoretical role of determining what evidence one has.

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# Chapter 21

## Is Evidential Fit Grounded in Explanatory Relations?



Matthias Steup

**Abstract** According to evidentialism, justification is a matter of evidential fit. Some evidentialists analyze the notion of evidential fit in terms of explanation. Applied to perception, the idea is, roughly, that an experience as of  $p$  is evidence for you in support of believing  $p$  if, and only if,  $p$  is either included in, or is a logical consequence of, the set of propositions that *explain* why you have that seeming. In this paper, I will raise problems for this approach and argue in defense of an alternative proposal.

**Keywords** Availability · Credentialism · Evidential fit · Explanationism · Explanatory goodness · Grounding · Phenomenal conservatism

### 21.1 Explanationism

When is a belief justified? Evidentialism says: when it fits the subject's evidence. This answer doesn't tell us very much unless we are being told exactly when a belief fits the subject's evidence. Simple Explanationism offers the following necessary and sufficient condition of evidential fit:

A belief that  $p$  fits  $S$ 's evidence  $e$  iff the truth of  $p$  is the best explanation of  $e$ .<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For evidentialists defending explanationism, see Conee and Feldman (2008) and McCain (2014). The idea that positive epistemic status, particularly in the context of inductive inference, can be accounted for via inference to the best explanation (IBE) goes back to Harman (1965, 1968). Vogel (1990, 2013) deploys IBE for the purpose of responding to Cartesian skepticism.

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When tested against objections, simple explanationism does not survive very long. Adding bells and whistles, resulting in Refined Explanationism, makes the view more plausible.

Explanationism is a grounding project. The goal is to ground the relation of evidential fit in explanatory relations. Now, when a theory analyzes A-type relations in terms of B-type relations, the thought motivating the theory is that B-type relations are more basic and better understood than A-type relations. According to explanationism, then, explanatory relations are more basic and better understood than the relation of evidential fit. I will argue that this is not the case.

## 21.2 Foundationalist Experiential Grounding

There are alternatives to grounding evidential fit in explanatory relations. Consider Michael Huemer's phenomenal conservatism (PC), which grounds justification in seemings: experiences that represent their propositional content assertively. PC tells us that, if it seems to S that  $p$ , then S has at least prima facie justification for believing  $p$ .<sup>2</sup>

As a fully universal theory of justification, PC says that all justification comes from and is conferred by seemings. Construed thus, PC answers the question, when is a belief justified? as follows:

S's belief that  $p$  is justified iff S's belief is based on an undefeated  $p$ -seeming.<sup>3</sup>

This is a theory of evidential fit. S's evidence consists of S's seemings. If S has seemings that support  $p$ , then S has evidence for  $p$ . S's belief that  $p$  fits S's evidence iff the seemings that support  $p$  are undefeated.

PC is a foundationalist grounding project. For a  $p$ -seeming to give S justification for believing  $p$ , it is not necessary that S has any *further* justification, namely justification for rejecting  $p$ -incompatible skeptical alternatives, or for believing that the seeming is undefeated, or for believing that the seeming has a reliable origin.

Here is an example. The table in front of me looks red to me. Its looking red to me is a visual seeming. It gives me, all by itself, justification for believing that the table is red. If I notice that there are red lights shining at the table, then I have a defeater. In that case, although I have justification for believing the table is red, if

<sup>2</sup>Huemer (2001, p. 99). Pryor (2000) defends a closely related view. – I will call a seeming with  $p$  as its propositional content a ' $p$ -seeming'.

<sup>3</sup>We may say that *phenomenalism* (the 'phenomenal' part of PC) is the view that seemings exist and that they can be a source of justification. *Universal phenomenalism* is the view that all seemings justify and that all justification comes from seemings. (For a defense, see Huemer 2007.) *Restricted phenomenalism* is the view that, while all seemings justify, not all justification comes from seemings. Pryor appears to defend restricted phenomenalism as far as perceptual seemings are concerned. Finally, *phenomenal credentialism* is the view that seemings have justificational force only if they are properly credentialed.

I were to believe the table is red, my belief would not be justified. If, however, I believe that the table is red and lack any such defeater, then my belief is justified, and the table's looking red to me is all that's needed for making my belief justified. In terms of evidential fit: if a table looks red to me, then the belief that it is red fits my evidence provided I have no defeater. Evidential fit is grounded in a visual seeming and the absence of defeaters.

### 21.3 Coherentist Experiential Grounding

There is the worry that phenomenal conservatism is too liberal. Does a *p*-seeming about whose reliability *S* is clueless give *S* justification for believing *p*? Arguably not. This worry motivates a view we may label 'credentialism'. According to credentialism, a *p*-seeming gives *S* justification for believing *p* if, and only if, the seeming is properly credentialed.<sup>4</sup> What gives a seeming proper credentials is evidence of its reliability. Such evidence consists of further seemings: seemings whose content warrants the attribution of reliability to a particular seeming. Hence, according to credentialism:

*S*'s belief that *p* is justified iff *S*'s belief is based on a *p*-seeming whose reliability is certified by *S*'s background seemings.

Consider again the example of the red-looking table. According to credentialism, the table's looking red is not by itself sufficient for giving me justification for believing that the table is red. What's needed in addition are seemings certifying that the seeming in question is reliable. Such seemings are supplied by memory: I remember that, in the past, similar seemings in similar circumstances have not misled me.<sup>5</sup>

Credentialism is a coherentist grounding theory because, whether a *p*-seeming gives *S* justification for believing *p* depends on support provided by the set of *S*'s background seemings. PC is a foundationalist grounding theory because it rejects any such dependence on background seemings: for a *p*-seeming to give *S* justification for believing *p*, it is not necessary that any of *S*'s other seemings certify it as a reliable seeming.

### 21.4 Grounding the Epistemic in the Non-epistemic

A successful theory of epistemic justification must ground justification in something that is (i) non-epistemic and (ii) non-evaluative. Here is a passage from Alvin Goldman's seminal paper "What is Justified Belief?":

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<sup>4</sup>See Steup (2004, 2018).

<sup>5</sup>For an elaboration of how memorial seemings constitute evidence of reliability, see Steup (2004).

The term 'justified', I presume, is an evaluative term, a term of appraisal. Any correct definition or synonym of it would also feature evaluative terms. I assume that such definitions or synonyms might be given, but I am not interested in them. I want a set of substantive conditions that specify when a belief is justified. Compare the moral term 'right'. This might be defined in other ethical terms or phrases, a task appropriate to meta-ethics. The task of normative ethics, by contrast, is to state substantive conditions for the rightness of actions. Normative ethics tries to specify non-ethical conditions that determine when an action is right. A familiar example is act-utilitarianism, which says an action is right if and only if it produces, or would produce, at least as much net happiness as any alternative open to the agent. These necessary and sufficient conditions clearly involve no ethical notions. Analogously, I want a theory of justified belief to specify in non-epistemic terms when a belief is justified. This is not the only kind of theory of justifiedness one might seek, but it is one important kind of theory and the kind sought here.<sup>6</sup>

I quote this passage because it articulates the theoretical goal with admirable clarity. If we wish to pin down what it is that makes a belief justified by offering a theory of evidential fit, it will not be informative to use notions that are part of the family of epistemically evaluative concepts. Rather, we must break out of the circle of epistemic evaluation. This could be done by shifting to another dimension of evaluation. For example, it might be held that epistemic evaluation is a species of, and thus can be grounded in, moral evaluation. But, as Goldman points out, a theory of moral evaluation aims to analyze moral rightness by stating non-ethical conditions. Hence, for a satisfying and truly informative theory of epistemic justification, the goal is to ground epistemic evaluation in conditions that are completely factual, that is, non-normative. I will refer to this desideratum as the NN-constraint.

I believe that both phenomenal conservatism and credentialism satisfy the NN-constraint. Seemings are non-normative mental states, just like pain, desire, hope, joy, and fear. When we say things like:

S has a headache. S hopes the headache will go away soon. S is enjoying her cup of coffee.

we are describing, not evaluating, what's going on with S. The same applies when we say that the table before S looks red to her, or that S remembers that visual seemings like the one she has when the table looks red to her have not misled her in the past. Seemings, then, can reasonably be viewed as non-epistemic, and indeed non-evaluative, grounds from which all epistemic justification arises.

