

# Basic knowledge and the normativity of knowledge: The awareness-first solution

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**Abstract**

Many have found it plausible that knowledge is a constitutively normative state, i.e. a state that is grounded in the possession of reasons. Many have also found it plausible that certain cases of proprioceptive knowledge, memorial knowledge, and self-evident knowledge are cases of knowledge that are not grounded in the possession of reasons. I refer to these as cases of *basic knowledge*. The existence of basic knowledge forms a primary objection to the idea that knowledge is a constitutively normative state. In what follows I offer a way through the apparent dilemma of having to choose between either basic knowledge or the normativity of knowledge. The solution involves homing in on a state of *awareness* ( $\approx$ non-accidental true representation) that is distinct from knowledge and which in turn grounds the normativity of knowledge in a way that is fully consistent with the existence of basic knowledge. An upshot of this is that externalist theories of knowledge turn out to be fully compatible with the thesis that knowledgeable beliefs are always beliefs that are justified by the reasons one possesses.

**What follows is my revision to this paper that appears in my book *Awareness and the Substructure of Knowledge***

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# Awareness and the Normativity of Knowledge

## 7.1 Introduction

Many have found it plausible that knowledge is a constitutively normative state, a state that is to be explained in terms of the possession of reasons. Many have also found it plausible that certain cases of proprioceptive knowledge, memorial knowledge, and self-evident knowledge are among a class of cases of knowledge that are not to be explained in terms of the possession of reasons. These are the cases of *basic knowledge* to be discussed. The existence of basic knowledge has provided a leading and widely influential objection to the idea that knowledge is a constitutively normative state. In what follows we'll find that the theory of possession offered in Chapter 6 helps us forge a way through the apparent dilemma of having to choose between basic knowledge and the constitutive normativity of knowledge.

After explaining the idea that knowledge is a constitutively normative state and its motivations, we will have a look at the wide range of cases that seem to threaten it. We will then see how broad factualism and our awareness-theoretic account of possession converge to help us understand the constitutive normativity of knowledge.

## 7.2 Knowledge Normativism

The idea that knowledge is a constitutively normative state has been a common place in epistemology. Plato argued in the *Meno* (97e–98a) that what separates knowledge from mere true belief is that knowledge always involves having 'reasoned out an explanation' (cf. Wedgwood 2018). Since one cannot have reasoned out an explanation for  $p$  in a way that yields knowledge without having sufficient reasons for believing  $p$ , this is a view on which knowledge is a constitutively normative state. Descartes wrote that 'knowledge [*scientia*] is conviction based on a reason so strong that it can never be

shaken by any stronger reason' (1988: CSMK 147). Kant claimed that knowledge is 'assent for objectively and subjectively sufficient grounds' (1996: A822/B850), and by 'grounds' Kant seems to have meant nothing more or less than 'reasons'.<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein also appears friendly to the constitutive normativity of knowledge, writing in *On Certainty* (1972: 504) that 'Whether I know something depends on whether the evidence backs me up or contradicts me.'<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, scepticism about knowledge has historically been driven by the assumption that knowledge is importantly tied to the possession of reasons. For the typical method of advocating for scepticism involves showing that within some domain we lack sufficient reasons for belief and concluding that we do not have knowledge in that domain. But this method only makes sense if we assume knowledge depends on believing for sufficient reasons.

A host of more recent anglophone epistemologists have likewise expressed their commitment to the normativity of knowledge in some form or other. C.I. Lewis (1946: 9) said that 'no believing state is to be classed as knowledge unless it has some ground or reason. It must be distinguished not only from false belief but also from that which is groundless and from the merely fortunate hazard of assertion'. Sellars (1956/1997: 298–99/76) wrote that in 'characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says'. Chisholm (1957: 16) held that knowledge is a matter of 'having sufficient evidence'. McDowell (1995: 881) said 'knowledge is a status that one possesses by virtue of an appropriate standing in the space of reasons'. According to Dretske (2017: 349), 'If you know that *p*, then your reasons for believing *p* are so strong that, given simply these reasons, you can't be wrong...' (cf. Dretske 1971).<sup>3</sup> Schroeder (2015a, b,c) has argued that knowledge just is belief for reasons that are objectively and subjectively sufficient. It is not terribly difficult to find other advocates of the view that knowledge is a constitutively normative state.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For an exposition of Kant's view on this see Chignell (2007).

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, as the passage continues 'For to say one knows one has a pain means nothing'. Arguably, this is an early expression of the problem of basic knowledge. For further passages that connect knowledge to evidence see *On Certainty* 243, 438, and 483.

<sup>3</sup> In his paper 'Two Conceptions of Knowledge: Rational vs. Reliable Belief', Dretske (1991) opposes the idea that knowledge requires justification. While this may appear to conflict with his earlier (1971) and later (2017) position that knowledge requires belief for conclusive reason, it does not. For the justification requirement Dretske is opposing in that paper is one that involves sophisticated inferential reasoning of the sort paradigmatically found in good scientific reasoning (1991: 16). This notion of justification is distinct from his notion of belief for conclusive reason (see Chapter 8, Section 8.3.1).

<sup>4</sup> Ayer (1956), Firth (1978), Bonjour (1985), Moser (1987), Conee and Feldman (2001), Lehrer and Paxson (1969), Lehrer (1990), and Gettier (1963).

As the citations above indicate, there are two common ways of expressing the idea that knowledge is in part a normative relation: one that is justification-centric and one that is reasons-centric. Both are related, as indicated in the last chapter: one has *ultima facie* justification to believe that  $p$  iff one has sufficient reasons to believe that  $p$ .<sup>5</sup> In what follows we will codify the view that knowledge is a constitutively normative state in the following way:

**Knowledge Normativism (KN).** Part of what it is for  $S$  to know that  $p$  at  $t$  is for  $S$  to believe that  $p$  at  $t$  for sufficient reasons that  $S$  possesses at  $t$ .

