



King's Research Portal

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Littlejohn, C. (2011). Reasons and Belief's Justification. In *Reasons for Belief* (pp. 111-130). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Forthcoming in A. Reisner and A. Steglich-Petersen (ed.), *Reasons for Belief* (Cambridge University Press).

1. INTRODUCTION

There's little to say about justification that cannot be said in terms of reasons. If you Φ and thereby do all that the reasons demanded, it cannot be that you oughtn't have Φ 'd. If it's not the case that you oughtn't have Φ 'd, there's no further question as to whether your Φ -ing was justified. Having done all that you should, there's no reason left standing to demand that you refrain from Φ -ing. There's nothing that could stand in the way of the justification of your actions or attitudes. Here's our first connection. If you've done all that the reasons demand, nothing prevents your actions or attitudes from being justified. On the other hand, we shouldn't believe or act without adequate justification. When you oughtn't Φ , there's an undefeated reason that demands that you refrain from Φ -ing. It's because of this reason that Φ -ing is beyond justification and the most you could hope for is an excuse. Think of cases of conflicting reasons. The only way to justify Φ -ing in the face of reasons that count against Φ -ing is to point to considerations that defeat these reasons. If the reasons you need cannot be found (i.e., reasons that defeat the case against Φ -ing), we can say that Φ -ing cannot be justified because there are reasons that demand that you not Φ that are not defeated. Here's our second connection. Fail to do what the relevant reasons demand and your actions and attitudes are beyond justification.

If we assume this much, there's little that distinguishes doing all that the reasons require from acting or believing with justification. So, we ought to be able to work from an account of reasons and their demands to an account of justification.¹ To do this, we have to settle a question about reasons. We know that reasons are demanding things, but what do they demand? Maybe reasons are reasons to conform.² If there's reason for you to Φ , its demands are met iff you Φ . Critics say that this account misrepresents their demands. According to one objection, it would be unreasonable for reasons to demand full conformity, so they must demand something less.³ According to another, mere conformity doesn't ensure that your actions or attitudes are justified

¹ The conclusions I'll defend concern the justification of belief, the examples will typically concern reasons for action. Like Alston (1988), I think we have a firmer grip on what reasons for action require. Also, at a certain level of abstraction we ought to expect that reasons for action and belief demand similar sorts of things. As Gibbons (Forthcoming) puts it, the similarities between reasons for action and belief have a built in explanation the dissimilarities lack because both are *reasons*.

² Gardner (2007) and Raz (1990) defend the view. Gardner rejects the view that justification is simply a matter of conforming to undefeated reasons.

³ Audi (2001), Bird (2007), Cohen (1984), Conee and Feldman (2004), Gibbons (Forthcoming), Herman (1994), Langsam (2008), and Wedgwood (2002a) each in their own way suggest that there's no real difference between the justified and the reasonable.

because you can conform to some reason quite in spite of your deliberative efforts.⁴ Reasons demand more than conformity.

In the first part of the paper, I'll look at some competing accounts of reasons and their demands. It's fair to criticize the conformity account on the grounds that justification involves more than merely conforming to the demands of the undefeated reasons. Normative appraisal is not wholly unconcerned with the reasons for which we act and believe, a fact that's hard to square with the conformity account. It's a mistake, however, to say that normative appraisal is concerned only with the reasons for which we act and believe. Reasons demand full conformity but don't demand compliance. The right account occupies a middle ground between the conformity and compliance accounts.

In the second part of the paper, I'll argue that there's something wrong with two influential approaches to epistemic justification. I'll focus on evidentialism and the knowledge account because they face structurally similar problems.⁵ They're either wrong about which norms govern belief or mistaken about what the reasons associated with these norms demand. There's more to a belief's justification than the evidentialist maintains and less to a belief's justification than the knowledge account says.

2. REASONS AND DEMANDS

According to the conformity account:

- I: In Φ -ing, S does all that the reasons require iff S conforms to the relevant reasons.

If you have a reason to Φ , you conform to that reason iff you Φ . We talk as if we have reasons for bringing about certain (external) states of affairs. It's possible to fail to conform to such reasons without thereby being anything less than fully reasonable or responsible. Those who think that reasons cannot demand that we bring about states of affairs on the grounds that someone might try but fail to do so without being anything less than rational or responsible often say that normative evaluation ought to be concerned only with the qualities of someone's deliberative efforts. They likely opt for a view along these lines:

- II: In Φ -ing, S has done all that the reasons require iff S is no less than fully reasonable and responsible for having Φ 'd.

Coming from a slightly different direction, some might object to (I) on the grounds that it fails to represent the full range of demands reasons make. While the results of our deliberative efforts do matter, reasons are also there to guide the way we reason, and the conformity account fails to do justice to this. So, someone might opt for the compliance account:

- III: In Φ -ing, S has done all that the reasons require iff S complies with the relevant reasons.

To comply with some reason to Φ is to Φ for that very reason. On this third account, normative appraisal is concerned both with the quality and results of our deliberative efforts. Sympathetic as I am to the idea that normative appraisal is concerned with the quality of our deliberative efforts, I shall argue that it's a mistake to say as (II) does that this is the sole concern of normative appraisal

⁴ A point stressed by Gardner (2005: 111) who insists that justification isn't just a matter of showing that someone's actions made the world better, but also a matter of showing that the subject's deeds or beliefs could be attributed to the subject's excelling at rationality.

⁵ See Adler (2002), Conee and Feldman (2004), Shah (2006), and Steup (2001) for defenses of evidentialism. Williamson (2000) defends the knowledge account as does Bird (2007), Huemer (2008), and Sutton (2005, 2007). Adler (2002) might defend both views.

and argue that (III) is wrong in the way it takes the justification of our actions and attitudes to depend on the reasons for which we act and believe. The right account is found somewhere in between (I) and (III).