It might be objected that phenomenal conservatism and credentialism fail to satisfy the NN-constraint because they crucially depend on employing the notion of defeat. My reply to this objection is that, when epistemic justification is grounded in seemings, the defeat relation can be analyzed in terms of further seemings. When a table looks red to me, I have a defeater if it seems to me there are red lights illuminating the table. The non-defeat condition, then, can be articulated as follows: S's *p*-seeming is undefeated iff S does not have any further seemings whose content

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<sup>6</sup>Goldman (1979, p. 1). See also Van Cleve (1985).

is logically inconsistent with  $p$  or indicates that  $S$ 's  $p$ -seeming is unreliable. Put thus, the no-defeat condition is non-evaluative.<sup>7</sup>

## 21.5 Does Explanationism Offer a Non-normative Grounding?

I just argued that phenomenal conservatism and credentialism satisfy the NN constraint. Does explanationism satisfy this constraint as well? To me, it seems doubtful that it does. According to explanationism, for  $p$  to fit  $S$ 's evidence  $e$ ,  $p$  must explain  $e$  better than any competing explanations. Whether this account of evidential fit satisfies the NN constraint depends on whether there is a non-evaluative way of accounting for one explanation being better than another one. In a recent defense of explanationism, Kevin McCain offers the following criteria of explanatory goodness: If explanation A is better than explanation B, then A:

- posits fewer individual entities (quantitative parsimony);
- posits fewer kinds of entities (qualitative parsimony);
- posits fewer explanatory regularities (explanatory simplicity);
- raises fewer unanswerable questions (explanatory questions).<sup>8</sup>

Further criteria of explanatory goodness are the avoidance of *ad hoc-ness* and consistency with background beliefs. For explanationism to succeed as a grounding project, it must be possible to analyze all of these good-making characteristics in a way that is entirely non-normative. This does not strike me as an easy task. I will argue that there are reasons to be doubtful. I suspect that grounding evidential fit in explanatory relation is like grounding epistemic evaluation in moral evaluation in the following respect: both analyses merely shift from one evaluative domain to another, without ever breaking out of the family of evaluative concepts and grounding evidential fit in entirely non-evaluative relations.

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<sup>7</sup>Spelling out the details of this approach to analyzing defeat would require additional work that cannot be undertaken here. Consider the following case: Looking at a bent pencil in a glass of water, I have two logically inconsistent seemings: the pencil is straight (S1), and the pencil is bent (S2). Yet it does not seem that S2 defeats S1. Evidentialists have several options for addressing this problem. First, they could argue that only undefeated defeaters succeed in defeating. S2 is defeated by what I remember about previous visual experiences of straight sticks that are immersed in water. Second, they could argue that, since I know S2 to be an optical illusion, S2 has no justificational force for me and thus is not a defeater. McCain (2014) proposes to handle the problem by appeal to explanatory considerations.

<sup>8</sup>See McCain (2014, p. 131). McCain takes these to be kinds of simplicity.

## 21.6 Evident Falsehoods

Suppose I see a table and believe it is red (Red) because it looks red to me. It is in fact a white table looking red because of cleverly hidden red lights. Since I have no reason to suspect such deception, Red fits my evidence. Let us see whether explanationism yields this outcome. According to explanationism, if Red fits my evidence, then Red best explains my evidence, namely the table's looking red to me. But Red is false. It does not explain my evidence at all. What explains why the table looks red to me is the presence of red lights.

Alternatively, suppose you are a brain-in-a-vat. You have experiences of your hands, and on the basis of that evidence you believe you have hands (Hands). Does Hands fit your evidence? According to evidentialism, the answer is yes. But, since you are a hand-less BIV, Hands does not explain why you have hand-experiences. Rather, what explains it is the envatment set-up arranging for you to have such experiences. To handle cases like these, McCain moves from Simple Explanationism to

### Refined Explanationism

A belief that  $p$  fit's S's evidence  $e$  iff  $p$  is part of or entailed by the best explanation of  $e$  that is available to S.<sup>9</sup>

The refined theory handles both cases with ease. Since I cannot see the hidden red lights, the best explanation available to me of why the table looks red to me is that the table is red. Likewise, if you are a BIV, the best explanation available to you of why you have hand experiences is that you have hands.

One worry about Refined Explanationism is the one mentioned above: Is it possible to state in non-evaluative terms why one explanation is better than another one? Another worry concerns the needed availability relation. Is it possible to analyze this relation without appealing to S's evidence? It might be, after all, that which one of several explanations is available to me is determined by my evidence. I will focus on this second worry next.

## 21.7 Availability

Suppose again you are a BIV. According to evidentialism, your belief that you have hands is justified because it fits your evidence. For explanationism as a theory of evidential fit to respect and protect this judgment, it must be the case that

E1 I have hands

is a better explanation than

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<sup>9</sup>For the details of McCain's analysis of evidential fit, see his (2014, Chap. 4). For a defense of his analysis against objections, see McCain (2017).



E2 I am a BIV whose hand-experiences are caused by a sophisticated set-up consisting of a powerful computer program and tricky stimulations of nerve endings,

provided that both E1 and E2 are available to you. But is E1 clearly a better explanation than E2? I will return to this question in the next section. Now I want to discuss how we should assess whether E2 is an available explanation.

Here is a case in which E2 is not available to the envatted subject. Assume a possible world in which aliens from a highly-advanced civilization in another galaxy visit France in 1812 and envat Napoleon. In the first half of the nineteenth century, computers did not exist. Nor did the literary genre of science fiction. It seems plausible to say that the BIV hypothesis was not available to Napoleon. Why wasn't it? A natural answer: because he didn't know anything about computers.<sup>10</sup> Since the word 'know' occurs in this answer, it violates the NN-constraint. Another answer: E2 was not available to Napoleon because he had no evidence of the kinds of things whose existence E2 entails. This answer suggests that Refined Explanationism should be modified as follows:

A belief that  $p$  fit's S's evidence  $e$  iff  $p$  is part of or entailed by the best explanation of  $e$  that is supported by—i.e. fits—S's evidence.

Now the evidential fit relation is used in the analysis of evidential fit. This looks like a dead end.

Here is a third answer: E2 was not available to Napoleon because he was lacking the requisite beliefs for making E2 available to him. But if we settle which explanations are, and which are not, available to S by appeal to S's beliefs, without factoring in whether the beliefs appealed to are justified, explanationism is at the risk of generating incorrect outcomes about evidential fit. Let's consider a case that illustrates the problem. Let the subject again be Napoleon and assume:

- (i)  $p = I'm$  the greatest general ever.
- (ii)  $e =$  It seems to Napoleon that he is the greatest general ever.
- (iii) Narcissism is the correct explanation of why it seems to Napoleon that he is the best general ever.
- (iv) Napoleon has plenty of evidence in support of his narcissism.
- (v) Since he is a narcissist, he ignores this evidence and fails to believe he is a narcissist.

Now, if what S does and does not believe settles what explanations are available to S, then we would have to say that  $p$  is for Napoleon the best available explanation of  $e$ . Outcome: Napoleon's self-aggrandizing belief fits his evidence. This strikes me as the wrong outcome. Napoleon's total evidence includes defeaters for  $e$  (evidence of his narcissism); therefore,  $p$  does not fit his evidence.

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<sup>10</sup>I assume that the envattling aliens deceive Napoleon into believing that his life continues roughly as he would have expected it.

Let me review. According to Refined Explanationism, the best explanation of S's evidence must be an explanation that is available to S. But which explanations are available and which are not? If availability is fixed by S's evidence, Refined Explanationism presupposes rather than analyzes the concept of evidential fit. Alternatively, explanationists might say that availability is fixed by what S happens to believe. In that case, Refined Explanationism will yield implausible outcomes about evidential fit. It seems that, to avoid implausible outcomes, explanationists need to consider what S *should* believe given S's evidence. The availability constraint, it would appear, makes it difficult for explanationism to ground evidential fit in non-evaluative relations.

## 21.8 Explanatory Goodness

I now move on to the other of the worries I mentioned above: Is it possible, without using any epistemic concepts, to analyze which of the explanations available to a subject is best? To discuss this question, I will again consider a BIV scenario. Suppose Sarah, a philosophy professor who specializes in epistemology, was abducted and envatted. She continues to believe that she has hands (Hands). Since she is an epistemologist, it seems unproblematic to assume that both

E1 I have hands

E2 I am a BIV whose hand-experiences are caused by a sophisticated set-up consisting of a powerful computer program and tricky stimulations of nerve endings

are available to her as explanations of the hand-experiences upon which Hands is based. According to evidentialism, Hands fits her evidence. To respect and protect this outcome, explanationism must somehow yield the result that E1 is better than E2. As mentioned above, advocates of explanationism attempt to provide support for this judgment by claiming that at least some of the following are true:

- (A) E1 posits fewer individual entities than E2;
- (B) E1 posits fewer kinds of entities than E2
- (C) E1 posits fewer explanatory regularities than E2;
- (D) E1 it raises fewer unanswerable questions<sup>11</sup>;
- (E) E1 is simpler than E2;
- (F) E2 is ad hoc in a way in which E1 is not;
- (G) E1 is consistent with S's background beliefs in a way in which E2 is not.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps a case can be made for saying that E1 is better than E2 because:

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<sup>11</sup>See McCain (2014, p. 131).

