

Do you see what I know? On reasons, perceptual evidence, and epistemic status

Clayton Littlejohn

Abstract: Our epistemology can shape the way we think about perception and experience. Speaking as an epistemologist, I should say that I don't necessarily think that this is a good thing. If we think that we need perceptual evidence to have perceptual knowledge or perceptual justification, we will naturally feel some pressure to think of experience as a source of reasons or evidence. In trying to explain how experience can provide us with evidence, we run the risk of either adopting a conception of evidence according to which our evidence isn't very much like the objects of our beliefs that figure in reasoning (e.g., by identifying our evidence with experiences or sensations) or the risk of accepting a picture of experience according to which our perceptions and perceptual experiences are quite similar to beliefs in terms of their objects and their representational powers. But I think we have good independent reasons to resist identifying our evidence with things that don't figure in our reasoning as premises and I think we have good independent reason to doubt that experience is sufficiently belief-like to provide us with something premise-like that can figure in reasoning. We should press pause. We shouldn't let questionable epistemological assumptions tell us how to do philosophy of mind. I don't think that we have good reason to think that we need the evidence of the senses to explain how perceptual justification or knowledge is possible. Part of my scepticism derives from the fact that I think we can have kinds of knowledge where the relevant knowledge is not evidentially grounded. Part of my scepticism derives from the fact that there don't seem to be many direct arguments for thinking that justification and knowledge always requires evidential support. In this paper, I shall consider the three arguments I've found for thinking that justification and knowledge do always require evidential support and explain why I don't find them convincing. I think that we can explain perceptual justification, rationality, and defeat without assuming that our experiences provide us with evidence. In the end, I think we can partially vindicate Davidson's (notorious) suggestion that our beliefs, not experiences, provide us with reasons for forming further beliefs. This idea turns out to be compatible with foundationalism once we understand that foundational status can come from something other than evidential support.

"Sometimes nothing can be a real cool hand"—Lucas Jackson.

1. Introduction

Maybe we don't need perceptual evidence.¹ When Davidson said, "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief" (1986: 141), he didn't miss the mark by much. Beliefs

¹ For the purposes of this discussion, I shall assume that a thinker's evidence consists of propositions or facts and that having this evidence requires having some propositional attitude. There are other conceptions of evidence (e.g., Conee and Feldman's (2004) view that our experiences are evidence), but I explained in my (2012) why I think we should not identify evidence with experiences. If having evidence (in the sense operative here) is necessary for having a justification to believe p , having a justification to believe p requires having some propositional attitude that's distinct from the belief that p with a suitable content. In the case of perceptual justification, this would have to be an experience or a perception if there is perceptual evidence. (It will simplify the discussion to focus on such views, but see Conee and Feldman (2004) and McCain (2014) for defences of alternative conceptions of evidence. I explain why I don't think experiences are evidence in Littlejohn (2012).) I should flag something discussed in Littlejohn (2017). Even if science teaches us that experiences have certain properties (e.g., they are propositional attitudes in their own right), there might be creatures very similar to us that have bursts of perceptual consciousness, perceptual beliefs, and the ability to steer through their environments who lack perceptual evidence (as understood here) because there are no

(understood as acts, not objects) are never really a reason for holding another belief, but what we believe or know can be a reason to believe something. Close enough.²

Sceptical? Here is a quick and dirty argument. Suppose that you're in some state of mind, X. I won't tell you what kind of state X is, but here are two possibilities about X. The first is that X differs from belief in terms of its representational properties or the commitment it entails. The second is that it doesn't differ from beliefs in this way.

Let's consider the first possibility, which is that X lacks the representational properties of a belief (e.g., it doesn't have a content that is accurate iff some proposition (e.g., that Agnes's eyes are blue) is true) or X doesn't commit you to something being true in the way that belief does (i.e., unlike belief, being in this state doesn't mean that either Agnes's eyes are blue or you're mistaken about that). Obviously, if being in X doesn't have belief-like content (e.g., that Agnes's eyes are blue), its content couldn't identify your reason for changing your mind about what colour Agnes's eyes are.³ So, it couldn't be the source of something that was your reason for believing that they weren't green, grey, brown, etc. Suppose X has some kind of content, however, but it doesn't commit you to the truth of that content in the way that belief does (i.e., whereas believing that Agnes's eyes are blue means that either they are or you're mistaken about that, being in X doesn't mean that either her eyes are blue or that you're mistaken about that). Then it couldn't be by virtue of being in X that this content (i.e., that Agnes's eyes are blue) could be your reason for ϕ -ing. Why not? Being in X would be compatible with being agnostic about whether Agnes's eyes were blue. And if you're agnostic about whether p , it couldn't be that p is, by your lights, why ϕ -ing would be sensible, reasonable, right, required, virtuous, desirable, etc. Just as an agnostic's reason for going to church cannot be that attendance pleases God greatly, being in a state that leaves you agnostic about Agnes's eye colour cannot explain how it could be that your reason for believing that her parents passed on a recessive gene for eye colour is that her eyes are blue. Maybe X plays some role in a causal process that produces a belief with this content, but it's only by virtue of being in this distinct belief state that this content, which you'd be committed to the truth of by virtue of believing and not by virtue of being in X, is available to function in your reasoning as one of your reasons. So, if experience differs from belief in one of these ways, experience on its own doesn't put propositionally specified evidence or reasons into your possession.

What if X doesn't differ from belief in these ways? If being in X means that you're in an attitude where you're committed to the truth of p , p might be something that could be one of your reasons for ϕ -ing, but then X would be a belief.⁴ So, Davidson was just about right. If p is

propositional attitudes antecedent to the beliefs formed in response to experience. (See Feldman (2004) and Pryor (2000) for discussion.) Could *these* creatures could have perceptual knowledge or perceptual justification? I see no reason that they couldn't, but such creatures would have justification and knowledge without supporting perceptual evidence.

² In saying that he was close enough, I'm not endorsing Davidson's coherentism. If a subject's evidence just is her knowledge, we could have a foundationalist view on which the foundations consist of immediate knowledge and all the rest of our knowledge is derived via inference from the foundations.

³ See Byrne's (2005) discussion of the idea that states without belief-like content might provide us with reasons for our beliefs.

⁴ See Collins (1987) for a defence of this conception of belief. See Littlejohn (2017) for a defence of the view that it's impossible for someone's reason for ϕ -ing to be p if they're agnostic about whether p . See Hyman (2015) for a defence of the view that we need to know p for p to be one of the reasons that might rationally guide us.

⁵ Because of the commitment-condition, we can agree with Logue (2014), Siegel (2005), and Schellenberg (2018) that experience has content and still doubt that there's such a thing as perceptual evidence. Denying that there is perceptual evidence is not tantamount to denying

potentially among the things that could be your reason for ϕ -ing, it's something believed. Seeing and experiencing alone doesn't make something believed. Davidson's scepticism about whether non-doxastic states could provide us with evidence or reasons for belief was well placed given the standard glosses on the subject's reason as something that figures in reasoning (typically by being an object of belief) and something that helps us see what it was that the agent thought made some response rationalised by reasoning one that was sensible, intelligible, appropriate, right, desirable, etc. Maybe Davidson should have said more than just that experiences can cause us to believe, but I think we have reasonably well worked out views now about how experiences can function as inputs to processes that produce beliefs that look for all the world to be good candidates for knowledge. And I don't think it's a fault of such accounts that they never say that our perceptual beliefs are based on propositionally specified evidence. Obviously, opinions differ on just this point. If this is right, we might still base our perceptual beliefs on perceptions and experiences, but we might not thereby base our beliefs on perceptual evidence.⁶

Other epistemologists often insist that we do need perceptual evidence. They say we need it for perceptual justification and knowledge. I disagree. I think we need it for neither. We should consider their case, though. Some will say that it's needed for justification (and, perhaps, needed for knowledge for that reason). Some will say that it's needed for knowledge (and, perhaps, needed for justification for that reason). I've found three arguments in the literature for thinking that we couldn't possibly have justification or couldn't have knowledge without supporting evidence. I shall review the ones I've found and explain why none of them settle the issue.⁷

The first argument is designed to show that we need perceptual evidence for perceptual justification. I shall argue that this argument fails unless it can be shown that a certain kind of knowledge isn't possible. The second argument is designed to show that this kind of knowledge isn't possible, but it commits us to a view of knowledge that most readers would agree is impossible to defend. Our third argument is less direct than our first two. It seeks to show that we need to posit perceptual evidence to understand how perceptual justification and knowledge is defeasible. This argument is quite powerful, but its power derives from the explanatory power of a particular view of knowledge and of defeat that I shall criticise. I shall offer an alternative account of defeat that, I think, improves upon this one. My account frees us from any commitment to the idea of perceptual evidence. So, maybe we don't need perceptual evidence. Sometimes nothing is enough.⁸

that experience is conceptual. For a defence of a view on which belief and experience are sufficiently connected for experience to provide evidence for non-perceptual beliefs, see Glüer (2009).

⁶ On Swain's (1979: 27) view, a belief might have a causal basis that's a state of mind or mental event and an evidential basis that's a proposition and it seems that in cases where the causal basis of a belief isn't a further propositional attitude, we could have causal basing without evidential basing and still meet the conditions imposed by his general theory of justification.

