Prospects for Evidentialism

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Abstract: One leading account of justification comes from the evidentialist tradition. According to evidentialists, whether a doxastic attitude is justified depends on whether that attitude is supported by the believer's evidence. This chapter assesses the prospects for evidentialism, focusing on the question of whether evidentialists can provide a satisfactory account of their key notions – *evidence possession* and *evidential support* – without helping themselves to the notion of justification.

1. Evidentialism Introduced

There seems to be a close connection between justification and evidence. Suppose I tell you that Holmes' evidence strongly supports believing the butler did it. Then it is very tempting to conclude that Holmes is justified in believing that the butler did it.

Can we leverage this observation into a theory of justification? Evidentialists say *yes*. While there are a few different ways of formulating the evidentialist thesis, a standard characterization goes like this:

Evidentialism (E): Necessarily, S is (*ultima facie*) epistemically justified in believing *p* at time *t* iff S's total evidence supports believing p at *t*.[1]

Three points of clarification will help set the stage for what follows. First, evidentialists offer **E** as a theory of *propositional* – rather than *doxastic* – justification. To illustrate the difference, suppose Holmes comes to believe the butler did it. But, in an uncharacteristic lapse of rationality, Holmes does not arrive at this belief by consulting the evidence, but rather through reading tea leaves. Is his belief justified? There is a sense in which the answer is *yes*, and a sense in which the answer is *no*. On the one hand, he has the doxastic attitude (belief) that he should adopt towards the butler's guilt, given his evidence. On the other hand, his doxastic state still seems defective, since it is not appropriately based on his evidence.[2]

Second, while **E** is formulated in terms of belief, it can be generalized to encompass all doxastic attitudes – including suspension of judgment, disbelief, and various degrees of belief:

> **Evidentialism Generalized:** Necessarily, S is (*ultima facie*) epistemically justified in adopting some doxastic attitude *D* towards *p* at *t* iff S's total evidence supports adopting *D* towards *p* at *t*.

What it takes for some evidence to support a doxastic attitude depends on the attitude in question. If *D* is *complete certainty*, then we might require that S's total evidence entails *p*. If *D* is *.5 credence*, then we might require that the evidence does not make *p* any more or less likely than ¬*p*.

Third, while **E** is officially formulated as a necessary biconditional, there is reason to think this falls short of capturing the heart of evidentialism. Evidentialists

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[1] For a classic statement of evidentialism, see Conee and Feldman (1985). For further development and defense, see the papers collected in Conee and Feldman (2004), as well as McCain (2014).
[2] For discussion of how to extend evidentialism to encompass doxastic justification, see Conee and Feldman (1985: 24). For further discussion of the relation between propositional and doxastic justification, see Turri (2010); Silva and Oliveira (this volume).

aim to provide an explanatorily illuminating account of the nature of justification. Thus it's natural to interpret evidentialists as claiming that the right-hand side of **E** is explanatorily prior to the left-hand side: evidential support is being used to explain epistemic justification, rather than the other way around.[3] This point will be particularly important for what follows.

Our initial clarifications out of the way, let us now turn to our central question: Does evidentialism offer a viable account of justification?

2. The Explanatory Challenge

The most common objections to evidentialism in the literature take the form of putative counterexamples. To briefly survey some of the most familiar:

- *Pragmatic encroachment:* Some philosophers have argued that whether one is justified in believing *p* depends in part on practical factors: A and B can have the same evidence *vis-à-vis p*, but A could be justified in believing *p* while B is not, provided that more is at stake for B (Fantl and McGrath 2002; Ganson 2008).

- *Negligent evidence-gathering:* Another challenge comes from cases where an agent forms the beliefs supported by the evidence that they possess, but the evidence they possess is a meager affair – one arrived at through negligence rather than careful inquiry. According to e.g., Kornblith (1982), justification depends not just on the evidence the agent possesses, but also on how the agent arrived at that evidence.

