

## 8. Knowledge Is Belief for Sufficient (Objective and Subjective) Reason

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[W]hen the holding of a thing to be true is sufficient both subjectively and objectively, it is *knowledge*.

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A822/B850

This paper outlines and lays the basis for the defense of a simple thesis: that knowledge is belief for reasons that are both objectively and subjectively sufficient. The analysis of knowledge, of course, is one of the most famous failed projects in analytic philosophy. Attempts to analyze knowledge can generally be categorized as (at least) one of 1) prone to counterexample, 2) too vague to make real predictions, or 3) so complex as to make it puzzling why knowledge is so important. But it is the thesis of this paper that with the right understanding of the chief difficulties encountered in the Gettier literature, and with the right perspective on the place of epistemology within normative inquiry more generally, we can see that many of the early approaches to the analysis of knowledge were essentially on the right track after all, even though they made natural mistakes of implementation along the way. The analysis that I'll offer is simple, free from at least the most significant standard sources of counterexamples, and makes sense of why knowledge is important and interesting.

In section 1, I'll set up the problem and define the space for its solution by explaining why knowledge must consist in a kind of *match* between objective and subjective conditions. Then in section 2, I'll introduce an old idea about how to analyze knowledge that is well motivated by the observations in section 1, and explain the chief difficulties this idea ran into, when it was originally introduced—the difficulties that eventually convinced so many that the analysis of knowledge was a failed project. In sections 3–5, I'll set up each of the three key moves that I will argue allow us to retain the key insights of this old approach while not only avoiding the problems it faces, but offering an explanation of where those problems came from, and delegating details, where appropriate, to more general problems for which we require solutions on independent grounds. Finally, I'll close in section 6 by summarizing what we've accomplished and how.

This paper does not constitute an exhaustive defense of the analysis of knowledge that I propose—on the contrary, it comes with distinct and non-trivial commitments, and at least on its simplest version, it faces further potential obstacles that I won't have the space to take up here. But what I do hope to accomplish, in this paper, is to remind us of how natural and well motivated the basic idea is, that knowledge is belief whose justification “stands up,” in the right way, to the facts, and to show that the most famous problems with analyses of knowledge that fit this schema have been problems with implementation, rather than with the spirit of the idea. If I can make each of these claims plausible, then that will help make the case that the distinctive commitments of my analysis are worth exploring further and taking seriously, and that it is worth exploring such a theory's versatility to respond to further potential objections.

## 1. KNOWLEDGE AS MATCH

Our story begins with the idea that knowledge is a distinctive kind of *match* between objective (or worldly) and subjective (or psychological) conditions. In this section I want to emphasize three aspects of this matching character of knowledge. Each of these aspects will later be important.

### 1.1. Aspect 1: Primeness

That knowledge consists in *some* kind of match between objective and subjective conditions is demonstrated by Timothy Williamson's (2000) argument that knowledge is what he calls *prime*. What Williamson means by the thesis that knowledge is prime, is that there is no way of separating out knowledge into “internal” and “external” factors, in such a way that to know *p* is to satisfy both the internal and external components. Since belief and justification are internal, and since truth is external, the idea is that you can't add either any internal condition or any external condition, which, together with belief, truth, and justification, is what it is to know.

Williamson's argument for the primeness thesis is simple. What he does is to construct pairs of cases, A and B, of subjects who know something, such that an internal duplicate of A who is in B's external circumstances does not know it. If knowledge is just a conjunction of internal and external factors, then this should be impossible—for A must satisfy the internal factor of knowledge (since she knows), and B must satisfy the external factor of knowledge (since she knows), so C—who has A's internal makeup and B's external circumstances—must satisfy both the internal and external factors of knowledge, and hence must know as well.

One of the simple examples that Williamson considers is a subject, A, who sees water normally through her right eye, but whose left eye, by chance, is receiving light rays “emitted by a waterless device just in front of that eye,” but a head injury prevents further processing of signals from her left eye. This subject processes the visual signals from her right eye, and believes that

there is water in front of her on the visual evidence. Intuitively, she knows that there is water in front of her. Subject B is just like subject A, except that everything is reversed—the left eye sees water normally, the right eye is confronted by the “waterless device,” and it is the signals from the right eye that are internally impaired. By parity of reasoning, subject B knows that there is water in front of her. To complete the argument, subject C is exactly like subject A internally—she is receiving water-like light rays in both eyes, but the signal from her left eye is prevented by a head injury—but is in exactly B’s external circumstances—the real water is in front of her left eye, and the waterless device is in front of her right eye. Intuitively, subject C does not know that there is water in front of her—for the only thing leading her to believe this is her illusory perceptual experience as of water, through her right eye.

What Williamson’s examples show is that knowledge can’t consist merely in the conjunction of internal and external conditions. It must involve the right *match* between these conditions. It is this match between the internal and external that Williamson’s examples exploit. Subject A’s internal component matches her external component, and subject B’s internal component matches her external component. Subject C fails to know, however, because for her, these components no longer match.

The idea that prime conditions can result from a *match* between internal and external components should not be surprising, and Williamson even explicitly acknowledges that an analysis of knowledge on which it requires such a match is not eliminated by his argument for primeness. Being prime is a very far cry from being unanalyzable; even the state of *believing the truth about p* is a prime condition. If A believes *p* and is in a situation in which *p* is true and B believes  $\sim p$  and is in a situation in which  $\sim p$  is true, each believes the truth about *p*—but C, who like A believes only *p* and like B is in a situation in which  $\sim p$  is true, does not believe the truth about *p*. Why not? Her internal state no longer *matches* her external state. The thesis of knowledge as match explains the primeness of knowledge in exactly the same way.

### 1.2. Aspect 2: Defeater Pairing

So to begin with, we know that knowledge involves some kind of match between internal and external conditions. But in fact, we know more about what kind of match this must be. For there is independent evidence that knowledge involves such a match, deriving from the way in which *defeaters* for knowledge pair into objective and subjective versions. As I will use the term, a *defeater* for knowledge is just a further detail, which, when added to a case in which we presume that someone knows, makes it turn out, other things equal, that she doesn’t know after all.

For example, suppose that Jones is driving through some scenic countryside, and looks over and sees a barn by the side of the road.<sup>1</sup> “Hey,” he thinks to himself, “that’s a cool-looking old barn.” Intuitively, we would

<sup>1</sup> See Goldman (1976).

presume that in such a case, Jones knows that he is looking at a barn. However, if we add to the case the detail that the barn Jones is looking at is actually the only barn for miles around, and all of the other apparent barns that he has been driving past are really just barn façades set up by Hollywood filmmakers, that changes our judgment about the case. Now we conclude that Jones doesn't really know that he is looking at a barn after all. The fact that he is driving through fake barn country is a *defeater* for his knowledge, because it is the detail of the case that makes it the case that he doesn't know after all.

The fake barn country case is what we might call an *objective defeater* for knowledge, because it is a worldly condition that defeats his claim to knowledge. In addition to objective defeaters, however, there are also *subjective defeaters* for knowledge. Suppose, instead of adding to our story that Jones is actually driving through fake barn country, we instead added that he *believes* that he is driving through an area where all but one of the things that look like barns are really just façades set up by Hollywood filmmakers. Nevertheless, as Jones drives by this particular thing that looks like a barn, he still thinks that it is really a barn. In this case it doesn't seem like Jones knows, either. So just as the fact that he is really driving through fake barn country can defeat his knowledge, so can the fact that he believes that he is, whether or not that belief is true. Since this defeater is a condition of Jones's belief state, we may call it a *subjective* defeater for his knowledge.