2.1 REASONS AND RATIONALITY

Some object to the conformity and compliance accounts on the grounds that they represent reasons as making unreasonable demands.⁶ It's said that (I) fails to do justice to the deontological character of justification we're urged to accept (II) in its place. Those who defend the deontological theory of justification often say that theirs is a view on which a belief is justified when it is, "epistemically permissible, a belief for which the subject cannot justly be blamed, or a belief the subject is not obliged to drop."⁷ The argument would be this. If we opt for (I), we have to allow for cases in which a subject who oughtn't Φ reasonably judges she ought to Φ . Suppose, if only for *reductio*, that such a case is possible. That she oughtn't Φ would mean that there's an undefeated reason that demands that the agent refrain from Φ -ing. When the agent acts in accordance with her judgment about what she ought to do she will thereby be in breach of her duties or obligations. But, the objection continues, this cannot be. It cannot be that her duty or responsibility was to refrain from Φ -ing because we cannot properly accuse her of any irresponsibility for having Φ 'd. Thus, reasons do not demand conformity, as (I) states. If, as a result of our deliberative efforts, we cannot be said to be anything less than fully reasonable or responsible, we cannot fail to do what the reasons demanded from us.

There's little to be said for this argument. The term 'responsibility' has a backwards-looking and forward-looking sense. The argument conflates these. It's true that if we oughtn't Φ , we have an undefeated reason to refrain from Φ -ing. In that sense, refraining from Φ -ing is a responsibility of ours. Here, 'responsibility' is synonymous with 'duty'. It's true that if we non-culpably judge that we ought to Φ and Φ accordingly, we cannot be accused of any irresponsibility. Here, however, 'responsibility' is being used with its hypological inflection.⁸ To say that we cannot be accused of any irresponsibility in this sense is to say that blame is inappropriate. In the absence of a reason to think that anyone who acts responsibly thereby meets her responsibilities, this argument gives us no reason to accept (II).

To see why reasons demand more than (II) suggests, consider three cases:

- C1: Green sees Peacock aim her revolver at Plum and knowing that the only way he can prevent Peacock from shooting Plum is by hitting Peacock with a candlestick. He hits her with the candlestick, thus saving Plum's life but injuring Peacock.
- C2: White sees Green raising a candlestick with the intention of hitting Peacock but does not realize that Green is trying to protect Plum. Believing that Green is trying to murder Peacock, he picks

⁶ This complaint is sometimes voiced by those who work on moral luck and deny that consequential luck can determine whether we've lived up to our obligations. See, for example, Nagel's (1979: 31) remark that strict liability might have its uses in the law but is "irrational as a moral position".

⁷ Steup (1999: 375). The argument sketched would be endorsed by those who take the reasonable to be the mark of the permissible.

⁸ Hypological judgments pertain to accountability, liability, responsibility, culpability and the like. See Zimmerman (2002).

up a wrench and swings it at Green, mistakenly believing that this is justified on grounds of protecting an innocent party.

C3: In an unrelated incident, Mustard stabbed White. He had gone mad.

Our ordinary scheme of normative appraisal recognizes a distinction between denials of responsibility (e.g., (C3)) and excuses (e.g., (C2)).⁹ It also recognizes a distinction between excuses and justifications where a justification depends upon showing that an action is right or permitted (e.g., (C1)). It's possible to maintain these distinctions and thus allow that these three cases illustrate three distinct ways of removing blame only if it's possible for an agent to be no less than fully rational or responsible even if the agent's action is an instance of excusable wrongdoing. An action can only be an instance of excusable wrongdoing, however, if the agent who performs the action fails to do what she ought to have done. An action can be all things considered wrong only if the agent who performs them has failed to do what the reasons required. Hence, it's possible for an agent to be fully reasonable and responsible while failing to do all that the reasons required. Thus, we must reject (II).

To defend (II), someone would have to show that our three cases do not illustrate three distinct ways of removing blame. It's clear that (C2) and (C3) differ significantly. To remove blame in (C3), we would have to show that Mustard lacked the capacities necessary for being properly held accountable for his deeds. As White can be held responsible for his deeds, if we are going to argue that White cannot be blamed for his deeds, it seems our only other option is to argue that White's actions, though wrongful, were nevertheless what we would expect from a fully reasonable agent. Given how things seemed to him at the time, we might say, we can see that White's response is no indication that he is anything less than fully virtuous. Presumably it is this that defenders of (II) must deny. They must deny that we excuse someone from wrongdoing by showing that their actions or attitudes were reasonable and that they were fully responsible for having acted or believed as they did. They must insist that this is a justification because defenders of (II) take the mark of permissibility to be an agent's being fully reasonable and responsible for having acted as she did.

This response puts defenders of (II) in a bit of a bind. The mark of permissibility isn't what they say it is. To defend their view, they have to classify the actions in (C1) and (C2) as right, thus denying that (C2) is a case of excusable wrongdoing. This doesn't sit well with intuition. Think about justified intervention. One striking difference between (C1) and (C2) is that it seems that an informed bystander could justifiably use force to assist Green but only justifiably use force to interfere with White. The natural explanation for this difference would seem to be that there is a difference in the deontic statuses of Green's and White's actions.¹⁰ If we say both acted rightly, we run out of moral distinctions to use to explain this difference. We should classify (C2) as a case of excusable wrongdoing and reject the link between being fully reasonable and doing what the reasons demand.

2.2 CONFORMITY OR COMPLIANCE?

⁹ Strawson (1962) refers to denials of responsibility as "exemptions", but I'll use Gardner (2007) and Horder's (2004) terminology.

¹⁰ As Robinson (1996) argues. Husak (1999) argues that there are problems with the details of the argument and I address his concerns in Littlejohn (MS).

Reasons demand conformity. The question is whether their demands end there. Critics of the conformity account insist that they demand more. Critics of the compliance account insist that they demand less than compliance. The critics are right. We ought to reject (I) and (III). The problem with the conformity account is that it denies that the quality of our deliberative efforts could have any bearing on whether we have done what the reasons required of us, that we could do what the reasons require quite in spite of our deliberative efforts. That's a mistake. Justification does depend on explanatory reasons, but not in the way the compliance account suggests.