<sup>12</sup>The other items on the list don't strike as promising for the job at hand.

- (A) E2 involves, given what Sarah has to go on, non-existing super-scientists and super-sophisticated envatment devices. None of these are needed for E1.
- (D) E2 raises the question: Why Sarah? Why, out of billions of people, was Sarah chosen for envatment? E1 does not raise this question.
- (E) E2 involves complicated assumptions about the items mentioned in (A). E1 does not depend on any such assumptions. E1 is therefore simpler than E2.

But there is a worry. Perhaps (A), (D) and (E) as indicators of why E1 is better than E2 mask an underlying difference that is epistemically evaluative. In general terms, perhaps there are cases that are problematic for Refined Explanationism because they have the following features:

- (i) two competing explanations of S's evidence for  $p$ , E1 and E2, are both available to S;
- (ii) explanationism yields the desired outcome— $p$  fits S's evidence—only if explanationism succeeds in identifying E1 as the better explanation;
- (iii) when judged against non-evaluative characteristics of explanatory goodness, E1 and E2 are equally good explanations of S's evidence;
- (iv) the only way to identify E1 as the better explanation is to appeal to S's evidence.

Call cases with these features equally-good-explanation cases (EGE cases). If explanationism is to succeed as a counterexample-free theory of evidential fit while respecting the NN-constraint, EGE cases must not exist. I suspect, however, that they do exist.

## 21.9 A Case of Equally Good Explanations

Here is a deception scenario that differs from standard BIV cases. Imagine a future, highly advanced society in which neuroscientists have mastered the technology for putting subjects in pods and deceiving them into having a seemingly normal life outside the pod. Enpodment (as opposed to envatment) is used for one, and only one, purpose: to improve the criminal justice system. Subjects found guilty of a crime and sentenced to long prison terms are put into pods, where they experience life in prison for a duration that fits the crimes they committed. This practice is considered superior to old-fashioned imprisonment because, making escape impossible and high-security buildings and armed guards superfluous, it comes with enormous cost-saving benefits. It is also considered more humane since the kind of violence typically experienced in prisons is not part of the deception.

Next, imagine two denizens of this society: Gus, who is experiencing a normal life, and Brad, who is in a pod and thus experiences life in prison. Although Brad finds it difficult to prevent forming beliefs based on his deceptive perceptual experiences, he knows that these beliefs are false. He remembers having committed a crime, being apprehended for it, found guilty in a trial, and having received a long

prison sentence. He knows, then, that he is in a pod. Imagine each of them in a situation in which they are having an experience of walking down a hallway. So, each of them has the following perceptual experience:

*S<sub>w</sub>* It seems to me I'm walking down a hallway.

Next, suppose each of them believes:

*w* I'm walking down a hallway.

Now, as an explanation of *S<sub>w</sub>*, *w* competes with

*d* I'm in a pod and deceived into believing I'm walking down a hallway.

Call *w* the 'Good Case' and *d* the 'Bad Case'. It seems clear that believing *w* fits Gus's evidence, but not Brad's. Refined explanationism accounts for this difference by saying that, for Gus, the Good Case explains *S<sub>w</sub>* better than the Bad Case does. I agree that it does. However, I would say that the Good Case is a better explanation for Gus than the Bad Case because Gus's total evidence supports the former, not the latter.

Advocates of explanationism would have to say that there is a non-epistemic, and indeed non-evaluative, difference between the Good Case and the Bad Case that makes the former a better explanation than the latter. How can explanationists secure this outcome? Consider again:

- (A) *w* posits fewer individual entities than *d*;
- (D) *w* it raises fewer unanswerable questions than *d*;
- (E) *w* is simpler than *d*.

Explanationists might say that, for Gus, the Good Case is better explanation than the Bad Case because of these features. That is why *w* fits Gus's evidence, whereas *d* does not. But now the following problem arises: if (A), (D), and (E) make the Good Case the better explanation for Gus, then they should make the Good Case the better explanation for Brad as well. However, for Brad, the Bad Case explains *S<sub>w</sub>* better than the Good Case does. This suggests that (A), (D), and (E) do not really mark a difference in explanatory goodness between *w* and *d* as two competing explanations. Rather, considered independently of Gus's and Brad's total evidence, the Good Case and the Bad Case are on a par. As mere explanations, they are equally good.

Gus believes he is walking down a hallway. So does Brad. Gus's belief fits his total evidence. Brad's does not. I submit this difference cannot be grounded in a difference of explanatory goodness between the Good Case and the Bad Case. Rather, what accounts for the difference is the following: for Gus, *S<sub>w</sub>* is undefeated; for Brad, it is not. Unlike Gus, Brad remembers having committed a crime, being found guilty, and sentenced to a prison term of (say) 12 years. Since he knows receiving a multi-year prison terms means enpodment, he has excellent evidence for believing that, even though he seems to be walking down a hallway, in fact is lying motionless within a pod. This difference between their total bodies of evidence accounts for not only why *w* fits Gus's but not Brad's evidence, but also for why the

Good Case is a better explanation of  $S_w$  for Gus, whereas Bad Case is a better explanation of  $S_w$  for Brad.

The enpodment society is an example of an EGE case. It has the following structure:

- (i) Two subjects, A and B, each have a  $p$ -seeming,  $Sp$ .
- (ii)  $p$  fits A's total evidence but not B's total evidence.
- (iii) There are two competing explanations of  $Sp$ : E1 and E2.
- (iv) For A, E1 is a good explanation of  $Sp$ . For B, E1 is not a good explanation of  $Sp$ .
- (v) For B, E2 is a good explanation of  $Sp$ . For A, E2 is not a good explanation of  $Sp$ .

The case poses a problem for explanationism because of features (iv) and (v). What they suggest is this:

- (vi) Considered independently of A's and B's total evidence, E1 and E2 are equals. There is no ground for saying that one is better than the other one.

The problem for explanationism, then, is that explanatory goodness seems to be subject-relative in the sense that it is a function of what propositions the subject's evidence supports. If this is true, explanationism is bound to violate the NN-constraint.

## 21.10 Two Ordinary EGE Cases

The envatment society case is a bit far-fetched. It might be objected that it isn't the most reliable way of ascertaining whether there really are EGE cases. My response to this worry is that there are plenty of EGE cases in ordinary life. I will describe two.

First case: I turn the ignition key, but my car doesn't start. Should I believe

$p$  the battery is dead

or

$q$  the gas tank is empty?

Which proposition fits my evidence? According to explanationism, the one that explains my evidence better than the other one. The problem is that, as mere explanations,  $p$  and  $q$  are equally good. Therefore, explanationism doesn't tell us which of the two propositions fits my evidence better. To figure out which of the two propositions fits my evidence better, we need to look at my total evidence. If I remember that the battery has given me trouble before and that I filled the tank yesterday, then  $p$  fits my evidence and therefore is a better explanation of my evidence than  $q$ . But if I recently replaced the battery and recall that the night before

I meant, but then forgot, to get gas because the warning light was on, then  $q$  fits my evidence and therefore explains my evidence better than  $p$ . Moral: Which of the two propositions fits my evidence better is not determined by which one explains my evidence better. Rather, it's the other way around: my total evidence determines which of the two propositions explains my evidence better.

Second case: My desk lamp went out. No other light in my study was turned on. I'm sitting in complete darkness. Does

$r$  the bulb burned out

or

$s$  the fuse blew

fit my evidence? As mere explanations of my evidence,  $r$  and  $s$  are equally good. Therefore, explanationism can't answer the question. Answering the question requires instead looking at my total evidence. If I know that I recently put a new LED bulb in the desk lamp and that the hallway and study fuse has a habit of blowing,  $s$  fits my total evidence and best explains why I'm sitting in the dark. If, on the other hand, I don't recall the fuse ever blowing before but know that the bulb in the lamp is an old-fashioned incandescent and probably a couple of years old, then  $r$  fits my total evidence and explains better than  $s$  why my desk lamp is no longer on. Again, evidential fit is not a function of explanatory goodness. It's the other way around: evidential fit determines explanatory goodness.

Let us review the nature of these cases. Each of them involves a pair of propositions only one of which fits my evidence. According to explanationism, the one that fits my evidence is the one that explains my evidence better than the other one. The challenge for explanationism is to find a way of identifying the better explanation without bringing anything into the picture that is epistemically evaluative. Since the cases involve equally good explanations, it's not easy to see how this can be done. I suspect these cases show that explanationism has things backwards: to identify the better explanation in such cases, we must determine which one is a better fit of my evidence.