- *Forgotten evidence:* Goldman (2011) gives the case of Ichabod, who forms the belief that *q* based on excellent evidence. Over the years, he gradually forgets this evidence while retaining his belief in *q*. According to Goldman,

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[3] What sort of explanation is being proffered? There a couple of options here. Some might offer **E** as an analysis of the ordinary concept of justification. Others might offer it as a metaphysical explanation, perhaps to be cashed out in terms of grounding. On this interpretation, **E** says that whenever an agent is justified in holding a belief, this fact is grounded in facts about evidential support (cf. Beddor 2015a).

Ichabod could well be justified in holding his belief in *q* at the later time, even though he no longer possesses sufficient evidence in its favor.

▪ *Enkrasia requirements:* More recently, a number of epistemologists have pointed out a tension between evidentialism and the "enkratic requirement", according to which an agent is never justified in believing akratic conjunctions of the form: *p and I am not justified in believing p*. To see the tension, consider someone who has compelling evidence in favor of *p*, but also has misleading evidence that they are not justified in believing *p* (perhaps an epistemologist with a sterling track record tells them as much). By **E**, it follows that they are justified in believing the akratic conjunction. But at least some philosophers have thought that any such belief will exhibit a form of incoherence that precludes it from being justified.[4]

For the purposes of this chapter, I will set these putative counterexamples aside. I will focus instead on a challenge that has received less attention, but which is arguably more fundamental. The challenge is this. Evidentialists explain justification in terms of the *agent's total evidence*. But how should we unpack this notion? Call this the "Evidence Possession Question":

> **Evidence Possession Question (EPQ):** What does it take for a subject to possess some proposition as part of their evidence at a time?[5]

The challenge for evidentialists is to provide a plausible and illuminating answer to **EPQ**. Moreover, the answer had better be consistent with the evidentialist's project of explaining justification in terms of the agent's evidence. And this turns out to be harder than many have thought.

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[4] For relevant discussion, see, among others, Titelbaum (2015); Littlejohn (2018); Worsnip (2018); Lasonen-Aarnio (2020).
[5] This formulation assumes that evidence is propositional. In §5.1 we'll look at what happens if we reject this assumption.

The aim of this chapter is to chart out the space of possible answers to **EPQ**. Along the way, I'll point out problems that arise when we combine evidentialism with various initially tempting answers; I'll also sketch some promising avenues for further research.

3. Towards a Theory of Evidence Possession: First Steps

What would constitute a satisfactory answer to **EPQ**? We should start by noting that the challenge is not to give an account of *evidence*, but rather to give an account of *evidence possession*. To see the difference, consider a tree with 52 rings. The fact, *The tree has 52 rings* (call this fact, "RINGS") is excellent evidence in support of the hypothesis that the tree is 52 years old. But suppose Clara has never examined this tree or heard reports about it. Clara does not *possess* RINGS as part of her evidence. And this, according to evidentialists, is why she is not justified in believing that the tree is 52 years old on the basis of RINGS.

What would it take for RINGS to become part of Clara's evidence? A natural first thought is that Clara would need to *believe* it, or at least stand in some belief-like relation to it. Would this also be sufficient for Clara to have RINGS as part of her evidence? If so, we could make short work of **EPQ**:

> **Evidence as Belief (E=B):** S has *p* as part of their evidence at *t* iff S believes *p* at *t*.[6]

An immediate worry for this view is that if we combine it with the evidentialist's principle **E**, we make it too easy to "bootstrap" one's way into justification. Suppose Clarence unjustifiably believes, *I will be president one day* (PRESIDENT). By **E=B**, he has PRESIDENT as part of his evidence. But then his total

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[6] See Feldman (1998) for the view that S has *p* as evidence at *t* iff S is thinking of *p* at *t*. See Schroeder (2011) for the view that S has *p* as evidence at *t* iff S has some "presentational attitude" towards *p* at *t*, where presentational attitudes include both beliefs and perceptual experiences.

evidence trivially entails PRESIDENT, and hence would seem to support believing this proposition. But then, by **E**, he is justified in believing PRESIDENT after all!