According to the compliance account, a reason to Φ demands that you Φ for that very reason. Doing all the reasons require depends on whether you conform to those reasons from those very reasons. This can't be right. Consider cases of overdetermination. Suppose there are two perfectly good reasons for Mustard to turn Plum in to the police. Are we to say that Mustard did anything less than what the reasons required if he turned her in to protect White? Surely not.¹¹ But, Mustard did not comply with an undefeated reason. If we think that any failure to do what an undefeated reason demands without any reason for so this failure is *prima facie* wrongful, we would have to think of his actions as being *prima facie* wrongful. Or, consider cases where the good reasons to act are explanatorily idle. If Mustard turns Plum in so that he can use the reward to buy himself something rather nice, what of it? Again, his actions aren't *prima facie* wrongful, but he has not complied with any particularly good reason.¹² The lesson is that the failure to comply with undefeated reasons does not by itself show that the agent's actions or attitudes are wrongful. This seems hard to square with the idea that reasons demand compliance.

Those who defend the compliance account insist that reasons demand more than mere conformity. If we know Plum moved her arm because she tried to sock Green in the jaw, it seems this alone is enough to show that Plum's action is *prima facie* wrongful. We know it is wrongful even if we do not yet know whether she made contact. The point is obvious enough. We can show that someone's actions or attitudes are wrongful even if we do not show that they acted against some undefeated reason. We only have to show that the agent's deliberative efforts were of sufficiently poor quality by showing that the agent either was willing to bringing about the bad or indifferent to the prospect of doing so. The malicious, negligent, and reckless agent fails to do what the reasons demand of them. This seems hard to square with the conformity account because we can easily imagine that there is no undefeated reason to which the agent fails to conform even though the agent is malicious, negligent, or reckless.

The considerations that cause trouble for the conformity and compliance accounts suggest that normative appraisal is concerned with both the quality and results of our deliberative efforts. An account that seems to do justice to this is a modified version of the compliance account that insists that you ought to always act or believe for some undefeated reason.¹³ It allows that you needn't act for every undefeated reason. If the reasons for which you Φ correspond to some undefeated reason, you have done all that the reasons require. Do anything less, and you fail to do all the reasons require.

The view is nicely tailored for addressing the problems that beset the conformity and compliance accounts, but the theoretical motivation for the view might seem obscure. It denies that reasons individually demand compliance but insists that there is nevertheless always a demand

¹¹ See Raz (1999: 91).

¹² See Raz (1990: 180).

¹³ Gardner (2007) defends the view that justification requires acting for an undefeated reason and Raz (1990: 40) defended the view that we always ought to act for some undefeated reason when he first published *Practical Reason and Norms*. He no longer defends the view.

to comply with some undefeated reason or other, so from where does this demand come? One suggestion is that if we always act or believe on an undefeated reason, we better conform to the demands reasons place upon us.¹⁴ The problem is that it seems to give an instrumental justification for the principle and that's too weak for our purposes. If we say there's overall reason to Φ , it's true that anyone who acts for an undefeated reason will conform to the demands of the undefeated reason. However, it's also true that someone can act for the wrong sorts of reasons knowing the act happens to be what there's overall reason to do. We cannot appeal to an instrumental principle to explain why we regard their actions as wrongful. Suppose Mustard sees Green take aim at Plum with a revolver and clubs him with a pipe knowing that this sort of thing would be justified on grounds of defending another. Suppose Mustard acts only with the motive of injuring his old enemy. Knowing what he knows, he knows that his act conforms to an undefeated reason. If the principle that you ought always act for some undefeated reason is just an instrumental principle, it doesn't explain why Mustard's action is wrongful.

One problem with the proposal, then, is this. As the motivation for the view cannot stem from a description of the demands individual reasons make, its motivation must derive from elsewhere. The justification that has been offered is instrumental and an instrumental principle is too weak. We want an account that accommodates the idea that normative appraisal is concerned with both the results of our deliberative efforts and the quality of those efforts. The modified compliance account doesn't quite do that, either. For the account asserts that we must always act for some undefeated reason, that the reason for which we Φ corresponds to a genuine reason to Φ . The lack of such a correspondence is not itself any indication that the agent's deliberative efforts are defective in any way. Plum knows she's promised to meet Green for lunch but hears that her former colleague Peacock has fallen ill and rushes to see her. Suppose we learn that Plum acts from a sense of religious duty rather than direct concern for Peacock's welfare. Plum is pious in a way many of us are not, and many of us can see no reason for discharging what she regards as her religious duties. We might say that she's reasonable for having judged that she ought to visit Peacock and no less than fully reasonable or rational for having both acted as she did and for the reasons she did. But, we would be chary to say that her reason for acting corresponded to any real reason for acting. So, we could not say it corresponded to any undefeated reason. Nevertheless, I see no reason to say that she did anything less than what the reasons required of her or that her actions were less than fully justified.

Note two things. First, if she did nothing wrongful, we have a perfectly good counterexample to the principle that states we ought always act for undefeated reason. The reason for which she acted isn't a valid reason. Second, it shows that the rationale for that principle cannot be that normative appraisal is concerned both with the quality of the agent's deliberative efforts and the results of those efforts. For that principle asserts that there must be a correspondence between the reasons for which an agent acts and an undefeated reason. The mere lack of such a correspondence is no indication that there was any defect in the way the agent deliberated. Nor does it indicate that the subject failed to conform to undefeated reasons. So, if the view's motivation stems from the thought that normative appraisal is concerned with both the quality and results of an agent's deliberative efforts, the view's motivation seems to support only the weaker view that we ought always conform to undefeated reasons while refraining from deliberating in ways that show disrespect for the reason's status as a reason.

¹⁴ Gardner (2007: 101).

