The Composite Nature of Epistemic Justification

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Abstract

According to many, to have epistemic justification to believe P is just for it to be epistemically *permissible* to believe P. Others think it's for believing P to be epistemically *good*. Yet others think it has to do with being epistemically *blameless* in believing P. All such views of justification encounter problems. Here, a new view of justification is proposed according to which justification is a kind of composite normative status. The result is a view of justification that offers hope of solving some longstanding epistemological problems.

Nearly three decades ago William Alston (1985, p.81) observed that despite the prominence of epistemic justification in epistemological debates 'it is usually not at all clear just what an epistemologist means by 'justified', just what concept the term is used to express.' Things have, I think, changed little. Many epistemologists proceed as if we all knew just what we were talking about in talking about justification, or at least that further clarification would be of little benefit. This does not necessarily mean epistemologists have been talking past each other, for justification is typically taken to be that normative quality whose presence *makes* (or at least *mark*s) the difference between ungettiered true belief and knowledge. Although acknowledging this functional role of justification can help fix the reference of the term 'justification', it leaves much to be desired for it tells us nothing about justification's relation to our inventory of normative statuses.[1]

To be sure, not all epistemologists have been silent on this issue. Some have sought to identify justification with certain normative statuses while distinguishing it from others. According to many, to have epistemic justification to believe P is just for it to be epistemically *permissible* to believe P. Others think it's for believing P to be epistemically *good*. Yet others think it has to do with being epistemically *blameless* in believing P. All such views of justification encounter problems for they fail to capture some intuitively compelling aspect of justification and other very plausible epistemic theses. After drawing attention to these problems a new view of justification is proposed according to which justification is a kind of composite normative status. The result is a view of justification that offers hope of solving some longstanding epistemological problems.

Section 1 clarifies the core question of this paper. Section 2 explains the difference between composite and non-composite normative statuses. Section 3 surveys common non-composite views of justification, while section 4 shows the problems these views face. Section 5 proposes a new view according to which justification is a composite normative status, while section 6 indicates how such a view can be used to resolve some persistent epistemological problems. Appendix A highlights other normative statuses one might wish to identify with justification (e.g., responsibility, reasonableness, having sufficient reasons, ought, fittingness) and points out various obstacles they will have to overcome. Appendix B discusses an objection to my thesis

stemming from fitting attitude accounts of value.

My goal in what follows is modest and proceeds on an assumption. The modesty bit concerns the scope of the present project. I aim only to provide an account of the dominant normative status *epistemologists* have had in mind in using the term 'justification'. The assumption is that *there is* some such dominant status, and thus that epistemologists have not, for the most part, been speaking past one another in their vigorous debates concerning the grounds of and extent to which we have justification. I will do nothing to justify this assumption other than noting it's plausibility given the fact we should not expect extremely competent, highly-reflective language users to have been using so central a term as 'justification' in equivocal ways. But even if I'm wrong about this and there is frequent ambiguity in uses of the term 'justification', the central benefits of this discussion will remain, as I will discuss in section 5.[2]

1 Clarifying the Question

This paper is about justification and its relation to other normative statuses and concepts. Since many epistemologists have thought that we can identify justification with certain other normative statuses we will proceed by considering whether any extant way of filling out the following schema has been adequate:

> *The J=Schema*. For S to have epistemic justification to believe P *is* for φ,

where some normative term other than 'justification' is used in the φ-instance.

Notice first that by focusing on the J=Schema we are answering our question about *justification* directly but our question about the *concept* of justification indirectly since instances of the J=Schema will not be meta-conceptual or meta-linguistic statements but material mode statements. That is, instances of the J=Schema will (typically) not *mention* our normative terms or concepts, they will simply *use* them.[3] The rationale for proceeding in the material mode is twofold. First, epistemologists are as much concerned with justification as the concept thereof. Second, it's often much more intuitive to ask and answer questions about whether or not 'one has justification' as opposed to whether or not 'the concept <justification> applies.' Although a posteriori identities threaten the general idea that just any true identity statement will help inform us of relations among our concepts, it remains plausible that a priori identities will (or at least often can). I will assume that this will not be a problem in what follows.[4]

Second, all substitutions for φ in the J=Schema will result in constitutive identity claims, thereby indicating that there is *no difference* between one having justification to believe P and φ. Accordingly, we have a kind of decision procedure for evaluating target substitutions for φ, since in order for an instance of the J=Schema to be true instances of φ must accommodate obvious facts about justification. Failing that, we will need a compelling error theory for those seemingly obvious facts about justification.

Third, we will leave it open whether or not there are true instances of the J=Schema in which no normative terms are used. If so, then a case can be made for a naturalistic reduction of justification. But this will not threaten the present project, whose concern is with justification's relation to other normative statuses and concepts.

Fourth, the J=Schema is distinct from the following:

> *The IVO Schema*. S has epistemic justification to believe P if and only if (and *because*) φ.[5]

What instances of these two schemas have in common is that they imply necessary and sufficient conditions for having justification. But they differ in that instances of the J=Schema purport to say something about *what justification is* whereas instances of the IVO Schema purport to say something about what it is *in virtue of* that one has epistemic justification. This later issue is where, among other things, the internalist-externalist debate lies and we will eventually say some things about how one's preferred instance of the J=Schema has implications for that debate.

2 Composite Normative Statuses

Suppose a parent were to forego a career advancing opportunity in order to pickup her young child from school when, due to unforeseen events, the child would otherwise have no way of getting home. Concerning such a case, there are various, distinct positive normative judgements we should make. For starters, picking up her child was a *good* thing to do. But it was also something this parent was *obligated* to do. Moreover, this parent is also *blameless*, if not also *praiseworthy*, for having so acted. The point of the illustration is a familiar one: distinct kinds of normative statuses can be brought together in the assessment of actions as well as agents. This obviously raises general questions about the relationships that obtain between axiological statuses (good/bad, better/worse), deontic statuses (permissible/obligatory/wrong), and hypological statuses (blameworthy/blameless/praiseworthy).[6] Below we will consider some, though by no means all, of the ways these might be related to each other.