⁷ Right or wrong, the English language seems to conspire against the view that Davidson denies. As Unger (1975) notes, we cannot say that Inge's reason for believing that Agnes's parents had blue eyes is that Agnes's eyes are blue unless we're prepared to say that Inge knows that Agnes's eyes are blue. If it's encoded into our language that sentences of the form, 'Inge's reason for ϕ -ing was that p ' entails, 'Inge knows that p ', English rigs the game against the view that says that sometimes Inge's reason for ϕ -ing is something that she doesn't know but merely perceives.

⁸ By 'nothing', here I mean, 'nothing in the body of evidence that provides the right kind of evidential support'. It seems that we can consistently say that nothing provides evidential support for a belief while allowing that something figures in some complex story about how knowledge is acquired. I don't think that evidentialists like Conee and Feldman (2004) would want to deny that it is an interesting philosophical question as to whether such inputs have to be evidence

2. Lord on the nature of defeat

Lord's (2013) argument fills a surprising gap in the literature.⁹ Given the popularity of the view that it's impossible to have justification for any belief without supporting evidence for it, we would expect the literature to be filled with arguments that support this view.¹⁰ The literature isn't always what we want it to be. His argument is supposed to show that all justification requires evidence. We disagree about whether all justified beliefs need to be supported by evidence, but our disagreement doesn't necessarily go all that deep. We can both agree with Raz when he says, "the normativity of all that is normative consists in the way it is, or provides, or is otherwise related to reasons" (1999: 67).¹¹ Let's use talk of 'reasons' and 'reason' to capture what we want to say about normative status. And let's suppose that only pieces of evidence can be good reasons to believe.¹² The issue that separates us is whether we always need good reasons to believe p to have justification to believe p .

Let's consider Lord's argument:

(L1) If p is not supported by sufficient reasons, then the set of reasons to believe p is defeated.

(L2) If the set of reasons to believe p is defeated, then p is not propositionally rational.

(LC) Thus, if p is not supported by sufficient reasons, then p is not propositionally rational (2013: 87).

As Lord anticipates, my issue is with (L1).

The argument is supposed to show that if p is not supported by sufficient reasons (not 'reason'), then it couldn't be rational to believe p . While it might seem quite plausible that it is only rational to believe when there is sufficient reason (not 'reasons'), I don't see why we need one or more good reasons (again, not 'reason') to respond to some situation rationally. If, as the context makes clear, having sufficient reasons (not 'reason') requires the existence of one or more such things, I think we should reject (L1).

since they seem to think that their view is an interesting philosophical view that requires substantive defence, not a trivial consequence of a decision to use the word 'evidence' for whatever it is that serves as an input to processes that might produce knowledge as output.

⁹ Kiesewetter (2017: 180) offers a similar argument the view that we need evidence for justification but uses talk of 'sufficient reason' instead of defeat.

¹⁰ I don't mean to deny that various authors (e.g., Conee and Feldman (2004) or McCain (2014)) have defended views that have this implication. They've also worked through a variety of cases to try to show that the evidentialist story provides the best treatment of these cases. I simply mean to say that it's rare to find a direct argument for the claim that all justification derives from evidential support or the support of supporting reasons.

¹¹ As outlined in my (2013), I would offer this reasons-centred view of justification. When there is no (undefeated) reason not to believe, a belief is justified. When there is undefeated reason not to believe, a belief is not justified. What determines whether there are such reasons? Norm conformity. Specifically, conformity to knowledge norms. It is because a belief is knowledge that there is no undefeated reason not to believe. (A belief is supposed to be knowledge, in my view.) And it is because a belief is not knowledge that there is undefeated reason not to believe. This is all compatible with a broadly Razian outlook. On this way of thinking about things, we would only say that a belief is justified only if supported by independent evidence if we thought that a belief could only be knowledge is supported by this evidence. Thus, everything turns on whether there can be knowledge without evidence. And I think there can be. I don't think that non-inferential knowledge is based on evidence. See Littlejohn (2017) for the argument.

¹² For arguments for this view, see Adler (2002) and Shah (2003).

Think about a practical case. Agnes has to decide whether to ϕ or not to ϕ . Couldn't Agnes find herself in a situation in which she is certain that there is neither a good reason to ϕ nor a good reason not to ϕ ? In such a situation, it seems it wouldn't be irrational for her to ϕ . I don't want to describe the situation as one in which she lacks or fails to have 'sufficient reason' to ϕ . I think Lord would want to say that if she failed to have sufficient reason or lacked sufficient reason to ϕ , it wouldn't be rational for her to ϕ . That seems plausible, but it also seems plausible that in a case like this it could be rational for her to ϕ (or for her not to ϕ). In the absence of any reason not to ϕ , she can have all the reason she needs (and so have 'sufficient reason' in some sense) even if she does not have a single reason to ϕ . (If the beer is free, Agnes has sufficient money for beer even if she's broke.¹³)

The point that I want to stress is that someone who accepts Raz's picture of the normativity of reasons can and should say that Agnes has sufficient reason (not 'reasons')/justification to ϕ without having a good reason to ϕ provided that she doesn't have good reasons not to. We need to say something that covers the case in which there are no reasons that that recommend ϕ -ing or recommend an alternative and it should be compatible with the idea that an agent who finds themselves in such an uninteresting situation has at least one rationally permissible option available to them. It's consistent with this picture that we always have sufficient reason (not 'reasons') or justification to ϕ whenever it's the case that there is not one single reason not to ϕ . Agnes might have sufficient reason to skip or turn a cartwheel iff (and because) there is not one single reason for her not to. Couldn't something similar hold for belief? Couldn't there be cases in which someone has sufficient reason or justification to believe by virtue of the fact that there is no reason for them *not* to believe? The fact that reasons and only reasons are normative doesn't close off this possibility. If something closes off this possibility, it's something else that closes off this possibility. It would be something that goes beyond what the argument above gives us.

Someone might say there's an important difference between the practical cases and beliefs. They'll say that there's a general presumption in favour of the view that when it comes to belief we cannot have justification without supporting reasons (count noun) since it's clear that for some beliefs (e.g., inferentially justified beliefs) we *do* have decisive reason not to believe when we don't have sufficient evidence.¹⁴ In the inferential case, having no evidence ensures that we don't have sufficient evidence and ensures that it would be irrational to believe. If I want to carve out a special exception for perceptual belief, shouldn't it fall to me to explain why some beliefs don't need evidence for their justification?

I accept the responsibility. Consider my counterargument:

(KN1) If you were to believe p and therein come to know that p , you would violate no epistemic norms.

(KN2) You can believe p and therein come to know that p without having any independently possessed evidence that supports this belief.¹⁵

¹³ Thanks to Michael Bench-Capon for the example.

¹⁴ This seems to capture part of Lord's (2013) motivation for accepting (L1). Justin Snedegar (in conversation) also suggested that there was a presumptive case in favour of (L1).

¹⁵ Since Williamson's (2000) identification of evidence and knowledge is in the space of possible views we should consider, I should make it clear that when I speak of knowledge without evidence, I mean this kind of case. Agnes is in a position to know, say, that she's sitting on the rug even though she presently has no evidence for this belief. In coming to know, E=K tells us that a *consequence* of coming to know this is that she has entailing evidence for this belief (i.e., by coming to know that she's sitting on the rug, her evidence entails that she is), but it warns us against thinking that a *precondition* on coming to know is that Agnes possessed evidence for her

(KN3) So, you can believe p without having any independently possessed evidence that supports this belief without violating any epistemic norms.

(KN4) If you believe p without violating any epistemic norms, you have sufficient reason (not ‘reasons’) to believe that p .

(KNC) So, you can have sufficient reason (i.e., justification) to believe p without evidence.

The above challenge assumed (and I granted) that inferential beliefs need supporting evidence, but then tried to show that this supports a more sweeping view according to which all beliefs need supporting evidence for their justification. To this, I respond as follows. We determine whether beliefs have or lack justification by thinking about how they relate to norms or normative standards. One such standard, of course, is the knowledge norm. We might say that certain violations of it count as unjustified and that certain beliefs that conform to it count as justified. When a proposition is clearly something we couldn’t know ‘straight off’ but could only know by relating it to other things that we know or justifiably believe, it’s clear that evidence is needed for justification because it’s needed to ensure that the belief has some of the properties needed for knowledge (e.g., that it isn’t one that would be true just as a matter of luck). Since it’s obvious that I cannot tell straight off whether infection rates have decreased over the past month, if I were to believe that they were without evidence then *this* belief would be one that would be accidentally true if true and would not be something that I knew. It’s this obvious failure to conform to the knowledge norm that explains why supporting evidence is needed for its justification. It’s because of how I’m related to the relevant facts that I’d need evidence to have knowledge and so need evidence to have justification. When, however, we’re dealing with something that I can tell straight off (e.g., whether my legs are crossed, whether I’m thinking about Vienna, whether the pain is in my toe or in my elbow), it isn’t at all clear why I would need supporting evidence for beliefs about such things to be non-accidentally true if true.¹⁶ It’s not clear why they’d need evidence to be knowledge. And it’s not at all clear why we should say that a belief that constitutes knowledge but isn’t supported by evidence would fail to be justified. Knowing means you don’t have to stop believing. Presumably, we’re supposed to stop believing when we lack justification. Without some argument against the possibility of immediate knowledge that isn’t accounted for in terms of independently possessed evidence, I think it’s clear that the presumptive case for thinking that need evidential reasons for the justification of every belief isn’t dispositive.