Perhaps that's the right view.¹⁵ There are always two ways to go wrong, either by failing to conform to an undefeated reason or by deliberating in ways that manifest willingness or indifference to acting against a reason. Don't go wrong in these ways and we can't fail to be justified. Doing all that the reasons require thus depends both on the explanatory and normative reasons. What distinguishes the modified compliance account from the present account is not this point, a point on which they agree, but the way these accounts take the normative status of our actions and attitudes to depend on explanatory reasons. The present account takes the normative status of our actions and attitudes to be *negatively* dependent on explanatory reasons. The modified compliance account insisted on a correspondence between the reasons for which you Φ and some undefeated reason for you to Φ . It thus makes the normative status of our actions and attitudes *positively* dependent on the reasons for which we act or believe what we do. Remember that the theoretical motivation for these accounts is the same. It's the observation that normative appraisal is concerned with the agent's contribution to action and belief. Objective features of the situation may determine what reasons there are, but they don't tell us that the agent's response to what she took these reasons to be is flawed, defective, or blemished in any way. If we were to say that the normative status of our actions and attitudes were *positively* dependent on explanatory reasons, insisting that we must always act for some genuine undefeated reason, this would have to derive from somewhere else. But we've seen that it can't derive from the assumption that reasons demand compliance, because they don't. So, the view that best harmonizes with intuition and the theoretical motivations offered for the rival accounts seems to be the view that a reason to Φ demands conformity and demands refraining from deliberating in ways that show disrespect for that reason's status as a reason.¹⁶

An example should help. Plum and Green take aim at Mustard and fire their revolvers. One of their bullets strikes, but one misses. The agent that shot Mustard acted against the reason associated with the duty of non-maleficence. It's clear that both agents' actions were wrongful. It seems we don't need to think about different features of Mustard to understand why both actions were wrongful. It's not as if the duty of non-maleficence demands that you refrain from shooting Mustard because he's sentient and then some other duty distinct from the duty of non-maleficence that demands that you refrain from trying to shoot him or failing to take due care to avoid shooting him in virtue of some features of Mustard other than sentience so that if there were some sentient being that lacked this further feature it would be wrong to shoot it but not wrong to try. There's just the one set of features of Mustard in light of which we can say that they oughtn't to have shot him, tried to shoot him, or fail to take due care to avoid shooting him. If we don't need two sets of features of Mustard to understand why these actions were wrongful, do we really need two different kinds of reasons where Plum failed to meet the demands of the first and Green failed to meet the demands of the second? I think not. We don't need to wait for the ballistics report. We need only the duty of non-maleficence and the reason associated with it to see that both agents' actions were wrongful and why they were. When there's reason not to Φ , the reason demands that you refrain from Φ -ing and demands that you don't deliberate in a way that shows disrespect for the reason's status as a reason. Beyond that, however, reasons demand nothing further.

¹⁵ Sverdlik (1996) defends the view that sufficiently bad motives and intentions can make otherwise justifiable actions wrongful. Like him, I want to say that normative appraisal is concerned with the reasons for which an agent Φ 's because it is interested in the quality of the agent's deliberative efforts.

¹⁶ On this view, reasons can both count against Φ -ing while excluding other reasons, namely those that we cannot deliberate from if we take due care to avoid Φ -ing.

3. JUSTIFICATION

Let's assume, if only as a working hypothesis, that reasons typically place upon us a pair of conceptually related demands. If you have reason not to Φ , in the absence of reasons to the contrary, you oughtn't Φ and oughtn't deliberate in ways that show disrespect for that reason's status as a reason. In other words, you ought not Φ and exercise due care to see to it that you do not Φ . Combine this account with the account of the connection between reasons and justification outlined in the paper's introduction, and it seems we ought to be able to work from a description of the norms of belief to an account of justified belief. Associated with any norm governing belief is a reason that demands, *inter alia*, that we conform to that norm. For any type of epistemic reason, assume there's a norm stating the conditions under which there is such a reason. A belief's justification depends on whether a belief conforms to the norms governing that belief and whether the subject can reasonably assume that the belief so conforms. Its justification shouldn't depend on much else.

If there were some consensus view as to which norm or norms governed belief, our work would be done. There is no such consensus view. I'll look at two of the more influential approaches to epistemic justification and argue that these approaches are flawed. The first, the evidentialist account, asserts that a belief's justification is determined entirely by relations between this belief and the evidence an individual has on hand.¹⁷ Facts that do not supervene on an individual's evidence might figure in some kinds of epistemic appraisal, but not appraisal concerned with a belief's justification. The second, the knowledge account, says we ought to characterize justification using the concept of knowledge and work from the assumption that knowledge is the norm of belief.¹⁸ These views, I'll argue, either rest on mistaken assumptions about the kinds of things that reasons demand or mistaken assumptions about the norms governing belief and the kinds of epistemic reasons there are.

3.1 EVIDENTIALISM

Evidentialists say the considerations that bear on whether to believe p consist of considerations taken to bear on the truth of p and can only consist of such considerations. Considerations that bear instead on, say, the practical benefits of believing p , however, do not give reason to believe p . Why don't practical considerations bear on whether we ought to believe? What explains the hegemony of evidence in doxastic deliberation?

Here's one possible explanation.¹⁹ First, it's said that belief is governed by the truth norm:

T: You ought not believe p unless p .²⁰

Second, it's supposed to be in virtue of our grasp of this normative truth that considerations taken to be irrelevant to the truth of a claim are excluded from deliberation so that only considerations

¹⁷ Adler (2002), Conee and Feldman (2004), Shah (2006), and Steup (2001) defend evidentialist views that differ in various ways but seem to agree that a belief's justification turns entirely on the evidence the believer has that bears on the truth or falsity of that belief.

¹⁸ See Williamson (2000).

¹⁹ Adler (2002) and Shah (2006) offer this sort of explanation. Steglich-Petersen (2006) argues that you don't need to assume that truth is the norm of belief to explain belief's transparency to truth.