Notice that in the fake barn cases, the objective defeater and the subjective defeater come paired. The very same proposition whose truth defeats Jones's knowledge in the objective defeater case is one such that Jones's mere belief in it defeats his justification in the subjective defeater case. This turns out to be no coincidence—it is an important and general fact that objective and subjective defeaters for knowledge *always* come paired. To see this, compare a different sort of case. The fake barn country case involves what has come to be known as an *undercutting* defeater. The fact that Jones is driving through fake barn country undercuts his justification for believing that he is looking at a barn, because it renders his visual evidence less useful. Undercutting defeaters are typically contrasted with *countervailing* defeaters, which involve contrary reasons.

For example, if you read in an academic article that a study has shown that axillary dissection is indicated for breast cancer, the fact that this study used an unrepresentative sample would be an undercutter for the conclusion that axillary dissection is so indicated, but the fact that there are several other studies that show no positive net effects for axillary dissection unless the sentinel lymph node tests positive for metastatic disease would be a countervailing defeater. Like undercutting defeaters, countervailing defeaters for knowledge come paired in matching objective and subjective varieties. If you form a belief that axillary dissection is indicated for breast cancer after reading only one article, then even if this is true, you don't really know it, if there is good research to the contrary. This is the objective defeater case. But if you

*have* read the contrary literature and believe the first article anyway in spite of the evidence, then you don't know, either. That is the subjective defeater case.

The importance of the pairing of objective and subjective defeaters for knowledge is illustrated by the literature on *pragmatic encroachment* on knowledge. Some authors have argued—very controversially—that knowledge depends not only on evidence and other truth-related factors, but also on what is at stake over a question for the believer.<sup>2</sup> But importantly, advocates of such pragmatic encroachment hold that high stakes can make it harder to know in each of two different ways. It can be harder to know either because the stakes are actually high, regardless of whether the agent realizes that they are, or because the agent believes the stakes to be high, regardless of whether they really are. The former cases—called *ignorant high stakes* by Stanley (2005)—are putative objective defeaters for knowledge, and the latter are putative subjective defeaters for knowledge.

It is no surprise that pragmatic encroachers like Stanley will think that there are two different ways in which stakes can make it harder to know, because it follows from our general principle that defeaters for knowledge always come paired in this way. Consequently, whether or not you follow Stanley and the others in believing that there actually *is* pragmatic encroachment on knowledge, the fact that those who are tempted to think there is are naturally led to postulate two corresponding types of defeat is further evidence for the centrality of the phenomenon of defeater pairing.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.3. Aspect 3: Explanatory Power

The phenomenon of defeater pairing is not only another important piece of evidence that knowledge involves a kind of match between objective and subjective conditions; it also tells us something important about what *kind* of match this must be. It suggests that the relevant match must be between the relationship a belief bears to the agent's other beliefs, and the relationship it bears to the facts. It is because these two relationships must match, that analogous upsets in either suffice to defeat knowledge. Before going on, however, there is one more aspect of this match that it will be important for us to observe. It is from this third aspect, that we can learn something about just what the relationship between a belief and other beliefs must be, which the relationship between that belief and the facts must match.

For our third aspect of the matching character of knowledge, we return again to Williamson, who argues that knowledge has a distinctive explanatory power, over and above belief and justified belief. Williamson argues for this distinctive explanatory power for his own distinctive dialectical reasons, and for our purposes we will not need everything that Williamson means to get

<sup>2</sup> See especially Fantl and McGrath (2002), Hawthorne (2004), Stanley (2005), Fantl and McGrath (2009), Schroeder (2012a), and Ross and Schroeder (2014).

<sup>3</sup> For a similar observation about lottery cases, see Nelkin (2000).

out of this argument.<sup>4</sup> But what I do think is clearly correct about Williamson's point, is that there are at least some cases in which the fact that someone knows provides a better explanation of their action than the fact that they believe, or that they justifiably believe.

Williamson's leading example of an explanation in which knowledge plays a distinctive explanatory role is the case of a burglar who "spends all night ransacking a house, risking discovery by staying so long." Williamson's explanation of why the burglar stayed so long is that he knew that there was a diamond in the house. The burglar's behavior is not explained by the fact that he believed that there was a diamond in the house—because several hours of ransacking with no results to show for it would in most cases suffice to make it rational for someone who believes, but does not know, that there is a diamond in the house, to give up that belief. Similarly, the burglar's behavior is not explained by the fact that he justifiably believed that there was a diamond in the house—for even a very good justification to believe that there is a diamond in the house can be defeated by the accumulation of the kind of counter-evidence one is bound to come by in the course of eight or nine hours of searching for it with no luck. In contrast, Williamson claims, the burglar's searching all night *can* be explained by the fact that he *knew* that there was a diamond in the house.

The reason the burglar's knowledge can provide a better explanation for his behavior than the fact that he believed, or even that he justifiably believed, is that knowledge involves a match between the burglar's belief state and the facts. It is because it involves such a match that it can explain why the burglar *still believes*, and indeed still *justifiably believes*, that there is a diamond in the house, even after eight or nine hours of looking for it with no luck. Here is an intuitive gloss on how it does this: it does it because knowledge is belief whose justification *stands up to the facts*. The fact that the burglar knows explains why he is justified in not ceasing to believe, even once he has acquired a fair bit of new evidence that there is no diamond in the house after all, because it involves having a justification that stands up to—and hence is robust in the face of—such evidence.<sup>5</sup>

How does this relate to our idea that knowledge is a match between the relationship between a belief and an agent's other beliefs, and the relationship between that belief and the world? It tells us something about what that relationship is. A belief's justification depends on its relationship to the agent's

<sup>4</sup> Compare, for example, Molyneux (2007).

<sup>5</sup> Note that I am *not* claiming that knowledge requires justification that is robust in the face of *any* discovery. This is clearly not the case. Sometimes even though you know, you can learn something that defeats your knowledge, by making you no longer justified in your belief. See section 2.2. But in general, this happens only when there is some other fact that, if only you learned it as well, would restore both your justification and your knowledge. Such evidence is *misleading*, in the proper sense. The intuitive force of the paradox of dogmatism, introduced by Harman (1973) and attributed to Saul Kripke, trades on the ambiguity between evidence that is misleading in this sense, and *is* properly ignored, and evidence that merely supports something false, which is *not* properly ignored.

other beliefs. The idea of knowledge as match tells us that a belief must bear a similar relationship to the world as it bears to other beliefs, in virtue of which it is justified. It's because of this match between the facts and one's justification, that because the burglar knows, his justification is robust in the face of the facts. This third aspect of the match involved in knowledge is one of the important things we'll be able to explain once my account is on the table.

## 2. TRADITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR THE ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE

In section 1 I've collected three important observations that motivate the idea that knowledge involves a kind of match between internal and external conditions. In fact, I argued, these observations motivate a much more specific idea about the kind of match that is involved. They motivate the idea that the justificatory status a belief has, in virtue of the agent's other beliefs, must be *good enough* that it "stands up to" the rest of the facts. This intuitive idea not only provides an intuitive explanation of Williamson's observations about the explanatory power of knowledge, it also explains the simplest sorts of Gettier cases—"false lemma" cases like Gettier's (1963) original *Brown in Barcelona*, undercutting defeater cases like Jones in fake barn country, and even countervailing defeater cases like the breast cancer research case. The appeal of this sort of idea should therefore be clear, and it is no surprise that many authors in the early decades of research into the Gettier problem offered versions of the idea that knowledge is justified belief that stands up in some way to the facts.<sup>6</sup>

The analysis of knowledge did not, therefore, become the most famous failed project of analytic philosophy because it was mysterious how to get this far. What became notoriously difficult was nailing down the details. Two issues, in particular, turned out to pose repeated challenges, no matter how theorists tried to contort the details of their accounts.