3. McDowell on knowledge

I don’t think the argument discussed above settles the question as to whether we need perceptual evidence for justification. Even if some beliefs cannot be justifiably held unless supported by sufficient evidence, there might be some things that we can know ‘straight off’ without relying on any evidence at all. If such immediate knowledge without evidence is possible, justification without evidence should also be possible. And if that’s possible, we might reasonably wonder

belief prior to forming this belief. In the relevant sense, the case just described is a case of knowledge without evidence because the only evidence that supported Agnes’s belief that she’s sitting on the rug is acquired because she’s formed that belief.

¹⁶ I think that Anscombe (1962) makes a compelling case that knowledge of the position of our own limbs without evidence is possible and that McGinn (2012) and Millar (2019) make a very powerful case for thinking that perceptual knowledge without evidence is possible. I would add that some cases of self-knowledge seem to be clear cases of knowledge without evidence. Conee and Feldman (2004) might disagree on the grounds that evidence as they understand it is present in some of these cases.

why we should think that perceptual evidence is necessary for perceptual justification or knowledge. Knowing ensures that we have all the justification we could need.

I want to turn to one of McDowell's arguments now because he's given the only extant argument that I know of for thinking that the kind of knowledge that I conjectured might be possible is in fact impossible. His argument is supposed to show that all knowledge requires evidence. If sound, his argument undercuts my objection to Lord's argument.

McDowell writes:

In the hybrid conception, a satisfactory standing in the space of reasons is only part of what knowledge is; truth is an extra requirement. So two subjects can be alike in respect of their satisfactoriness of their standing in the space of reasons, because only in her case is what she takes to be actually so. But if its being so is external to her operations in the space of reasons, how can it not be outside the reach of her rational powers? And if it is outside the reach of her rational powers, how can its being so be the crucial element in the intelligible conception of her knowing that it is so (1998: 403)?

Those who defend a hybrid conception of knowledge (a conception that McDowell rejects) will say that reasons for belief bring us only part of the way towards knowledge. The truth of the relevant belief is a further factor that must obtain and a factor that might fail to obtain even when we have reasons that provide justification (i.e., ensure a 'satisfactory standing in the space of reasons'). The problem with this idea of knowledge is the idea of attaining a kind of positive normative standing because of the support of reasons and because some additional factor (i.e., grace, good fortune, invisible interventions by unknown guardian angels). The additional factor, which has nothing to do with our reasons or the operation of reason, McDowell thinks, cannot be an essential factor in making it that we manage to respond to the world as experienced as we ought to. It must be within the reach of reason and down to what reasons we have that we have managed to respond to the world as experienced as we ought to, but then we cannot come to believe what we ought to without any reasons at all for reason to operate on. So, on the assumption that knowledge is a standing in the space of reasons in the sense that the difference between knowing and believing without knowing corresponds to the difference between believing what we ought to and failing to believe what we ought to, knowledge without evidence isn't possible.

One worry I have with the argument is that I don't see why we should grant that normative standings depend exclusively upon reasons within the reach of our rational powers.¹⁷ In some sense, the reasons in virtue of which the ancient baddies should have done things differently might have been outside the reach of their rational powers, but they were the baddies and they shouldn't have acted and believed as they did.¹⁸ Even if we bracket these concerns, problems remain.

¹⁷ Could McDowell abandon this idea that knowledge is normative and just focus on justification? Wouldn't his argument show that justification depends upon possessing reasons that provide certain support for our beliefs? I don't think so. It would then seem that the premise (i.e., justification depends upon having reasons that ensure that we're justified) would either be too close to the conclusion to support (L1) or would suffer from the same dialectical problem. Grant that we could have knowledge without evidence, and I think we have to concede that we don't have any good reason to accept (L1).

¹⁸ In Littlejohn (2012, 2014), I argue that certain 'morally loaded' cases can be used to attack various internalist views of the justification of belief with a special focus on cases of normative uncertainty and mistaken normative belief. Srinivasan (forthcoming) defends a similar kind of 'radical externalism' and our externalist view is difficult to reconcile with this claim that a

3.1 Defeasibility and defeasible reasons

McDowell's rejection of the hybrid view commits him to the view that what we're in a position to know supervenes upon what we're aware of and our awareness of it.¹⁹ We might be sceptical that there exist such objects of visual awareness or episodes of visual awareness that have this epistemic upshot.²⁰ We might be even more sceptical that we satisfy this condition in the case of

normative standing is determined entirely by things that are within reach of a particular person's rational powers. If some consideration is not within someone's reach because they are cruel or selfish, say, the reason might still apply to them, determine what they ought to do, and the failure to reach seems to explain why they're culpable for the failure rather than shift or subvert their obligation. It should be said that it's not clear whether McDowell's point about reasons and the reach of our rational capacities is intended as a general point about normative status or just as a point about what's needed for knowledge (e.g., a point about the kind of non-accidental connection needed for knowledge).

¹⁹ If this were insufficient, we would locate something necessary for knowledge outside of the reach of our rational powers and that saddles us with the hybrid conception of knowledge.

²⁰ If we thought that *that Agnes's eyes are blue* was among the things that were there in the surroundings for us to view, look at, watch, or see, we might be tempted by the view that what the senses come into contact with might (e.g., by virtue of making us consciously aware of them) ensure that the beliefs we form by taking in what the senses come into contact with couldn't possibly fail to constitute knowledge. For how could one be both aware that *p* and fail to be in a position to know that *p*? Good question. Part of my answer is that being aware that *p* just *is* knowing that *p*. (See French (2012) for a discussion of 'sees that *p*'.) Part of my answer is that the thought that *that Agnes's eyes are blue* is something in our surroundings that might come into view is deeply confused. (See Longworth (2018) and Travis (2013).) If we acknowledge that what our senses encounter is limited to what is located in our surroundings (and thus particular, not general in the way that *that Agnes's eyes are blue* must be), we have to acknowledge that *that Agnes's eyes are blue* is only something we could be made aware of by means of (a) some form of visual contact with Agnes and her eyes *and* (b) the exercise of conceptual capacities (which assimilate the present case to a range of other cases of *having blue eyes* which we aren't visually aware of), we see that there must be some story about how the concept's application to the present case is triggered by something particular that the senses encounter that merits this application and ensures that the application isn't just accidentally correct. *This* story will describe a process that doesn't *begin* with propositional inputs because the point of this story is to tell us why the first set of concepts are applied to the particulars that come into contact with our senses. Once we see that this part of the overall story about how we form perceptual beliefs and acquire perceptual knowledge does *all* the work of explaining how the concepts are applied in such a way that the correctness of their application is non-accidental, we can see one reason to doubt the need to posit non-doxastic propositional attitudes that support our perceptual beliefs to explain how these beliefs (e.g., about Agnes's eyes being blue) could be non-accidentally correct. Once we have a story that explains how in coming into contact only with particulars our concepts might be correctly and non-accidentally applied in experience, we can cut out the middle man and tell a story about how a process that produces perceptual belief without any antecedent non-doxastic propositional attitudes might produce beliefs that are non-accidentally correct. The success of an argument, then, that seeks to show that perceptual knowledge is only possible in creatures whose perceptual beliefs are based on further propositional attitudes would turn on identifying some further condition on knowledge (i.e., one distinct from the non-accidentality condition) that wouldn't be met. It is unclear what condition this might be. Once we have belief, truth, and a non-accidental connection that's grounded in the operation of our perceptual capacities, we seem to be pretty close to knowledge. For further discussion, see Littlejohn (2017).

inductive inference. Knowledge via inductive inference is based on awareness of reasons such that it's metaphysically possible for some thinker to be aware of just these reasons and to fail to know. The defeasibility of this knowledge is partially down to the fact that the grounds for it are defeasible. Once we allow for knowledge from defeasible grounds, we're committed to the hybrid conception of knowledge.

3.2 We do not see (or watch, look at, or view) what we know

Suppose that what perception relates us to is wholly particular. What perception places in view is limited to things that are in the perceiver's surroundings (Travis 2013). Could facts about what we're in a position to know perceptually supervene upon facts about perceptual contact with particulars? I doubt it.

Think about the fake barn cases (Goldman 1976). In the good case, Agnes sees a barn and come to know that the building is a barn. Consider a case as similar to this one as possible in which there are nearby fakes that she doesn't see but still prevent her from knowing. Agnes couldn't know that the building she sees is a barn even though it is one. My claim is this. Facts about whether she perceives something and what she perceives are the same in the two cases. The modal difference between the cases (i.e., the fact that she could have easily seen a ringer in one case but there are no fakes in the other) matters to what she can know but *not* to what she can see (or watch, look at, view). Facts about what we are in a position to know perceptually do *not* supervene upon facts about the objects of perceptual awareness and our awareness of them.²¹

One lesson that I'd take from the fake barn case concerns the objects of knowledge and perception. If the object of perceptual awareness was just what we know, it's easy to see why someone might think that seeing guarantees that we're in a position to know. Once we abandon this view, however, and think that what we see is limited to particulars that aren't the objects of knowledge, we might reasonably worry that what can know depends upon more than just what the inputs are to the processes that produce our perceptual beliefs. This is the thin wedge that pushes us towards the hybrid view. Once we embrace that view, we cannot rely on McDowell's arguments to show that certain forms of knowledge (i.e., knowledge without evidence) aren't possible.