In the mean time it is worth noting this: there are yet other normative statuses that we might think of as *composites* of our axiological, deontic, and hypological statuses. For example, on one understanding of supererogation, *supererogatory* actions in the moral domain are simply those that are both permissible *and* good.[7] For another example, some have maintained that there are *suberogatory* actions, i.e., actions that are permissible *but also* bad.[8] We could introduce further terms to refer to other combinations, e.g., with the possibility of moral dilemmas in mind we might say an action is *impermissibly optimal* just in case it's impermissible but better than any alternative action one could perform.[9]

I highlight the phenomenon of composite normative statuses to raise the central question of this paper: is justification to be identified with a composite or a non-composite normative status?

3 Non-composite Views of Epistemic Justification

Non-composite views of justification are quite popular. For example, Goldman writes:

> Evaluative, or normative, discourse appears in different styles. Some specimens of such discourse include deontic terms, like 'obligatory', 'permitted', and 'forbidden',

or more familiarly, 'right', and 'wrong'. Often such terms have systems of rules associated with them. Let us call this kind of normative discourse *deontic*. ... Epistemologists often try to identify rules of rationality, and they sometimes talk about what is rationally required. *This is deontic language in the epistemic domain. ...I will treat justifiedness...as a deontic notion* and examine it in a framework of rules.[10]

Which deontic property is justification to be identified with? Goldman goes on to clarify that it's permissibility (as opposed to obligation), and thus Goldman takes justification to be a non-composite normative status. Thus we have:

(J=P) For S to have epistemic justification to believe that P is for S to be epistemically permitted to believe that P.

Goldman doesn't offer any argument for (J=P) for he thinks this is a clear bit of linguistic/conceptual analysis, as do many others.[11]

In contrast, some have sought to identify justification not with permissibility, but with some hypological status instead. The most common way this has been done is in terms of blamelessness:

(J=NoBlame) For S to have epistemic justification to believe that P is for S to be epistemically blameless in believing that P.[12]

However, in contrast to both hypological and deontic views of justification, Alston argues for the following:

Let's specify an 'evaluative' sense of epistemic justification (J_e) as follows: S is J_e in believing that P IFF S's believing that P, as S does, is a *good* thing from the epistemic point of view.[13]

Alston is clear that what he intends the above to be is an expression of *what it is* to have a justified belief (as opposed to mere necessary and sufficient conditions). And since having a *justified belief* that P (= doxastic justification for P) requires that one have *justification to believe* that P (= propositional justification for P), we might expect Alston to endorse the following as well:

(J=G) For S to have epistemic justification to believe that P is for it to be an epistemically good thing for S to believe that P.

Interestingly, Alston (1989, p. 84-86) admitted that justification is most naturally understood in connection with permissibility, and he therefore took himself to be offering a somewhat revisionary account of justification.[14] Should Alston's admission here lead us to dispense with (J=G)? I think this would be a mistake. For, as we will see, (J=G) can explain certain essential features of justification that deontic and hypological accounts cannot.

Clearly, all of the above views about justification are non-composite views for they each

identify justification with a single normative status that is either axiological, deontic, or hypological. I have not given every possible non-composite view of justification, but I have given the primary ones. Most of the remaining views can be understood in relation to them and will fall prey to the sorts of problems these views will be shown to face. I briefly address the remaining views of justification in Appendix A.

4 Against Non-Composite Views of Justification

What we need in a theory of justification is a theory that can accommodate justification's intuitively compelling characteristics and other very plausible epistemic theses. The characteristics of justification that will loom large are the following:

Doxasticism. Justification can apply to beliefs.

Comparativism. Justification comes in degrees; one can have more or less justification to believe that P.

Goodness Entailment. To have justification to believe that P is to stand in a valuable position with respect to believing that P, at least to the extent that having justification to believe that P entails that believing that P is an epistemically good thing to do.

Permission Entailment. Justification is permission entailing in the sense that S has justification to believe that P only if it is permissible for S to believe that P.

In what follows I defend the above characteristics while showing that non-composite views of justification have tremendous difficulty accommodating them as well as some other very plausible epistemic theses.

4.1 Against (J=P)

Justification comes in *degrees* in some intuitive sense. I might hear Alvin speaking in the next room, but you might both hear and see him (because you're the one he's talking too). Intuitively, you would have *more justification* to believe that Alvin is in the building than I do even though we both have justification (*simpliciter*) to believe it. The idea that justification comes in degrees in this way is a very common view among epistemologists, and it is a view any plausible theory of justification must be able to accommodate.[15]

But (J=P) faces trouble on just this point, for it cannot accommodate the degreed character of justification given that deontic statuses are not degreed. No permissible (obligatory, wrong) action is more permissible (obligatory, wrong) than another.[16] This, of course, does not mean that we cannot make comparative judgements among permissible actions; indeed, we frequently do make comparisons among such actions. For example, one permissible action might be *better (worse) than* another permissible action, and clearly some violations of norms are more (less) *egregious* or *serious* than others. Armed robbery and petty theft both violate the (simplified)

norm that says it's wrong to steal. Although both are wrong and although neither is more wrong than the other, armed robbery is *worse* than petty theft and worthy of *severer punishment*.[17] But these comparisons that we're able to make among permissible (obligatory, wrong) actions are decidedly non-deontic, and they do not have even the slightest whiff of implying that one permissible (obligatory, wrong) action can be more (less) permissible than another.[18] The looming implication is that if (J=P) were correct, then, for example, we could never truly claim that one of two justified beliefs enjoyed more justification than the other. But this is quite a price to pay for a theory of justification.