## 21.11 The Missing Causal Connection Problem

It is not obvious that all explanation is causal. It is uncontroversial, however, that standard explanations make reference to or at least implicitly assume causal connections. Now, some propositions that fit  $S$ 's evidence are about the future. Others are about abstract objects such as concepts, numbers, or sets. Such propositions cannot enter into causal relations. It is unclear, therefore, in which sense they can best explain  $S$ 's evidence for them. This type of problem arises as well when we consider propositions  $S$  is justified in believing because they fit  $S$ 's background knowledge. Here is an example: Visiting the zoo, Zoe, a philosophy graduate student with a

particular interest in epistemology, is in front of the Zebra enclosure. On the basis of

*e* background facts about zoos and human behavior<sup>13</sup>

Zoe believes

*p* the animals in the pen are not cleverly disguised mules (No Disguise).

Is Zoe justified in believing No Disguise? Let us make two assumptions. First, justifying evidence need not be truth-entailing. Second, Zoe is justified in believing *p* iff believing *p* is more reasonable for her than suspending judgement about *p*. If we accept these assumptions, we should agree that Zoe is justified in believing No Disguise. In evidentialist terms: No Disguise fits her evidence. According to Refined Explanationism, to say that Zoe's belief fits her evidence is to say that No Disguise is part of, or entailed by, the best explanation of Zoe's background that is available to her. This approach works well in cases of beliefs based on perception. Clearly, the fact that the animals in the pen are zebras best explains why the animals look like Zebras to Zoe. But does No Disguise explain Zoe's background knowledge about zoos and human behavior? Two points deserve our attention. First, No Disguise is not in any way causally connected to Zoe's background knowledge. So, if No Disguise is part of or entailed by what best explains Zoe's background knowledge, this must be the case because No Disguise bears some other, non-causal relation to Zoe's background knowledge. I don't find it easy to discern what this relation might be.

Second, it is not clear what the best explanation of Zoe's background knowledge, available to Zoe herself, actually is. I suppose that, if Zoe were to ask herself what explains her background knowledge about zoos and human behavior, she would probably say something like the following: "I was born into and grew up in a set of circumstances in which a college-educated person pretty much knows that sort of stuff." The overall causal nexus to which this minimalist account refers is enormously complex. It cannot be summed up by mentioning just two or three causes that would elicit the response "Ok, now I see why Zoe has this particular body of background knowledge about zoos and human behavior." Now consider explanationism. The basic idea is that No Disguise fits Zoe's evidence because No Disguise explains Zoe's background knowledge about zoos and human behavior. The problem is that, to the extent there is an interesting explanation of Zoe's zoo-related background knowledge, No Disguise is not going to play any role in it at all.

The core of the problem is that some propositions that fit S's evidence are not in any way causally connected to those parts of S's evidence that support them. That makes it difficult to see in which sense they can in any way explain S's evidence.

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<sup>13</sup>To lend further plausibility to the judgment that Zoe is justified in believing No-Disguise, we may assume she has researched the issue carefully and concluded that the likelihood of seeing CDMs instead of zebras is extremely low.

Further cases illustrating this problem are easy to find. Here is another one. After a day of work on campus, I'm walking back to where I parked my car. I believe it still is where I parked it in the morning (Still There). What justifies me in believing Still There is the following bit of background knowledge: in the neighborhood where I park my car, car theft is pretty much non-existent.<sup>14</sup> What explains that I have this evidence? In a way, that's an odd question since there is nothing surprising about my having such evidence. Once one has lived at a certain place, it's difficult not knowing which neighborhoods are safe and which are not. If I didn't have the relevant background knowledge, that would be something in need of explanation. Nevertheless, my background knowledge regarding the frequency of car-theft in the neighborhood in question does have a causal history, and hence an explanation, however banal and uninteresting it might be. The important point is that Still There is neither a part of that explanation nor entailed by it.<sup>15</sup> It is not easy to see, therefore, how Explanationism can account for why Still There fits my evidence.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>According to various theories of knowledge, Zoe cannot know No-Disguise, just on the basis of her background knowledge. There is no need here to settle the question whether Zoe knows that the animals in the pen are not cleverly disguised mules. What's needed is merely the premise that she is justified in believing this, in the sense that it is more reasonable of her to believe No-Disguise than to suspend judgment on the matter.

<sup>15</sup>It seems obvious that my background knowledge does not *entail* Still There. Explanationists might argue instead that the set of propositions that explains my background knowledge makes Still There *probable*. This move is problematic for at least two reasons. First, while it seems clear that my *background knowledge* makes Still There probable, it is not clear that *what explains my background knowledge* makes Still There probable. Second, since Still There makes no causal contribution to my background knowledge, it has no explanatory power relative to my background knowledge as the explanandum. As a result, the appealed-to probability relation does all the work of accounting for evidential fit. It is difficult to resist the conclusion, therefore, that the proposed solution is explanationist in name only. Third, the making probable relation is, arguably, an epistemic relation. If it is, then the move under consideration violates the NN constraint. For ways in which explanationism can address the problem of the missing entailment relation, see McCain (2015).

<sup>16</sup>Earlier versions were presented at 12th Annual Russell Conference in Healdsburg, CA, March, 2016 and a Symposium on Kevin McCain: *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification* at the annual meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association in San Francisco, April 2, 2016. For helpful discussion and comments, I am grateful to Kevin McCain, Bruce Russell, and Jonathan Vogel.



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## Chapter 22

# Explanationist Evidentialism: A Defense



Kevin McCain

**Abstract** In this chapter I defend Explanationist Evidentialism, the theory developed and argued for in *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification*, from the objections raised by Richard Fumerton, Jonathan Kvanvig, and Matthias Steup. Ultimately, I conclude that although each of these philosophers presents interesting challenges, none of the challenges succeed in undermining Explanationist Evidentialism. It remains a viable theory of epistemic justification:

**Keywords** Explanationist evidentialism · Inferential justification · Introspective beliefs · Kvanvig's dilemma · Well-founded belief

I have made several attempts to expound and defend a theory of epistemic justification I call "Explanationist Evidentialism."<sup>1</sup> My aim here is to further defend the theory by responding to some of the challenges raised in the preceding chapters by Richard Fumerton, Jonathan Kvanvig, and Matthias Steup.<sup>2</sup> It will be helpful to first get clear on the nature of Explanationist Evidentialism ("EE") before examining their various objections.

EE has its roots in the mentalist evidentialism of Earl Conee and Rich Feldman.<sup>3</sup> In fact, I see EE as a way of filling in the key details of their theory. So, it will be helpful to recall Conee and Feldman's evidentialism here. In their classic paper, "Evidentialism", Conee and Feldman provide an account of both *propositional justification* (what is required for one to have justification for believing that *p*), as

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<sup>1</sup>See my (2013, 2014a, b, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018a, b).

<sup>2</sup>Those chapters, as well as this one, grew out of a 2016 Pacific APA symposium on *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification*.

<sup>3</sup>See, especially, Conee and Feldman (1985, 2004, 2008, and 2011).

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well as an account of *doxastic justification/well-founded belief* (what is required for one's belief that  $p$  to be justified). When it comes to propositional justification Conee and Feldman offer this:

EJ Doxastic attitude  $D$  toward proposition  $p$  is epistemically justified for  $S$  at  $t$  if and only if having  $D$  toward  $p$  fits the evidence that  $S$  has at  $t$  (1985, 15).

Their account of doxastic justification/well-founded belief is:

WF  $S$ 's doxastic attitude  $D$  at  $t$  toward proposition  $p$  is well-founded if and only if

- (i) having  $D$  toward  $p$  is justified for  $S$  at  $t$ ; and
- (ii)  $S$  has  $D$  toward  $p$  on the basis of some body of evidence  $e$ , such that
  - (a)  $S$  has  $e$  as evidence at  $t$ ;
  - (b) having  $D$  toward  $p$  fits  $e$ ; and
  - (c) there is no more inclusive body of evidence  $e'$  had by  $S$  at  $t$  such that having  $D$  toward  $p$  does not fit  $e'$  (1985, 24).

While EJ and WF are both plausible principles, and Conee and Feldman have done much work to elucidate and defend them, important questions remain.

(Q1) What is evidence?

(Q2) What does it take to have evidence?

(Q3) What does it take for a proposition to fit one's evidence?

(Q4) What does it take to believe a proposition on the basis of some evidence?