### 2.1. *An Illustrative Account*

Many of the early accounts of knowledge presented in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s had trouble with both of the main difficulties in which I will be interested. For concreteness, I'll illustrate them with a particularly simple and natural account due to Peter Klein (1971), which fully captures the spirit of our guiding idea that knowledge is belief whose justification "stands up to" the facts.

According to Klein (1971), *S* knows *p* (at time  $t_1$ ) just in case at  $t_1$  *S* truly believes *p*, *p* is evident to *S*, and "there is no true proposition such that if it became evident to *S* at  $t_1$ , *p* would no longer be evident to *S*" (1971, 475). This captures very well the idea that knowledge is belief whose justification stands

<sup>6</sup> See, in particular, Clark (1963), Sosa (1964), (1970), Lehrer (1965), (1970), (1974), Lehrer and Paxson (1969), Klein (1971), Annis (1973), Ackerman (1974), Swain (1974), Johnsen (1974), Unger (1975), Olin (1976), and Barker (1976) for some of the highlights of this tradition.

up to the facts. Klein captures the way in which belief must stand up to the facts by supposing that there must be no fact such that were it added to *S*'s beliefs, *S*'s justification for believing *p* would go away. This account explains why knowledge involves the kind of match that makes it prime. It explains why we observe defeater pairing, because the objective conditions that defeat knowledge are just the things that, were they to be justifiedly believed, would subjectively defeat knowledge by defeating justification. And it explains Williamson's thesis about explanatory power, because it explains why someone who knows will in general continue to be justified in her belief even when she discovers new evidence, as the burglar does after spending the entire night ransacking the house in search of diamonds.<sup>7</sup>

Klein's account explains all of our observations from section 1 because it makes good on the idea that knowledge is belief whose justification stands up to the facts. As we'll see in sections 2.2 and 2.3, it is subject to predictable counterexamples. But it is important to keep clear on whether these counterexamples reflect poorly on the core idea that knowledge is belief whose justification stands up to the facts, or they only reflect poorly on the way in which Klein tried to make this idea precise. It will be the thesis of this paper that the major problems besetting this account and others like it derive from mistakes in implementation, rather than from any failure of the core insight that knowledge is belief whose justification stands up to the facts in the right way.

## 2.2. *The Defeater Dialectic*

Suppose that you see Tom Grabit come out of the library, pull a book from under his shirt, cackle gleefully, and scurry off. In this case, absent further information, it looks like you know that Tom stole a book. But if Tom has an identical twin, Tim, from whom you could not distinguish him, then it seems that you don't really know after all. Tim would therefore be a defeater for your knowledge that Tom stole a book. Klein's account can capture this defeater for knowledge, since if you were to find out that Tom has an identical twin, then you would no longer be justified in believing that Tom stole a book solely on the basis of your visual evidence. So far, so good.

But unfortunately, just as knowledge can be defeated, defeaters for knowledge can also be defeated. Suppose, for example, that Tim's wedding was scheduled for today in another state. If this is the case, then it seems that you can know that Tom stole a book on the basis of your visual evidence alone, even though he has an identical twin. So the potential defeater for your knowledge is itself defeated. But Klein's account is too strong, and gets this wrong. According to Klein, since finding out that Tom has a twin (without also

<sup>7</sup> Note, however, that it does not explain exactly the right degree of robustness of knowledge in the face of new evidence. This will become clear in section 2.2.

finding out that Tim's wedding is scheduled to take place in another state) would make your justification go away, you don't know.<sup>8</sup>

In the early 1970s a great deal of published work on the analysis of knowledge went into trying to characterize the conditions on which a true proposition is a defeater that is not itself defeated. This turned out to be very difficult to do, in part because just as knowledge can be defeated and defeaters can be defeated, defeater-defeaters can also be defeated. For example, if Tim called off the wedding, then the fact that it was scheduled to be today in another state doesn't interfere with Tim's interfering with your visual evidence that Tom stole a book. And if the reason Tim called off the wedding was to elope to Bali instead, then it seems that you can know after all. But if all of the flights to Bali have been cancelled, then perhaps you don't. What cases like this show is that defeaters and defeater-defeaters can go on ad infinitum.<sup>9</sup>

This means that it is not enough for an analysis of knowledge to predict the ways in which knowledge can be defeated. It must also be able to predict the ways in which the defeaters for knowledge can themselves be defeated, so that the agent knows after all. An analysis that fails to allow for defeaters will be too expansive, allowing for knowledge that there is not. But an analysis that fails to allow for defeater-defeaters will be too narrow, failing to account for knowledge that there is. And one that fails to allow for defeater-defeater-defeaters will be too expansive again. Just talking about the phenomenon is a bit dizzying; it's easy to see why so many attempts to analyze knowledge ended up with epicycles—the phenomenon seems to cry out for them.

It turns out that the defeater dialectic is very familiar to moral philosophers, as pushed by proponents of moral particularism. Whereas the defeater dialectic for knowledge starts with the problem that knowledge can be defeated in a range of ways, and then adds that defeaters can be defeated, and even defeater-defeaters can be defeated, the particularist dialectic in moral philosophy starts with the facts that the wrongness of an action can be defeated in a variety of ways, and even those defeaters can themselves be defeated. Just as the defeater dialectic in epistemology poses a problem for the analysis of knowledge, particularists argue that the defeater dialectic in moral philosophy poses a problem for the possibility of posing any informative generalizations at all about—let alone any analyses of—moral wrongness.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In general, whenever there is a potential objective defeater for your knowledge that is itself defeated, learning the potential defeater without learning its defeater-defeater will undermine both justification and knowledge. Defeaters which are themselves defeated can thus provide *misleading* evidence, if you learn them without also learning of their defeater. This shows that the extra explanatory power offered by knowledge in burglar cases like Williamson's is limited.

<sup>9</sup> Compare especially Levy (1977) for discussion of this point. This case is a variation on a case introduced by Lehrer and Paxson (1969), variations on which are common in the literature cited in note 4.

<sup>10</sup> Compare especially Dancy (2004), Schroeder (2011a) for discussion.

The similarity between the defeater dialectic in epistemology and in moral philosophy will be important for my eventual solution.

### 2.3. *The Conditional Fallacy*

The other major difficulty faced by many early attempts to analyze knowledge is the conditional fallacy. An account commits the conditional fallacy by attempting to analyze a categorical property in conditional terms. For example, we saw that on Klein's account you know if you justifiedly believe the truth, and moreover there is no true proposition, such that were you to (justifiedly) believe it, you would cease to be justified in your belief. This conditional account attempts to capture the idea that knowledge is true belief whose justification is good enough to "stand up to" the facts, and uses the conditional in order to gloss what it is to be good enough to stand up to the facts. The idea is that it *is* good enough, if it *would still be* sufficient for justification, if the agent (justifiedly) had beliefs in those facts.