Defenders of (J=P) might argue that what is degreed is not *justification* itself, but the *states* that are justified. On this view, to claim that, say, you have more justification to believe P than me is just to claim that *the degree of belief* you are justified in taking towards P is greater than the degree of belief I'm justified in taking towards P. Yet such a response is of limited value. First, it assumes that we can reduce belief to degrees of belief, which may not be as easy as it seems.[19] Second, not all the states that can be justified are degreed. Actions and assertions can be justified to a greater or lesser extent, but they are not degreed states: one cannot more or less *assert* or *act as if* P. But one can have more justification to assert P or act as if P than another, if, say, one has more evidence for P than another.[20] Lastly, even when it comes to degrees of belief it makes sense to make comparative judgements. Two people might have justification to take the same degree of belief towards P, but one might have more justification than the other to do so because one has more evidence than the other.[21]

Alternatively, defenders of (J=P) might argue that talk of 'having more justification' is just a way of talking about there being more grounds for one's justification. To be sure, one's degree of justification is always determined by one's grounds, but one can have more justification while having fewer grounds. For it's the quality as well as the quantity of one's grounds that determines one's degree of justification. For example, it's possible for a visual experience as of P to yield more justification for one to believe P than two independent testimonial sources.

The fact that (J=P) cannot accommodate Comparativism is a serious concern with (J=P). For a theory of justification that fails to allow the variety of comparative judgements we actually make concerning justification just isn't a theory of justification.[22]

4.2 Against (J=G)

Unlike (J=P), (J=G) can accommodate the degreed character of justification and the sorts of comparative judgments we make concerning justification because goodness is degreed and allows us to make comparative judgements concerning what's better or worse. Thus, we can understand comparative claims about one having *more (less) justification* as claims about one being in an epistemically *better* (worse) position. So trouble with Comparativism needn't arise.

An additional mark in (J=G)'s favor is it's ability to explain Goodness Entailment and justification's general connection to value. Questions concerning epistemic value typically concern what it is about *knowledge* that makes it more valuable than true belief–a question that is asked in a way that assumes that knowledge is indeed valuable.[23] But the same kind of assumption-laden question arises in connection with justification: what makes a justified true

belief more valuable than mere true belief? Underlying this question is a virtually tautological assumption that having justification to believe P is to be in an epistemically valuable position with respect to believing P. At least one way to capture justification's connection to value is by saying that justification is goodness entailing in the sense indicated by Goodness Entailment above. That is,

> S has epistemic justification to believe that P only if believing that P is an epistemically good thing for S to do.

So (J=G)'s ability to accommodate the sorts of comparative claims we want to make concerning justification and the goodness entailing character of justification affords us some reason to endorse (J=G).

But that notwithstanding, there are also reasons to worry about (J=G). For just as justification is goodness entailing it also seems to be *permission entailing* in the sense indicated by Permission Entailment: one cannot have justification to believe P without it being epistemically permissible for S to believe P. This thesis, unsurprisingly, enjoys wide support among epistemologists.[24] Just consider what it would mean to say that believing P is justified yet wrong. To begin to make sense of such an assertion we'd have to introduce something like the prima facie/ultima facie distinction, and interpret our asserter as saying something to the effect of: believing P is *merely* prima facie justified, and so it's in fact wrong for one to believe P. But this is just to say that one doesn't really have (ultima facie) justification to believe P. Very plausible is the claim that everything one has justification to believe one is also permitted to believe, and finding intuitively clear cases that demonstrate otherwise is quite difficult.

There are two concerns that the permission entailing character of justification raises for (J=G). The first concern is that it's not at all clear that φ-ing being good for S to do entails that φ-ing is permissible for S to do. Outside the epistemic domain it is a common thought that somethings can be good without being permissible,[25] and even inside the epistemic domain this is arguable.[26]

The second concern for (J=G) stems from what seems to be the best explanation of the permission entailment of justification. Goldman (1986, p. 59) claims that a view of justification as permissibility is 'warranted by purely semantic considerations,' and he is not alone in thinking this. Wedgwood (2012, p. 274) says that '...to say that a belief is justified is to say no more than that it is permissible...'; Littlejohn (2012, p. 157) tells us that the concept of epistemic justification is 'constitutively connected to the concept of obligation' such that a 'belief is justified only if it is permissibly held...'; Pollock and Cruz (1999, p. 123) explain justification by saying that 'Justification is a matter of epistemic permissibility...'[27] If correct, the reason that justification is permission entailing is owed to the fact that justification just *is* a sort of permission. This is an eminently plausible suggestion, and I suspect the general endorsement of the permission entailing character of justification is to be explained in terms of its constitutive connection to permissibility, even if the exact language used in such endorsements does not bring it out as clearly as do the above citations.

Now here's the rub for (J=G): (J=G) suggests that justification and goodness also stand in a constitutive relation, and thus we can analyze justification in terms of goodness. So (J=G)

together with the idea that there's a constitutive connection between justification and permissibility implies that *goodness* could also be analyzed in terms of permissibility. However, this is a very controversial thesis owing to the differences between deontic statuses and axiological statuses.[28] So there is a surprising theoretical commitment involved in endorsing both (J=G) and the constitutive claim concerning justification and permissibility. Accordingly, to the extent that we have good reason to think it impossible to analyze goodness in terms of permissibility, we have reason to reject (J=G). However, any declaration of the impossibility of such an analysis would be premature, and I would like to remain neutral on that issue, particularly in light of fitting attitude (FA) theories of value which offer defensible (though not uncontroversial) analyses goodness in terms of deontic statuses. In Appendix B I show that if some FA theory is true, then the resulting view of justification will be a non-composite one, and thus an FA theory can do little to help (J=G). In sum, then, the problem is this: if goodness is not constitutively connected to permissibility, then (J=G) is inconsistent with what seems to be the best explanation of why Permission Entailment is true. But if goodness is constitutively connected to permissibility because some FA theory is correct, then the resulting view of justification will not be a non-composite one, in which case (J=G) is false.[29]

4.3 Against (J=NoBlame)

The aforementioned considerations weighing against (J=P) and (J=G) may tempt some to adopt a view of justification as blamelessness. There are, however, significant problems with such a view.