Without specific answers to (Q1)–(Q4) evidentialism is more a family of theories, or perhaps a schema for how one might construct a theory, than a full-fledged account of epistemic justification. EE answers these questions and yields what aspires to be a complete mentalist evidentialist theory of epistemic justification. Very roughly, EE answers (Q1)–(Q4) in the following way:

1. Evidence consists of non-factive mental states.
2. Having a particular item of evidence requires having it as an occurrent mental state or having the ability to access that mental state through reflection alone.
3. Propositions fit one's evidence because of explanatory relations holding between them and the evidence.
4. Believing on the basis of some evidence is a matter of the belief being caused in the right way by that evidence.

When we plug the answers to these questions back into Conee and Feldman's EJ and WF we get the two components of EE, Ex-EJ and Ex-WF:

- Ex-EJ: I) Believing  $p$  is epistemically justified for  $S$  at  $t$  if and only if at  $t$   $S$  has considered  $p$  and:
- 1)  $p$  is part of the best explanation available to  $S$  at  $t$  for why  $S$  has her occurrent non-factive mental states and the non-factive mental states that she is disposed to bring to mind when reflecting on the question of  $p$ 's truth
  - OR
  - 2)  $p$  is available to  $S$  as an explanatory consequence of the best explanation available to  $S$  at  $t$  for why  $S$  has her occurrent non-factive mental states and the non-factive mental states that she is disposed to bring to mind when reflecting on the question of  $p$ 's truth.
- II) Withholding judgment concerning  $p$  is epistemically justified for  $S$  at  $t$  if and only if at  $t$   $S$  has considered  $p$  and neither believing  $p$  nor believing  $\sim p$  is epistemically justified for  $S$  (2014a, 79).<sup>4</sup>

- Ex-WF: At  $t$ ,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is well-founded if and only if:
- At  $t$ ,
- (I)
    - 1) Each  $e_i \in E$  is a direct cause of  $S$ 's believing that  $p$
    - AND
    - 2) Each  $e_i \in E$  is an actual cause of  $S$ 's believing that  $p$
    - AND
    - 3) It is not the case that intervening to set the values of all direct causes of  $S$ 's believing that  $p$ , other than the members of  $E$ , to 0 will result in  $S$ 's not believing that  $p$  when every  $e_i \in E$  is held fixed at its actual value.
  - (II)  $E$  is a subset of  $S$ 's occurrent non-factive mental states and the non-factive mental states that she is disposed to bring to mind when reflecting on the question of  $p$ 's truth.
  - (III)
    - 1)  $p$  is part of the best explanation available to  $S$  for why  $S$  has  $E$
    - OR
    - 2)  $p$  is available to  $S$  as an explanatory consequence of the best explanation available to  $S$  for why  $S$  has  $E$ .
  - (IV) There is no set of  $S$ 's occurrent non-factive mental states and the non-factive mental states that she is disposed to bring to mind when reflecting on the question of  $p$ 's truth,  $E^*$ , such that:
    - A)  $E$  is a subset of  $E^*$
    - AND

<sup>4</sup>It is worth noting that this formulation is slightly different from what is presented in my (2014a). I have replaced "logical consequence" with "explanatory consequence" here. I explain the reasons for this in my (2015).

- B)  $p$  is not part of the best explanation available to  $S$  for why  $S$  has  $E^*$   
 AND  
 C)  $p$  is not available to  $S$  as an explanatory consequence of the  
 best explanation available to  $S$  for why  $S$  has  $E^*$   
 (2014a, 118).<sup>5</sup>

Combined, Ex-EJ and Ex-WF constitute EE. Of course, there are a number of points about EE that need to be clarified and defended in order to make the case that it is the correct theory of epistemic justification. Although this is definitely work that is worth doing, I won't attempt to do it here for two reasons. First, I have attempted to provide these clarifications and defenses in various other writings. Second, working out all the finer details of EE isn't necessary for appreciating the challenges raised by Fumerton, Kvanvig, and Steup. So, I will only concern myself with spelling out features of EE when doing so either helps to clarify one of their criticisms, or when it can help with understanding my responses on behalf of EE.

## 22.1 Response to Fumerton

Fumerton's criticism of EE comes in the form of two primary challenges. First, he argues that EE cannot properly account for the justification of introspective beliefs. Second, he charges that reasoning to the best explanation fails to constitute a fundamental method of reasoning. The explanationist evidentialist can overcome both of these challenges.

### 22.1.1 *Introspective Beliefs*

When it comes to the justification of introspective beliefs Fumerton considers an instance where he is in pain. He aptly notes that according to EE, the proposition  $\langle I$  (Fumerton) am in pain  $\rangle$  must be part of the best explanation of his evidence since it is clearly justified. However, he questions what this proposition could possibly explain. He wonders, "Is it supposed to be explaining the fact that I believe that I'm in pain, or the fact that it seems to me that I'm in pain, or the fact that I'm bleeding profusely and screaming profanities at the top of my lungs?" (Chap. 19, 337). Of course, Fumerton is correct that "All this seems wrong—almost comically wrong" (Chap. 19, 337–338). In light of this, Fumerton concludes that EE fails to adequately account for the justification of introspective beliefs.

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<sup>5</sup>Footnote 4 applies here as well.

It is instructive to consider what Fumerton does think justifies his pain belief, since he thinks that this is not due to an explanatory relation. He says, “It’s not the mere fact that I’m in pain that justifies my believing that I’m in pain. It is, rather, the fact that I am directly aware of being in pain” (Chap. 19, 337). But, this can’t be the full story. Even on Fumerton’s own theory more is required for justification. According to Fumerton, one has non-inferential justification when “one is acquainted with [directly aware of] the fact that *P*, the thought that *P*, and the relation of correspondence holding between the thought that *P* and the fact that *P*” (1995, 75). So, the explanation for why his pain belief is justified isn’t as simple as Fumerton suggests—even by his own lights. It’s not just direct awareness of being in pain that justifies Fumerton’s belief. It’s that direct awareness plus his direct awareness of the thought <I (Fumerton) am in pain> along with his direct awareness of the correspondence between that thought and his awareness of being in pain.

Now, in pointing out that Fumerton is committed to more than he seems to suggest I’m not trying to *tu quoque* him. The goal is rather to make it clear that more is required than direct awareness of the pain for Fumerton’s (or anyone’s) belief that he is in pain to be justified.<sup>6</sup> So, when the explanationist evidentialist says that there is more going on than simply Fumerton having a direct awareness of his pain, she is not alone. That being said, what should an explanationist evidentialist say about this sort of case? I think that she should accept Fumerton’s own suggestion from earlier work that when it comes to Fumerton’s pain belief there are three things that should be distinguished: (a) the experience itself, (b) Fumerton’s awareness of that experience and its features, and (c) Fumerton’s belief about the experience and its features.<sup>7</sup> With these distinctions in hand, the explanationist evidentialist can readily answer Fumerton’s question about what the proposition believed, <I (Fumerton) am in pain>, best explains. <I (Fumerton) am in pain> is part of the best explanation of Fumerton’s evidence, a major part of which is (b). Thus, EE doesn’t seem to have a problem here.

There may be a complication, however. Fumerton claims that there is a regress looming for the explanationist evidentialist’s account of the justification of introspective beliefs. He puts the concern this way:

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<sup>6</sup>This is assuming an internalist view of epistemic justification, which both Fumerton and I are happy to do. Externalists may be able to avoid claiming that more is required. For example, a reliabilist can deny that one even needs to be directly aware of the pain experience. Instead, they can claim that as long as the pain belief is the result of a reliable belief forming process it is justified. Nevertheless, even a reliabilist will have to acknowledge that one needs to possess the concepts required for grasping the believed proposition in order to have a justified introspective belief.

<sup>7</sup>See Fumerton (2005, 125) where he argues in support of the importance of distinguishing these states when considering instances of justified introspective beliefs.

I'm in the business of explaining once I find something that I'm interested in explaining—the potential explanandum of an explanation. But how do I come to know that which I want explained? Is it too a posit justified on the basis of *its* explanatory power? If it is, I'll need to find some other data for it to explain, something that will require me to scurry around to find another explanandum, and so on *ad infinitum* (Chap. 19, 338).

Consequently, Fumerton thinks that explanationist evidentialism faces “the very regress foundationalists have always sought to end” (Chap. 19, 338).