²⁰ Owing to the factivity of knowledge, anyone who thinks that knowledge is the fundamental norm of belief thinks that truth is a norm of belief. Boghossian (2003), Velleman (2000), Wedgwood (2002b), and Williams (1973) also defend the view that belief is governed by the truth norm.

taken to bear on the truth of the relevant proposition are included in doxastic deliberation. Third, nothing can be a reason unless it can figure in reasoning.²¹ If we add this assumption that a consideration can constitute a reason to believe or act only if it is capable of being a reason for which we believe or act, we have our argument for evidentialism. What we ought to believe is a function of the reasons there are, and considerations unrelated to truth have just been disqualified as potential reasons. Thus, “only evidence for and against the truth of p is relevant to answering the doxastic question whether to believe that p ”.²²

I think the argument fails as an argument for evidentialism even if it rules out the possibility of practical reasons to believe. If belief is governed by the truth norm, there’s a reason to refrain from believing p if $\sim p$. Whether a belief misrepresents how things are is not something that supervenes on an individual’s evidence. So, the evidentialist cannot say *both* that belief is governed by the truth norm and that only evidence for and against a belief bears on whether to believe some proposition. The evidentialist cannot motivate the evidentialist view by saying that the truth norm governs belief and then deny that the falsity of a belief gives us reason *not* to believe. If they say that a belief’s justification depends on the evidence and not also the truth, they would have to say that this reason demands something less than full conformity. The problem with this response is predictable: reasons demand conformity.

I don’t think that the evidentialist view is that beliefs that contravene the truth norm are justified because evidence gives overriding reason to contravene that norm. The evidentialist seems to think that the justification of our beliefs depends on the evidence and nothing further *because* belief is governed by the truth norm. Norms don’t typically give overriding reason for their own violation. There’s an important difference between cases of conflicting reasons and the case in which good evidence supports a false belief. In the case of conflicting reasons, we can be fully aware of both sets of reasons and knowingly judge that we ought to act on the undefeated reason. No one thinks that we can be aware of the evidence, aware that there is reason to refrain from believing p because of how that belief contravenes the truth norm, and knowingly judge that we ought to believe what the evidence supports. If the evidentialist wants to deny that the truth of our beliefs is necessary for their justification, they had better deny that belief is governed by the truth norm.²³

Some evidentialists seem to do just this.²⁴ They say that a belief’s truth is unnecessary for its justification without having to say that a belief’s failure to conform to the norms of belief is irrelevant to the belief’s justification. Rather than say that the reasons demand less than conformity, some evidentialists will say that *only* evidential norms govern belief.²⁵ This move

²¹ Shah (2006: 484) attributes this assumption to Williams (1981).

²² Shah (2006: 498). According to Owens (2000), the amount of evidence necessary for properly settling the question whether to believe might depend on the practical significance of adopting a belief on the matter and closing deliberation. Fantl and McGrath (2002) later defend a similar claim. Shah might say that his conclusion is not threatened by these authors’ conclusions by saying that only evidence is relevant in the way *reasons* are to answering the question whether to believe p .

²³ This comes with costs. It undermines the explanation that has been given for the transparency of belief to truth and the aim of belief.

²⁴ See Conee and Feldman (2004).

²⁵ Feldman (1988a: 247) says we might have truth as a goal, but insists that the truth or falsity of a belief has no bearing on what we ought to believe because a belief could be false without our knowing it. This suggests that he thinks that reasons can bear on what we ought to believe only if we have access to these reasons. I’d say that the truth of a belief cannot give you reason to believe

avoids one set of problems, but introduces new ones. Briefly, here are two. First, the truth norm plays an important role in explanations as to why belief is transparent to truth and why only what the agent takes to be truth-related considerations can figure in doxastic deliberation. Second, think about the connection between an agent's beliefs about what she should do and the actions she performs in light of these beliefs. The agent's beliefs about what she should do rationalize intentions that rationalize actions. I think that the intention can rationalize the action, in part, because once the case for intending to Φ is settled, there is no further question to settle to determine whether to Φ .²⁶ I think the belief that you should Φ is a belief that can rationalize the intention, in part, because once the case for believing that you ought to Φ is settled, there's no further question to settle to determine whether to intend to Φ .²⁷ If that's right, that suggests that when there is sufficient reason to believe that you ought to Φ , there's sufficient reason to intend to Φ and act accordingly. Of course, if there is a decisive case against Φ -ing, there's not a sufficient case for Φ -ing. So, *if* there's a decisive case against Φ -ing, the reasons that oblige you to refrain from Φ -ing would seem to oblige you to refrain from intending to Φ and from believing that you ought to Φ . Since the facts that determine whether you ought to Φ sometimes include facts that do not supervene upon the evidence, these external facts that oblige you to refrain from Φ -ing oblige you to refrain from concluding deliberation by forming the belief that you ought to Φ . That's so even if you have the same evidence as someone in some possible world who knows that they should Φ . Provided that you shouldn't Φ , you shouldn't conclude deliberation by judging that you should Φ .

An evidentialist could deny this, but then they have to give us some explanation as to why beliefs about what ought to be done rationalize intentions.²⁸ If distinct considerations determine whether to believe you ought to Φ and whether to intend to Φ , it's hard to see why beliefs would play this rationalizing role. If what motivates the evidentialist to deny that belief is governed by the

unless you're aware of it, the falsity of a belief can exert its normative force whether you're aware of it or not. It appears Feldman's reason for denying there's a truth norm is that it implies we could fail to do all the reasons require without being in a position to know this. Maybe he adheres to (II).

²⁶ For discussion, see Hieronymi (2005) and Shah (2008).

²⁷ Concerning the toxin puzzle, we might say that the reason that you cannot form the 'prize winning' intention is that you know that by forming the intention to Φ , there is nothing further to consider in settling the question as to whether to Φ . However, as you know that there *is* something further to consider (i.e., that you would make yourself sick for no reason), you cannot form the intention without adding reasons or manipulating yourself to lose sight of them. If another eccentric billionaire came along and challenged you to come to believe that you ought to drink the toxin without forming the intention to drink, I think we just reproduce the original case one level up and the same points apply. You cannot form the prize winning belief because you know that if you believe you ought to Φ , there is nothing further to consider in settling the question as to whether to intend and whether to act. But, there *is* something further to consider and so you cannot form the prize winning belief without doing the sorts of things that would allow you to form the intention and violating the terms of the arrangement.