The first concern with (J=NoBlame) has to do with how commonly epistemologists *distinguish* blamelessness from justification. For, intuitively, there are cases where justification is absent though one is blameless. By the lights of many (internalists and externalists) a view of justification as blamelessness would not only be revisionary but would fly in the face of intuitively clear cases where justification and blamelessness come apart.[30] [31]

A second concern has to do with Permission and Goodness Entailment. It's false that being blameless for ϕ-ing entails the permissibility or goodness of ϕ-ing. Indeed, our ordinary ascriptions of blamelessness naturally gravitate, not towards whether or not ϕ-ing is good or permitted, but towards considerations having to do with an agent's motivations for ϕ-ing and what could reasonably be expected of agents in such circumstances.

A final concern with (J=NoBlame) is its tension with Doxasticism, i.e., the claim that justification can apply to *beliefs*. For blamelessness doesn't seem to apply to beliefs, but to the *persons* who have them. In general, we blame *agents for* what they do, but we do not blame *what they do*.[32] We evaluate the things agents do in other ways, e.g., we talk of the activities of agents as being good or bad, or right or wrong, or we deploy 'thicker' evaluative statuses that apply to the activities of agents. A defender of (J=NoBlame) might insist that beliefs are suitable objects of blame, but even if that were correct, it would be of limited value for defenders of (J=NoBlame) given the previously mentioned problems.[33] [34]

Now, our inventory of normative terms is rich, and I have not exhausted all possible non-composite views of justification. In Appendix A I relate the points made concerning (J=P), (J=G),

and (J=NoBlame) to other potential views of justification that might appeal to some readers.

5 Towards a Composite View of Justification

So standard non-composite views of justification face difficulties, being unable to accommodate certain intuitive features of justification and other plausible claims about justification. Fortunately, there are alternative views of justification.

One alternative is to maintain that justification is a *sui generis* normative status that applies to beliefs, is degreed, and is both permission entailing and goodness entailing. On this view, we might be able to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for justification in terms of permissibility, goodness, and possibly other things. But such conditions could not be used to tell us *what it is* for one to have justification.

But there is a more parsimonious way to proceed, a way that begins by rejecting the common assumption that justification is a non-composite status. Here, then, is the view I advise we adopt:

(J=P&G) For S to have epistemic justification to believe that P is for S to be epistemically permitted to believe that P and for it to be an epistemically good thing for S to believe that P.

Justification, according to this view, is just one among many composite normative statuses: the status of being both permissible and good.

(J=P&G)'s virtues are many. First, it can explain all of the features of justification that were seen to be problematic for (J=NoBlame), (J=G), and (J=P). For if (J=P&G) is correct then it follows that justification applies to beliefs (since permissibility and goodness do), it follows that justification is degreed (since goodness is), and it follows that justification is both permission entailing and goodness entailing (since every property entails itself). Second, if (J=P&G) is correct, then justification is permission entailing for the very reason so many have thought it was: justification is constitutively connected to permissibility. Third, (J=P&G) is able to do all this while keeping justification separate from blamelessness, thereby allowing us to maintain that a thinker can be blameless even while having an unjustified belief. Fourth, (J=P&G) can explain all this without requiring us to introduce a *sui generis* normative status. So on grounds of parsimony (J=P&G) is preferable to a *sui generity* view. Fifth, (J=P&G) is silent on the exact relationship between permissibility and goodness, thereby remaining neutral on dependence questions concerning 'the right' and 'the good'. Thus, one can endorse a consequentialist view of justification according to which what's permitted depends on what's good, or one can take the reverse view, or an independence view. Finally, as we will see in the next section, (J=P&G) provides us with a way of explaining and resolving certain longstanding debates in epistemology.

Is there any other composite account of justification that could turn the same trick? The most commonly encountered composite normative statuses are conjunctive, but perhaps there is room in our collection of normative statuses for disjunctive composite statuses. Thus, one might wonder about the merits of the following view of justification:

(J=PvG) For S to have epistemic justification to believe that P is for it to be the case

that *either* S is epistemically permitted to believe that P *or* it is an epistemically good thing for S to believe that P.

(J=PvG) would certainly help make sense of some of the observed properties of justification. But notice that if justification is in fact permission entailing and goodness entailing, then justification never comes apart from *both* goodness and permissibility. For (J=PvG) implies:

(J ↔ PvG) S has epistemic justification to believe that P IFF *either* S is epistemically permitted to believe that P *or* it is an epistemically good thing for S to believe that P.

Now, suppose it's permissible for S to believe P. From this and (J ↔ PvG) it follows that S has justification to believe P. And because justification is goodness entailing it follows that it's also a good thing for S to believe P. Now suppose it's a good thing for S to believe P. From this and (J ↔ PvG) it follows that S has justification to believe P. And because justification is permission entailing it follows that it's also permissible for S to believe that P. Thus it follows from (J ↔ PvG) and the permission and goodness entailing character of justification that:

(J ↔ P&G) S has epistemic justification to believe that P IFF S is epistemically permitted to believe that P *and* it is an epistemically good thing for S to believe that P.

So goodness and permissibility are inseparable on the disjunctive view. But it seems a bit odd to offer a disjunctive account of justification when both properties always come together since this opens up an explanatory lacuna. For on a disjunctive account it's not clear what it is about justification that is able to explain the fact that justification is both permission entailing and goodness entailing. (J=P&G), by contrast, has a ready explanation because permissibility and goodness is just what justification consists in. So (J=P&G) appears preferable to (J=PvG).[35]

6 Why (J=P&G) Matters

What's the upshot of all this? Why should we care about justification's relation to these other normative statuses? Apart from a general interest in truth, we should care because as we saw in section 3 there are a variety of very plausible theses concerning justification that are standardly assumed by epistemologists, but none of the standard non-composite views of justification seem compatible with all of them. So retaining a non-composite view of justification will require one to give something up. But no such cost comes with (J=P&G).