The problem can be formulated in more general terms. Consider the following plausible constraint on how evidential support works:

> **Evidence-Support Link:** Necessarily, if S has p as evidence at t, then S's total evidence supports believing p at t.

Most theories of evidential support validate this principle. Consider probabilistic theories of support, according to which the degree to which S's total evidence e supports believing p is determined by a probability function Pr that reflects the probability of p conditional on e. On any such theory, if e entails p, then $Pr(p|e) = 1$, and so e will support believing p to the greatest degree possible. Or consider "normic" theories of evidential support, according to which e supports believing p iff in all of the most normal world where e is true, p is true (Smith 2010). Clearly, if p is part of e, then p will be true in all of the worlds where e is true. For a final example, consider explanationist theories of evidential support, according to which e supports believing p iff p is entailed by the best explanation of e (cf. Conee and Feldman 2008; McCain 2013, 2014). This approach also validates **Evidence-Support Link**, given the assumption that the best explanation of e entails e.

The **Evidence-Support Link** provides a principled reason to hold that believing p does not suffice for p to be part of one's evidence. Rather, one needs to be *justified* in believing p. We can formulate this as a constraint on an answer to **EPQ**:

> **Evidence-Justification Link:** Necessarily, if S has p as evidence at t, S is (*ultima facie*) epistemically justified in believing p at t.

4. Epistemic Theories of Evidence Possession

What theory of evidence possession would validate the **Evidence-Justification Link**? One natural strategy would be to explain evidence possession in explicitly epistemic terms. This section considers two versions of this approach.

4.1 Evidence as Justified Beliefs?

One option is to simply define an agent's evidence in terms of their justified beliefs:

> **Evidence as Justified Belief (E=JB):** S has p as evidence at t iff p is *ultima facie* epistemically justified in believing p at t.

On this view, Clara will only come to have RINGS as part of her evidence when she is in a position to *justifiably* believe RINGS.

E=JB seems plausible on its face, and a number of authors have endorsed something in the ballpark.[7] However, no such account will serve the evidentialist's purposes (Goldman 2011; Beddor 2015a). After all, we have seen that evidentialists seek to explain justification in terms of evidence possession. So if they go on to explain evidence possession in terms of justification, they run afoul of a highly plausible desideratum on a theory of justification:

> **Non-Circularity Desideratum:** Any adequate account of justification will not rely on the notion of justification in the *explanans*.

4.2 Evidence as Knowledge?

Perhaps, some may suggest, we can avoid this problem by characterizing evidence possession in terms of a state that is distinct from justification, but which nonetheless entails justification. For example, some might appeal to Williamson's influential proposal that:

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[7] See e.g., Kim 1988: 290-291. See also Goldman 2009, who suggests that you have p as part of your evidence iff you are non-inferentially justified in believing p.

Evidence as Knowledge (E=K): S has p as evidence at t iff S knows p at t.[8]

In a similar vein, some might hold that an agent's evidence consists in some proper subset of their knowledge – for example, their observational knowledge (Maher 1996) or their epistemic certainties (Beddor 2020).

A first observation is that this approach yields a very different sort of evidentialist theory from that which has been defended by traditional evidentialists, such as Conee and Feldman. Conee and Feldman are arch-internalists: they take justification to supervene on the believer's (non-factive) mental states. By contrast, adopting **E=K** leads to a form of externalism. After all, two agents can be in the same non-factive mental states yet differ in terms of what they know, since one of them might have true beliefs and the other false beliefs. Should this externalist intrusion be welcomed or shunned? This is up for debate; the answer will depend on one's views on the internalism/externalism fight more generally.

On to the main point at issue: would embracing **E=K** allow evidentialists to escape the circularity worry? This too is up for debate. According to a long-standing tradition in epistemology, knowledge is to be analyzed – at least in part – in terms of justification. If this tradition is on the right track, then appealing to **E=K** won't circumvent the circularity problem; it will just push it back a step.

Perhaps, then, evidentialists should follow Williamson a step further. Perhaps in addition to embracing **E=K**, they should also hold that knowledge is *unanalyzable*.[9] On this view, while knowledge entails justification, it cannot be defined in terms of justification.