3.3 The bad case

The third problem is this. Even if we think that, say, there's a notion of justification according to which a belief is justified only if it is knowledge, we want to say something nice about the bad case. Let's suppose that we reserve justification for a kind of objective suitability that amounts to something like knowledge and say that beliefs are rational when they are subjectively or prospectively suitable. If we agree that in the bad case you have rational (albeit not justified) beliefs, we want some account that explains why this is. If all that the disjunctivists like McDowell can say about the evidence in the bad case is that it is not discernibly different to the evidence we have in the good, we don't seem to have any explanation as to why beliefs in some bad cases are rational.

4. Schroeder on the defeasibility of perceptual knowledge and justification

Here's where things stand. It seems that Lord's argument doesn't show that justification always requires evidence if it's possible to have some immediate or non-inferential knowledge without evidence. (Such knowledge would seem to show that we can have justification without evidence.) McDowell's argument is supposed to close off the possibility of knowledge without evidence, but the implications of this argument don't sit well with the idea that much of our knowledge is defeasible and provided by fallible sources. Let's start fresh.

²¹ One response (and the only response that makes sense to me) would be to insist that we do have knowledge in these cases. See Schellenberg (2018: 210) for discussion.

Schroeder (2015) defends a Kantian view of knowledge. Knowing, he says, is believing for sufficient subjective and objective reason. We should consider this view because it, like McDowell's view, vindicates the idea that all knowledge must be supported by reasons. It differs from that view, however, in that it seems to explain many of our intuitions about the defeasibility of knowledge.

Let me flag one thing. Schroeder's approach is similar in some respects to McDowell's. It thus differs from mine which is inspired by Williamson (2000). In the knowledge-first view developed below, facts about knowledge aren't explained in terms of facts about reasons, the ways they balance, or their sufficiency. Facts about knowledge explain facts about reasons. I say that it's because we know that we have sufficient reason to believe. He says that it's because we have sufficient (subjective and objective) reason to believe that we know. Like McDowell, the possibility of and presence of knowledge is explained in terms of reasons. Reasons are, for him, more fundamental.²²

While Schroeder and McDowell will both say that beliefs are knowledge because of some relations between these beliefs and reasons, Schroeder offers a strikingly different account of reasons and (crucially) of their sufficiency. McDowell is committed to a (seemingly) problematic kind of infallibilism because he says that reasons for Agnes to believe p are sufficient iff necessarily by having these reasons she's in a position to know p . (Thus, if those reasons are compatible with $\sim p$, they couldn't be sufficient to believe p .) For Schroeder, some reasons will be (subjectively and objectively) sufficient for Agnes to believe p iff they are sufficiently weighty. In the practical case, a reason might be a good reason to ϕ but fail to make it the case that we may or should ϕ because there are weightier reasons to do otherwise. If such a reason were unopposed, however, it could make it the case that Agnes ought to ϕ even if that reason were quite weak just because there weren't reasons lined up on the other side to outweigh it. He thinks that something similar holds for belief. The factors that determine whether some reasons are (subjectively or objectively) sufficient will include the presence/absence of reasons against. Reasons that might exist and be sufficient in one case might fail to be in another if they run up against reasons on the other side. Understanding sufficiency in terms of balance allows for a kind of defeasibility that McDowell's account cannot.

To get a fuller understanding of Schroeder's account, we need to know more about his subjective and objective reasons. We also need to understand how the balance of reasons explains the notion of sufficient reason.

Let's start with Schroeder's subjective and objective reasons. Think of objective reasons as facts which we might or might not be cognizant of. And think of them as things that determine whether some response (e.g., drinking the drink, believing this is a barn, etc.) is *correct*. If Agnes pours you a Bernie (i.e., a petrol and tonic) and convinces you that it's a gin and tonic, drinking wouldn't be the correct response. The facts in virtue of which it's not the correct response aren't known to you now, but they still do their work in determining what the correct

²² I should add that I'm also slightly sceptical of the project of characterising knowledge by appeal to normative reasons since I don't know if such reasons apply to all the non-human animals that we would want to attribute knowledge to. One reason that I'm attracted to Hyman's (2015) approach to knowledge is precisely that it links up the possession of knowledge to the abilities that we seem to assume non-human animals have when we think it's credible to ascribe knowledge to them. For some such animals (e.g., Agnes (i.e., my dog)), I don't think it's plausible that normative reasons apply to her. On my view, knowledge is a non-normative relation that can help to explain why some creatures that can be held accountable have/lack justification much in the way that utilitarians will say that maximising choiceworthiness is a non-deontic property that can help explain why some creatures (e.g., us, but not cows) can act rightly or fail to. Someone who is very Kantian might say that this is silly and that only humans are knowers because only we have the right rational capacities.

response would be (i.e., not drinking). We tend to think that in these cases drinking is *rational* even if incorrect. Schroeder says that this is because you had sufficient subjective reason to drink. In this case, the subjective reason would be the content of a mental state (e.g., the content of your false belief that the stuff is gin). Subjective reasons can be true but they needn't be. Their truth or falsity doesn't typically have much direct bearing on whether a response is rational.

We can draw similar distinctions when thinking about reasons for belief. It was rational to drink and rational to believe the stuff was gin. This is because there was sufficient subjective reason to act or believe. It was incorrect to drink and incorrect to believe the stuff was gin. This is because there was not sufficient objective reason to act and believe. In each case, sufficiency is supposed to be a matter of the balance of reasons for and against. Reasons (objective or subjective) to believe the stuff was gin would be provided by evidence (objective or subjective). These can come up against reasons to believe something incompatible (e.g., that the stuff was vodka, petrol, distilled water) or to suspend. Reasons to suspend can come from things like higher-order evidence (e.g., considerations that indicate that our rational capacities have been compromised in some way) or might have to do with non-epistemic factors that help to dictate how much evidence would be needed to settle a question (e.g., we might need more evidence to rightly decide that someone is guilty if we know that the finding of guilt will mean the death penalty than we would if we were trying to get the right answer in a pub quiz). The important thing to remember is that the balance of subjective and objective reasons determines whether something is rational and correct and it is by believing for reasons that are subjectively and objectively sufficient that we come to know.

In the epistemic case, Schroeder proposes that there's an interesting connection between the sufficiency of subjective and of objective reasons. Objective defeaters can prevent objective reasons from being sufficient. In a good case, the marks of a gin and tonic might help us explain why you believed for sufficient objective reason. If we add in certain epistemically bad objective factors (e.g., the fact that a belief is false, the fact that there are convincing fakes nearby, etc.), however, you might fail to believe for sufficient objective reason. These objective defeaters are knowledge defeaters and we can think of them as a feature of a case that makes it turn out that someone who we might have presumed knew something doesn't in fact know (2015: 228).

Objective defeaters come paired with subjective defeaters. Schroeder observes that, "it is an important and general fact that objective and subjective defeaters for knowledge *always* come paired" (2015: 229). As he puts it, "the same motivating reasons for belief that could fail to be subjectively sufficient because of some further belief could fail to be objectively sufficient because of a corresponding further fact" (2015: 242). He exploits this fact to explain why various factors (e.g., practical stakes, countervailing evidence) might preclude knowledge and why attitudes concerning such factors might defeat rationality (and thereby defeat knowledge). In some cases (e.g., the fake barn case discussed below), the explanation of liability to defeat fixes on certain facts about subjective reasons and their connection to objective reasons. Because of this, the requirement that justified beliefs be based on evidence isn't an explanatorily idle feature of Schroeder's account.

We need to add one more piece to the picture. When are reasons sufficient? Here are two answers that Schroeder doesn't accept. The first is my answer: you lack sufficient objective reason if (and because) you're not in a position to know and there is sufficient objective reason if (and because) you are in a position to know. The second is McDowell's answer: the sufficiency of reasons turns on whether awareness of them guarantees that you're in a position to know. Schroeder's account of sufficiency differs from mine because it shares the same explanatory ambition of McDowell's account (i.e., to explain why we are or are not in a position to know in terms of relations to reasons) and differs from McDowell's in that he doesn't think that the metaphysical possibility that someone might believe for the same reasons as you and fail to know means that your reasons aren't sufficient. On Schroeder's view, reasons are sufficient because of how they balance. Balance is understood in terms of their weights.