Indeed, if (J=P&G) or some other composite view of justification is correct then non-composite views simply conflate justification's distinct aspects. And such conflation is likely to lead to confusions and needless controversies when answering first-order questions about the grounds and transmission of justification as well as justification's relation to knowledge. In this regard, we should value (J=P&G) because it is likely to have theoretical payoffs when answering such questions. For with (J=P&G) we might be able to chalk-up much of the persistent disagreement among epistemologists on matters of justification to the conflation of two distinct aspects of justification: permissibility and goodness. For example, the internalist-externalist

debate has sought to locate those conditions *in virtue of which* one can have justification. But if (J=P&G) is correct epistemologists have been asking one question where they ought to have been asking two questions: in virtue of what is a belief epistemically permissible and in virtue of what is a belief epistemically good. Thus, it could be argued that, say, internalist conditions for justification get at what it is in virtue of that a belief is epistemically *permissible* whereas externalist conditions get at what it is in virtue of that a belief is epistemically *good* (or vice versa), and it's only when both kinds of conditions are satisfied that a thinker has justification. So this sort of solution could potentially go a long way towards helping us reconcile internalist and externalist intuitions in a consistent manner.[36] [37]

For another example of the uses to which (J=P&G) can be put, consider Moorean arguments against skepticism, such as:

> THE PROOF
> (Moore-1) I have hands.
> (Moore-2) If I have hands, then I'm not a brain in a vat who merely seems to have hands.
> Therefore,
> (¬BIV) I am not a brain in a vat who merely seems to have hands.

Mooreanism is, roughly, the view that it is possible for a thinker to use The Proof to acquire justification to believe (¬BIV) provided she has justification to believe (Moore-1) and (Moore-2). But, as has been commonly observed, Mooreanism seems not only committed to licensing *this* (apparently) question begging argument as a source of justification for its conclusion,[38] but it also implies that we can, with stunning ease, acquire justification to disbelieve any skeptical hypothesis which implies that our evidence is misleading.[39] Now, in general, non-skeptical opponents of Mooreanism agree with the Moorean thesis that we have justification to believe (¬BIV), they just think the *source* of this justification is to be located somewhere other than The Proof. My point, then, is that Moorean arguments against skepticism (and similarly problematic arguments) may succeed in transmitting one of the aspects of justification but they fail to transmit the other.[40] If correct, (J=P&G) opens up a middle path between Mooreanism and its opposition. Just which aspect of justification the The Proof is capable of transmitting will, I suspect, partly turn on how we ought to sort out the internalist-externalist issue. After all, believing on the basis of competent deductions is a conditionally reliable belief forming method and thus will have more in common with externalistically valued features than internalistically valued ones.

The issues here are complicated and more work needs to be done to demonstrate just how the (J=P&G) could be leveraged to resolve the present problems. But I hope to have made plausible the idea that we have not exhausted all options in our thinking about Moorean responses to skepticism or the internalist-externalist debate. The potential benefits of (J=P&G) don't end here. Similar considerations might be brought to bear on a host of other epistemological problems involving justification: concerns about pragmatic encroachment on justification, concerns about how peer disagreement can affect justification, concerns about the epistemic impact of cognitive penetration on perceptual justification...to name but a few. These suggested applications are all

highly schematic, but they are equally promising. For if justification is indeed a composite normative status then our first-order questions about justification have been problematically simplistic.

At the beginning I made the assumption that 'justification'-talk was typically not ambiguous. I still think that is correct. However, suppose one wanted to maintain an ambiguity view according to which 'justification' is sometimes used to refer to permissibility and at other times to goodness. Still, the central theoretical benefits gestured at above remain. For we must be careful to distinguish between questions concerning epistemic goodness and epistemic permissibility, whatever their relation to the term 'justification'. And since composite normative statuses come cheap, we can equally well ask after what it takes for a belief to be *both* good and permissible. This alone may go a long way towards reconciling recalcitrant intuitions and divisive epistemological positions. So even if one wishes to give ownership of the term 'justification' exclusively to goodness (or to permissibility) we can safely permit it. Though it comes with a cost, requiring one to give up on some of the very plausible claims made concerning justification that were discussed in section 3. In any case, what we must insist on is that one use their terms consistently and clearly distinguish between questions about the epistemic right from questions about the epistemic good.

In conclusion, I have argued that there is precedent for acknowledging composite normative statuses, and I have motivated the idea that justification is such a status. What (J=P&G) offers us is a view of justification that best explains the variety of justification's characteristics as well as the potential to resolve some longstanding epistemological problems.

Appendix A: On Responsibility, Reasonableness, Reasons, Ought, and Fittingness

Our inventory of normative statuses is not limited to the statuses so far considered. But a full treatment of how all such statuses are related (which are primitive, which entail which, etc.) is a very large task. That said, I would like to make some brief comments about certain other normative notions employed by epistemologists. My comments here will err on the side of brevity and lean heavily on the considerations discussed in section 3.

Justification has sometimes been associated with *responsibility*, thus one might think that here lies a distinct view of justification. The trouble is that 'responsibility' is plausibly used to express either a hypological status (e.g., Booth and Peels (2010)), in which case it falls prey to the previously mentioned problems with hypological statuses, or it is used to express a deontic status (e.g., Greco (1990, p. 246); BonJour (1985, p. 8)), in which case it runs aground of the requirement that justification comes in degrees.[41]

A somewhat different suggestion is that we identify justification with *reasonableness*. A virtue of this view is that it can accommodate both Comparativism and Doxasticism. But, as Sutton (2007, p. 35ff) argues, reasonableness is only a property of beliefs in a *derivative* sense. Reasonable beliefs are those which a reasonable *person* would or could hold in a given set of circumstances. In this way, the present view has more in common with hypological accounts of justification, and for that reason faces problems accommodating Permission and Goodness

Entailment.