Fortunately, explanationist evidentialists have a ready answer to this concern. The key here is to note that EE requires that  $p$  be part of the best explanation of  $E$  in order for  $p$  to be justified. It doesn't require that you know that a particular mental state is part of  $E$ —it only requires that it is part of  $E$ . Hence, EE doesn't require that you know what you want to explain. Of course, this response is likely to be unsatisfying for those who like particularly strong forms of internalism, such as Fumerton. For this reason, it is important to note that there are various ways of combining EE with other views that allow the explanationist evidentialist to embrace stronger internalist leanings while addressing Fumerton's worry. Importantly, these combinations do not require the explanationist evidentialist to sacrifice her commitment to EE. For instance, one might combine EE with phenomenal conservatism by arguing that one's evidence consists of seemings.<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, one might combine EE with an even more expansive epistemic conservatism, allowing that the mere having of a belief confers some positive epistemic status on that belief.<sup>9</sup> One could even take a page from Fumerton's book and combine EE with the idea that mental states that one is directly aware of constitute one's evidence. Taking a different tack, one might opt for incorporating coherentist elements into EE, which would allow a more holistic response to this sort of regress worry.<sup>10</sup> Of course, these are not exclusive proposals. For example, one might adopt a version of EE that embraces seemings and epistemic conservatism when it comes to evidence while embracing coherentist insights.<sup>11</sup> There are a number of possibilities here. The important points are that these options are all consistent with EE, and they allow the explanationist evidentialist to avoid the regress that worries Fumerton.

Fumerton anticipates this sort of combining of EE with other epistemological theories. And, he finds it problematic. As he says, “if it is either coherence or seemings that do the epistemological work, we will have located *there* the source of the relevant justification” (Chap. 19, fn 7, 338). Presumably, Fumerton would argue that a similar problem arises for any other pairing of EE with other views. Thus, Fumerton alleges that EE can avoid the regress problem only by being subsumed

<sup>8</sup>I explore this promising combination in my (2018a).

<sup>9</sup>I have argued that epistemic conservatism is much more plausible than is often thought in my (2008) and (Forthcoming-a). I also argue that it is perfectly consistent with an evidentialist conception of epistemic justification in my (Forthcoming-b).

<sup>10</sup>See Poston (2014) for a coherentist view that is very similar to EE.

<sup>11</sup>Such a view bears some resemblance to earlier explanationist views like those of Elgin (1996), Lycan (1988), and Harman (1973, 1986).

under another theory because something other than explanatory considerations is really the source of justification.

Fumerton is mistaken on this point, however. Even if EE incorporates elements of another theory, it doesn't mean that explanatory considerations fail to do justificatory work. Consider a pairing of EE with phenomenal conservatism. On such a view, seemings would count as one's evidence. As a result, it is seemings that are in need of explaining, but it doesn't follow from this that seemings justify on their own. This version of EE would plausibly contend that a particular seeming that  $p$  doesn't justify believing that  $p$  unless the truth of  $p$  is part of the best explanation of that seeming. In order for this to be the case it is very likely that there will have to be a number of background beliefs and other seemings that help make  $p$  part of the best explanation of one's total evidence.<sup>12</sup> It is simply not enough that one have the seeming. Recall that above we noted that even on Fumerton's own view it is not simply the direct awareness of a pain that justifies believing that one is in pain. Other things, such as direct awareness of the proposition believed and of the correspondence between the pain and that proposition, are necessary. In light of this, it would be misleading to say that the source of the justification for the pain belief is the direct awareness of the pain experience. Instead, this is part of the source of the justification, but on its own it doesn't cut it. Similar considerations apply to EE. If one combines EE with something like phenomenal conservatism, it is misleading to say that the source of the justification for one's pain belief is the seeming that one is in pain. This seeming is part of the source of justification, but on its own it doesn't cut it. The whole story of the source of justification will involve that seeming along with background evidence and explanatory considerations. Therefore, there doesn't seem to be good reason to think that EE has to sacrifice its identity to avoid the regress worry that Fumerton raises.

### 22.1.2 *Inferential Justification*

Fumerton's second criticism of EE involves attacking a weaker thesis, the claim that being the best explanation of a body of evidence is a source of inferential justification. Some of the worries that Fumerton raises on this score have been addressed above, so I will focus here on the weightiest of his new concerns—reasoning to the best explanation is not a fundamental method of reasoning. According to Fumerton, inference to the best explanation, which is the sort of inferential reasoning that is licensed by EE, simply reduces to enumerative induction. This would be problematic because, if correct, EE would fail to describe an independent account of inferential justification.

Although Fumerton has argued in a number of places (1980, 1995, 2017) that inference to the best explanation reduces to enumerative induction (sometimes

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<sup>12</sup>I discuss this in much more detail in my (2018a).



coupled with deduction), this is not so. First of all, enumerative induction faces a serious skeptical problem. What licenses us to project to unobserved cases from observed cases? As Hume argued, if we only rely on enumerative induction, it seems that we have no good reason to do this (2010, Sect. 4). However, if enumerative induction really involves inference to the best explanation, we do have good reason to project in this way. For example, if the best explanation of why all observed instances of gold atoms have had 79 protons is that it is a law of nature that gold atoms have 79 protons, then we have very good reason to think that the next bit of gold observed will have atoms with 79 protons.<sup>13</sup> So, solving the problem of induction is one reason to think that, contra Fumerton, enumerative induction actually reduces to inference to the best explanation.

Another reason to think enumerative induction reduces to inference to the best explanation becomes apparent when we consider inductive fallacies. Take for instance the common fallacies of drawing conclusions from insufficiently large samples and biased sampling. What makes such inferences fallacious? Enumerative induction taken as fundamental, as Fumerton suggests, leaves us with no answer. But, if we understand enumerative induction in terms of inference to the best explanation, an answer is apparent. In both instances the reason that we are not justified in projecting from our observations to unobserved cases is that we have a rival explanation that accounts for our observations at least as well as the one that would license projecting to unobserved cases. To see this, consider an example of biased sampling.<sup>14</sup> You want to know the most popular college football team in the U.S. You interview students at the University of Notre Dame and find that almost all of them prefer their university's team to any other college football team. Why shouldn't you infer on the basis of this information that most college students prefer the University of Notre Dame's football team to all others? Enumerative induction gives no answer to this, but inference to the best explanation does. The reason you shouldn't infer this is that the best explanation of your survey data is not that the University of Notre Dame's football team is by far the most popular college football team in the U.S. A better explanation of your data is that students tend to prefer the football team of their own university to other teams. Accordingly, consideration of inductive fallacies gives us another powerful reason to think that inference to the best explanation does not reduce to enumerative induction. In fact, we have reason to think that the reduction goes in the other direction—enumerative induction, when it is justifying, reduces to inference to the best explanation.

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<sup>13</sup>See BonJour (1998) and my (2016) for more on this. See Huemer (2009) and Poston (2014) for arguments making similar claims related to Goodman's new riddle of induction.

<sup>14</sup>The example that follows is similar to one I describe elsewhere (2016, 195).

## 22.2 Response to Kvanvig

Kvanvig focuses his attention on the ontology of evidence. In particular, he challenges the defense of Statism that I offer in *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification*.<sup>15</sup> Although Kvanvig touches upon a number of interesting issues in his chapter, I will limit my discussion to his main argument in support of Propositionalism over Statism—what I call “Kvanvig’s Dilemma.”

### 22.2.1 Clarifications

Before digging into the details of Kvanvig’s case against Statism, it is worth clarifying a couple points. First of all, there are two broad views of the nature of evidence. On the one hand, there is Statism—the view that evidence consists of mental states. On the other hand, there is Propositionalism—the view that evidence consists of propositions. Kvanvig points out that this way of expressing Propositionalism is commonly used but misleading. He claims that instead it is more accurate to think of Propositionalism as identifying “evidence with informational content” where such content is properly understood to encompass more than just propositions (Chap. 20, 347). As Kvanvig correctly notes, some of my earlier criticisms of Propositionalism targeted the common, narrower expression of the view. Here Propositionalism will be understood in Kvanvig’s broader sense.

Another point to clarify at the outset concerns the impact that my disagreement with Kvanvig has on EE. Although I agree with Kvanvig that determining the correct ontology of evidence is an important task, we both agree that EE is not held hostage to the outcome of this debate (between Statism and Propositionalism). I make clear elsewhere (2014a) that what matters for EE is that evidence be understood in a way that respects key internalist intuitions such as the one at play in the new evil demon problem. This requires that evidence be non-factive. Statism and Propositionalism can both accommodate this fact. As Kvanvig makes clear, the truth of Propositionalism would not preclude us from identifying S’s evidence with her non-factive mental states (Chap. 20, 348). Hence, the sort of internalist mentalist stance that is essential to EE is consistent with either view. This is why even though I argue that Statism is correct, as far as EE is concerned S’s evidence can be understood as “either her non-factive mental states or the propositional contents of her non-factive mental states” (2014a, 27). None of this is to say that there aren’t important issues at play here or that we shouldn’t try to discover the correct ontology of evidence. Rather, the point is just that whether one sides with Kvanvig or with me on this issue the acceptability of EE is not affected.

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<sup>15</sup>In my previous work I referred to this view as “Psychologism”, but I will follow Kvanvig in calling it “Statism”.