While this is a potentially promising path, it faces some hurdles. First, going this route precludes some explanatory projects that evidentialists might have hoped to

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[8] See Williamson 1997, 2000; as well as Bird 2018. For critical discussion of **E=K**, see, among others, Goldman 2009; Comesaña and Kantin 2010; Littlejohn 2011; Arnold 2013.
[9] See Williamson 2000; cf. Zagzebski 1994.

pursue. Most obviously, it precludes deploying one's evidentialist analysis of justification in service of an analysis of knowledge.

Second, even if we are convinced – perhaps due to the supposed insolubility of the Gettier problem – that a full-fledged *analysis* of knowledge is impossible, there still might be sense in which knowledge is to be explained in terms of justification. For example, it might be that whenever S knows *p*, this fact is partially grounded in the fact that S justifiably believes *p*. As Beddor (2015a) notes, if knowledge facts are partially grounded in justificatory facts, we face the threat of explanatory circularity once again. Of course, the explanation in question will be metaphysical rather than conceptual, but this seems like small comfort: grounding circularity seems just as objectionable as conceptual circularity.

Those attracted to the "Knowledge First" picture might just maintain that this gets things the wrong way around: justificatory facts are grounded in knowledge facts, not *vice versa*. This is a tricky issue to adjudicate, since it is hard to tell what hangs on the debate. One agenda item for further research on this topic is to try to develop some criteria for assessing these questions of relative explanatory priority (is K grounded in J, or the other way around?).

Even if the Knowledge First route would allow evidentialists to satisfy the **Non-Circularity Desideratum**, the resulting package still may not satisfy further desiderata on an account of justification. For example, it would still run afoul of the following desideratum:

> **Naturalistic Desideratum:** Any adequate account of justification will explain justification in non-epistemic terms.

After all, justification will be explained in terms of evidential support, which will be explained in terms of knowledge, which – according to the view under consideration – cannot be analyzed further.

Of course, the **Naturalistic Desideratum** is much more demanding than the **Non-Circularity Desideratum**. Is it overly demanding? Would evidentialists be

within their rights to reject it? Perhaps. But doing so is not cost-free. It is widely agreed that justificatory facts – and epistemic facts more generally – supervene on non-epistemic facts. As Kim (1988) notes, if we can provide a naturalistic account of justification, we will be able to explain why this supervenience holds. By contrast, it's less clear what evidentialists who reject the **Naturalistic Desideratum** will say here. Is the supervenience of the epistemic on the non-epistemic a brute fact?

It is also worth noting that a number of epistemologists from rival traditions explicitly embrace the **Naturalistic Desideratum**. For example, Goldman (1979) takes a major selling point of his reliabilist account of justification to be that it specifies in non-epistemic terms when a belief is justified. This raises the worry that if evidentialists simply reject the **Naturalistic Desideratum**, they will not be playing by the "same rules" as their opponents.[10]

5. Non-Epistemic Theories of Evidence Possession

What answer to **EPQ** would satisfy the **Naturalistic Desideratum**? In this section, I explore two options. The first is to explain evidence possession in terms of experiential states. The second is to co-opt ideas developed outside of the evidentialist laboratory and retool them as accounts of evidence possession.

5.1 Experientialist Answers to EPQ

Many evidentialists hold that there is a close connection between an agent's evidence and their experiences. A particularly clear statement of this idea can be found in the work of Conee and Feldman. While Conee and Feldman allow that there is a sense in which beliefs can qualify as evidence, beliefs only do so derivatively. According to Conee and Feldman, all "ultimate" evidence – that is, all evidence that does not derive from some further evidence – consists in experiences. As they put it: "Something at the

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[10] Whether evidentialism and reliabilism should be properly regarded as opponents is also up for debate. I return to this issue in §5.2.

interface of your mind and the world—your experiences—serves to justify belief in a proposition, if anything does" (2008: 88).[11]

There are a couple of ways of developing this experientialist approach, depending on whether one thinks agents' evidence includes the contents of the relevant experiences or the experiences themselves. Let's start with the first option:

> **Evidence as Experiential Contents:** S has p as (ultimate) evidence at t iff at t S is having an experience (e.g., a perceptual state or an apparent memory) with content p.