One might think that the notion of *reasons* can provide us with an adequate view of justification, justification just being a matter of having *sufficient reasons*.[42] But the concept of reasons is what we might call a *grounding normative concept,* i.e., a normative concept whose application to an object identifies that object as a (potential) *ground or source* of some normative status that that (or more likely, some *other*) object possesses. Our use of the term 'reasons' is in this way akin to the epistemological term of art 'justifier', which is anything that acts as a ground or source of justification to believe P (Pryor (2005)). But just as there's no hope of understanding the term 'justifier' apart from understanding the notion of justification, so too there is no hope of understanding the term 'reason' (or 'sufficient reason') apart from understanding the target normative status(es) it's related to.[43] So accounting for justification in terms of having sufficient reasons just pushes the central question of what justification is back a step: is it reasonableness? is it permissibility? is it goodness? etc.

Might 'ought' provide us with a better alternative? 'Ought' is a member of the broader family of deontic terms and is often associated with justification. But there are problems with treating the concept of justification as an ought-concept. First, ought-claims are highly context sensitive and are not always connected to permission and thus can fail to be permission entailing (Wedgwood (2009, p. 507); Schroeder (2011, p. 10)). Second, sometimes what makes ought-claims true is the fact that something or other is obligatory, permissible, or wrong. So, the fact that there are true ought-claims in epistemic assessment doesn't imply that the concept of what one *ought* to believe is fundamental to epistemic appraisal or useful for exposing the character of justification. Finally, justification comes in degrees and allows for comparative judgements, but the concept of ought doesn't. Thus this view wouldn't permit us to make the kinds of comparative judgements epistemologists expect to make with the concept of justification.[44]

There is another family of concepts that have been used in connection with justification and deserve more attention than I can give them here. These concepts are referred to by the terms 'fitting' and 'appropriate' (Pryor (2005, p. 181); Feldman and Conee (1985, p. 15)). These are often thought to fall into the broader family of deontic notions (Tappolet (2013); Chappell (2012, p. 689 fn11)), but unlike 'ought' and 'permissible' these terms have a comparative form and thus identifying them with justification can accommodate Comparativism.[45] The trouble is that comparative judgements involving them often seem to be a kind of value judgement. For example, to declare one inappropriate response to an expert performance more appropriate than another inappropriate response (say jeering quietly rather than jeering loudly) is to declare the one action (quite jeering) a *better* response than the other (loud jeering). But this is a kind of value judgement and thus seems to indicate that we sometimes use the term 'appropriate' to refer to a normative status that is degreed and has an axiological element. I do not have space to argue the matter here, but I think there is a common (though perhaps not exclusive) use of terms like 'fitting' and 'appropriate' which, like 'justification', are used to express a concept that has *both* a deontic and an axiological element.[46] Thus, although I'm not wholly opposed to identifying justification with appropriateness (or at least the status referred to by 'appropriateness' on certain occasions of use), I don't think we advance our understanding of justification by doing so.

Appendix B: Fitting Attitude Theories

Fitting attitude (FA) theories of value take certain deontic statuses (ought, required, fitting) and certain psychological states (desiring, favoring, preferring) and proceed to analyze our axiological statuses (good, bad) in terms of them.[47] Such attempted analyses may seem to pose a threat to (J=P&G) for then we could take (J=G) and thereby explain justification's connection to permissibility and goodness without having to regard justification as a composite normative status at all.

To clarify the threat to (J=P&G) let's take Zimmerman's (2001) FA theory, which says that for x to be good is, roughly, for one to be *required to favor* x. Putting this together with (J=G) we get the following view of justification:

> (J=RF) For S to have epistemic justification to believe that P is for S to be required to favor believing that P.[48]

But notice, although (J=RF) can explain justification's goodness entailing and permission entailing character, as well as justification's constitutive connection to deontic statuses generally, it doesn't tie justification to the right deontic status. For justification is supposed to be constitutively connected not to requirement but to *permissibility* (= being not forbidden to ϕ, or being not required not to ϕ). Moreover, (J=RF) seems to wrongly associate justification with belief. When one has justification to believe P, one is permitted *to believe* P, but it's far from clear that being permitted/required *to favor* believing P entails that one is permitted *to believe* P. (Saving innocent people from suffering may be the sort of thing that we are required to favor, but considerations of personal autonomy would suggest the possibility of cases where saving one from suffering is nevertheless forbidden.)

We can easily resolve these matters in a FA framework by distinguishing between *having a requirement to favor believing* (= believing is a good thing to do) from *lacking a requirement not to believe* (= believing is permissible):

> (J=RF&P) For S to have epistemic justification to believe that P is for (i) S to be epistemically required *to favor* believing that P, and (ii) for S to not be epistemically required not to *believe* that P.

Here's the upshot: given that justification is both permission and goodness entailing, and given that we have adequate reasons to think permissibility and goodness are two distinct statuses according to FA theories themselves, it just doesn't matter if the notion of goodness can be (partially) analyzed in terms of deontic notions. For if a FA theory of value were correct, we would still need a composite account of justification in order to accommodate all of justification's intuitively compelling properties.[49]

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1 I will be using 'normative' as an umbrella term to capture all forms of assessment.

2 Alston (2006) challenges this assumption, arguing that the persistent disagreement in epistemology is best explained by the thesis that 'justification' fails to refer to some one property. The view of justification that I argue for here will afford us an alternative explanation–not considered by Alston–which is consistent with the assumption I'm making. My view of justification is at least as well positioned as Alston's to explain certain unyielding debates in epistemology (see section 5).

3 The possibility of mixed answers to the J= Schema that both use *and* mention normative terms and/or concepts needn't concern us. Such answers will not be particularly plausible and none of the traditional views of justification discussed by epistemologists would count as such.

4 For further discussion of the kinds of issues this kind of investigation surfaces see Ludwig (2007) and Williamson (2007).