We've already seen, in section 2.2, that this account runs into trouble with the defeater dialectic. But it also runs into trouble with the conditional fallacy. To see why in the abstract, note that the conditional analysis has us evaluate whether some justification *is* good enough for knowledge by looking at whether it *would be* good enough, at the closest world at which the agent has the other belief. But in some cases, the closest world in which the agent has the relevant belief will also be a world where other things happen. Perhaps the agent *would* know, in such a world, even though she actually does not. Or perhaps she would not, even though actually she does. Either of these scenarios can create conditional fallacy trouble for such an account.

Once we understand how the conditional fallacy works, it is easy to imagine what such counterexamples must look like, but the one offered by Shope (1983) is simple: suppose that S knows that she is not justified in believing some proposition *r*. But suppose that *r* is true. Finally, add to the case that were S to justifiedly believe *r*, this justification would be transparent to her, so that she would no longer be justified in believing that she is not justified in believing it. According to Klein's account, S does not know.

If Shope's counterexample to Klein strikes you as a matter of detail, rather than spirit, then you and I are on the same page. The counterexample shows that Klein was wrong to try to cash out the way in which justification must "stand up to" the facts in terms of a subjunctive conditional. But the problem is a general one for the use of such subjunctive conditionals to try to analyze categorical properties. We would be remiss if we took it to cast aspersions on the core insight that knowledge is belief whose justification stands up to the facts. We will simply need to find a way of understanding this "standing up to" relation in categorical, non-conditional, terms.

The defeater dialectic and the conditional fallacy are the two main problems for the analyses of knowledge canvassed by Shope (1983), which is cited by pessimists like both Williamson (2000) and Kvanvig (2003) as an authoritative treatment of the persistent problems facing analyses of knowledge.

There is no guarantee that an analysis of knowledge that avoids these two problems without arcane twists and turns will also be free of other problems or objections, but if there is an independently motivated and natural account that is free of these two problems, that should at least make us question what grounds we have for inductive pessimism about the Gettierological project.

### 3. FIRST MOVE: TWO KINDS OF SUFFICIENCY

In this paper I will be defending the same sort of account as we have been describing so far—one on which knowledge consists in the right sort of match between one’s justification and the facts, where that match involves the justification somehow being “good enough” to “stand up to” the facts. But unlike earlier attempts to cash out this idea, the account that I offer will be based on some broad principles that render it immune to the chief difficulties encountered by earlier accounts.

In the next three sections, I will be breaking up the steps required in order to explain how my favored version of this analysis of knowledge works, by dividing them into three principal moves. The first move, in the remainder of section 3, is to distinguish between two different ways in which the reasons for a belief can be sufficient, by distinguishing between two kinds of reasons: objective and subjective. This move establishes the key concepts employed by my account. The second move, in section 4, is to show how to defend a categorical account of the sufficiency of reasons. This move lets us avoid the conditional fallacy. And the third move, in section 5, is to defend an important thesis about the weight of reasons. This thesis will allow us to make the right predictions about the defeater dialectic.

What all three of these moves have in common is that they appeal to natural and independently motivated claims about *reasons*. I will offer no general argument here that knowledge needs to be understood in terms of reasons, besides trying to exhibit the explanatory power and resourcefulness of such an account. But one piece of circumstantial evidence that this is not a crazy idea is the pervasiveness of the idea, at least in moral philosophy, that reasons are the basis of normativity. If questions about knowledge and justification are normative questions, then it follows from this general idea that we should expect them to ultimately be questions about reasons. Of course, it could be that knowledge and justification are the cases that prove this general idea to be false. But given the broad appeal of this general idea, it is at least hardly ad hoc or strained to investigate what resources reasons provide us for the analysis of knowledge.

#### 3.1. *Objective and Subjective Reasons*

So far I’ve been saying a few things: that knowledge involves a kind of *match*, and that this match involves one’s justification being *good enough* to stand up to the facts, in some way. But we know, from the problems posed by the conditional fallacy, that it will not do to try to cash out this notion of being “good

enough” in counterfactual terms. So we will need to understand it in terms of some categorical relationship between one’s belief state and the facts. In this and the following subsection I will argue that we can do so by appeal to some independently important and well-motivated distinctions—distinctions that are important not only for the study of epistemology, but for the study of reasons more generally.

The most important distinction that we will need, is that between what are sometimes called *objective* and *subjective* reasons. The intuitive distinction goes like this: if Max is smiling, that is reason to believe that he is happy. But if no one realizes that Max is smiling, no one *has* that reason to believe that Max is happy. I’ll call the sense in which the fact that Max is smiling is a reason to believe that he is happy, even if no one knows about it, the *objective* sense of “reason,” and I’ll call the sense in which in this case no one has a reason to believe that Max is happy the *subjective* sense of reason. Objective reasons, then, are facts or true propositions, and subjective reasons are propositions to which agents have some sort of epistemic access—the kind of access, whatever it is, that is lacked when no one has the reason to believe that Max is happy.

Some people believe that subjective reasons, so understood, must themselves be objective reasons. They believe that talk about whether someone *has* the reason to believe that Max is happy may be taken literally, as talk about some sort of possession relation that agents might bear to things that are reasons to believe that Max is happy.<sup>11</sup> I call this view the *Factoring Account*, and my view is that it is wrong. I believe that the “has” in “Caroline has a reason to believe that Max is happy” is pleonastic, as in “Caroline has a golf partner.” The latter does not mean that there is someone who is a golf partner and whom, moreover, Caroline has; it just means that there is someone who is Caroline’s golf partner. Similarly, on my view, talk about the (subjective) reasons that someone has is just talk about the things that are reasons for her (in the subjective sense of “reason”). I have argued at length against the Factoring Account elsewhere;<sup>12</sup> in this paper I will simply assume that this theory is wrong, and that subjective reasons need not themselves be objective reasons—someone may have a subjective reason without there being any corresponding objective reason.

I mention the Factoring Account and my view that it is false because it will be important in what follows that subjective reasons do not need to be based on *true* beliefs. Since objective reasons must be truths, the idea that subjective reasons are just objective reasons to which you stand in some possession relationship implies that subjective reasons *must* be based on true beliefs. That is why I think it is important to see that this view is false. At any rate, I will assume that subjective reasons can be based on false beliefs in what follows.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In Schroeder (2008) I make the case that there is much circumstantial evidence that this thesis has been widely accepted by epistemologists. Errol Lord (2010) defends it explicitly, in responding to Schroeder (2008).

<sup>12</sup> Schroeder (2008).

<sup>13</sup> For argument, see Schroeder (2008).

Other people—well, some of them are the same people—believe that having a subjective reason requires having a justified belief in that proposition, or even knowing it.<sup>14</sup> I believe that this theory is also wrong; on my preferred view, having a subjective reason requires only having a belief—or a perceptual state with a propositional object (perhaps intellectual seemings will also do the trick). Having a reason does not require that the belief (or the perceptual state or intellectual seeming) be justified, though I do hold that when a belief is *unjustified*, the subjective reason that the agent thereby has is guaranteed to be defeated, so it is not possible to “bootstrap” yourself into having *good* reasons to believe something, simply by having unjustified beliefs that support it. Again, I have argued for these views elsewhere at length.<sup>15</sup> Here I will simply assume that we do not need to appeal to the concepts of rationality, justification, or knowledge in understanding what it is for someone to have a subjective reason. This is important, because this allows us to *use* the concept of having a reason in order to analyze rationality, justification, and knowledge—which would not otherwise be possible, without circularity. For our purposes, we can see this as one of the important, non-trivial, commitments of the analysis of knowledge advocated in this paper.