An account of evidence possession along these lines faces challenges to both its necessity and sufficiency directions. With regards to the necessity direction, some might worry that **Evidence as Experiential Contents** is too restrictive, since it precludes an agent's non-occurrent mental states from featuring in their evidence. After all, the worry runs, at any given time we have a great deal of tacit knowledge. If none of this tacit knowledge is part of our evidence, then, by the evidentialist's lights, none of this tacit knowledge is relevant to the justificatory status of our beliefs.

On to the sufficiency direction: another problem for **Evidence as Experiential Contents** is that you can have an experience with content p without being *ultima facie* justified in believing p. To give a stock example, suppose Erwin is looking at a red vase, when he is told that he is looking at a white vase illuminated by a red light. Erwin has a visual experience with the content: *There is a red vase in front of me* (call this "VASE"). By **Evidence as Experiential Contents**, it follows that Ewin has VASE as part of his evidence. But this conflicts with the **Evidence-Justification Link**. After all, Erwin is not *ultima facie* justified in believing VASE, since he has a defeater for this proposition.

Some might respond by pointing out that Erwin's visual experience still makes him *prima facie* justified in believing VASE. But this is not enough for the evidentialist's

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[11] For another influential treatment of evidence in terms of experiential states, see Lewis 1996.

purposes. To see why, suppose we held that Erwin possesses VASE as part of his evidence, even though his justification for believing this proposition is defeated. By the **Evidence-Support Link**, it follows that Erwin's total evidence supports believing VASE. But then by **E**, it follows that Erwin is *ultima facie* justified in believing VASE. Surely we can't convert a defeated belief into an undefeated belief so easily![12]

Evidentialists may regard this as a reason to adopt the second version of the experientialist approach, according to which experiences themselves – not their contents – constitute an agent's evidence:

> **Evidence as Experiences:** S has *e* as (ultimate) evidence at *t* iff *e* is an experience that S is undergoing at *t*.

On this view, while Erwin doesn't have VASE as part of his evidence, he still has the visual experience of seeing a red vase (or what appears to be a red vase) as part of his evidence. And perhaps this experience is not the sort of thing that can be justified or unjustified, defeated or undefeated: while it can confer justification, it is not itself epistemically assessable.

Evidence as Experiences rejects an assumption that has been guiding our discussion thus far: namely, that one's evidence consists in propositions. This raises the question: can non-propositional entities stand in the right relations to propositions in order to count as evidence for/against them? As we saw in §2, there are a number of promising accounts of when a *proposition* is evidence for another proposition. For example, according to probabilistic accounts of evidential support, *e* is evidence for *h* iff the probability of *h* conditional on *e* is sufficiently high. But some have worried that this only makes sense if *e* is itself propositional (Williamson 1997, 2000: chp.9).

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[12] One might try to get around this point by converting evidentialism into a theory of *prima facie* justification rather than *ultima facie* justification (cf. Schmidt 2019). But this would limit the scope of the evidentialist's explanatory project. Historically, evidentialists have thought that one advantage of their theory is that it can be used to explain the conditions under which a *prima facie* justified belief is *ultima facie* justified. See e.g., Conee and Feldman 2005 who try to explain defeat in evidentialist terms.

Defenders of **Evidence as Experiences** might suggest that instead of talking about the probability of *h* conditional on *e*, we can instead talk about the probability of *h* conditional on *the fact that the subject is experiencing e*. That is:

> **Experiential Support:** Suppose S's (ultimate) evidence is a set of experiences $e_1...e_n$. These experiences support believing *p* iff the probability of *p* conditional on the fact that S is undergoing experiences $e_1...e_n$ is sufficiently high.

