Higher-Order Defeat and Intellectual Responsibility

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**1. Introduction**

Recently, a number of scholars have been attracted to the phenomenon of higher-order defeat on doxastic justification. This is defeat caused by the so-called ‘higher-order evidence.’ Roughly, the kind of higher-order evidence that allegedly have defeating power are not evidence directly about the content of one’s belief but evidence that one’s belief is formed in an epistemically defective way. For example, it might be evidence that your belief in a mathematical proposition is a result of reasoning-damaging drug, or evidence that some of your perceptual belief is a result of hallucination. It’s widely accepted that, when you gain such kind of evidence, your belief is no longer doxastically justified. (Hereafter, I will call the higher-order evidence that allegedly has defeating power ‘HOD,’ and I will use ‘higher-order defeat’ to refer to the alleged phenomenon of defeat resulted by gaining HOD.)[[1]](#footnote-1)

Assuming that gaining HOD does defeat doxastic justification, we might wonder why exactly the defeat happens. Given that many theories of doxastic justification can be understood as fitting the schema of proper basing on propositional justifiers (see Turri 2010), we might attempt to explain higher-order defeat either by arguing that HOD defeats propositional justification or by arguing that it defeats proper basing. It has been argued that the former attempt is unpromising because a variety of prominent theories of propositional justification cannot account for higher-order defeat (Christensen, 2010; Lasonen-Aarnio, 2014). This leads some scholars to take the second attempt. (See Smithies 2015 and Wietmarschen 2013.)

In this paper, I criticize this second attempt, and I defend the first attempt by arguing that a theory of propositional justification that requires intellectual responsibility can nicely explain why exactly HOD defeats justification. My proposal is that HOD defeats doxastic justification by defeating propositional justification, and it defeats propositional justification because there is in principle no intellectually responsible way to maintain the original beliefs due to the presence of HOD.

The question of why higher-order defeat happens is important. First, the answer will substantially constrain our theories of justification. For why exactly a belief is defeated speaks a lot about why exactly a belief is justified. A theory of justification would be defective if it cannot explain why an important kind of defeat happens. So, if my argument were successful, it would give us a strong reason to believe that justification requires intellectual responsibility. And since the responsibility condition is most amenable to deontological theories and virtue theories of justification, my discussion will provide a strong reason to move towards these two kinds of theories.

Second, seeing why higher-order defeat happens will help explain what makes the so-called ‘level-bridging principle’ true. Roughly, the principle bans holding a belief while simultaneously believing that it is epistemically defective.[[2]](#footnote-2) The principle has recently been recognized for its important role in several scholars’ arguments for some important conclusions about epistemic rationality or justification (hereafter, I will use ‘rationality’ and ‘justification’ interchangeably).[[3]](#footnote-3) However, although the principle is intuitive and although violating it brings unwelcome commitments (Horowitz, 2014), there has been little work devoted to grounding the principle, namely, to explaining what makes the principle true. This is unsatisfying. (Compare: skepticism is unintuitive and it brings unwelcome commitments, but it would be good if we can positively explain what makes the skeptic’s argument wrong.) I believe that a positive story about why higher-order defeat happens will provide such a ground: we can explain what makes the level-bridging principle true by explaining exactly why evidence for the higher-order belief defeats the first-order belief.

My paper proceeds in the following way. In section 2, I clarify the notion of HOD. In section 3, I criticize the proposal that HOD makes our beliefs unjustified not by defeating propositional justification but by making our beliefs no longer properly based on propositional justifiers. In section 4, I propose that HOD defeats propositional justification, and I support this proposal by explaining how including intellectual responsibility as a required condition of propositional justification can nicely account for higher-order defeat. Section 5 concludes the paper.

**2. What is a HOD?**

As above-mentioned, HOD is evidence that one’s belief is formed in an epistemically defective way. To see what exactly the defect involves, consider the following paradigm examples of HOD discussed in the literature on higher-order evidence.