KN is neutral on a number of issues. It says nothing of the nature of reasons, it says nothing about what it takes to have (=possess, access) reasons, and it says nothing about what it is to believe for (=on the basis of) a reason. In this way KN is, to some extent, an ecumenical claim. We will return to different ways of understanding these aspects of KN below. Others may want to lay claim to the idea that knowledge is a normative relation without taking it to be normative in a sense connected to reasons, especially reasons construed as facts.<sup>6</sup> What matters in what follows is not who gets to claim that knowledge is 'normative', but whether KN is true.

Why has the idea that knowledge is a constitutively normative state been so influential? Doubtless part of the appeal of KN has to do with the fact that so many paradigm instances of knowledge are instances where agents host a belief for sufficient reasons. Take my belief that my spouse loves me, that my childhood home had a front door, and that I'm now seeing something: these are each cases of knowledge that are cases of belief for sufficient reasons. We could of course enumerate more and increasingly diverse instances, and then invite an induction to all cases of knowledge. Additionally, KN has the sound of the self-evident about it,<sup>7</sup> and this is evidenced by the odd sound of its denial: the claim that 'She knows that she's in pain, but lacks sufficient reasons to believe it' sounds infelicitous in the way that self-inconsistent statements typically do. Even Sylvan's (2018) careful and nuanced rejection of KN does not deny that knowledge requires having sufficient reasons for

<sup>5</sup> Schroeder (2015a), Lord (2018a), and Sylvan (2018). Chisholm, in contrast, used the concept of evidence in his account of knowledge. No complications are introduced by this provided our evidence is the only sort of reason for belief that can ground knowledge.

<sup>6</sup> I would not, for example, object to those who want to hold that knowledge is 'normative' in a distinct sense associated with proper function (Graham 2019).

<sup>7</sup> This is implied by Kant's (A822/B850) remark that his normative view of knowledge is 'readily grasped' and so not in need of exposition or defense.

belief. He just thinks that knowledge *entails* having sufficient reasons for belief without knowledge being constituted by the possession of sufficient reasons. Sylvan's distinguished opposition to KN will be addressed below.

While KN has been widely endorsed among epistemologists, there are plenty of recent accounts of knowledge that are taken to be inconsistent with KN. Instances of such theories can be found in early causal theories of knowledge (Goldman 1967; Armstrong 1973), tracking theories of knowledge (Nozick 1981), reliabilist theories of knowledge (Kornblith 2002, 2008; Plantinga 1993), certain safety theories of knowledge (Sosa 1999; Williamson 2000; Pritchard 2005; Grundmann 2018), reliabilist virtue theoretic accounts of knowledge (Sosa 2007; Greco 2010; Miracchi 2015; Kelp 2019), as well as theories of knowledge that combine elements of safety theories and reliabilist virtue epistemology (Pritchard 2012a; Kelp 2013). What such theories have in common is the implication that knowing is just a matter of one's true belief satisfying some externalist condition, while in each instance the target externalist condition is never reductively analysed in terms of having sufficient reasons.

To make this point concrete take Pritchard's (2012a) anti-luck virtue epistemology which combines safety-theoretic and reliabilist virtue-theoretic conditions. A belief is safe, roughly, when it could not have easily been false when formed in the way it was actually formed, and a belief is virtuous, roughly, when it is non-defectively produced by a reliable cognitive ability. But neither the concept of believing safely nor believing virtuously are explicated in terms of having sufficient reasons. Accordingly, Pritchard is careful when discussing his views about the relation between normativity and knowledge to emphasize that his anti-luck virtue epistemology is supposed to be in tension with normative views of knowledge. For example, Pritchard (2016) writes:

For while I think it is clear that paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge are rationally grounded, I'm careful not to make any general claims in this regard. In particular, I don't claim that perceptual belief is in general rationally grounded or that propositional knowledge is in general rationally grounded (and I certainly don't hold that all propositional knowledge must be grounded in factive reasons). (Pritchard 2016: 233)

This rejection of KN by Pritchard and others is motivated by the difficulty of accounting for clear cases of knowledge where it is in no way obvious that one has knowledge in virtue of having sufficient reasons.

### 7.3 The Challenge of Basic Knowledge

To get a grip on the challenge of basic knowledge it will help to consider a few examples. Turri (2010b: 320) argues that certain instances of self-evident knowledge are instances of knowledge not grounded in the possession of reasons:

Descartes notwithstanding, it is highly implausible that I need a reason to justifiedly believe, or know, for that matter, that I exist. Of course, the fact that I have abundant reasons to believe that I exist is irrelevant to whether I need such reasons for my belief in my own existence to rise to the level of doxastic justification or knowledge.

Plausibly, Turri's remarks could be extended to other cases of exceedingly self-evident truths: that I am now thinking, or that I am here now, or that if there is something then there is not nothing. People who believe these things typically have knowledge and justified beliefs, but it is not clear what reason, if any, they must be relying on in order to have this knowledge and justification.

Littlejohn (2015) argues for the same claim in the case of proprioceptive knowledge:

If we choose our examples correctly, we'll quickly see that the possibility of knowledge doesn't turn on whether there are available supporting reasons because we'll see that there are perfectly good cases of knowledge without clues. Anscombe (1962) told us where to look for such cases. The knowledge that you have of the position of your own limbs is knowledge, but the beliefs that constitute knowledge don't count as rationally held because we can work out where our limbs are by relying on some clues. If your legs are crossed and you know it, you don't work out which leg is on top of the other by consulting a feeling, a tickle or a sensation that's a clue to how your legs are positioned. There's a story to tell about how this knowledge is possible, but when we say, 'You know this because...' we don't fill in the dots by identifying the clues you relied on or the reasons... that persuaded you.