I want to emphasize three things about the objective/subjective distinction. First, it is a natural and intuitive distinction. This is illustrated not only by the fact that it is easy to give an intuitive sense for what such talk is about, but by the facts that the same distinction applies to reasons for action as for reasons for belief, and that the same distinction can be made for evidence as for reasons—presumably because evidence matters in epistemology because it is a particularly important kind of reason for belief. Second, I want to emphasize that for my main claims in this paper I do not need any particular claims about the ontology of subjective reasons. You may hold, as I have in previous work,<sup>16</sup> that they are the contents of beliefs, or you may hold that they are the belief state itself. All that matters for my view about knowledge is that there is a way of mapping between subjective reasons and objective reasons.

And third, I will be assuming both that subjective reasons need not be factive, and that we can understand them independently of knowledge and justification. These are the assumptions that will be important for me in what follows, and though I have argued for each of them separately before, here the principal argument for these claims will be by reference to their fruits, as illustrated by the way in which they allow for subjective reasons to play a role in the analysis of knowledge.

<sup>14</sup> Compare, for example, Feldman (1988, 227): “If I believe, for no good reason, that P and I infer (correctly) from this that Q, I don’t think we want to say that I ‘have’ P as evidence for Q. Only things that I believe (or could believe) rationally, or perhaps, with justification, count as part of the evidence that I have. It seems to me that this is a good reason to include an epistemic acceptability constraint on evidence possessed . . .” See also Williamson (2000) and Hawthorne and Stanley (2008).

<sup>15</sup> Schroeder (2011b).

<sup>16</sup> Schroeder (2007), (2008), (2011b).

### 3.2. *Rationality and Correctness*

The objective/subjective distinction among reasons corresponds to an important distinction between *rationality* and *correctness*. Leaving epistemology aside for a moment, it can be rational for Bernie, who believes that his glass contains gin and tonic, to take a sip, even though this is not the correct or advisable thing for him to do, since in fact his glass contains gasoline. Similarly, it can be correct for him to set his glass down without taking a sip, without that being a rational course of action for him, given that he's been looking forward to a drink all day and doesn't want to offend his host. In the theory of practical reason, it is natural to hold that subjective reasons are related to rationality in the same way that objective reasons are related to correctness. Though Bernie's subjective reasons are *sufficient*, or *good enough* to make taking a sip rational, his objective reasons to take a sip are *not* sufficient to make it correct—for there is a decisive objective reason for him not to take a sip—namely, that his glass is full of gasoline.

The distinction between rationality and correctness is also important for belief. A belief is generally held to be *correct* just in case it is true, but many false beliefs are rational, and many true beliefs are not rational. A false belief will be rational for someone who has sufficient evidence that it is true—that is, who has good enough *subjective* reasons to believe that it is true. Similarly, a true belief will fail to be rational, for someone who has conclusive reason *not* to believe the proposition in question. So it is natural to think that the rationality of beliefs is related to subjective reasons for belief in the same way that the rationality of action is related to subjective reasons for action.

However, many epistemologists believe that the *correctness* of beliefs has nothing to do with reasons.<sup>17</sup> Whereas the correctness of an action may depend on the objective reasons in favor of or against it, it is commonly observed that the correctness of a belief depends only on whether it is true. Consequently, many epistemologists assume that for belief, correctness just *is* truth. This assumption is premature and misguided. On the assumption that the fact that *p* is false is always a conclusive objective reason not to believe *p*, we can derive the fact that it is correct to believe *p* only if *p* is true from the generalization that, like action, belief is correct just in case there are no conclusive reasons against it. On the natural assumption that “correct” is univocal as applied to action and belief, this is a much better motivated way of accounting for this data.

So this leads us to a picture on which there are two important kinds of sufficiency, corresponding to the two important kinds of reason: when the objective reasons to believe *p* are sufficient, it is *correct* to believe *p*, and when the subjective reasons to believe *p* are sufficient, it is *rational* to believe *p*. This kind of rationality of believing *p* is what epistemologists would refer to as

<sup>17</sup> Compare Gert (2008).

*propositional justification*.<sup>18</sup> Whether it is rational for a subject to believe *p* in the sense of whether the subject has a propositional justification to believe *p* can depend solely on her subjective reasons, and whether they are good enough. But it is also often important to know not only whether *p* is a rational thing for a subject to believe, but whether she is rational *in* believing *p*. This is what epistemologists typically refer to as *doxastic* justification.<sup>19</sup>

It is straightforward to make sense of doxastic justification in our framework. Doing so just requires introducing a third important sense of “reason”—what moral philosophers refer to as *motivating* reasons. The motivating reason for which you do something is just the reason *for which* you do it. Similarly, the motivating reason for which you believe something is just the reason *for which* you believe it. By calling such things “motivating reasons” I do not mean to judge whether believing something for a reason deserves to be called “being motivated” in any robust sense of the term, merely to observe that there is an exact analogue in epistemology of what moral philosophers refer to as “motivating reasons.” Epistemologists tend to prefer to talk about the *basing relation*, but I find this awkward and less clearly grounded in pretheoretically important talk. We know pretheoretically that people do and believe things for reasons; motivating reason talk is just talk about the reasons for which they do and believe these things.

Although motivating reason talk is I think perfectly pretheoretically sensible, that is not to say that it is easy to analyze. Importantly, motivating reasons figure in explanations of why an agent does or believes what she does, but not all explanations of why an agent does or believes what she does are reasons-explanations. It turns out that it is hard to say what this difference is, but rather than get distracted by this, I will simply rely on an intuitive understanding of talk about motivating reasons, since it is a distinction that I take it everyone needs to be able to make sense of, independently of their account of knowledge. I’ll have more to say in the final section of the paper about the detrimental effects in the epistemological literature of premature attempts to analyze important concepts like this one.<sup>20</sup>

I will take it that at least in normal cases and possibly in all cases, the reasons for which someone believes something are themselves subjective reasons for her to believe it. I will further take it that in at least some cases, the reasons for which someone believes something are themselves objective reasons to believe it—this happens, I take it, when the reasons for which someone believes something are true.<sup>21</sup> My own view is that what makes it possible

<sup>18</sup> Here I equate justification with rationality. I take it from its use within epistemology that “justification” is a property of belief which is clearly intuitively necessary for knowledge, and present in Gettier cases. I think, but will not argue here, that the most natural such property of which we have an independent grasp is simply that of being rational.

<sup>19</sup> Kvanvig and Menzel (1990) also distinguish doxastic and *personal* justification, but I will not be concerned with this distinction in what follows.

<sup>20</sup> Compare Lehrer (1971), whose account of what it is to believe something for a reason was one of Shope’s (1978) leading examples of the conditional fallacy.

<sup>21</sup> Compare Dancy (2000).

for someone's motivating reasons for belief to be both subjective reasons to believe and objective reasons to believe, is that the same kind of thing plays all three roles: propositions are objective reasons when true, subjective reasons when believed, and motivating reasons when, by being believed, they play a certain role in bringing about another belief or in maintaining that other belief. But nothing in what follows will turn on that—so long as your conceptual framework can make sense of what it means for the reason for which someone believes something to be a good objective reason to believe it or a good subjective reason to believe it, you will have allowed for everything that I need.