However, a second hurdle for **Evidence as Experiences** is less easily surmounted. We saw that **Evidence as Experiential Contents** – when combined with the **Evidence-Support Link** and **E** – implausibly entails that you are always *ultima facie* justified in believing the contents of your current experiences. To its credit, **Evidence as Experiences** avoids this consequence. Still, **Evidence as Experiences** – when conjoined with **Experiential Support** and **E** – carries an implausible consequence of its own:

> **Experience-Justification Link:** For any subject S undergoing experiences $e_1...e_n$ at time *t*: S is *ultima facie* justified in believing that they are undergoing $e_1...e_n$ at *t*.

In other words, we always have indefeasibly justificatory access to our current experiences. While this view enjoys a venerable historical pedigree, recent work at the intersection of psychology and epistemology calls it into question (see esp. Schwitzgebel 2008). For example, many emotions have an experiential component. But, it seems that someone could undergo a certain low-level degree of irritation (say) without being justified in believing that they in such an emotional state. And even if we restrict the relevant experiences to *perceptual* experiences, it's not clear that the challenge is avoided. After all, it seems someone could fail to be justified in believing certain subtle facts about the extent of their current visual field – just imagine that a

usually trustworthy oracle provides them with misleading information regarding the relevant facts. Even if we enjoy *prima facie* justification for believing every true proposition describing our current experiences, is this justification immune to defeat?

So both ways of developing an experientialist account of evidence possession face challenges, at least when combined with key evidentialist commitments. Even if these challenges can be overcome, experientialists face a further – and arguably more fundamental – question: Why is it that experiences and only experiences serve as the ultimate justifiers?

The answer can't just be that experiences serve to reliably indicate facts about the world. After all, non-experiential states do this too; my blood pressure reliably indicates facts about my health. Perhaps, some might suggest, it's because we have privileged epistemic access to our own experiences: when I am undergoing some experience *e*, I am justified in believing that I am undergoing *e*; not so with my blood pressure. But there are two problems with this answer. The first is that, as we have just seen, there is reason to doubt that we always enjoy untrammeled epistemic access to our experiences. The second is that the threat of circularity rears its head again. On the proposal under consideration, the fact that S possesses some experience *e* as evidence is explained in terms of the fact that S is justified in believing: *I am undergoing e* (call this "UNDERGOING"). But what makes S justified in believing UNDERGOING? According to **E**, the explanation will involve facts about S's total evidence. But if the experiential approach is right, this explanation will itself involve the fact that S has *e* as evidence, leading to circularity.

5.2 Reliabilist Answers to EPQ

In light of these difficulties, evidentialists who aim to satisfy the **Naturalistic Desideratum** might try looking to other epistemological traditions for help. Earlier, we noted that reliabilists have been particularly vocal about their naturalistic aspirations. Perhaps, then, evidentialists could simply convert a reliabilist account of justification into an account of evidence possession, e.g.:

Evidence as Reliably Formed Beliefs (E=RB): S has *p* as evidence at *t* iff S believes *p* at *t* and this belief was reliably formed.[13]

Assuming that reliability can be cashed out in non-epistemic terms – e.g., as the ratio to true to false beliefs produced by the belief-forming process – this account has good claim to satisfying the **Naturalistic Desideratum**.

Of course, going this route will be anathema to internalists. But, as we saw in our discussion of **E=K**, evidentialists need not take on board internalist commitments. The heart of evidentialism is the claim that justification is a matter of evidential support. And this thesis is compatible with any number of different views about the nature of evidence and evidential support, including thoroughly externalist positions.[14]

But even if we are happy going externalist, not all is smooth sailing. Recall the **Evidence-Justification Link**: if S has *p* as evidence, then S is *ultima facie* justified in believing *p*. **E=RB** validates this principle only if being reliably formed is a sufficient condition for a belief to be *ultima facie* justified. But some familiar criticisms of reliabilism cast doubt on this sufficiency claim.

One source of trouble comes from Bonjour's (1985) case of Norman the clairvoyant. Norman forms the belief that the president is in New York via a reliable clairvoyant faculty, but Norman is completely unaware that he has this faculty. According to Bonjour, Norman's belief is not justified, despite being reliably formed.