(Littlejohn 2015: 601–2)

Littlejohn's 'clues' are just reasons, and his point is that they are lacking in paradigmatic cases of proprioception.

For yet another example, Goldman (2009) argues that much of our knowledge at a time  $t$  is not grounded in reasons we possess at  $t$ . This is because the persistence of knowledge doesn't depend on the persistence of our possession of reasons. Thus, when we forget the reasons in virtue of which we came to know  $p$  (as we often do), we have knowledge that  $p$  at  $t$  without having any reasons in virtue of which we know that  $p$  at  $t$ . Unless one adopts a generous theory of the possession of reasons that allows us to possess forgotten reasons, the case of forgotten evidence is a powerful objection to KN given how ordinary it is for us to persist in holding beliefs and retaining knowledge while having forgotten the reasons on which we based our beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

Another often cited example involves chicken sexing. Consider Armstrong's (1963) remarks:

consider the interesting case of the chicken-sexer. He can, more or less accurately, say that a chicken will grow up to be a cock or a hen, but he does not know, and nobody else knows, what visual cues he is using. (Chicken-sexers are trained by being shown photos of chicks whose later career is known. They are told when they guess correctly, and they gradually come to guess better and better.) It is natural to say that female and male chicks give rise to different inner states resembling visual impressions in the chicken-sexer, and that these inner states are responsible for the sexer's choice, but yet that the sexer is not directly [introspectively] aware of these states. (Armstrong 1963: 431–2)

One of the intuitions that epistemologists have had about this case is that chicken sexing, so described, is at least a possible way of coming to know that a chick has a given sex. And it is at least a possible way of coming to know that is not grounded in reasons possessed by the agent.<sup>9</sup> So again we seem to have a counterexample to KN.

Potential counterexamples to KN don't end here. Some might think that the possibility of knowledge by blindsight a case of knowledge not grounded in possessed reasons (cf. Block 1995; Sosa 2015). Similarly, some have thought that facts about our current mental states are sometimes directly accessible and knowable without the reliance on any kind of intermediary state that indicates the fact that we are currently in that mental state. But again, such knowledge would seem to be knowledge that is not grounded in possessed reasons and, hence, another counterexample to KN.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Michaelian (2011) and Bernecker and Grundmann (2019).

<sup>9</sup> See also Goldman (1975: 112–14), Foley (1987), Sosa (2015), and Sylvan (2018).

In what follows, *basic knowledge* will refer to the class of cases of knowledge (or possible knowledge) cited above, i.e. the cases above of proprioceptive knowledge, self-evident knowledge, knowledge despite forgotten evidence, and knowledge via chicken sexing, blindsight, and introspection. But it will be left as an open question whether or not these cases of basic knowledge are cases of knowledge that are not grounded in possessed reasons. That's the topic of Section 7.4.

Generally, what underlies the objection to KN from basic knowledge is the disanalogous structure between cases of basic knowledge and paradigmatic cases of perceptual knowledge. In the typical perceptual case it is regularly assumed that we have a perceptual representation that plays the dual role of (i) justifying our perceptual belief and (ii) giving us access to (=putting us in possession of) the relevant features of the world in virtue of which our perceptual belief is knowledge-constituting in good external circumstances. Moreover, this is imagined to be a diachronic relation in so far as our perceptual beliefs are caused by our perceptual representations.<sup>10</sup>

To illustrate, consider coming by perceptual knowledge that you have a hand. It is often assumed that you first see that you have a hand, i.e. you have a visual perceptual representation in epistemically good circumstances whose content is that you have a hand. Since you're in good circumstances this perceptual representation gives you access to the fact that you have a hand and also gives you justification to form a belief that you have a hand. After, and in response to, your perceptual representation you form the knowledge-constituting belief that you have a hand. This is illustrated in Figure 7.1:

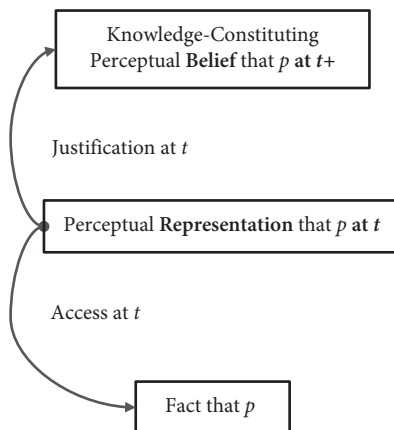


Figure 7.1 Standard model of perceptual knowledge

<sup>10</sup> Pryor (2000), Huemer (2001, 2007), Silins (2007), and Neta (2010).



The idea depicted in that figure is of one's epistemic access to the world being constituted by, and thus temporally coincident with, one's perceptual representation in good circumstances, and this perceptual access to the world prompts one to then respond by *subsequently* forming a belief that is both justified and knowledge-constituting in good circumstances.

But in the cases of basic knowledge listed above it is commonly argued that we don't get a picture that is anything like this. For example, chicken sexer's do not (or, at least, are not imagined to) report having special experiences that indicate whether or not a chick is male or female; in cases of forgotten evidence one has lost their evidence and thus lost that which stood to justify their belief to begin with. As Anscombe (1957) and Littlejohn (2015) urge us, reconsider the case of proprioceptive knowledge. Just close your eyes and consider how your arms and legs are arranged. If your hands are above your knees, you know that they are; if your feet are crossed, you know that they are; if you're standing (sitting), you know that you are. But your proprioceptive knowledge in these instances is not mediated by any obvious non-doxastic proprioceptive representational state in the way that paradigmatic perceptual knowledge tends to be mediated by non-doxastic perceptual representational states.<sup>11</sup> Put differently, it is not as though you have some proprioceptive representational experience independent of your belief as you do when in normal circumstances you look in the direction of a nearby tree and have a visual experience as of a tree.