Before going on, it is important to emphasize that these concepts—of objective and subjective reasons for belief, and of the motivating reason for which someone believes something—are not special inventions created for the purpose of understanding knowledge, or even for the purpose of epistemology. The very same concepts are central in the study of practical reason—moral philosophers make the same distinctions between objective and subjective reasons for action and for attitudes other than belief, and distinguish both from the motivating reasons for which someone acts or for which they hold a certain attitude. Indeed, my own previously mentioned arguments against the Factoring Account are based on the practical case. Moreover, it should not be surprising that belief is subject to at least some of the same categories that we use in trying to understand action and other attitudes, nor that “reason” should turn out to be unambiguous in “reason for action,” “reason for belief,” and “reason for intending.”<sup>22</sup>

With the concept of a motivating reason in hand, however, we may say that an agent is *doxastically rational* in believing *p* just in case the reasons for which she believes *p* are subjectively sufficient. This means simply that the reasons for which she believes *p* include among them subjective reasons for her to believe *p* that are sufficient to make it propositionally rational for her to believe *p*. Corresponding to the notion of *doxastic rationality* in the subjective domain is the notion of *well-groundedness* in the objective domain. A belief is

<sup>22</sup> It is sometimes said that “reason” cannot be unambiguous across “reason for action” and “reason for belief,” or at least that reasons for action and reasons for belief are very different kinds of thing, because reasons for action must be believed, and reasons for action must only be true. The foregoing distinction between objective and subjective reasons should make clear, however, that this allegation compares subjective reasons for belief with objective reasons for action—which *do* behave differently, because they are on opposite sides of the objective/subjective distinction. It is perfectly understandable, moreover, why we are more interested in objective reasons in ethics and more interested in subjective reasons in epistemology—after all, in epistemology it is widely agreed that what we objectively ought to do is to believe the truth—the whole problem is how to accomplish that. So we know what the objective reasons support—they support the truth; the problem is getting there. Whereas in moral philosophy, one of the main issues at stake is what action is supported by the facts, even if we know what those facts are—and consequently we do, in fact, spend more time discussing objective reasons in moral philosophy. The fact that discussions in epistemology focus mostly on subjective reasons and discussions in ethics focus mostly on objective reasons is therefore easy to understand, and should not confuse us into thinking that reasons for action and reasons for belief are fundamentally different topics.

well grounded just in case the reasons for which it is held are *objectively* sufficient. This means simply that the reasons for which it is held include among them objective reasons sufficient to make it correct for it to be held.

Knowledge, I claim, at least at a first pass, is just belief that is both doxastically rational and well grounded.<sup>23</sup> That is, as Kant says, it is belief for reasons that are both objectively and subjectively sufficient.<sup>24</sup> Now we just need to know how to make sense of this talk about sufficiency.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. SECOND MOVE: SUFFICIENCY AS BALANCE

In section 3 I laid out the key concepts and elements of my approach—enough to see what my final analysis of knowledge will look like. This account makes good on all of the structural features that underlay our original motivating idea that knowledge is belief whose justification stands up to the facts. At its core is a “match” between objective and subjective conditions, validating the primeness of knowledge. The relevant match is between the structure of one’s justification and the facts, as suggested by the phenomenon of defeater pairing, and the account explains why we should predict the phenomenon of defeater pairing, because the same motivating reasons for belief that could fail to be subjectively sufficient because of some further belief could fail to be objectively sufficient because of a corresponding further fact. And it explains the explanatory power of knowledge in cases like Williamson’s, because it imposes the requirement that a knower’s reasons for belief need to be sufficient not only in the face of her other subjective reasons, but also in the face of the facts.

However, in order to make good on this account, we will need to see how it can avoid the main problems for similar accounts of knowledge. In particular, we will need to see how it can avoid the conditional fallacy, and how it will be able to make the right predictions about the defeater dialectic. In the remainder of section 4, I will introduce a categorical account of *sufficiency*, in order to address the first issue. Then in section 5, I’ll show how to make the right predictions about the defeater dialectic.

<sup>23</sup> Note that well-foundedness ensures truth given our assumption that the fact that  $\sim p$  is always a conclusive reason not to believe  $p$ , assuming bivalence. So given this assumption we need not separate truth condition in our analysis.

<sup>24</sup> In a pair of fascinating discussions, Chignell (2007a) and especially (2007b) explores what Kant means by this remark, and I think makes the case that Kant does in fact mean by it roughly what I do, although by Chignell’s account, Kant has somewhat different views about objective reasons and subjective reasons than I would accept.

<sup>25</sup> Like Kant, on Chignell’s (2007b) reading, Robert Fogelin (1994) defends an account that bears strong similarities to the one outlined in this paper, but with some differences in detail. According to Fogelin, “ $s$  knows that  $P$  iff  $S$  justifiably came to believe that  $P$  on grounds that establish the truth of  $P$ ” (1994, 28). This is essentially my account, with “establish the truth of  $P$ ” as a gloss on what makes grounds objectively sufficient. I’m not very clear, however, what it means for grounds to “establish the truth of  $P$ ,” if that is to be weak enough to make room for ordinary claims to knowledge. And Fogelin does not help on this score, using his account to argue for Pyrrhonian skepticism. My account requires only that the reasons for which you believe must outweigh the reasons against belief.

#### 4.1. *Balance as a Categorical Account of Sufficiency*

On the picture I described in section 3.2, doxastic rationality and well-groundedness are strictly analogous properties of belief. One holds in virtue of the relationship between the reasons for which one holds the belief and the rest of one's *subjective* reasons, and the other holds in virtue of a strictly analogous relationship between the reasons for which one holds the belief and the rest of one's *objective* reasons. It is this strict analogy that makes good on our idea from section 1.2 that the kind of match that knowledge involves is a match between the way one's belief is related to one's other beliefs, and the way it is related to the world. Our account takes reasons as its primitive, and uses them to explain both justification and knowledge.

But Klein's account, introduced in section 2.1, takes justification, rather than reasons, as primitive, and does not have something more detailed to say about the relationship between reasons and justification. So when Klein is looking for something to say about the way in which one's justification must "stand up to" the facts, in order to constitute knowledge, he is limited to saying things that he can say using only the concept of justification. This is an important part of what pushes him to employ a counterfactual test (besides the fact that the test seems to do okay in a range of intuitive cases).

But another way of reading Klein's account is as offering an implicit picture of what makes the reasons for which one believes objectively sufficient. We can get this picture by adding our view of reasons and justification to Klein's view, and seeing what it implies about what it is for reasons to be objectively sufficient. On this picture, the reasons for which one believes are objectively sufficient if there is no truth such that if it were added to one's beliefs, then the reasons for which one believes would fail to be subjectively sufficient. This picture assumes an account of subjective sufficiency, and tries to piggyback an account of objective sufficiency by means of Klein's counterfactual test. The conditional fallacy suggests that this is a bad way to go. Rather than understanding the way in which the reasons for which the agent believes must "stand up to" the facts in terms of *justification*, we should understand it as a direct, categorical relationship between those motivating reasons and the facts. And it should be the exact same relationship on both the objective and subjective sides.

Moral philosophers have a simple idea about the relationship between reasons and justification. According to this idea, an action is rational just in case the agent's subjective reasons to do it are at least as good as her subjective reasons not to do it. Similarly, an action is correct just in case the agent's objective reasons to do it are at least as good as her objective reasons against doing it.<sup>26</sup> This is what I call the idea of *sufficiency as balance*.<sup>27</sup> According to the idea of sufficiency as balance, reasons determine what it is rational to

<sup>26</sup> Compare Parfit (2011), who takes this idea to be so natural that he stipulates that he will talk about "ought in the sense of most reason."