Drug

I am a student in a logic class. I believe that I have just solved the logical puzzle given by the professor. But then I receive evidence that the coffee I just had was slipped some drug that undetectably harms one’s logical reasoning ability. (Christensen, 2010, p. 187)

Sleep Deprivation

A doctor just made a diagnosis for a patient based on the symptoms he observes. But then he is reminded that he has been awake for 36 hours. (Christensen, 2010, p. 186)

Hypoxia

A pilot is considering whether he has enough fuel to make it to Hawaii. Based on his past experience and his calculation of how much fuel is needed, the pilot believes that he can make it to Hawaii. But then he gets evidence that he is in a state of hypoxia, a condition that often undetectably harms pilots’ reasoning. (Lasonen-Aarnio, 2014, p. 315)

How should we characterize the HOD in these examples? There are two answers in the literature. The first one says that it’s evidence that one’s belief is *irrational*. For example, Christensen (2010, p. 185) characterizes HOD as evidence that one’s belief is ‘rationally sub-par’ or evidence of one’s ‘rational failure.’ (Also see Lasonen-Aarnio 2014, pp. 315-6.) The second characterization describes HOD not as evidence of *irrationality* but as evidence of *unreliability*, namely, evidence that one is unlikely to reach a true belief in the current situation (Christensen, 2016, p. 397.)

Which characterization we should choose depends on what theories of rationality we hold. If rationality is essentially the same thing as reliability, as reliabilists tend to think, then evidence of irrationality is the same thing with evidence of unreliability. And thus it doesn’t make much difference which characterization we choose. But if rationality is essentially a matter of conforming to what one’s evidence supports, as evidentialists tend to think, then evidence of unreliability will be broader than evidence of irrationality. To the extent that irrational beliefs are often unlikely to be true, evidence of irrationality will often also be evidence of unreliability. But evidence of unreliability is not limited to evidence of irrationality. In this case, characterizing HOD as evidence of irrationality will be *too restrictive* because it will leave out many instances of defeaters that intuitively should be classified as HOD. For example, the doctor in Sleep Deprivation might gain evidence that, although his diagnosis is rational because it’s supported by the actual evidence he possesses, his lack of sleep makes him unreliable in noticing crucial symptoms of the patient. Such defects in *collecting* or *identifying* evidence will also make the doctor unlikely to give a correct diagnosis—It’s not an uncommon phenomenon that, although a doctor correctly assesses what his current observation supports, he fails to give a correct diagnosis because he fails to notice a crucial symptom. So, when the doctor gets evidence that he is unable to notice certain crucial symptoms, his belief might be defeated even if it’s not evidence that he is unable to correctly assess the probative force of his evidence.[[4]](#footnote-4) That is, in this case, the doctor’s evidence of sleep deprivation is evidence of unreliability, even if it’s not evidence that his belief is irrational (in the evidentialist sense of irrationality). So, if we want to allow that an evidentialist theory of rationality might be correct, it’s better to characterize HOD as the broader notion of evidence of unreliability.

This characterization enables us to see how HOD connects to the other two types of defeaters that we are familiar with: rebutting defeaters and undercutting defeaters. Suppose one justifiably believes *p* based on one’s evidence E. A rebutting defeater is evidence attacking the content of the belief: it’s evidence that *p* is false. And an undercutting defeater is evidence attacking the evidential connection: it’s evidence that E doesn’t support *p*. (See Pollock and Cruz (1999, p. 196).) These two types of defeaters relate to HOD in the following way. (1) Rebutting defeaters are a relatively weak kind of HOD. This is because evidence that *p* is false is also evidence that you’ve reached a false belief about *p* and thus some weak evidence of your unreliability; (2) Undercutting defeaters are also some weak kind of HOD: they are evidence that you’ve misjudged the evidential connection between E and *p* and thus some (relatively weak) evidence of your unreliability in reaching a true belief about *p*. But in those cases where E is your *only* evidence about *p*, undercutting defeaters will also be strong HOD. For in such cases, evidence that E doesn’t support *p* is evidence that you have no good evidence about *p* to rely on, and thus it’s evidence that you are unlikely to reach a true belief about *p*.