Thus, according to the line of thought given by Anscombe and Littlejohn, in cases of proprioceptive knowledge we just have the proprioceptive cognitive ability that has as its characteristic output knowledge-constituting proprioceptive beliefs, and when exercises of this ability yield knowledge they thereby give us access to the world. This is illustrated in Figure 7.2:

<sup>11</sup> At the sub-personal level there can be non-doxastic representational states that play a role in arriving at one's proprioceptive belief. All we're concerned with here are non-doxastic representations that are appreciable at the personal level. For if sub-personal non-doxastic representations were always actually available to justify beliefs in the way perception is commonly thought to, then the objection from basic knowledge would be untroubling in the actual world. But the mere metaphysical possibility of cognitive abilities that have as outputs knowledge-constituting beliefs independent of any mediated non-doxastic representation is enough to challenge the idea that knowledge is constitutively a normative state.

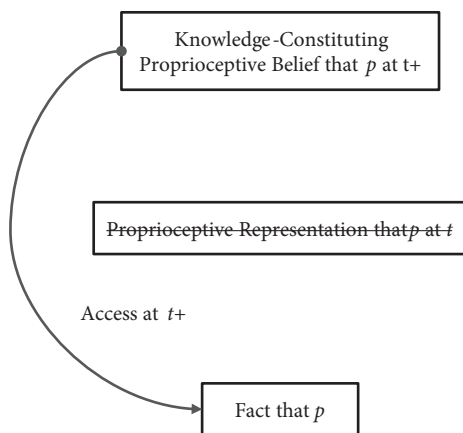


Figure 7.2 Standard model of basic knowledge

So while our proprioceptive knowledge ensures that we have proprioceptive access to the proprioceptive facts, there is no apparent story to tell about how that proprioceptive knowledge is to be explained in terms of a prior normative relation to those same facts. The raw materials to tell that story appear to be absent.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, the problem for advocates of KN is this: cases of basic knowledge seem to be cases of knowledge that  $p$  where one has that knowledge without having it in virtue of possessing sufficient reasons to believe  $p$ . The possibility of such knowledge is inconsistent with KN. However, whether or not the cases of basic knowledge are counterexamples to KN depends on how we understand the conditions for *having sufficient reasons*.

## 7.4 Mentalism vs Broad Factualism

So what are reasons and when are they sufficient? As we saw in Chapter 6, sufficiency is regarded as a matter of weightiness:  $S$  has sufficient reasons to believe  $p$  iff the reasons  $S$  has for believing  $p$  are at least as weighty as the

<sup>12</sup> You'll notice that 'justification' does not appear in Figure 7.2. This is to accommodate the fact that there are two ways of thinking about basic knowledge in the existing literature. One way involves the idea that in such cases justification is absent; they are cases of knowledge without justification (Kornblith 2008). The other way involves the idea that knowledge always entails, but is not constituted by, justification (Littlejohn 2017; Sylvan 2018).

reasons  $S$  has not to believe  $p$ . Talk of the weight of reasons is meant to capture the way in which reasons can 'stack-up' in favour of and in opposition to certain responses. For example, in the case of belief you can have all kinds of reasons to believe  $p$  and all kinds of reasons to refrain from believing  $p$ . But you only have sufficient reasons to believe  $p$  when your reasons in favour of believing are not outweighed by your reasons to refrain (Lord and Maguire 2016). For the most part this way of thinking about sufficiency is independent of one's stance on the nature of reasons.

As to what reasons are, the traditional view among epistemologists has been a version of mentalism which holds that epistemic reasons for belief are non-factive representational mental states: perceptual experiences, introspective experiences, memorial experiences, intuitive experiences, as well as beliefs.<sup>13</sup> Since mental states are always mental states of the subject hosting them, the question of what it takes for one to possess reasons, arguably, requires no additional condition on mentalist views. It was this mentalist picture of reasons that was implicit in the presentation of the basic knowledge objection to KN in the last section.

While mentalism has been the unexamined default position among epistemologists, non-mentalist alternatives have been on the rise in recent years. Here's the commonly endorsed and defended alternative to mentalism discussed in Chapter 6:

**Broad Factualism.** Objective reasons are token identical to either facts or true propositions that favour responses.

Again, the main motivation behind broad factualism has to do with our justificatory practices: we reference (or attempt to reference) facts or true propositions when engaged in the activity of justifying the actions and attitudes of ourselves and others. We say things like: the fact that there are elephants in Africa is a reason to believe that they have not yet gone extinct, and the fact that you are hungry is a reason to get a snack, and the fact that a potential action would cause harm is a reason to refrain from that action, and so forth. When our attempts to justify actions and attitudes reference falsehoods rather than facts we view the attempted justification as defective. Broad factualists take this aspect of our justificatory practice as illuminating

<sup>13</sup> See Davidson (1986), Huemer (2001, 2007), Lyons (2009), Pollock and Cruz (1999), Silins (2007), Neta (2010), Schroeder (2015a, 2015b), and Pryor (2000).

the sources of our justification for our attitudes and actions, i.e. facts or true propositions.