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller defense of *sufficiency as balance*, see Schroeder (forthcoming).

do by competing against one another. When the (subjective) reasons to do something are at least as good as their competitors,<sup>28</sup> that is a rational thing to do. Similarly, when the (objective) reasons to do something are at least as good as their competitors, it is a correct thing to do. When an agent's reasons to do something are at least as good as her reasons against doing it, we may say that they are *sufficient*, and the same definition works, whether we are talking about objective or subjective reasons. So on this picture, sufficiency is a categorical relationship between reasons, determined wholly by their relative *weights*—by how “good” of reasons they are, or how significant a role they play in the competition between reasons.

It is easy to extend this categorical account of sufficiency to smaller sets of reasons. Just as we may say that the set of *all* of an agent's subjective reasons to do something is sufficient just in case together they are at least as good as the set of all of the agent's subjective reasons against doing it, similarly we may say that some *arbitrary* set of an agent's subjective reasons to do something are sufficient just in case together they are at least as good as the set of all of the agent's subjective reasons against doing it. And similarly for objective reasons. This extension of the concept of sufficiency from applying to *total* sets of reasons to arbitrary sets is what allows us to apply it to the reasons *for which* an agent believes, which often do not include all of her subjective reasons to believe and always do not include all of the objective reasons to believe. Because a subset of an agent's subjective reasons can be sufficient only if the set of all of her reasons is sufficient, the sufficiency of even the subset of her reasons for which she actually believes is enough to guarantee the rationality of the belief. Similarly, because a subset of the objective reasons can be sufficient only if the set of all objective reasons is sufficient, the sufficiency of even the subset of objective reasons for which an agent believes is enough to guarantee the belief's correctness.

Because sufficiency as balance relies on a categorical relationship between reasons—their comparative weight—it doesn't introduce any liability to conditional fallacy-type problems. From the wider, more inclusive perspective that includes work in moral philosophy, appealing to something like sufficiency as balance looks like a no-brainer.<sup>29</sup> But in the next subsection I'll explain why this has not seemed like such an obvious thing to say about the rationality of *belief*.

#### 4.2. Harman's Challenge

As we saw in the previous section, the idea of sufficiency as balance is familiar and important from moral philosophy. However, it has not always seemed like such an obvious idea in epistemology. To see why, let's start by being a bit more careful in our talk about reasons for and against belief. As illustrated by Pascal's Wager, not just anything that “counts in favor” of a belief helps

<sup>28</sup> Or at least: *not outweighed* by their competitors.

<sup>29</sup> Compare especially Ross (1930).

to make it rational in the way required for knowledge. Rather than getting caught up in whether there is *some* sense of “rational” in which becoming convinced by Pascal’s argument can make it “rational” for you to believe in God, let us define *epistemic rationality* as the strongest kind of rationality that is entailed by knowledge. Because Pascalian considerations do not affect knowledge, they clearly do not affect epistemic rationality. So whether or not Pascalian considerations count as reasons for belief for some purposes, they are not the “right kind” of reason for belief to be important for the study of epistemic rationality or knowledge. They are not, as we may say, *epistemic* reasons.

What does affect epistemic rationality, it seems, is *evidence*. Without evidence of some sort, belief is not rational. This thought leads to the view that when we are talking about reasons for belief in the context of knowledge—that is, when we are talking about *epistemic* reasons for belief—what we are really talking about is evidence.<sup>30</sup> But unfortunately for sufficiency as balance, it is not at all plausible that your evidence is sufficient to make believing *p* rational just in case it is at least as good as the competing evidence. If your evidence for *p* is merely *as* good as the competing evidence, then it is generally *irrational* for you to believe *p*; instead, you should remain agnostic. Gilbert Harman (2004) argues that this means that though sufficiency as balance works just fine for the rationality of action, it is inadequate for the rationality of belief, and argues on these grounds that rationality of action and rationality of belief are disanalogous.

It is therefore plausible that thinking of epistemic reasons as evidence has played an important role in dissuading epistemologists from appealing to sufficiency as balance. But this reasoning goes too quickly. The putative problem for sufficiency as balance arises because in addition to believing *p* and believing  $\sim p$ , there is an important third option—*believing neither*. But all of the evidence either supports *p* or supports  $\sim p$ , and so all of the evidence is either reason to believe *p* or reason to believe  $\sim p$ ; there isn’t any evidence left over to be reason to believe neither. So if epistemic reasons—the reasons that bear on epistemic rationality—are exhausted by the evidence, then sufficiency as balance can’t be the right account of what makes them sufficient.

But it was a hasty overgeneralization from Pascal’s case to conclude that just because Pascalian considerations are not epistemic reasons, there can’t be any reasons that bear on epistemic rationality that are not evidence. Rather than concluding on the basis of Harman’s observation that the rationality of belief and the rationality of action are deeply disanalogous, a perfectly good alternative would have been to conclude that not all epistemic reasons are evidence—and in particular, that there are epistemic reasons *against* belief that are not evidence.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Compare Bonjour (1985), as well as Parfit (2001), Piller (2001), and Hieronymi (2005).

<sup>31</sup> See Schroeder (2012b).

This should not be a surprising claim. As I've introduced the term, "epistemic reason" isn't just a shorthand for "evidence"; it's a term for those reasons, whatever they are, that bear on epistemic rationality, which is the strongest kind of rationality entailed by knowledge. And there do seem to be non-evidential factors that bear on whether belief is rational. For example, suppose that both Sophia and Zoe have significantly better evidence for  $p$  than for  $\sim p$ , but their situations differ in the following way: although Sophia is in a position to be confident that no further evidence that might bear on the matter is forthcoming, Zoe is waiting on the results of an experiment that has the potential to provide more conclusive evidence than any of her evidence collected so far. Zoe's expectation of further evidence is not evidence against either conclusion, but it does seem to raise the bar for how conclusive her existing evidence must be, in order to make it rational for her to believe. Here is a natural explanation of why: it's because the expectation of further evidence is an epistemic reason *not* to believe.

A full evaluation of whether there are indeed epistemic reasons against belief that are not evidence would take us substantially astray.<sup>32</sup> The point I want to make in this section is that there is a *prima facie* obstacle, which is enough of an obstacle to explain why epistemologists have generally not appealed to sufficiency as balance, but easily enough overcome that it should not dissuade us from realizing the virtues of having a categorical account of sufficiency that is consistent with a uniform picture of the sufficiency of reasons for action and reasons for belief. With sufficiency as balance in hand, we can avoid any risk of conditional fallacy-type problems. So all that remains is to get an understanding of the more complicated features of the defeater dialectic. To that we turn in section 5.

## 5. THIRD AND FINAL MOVE: WEIGHING REASONS

So far, I've introduced the familiar distinction between objective and subjective reasons, characterized knowledge as belief for reasons that are both objectively and subjectively sufficient, shown that this account fits with the way in which we already observed that knowledge involves a "match" between objective and subjective factors, and showed that by appealing to familiar and general ideas from moral philosophy, we can characterize sufficiency in categorical terms, avoiding the need to fall into the conditional fallacy. What remains is to see why the resulting picture should lead us to predict, rather than be frustrated by, the defeater dialectic. In section 5.1 I'll explain on general grounds why the defeater dialectic is exactly what we should expect given general and independently motivated observations about the weight of reasons, and in section 5.2 I'll isolate a simple conjecture that, if true, would explain why this would be true.

<sup>32</sup> See especially Schroeder (2012a) and (2012b).