### 22.2.2 *Kvanvig's Dilemma*

The central challenge that Kvanvig presents for Statism comes in the form of a dilemma. Either the view is to be understood in terms of token mental states or types of mental states, but both understandings are problematic. Here is his expression of the problem:

If Statism is a token-level view, it can't accommodate the worry about evidence one does not possess that is central to a fallibilist epistemology. And if it is a type-level view, it's just a masked version of Propositionalism: an account where all the work is done by informational content, but with a few bells and whistles added to distract the observer from seeing how the machine actually works (Chap. 20, 353).

While the token-level version of Statism might be defensible, Kvanvig makes a pretty convincing case against it. Consequently, I will focus on the second horn of Kvanvig's dilemma by arguing that the extra "bells and whistles" of type-level Statism do important work. So, what exactly does type-level Statism (let's refer to it as "Statism<sub>T</sub>") look like? Kvanvig helpfully explains that Statism<sub>T</sub> should type the relevant mental states not only by "attitude type (e.g., cognitive states including both beliefs and experiences) but also in terms of content" (Chap. 20, 350–351). As a result, Statism<sub>T</sub> yields that a given bit of evidence is a particular cognitive state with a particular content. Note this is not to say that the evidence is the content and having the evidence is being in the cognitive state with that content—that is Propositionalism. Instead, the idea is that evidence, *e*, is identical to mental state type *m*, where *m* is typed both in terms of the cognitive attitude that it is and the content that it has. For example, according to Statism<sub>T</sub>, Sally and Sam have the same evidence, *e*, when they both have the justified belief that " $1 + 1 = 2$ ". Why? The answer is that they both have a particular token mental state with the same type—they both have a mental state that is a belief with the content  $\langle 1 + 1 = 2 \rangle$ .

Statism<sub>T</sub> sounds like a plausible view, so what's the problem? According to Kvanvig, "the theoretical work is being done by informational content" because "it is in virtue of being typed by content that the state in question—an abstract state-type, recall—constitutes evidence for some claims and not others" (Chap. 10, 351). Hence, Kvanvig claims "all the explanatory work is being done . . . by the token believing or experiencing, plus the informational content in question" (Chap. 20, 351). Thus, he concludes that Statism<sub>T</sub> "isn't really incompatible with Propositionalism, it is just Propositionalism encumbered with a gratuity" (Chap. 20, 351).

Of course, if Kvanvig is correct that Statism<sub>T</sub> is really just Propositionalism with unnecessary add-ons, then there is at least one thing going for Statism<sub>T</sub>—it is immune to all of the problems for Statism that Kvanvig claims only Propositionalism can avoid. However, this isn't sufficient for making Statism<sub>T</sub> acceptable because if Propositionalism can avoid the same problems while being a simpler theory, it has an advantage over Statism<sub>T</sub>. So, the question is does Statism<sub>T</sub> have any advantages over Propositionalism? The answer is "yes". Here I'll discuss two of those advantages.

First of all, as I have argued previously (2014a), Propositionalism faces a circularity problem.<sup>16</sup> When S sees a fire truck, the evidence provided by her perceptual experience justifies her in believing <there is a fire truck>. What is this evidence? According to Propositionalism, it is the proposition <there is a fire truck>. So, S's evidence for <there is a fire truck> is <there is a fire truck>. This is a very small circle indeed. Statism<sub>T</sub> doesn't share this problem though. According to Statism<sub>T</sub>, S's evidence in this case is her mental state. This mental state is evidence for <there is a fire truck> in virtue of its content, but the evidence is not identical with that proposition. Thus, there is no circularity in the picture Statism<sub>T</sub> offers.

Admittedly, Kvanvig offers what seems to be a plausible response to the circularity problem facing Propositionalism by claiming that the informational content of S's perceptual experience is richer than <there is a fire truck>. Accordingly, he argues that Propositionalism doesn't commit one to claiming that <there is a fire truck> is S's evidence for <there is a fire truck>. This, however, leads to another problem for Propositionalism. As Kvanvig recognizes, it now seems that S's evidence entails <there is a fire truck>. This is problematic because as a fallibilist about perceptual justification, Kvanvig does not want to claim that a perceptual experience as of a fire truck entails that <there is a fire truck>. Thus, Propositionalism seems to jump from the frying pan of circularity into the fire of entailment. But, again, Statism<sub>T</sub> doesn't share this problem. Since Statism<sub>T</sub> doesn't identify the evidence with the content of S's perceptual experience it doesn't follow that S's experience entails <there is a fire truck>. There is no problem with saying that S's evidence PE<sub><there is a fire truck></sub> (perceptual experience as of there being a fire truck) doesn't entail <there is a fire truck> even though it provides evidence for believing this proposition.

Kvanvig gestures at a possible response to the entailment problem on behalf of Propositionalism. Essentially, his idea is that we should think of evidence as "a proposition under a guise" (Chap. 20, 355). This may allow one to avoid the entailment problem because <there is a fire truck> under one guise may not entail <there is a fire truck> under another guise or no guise at all. However, as Kvanvig admits, this proposal may require us to rethink the evidence relation in a pretty substantial way so that we don't gain evidence in support of a proposition, but only in support of that proposition under a particular guise. Whether or not this sort of proposal can be fleshed out and made plausible remains to be seen. Regardless, at this point it is clear that Statism<sub>T</sub> has at least one advantage over Propositionalism—it can avoid the circularity and entailment problems without requiring any such revision to how we conceive of the evidence relation.

There is a second advantage that Statism<sub>T</sub> has over Propositionalism. It avoids what I will call the "same evidence problem" facing Propositionalism. To illustrate the same evidence problem, consider a situation where S has an intense pain and she tells her doctor about it. Presumably, both S and her doctor are justified in believing that S is in pain. What is their evidence? Statism<sub>T</sub> says that they have

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<sup>16</sup>See Turri (2009) for discussion of this problem and others for Propositionalism.

different evidence that supports the same proposition. S's evidence consists of her pain experience (typed by experience and its content); the doctor's evidence consists of her hearing S's testimony (typed by experience of testimony and its content). The content of these mental states both include  $\langle S \text{ is in pain} \rangle$ , so they support believing that S is in pain. Nevertheless, since they are different cognitive attitude types, they are different evidence. This seems intuitively correct. After all, S's evidence seems to support her belief that she is in pain more strongly than the doctor's evidence does. Additionally, S's evidence is qualitatively very different from the doctor's. It would be very strange to claim that S and the doctor have the same evidence for thinking  $\langle S \text{ is in pain} \rangle$ . This is exactly what Propositionalism says though. S's evidence is  $\langle S \text{ is in pain} \rangle$  because that is the content of her experience, and the doctor's evidence is  $\langle S \text{ is in pain} \rangle$  because that is the content of the testimony she received.

Now, the Propositionalist might try to respond to the same evidence problem by claiming that what is driving the intuition here is simply that S and the doctor have the same evidence in different ways. But, this doesn't seem correct. It's not simply that S and her doctor have the same evidence in different ways; they have different evidence. Of course, the Propositionalist might take up Kvanvig's "guises" proposal and say that what's going on here is that S has  $\langle S \text{ is in pain} \rangle$  under one guise and the doctor has  $\langle S \text{ is in pain} \rangle$  under another guise. This might go some way toward resolving this issue, but it will leave us stuck with the idea that S and her doctor aren't justified in believing the same proposition. Something that Kvanvig's guise approach will saddle the Propositionalist with in every case of testimony where the testifier has firsthand evidence of the claim in question. This is a strange result.

Undoubtedly, neither of the considerations raised in support of Statism<sub>T</sub> definitively show that it is superior to Propositionalism understood in terms of Kvanvig's "guises" proposal. Nonetheless, they do show that Statism<sub>T</sub> is superior to the standard version of Propositionalism. Further, they help make the case that the "bells and whistles" Statism<sub>T</sub> adds to Propositionalism aren't gratuitous. Finally, these considerations lead one to question whether Kvanvig's claim concerning Statism's ability to yield the intuitively correct results better applies to Propositionalism. Perhaps when it comes to correctly describing the nature of evidence, it is Propositionalism that "at best, contorts to try to do so" (Chap. 20, 346).

### 22.3 Response to Steup

Steup is concerned that EE fails to satisfy what he calls the "NN-constraint", which is necessary for providing a fully reductive account of epistemic justification. As Steup explains it, the idea behind the NN-constraint is that "for a satisfying and truly informative theory of epistemic justification, the goal is to ground epistemic evaluation in conditions that are completely factual, that is, non-normative" (Chap. 21, 362). When it comes to EE Steup charges that it cannot satisfy the NN-constraint because its account of evidential fit sneaks in epistemic, i.e. normative, notions.