Whether the reasons (objective or subjective) are sufficiently weighty depends upon what they're up against. Some reasons might be sufficiently weighty in one case (e.g., because they lack competitors) and they might be insufficiently weighty in another (e.g., because of other reasons, defeaters, etc.). This gives us the tools that we need to characterise the objective defeat of knowledge and the subjective defeat of rationality (which, in turn, is just another way to defeat knowledge). Schroeder thinks that the subjective reasons that support belief are pieces of evidence. The objective reasons that count against believing needn't be. The practical stakes, for example, might, if unknown, prevent some reasons from being objectively sufficient and beliefs about these practical stakes might, if they obtained, prevent some reasons from being subjectively sufficient. Maybe Schroeder wouldn't put it this way, but I will. You might think that if evidence is needed for justification, rationality, or knowledge and we don't have enough of it, this means that there is a reason not to believe. This further reason is *not* a further piece of evidence.²³ Don't assume that the comparative weight of reasons is understood in terms of the strength of evidence for and against. It's not that simple.

Let's work through one of his examples. It looks to Agnes that the tile is red. In the objective defeat condition, she's wearing tinted lenses that affects the colour of tiles. In the subjective defeat condition, she rationally believes she's wearing the lenses. Schroeder offers these remarks:

The fact that you are wearing rose-coloured glasses defeats your visual evidence that there is something red in front of you, on this view, because it cannot be true that you see that there is something red in front of you if you are wearing rose-coloured glasses. This suffices to defeat your knowledge, because knowledge cannot be based on false lemmas (forthcoming).

When you are told that you are wearing these glasses, that knocks out the support provided by the subjective reason (i.e., that you see that there is something red) and so defeats rationality (and knowledge) by ensuring that you lack sufficient subjective reason.

If I understand his view correctly, Schroeder doesn't assume that there's some single, overarching objective standard that determines whether there is sufficient subjective and objective reason to believe. The real explanatory work is meant to be done by facts about the weights of the relevant sets of subjective and objective reasons (e.g., with no reason to suspect things are amiss, a certain experience can provide sufficiently weighty reasons to believe that would be sufficient in the absence of reasons against believing; with some reason to believe that it won't rain, we might have sufficient reason to believe that it will if the evidence that it will is sufficiently strong). This is important to remember when we're thinking about the explanatory virtues of his view compared to the alternative introduced below. On the one hand, it might seem that plonking down a uniform standard (e.g., the truth norm, the knowledge norm) without much explanation as to why there is such a standard detracts from the explanatory power of a view (e.g., my view).²⁴ On the other, it might seem that if we don't have much insight into why

²³ See Owens (2000). Schroeder (2015) agrees and it's an important part of his understanding of the balance of reasons. Part of my response to McDowell's (1998) argument against disjunctivism is that there might be objective reasons not to believe in the bad case and no objective reason not to believe in the good case. This gives us a difference in reasons that explains the difference in knowledge and this lets us say that whilst being in the good case means that there's a difference in reasons, the difference isn't explained in terms of awareness of reasons that guarantee that we're in the good case. In this respect, my views are more similar to Schroeder's than McDowell's.

²⁴ In Littlejohn (2017), I try to explain why there should be a uniform standard for belief and why it should be knowledge in terms of two ideas. The first is that the standard tells us when a

certain reasons have the weights that they do or why certain things will or will not constitute reasons that weigh in favour or against, this detracts from the explanatory power of Schroeder's approach.

I'd like to say four things about the approach to the defeasibility of knowledge and rationality. First, we can see why Schroeder thinks that the case isn't a case of believing something for sufficient objective reason (i.e., because the subjective reason that constitutes the subject's reason is false). This approach isn't (and isn't meant to be) one we can generalise across all cases. It doesn't cover the case of knowledge from defeasible grounds. Moreover, it's not clear that it delivers the right verdict in all cases. If Schroeder's view says that when we infer something from a false belief we don't believe for sufficient objective reason, his account says that we always lack knowledge in such cases. Against this, I think there are counterexamples to counter-closure in which we reason from false beliefs and thereby acquire knowledge (e.g., Tiny Tim believes (and knows) there will be presents under the tree because he believes Father Christmas will deliver them).²⁵ Because of this, I have some worries about the explanatory power of his approach. In some cases, it seems to matter to whether we know whether Schroeder's subjective reasons are true. In some cases, it doesn't.

Second, while Schroeder might be right that the thing he'll describe as the insufficiency of subjective reason sometimes helps explain why we don't know, I don't know that it does in every case. Let me foreshadow something I'll say below. Think about cases of improbable knowing (e.g., Williamson's (2014) unmarked clock). If these cases are genuine, we have a case in which a subject can know even though the probability that they don't know is very close to 1. The case poses a problem for the Kantian view and its approach to defeat. Let ' p ' be the thing that is, according to Williamson, the strongest thing Agnes can know when she views the unmarked clock so that, on Williamson's description, we say Agnes knows p but the probability on her total evidence that she knows p is close to 0. Consider three theoretical options:

1. Agnes knows p but it's not reasonable for her to believe p ;
2. Agnes knows p and it's reasonable for her to believe p ;
3. It's not reasonable for Agnes to believe p and she doesn't know p .

My preferred option is (1), but here's the problem for the Kantian view. On the one hand, if we say that Agnes knows p , Schroeder's view says that she believes for sufficient subjective reason. And if we say that it's not reasonable for her to believe p , it's tempting to say that she doesn't believe for subjective reason. If we opt for (1), we either sever the connection between what's reasonable to believe and what we have sufficient subjective reason to believe (which seems costly) or we sever the connection between what we can know and what we have sufficient subjective reason to believe (which turns this into a counterexample to the Kantian view).²⁶ If we

belief can fulfil its functional role (which I take to be providing propositionally specified reasons for use to use in reasoning). The second is an account of which beliefs are fit to fulfil their function. I think that beliefs are fit for this function iff they constitute knowledge and *this* is why knowledge is the norm of belief.

²⁵ See Hilpinen (1988) and Luzzi (2010) for discussion of counter-closure (i.e., the idea that if we come to know (or justifiably believe) something inferentially, the supporting beliefs themselves must also have been knowledge (or justified)).

²⁶ For a defence of unreasonable knowledge, see Lasonen-Aarnio (2010). These cases make me worry also about Bird (2007) and Ichikawa's (2017) approach to justification. While I think there's a notion of justification that patterns with what we objectively ought to believe on which justified beliefs just are pieces of knowledge, they want an account of justification which is closer to my notion of rationality. It's supposed to tell us (roughly) what we subjectively ought to believe and capture that thing that BIVs can have when they believe they have hands. Bird and Ichikawa say that on their view a belief is justified even if it's not knowledge provided that a subject sufficiently like the believer has knowledge. My worry is that if we're trying to

opt for (2), we avoid this, but we have to swallow this bitter pill. We have to say that running incredibly high risks of believing without sufficient objective reason is compatible with believing for sufficient subjective reason.²⁷ I don't think our best account of the connection between the objective and subjective ought will let us take this view towards running known risks of believing or acting against (overall) objective reason. We shouldn't say, for example, that we need to be *certain* that we lack sufficient objective reason to respond in some way for it to be the case that we subjectively should not respond in that way. The problem with the third response, Williamson would argue, is that it leads to a form of scepticism.

Third, consider the treatment of environmental luck cases. Here's how Schroeder tackles this case:

If Jones sees something that looks like a barn in broad daylight, under ordinary circumstances we would take that to be an excellent objective reason to believe that it is a barn. But if he is in fake barn country, visual evidence of a barn is not such a great reason to believe he is seeing a barn after all (2015: 247).

What standard of goodness of reason is at play? If the goodness of reason were cashed out in truth-centric terms (e.g., reliability, probability), it's hard to see why the reasons couldn't be sufficiently good if the number of fakes were sufficiently small.²⁸ Even if the number were small, they still might threaten knowledge.

I have similar concerns about lottery cases. Suppose we don't have knowledge in such cases. On the Kantian view, this means we cannot believe for sufficient subjective and objective reason. Why couldn't we? I think it's hard to say why we cannot believe for sufficient subjective or objective reason in lottery cases without appeal to a standard like the knowledge norm to explain why there's decisive reason not to believe in such a case. If you asked me to explain why, say, we couldn't believe for sufficient subjective and objective reason in the lottery case *and* you told me that I couldn't help myself to the general norm that enjoins us not to believe things we wouldn't know, I'd struggle. I could say that you shouldn't believe such things because you know that there's some small chance that you'll be mistaken, that a policy that allowed such beliefs would permit us to believe inconsistent sets of propositions, or that this would allow us to believe things that won't be part of the best explanation as to why we have the evidence that we do. Would this move you? I don't think it should. In each case, there seem to be cases of knowledge in which these conditions aren't met. I suspect that at bottom the real reason we think that we shouldn't believe lottery propositions is that they are, in Sutton's (2007)

characterise this more subjective notion, it shouldn't be something that we can have when we know when it's also nearly certain on our evidence that we don't know. In my view, these accounts don't factor in risks of objective wrongfulness in the right way.

²⁷ Someone might ask why this possibility is any more problematic than the possibility that we believe a truth in spite of running incredibly high risks of believing a falsehood. If we generally allow that an arbitrarily high risk of failure is compatible with success, why don't we allow for it here? One answer is this. It seems that an important input into the theory of what a subject subjectively ought to do are clear intuitions about the rational management of certain risks. In this case, the risks might be that of failing to believe what she can know and believing something without knowing. If we say that someone subjectively ought to believe in spite of the enormous risk of believing without knowing, we seem to have overlooked the importance of handling the risk of believing without knowing. If we say that someone subjectively ought not believe in spite of there being nearly no risk at all of believing without knowing, we seem to have overlooked the importance of handling the risk associated with the wrongful omission.