Despite these close connections, HOD still differs sharply from the two familiar types of defeaters to deserve the recent booming interest in it. To see this, I should first point out that there are ‘pure’ HOD—HOD that are neither rebutters nor undercutters, or more exactly, HOD that are strong enough to require you to suspend judgment and yet the element of rebutting or undercutting is at best very weak. Imagine that you are a student working on whether a mathematical proposition holds. One day you think that you have constructed a proof of the proposition from some axioms. You have checked the proof many times and it is in fact correct. But then your professor tells you it is incorrect, without telling you whether the proposition is false or whether the axioms you appeal to do entail the proposition. Particularly, he says, “correctly proving the proposition or proving its negation requires certain highly sophisticated skill that is far beyond your current mathematical capacity, so whatever ‘proof’ you think you’ve got is probably wrong.” In this case, you get strong evidence that your proof is wrong, and this evidence is *not* strong evidence that the entailment is not there, since you should think that your giving a wrong proof is better explained by your lacking the crucial skill than by the absence of the entailment. In this case, you get a strong HOD—strong enough to require you to suspend judgment—but at best a weak rebutter and undercutter. Evidence that *your* proof is incorrect is only weak evidence that the proposition is not entailed by the axioms (perhaps there are tons of other proofs) and even weaker evidence that the proposition is not true.[[5]](#footnote-5)

So, we do have pure HOD. It’s evidence that you are unlikely to reach a true belief about the proposition in question due to drug, hallucination, or some other condition that impairs cognitive abilities, without being evidence about whether the proposition is true or whether it’s supported by your original evidence. The bottom line is that pure HOD is evidence about *your* performance in the process of reaching an attitude about the proposition in question. That *you* are unlikely to reach a true belief about the proposition or about the evidential connection in question tells us little about whether the proposition is true or whether the evidential connection is there.[[6]](#footnote-6) Hereafter, when I talk about HOD, I refer to pure HOD unless otherwise stated. (I do this mainly because of theoretical interests. It’s interesting to see how pure HOD works, given that HOD is introduced into the literature as a kind of defeaters differing from the traditional rebutting or undercutting defeaters. I don’t assume that pure HOD must work in a different way from rebutters or undercutters.)

**3. The Proper Basing Proposal Fails**

**3.1 Motivation for the Proper-Basing Proposal**

It’s common nowadays to distinguish propositional justification from doxastic justification. The distinction corresponds to the distinction between saying ‘one *has justification* to believe that *p*’ and saying ‘one’s belief that *p* *is justified’* (or ‘one is justified in believing that *p*’). According to an orthodox schema, doxastic justification is propositional justification plus proper basing. (For a list of prominent epistemologists who explicitly endorse this schema, see the references given in Turri 2010, pp. 3-5.)[[7]](#footnote-7) One has propositional justification to believe a proposition *p* when one has good reason to believe that *p*. But to have doxastic justification in believing that *p*, having good reasons is not enough; one’s belief must also be properly based on those good reasons. Given this schema, we might wonder whether HOD defeats doxastic justification by defeating propositional justification or by defeating proper basing.

Since the introduction of the notion of HOD, several scholars have argued that, for a broad variety of theories of propositional justification, it’s hard to see how higher-order defeat happens. The core idea of their argument is that gaining HOD wouldn’t automatically imply that one’s belief doesn’t fit one’s total evidence, or that there is no reliable process that would produce the belief if operated, or that there is no good epistemic rule recommending holding the belief, etc.