Another difficulty comes from our earlier cases of defeat. Recall Erwin, who comes to believe VASE (<*There is a red vase in front of me*>), despite having been told that the vase is illuminated by a red light. One natural way of typing Erwin's belief-forming process is to describe it as *vision*, or perhaps something more fine-grained like

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[13] Cf. Sosa and Sylvan (2019), who endorse a virtue epistemological, reasons-based account of justification. On their view, justification is determined by an agent's reasons for belief, and these reasons are analyzed in terms of competent attractions to assent. The exact relation between their approach and **E=RB** will depend on whether we analyze *competent attractions to assent* in reliabilist terms.

[14] Of course, if evidentialists are willing to embrace **E=RB**, they face the question: why retain evidentialism at all? Why not just go in for a simple reliabilist theory, on which a belief is justified iff it is reliably formed? One possible response would be to emphasize the intuitive connections between justification and evidence with which we began. Evidentialists might argue that the only way to capture these connections is by embracing some form of **E**, even if it is a reliabilist form.

visual recognition of the surface properties of middle-sized objects in good lighting conditions. But both of these process types are reliable. So **E=RB** entails that Erwin has VASE as part of his evidence after all, despite the defeater provided by his interlocutor's testimony.

By now, reliabilists have offered various responses to these challenges. And many of these responses – if successful – could be co-opted by evidentialists.[15] To focus on the second challenge, one response is to maintain that we need to be more careful about how we type belief-forming processes. Perhaps the right way of typing Erwin's belief-forming process will mention the fact that he has received testimony that the vase is not red. And so perhaps, properly-typed, Erwin's post-testimony belief in VASE is not reliably formed. The main question for this response is whether we can give principled, independently motivated criteria for how to type the agent's belief-forming process – criteria that will yield the right results in all cases of defeat.[16] An alternative response would be to complicate our account of evidence possession by adding a further clause designed to rule out defeaters (cf. Goldman 1979). Here the crucial question is how to spell out this further clause without implicitly relying on epistemic notions like evidence and justification.[17]

Taking stock: evidentialists who want to satisfy the **Naturalistic Desideratum** might try adopting a reliabilist account of evidence possession. However, this approach faces its own share of difficulties. Perhaps the most worrisome, from the perspective of this chapter, is that **E=RB** inherits all of the standard problems for the idea that

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[15] Many, but not all. Some philosophers have tried to solve these problems by incorporating an evidentialist component into reliabilism. For example, Comesaña (2010) argues that Norman's belief is not justified because his reliably formed belief does not take evidence as input. Similarly, Miller (2019) suggests that Erwin's belief is defeated because it is not supported by his evidence. These solutions will not be available proponents of **E=RB**, since they presuppose that reliably believing *p* does not suffice for possessing *p* as evidence.

[16] This issue is thus closely tied to the generality problem for reliabilism (Conee and Feldman 1998). For further discussion of this response, see Beddor 2015b; Constantin forthcoming; Nagel forthcoming.

[17] Goldman (1979) tried to do this in terms of the alternative reliable process available to the agent. According to Goldman's proposal, a reliably formed belief *B* is defeated – and hence fails to be *ultima facie* justified – iff there is some alternative reliable process available to the agent which is such that, if it had been used, it would have led the agent to abandon *B*. This counterfactual proposal faces troubles of its own. Fumerton (1998) worries that, properly spelled out, the account will smuggle in unreduced epistemic notions. And Beddor (2015b) argues it commits a version of the conditional fallacy, rendering it vulnerable to counterexample.

reliability suffices for justification. While evidentialists may find this disappointing, they will at least have company in their disappointment: since these problems are first and foremost problems for reliabilists, evidentialists will at least be no worse off than reliabilists on this score.

6. Plunging Ahead or Back to the Drawing Board?

In this chapter we have surveyed some of the main options for developing an explanatorily illuminating account of evidence possession on the evidentialist's behalf. Each of the options we canvassed ran into difficulties. Where does this leave evidentialists?