²⁸ Feldman (1988b) claims that it's possible for someone to justifiably believe that they ought to Φ when they oughtn't Φ . Along with Broome (2001), I think there's a normative requirement in light of which you oughtn't both: believe that you ought to Φ but not intend to Φ .

truth norm is the thought that the truth norm is unreasonable in demanding that believers refrain from believing on strong evidence, I think the evidentialist is in trouble. To block the argument above, the evidentialist has to say that facts about what you ought to believe about what you should do are fixed by facts about your evidence even if facts about what you ought to do are fixed by further facts and allow for pairs of cases where some subject ought to believe she ought to Φ and ought to believe she ought to Ψ where she ought to act in light of one belief but not the other. This view is just as unreasonable as the view that states that belief is governed by the truth norm. Imagine an advisor who, upon learning that you do not know what to believe about the choice between Φ -ing and Ψ -ing says that you ought to think of Φ -ing as a necessary evil. Imagine this same advisor who, upon seeing you Φ , criticizes you for failing to Ψ . You object but the advisor says that she was being perfectly consistent. One bit of advice was about belief and another about action. If that is what your advisor advises, you need a new advisor.

We've already seen that among the facts that determine whether someone should act are often facts about the situation that do not supervene upon the facts that determine what the agent's evidence is. The evidentialist insists that it's only facts that strongly supervene upon the agent's evidence that determine what the agent should believe. If facts about how an agent should act do not supervene upon the evidence but facts about what an agent should believe do supervene upon the evidence, it should be possible for the agent to believe she ought to Φ , be obligated to refrain from Φ -ing, but have no reason at all to refrain from believing that she ought to Φ . It's one thing to say that conscience is fallible, but quite another to say that there is an undefeated reason to refrain from acting on a normative judgment that is epistemically impeccable. If the resistance to saying that belief is governed by the truth norm is motivated by the thought that such a norm demands the unreasonable from agents who have good evidence that supports false propositions, surely the norm that enjoins us to refrain from acting on beliefs about what we ought to do even if those beliefs are the beliefs we ought to have is equally unreasonable. So, while I think many of us would want to say that just as when there is decisive reason not to Φ , there is decisive reason not to intend to Φ , when there is decisive reason not to Φ or intend to Φ , there is decisive reason not to believe that you ought to Φ .

The problem facing the evidentialist is this. On the one hand, if you try to motivate the view by appeal to the truth norm, you can consistently say that certain considerations that don't bear on the truth of our beliefs cannot constitute reasons for belief, but defending the further claim that only pieces of evidence can constitute reasons requires a view of the demands of reasons we have already rejected. It requires thinking of reasons as demanding something less than conformity. We can be excused for acting against some undefeated reason, but that is the most we could ever hope for. On the other hand, those unwilling to embrace the conclusion that the falsity of a belief constitutes a conclusive reason to refrain from holding it take such a consequence to be a conclusive reason for denying that belief is governed by the truth norm. Instead, they'll say that belief is governed only by evidential norms and the falsity of a belief is said to have no normative significance. False beliefs are failures, to be sure, but not failures that have epistemic normative significance. The problem with this is that it seems hard to square with the idea that a belief's justification depends on whether it's fit for the purposes of practical deliberation. When a subject cannot both rationally believe a set of claims and refrain from acting, if the agent oughtn't perform the action, the agent oughtn't hold these beliefs. A belief is fit for practical deliberation only if it should not be excluded from practical deliberation, and whether a belief should be excluded from deliberation does not depend solely on the evidence the subject has on hand.

The problem with the evidentialist view is that it restricts the scope of epistemic evaluation to relations between a belief and the evidence an individual happens to have on hand. The knowledge account seems to do justice to the idea that the scope of epistemic evaluation includes relations between a belief and the states of affairs it represents by insisting that belief is not governed just by evidential norms, but also the knowledge norm:

K: You should not believe p unless you know that p .

Because knowledge is factive, the knowledge account takes epistemic evaluation to be concerned with more than relations between beliefs and the evidence we have on hand. It would also be concerned with relations between these states of mind and the states of the world they represent. While this view overcomes a difficulty the evidentialist view cannot, it suffers from difficulties structurally similar to those that beset the evidentialist view. The view is either at odds with independently motivated claims about the norms of belief or at odds with the account of reasons defended in the first part of the paper.

In its most popular form, the knowledge account asserts that knowledge is the norm of belief but denies that knowing p is necessary for justifiably believing p :

Anything short of knowledge is failure. But some failures are worse than others. And in particular some failures can be laid at the door of the believer, because the source of failure is one or more of the believer's mental states, and some failures can be ascribed to mischance, in that the failure is due to some mentally extraneous factor. The role of the concept of justification is to mark the difference between these different sources of failure.²⁹

Focus on the last line. This can't be right. Anyone who adopts this attitude towards justification has adopted a view on which justification doesn't involve showing that a justified action or attitude does all that the reasons require or has adopted the view that reasons demand something less than conformity. For surely *if* knowledge is the norm of belief, there's a reason to refrain from believing what you don't know that constitutes a conclusive reason unless it's overridden by some stronger reason to contravene the knowledge norm. As no one thinks there is such a reason, a defense of the knowledge account just is a defense of the idea that there is such a reason to refrain from believing what you don't know to be true. So, the only way to make sense of this view is to either say that we can successfully justify Φ -ing in the face of undefeated reasons not to Φ or assert that reasons demand less than conformity. The first option is incoherent. The second option is indefensible for reasons we've discussed already. You either have to deny that knowledge is the norm of belief or accept that a belief's failure to constitute knowledge constitutes a conclusive reason for abandoning that belief. If knowledge is the norm of belief, knowledge that p is true is necessary for having a justified belief that p is true.

Some embrace the idea that you can't justifiably believe what you don't know, taking this, as I do, to be a consequence of treating knowledge as the norm of belief.³⁰ The problem with this

²⁹ Bird (2007: 95).