Unlike mentalists, broad factualists need to say something substantive about what it takes to have (=possess, access) a reason. For if reasons are facts or true propositions they are not automatically within one's ken in a way that could justify one's prospective beliefs and actions. The fact that a mathematician has proven  $X$  is a conclusive reason for you to believe  $X$ , but if you're wholly ignorant that  $X$  has been proven you cannot justifiably believe or reason from  $X$  in the process of forming new beliefs or in deciding which courses of action to take. In the last chapter the following view was defended:

**Possession as Functional Factual Awareness (PFA).** Necessarily,  $S$  possesses the fact that  $p$  as a reason for a response  $F$  iff  $S$  is in a position to be aware of the fact that  $p$ , and  $S$  is reliably able to use  $p$  as a reason for  $F$ -ing.

Before turning to how broad factualism and PFA provide an answer to the problem of basic knowledge, it is worth quickly exploring how a mentalist might try and address this problem.

## 7.5 Is There a Mentalist Solution to the Challenge of Basic Knowledge?

Some may wonder whether or not a mentalist picture of reasons could resolve the problem of basic knowledge. For perhaps every basic belief that  $p$  is a case where agents have sub-personal capacities that give rise to a seeming that  $p$ , where the seeming state is itself a reason for belief that  $p$  and the belief that  $p$  is formed in response to the seeming that  $p$ . Arguably, then, the seeming justifies the belief (barring defeaters) and the agent has access to the reason in virtue of it being her own mental state. If something along these lines is correct, then we have a possible mentalist solution to the present conflict between basic knowledge and KN since reasons (in the form of seeming states) always justify the basic beliefs one has.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> I'm grateful to a referee at *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* for pointing this out to me.

This is a suggestion worth taking seriously, and I will not offer any decisive objection to it. I do think, however, the proposed solution is not as straightforward as it appears to be. For to appeal to seemings in this way we first have to say something about the relation between beliefs and seemings. Here are some options:

**Independence.** Seemings and beliefs are independent psychological states. Therefore, it is possible for *S* to believe that *p* without it seeming to be the case that *p*, and vice versa.<sup>15</sup>

**Identity.** Seemings and beliefs are identical states. Therefore, necessarily, *S* believes that *p* iff *p* seems true to *S*.<sup>16</sup>

**Composition.** Beliefs are to be understood reductively as seemings that have a certain functional profile, namely, the functional profile that is characteristic of belief in assertion, action, and inference. Therefore, it is impossible for *S* to believe that *p* and it fail to be the case that *p* seems true to *S*.<sup>17</sup>

Recall, KN is a necessity claim. Now, if Independence is true then it is metaphysically possible for there to be, for example, proprioceptive beliefs with any (or all) the externalist virtues (e.g. safety, sensitivity, manifesting reliable ability, adherence) without any seeming. Standard externalist theories of knowledge will thus entail that there are possible cases where these seeming-free beliefs are knowledge. So they will be instances of knowledge without seemings to appeal to for justification in the case of basic knowledge. So, by externalist lights, KN must be false if Independence is true.

Now consider Identity. If Identity is true, then it is metaphysically possible for there to be proprioceptive beliefs with all the externalist virtues (e.g. safety, sensitivity, manifesting reliable ability, adherence) without a distinct seeming/belief state on which to base one's proprioceptive belief. Again, externalists will call such a beliefs knowledge, and it will be a case of knowledge without seemings to *non-circularly* appeal to for its justification. For the only relevant seeming will be identical to the proprioceptive belief itself. But to allow the seeming/belief to be a self-justifying mental state is to allow for a kind of epistemic circularity akin to premise-circularity that

<sup>15</sup> Bealer (1998, 2004), Pust (2000, 2019), and Huemer (2001, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Lycan (1988: 165–6) and Swinburne (2001: 141–2).

<sup>17</sup> Lyons (2009: 71–4).

epistemologists have tended to want to avoid. So, by externalist lights, KN must be false if Identity is true and beliefs cannot be self-justifying.

Now consider Composition. If Composition is true, we again seem to have a circularity problem. For, then, a part of the mental state that makes up the belief state (the seemings portion) will have to be taken to justify the whole belief state. Again, this seems undesirable for it requires a belief to be self-justifying. So, by the lights of externalists, KN must be false if Composition is true and beliefs cannot be self-justifying.

So mentalists who want to employ seemings to resolve the basic knowledge objection to KN face a *prima facie* dilemma: either reject basic knowledge as genuine knowledge or accept some kind of epistemic circularity on which beliefs can be self-justifying. As we will see, broad factualists face no such dilemma.

## 7.6 Answering the Challenge of Basic Knowledge

So far we have seen how broad factualism together with PFA offers a specific way of understanding what it takes to have sufficient reasons to believe *p*. In what follows we will encounter a natural taxonomy of cases of justified belief that emerge from this. Specifically, distinct categories of justified belief will unfold in such a way that the cases of basic knowledge find a natural home as a kind of belief for sufficient reasons.

Let's start with inferential knowledge. Take a case where you infer *p* from *q* where  $p \neq q$ . Suppose also you know that *q* and *q* implies *p*, and you competently deduce *p* from that knowledge. Other things being equal, in such cases you are justified in believing *p* because there are facts distinct from *p* that you know—and hence are aware of and so have access to. We can refer to such cases where you have justification to believe *p* due to inferences from prior states of knowledge (or awareness) that do not explicitly involve the fact that *p* as cases of *indirect justification*.

But not all cases of justification are indirect. Take, for example, a case where you believe that there is a ceiling over your head in response to seeing that there is a ceiling over your head. Given how ingrained the mentalist picture of reasons is in epistemology we need to take care in understanding what is happening in this sort of case. According to broad factualism only facts (true propositions) can justify beliefs. So your state of *visual awareness* plays no justificatory role here. Rather, PFA indicates that the function of visual awareness is to give you *the content* of that awareness state—i.e. the

fact itself—as a reason for a response. And once you come to possess that fact as a reason, you then have a reason that provides you with conclusive evidential support for it (since  $p$  entails  $p$ ). Other things being equal, this will justify you in believing that  $p$ . So in this visual case it is the fact that there is a ceiling over your head that is justifying your belief that a ceiling is over your head; your visual awareness of that fact simply enables this to happen by putting you in possession of a relevant fact.