²⁸ For a debate about whether the Kantian account handles environmental luck cases, see de Prado Salas (2016) and Whiting (2015). See also Schroeder's (2015b) reply.

terminology, known unknowns. This explains why we think we have decisive reason not to believe.²⁹

This is just a suspicion, but let me say something that might help motivate the concern. Consider an example:

Eye Exam. An eye doctor has you look into a device that flashes slides. You were asked to identify the number or letter that you see. In each case, the letter or number appears quite clearly to you. The exercise is a bit tedious as it goes on for quite some time without much by way of variability. The letters and numbers aren't particularly small or blurry. Your doctor says that you did very well and won't need glasses (Dutant and Littlejohn forthcoming b: 5).

Your doctor adds that you made one error.

Before being told that a mistake was made, each true belief you form could be knowledge. After you believe that the mistake was made, you could continue to retain your knowledge (and come to know something new—that a mistake was made) provided that you remember what you judged in these cases and didn't abandon your beliefs.³⁰ If I'm right about how much you can know, it's tempting to think that you can also continue to rationally believe.

How many beliefs might be rational in this case? It would be dogmatic to say that it's not rational to believe the doctor. It would be too externalist to say that some but not all might be rational. It would be too sceptical to say that none would be rational.³¹ This is a perfectly good case of rational inconsistency. You have rational beliefs in spite of the chance of error, in spite of the fact that you'd have an inconsistent set of beliefs, and in spite of the fact that it couldn't be the case that each belief is part of the best explanation as to why you have the evidence that you do.³²

²⁹ Of course, as Earl Conee has reminded me, some will say that we should believe lottery propositions. See McGlynn (2013), for example. This option isn't available to Schroeder if such propositions are things we know we cannot know. If we cannot know such things, we cannot believe them for sufficient subjective and objective reason. If we know that we cannot know them, we know we cannot believe them for such reasons. If it's possible to rationally believe such propositions even though we know we cannot know them, this would be a straightforward counterexample to Schroeder's Kantian view. For what it's worth, I think that it's clear that it's not rational to believe lottery propositions outright. Consider Conee and Feldman's suggestion that we only have sufficient evidence when our evidence "places the [truth of a] proposition beyond reasonable doubt" (2005: 103). It's generally agreed in the law and in philosophical discussions of the standard of proof that the kind of naked statistical evidence we have in lottery cases does *not* place the truth of the proposition beyond reasonable doubt. See Gardiner (2019), Littlejohn (2017), Smith (200), and Moss () for discussion of the insufficiency of naked statistical evidence for a criminal conviction and attempts to explain how we can lack sufficient evidence to believe lottery propositions when we have it to believe things via experience, testimony, memory, and so on.

³⁰ Make the numbers quite large if that helps. Make the grounds quite diverse if that helps and make this a geography exam, logic exam, a series of history exams, etc.

³¹ For a defence of this view, see Christensen (2004). For a dissenting view, see Ryan (1991, 1996).

³² For a defence of this kind of explanationist view, see McCain (2014). This view provides a nice explanation as to why we might not be rational in lottery cases, but I think it struggles with preface cases. Why can't each rational belief be part of the *best* explanation of your total evidence? The idea is that the best explanation would be a consistent explanans. If you divide your beliefs up into consistent subsets of beliefs, we could have two equally good explanations,

The things that people have said to explain why lottery beliefs cannot be rationally held (without appealing the knowledge norm) are things that suggest that our beliefs in preface cases cannot be rationally held (and the things that people tend to say to show that beliefs in the preface case are rational suggest that they should be rational in the lottery case). I have serious doubts about explaining the crucial sets of intuitions (i.e., that we can mostly believe for sufficient subjective and objective reason in preface cases but cannot in lottery cases) without invoking a knowledge norm to explain why some beliefs but not others are held for sufficient reason.³³

Consider one final case. On the Kantian view, if Agnes believes p but doesn't know p , she either fails to believe for sufficient subjective reason or for sufficient objective reason. If there's a case in which she believes and a lack of knowledge isn't due to one of these failures, we have a counterexample. We know little about what kinds of things might prevent objective reasons from being sufficient, but here's a test case. How do we handle cases involving conjunctions like, 'Dogs bark, but I don't know that they do'?

Obviously, this cannot be known. The question isn't whether it can be known, but whether we should think that the Kantian view has the resources to handle the case. We either have to say that we cannot believe this for sufficient subjective reason or cannot believe for sufficient objective reason. The case can be formulated in the third-person, so that rules out an explanation given in terms of subjective reasons.³⁴ Everything turns on whether we have to fail to believe for sufficient objective reason. We have almost nothing to go on here to explain why it would be impossible to believe for sufficient objective reason except that the thing cannot be known (e.g., it can be based on sufficiently good subjective reason, it can be true, etc.). If we have to appeal to the fact that it's not known to explain why it cannot be believed for sufficient objective reason, this comes very close to using the lack of knowledge to explain something about the ways that the reasons have to be balanced. If we do this, we seem to appealing to the knowledge norm to do explanatory work.³⁵ This is precisely what I'd urge everyone to do, but it seems that once we invoke this norm, we're no longer in the game of explaining everything in terms of the balance of reasons.

5. Knowledge and Defeat

but if neither is best, we couldn't explain how the beliefs could be justified and if some consistent set were the best, we couldn't explain how the others could be justified.

³³ These preface-type cases are particularly troubling for views that say that rational beliefs are rational because they're based on sufficient subjective reason where these views allow that these reasons might be falsehoods. (See, for example, Comesaña and McGrath (2016) account of perceptual justification.) It's one thing to say that we might have rational but inconsistent beliefs, but can we allow for inconsistent evidence? If having sufficient subjective reason implies having sufficient evidence and having sufficient evidence requires crossing *some* threshold of support, we face the problem that conditional probabilities are undefined when a subject's total evidence is inconsistent (and hence received probability 0). For discussion, see Williamson (2009). Once we allow for false evidence, there seems to be no principled restriction we could place on evidence to rule out inconsistent evidence.

³⁴ Agnes is the F but she doesn't believe that she is. She believes <The F believes p but doesn't know that p >. This belief couldn't constitute knowledge. The problem couldn't be that she fails to believe for sufficient subjective reason for had someone else been the F this belief could have constituted knowledge even if her subjective reasons were the same.

³⁵ We can explain why we cannot know the Moorean absurdities without invoking a knowledge standard, but it doesn't seem we can explain why this matters to believing for sufficient subjective or objective reason without appeal to such a standard.

There isn't some single thing that actions ought to aim at apart from ensuring that we do what we have most reason to do. It makes sense to think about the objective reasons, their weights, and the balance when trying to decide whether someone acted correctly or rationally. When it comes to belief, there *is* some single standard that governs all belief that can tell us whether and why we can or cannot have sufficient objective reason to believe something.³⁶ Beliefs, I say, are supposed to be knowledge. When they are, *that's* why there is sufficient objective reason to believe. When they aren't, *that's* why there's not sufficient objective reason to believe and there's sufficient objective reason not to believe. This might be where Schroeder and I disagree.³⁷

We see this play out in the cases that look like counterexamples to the no false lemmas view. In spite of a belief being based on a falsehood, it seems we can sometimes know and so should (objectively) believe. This is puzzling from the perspective of the Kantian view, but it isn't puzzling from the perspective of a view that uses knowledge to explain what sufficiency of reasons comes to. We see this play out in the lottery and preface cases. The prospect of coming to know is good in one case and not the other. This, I say, is why it seems we have sufficient reason to believe in one case and decisive reason not to believe in the other.

Suppose that belief is governed by norms such as these:

K-: If we are not in a position to know *p*, we should not believe *p*.

K+: If we are in a position to know *p*, we should believe *p*.

These norms tell us when (and why) we have or lack sufficient objective reason.³⁸ They do not tell us much about defeat, however, so the challenge is to use this to give an account of defeat that has as much explanatory power as the best alternative (i.e., Schroeder's account) without positing perceptual evidence to explain how perceptual beliefs might be rational in some cases and have rationality defeated in others.

Rationality defeat has to do with the subjective side of normativity. What we would be rational to believe pairs with what we subjectively ought to (or may) believe. What's irrational pairs with what we subjectively shouldn't believe.³⁹ Rationality defeat is a kind of toxicity. Rationality defeaters explain why we subjectively shouldn't believe. To give a theory of defeat, we need a theory of what makes belief irrational, which is to give a theory of what we subjectively shouldn't believe.

³⁶ If I understand Schroeder's view, the most unified thing we can say about correctness is that it's determined by the balance of reasons. I would appeal to a unified standard of correctness. Wedgwood (2017) says that it's truth. I say it's knowledge (Littlejohn forthcoming b). Schroeder (2015) and I agree that it's not (just) truth.

³⁷ For a defence of this point about the difference between belief and action and its connection to reasons, evidence, and rational regret, see Littlejohn (2012: 74).

³⁸ In what follows, I hope to address Ghijsen, Kelp, and Simion's (2016) concerns about whether there could be knowledge norms given our imperfect access to their application conditions.