³⁰ Sutton (2005, 2007) defends the view. Hawthorne and Stanley (2008) express some sympathy for the idea that p is a reason for belief iff p is known. In Littlejohn (2009a), I criticize their arguments for the view that it's proper to treat p as a reason iff you know p . I think they're right that it's proper to treat what you know as a reason and improper to treat p as a reason if $\sim p$. The reason, I think, that it's proper to treat what you know as a reason is that it's proper to treat what you justifiably believe as a reason and knowledge requires justification. If we adopt a closure

view is not that it's incoherent. Problems for this view emerge if we think about its implications for Gettier cases. If knowledge is the norm of belief, subjects are obliged to refrain from believing in Gettier cases and so can't believe with justification in such cases. The most the subject could hope for in such cases is an excuse. But, this seems highly counterintuitive. Consider one of your run of the mill Gettier cases. Having just finished lunch, Plum hands the waitress a ten-dollar bill. She reasonably believes that she's paid her bill. She has paid her bill with genuine currency. However, unbeknownst to her, she's dining in the land of fake ten-dollar bills. She doesn't know she's handed the waitress a genuine ten dollar bill because there are fake bills in the other diners' pockets that would easily pass for the real thing. So, she doesn't know that she's really paid her bill. Think about her belief that she has paid her bill. Do we really think, knowing what we know, that there is something to be excused here? Knowing what we know, we wouldn't say that she oughtn't believe what she does. There was no breach to excuse, much less justify. The knowledge account says that there are conclusive reasons to refrain believing where there are none.

3.3 A REMAINING OPTION

We might sum up the problems for the knowledge account and evidentialism as follows. We can think of a belief's justification in terms of our doing all that is demanded by the norms that govern belief. We do all that is demanded if our beliefs conform to the undefeated reasons associated with a norm and have taken all due care to see to this. The problem that the evidentialist faces is that it seems that if they take truth to be the norm of belief, they have to insist that the justification of belief involves more than just relations between that belief and the evidence. If, however, they insist that a belief's justification involves just relations between the belief and the evidence, they either deny that reasons demand conformity or deny that belief is a state governed by the truth norm. They should say neither of these things. The knowledge account faces a structurally similar problem. If they take knowledge to be the norm of belief, they have to say that if you fail to know for any reason, there's a conclusive reason to abandon the belief. To bring that in line with intuition, they have to say that reasons demand less than full conformity. As reasons do demand conformity and there's less to justification than knowledge, knowledge is not the norm of belief.

The norms of belief are concerned with more than just relations between beliefs and bodies of knowledge or evidence but less than that which turns a belief into knowledge. So, what is the norm of belief? Perhaps the fundamental norm of belief is the truth norm, the norm that says that we oughtn't believe p unless p is true. It's often said that belief aims at the truth, and some have suggested that we ought to unpack this metaphor in normative terms. I'm quite happy to do this. True beliefs can do what beliefs are supposed to do. False beliefs cannot. What beliefs are supposed to do is represent how things are so that we might rely on them for the purpose of deliberation. They're supposed to give us the reasons from which we can then reason, and if reasons are the facts represented by beliefs, false beliefs cannot do what beliefs are supposed to

principle on which having a justified belief ensures having a reason to believe that which is an obvious consequence of what is believed, belief can be justified only if it is true. Here's the argument. Assuming our closure principle, if S 's belief that p is justified, S has a reason to believe that which is an obvious consequence of p . That p is true is as obvious a consequence of p as anything could be. Thus, it follows that if S 's belief that p is justified, p is an epistemic reason of S 's. But, p is an epistemic reason of S 's only if p . (In Littlejohn (Forthcoming), I argue that justifying reasons are factive.) Thus, if S 's belief that p is justified, p is true.

because they cannot contribute reasons from which we might deliberate. Rather, they pass off non-reasons as if they were reasons.

Some have argued that you cannot build a theory of justification starting from just the assumption that truth is the norm of belief. That assumption, they say, is far too weak to do the work it must.³¹ If we say that truth is the norm of belief, it seems that any true belief will be 'correct'. But then it seems that any true belief will be justified, and this is clearly false.³² It would be clearly false to say that any true belief is justified, but this isn't what the truth account says. It's hardly news that there can be undefeated reasons to refrain from Φ -ing even if Φ -ing fulfills some goal at which it's permissible to aim. If I'm right about what reasons demand, the reason associated with the truth norm does demand that you refrain from believing falsehoods. In the absence of overriding reason to believe falsehoods, false beliefs will be unjustifiable. If I'm right about what reasons demand, the reason associated with the truth norm *also* demands that you refrain from believing if your believing indicates a lack of due care for conforming to the truth norm. That is to say, it's because you oughtn't believe what's false that you oughtn't hold those beliefs only an irresponsible or irrational person could hold. Insofar as this requires having beliefs backed by the sort of evidence we'd think of as the sort of evidence a reasonable and responsible person would have prior to believing, there's no reason to think that a belief's truth suffices for its justification.

If truth is the norm of belief, we can say that there's reason to refrain from holding those beliefs that fail to faithfully represent how things are and reason to refrain from holding those beliefs for which you are properly faulted for holding. If a belief's justification can be cashed out in terms of a believer doing all that the reasons required, we can say that the justified belief is the faultlessly held belief that faithfully represents how things are. If we think of justified belief as the inner analogue of warranted assertion, then perhaps the following gives some motivation for the view. Plum asserts that Green had planned on killing Mustard for years but missed the opportunity when Mustard died of natural causes. If Green never planned any such thing, Green can say truthfully that Plum shouldn't have asserted this.³³ If we know that Plum had no evidence to back this assertion, this fact alone gives us sufficient warrant to say she oughtn't have asserted this and we can fault her for the assertion. Is there some third way for Plum's assertion to be wrongful? I can't think of one. Perhaps an assertion is unwarranted if false, unwarranted if unsupported by the evidence, and not unwarranted otherwise. It's tempting to think that the features in virtue of which she oughtn't have asserted *falsely* that p are the features in virtue of which she oughtn't have asserted *without evidence* that p . So, it's tempting to think that there's some single set of considerations in light of which something demands that she refrains from asserting the false and

³¹ Williamson (2000: 245). I address his argument in detail in Littlejohn (2010).