Let's use the term *direct justification* for such cases where the fact that  $p$  is what justifies believing that  $p$ . Endorsements and defences of direct justification are not unheard of.<sup>18</sup> The picture of direct justification just described is illustrated by Figure 7.3:

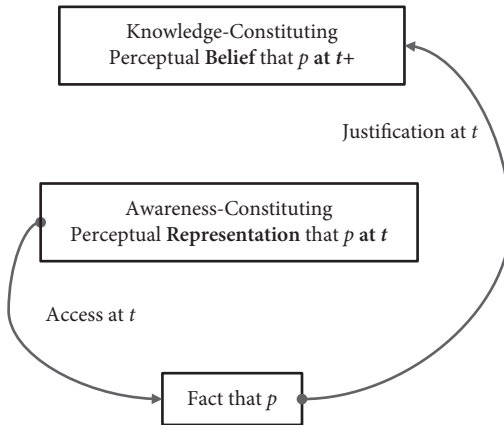


Figure 7.3 Broad factalist model of non-basic perceptual knowledge

Unsurprisingly, some have worried about direct justification. For example, Schroeder (2015b) writes that while he used to endorse the existence of direct justification, he does so no longer owing to trouble with undercutting defeaters:

If your visual evidence that there is something red in front of you is just <that there is something red in front of you>, this is such good evidence that there is something red in front of you that it is hard to see how it could be defeated by learning that you are wearing rose-colored glasses.

(Schroeder 2015b: 379)

<sup>18</sup> Hopp (2012), Schroeder (2011, 2015a), Lord (2018a: 75ff). See also Sosa (2015: 197–8).

There are various problems with this objection. First, it is unclear why the identity of  $p$  with  $p$  should make one's belief that  $p$  more resistant to undercutting defeat than cases of indirect justification where  $q$  justifies belief in  $p$  while being necessarily coextensive with  $p$ . For example, as a matter of logical necessity: a figure is triangular iff it is trilateral. This pair of claims is modally so related that knowing either member of the pair provides the same degree of probabilistic and logical support for the other member. But we would not say that learning that a figure is trilateral could not justify the claim that it's triangular for this reason. I assume Schroeder would want to preserve this judgment. But if he does, he needs to explain how the distinctness between 'x is triangular' and 'x is trilateral' makes the problem of undercutting defeat less difficult given that being triangular is such spectacular evidence for being trilateral.

Second, it doesn't follow that one has justification to believe that  $p$  simply because one has a strong, even a conclusive, reason to believe  $p$ . Recall Chapter 4 where it was argued that one could be visually aware of the fact that the object one is looking at is a barn even though one could not rationally believe it due to misleading information that one was in fake barn country. This is just a case of undercutting defeat where one is intuitively unable to form a justified belief in  $p$  despite being visually aware of a fact  $p$ . What this suggests is that the sufficiency of one's reasons for belief is sometimes hostage to one's higher-order information, a point that has been argued elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> It's also a point that suggests a fallacy in the assessment of reasons: just because one's total reasons provide strong support for *the truth of  $p$*  does not mean that one's total reasons provide strong (or any) support for *believing  $p$* . While cases of undercutting and higher-order defeat may be controversial examples driving this lesson, we've discovered independent evidence for it from the cases of self-defeat considered in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2. In cases of self-defeat one has conclusive evidence in support of the truth of  $p$ , but one lacks sufficient reasons to believe  $p$  because the very act of believing  $p$  ensures the falsehood of  $p$ .

What the above cases of direct and indirect justification for belief have in common is that neither requires one to actually have the belief that  $p$  in order for believing that  $p$  to be justified by the reasons one possesses. This is because in those cases one's access to the facts that justify believing that  $p$  is not constituted by or otherwise dependent on one's already believing that  $p$ . So such instances of direct justification to believe  $p$  are non-doxastic in so

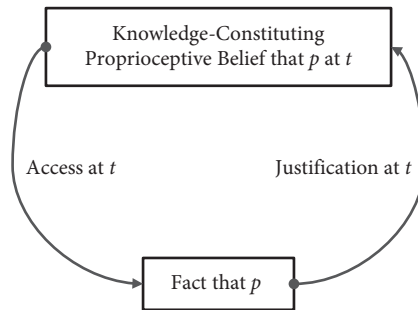
<sup>19</sup> See Silva (2017), Neta (2019), and van Wietmarschen (2013).



far as one's justification to believe  $p$  doesn't depend on one actually believing that  $p$ . Rather, it depends on one hosting a *non-doxastic* awareness-constituting representational state towards  $p$ .

Let's say that *contributorily justified beliefs* are beliefs that are either indirectly justified (as in the above case of inferential knowledge) or non-doxastically directly justified (as in the above case of perceptual knowledge). However, not everything we know and justifiedly believe is like this, bringing us back to the problem of basic knowledge.