5 The form of this schema is intended to be equivalent to: (ψ iff φ) and (ψ because φ).

6 I use the term 'deontic' narrowly to refer to the family of normative statuses inter-definable with obligation. I say a few things about normative statuses that fall into the broader deontic category in Appendix A. The term 'hypological' is owed to Zimmerman (2002).

7 Heyd (1982) and Chisholm (1963, p. 5). Lawlor (2009, p. 214) offers a more plausible account of supererogation, but rather

than using the notion of good *simpliciter*, he employs the comparative: an action is supererogatory just in case the performance of that act is *better than* duty requires.

8 See Chisholm (1963, p. 5) and Driver (1992, p. 290-291). For an epistemic application of this idea see Turri (forthcoming).

9 For other composite normative statuses see McNamara (1996) and (2011).

10 Goldman (1986, p. 25), last emphasis mine.

11 Goldman (1986, p. 59), Pollock and Cruz (1999, p. 123), Littlejohn (2012, p. 8), Wolterstorff (1983, p. 144), Berker (2013) and (forthcoming), and Wedgwood (2012, p. 274). Many others connect justification to permissibility to the minimal extent that having justification to believe P *entails* that it's permissible to believe P. But whether or not they would also endorse (J=P) is less clear. I will discuss the permission entailment of justification further in the next section.

12 Ginet (1975, p. 28). Cf. Booth and Peels (2010). Weatherson (2008) has argued that *if* one favors a hypological account of justification one would do well to think of justification as praiseworthiness rather than blamelessness. However, see Booth and Peels (2010) for responses to Weatherson.

13 Alston (1989, p. 96-97). Cf. Smithies (2012, p. 279-280).

14 Alston thought that justification should not be understood in terms of permissibility or blamelessness because such views imply that we have a certain kind of voluntary control over our beliefs, a kind of voluntary control which we almost certainly lack. Thus such views of justification run afoul of skepticism. For some responses to Alston's line of argument see Chuard and Southwood (2009), Engel (2009), Ginet (2005), Heller (2000), Hieronymi (2008), Owens (2000), Shah (2002), and Steup (2008).

15 Alston (1989, p. 84), Kvanvig (2010, p. 242), Goldman (1986, p. 104), Pritchard (2011, p. 238), Plantinga (1986), and Chisholm (1977, p. 6-7). Cf. Sosa (2007, p. 97).

16 Hume (1739, III, vi: 530-1), Zimmerman (2001, p. 9), Frey (1995, p. 78), Ogien and Tappolet (2009, p. 64-65), Tappolet (2013), and Alexander and Moore (2012, section 4).

17 A further, but less common, sort of comparison we can make among actions concerns their grounds for one permissible (wrong, obligatory) action may have *more (fewer) grounds than* another. A *ground* for x's being permissible (obligatory, wrong) is whatever it is *in virtue of which* x is permissible (obligatory, wrong). Since that in virtue of which an action is permissible may be overdetermined, it's possible for one permissible action to have more grounds than some other permissible action. But this does not imply one action can be more permissible.

18 For discussion of one attempt to get comparative claims with a deontic status see the discussion of 'ought' in Appendix A.

19 For opposition to such reduction see Eriksson and Hájek (2007) and Buchak (forthcoming).

20 Even if knowledge, an arguably non-degreed normative status, is what justifies assertions and actions, one of two people who know P can still have more justification to assert or act as if P. For one of the two knowers may have more evidence undergirding what they know. For a recent discussion of the justification of assertion and action see Smithies (2012b).

21 Suppose you had three extremely reliable and independent sources for thinking *that the probability of rain tomorrow is .9*, and you had no reason to think otherwise. In such a case each source is, all by itself, able to afford you justification to put a certain degree of belief–call it '*d.9*'–in the claim *that it will rain tomorrow*. Now suppose I had only two such sources. I would then have justification to take the *same* degree of belief, *d.9*, in the claim *that it will rain tomorrow*. But even so, since you have an additional highly reliable source that I lack, you would also have more justification than I do. But we cannot explain the sense in which you have more justification in terms of your having justification to take a higher degree of belief towards the claim *that it will rain tomorrow*. After all, none of your sources indicates that the likelihood of rain is any greater than .9. What you would have, though, is justification to take a higher degree of belief than me in the claim *that the probability of rain tomorrow is .9*. But this is a distinct claim.

22 There may be an additional problem with (J=P) for insofar as permissibility is not goodness entailing in the moral domain (see footnote 5 concerning the suberogatory), one might think that it's not goodness entailing in the epistemic domain either. I am sympathetic to this, but defending examples would take us far afield. See Turri (forthcoming) for a possible epistemic example involving the justification of assertions.

23 Haddock, Millar, and Pritchard (2008).

24 In addition to those who endorse (J=P), see Kim (1988, p. 383), Wolterstorff (1983, p. 144), BonJour (1985, p. 8), Oakley (1988, p. 271), Lycan (1985, p. 137), Plantinga (1983, p. 52), Ginet (2005), Kroedel (2012), Steup (2001), Wedgwood (2012, p. 274).

25 For example, maximizing forms of consequentialism clearly allow this, and even satisficing forms of consequentialism–which risk, as Bradley (2006) points out, condoning intuitively impermissible acts as permissible simply because they are 'good enough'–allow for there to be *some* cases of good acts that fail to be permissible. Nonconsequentialist views also should allow for goodness to separate from permissibility. One might have an obligation to save one's spouse from death (perhaps stemming from some specific marital vows), but choose to save an innocent stranger instead. Saving the stranger is not a morally bad thing to do, but it would not be morally permissible.

26 For example, Berker (2013) and (forthcoming) offers several examples that given currently popular consequentialist ways of thinking about epistemic justification, there are many cases where it is not permissible to believe P even though it is good for one to believe P. But this application of Berker's cases is complicated for he takes his examples to be evidence that we need to reject epistemic consequentialism, and if he's right about that, it's unclear that his examples give us reason to think that goodness and permissibility can detach in epistemology.