³⁹ I prefer to characterise things in terms of objective and subjective 'ought', however, and won't explain anything in terms of subjective reasons. Some might think of what we subjectively shouldn't believe as what we think or believe we shouldn't believe (in some non-subjective sense). This fits with a historical understanding of the subjective 'ought', but I don't think that it's a plausible understanding of what the subjective 'ought' could be. In many cases of decision under uncertainty, we subjectively ought to do things that we're certain we shouldn't objectively do, after all. My preferred account of the subjective ought is (a) intended as an account of what rational believing consists in and (b) doesn't underwrite the link between the subjective ought and beliefs about some other ought because it tells us that what we subjectively ought to do is determined by the possible objective factors that determine what we objectively ought to do and the probabilities that these factors obtain. Thanks to Earl Conee for discussion on this point.

We have a key part of that story in front of us.⁴⁰ When we're certain that we objectively ought to ϕ (or objectively ought not ϕ), we subjectively should ϕ (or shouldn't ϕ). It's under conditions of uncertainty about whether we objectively ought to believe that it's hard to know whether we subjectively should believe. Here's my proposal. Under conditions of uncertainty about the objective reasons, we subjectively ought to respond in ways that are sensitive to certain risks. We ought to minimise expected objective wrongfulness. In the case of belief, if the objective standards governing belief are the knowledge norms, this comes to the idea that we subjectively ought to believe iff the probability that by believing we'll come to know is sufficiently high. We subjectively ought not believe iff it is not sufficiently high. What are defeaters? They are indicators of ignorance. We have partial defeat when something lowers the probability of coming to know. We have full defeat when that probability is brought below some threshold.

What we subjectively should believe is a function of two things, the strengths of the objective reasons to conform to K+ and K- and the probability that by believing (or not believing) we'll violate these objective norms. The theory of the subjective ought, I claim, gives us our theory of defeat. Some defeaters defeat by lowering the probability of a target proposition thereby raising the risk that we'll believe without knowing. Some raise the probability of not knowing without having any impact at all on the probability that our beliefs are true. On this account, all defeaters share something in common, which is that they are a sign or a warning that we're violating K-. They might function in slightly different ways depending upon what they indicate the particular flaw in our epistemic position might be (e.g., evidence that something is false, an indication that we're in an abnormal situation that's bad for the normal functioning of our cognitive processes, an indication that there are easy error possibilities, etc.).

The general idea is that we state a theory of rational belief and defeat together. To rationally believe something, the probability that the belief is knowledge has to be sufficiently high. A defeater is just evidence that we're in the bad case. How does this handle our cases? In some cases, it's certain that we won't know (e.g., the lottery case, Moorean absurdities), so it's certain that we subjectively shouldn't believe. In some cases, it's certain that we will know, so there's no defeat to worry about (e.g., the cogito).

Thinking about the preface case is helpful for thinking about this view. When the set of propositions is large enough, we might think of each proposition in that set is quite likely to be something we can know if we believe it. Because of this, the account says that in preface cases (but not lottery cases) we subjectively ought to believe. (In the case of each proposition, believing minimises expected objective wrongfulness.) Scale matters.⁴¹ As the number of known

⁴⁰ The account of defeat sketched here is developed in much greater detail in Dutant and Littlejohn (forthcoming). See also Dutant and Fitelson's (ms.) account of rationality in terms of knowledge-centred epistemic utility theory. One really nice thing about our knowledge-centred approach is that we identify some single standard that explains why all defeaters defeat and provides a much more straightforward account of higher-order defeat (e.g., hypoxia cases) and what we call negative self-appraisal defeat (e.g., cases where you have evidence that some particular belief isn't knowledge, isn't rational to hold, isn't supported by evidence, etc.). While some truth-centric views of rationality predict that it's rational to believe certain Moorean absurdities and that certain forms of epistemic akrasia are rational (e.g., Dorst's (forthcoming) or Sturgeon's (2020) Lockean view), the knowledge-centred view handles most of these cases without too much fuss.

⁴¹ Another case in which scale matters is in the case of negative self-appraisal. It's irrational to believe p and believe that you don't know that p . I think it's also irrational to believe p , believe q , and believe that you don't know both p and q . It's not irrational, however, to believe this p_1, p_2, \dots, p_n and to believe that at least one of these things isn't something I know if n is suitably large. This is some evidence that whether it's rational to believe depends upon some threshold of risk,

errors increases or the size of the set of relevant propositions is decreased, the probability that some proposition in that set is one we can know decreases. At some point, the risk of believing without knowing is too great and it's no longer rational to believe.⁴² Believing doesn't minimise expected objective wrongfulness but suspending does. As with the unmarked clock case, such a case presents us with hard choices if we characterise knowledge in terms of believing for sufficient subjective and objective reasons. We might think that there might be some case in which the number of known errors makes it too risky (i.e., unreasonable) to believe in light of the normative pressure to conform to K- and K+ even though we might think there is some real chance that if we believed something in the relevant set of propositions we could conceivably come to know. Perhaps this is another case in which what we objectively ought to believe and subjectively ought not believe causes trouble for the Kantian view.

What about perceptual cases? One way to think about perceptual knowledge without evidence is in terms of coming to know things on the basis of how things look. Following Millar (2000), I think that what's key to coming to know, say, that something is a barn by the look of the thing is that our disposition to judge is triggered by a distinctive look (i.e., a look that a barn has that non-barns you might easily encounter won't have). On the present proposal, we might say that an objective lack of a distinctive look defeats knowledge. (Think of the fake barn case.) Similarly, evidence that we're not keyed in to a distinctive look can function as a rationality defeater. (Think of misleading evidence about the presence of nearby ringers.) When it's certain that a look isn't distinctive, it's irrational to believe. When it's certain that a look is distinctive, it might be irrational not to. If we cannot be highly confident that a look is distinctive, suspension might be rational. The proposal tells us when it comes to the rationality of full belief, the risks to care about and the risk that's tolerable is determined by the weights of the objective reasons to conform to K- and K+. This gives us a general way to think about the ways in which the rationality of perceptual belief might be defeated and it gives us a way to think about defeater pairing but we didn't use the notion of perceptual evidence in this account.

The proposal sketched here must be the right way to think about defeat if (a) defeat is connected to rationality and the subjective ought in the way I've just suggested, (b) K- and K+ are the objective norms that govern belief, and (c) the subjective ought is characterised in terms of minimising expected objective wrongfulness.⁴³ Grant me the assumption that a full rationality

though not (just) the risk of error. I think that if you want to develop a view like Schroeder's, you can use the account sketched here to explain why some risks are such that they prevent us from having sufficient reason to believe and other risks are such that they don't. If we don't introduce probabilistic discounting of objective reasons into the picture of sufficient subjective reason, I don't see how we can account for the importance of scale. I find scale a helpful way of making vivid the points about risk and its relevance to rationality.

⁴² But what is that point? Is there some magic threshold? No. The threshold is determined by the strength of the relevant objective reasons. If we can give a cardinal representation of their strength, this gives us the threshold. It might be helpful to see Dorst's (forthcoming) defence of the Lockean view and derivation of a non-arbitrary threshold to see how this works in a value-centric framework and then think about whether we can consequentialise the present framework so that we can generate a threshold in the way that he does (i.e., by thinking about the undesirability of failing to attain good epistemic results and of bringing about bad epistemic results).

⁴³ For defences of this approach to the subjective ought, see Lazar (forthcoming) and Olsen (2018). One nice feature of this approach is that it explains why we sometimes should subjectively ϕ even when we know that we objectively should not ϕ and thus this allows for rationality and correctness to come apart in the ways that it must to allow for unreasonable knowledge and to retain the idea that while we subjectively shouldn't save all the miners we objectively ought to save all the miners. This approach also helps us deal with the problems that

defeater ensures that we subjectively shouldn't believe. The only way that this account of rationality and defeat could fail to be extensionally adequate is if (a) the relevant objective reasons are provided by something other than K- and K+ or (b) the subjective strength of the defeater is not proportional to the strength of the objective reasons and the probability that these reasons are actual.⁴⁴ Our intuitions about lottery cases, preface cases, and various cases in which the salient risk of believing without knowing waxes or wanes make me think that this account predicts our intuitions quite well.

Conclusion

I have addressed the three known arguments for thinking that perceptual justification requires perceptual evidence. The first sought to show that we need perceptual evidence for perceptual justification on the grounds that lacking evidence functions as a kind of defeater. I have argued that this is questionable if we don't have any good reason to deny that knowledge without evidence is possible. The only argument I've seen that directly aims to establish that this is impossible rests on assumptions about knowledge that few of us would defend. Perhaps the most promising case to be made for thinking that we need perceptual evidence comes from an idea, explored in Schroeder's work, that positing this evidence helps us understand the defeasibility of perceptual justification and knowledge. I offered an account of defeat that I believe improves upon his account. If the proposed account is correct and defeaters defeat because by giving us evidence that we're ignorant, my account explains the defeasibility of perceptual justification and knowledge without any commitment to perceptual evidence. So, while we can all agree that we shouldn't believe without sufficient reason (not 'reasons'), I still don't think we have sufficient reason or reasons to believe that we need perceptual evidence for perceptual justification.