Most of the difficulties we encountered arose from the fact that it is hard to develop an account of evidence possession that satisfies the **Naturalistic Desideratum** while also validating the **Evidence-Justification Link**. Given this, evidentialists have two options. One is to press ahead and try to develop an account of evidence possession that does fulfill both of these constraints. For example, it may turn out that the problems facing either experientialist or reliabilist answers to **EPQ** are matters of detail rather than principle. For folks who remain optimistic on this score, the main remaining task will be to fill in the details, yielding a debugged version of either approach.

The other option is to rethink our commitment to either the **Naturalistic Desideratum** or the **Evidence-Justification Link**. Take the **Naturalistic Desideratum** first. As we acknowledged in §4, this is a demanding requirement, and some may well protest that it is *too* demanding. After all, attempts to provide naturalistic reductions of other philosophically interesting phenomena have a fairly bleak track record. For evidentialists who reject the **Naturalistic Desideratum**, **E=K** (or maybe **E⊆K**) may be the best bet. For such theorists, the main remaining hurdle is to provide an alternative explanation of the various considerations that led many epistemologists to hanker after a naturalistic reduction in the first place.

Alternatively, we might consider giving up the **Evidence-Justification Link**. As we saw in §3, a powerful source of support for this requirement comes from the **Evidence-Support Link** (if p is part of your total evidence, then your total evidence

supports believing *p*). As we saw, this principle is validated by many leading accounts of evidential support. Still, we might hope to find some alternative account of evidential support that invalidates this principle, allowing us to reject the **Evidence-Justification Link**.

What would such an account look like? I'll close by mentioning two avenues for further exploration.

Thus far we have implicitly assumed that evidence possession is a categorical affair: either you have some proposition as part of your evidence or you do not. As Joyce (2004) observes, another approach is to think that evidence possession comes in degrees: you possess some pieces of evidence to a greater degree than others.[18] For advocates of a "gradational" conception of evidence possession, it would be natural to deny that the **Evidence-Support Link** holds in full generality. Rather, it only holds for those bits of evidence the agent possesses to the greatest degree possible – i.e., if S *maximally* has *p* as evidence at *t*, then S's total evidence supports believing *p* at *t*. The main challenge for this approach is to give a substantive – and naturalistic – story about what determines degrees of evidence possession. Suppose *p* and *q* are both part of my evidence, but *p* is part of my evidence to a greater degree than *q*. What makes this the case? An interesting project would be to try recasting experiential and reliabilist answers to **EPQ** as answers to this question. That is, could we use degrees of experiential vivacity, or degrees of reliability, to ground degrees of evidence possession? Would the resulting theories still run into the same problems raised in §5?

Another avenue for rejecting the **Evidence-Support Link** would be to distinguish between *undefeated evidence* and *defeated evidence*. Standard evidentialist views don't make this distinction. They provide a story about how the justification that a body of evidence confers on a belief can defeated, but they don't come with any story about how evidence itself can be defeated. If we could develop such a story, then we might replace **Evidence-Support Link** with the principle that if *p* is part of S's

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[18] Cf. Jeffrey (1965), who develops a view on which pieces of evidence can themselves be assigned non-maximal probabilities.

undefeated evidence at *t*, then S's total evidence supports believing *p* at *t*.[19] Here too, the main challenge is to actually provide the requisite story – that is, to give a systematic account of when evidence is defeated that satisfies the **Naturalistic Desideratum**.

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[19] Cf. Schroeder (2011), who suggests a picture along these lines, but without providing a detailed theory of how evidence gets defeated. For those looking to develop such a theory, one option would be to turn to the work of John Pollock, who developed a non-probabilistic, reasons-based account of justification (e.g., Pollock 1987, 1995). On Pollock's framework, justificatory support is determined by *prima facie* reasons, and all *prima facie* reasons can – at least in principle – be defeated by further *prima facie* reasons. So one option for evidentialists would be to develop an analogous notion of *prima facie* evidence, and then use Pollock's formal framework for computing the justificatory and defeat statuses of beliefs in terms of *prima facie* evidence.

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