For instance, Christensen (2010, pp. 195-7) has argued that the evidentialist theory of propositional justification—according to which to have propositional justification for one’s belief *p* is for the belief to be supported by one’s total evidence—cannot account for higher-order defeat.[[8]](#footnote-8) No matter whether one’s total evidence supports *p* when it makes *p* probable or when it reliably indicates *p*, HOD leaves the evidential connection intact (remember that I am talking about *pure* HOD, which is evidence solely about *your* reliability, without being evidence about *p* or about the evidential connection.) That is, if your original total evidence E supports *p* before you gain HOD, E still supports *p* when you gain HOD. And since HOD has nothing to do with whether *p* is true, that your original total evidence E still supports *p* seems to imply that your current total evidence E&HOD also supports *p*. So, evidentialism predicts that HOD doesn’t defeat propositional justification.

Reliabilist theories of propositional justification fares no better in accounting for HOD. Consider Lasonen-Aarnio’s argument (2014, pp. 325-6). Suppose that, in a case like Drug, my belief in the solution of the puzzle is originally produced by an infallible logical faculty that I possess. When I get the drug evidence, it seems that this 100% reliable logical faculty would still be available. So I still have propositional justification to believe the theorem. And even if a reliabilist adds a condition like ‘there must be no alternative, equally reliable process available to one that would not result in a belief in p,’ the difficulty persists: It seems that no alternative process by which I might come to give up believing in the theorem due to HOD would be 100% reliable.

Given that these prominent theories of propositional justification fail to predict that one no longer has propositional justification when gaining HOD, it’s tempting to suspect that HOD defeats doxastic justification not by defeating propositional justification but by defeating proper-basing. The suspicion is that HOD makes one’s belief doxastically unjustified by making it no longer properly based on one’s propositional justifiers. Let’s call this ‘the proper basing proposal’ or ‘PB’ for short.

PB sounds plausible. It’s tempting to think that, if you get evidence that you are unreliable in assessing the evidential connection, your belief is no longer justified because somehow you should no longer ‘rely on’ your original evidence, even if the evidence still supports your belief. In fact, Christensen (2010) comes close to endorsing this proposal when he suggests that HOD defeats justification by requiring one to ‘bracket’ one’s original evidence. Although he doesn’t explain clearly what ‘bracketing’ is, it’s not quite a stretch to say that to bracket one’s evidence is to ‘not rely on’ one’s evidence or ‘not base’ one’s belief on the evidence. In what follows, I explore how PB might be developed and I argue that it faces severe difficulties.

**3.2 *Basing* versus *Proper* Basing: Two Versions of PB**

Before I get into PB’s difficulties, I want to clarify what exactly the PB theorist’s task is. What he must explain is not only how gaining HOD makes one’s belief *in fact* improperly based, but also how the HOD makes it *impossible* for one’s belief to be properly based—impossible given one’s epistemic situation. For if the evidence merely makes one’s belief improperly based as a matter of fact without making proper basing impossible, then such evidence shouldn’t require one to *give up one’s belief*; instead, what one should do is to continue to hold that belief but *revise the way in which the belief is based*. But this is not how the defeating effect of HOD is taken. Those who take higher-order defeat seriously think that we should really suspend judgment upon getting such HOD, not just to rebase our original belief.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Now that we are clearer on PB’s task, we can distinguish two versions of PB. The first version focuses on the ‘basing’ part: It says that HOD defeats justification by making one’s belief no longer *based* on good reasons, even if one still has good reasons. The second version focuses on the ‘proper’ part: It says that HOD makes one’s belief no longer *properly* based on good reasons.

The first version is clearly implausible. Apparently, how one’s belief is based is a purely psychological process, a process about how the belief is formed or maintained, and gaining a piece of evidence needs not change this psychological process. No matter what evidence one gains, it’s entirely *possible* for one to hold one’s belief on the same basis. It’s entirely *possible* for one to ignore the new evidence, acting as if one has never gained the evidence in the first place.