Realising that we might not need evidence for justification should free us from the burden of trying to find ways in which experience is sufficiently belief-like to shoulder the epistemic burden of belief. Maybe only beliefs provide us with propositionally specified reasons for believing, feeling, and doing things. Even if normative reasons make the normative world go round, we might not need perceptual evidence. Maybe perception can make things evident without it.⁴⁵

References

- Adler, Jonathan. (2002). *Belief's Own Ethics*. MIT University Press.
- Anscombe, G.E.M. (1962). On Sensations of Position. *Analysis* 22: 55-8.
- Bird, Alexander. (2007). Justified Judging. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74: 81-110.
- Byrne, Alex. (2005). Perception and Conceptual Content. In E. Sosa & M. Steup (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Blackwell, pp. 231-50.
- Christensen, David. (2004). *Putting Logic in its Place*. Oxford University Press.
- Collins, Arthur. (1987). *The Nature of Mental Things*. University of Notre Dame Press.

uncertainty create for theories that try to characterise the deliberative ought in terms of sets of objective reasons discussed in Littlejohn (forthcoming).

⁴⁴ See Lazar (forthcoming) for further discussion of how easy it is to use the tools of decision theory to characterise a subjective ought in terms of probability and the possible grounds of the objective ought.

⁴⁵ Discussions with Maria Alvarez, Bill Brewer, Branden Fitelson, Dan Fogal, Benjamin Kiesewetter, Maria Lasonen-Aarnio, Errol Lord, Susanne Mantel, Mark Schroeder, Justin Snedegar, Matt Soteriou, Charles Travis, and Tim Williamson have been immensely helpful in formulating some of the ideas here. I would particularly like to thank Julien Dutant for collaboration on some of the ideas drawn upon in the later parts of the paper and Earl Conee for his extensive and insightful comments.

- Comesaña, Juan and McGrath, Matthew. (2016). Perceptual Reasons. *Philosophical Studies* 173: 991–1006.
- Conee, Earl and Feldman, Richard. (2004). *Evidentialism*. Oxford University Press.
- de Prado Salas, Javier Gonzalez. (2016). Schroeder and Whiting on Knowledge and Defeat. *Logos & Episteme* 7: 231-8.
- Dutant, Julien and Fitelson, Branden. (MS). Knowledge Centered Epistemic Utility Theory.
- Dutant, Julien and Littlejohn, Clayton. (Forthcoming). Defeaters as Indicators of Ignorance. In M. Simion and J. Brown (ed.), *Reasons, Justification, and Defeat*. Oxford University Press.
- Dutant, Julien and Littlejohn, Clayton. (Forthcoming). Justification, Knowledge, and Normality. *Philosophical Studies*.
- Fogal, Daniel. (2016). Reasons, Reason, and Context. In B. Maguire and E. Lord (ed.), *Weighing Reasons*. Oxford University Press, pp. 74-104.
- Foley, Richard. (2009). Beliefs, Degrees of Belief, and the Lockean Thesis. In F. Huber and C. Schmidt-Petri (ed.), *Degrees of Belief*. Springer.
- French, Craig. (2012). Does Propositional Seeing Entail Propositional Knowledge? *Theoria* 78: 115–27.
- Gardiner, Georgi. (2019). *The Reasonable and the Relevant: Legal Standards of Proof*. 47: 288-318.
- Ghijsen, Harmen, Kelp, Christopher, and Simion, Mona. (2016). Norms of Belief. *Philosophical Issues* 26: 375-392.
- Glüer, Kathrin. (2009). In Defence of a Doxastic Account of Experience. *Mind & Language* 24: 297-327.
- Goldman, Alvin. (1976). Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge. *Journal of Philosophy* 73: 771–91.
- Hilpinen, Risto. (1988). Knowledge and Conditionals. *Philosophical Perspectives* 2: 157–82.
- Hyman, John. (2015). *Action, Knowledge, and Will*. Oxford University Press.
- Ichikawa, Jonathan. (2017). *Contextualising Knowledge*. Oxford University Press.
- Kiesewetter, Benjamin. (2017). *The Normativity of Rationality*. Oxford University Press.
- Lasonen-Aarnio, Maria. (2010). Unreasonable Knowledge. *Philosophical Perspectives* 24: 1-21.
- Lazar, Seth. (Forthcoming). Duty and Doubt. *Journal of Practical Ethics*.
- Littlejohn, Clayton. (2012). *Justification and the Truth-Connection*. Cambridge University Press.
- Littlejohn, Clayton (2013). The Russellian Retreat. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 113: 293-320.
- Littlejohn, Clayton. (2014). The Unity of Reason. In C. Littlejohn and J. Turri (ed.), *Epistemic Norms*. Oxford University Press, pp. 135-54.
- Littlejohn, Clayton. (2017). How and Why Knowledge is First. In J. Carter, E. Gordon, and B. Jarvis (ed.), *Knowledge First*. Oxford University Press, pp. 19-46.
- Littlejohn, Clayton. (Forthcoming). Being More Realistic About Reasons: On Rationality and Reasons Perspectivism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Littlejohn, Clayton. (Forthcoming b). On What We Should Believe (and When (and Why) We Should Believe What We Know We Should Not Believe). In K. McCain and S. Stapleford (ed.), *Epistemic Duties*. Routledge.
- Littlejohn, Clayton. (Forthcoming c). Truth, Knowledge, and the Standard of Proof in Criminal Law. *Synthese*.
- Longworth, Guy. (2018). Surveying the Facts. In J. Collins and T. Dobler (ed.), *The Philosophy of Charles Travis*. Oxford University Press, pp. 237-60.
- Lord, Errol. (2013). *The Importance of Being Rational*. Princeton University.
- Logue, Heather. (2014). Experiential Content and Naive Realism: A Reconciliation. In B. Brogaard (ed.), *Does Perception Have Content?* Oxford University Press.
- Luzzi, Federico. (2010). Counter-Closure. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88: 673–83.
- McCain, Kevin. (2014). *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification*. Routledge.
- McDowell, John. (1998). *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality*. Harvard University Press.
- McGinn, Marie. 2012. Non-Inferential Knowledge. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 112: 1-28.

- McGlynn, Aidan. 2013. Believing Things Unknown. *Noûs* 47: 385–407.
- Millar, Alan. (2000). The Scope of Perceptual Knowledge. *Philosophy* 75: 73–88.
- Millar, Alan. (2019). *Knowing by Perceiving*. Oxford University Press.
- Moss, Sarah. (2018). *Probabilistic Knowledge*. Oxford University Press.
- Olsen, Kristian. (2018). Subjective Rightness and Minimizing Expected Objective Wrongdoing. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 99: 417-441.
- Owens, David. (2000). *Reason without Freedom*. Routledge.
- Pryor, Jim. (2000). The Skeptic and the Dogmatist. *Noûs* 34: 517–49.
- Raz, Joseph. (1999). *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action*. Oxford University Press.
- Ryan, Sharon (1991). The Preface Paradox. *Philosophical Studies* 64: 293-307.
- Ryan, Sharon. (1996). The Epistemic Virtues of Consistency. *Synthese* 109: 121–41.
- Schellenberg, Susanna. (2018). *The Unity of Perception: Content, Consciousness, Evidence*. Oxford University Press.
- Schroeder, Mark. (2015). Knowledge is Belief for Sufficient (Objective and Subjective) Reason. In T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, Volume 5. Oxford University Press, pp. 226-252.
- Schroeder, Mark. (2015b). In Defense of the Kantian Account of Knowledge: Reply to Whiting. *Logos & Episteme* 6: 371-382.
- Schroeder, Mark. (Forthcoming). Perceptual Reasons and Defeat. In M. Simion and J. Brown (ed.), *Reasons, Justification, and Defeat*. Oxford University Press.
- Shah, Nishi. (2003). A New Argument for Evidentialism. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56: 481-98.
- Siegel, Susanna. (2005). *The Contents of Experience*. Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Martin. (2016). *Between Probability and Certainty*. Oxford University Press.
- Srinivasan, Amia. (Forthcoming). Radical Externalism. *Philosophical Review*.
- Sturgeon, Scott. 2020. *The Rational Mind*. Oxford University Press.
- Sutton, Jonathan. (2007). *Without Justification*. MIT University Press.
- Swain, Marshall. (1979). Justification and the Basis of Belief. In G. Pappas (ed.), *Justification and Knowledge*. Reidel, pp. 25–51.
- Travis, Charles. (2013). *Perception: Essays after Frege*. Oxford University Press.
- Unger, Peter. (1975). *Ignorance*. Oxford University Press.
- Wedgwood, Ralph. (2017). *The Value of Rationality*. Oxford University Press.
- Whiting, Daniel. (2015). Knowledge is Not Belief for Sufficient (Objective and Subjective) Reason. *Logos & Episteme* 6: 237-243.
- Williamson, Timothy. (2000). *Knowledge and its Limits*. Oxford University Press.
- Williamson, Timothy. (2009). Replies to Critics. In P. Greenough and D. Pritchard (ed.), *Williamson on Knowledge*. Oxford University Press, pp. 279-85.
- Williamson, Timothy. (2014). Very Improbable Knowing. *Erkenntnis* 79: 971-999.