Steup's criticism rests on three grounds. Although none of these grounds provide sufficient reason to doubt EE, here I will limit my focus to explaining why the first two grounds are inadequate.<sup>17</sup>

### 22.3.1 *Availability*

The notion of *availability* plays a key role in EE. According to EE a proposition has to be part of the best *available* explanation of S's evidence, or *available* as an explanatory consequence of that best explanation, in order to be justified for S. One reason for this is that we can be justified in believing things even if they aren't in fact part of the correct explanation of our evidence. EE is a fallibilist theory, after all. Another reason for this is that it is plausible that we don't have justification for propositions that we don't grasp or explanations that we can't even bring to mind. More can be said on this topic, but for the present purpose it is enough to recognize that according to EE justification depends crucially on what the best *available* explanation is. Consequently, it is important that the availability condition that EE includes can be fleshed out in such a way that EE correctly captures our intuitions about justification without collapsing into some other account of evidential fit.

Unfortunately, Steup claims that EE's availability condition cannot be analyzed without appealing to what fits S's evidence. The problem here, as Steup sees it, is that whether or not an explanation is available to S will depend upon the evidence that S has. Hence, he worries that EE fails to satisfy the NN-constraint because it provides an account of evidential fit that appeals to evidential fit itself. More explicitly, he argues that on each of the three candidates for understanding availability that he considers either EE is rendered implausible or it sneaks something normative into its analysis of evidential fit.

I agree with Steup that his first two options for availability will not do the job. Clearly, EE cannot make availability a matter of what S knows—this would make knowledge part of EE's analysis of evidential fit. It seems equally clear that availability cannot be a matter of being supported by S's evidence. This would, as Steup asserts, lead to EE saying, "*p* fits S's evidence *e* iff *p* is part of . . . the best explanation of *e* that is supported by—i.e. fits—S's evidence" (Chap. 21, 365). While it's not obvious to me that Steup's third option, that availability depends on what S believes, has to lead to the implausible results that he claims, I'm willing to

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<sup>17</sup>I don't respond to Steup's third ground for his criticism, what he calls the "Missing Causal Connection Problem", because I have addressed this worry in other recent work. See my (2015) and (2017).

grant for the sake of argument that it won't work for EE either.<sup>18</sup> What, then, should the explanationist evidentialist say about availability?

The availability condition of EE should be understood in terms of what S is disposed to become aware of when reflecting on her evidence. More precisely:

At  $t$  S has  $p$  available as part of the best explanation for why S has  $e$  if and only if:  
At  $t$  S has the concepts required to understand  $p$  and S is disposed to have a seeming that  $p$  is part of the best answer to the question "why does S have  $e$ ?" on the basis of reflection alone (2014a, 67).<sup>19</sup>

It is important to note that this understanding of availability makes no appeal to what S knows or believes, nor does it appeal to what is supported by S's evidence. Rather, what is required for S to have an explanation available is that S be disposed to have a particular seeming.

According to Steup, views that ground evidential fit in seemings, such as phenomenal conservatism and his "credentialism", satisfy the NN-constraint. Why? "Seemings are non-normative mental states" (Chap. 21, 362). If Steup is correct about this, and it seems that he is, then grounding availability in dispositions to have seemings should satisfy the NN-constraint as well. After all, if seemings are non-normative mental states, dispositions to have such non-normative mental states also appear to be non-normative.

Admittedly, one might worry that S's non-factive mental states, i.e. her evidence, are what ground her dispositions to have seemings. Hence, one might think that the availability required by EE ultimately bottoms out in S's evidence. While it is correct that S's dispositions are grounded in her evidence (at least partly), this doesn't pose a problem. S's evidence isn't playing a normative role when it comes to fixing what is available to her. Instead, S's evidence is merely playing a causal role. As a result, EE doesn't end up saying that " $p$  fits S's evidence  $e$  iff  $p$  is part of . . . the best explanation of  $e$  that is supported by—i.e. fits—S's evidence" (Chap. 21, 365). It ends up saying something more like " $p$  fits S's evidence  $e$  iff  $p$  is part of the best explanation of  $e$  that the mental states comprising S's evidence dispose her to bring to mind upon reflection." Therefore, EE can account for the required availability in a way that satisfies the NN-constraint.

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<sup>18</sup>I hesitate to agree with Steup about the plausibility of analyzing availability in terms of what S believes because it seems that restricting explanations that provide justification to the best *sufficiently good* available explanation may avoid the worries he raises. This sort of restriction is motivated by independent reasons (see my (2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018b)).

<sup>19</sup>Likewise,  $p$ 's being available as an explanatory consequence should be understood in terms of S's being disposed to have a particular seeming on the basis of reflection alone.

### 22.3.2 *Equally Good Explanations*

Steup's second ground for criticizing EE is that he claims there are *Equally Good Explanations* (EGE) cases. EGE cases have the following features:

- (i) two competing explanations of S's evidence for  $p$ , E1 and E2, are both available to S;
- (ii) explanationism yields the desired outcome— $p$  fits S's evidence—only if explanationism succeeds in identifying E1 as the better explanation;
- (iii) when judged against non-evaluative characteristics of explanatory goodness, E1 and E2 are equally good explanations of S's evidence;
- (iv) the only way to identify E1 as the better explanation is to appeal to S's evidence. (Chap. 21, 367)

The problem these cases pose is that it seems that EE can only identify one explanation as the best by appealing to the explanation's better fit with S's evidence. This, however, would amount to spelling out evidential fit in terms of evidential fit.

It will be helpful to focus on one of Steup's concrete examples of an EGE case. Recall his case of the car that won't start. Steup asks, "Should I believe  $p$  the battery is dead or  $q$  the gas tank is empty?" (Chap. 21, 369). He tells us that if we add to the case that he recalls the battery giving him trouble before filling his tank with gas the day before,  $p$  fits his evidence "and therefore is a better explanation of [his] evidence than  $q$ " (Chap. 21, 369). Why is this thought to be a problem for EE though? Steup explains, "the problem is that, as mere explanations,  $p$  and  $q$  are equally good" (Chap. 21, 369). Thus, he concludes the moral of this case (and the other EGE cases which share all of the relevant features) is that "Which of the two propositions fits my evidence better is not determined by which one explains my evidence better. Rather, it's the other way around: my total evidence determines which of the two propositions explains my evidence better" (Chap. 21, 370). Put another way, "The problem for explanationism, then, is that explanatory goodness seems to be subject-relative in the sense that it is a function of what propositions the subject's evidence supports" (Chap. 21, 369).

In order to evaluate whether Steup's EGE cases really pose a problem for EE we should get clear on why he claims that  $p$  and  $q$  are equally good explanations. We have a hint of why he thinks this from the fact that he says they are equally good as *mere* explanations. The reason for this is that Steup thinks that in order to avoid appealing to what the evidence supports EE has to hold that explanations should be evaluated in isolation from the evidence. Consequently, he claims that  $p$  and  $q$  must be evaluated strictly in terms of things like simplicity.

Although Steup is correct that simplicity and various other intrinsic features of explanations are important for evaluating them, he is mistaken in thinking that explanations should be evaluated in isolation from the evidence. Explanatory power



(the range of data explained by an explanation) is a central explanatory virtue.<sup>20</sup> One of the key factors in evaluating an explanation is the question of whether it actually explains the data! When it comes to EE the data is S's evidence, so determining the best explanation of S's evidence is going to require examining the evidence. In Steup's case it is stipulated that  $p$  and  $q$  are otherwise equal, but  $p$  explains more of the relevant data (his experience of the car not starting, his memory that the battery gave him trouble, etc.) than  $q$ . So,  $p$  has more explanatory power than  $q$  (which doesn't explain his memory, for instance), and when all other things are equal, the explanation with the most explanatory power is the best. Does this amount to saying that the explanation that best fits the evidence is the best? No, it amounts to saying that the explanation that explains the greatest range of relevant data is the best. When it comes to EE the relevant data is S's evidence, so potential explanations should be evaluated at least partly in terms of the range of S's evidence that they explain. Leaving out this line of evaluation is ignoring one of the chief explanatory virtues. That's a mistake. Importantly, including consideration of explanatory power does not run afoul of the NN-constraint. EE doesn't say look to see what best fits the evidence and conclude that it is the best explanation; it says look and see what best explains the evidence and that is what best fits it.

In sum, Steup's criticisms (like those of Fumerton and Kvanvig), while interesting and worthy of careful consideration, fail to undermine EE. Thus, EE remains a viable theory of epistemic justification.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>See Poston (2014) for discussion of the importance of explanatory power as a virtue. Also, see my (2014a, 2015, 2016, and 2017).

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