Surprisingly, broad factualism and PFA neatly pave the way for an explanation of how to reconcile basic knowledge with KN. To see this take a knowledge-constituting proprioceptive belief that  $p$ . Whenever one forms a knowledge-constituting proprioceptive belief that  $p$ , that belief is also awareness-constituting: for every instance of knowledge is itself an instance of factual awareness. Moreover, given PFA, it follows that one has access to the fact that  $p$  when one proprioceptively knows that  $p$ . And this direct doxastic proprioceptive access to the fact that  $p$  enables that very fact to in turn justify one's proprioceptive belief that  $p$ . Figure 7.4 illustrates this:



**Figure 7.4** Broad factualist model of basic knowledge

For example, take the proprioceptive knowledge that your hands are above your feet. On this picture, *upon* forming your knowledge-constituting belief that your hands are above your feet, you came to possess the fact that your hands are above your feet. So *upon* forming that knowledge-constituting belief your belief became justified by the very fact your belief was about.

What distinguishes such instances of proprioceptive knowledge from the more familiar paradigmatic cases of perceptual knowledge is the type of representational state that is awareness-constituting and

hence access-granting. In the typical perceptual case it is a *non-doxastic* representational state. But in the cases of basic knowledge it is a *doxastic* representational state, i.e. the knowledge-constituting belief itself. Let's call beliefs that are justified by reasons accessed in this direct, doxastic fashion *constitutively justified beliefs*.

The coherence of constitutively justified beliefs eliminates the problem of basic knowledge facing KN.

## 7.7 Objections and Responses

*The Epistemic Circularity Objection.* Cases of basic knowledge are cases of constitutively justified belief. But it can seem as if constitutively justified beliefs are self-justifying. For in the constitutive case, the belief that  $p$  is justified by the fact that  $p$ . That seems circular in some epistemically problematic sense.

However, it does not follow from the fact that there are knowledge-constituting beliefs which play a role in their own justification that these beliefs are also self-justifying. Again, according to broad factualism only facts (true propositions) justify beliefs. This holds even in the proprioceptive case above: it is the fact that  $p$  that justifies believing that  $p$ . It is just that one's knowledge-constituting proprioceptive belief that  $p$  is part of what enables the fact that  $p$  to perform a justificatory function by facilitating access to the fact that  $p$ . But the enabling role is distinct from the justificatory role.

*The Metaphysical Circularity Objection.* Sylvan (2018: 208) has issued the following argument against KN:

- M1. Justification is grounded in possessed reasons.
- M2. Possession of reasons is grounded in knowledge.
- M3. So, on pain of metaphysical circularity, knowledge is not grounded in justification.

M3 is inconsistent with KN. The solution to this problem comes from earlier chapters: possession is grounded in factual awareness (Chapter 6) and factual awareness is not knowledge (Chapter 4). So M2 is false.

*The Objection from Determination.* Sylvan (2018: 200) issues an argument from determination against KN:

- D1. Seeing that  $p$ , remembering that  $p$ , etc., are determinants of knowing that  $p$ .
- D2. Seeing that  $p$ , remembering that  $p$ , etc., are not normatively constituted; rather, they are non-normative in the way mental states generally are.
- D3. If a determinable is normatively constituted, its determinates must be too.
- D4. So, knowledge is not normatively constituted.

D4 is inconsistent with KN. Again, we've already found the solution to this problem. D1 is false: seeing that  $p$ , remembering that  $p$ , it is being self-evident to  $S$  that  $p$  and so forth are not forms of knowing that  $p$ . They are forms of factual awareness, and not every instance of factual awareness is normatively constituted (Chapter 4).

But suppose D1 were true. We can block the argument at D2. For against D2 consider Sylvan's (2018: 199) own account of seeing that  $p$ : 'Seeing that  $p$  plausibly consists in having a visual belief who's truly representing that  $p$  manifests a reliable perceptual ability.' Now, if D1 is true then seeing that  $p$  is just a determinate way of knowing that  $p$ . On Sylvan's view seeing that  $p$  is a kind of *belief* that  $p$  from a non-defective exercise of one's cognitive ability. Call this *doxastic seeing*. Doxastic seeing that  $p$  is a form of awareness of the fact that  $p$ , but it's also a kind of believing that  $p$ . It's perfectly coherent to hold that doxastic seeing that  $p$  is a kind of *constitutively* justified belief that  $p$ . This is consistent with KN.

*The Argument from Animal Knowledge.* Sylvan (2018: 203ff) argues that if 'justified' is treated as a paradigmatic deontic term to be analysed in terms of reasons then 'we can appeal to animal knowledge again to set aside JTB+ analyses'. This would rule out KN. But the cases of animal knowledge to which Sylvan is referring are just the cases of basic knowledge mentioned above. I already explained how basic knowledge is consistent with KN and responded to his other objections.

*The Doxastic Justification Objection.* Another worry with KN and constitutive justification concerns whether or not it is coherent to regard constitutively justified beliefs as beliefs that are held for reasons. To see the trouble recall that paradigmatic cases of perceptually justified beliefs are beliefs that are (i) based on reasons to which one has independent access, (ii) one's belief is a causal (and hence a diachronic) response to that mode of access, and (iii) one's belief counts as responsive to one's epistemic reasons in virtue

of (ii). But in the case of constitutive justification this manner of causal/diachronic responsiveness to independently accessed reasons is not possible. For one's access to the facts that justify believing  $p$  is not prior to one's belief that  $p$ . The two are coincident. To put the issue differently, while it may not be hard to see how constitutively justified beliefs can enjoy propositional justification, it remains somewhat more difficult to see how they can enjoy doxastic justification.

There are a couple ways to answer this worry on behalf of KN. There is, as usual, a bullet-biting response: constitutively justified beliefs like we find in the cases of basic knowledge are beyond doxastic justification, they are simply cases where the notion of a belief being held *for* a reason is inapplicable. But the inapplicability of this kind of justification doesn't refute KN in a way that makes it no longer sensible to talk about knowledge as a constitutively normative state. At most it would force us to revise it so that it concerns only *having sufficient reasons for belief* not *believing for sufficient reasons*.