This verdict is confirmed by major theories of basing in play. (For good overviews of basing, see Korcz (2010) and Sylvan (2016).) Consider the doxastic theory first, which roughly says that one’s belief that *p* is based on a reason R just when one has some meta-belief to the effect that R supports *p*. This theory predicts that HOD needn’t make my belief no longer based on good reasons—if I initially have a meta-belief to the effect that R supports *p*, I could still hold the belief when gaining HOD.

Or consider the causal theory of basing, which says that one’s belief that *p* is based on a reason R if this belief is non-deviantly causally sustained by R. Since gaining HOD needn’t change the causal sustaining chain of my belief that *p*, if the belief is originally non-deviantly sustained by R, it could remain so and thus it could still be based on R.

In sum, gaining HOD doesn’t need to make my belief no longer *based* on good reasons. So, the first version of PB fails. Later on, when I refer to PB, I mean the second version of it, which says that HOD makes my belief no longer *properly* based.

**3.3 What is Proper Basing?**

First, we need to get clear on the notion of proper basing. When one believes that *p* based on evidence E, what makes the basing proper?

To understand what proper basing is, a short review of how the term ‘proper basing’ comes into view is in order. Originally, the orthodox schema about how doxastic justification relates to propositional justification is framed into the claim that one has the former when one’s belief is *based* on the latter. (Or even if there is occasional mention of ‘proper basing,’ when talking about what turns propositional justification into doxastic justification, the basing relation is often emphasized while the term ‘proper’ is often ignored. Again, see Turri 2010, pp. 2-5 for helpful references). The additional requirement of *proper* basing is introduced or emphasized by proponents of the schema mainly as a reaction to Turri 2010. In that paper, Turri argues against the orthodox schema by raising some counterexamples. In the first example, a detective comes to believe that John is the murderer by inferring it from a body of excellent evidence (fingerprints, witnesses’ testimonies, etc). So, his belief is based on the evidence. However, he only infers that John is the murderer from his evidence because he consults some tealeaf reading that says that the evidence makes it highly likely that John is the murderer. Clearly, the detective’s belief is not doxastically justified, although it’s indeed based on the propositional justifiers. In the second counterexample, the subject comes to believe that (P3) <The Spurs will win> by inferring it from his knowledge that (P1) <The Spurs will win if they play the Pistons> and knowledge that (P2) <The Spurs play the Pistons>. So, the subject’s belief P3 is indeed based on his propositional justifiers. However, the subject infers P3 not by doing a modus ponens but by relying on this rule: for any proposition *r*, P1 and P2 implies *r*. Again, the subject’s belief is doxastically unjustified even though it’s based on his propositional justifiers.

As a response to these counterexamples of the original formulation of the orthodox schema, some defenders of the schema draw the lesson that doxastic justification requires not just *basing*, but *basing in a proper way* (thus the term ‘proper basing’), on the propositional justifiers. (See, for instance, Smithies (2015, p. 2782) and Silva (2015, p. 954).) Intuitively, the subjects’ beliefs in Turri’s examples are not properly based on the propositional justifiers. Moreover, they think that Turri’s examples suggest a natural understanding of what proper basing is when one’s belief is inferential. In the examples, the subjects’ beliefs are based on his evidence because it’s inferred or reasoned from the evidence, but the basing process is improper because the reasoning is bad. So, whenever one’s basing involves reasoning, the basing is proper when the reasoning is good. (Suggestion of this view of proper basing can be found in Smithies (2015, p. 2782) and van Wietmarschen (2013, p. 414-5).