### 5.1. *The Structure of Defeaters*

To see why the picture that I've already described should lead us to anticipate the defeater dialectic, start by observing that one of the distinctive virtues of *sufficiency as balance*, as an account of the sufficiency of reasons, is that it readily explains the difference between undercutting and countervailing defeaters. A set of reasons fails to be sufficient only if the competing reasons are better. And when we add a further detail to a case, that can make this happen in exactly one of two ways. The further detail we add might itself be one of the competing reasons, or might reveal that the competing reasons are better than we otherwise would have presumed. In that case, it is a countervailing defeater. Or it might instead reveal that the reasons we are interested in are not, after all, as good as we would have presumed. In that case, it is an undercutting defeater. Because a set of reasons can fail to be sufficient either by being reduced in weight or by facing even stronger competition, this yields a natural and important distinction between these two kinds of defeat.

The fact that *sufficiency as balance* explains the naturalness and importance of an intuitive distinction that has widely been taken to be important is evidence in its favor. But it also points us in the direction of a general reason to expect the defeater dialectic: we should expect defeater-defeaters, defeater-defeater-defeaters, and so on, precisely if this is what we find for the weight of reasons in general. But in fact, this *is* what we find for reasons in general. In normal cases, the fact that telling Kenny that *p* would be a lie is a weighty reason not to do so. But if you are playing the game Diplomacy, this is not such a weighty reason—for lying is a normal and expected part of the game. What this shows is that ordinary cases of reasons for action can have their weight lowered by further facts, making these further facts defeaters. But these defeaters can also be defeated. For example, if Kenny is your husband and you ended up in a bitter fight the last time you lied to him during a game of Diplomacy, the fact that telling Kenny that *p* would be a lie may be a weighty reason not to do so after all. So though normally the fact that you are playing Diplomacy lowers the weight of this reason, under this circumstance it does not—and hence we have an example of a defeater-defeater.

We can make the same observations in the case of reasons for belief, merely by focusing on plausible judgments about objective reasons. If Jones sees something that looks like a barn in broad daylight, under ordinary circumstances we would take that to be an excellent objective reason to believe that it is a barn. But if he is in fake barn country, visual evidence of a barn is not such a great reason to believe he is seeing a barn after all. However, if he is in real barn state within fake barn country, that defeater is defeated, and his visual evidence seems like a good reason to believe that he is seeing a barn after all. What this case shows is that features of how the cases lead to defeaters for knowledge line up precisely with plausible judgments about the force of objective reasons for belief.

The literature on particularism in ethics is full of examples like this, which mirror the structure of the defeater dialectic in epistemology.<sup>33</sup> What this shows, I believe, is that the fact that the weight of reasons can be lowered or eliminated by further considerations, whose relevance can itself be eliminated by yet further considerations, and so on, is a general and independently motivated observation about the weights of reasons. But it is precisely the observation about the weight of reasons that would need to be true, in order for us to expect the defeater dialectic in epistemology, given my analysis of knowledge. And so I conclude that given what we independently know to be true about the weight of reasons, my analysis of knowledge predicts the defeater dialectic, rather than being frustrated by it. It does so not by explaining it in itself, but by delegating that explanation to independently observable facts about how the weight of reasons can be affected by further facts.

### 5.2. *Reasons for Reasons*

Still, we might want more of an explanation of why it is that the defeater dialectic works in this way: why it is true not only that the weight of reasons can be defeated, and defeaters for the weight of reasons can be defeated, but this phenomenon seems to go “all of the way up”—admitting of no a priori limit. In other work, I’ve advocated a simple conjecture that would explain *why* this is what we should expect. In its most general form, this conjecture is that the considerations that reduce the weight of reasons are themselves reasons. If reasons are lowered in weight by other reasons, then it is only to be expected that those reasons could also, at least in principle, be lowered in weight—by further reasons. And that is precisely the structure that would lead us to expect no a priori limit to when things might end.

Of course, if the weight of reasons is itself affected by other reasons, that raises many important questions about exactly how this works. We will not ultimately have any complete *explanation* for the defeater dialectic until we know exactly how this is.<sup>34</sup> However, the right standard for determining whether we are on the right track for the analysis of knowledge is not whether we have in hand a complete analysis of everything to which we appeal. That erroneous standard is what led earlier accounts astray, with premature attempts to analyze general concepts. What we need, in order to be confident that we are on the right track, is only that the features of the unanalyzed concepts to which we appeal, in order to get plausible predictions about knowledge, are just the ones that we have independent reason to expect out of any acceptable analysis of those subsidiary concepts. And that is what I have been arguing is true about the weight of reasons. We know on independent grounds that it is a general fact—true about reasons

<sup>33</sup> See especially Dancy (2004).

<sup>34</sup> See Shackel (forthcoming) for criticisms of the particular way that I tried to do this in chapter 7 of *Slaves of the Passions*.

for action as well as reasons for belief—that reasons can be lowered in weight by further considerations, and that yet further considerations can interfere with this weight-lowering, and so on. That is all that we need in order to be confident that our account has the right structure to expect and ultimately to explain, rather than to be frustrated by, the defeater dialectic.

## 6. OVERVIEW

In this paper I've been defending the idea that by appeal to general and independently motivated claims about reasons, we can make good on the natural idea that knowledge is belief that "stands up to" the facts, without falling into the familiar traps set by the conditional fallacy and the defeater dialectic, which were responsible for so many of the arcane twists and turns of the Gettier literature in the 1970s. The main lesson that I hope to draw from this is that the failures of attempts to make good on this general idea do not reflect poorly on the idea itself, so much as they reflect on the tools that were used to implement it. And this, I believe, should undermine what grounds this history of failures provides for inductive pessimism about the project of analyzing knowledge.

Moreover, if epistemology is just one branch of normative inquiry more generally—the branch concerned with the assessment of our cognitive capacities—then it should not be a surprise that it helps to take a broader perspective inspired by paying attention to normative concepts outside of epistemology, when focusing on the right way to implement this general, attractive, and well-motivated idea about the nature of knowledge. Paying attention to how our claims about reasons generalize to fit with cases outside of epistemology is neither *ad hoc* nor imperialist, on this view, but rather just the right kind of constraint to keep us from pursuing dead ends.

If I've been successful so far, then the virtues of the analysis of knowledge that I've been describing should be clear: it is motivated by its fit with our three observations about knowledge as match, by the natural solutions it provides to the most famous sorts of problems with the analysis of knowledge, and by the fact that these solutions appeal only to the sort of resources that we would expect, if we take seriously the idea that knowledge is a normative notion and the normative is to be explained in terms of reasons. It is also simple, and natural—it is simply the conjunction of two closely related properties: the property of being doxastically rational, and the property of being well grounded. Knowledge behaves in complex ways in interesting cases not because knowledge is complicated or *ad hoc*, but because of the complex behavior of reasons. And it is an important achievement for the same reasons that moral theorists from Aristotle through Kant and beyond have valued not only doing the right thing, but doing it for the right reasons. In short, knowledge is in the realm of belief what virtuous action is in the realm of action.

I don't claim that the account described here is free from all problems; as I noted earlier, we need to take on substantive and highly non-trivial commitments about the priority of reasons, justification, and knowledge even in order to get the project off of the ground, and along the way I've appealed to surprising claims about other things—particularly including the idea that there are epistemic reasons against belief that are not evidence. The account may also require refinement in order to deal with different kinds of cases. The main thing that I claim for it is not that it should be the final word in the analysis of knowledge, but that it offers a *prima facie* very promising space for an account, in a part of logical space about which there has been so much inductive pessimism, and does so in a way that is motivated by general principles. These things make me suspect that it is worthy of further attention.<sup>35</sup>

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