This bullet-biting response concedes little to the objector and so is a reasonable way of proceeding. But it is not necessary. For the objection turns on the assumption that a belief's being held *for a reason* requires a response to prior, independently accessed reasons. This assumption is doubtless natural on the traditional mentalist idea that normative reasons are mental states, and the further common assumption that one's belief that  $p$  is doxastically justified only when it is formed in the right way in response to those prior mental states. But the mentalist assumption is inconsistent with broad factualism and so can't play a role in underwriting the idea that doxastic justification is impossible for constitutively justified beliefs. Indeed, once mentalism is put out of the picture it becomes difficult to get a grip on this particular objection. This difficulty is added to on the present account of reasons and their possession. For given PFA, constitutively justified beliefs are non-accidentally related to the facts in virtue of which they're justified. And, given broad factualism, were the believed fact not to obtain that belief would not and could not be justified in the constitutive case. Accordingly, there is a robust sense in which constitutively justified beliefs are *non-accidentally responsive to reasons* and, in this sense, held *for* reasons.

Doubtless there are further senses in which a belief can be held *for* a reason that constitutively justified beliefs are incapable of satisfying. For example, any view on which believing that  $p$  for a reason requires one to be able to non-question-beggingly argue for their belief that  $p$  would be a view of believing for a reason which constitutively justified beliefs will not satisfy. When asked why one believes  $p$  in constitutive cases one may only be able

to cite the reason as being  $p$  itself. This is of no dialectical value. But as Alston (1989) and many others have urged us, we should not confuse having the ability to justify our belief (giving the reasons for which we believe) with having a justified belief (holding a belief for sufficient reasons). The general point, then, is that we can coherently find value in a range of increasingly demanding notions of 'believing for a reason,' but there is at least one minimal notion of believing for a reason that seems to be in play in the cases of constitutively justified belief and the cases of basic knowledge. That there is such a minimal notion is enough for defenders of KN who think knowledge is not merely a matter of *having* sufficient reasons for belief, but also a matter of believing *for* sufficient reasons.

*The Deliberative Objection.* Some might have the following concern:

Bring in the subject's deliberative perspective on how the world strikes her, and on what to believe given this. The subject has no prior awareness of the fact that  $p$ , e.g. that her legs are crossed, and possesses this reason initially exactly by way of believing that her legs are crossed. From her perspective, the belief that her legs are crossed has nothing going for it, she just randomly finds herself with it. As far as she can tell, the belief has zero support. So as far as her own deliberation goes, it is hard to see how she could then justifiably rely on the reason, allegedly possessed thereby, in further reasoning. But if she can't rely on it in further reasoning, how can we say she possesses it? So to the extent that possessing reasons is essentially connected to using them in reasoning, something seems to be missing when the subject possesses a reason via a constitutively justified belief.<sup>20</sup>

Notice first that it is a bit of an overstatement to say basic beliefs have nothing going for them from the first-person point of view. In general, for mature thinkers who are capable of raising the deliberative question, basic beliefs fit one's expectations about the world as well as one's expectations about their ability to access the world. For when I come to believe my hands are above my knees without looking at them (by proprioception) this new belief is not typically a surprise to me. Often enough my hands are above my knees, and I know that I am typically able to know this sort of fact about my body without looking. The fact that we have a sense of our own cognitive abilities involving our basic beliefs says something in favour of our reliance

<sup>20</sup> I'm grateful to a referee at *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* for pointing this out to me.

on our basic beliefs in future reasoning. In other words, we know enough about our cognitive abilities to, if needed, construct some kind of meta-justificatory argument for the reliability of our proprioceptive beliefs as well as our other basic beliefs. If I'm in a position to do this, it is clearly not the case that there is *nothing* going for basic beliefs from the first-person point of view.

Moreover, recall a putative lesson of Agrippa's trilemma. Suppose I justifiedly believe  $p$ . This needs to be explained, and the usual candidate explanations are these: I justifiedly believe  $p$  because my justification for  $p$  is circular, infinite, or has a foundation. The typical answer these days is foundationalist, and part of the foundationalist picture is that questions about the origins of our justification have a stopping point (or rather a starting point) that is 'beyond' needing further justification. On one kind of mentalist picture, it is our non-doxastic experiences that are the stopping point. For example, in the perceptual case it is our perceptual experiences, and we don't need to search for a further justification for our perceptual experiences in order for them to serve as sources of justification for our beliefs. This is due in part to the fact that perceptual experiences are not the kind of state that can be justified (they are non-doxastic and involuntary responses to the world). So according to the mentalist foundationalist, if I believe  $p$  and the (normative) reason that justifies my belief that  $p$  is my perceiving that  $p$  (or my seeming to perceive that  $p$ ) this is where things end.

But notice anti-foundationalists could put pressure on this mentalist stopping point: 'From my perspective, the perceptual experience that  $p$  has nothing going for it, I just randomly find myself with it. As far as I can tell, the perceptual experience has zero support. So as far as my own deliberation goes, it is hard to see how I could then justifiedly rely on the reason, allegedly possessed thereby, in further reasoning.' You'll have noticed that this is the very concern raised above. And if it applies to basic beliefs, it applies here too. For, quite generally, if the justification of a belief that  $p$  depends on my relying on something else,  $c$ , one can always ask (or be asked) why one is relying on  $c$ . It is hard to see why the mentalist has any special advantage here. That is, if  $c$  is a mental state that temporally preceded the belief that  $p$ , it only pushes this question back one step: I believe  $p$  because of  $c$ . Okay. But why rely on  $c$ ? So the core deliberative question remains whether or not one is a mentalist, and the foundationalist response is the same in both cases.

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