³² Vahid (2006: 305) says that a consequence of Wedgwood's (2002b) view that a belief is correct (in a normative sense) iff the proposition believed is true and this commits him to saying we ought to believe all truths. I think this is easily avoided. Correctness doesn't entail the non-existence of reasons to refrain. Think about true assertions that express unreasonably held beliefs. Vahid also objects on the grounds that Wedgwood's view implies that no false beliefs are justified. In Littlejohn (2009b), I explain why an externalist view with this implication is consistent with our ordinary intuitions about justification ascription.

³³ Suppose truth is the norm of belief. If assertion wasn't subject to the truth norm, it should be possible for me to permissibly assert p knowing that you'd accept my say so even if it's wrong for you to accept p . That seems unacceptable. It's odd to think to yourself that it's not wrong to sincerely assert knowing that it would be taken at face value when it's wrong for others to take the assertion at face value and thereby believe it.

asserting without evidence. We have one ground with two conceptually related demands. Further, it's tempting to think of assertion and belief in parallel. If the norms of belief permit belief, they permit asserting that the belief is true. If the norms don't permit the belief, the norms of assertion won't then let you assert what you oughtn't believe. If there's nothing more and nothing less to warranted assertion than what I've suggested, a belief's justification will not involve less than the belief's faultlessly and faithfully representing how things are. Maybe there's not much more to it, either.³⁴

REFERENCES

- Adler, J. 2002. *Belief's Own Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press.
- Alston, W. 1988. The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification. *Philosophical Perspectives* 2: 257-99.
- Audi, R. 2001. An Internalist Theory of Normative Grounds. *Philosophical Topics* 29: 19-46.
- Bird, A. 2007. Justified Judging. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74: 81-110.
- Boghossian, P. 2003. The Normativity of Content. *Philosophical Issues* 13: 31-45.
- Broome, J. 2001. Normative Practical Reasoning. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 75: 175-93.
- Cohen, S. 1984. Justification and Truth. *Philosophical Studies* 46: 279-95.
- Conee, E. and R. Feldman. 2004. *Evidentialism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fantl, J. and M. McGrath. 2002. Evidence, Pragmatics, and Justification. *Philosophical Review* 111: 67-94.
- Feldman, R. 1988a. Epistemic Obligations. *Philosophical Perspectives* 2: 235-56.
- _____. 1988b. Subjective and Objective Justification in Ethics and Epistemology. *The Monist* 71: 405-19.
- Gardner, J. 2005. Wrongs and Faults. *The Review of Metaphysics* 59: 95-132.
- _____. 2007. *Offences and Defences*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gettier, E. 1963. Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? *Analysis* 23: 121-3.
- Gibbons, J. Forthcoming. Things That Make Things Reasonable. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Hawthorne, J. and J. Stanley. 2008. Knowledge and Action. *The Journal of Philosophy*.
- Herman, B. 1994. *The Practice of Moral Judgment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hieronymi, P. 2005. The Wrong Kind of Reasons. *The Journal of Philosophy* 102: 37-57.
- Horder, J. 2004. *Excusing Crime*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Husak, D. 1999. Conflicts of Justification. *Law and Philosophy* 18: 41-68.
- Huemer, M. 2007. Moore's Paradox and the Norms of Belief. In S. Nuccetelli and G. Seay (eds.), *Themes from G.E. Moore*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kavka, G. 1983. The Toxin Puzzle. *Analysis* 43: 33-6.
- Lackey, J. 2007. The Norms of Assertion. *Nous* 41: 594-626.
- Langsam, H. 2008. Rationality, Justification, and the Internalism/Externalism Debate. *Erkenntnis* 68: 79-101.
- Littlejohn, C. Forthcoming. Evidence and Armchair Access. *Synthese*.
- _____. 2010. Moore's Paradox and Epistemic Norms. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88: 1-22.
- _____. 2009a. Must We Act Only On What We Know? *Journal of Philosophy* 106: 463-74.

³⁴ Thanks to Robert Howell, Errol Lord, Luke Robinson, Brad Thomson, Steve Sverdlik, and Mark van Roojen for discussing the issues addressed in this paper. I also want to thank Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen and an anonymous referee for their helpful written comments.

- _____. 2009b. The Externalist's Demon. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39: 399-435.
- _____. MS. The Myth of the False, Justified Belief.
- Moser, P. 1989. *Knowledge and Evidence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagel, T. 1979. *Mortal Questions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Nozick, R. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Owens, D. 2000. *Reason Without Freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Raz, J. 1990. *Practical Reason and Norms*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1999. *Engaging Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Robinson, P. 1996. Competing Theories of Justification: Deeds v. Reasons. In A. Simester and A. Smith (eds.), *Harm and Culpability*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shah, N. 2006. A New Argument for Evidentialism. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56: 481-98.
- _____. 2008. How Action Governs Intention. *Philosopher's Imprint* 8: 1-19.
- Steglich-Petersen, A. 2006. No Norm Needed: On the Aim of Belief. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56: 499-516.
- Steup, M. 1999. A Defense of Internalism. In L. Pojman (ed.), *The Theory of Knowledge*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- _____. 2001. Epistemic Duty, Evidence, and Internality. In M. Steup (ed.), *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Strawson, P. 1962. Freedom and Resentment. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48: 1-25.
- Sutton, J. 2005. Stick To What You Know. *Nous* 39: 359-96.
- _____. 2007. *Without Justification*. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press.
- Sverdlik, S. 1996. Motive and Rightness. *Ethics* 106: 327-49.
- Vahid, H. 2006. Aiming at Truth: Doxastic vs. Epistemic Goals. *Philosophical Studies* 131: 303-35.
- Velleman, D. 2000. *The Possibility of Practical Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wedgwood, R. 2002a. Internalism Explained. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65: 349-69.
- _____. 2002b. The Aim of Belief. *Philosophical Perspectives* 16: 267-97.
- Williams, B. 1973. *Problems of the Self*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1981. *Moral Luck*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Williamson, T. 2000. *Knowledge and its Limits*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Zimmerman, M. 2002. Taking Luck Seriously. *The Journal of Philosophy* 99: 553-76.