But there are other possible cases unrelated to Berker's. For instance, suppose one has a justified belief in P at t, but at a subsequent time t1 forms an unjustified belief that believing P is unjustified while still retaining one's original grounds for believing P in the first place. Although many wish to say that believing P is no longer (ultima facie) justified, there's no doubt that one remains in an epistemically valuable position with respect to P. For one has retained one's original grounds for P and one's higher-order belief that one's belief in P is unjustified, is itself unjustified. A plausible way of describing this is by saying that

one's belief in P is *not permitted* (owing to one's defeating higher-order belief), but one's belief in P is nevertheless *good* (owing to one's retention of their original, justification-conferring ground). Cf. Pryor (2004, p. 363-365).

27 See also Alston (1989, p. 116), Plantinga (1983, p. 52), and Wolterstorff (1983, p. 144).

28 For a list of the differences that make such analyses difficult see Tappolet (2013).

29 One last issue worth briefly mentioning is that justification is widely regarded to be closed under certain conditions. But unlike deontic statuses, axiological statuses are not so closed (Tappolet (2013) and Wedgwood (2009, p. 511)). So a deontic view of justification will have the added benefit of being able to more easily explain the widespread endorsement of closure principles for justification, while an evaluative status will have greater difficulty doing so. The envisioned explanation, however, requires more space than I can give it here.

30 For cases of blamelessness *without* justification see Alston (1989, p. 145), Goldman (1988), Boghossian (2008, p. 259), Feldman and Conee (1985, p. 17), Heatherington (2002), Pryor (2001, p. 14-17), Smithies (2012, p. 280), Sutton (2005, p. 369), and Littlejohn (2009) and (2012). For possible cases of blameworthiness *with* justification see Tucker (2010, p. 541). The later cases of blameworthiness with justification would pose problems for those who would wish to identify justification with praiseworthiness since one cannot be blameworthy for believing P while also being praiseworthy for believing P.

31 Cases where justification and blamelessness separate are most readily available on externalist theories of justification for it's easy to see how one's (possibly modal) environment can upset one's ability to acquire justification in a way that is inaccessible to the agent who's doing the best they can with what they've been given. But even on certain internalist views this distinction will be necessary. For one's own mind can sometimes be just as undetectably uncooperative and misleading as one's environment.

32 Heyd (2011, section 2), Zimmerman (2002, p. 554), and Littlejohn (2012, p. 4-11).

33 It's not that people can't meaningfully say things like 'The agent's action of doing A was blameless,' it's just that this is most naturally understood as a claim about an *agent* being blameless for what they did. Thanks to a PPQ referee for prompting me to consider this.

34 Perhaps it's also worth mentioning that drawing the propositional/doxastic justification distinction would be quite difficult were (J=NoBlame) true. For one cannot be blameless for ϕ-ing unless one ϕs. But propositional justification is supposed to be a positive normative status one can have to believe even if one does not have a belief. The best a proponent of (J=NoBlame) could do is to make propositional justification a kind of would-be justification. But would-be normative statuses are not normative statuses at all. This will be a problem for any hypological view of justification.

35 Alternatively, one might put pressure on the idea that our account of justification's degreed character requires goodness *simpliciter*, noting that the following will do just as well as (J=P&G) when it comes to accommodating the fact that justification comes in degrees:

> (J=P&G-as) For S to have epistemic justification to believe that P is for S to be permitted to believe that P and for believing that P to be epistemically *at least as good as* not believing that P.

Should such a view be correct, justification would still turn out to be a composite normative status very closely related to (J=P&G). For present purposes I'm content to leave this an open question. For (J=P&G-as) carries with it nearly all of the benefits that have been argued to come with (J=P&G). The chief cost is that one will either have to give up on Goodness Entailment or else find some other explanation of it. Indeed, should one find independent reason to give up on Goodness Entailment (J=P&G-as) may be the next best alternative that can accommodate justification's core characteristics. Thanks to a PPQ referee for having me consider this issue.

36 It might be objected that (i) these supposed benefits hinge on epistemic permissibility and epistemic goodness being independent in the epistemic domain, and that (ii) such independence is unlikely given the wide agreement among epistemologists that some form of epistemic consequentialism is true, where epistemic consequentialism is the view that epistemic permissibility depends on epistemic goodness. In response, notice first that epistemic consequentialism is questionable (see Berker (2013) and (forthcoming)). Second, even epistemic consequentialists can take advantage of the suggested solutions to epistemological problems so long as they don't tie permissibility too closely to goodness *simpliciter*. All they need do is allow that (a) different kinds of factors (e.g., internalist and externalist factors) can contribute to the (degree of) goodness of a given belief, and (b) that some of those factors can be sufficient to make a belief good *enough* to be permissible even if they fail to make a belief good *simpliciter*. The goal here is to allow epistemic goodness and permissibility to come apart just far enough to reap some of the aforementioned benefits.

37 Justification is widely agreed to be crucially related to knowledge (whatever the exact relation is), thus one may worry that this kind of solution to the internalist-externalist debate makes the acquisition of knowledge more difficult than necessary, for it would require the satisfaction of both internalist and externalist conditions (since both are needed for justification). But I think we find here find a very natural motivation for distinguishing between different kinds of knowledge. For we can divide questions about knowledge into three different kinds: questions about knowledge states consisting of (or otherwise related to) ungettiered true belief plus *permissibility* versus knowledge states consisting of ungettiered true belief plus *goodness*, versus knowledge states consisting of *both* permissibility and goodness.

38 For discussion of the question begging character of this argument see Wright (2004).

39 Cohen (2002).

40 This is not to say that one cannot have full blown justification for the denial of skeptical hypotheses like (¬BIV). It's just to say that what makes it good for one to believe the denial of skeptical hypotheses is to be located somewhere other than Moorean arguments, perhaps with the very sorts of factors non-skeptical anti-Mooreans have often argued for. Thanks to John Turri for pointing this out to me.