Now, we have some understanding of what proper basing is for an inferential belief. What about non-inferential beliefs? No explicit answers have been offered by those defenders of the orthodox schema, partly because Turri’s counterexamples are all about inferential beliefs as they stand.However, it seems that a causal theory of basing comes in handy at this place. We can say that the proper basing of non-inferential beliefs involve some kind of appropriate causation, ‘appropriate’ in a broadly reliabilist sense.[[10]](#footnote-10)

In sum, proper basing can be understood in the following way. When a belief *p* is based on something E, the basing is a process transitioning from the mental state representing or involving E to the mental state of believing that *p*. If the transition is inferential, then the basing is proper when the reasoning involved is good. If the transition is non-inferential, then the basing is proper when the relevant causal process is reliable. Given that this sounds a good approximation of what proper basing is, let’s assume that it’s along the correct line and see if PB would work.

**3.4 Difficulties for PB**

PB faces an immediate difficulty in accounting for how HOD defeats the doxastic justification of a non-inferential belief. According to the above understanding of proper basing, a non-inferential belief that p is properly based on the basis E when the belief is caused by E and the causal process is reliable. But as we have discussed in section 3.1, gaining HOD allows availability of a reliable process. That is, gaining evidence of unreliability doesn’t imply that any available process that would lead one to retain the belief would be unreliable. But if a reliable process is available, there is simply no reason to think that the process couldn’t operate in the presence of HOD and thus there is no reason to think that one’s belief couldn’t still be properly based. For example, suppose that my belief that the president is in New York is produced by my 100% reliable belief-forming process of clairvoyance. Suppose that I gain a misleading HOD that I am affected by a drug that causes my clairvoyance to be unreliable. Since the HOD is misleading, the clairvoyance process can continue to operate and thus can still produce the belief that the president is in New York. When this process continues to produce the belief, the belief will still be properly based.

So, PB faces difficulties in explaining higher-order defeat of non-inferential beliefs. In what follows, I argue that this difficulty will also cause a problem in cases of inferential beliefs. A part of my argument is that the PB theorist has to claim that the higher-order defeat of inferential beliefs traces back to the higher-order defeat of non-inferential beliefs. So, their difficulty in accounting for the latter implies difficulty in accounting for the former.

First, let’s see how a PB theorist might explain why HOD makes an inferential belief improperly based. In a recent paper, van Wietmarschen (2013, pp. 414-5) argues that one’s belief cannot be a result of good reasoning when gaining HOD. (Smithies 2015, p. 2787 offers a similar explanation.) This is because when one gains HOD, the reasoning behind one’s maintaining the original belief involves dismissing the HOD as misleading. Since such dismissal is unjustified, a reasoning that involves such dismissal will be bad reasoning. Take Drug as an example. The reasoning that leads one to retain the belief that *p* must involve the belief that one is not drugged. But the belief that one is not drugged is unjustified due to the HOD that strongly supports that one *is* drugged. In short, the reasoning in Drug becomes bad because it must take the form ‘E; and I am not drugged; therefore, *p*’ and the second premise is unjustified.

Although this explanation sounds appealing, it won’t work. In Drug, *if* ‘E; and I am not drugged; therefore, *p*’ is a form that my reasoning to *p* *must* take in order for me to keep my belief, then it’s true that my belief that *p* cannot be properly based. But the problem is that this is not a form my reasoning *must* take, because my reasoning *doesn’t need* to involve the belief that I am not drugged. To see this, think about what reasoning from one’s evidence E to *p* amounts to: it’s to believe that *p* because one *takes E to support p*. No step in the reasoning has to mention anything about whether one is drugged. If E is my evidence (and this is not changed by the drug evidence), my reasoning to *p* from E will at most involve a belief *that E supports p*. I don’t need to form any belief about *whether I am drugged*.[[11]](#footnote-11) If I believe that E supports *p* and for this reason I believe that *p*, my belief that *p* is still a result of reasoning from E. Perhaps my actual psychology is that when I believe that E supports *p* I would also believe that I am not drugged. But the point is that it’s only the former belief that must figure in my reasoning to *p*. The latter belief, justified or not, is *not* part of my reasoning and therefore doesn’t make my reasoning to *p* bad.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Now, a PB theorist will push back in this way: it doesn’t matter whether what figures in my reasoning is a belief of not being drugged or a belief about the evidential support. For even if it’s the latter, my reasoning will still be bad, because my belief about the evidential support will also be unjustified due to the drug evidence.

If a PB theorist makes this move, he is essentially saying that HOD defeats one’s first-order belief by defeating the second-order belief about evidential support. This move faces two severe problems.

First, it only applies to a limited range of higher-order defeat. Recall that HOD is evidence of unreliability, namely, evidence that one is unlikely to reach a true belief in the circumstance. It’s true that, in some cases such as Drug, such unreliability is generated by unreliability in assessing evidential connection. But as I have discussed in section 2, the unreliability could also be generated by unreliability in *collecting* or *identifying* evidence. If so, we could imagine a variation of Drug in which the drug only affects one’s ability in collecting or identifying evidence and leaves one’s ability in assessing evidence intact. In such a case, if one initially held a justified belief about the evidential connection, one still does so when acquiring the evidence of being drugged. So, PB couldn’t account for higher-order defeat in such cases. This is the first problem with the PB’s theorist move that HOD defeats first-order belief by defeating the second-order belief about evidential support.

Second, even in those cases where the unreliability in question involves unreliability in assessing evidence, the PB theorist still faces a severe difficulty. In these cases, it’s presumably true that one’s second-order belief about the evidential connection is unjustified. So, the PB theorist can indeed tell a plausible story about why the higher-order defeat happens at the level of one’s first-order belief. However, the PB theorist will run into a problem in explaining why the defeat also happens at the second-order level. Let me explain.

The first thing to note is that, when one’s belief about the evidential connection is defeated because one gains evidence that one is unreliable in assessing evidence, the defeat happing to one’s second-order belief would also be an instance of higher-order defeat. For evidence of unreliability in assessing *whether E supports p* is HOD about *whether E supports p*, in the same sense that evidence of unreliability in assessing whether *p* is HOD about *p*. So, a PB theorist should explain how the defeat happens at the second-order level—the level involving the belief ‘E supports p.’

How would a PB theorist explain the higher-order defeat at the second-order level? For the sake of consistency, he has to say that the second-order belief is defeated because it’s rendered improperly based by the HOD. So, the upshot is this: the PB theorist has to trace the improper basing of one’s first-order belief that *p* to the improper basing of one’s second-order belief that E supports *p*.

But this would lead to a regress. For if we ask how my second-order belief is rendered improperly based by the HOD, the PB theorist will have to appeal to the improper basing of third-order beliefs about evidential support, beliefs such as ‘E\* supports ‘E supports *p*’.’ The regress would be unproblematic if it could go on forever, that is, if we could have increasingly higher-order beliefs about evidential support. But the regress couldn’t go on forever. Eventually we will reach a belief about evidential support that is not inferred from further evidence (call these ‘basic evidential beliefs’). Consider beliefs of the form ‘‘if P then Q’ and ‘P’ support ‘Q’’ or of the form ‘that human beings have observed P everyday in the past supports that P will be true tomorrow.’ It’s a familiar point that justifiably holding these basic beliefs cannot require that these beliefs be inferential, since any inference from the putative further evidence to those beliefs would be circular. If these beliefs are non-inferential, then as we have discussed in section 3.3, the proper basing of such beliefs might only involve reliable causation. But as we have seen in section 3.1, gaining HOD doesn’t need to make a reliable process unavailable. In fact, it’s hard to see how the HOD in Drug or Hypoxia would make one unreliable in forming such basic evidential beliefs. Evidence that I am drugged so that my ability is damaged in solving a logical puzzle needs not be evidence that I am not able to judge things as basic as whether ‘P’ and ‘if P then Q’ supports Q.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Now, let’s review the process of how the above two problems arises for PB to account for higher-order defeat in an inferential belief. Suppose my belief that *p* is a result of inference from evidence E. The PB theorist claims that HOD defeats my belief that *p* by making it improperly based. Since proper basing in inferential beliefs can be understood as good reasoning, he will have to say that the HOD ruins my reasoning from E to *p*. But given that I still have evidence E when acquiring HOD, my reasoning from E to *p* would be good if I believe that *p* because I justifiably hold the second-order belief that E supports *p*. So, the PB theorist will have to say that the HOD makes the second-order belief unjustified. This suggestion faces two severe problems. First, it doesn’t apply when the HOD is not about one’s unreliability in evidence-assessment but about one’s unreliability in evidence-collection. Second, in explaining why the higher-order defeat happens at the second-order level, the PB theorist has to trace the improper basing to the improper basing of one’s basic evidential beliefs, but it’s hard to see how such basic beliefs are rendered improperly based by the HOD in typical cases of higher-order defeat.

To conclude, it’s implausible to say that HOD defeats one’s doxastic justification by making one’s belief improperly based. Assuming the schema that doxastic justification is proper basing on propositional justifiers, we should reconsider the proposal that HOD defeats doxastic justification by defeating propositional justification. In the next section, I cash out this proposal by arguing that, unlike traditional evidentialist or reliabilist theories of propositional justification, a responsibilist theory of propositional justification can nicely account for higher-order defeat.

**4. The Responsibility Proposal**

This is my explanation of why HOD defeats doxastic justification: when one gains HOD, one no longer has propositional justification to hold one’s belief because there is in principle no responsible way to maintain one’s belief in the presence of HOD. In what follows, I will first explain what the responsibility condition means; then I will explain how this condition can be used to explain higher-order defeat. If I am successful, this lends strong support for the view that doxastic justification requires responsibility, a view that is regaining traction in the recent development of theories of justification (see Peels 2016a and 2016b).

**4.1 What Is Responsibility?**

As a warm up to understand the responsibility condition, let me note that there is a familiar kind of counterexample to evidentialism that resembles cases involving higher-order defeat in the following two respects: the subject’s belief is properly based on evidence that supports the proposition believed, and yet intuitively the belief is unjustified. These are the so-called cases of ‘defective inquiry.’ Consider this case from Baher (2009, p. 547):

Defective Inquiry

George represents the epitome of intellectual laziness and obliviousness. He goes about his daily routine focusing only on the most immediate and practical of concerns. He lacks any natural curiosity. Unsurprisingly, he holds many beliefs he shouldn’t. Among them is the belief that exposure to second-hand smoke is harmless to health. He believes so because he remembers that some years ago a reliable source tells him that this is confirmed by a considerable amount of research. However, this belief is attributable to his intellectual laziness and obliviousness. Had he been slightly more attentive to the well-publicized research on the risk of secondhand smoke, he wouldn’t hold this belief.

In this example, George’s belief fits the evidence he has. After all, he has no reason to doubt the reliability of the source in question or the reliability of his memory. And his belief is properly based on his memory. But it seems that he *shouldn’t* hold the belief. If justified beliefs are those one should have or at least is permissible to have, then it seems that George’s belief is unjustified.[[14]](#footnote-14)

What makes George’s belief unjustified? A natural answer is that it’s unjustified because it’s a result of intellectual irresponsibility. That is, George has certain intellectual obligations when it comes to belief-formation, and he doesn’t do what’s reasonably expected to ensure that he meets those obligations. Just like a father is responsible in handling a situation involving his children when he does what he is obligated to do with regards to his children, and a judge is responsible in ruling a case when he does what he is obligated to do with regard to the ruling, a person is responsible in holding a belief when he does what he is obligated to do with regard to the belief.

What are these obligations that generate responsibility? The answer depends on where obligations come from. I will not discuss the issue in detail here, but it’s plausible to claim that an agent’s obligations sometimes come from the very role the agent plays (Feldman, 2000, p. 676). So, a father has the obligation to do what he’s reasonably expected to ensure that his children have good life, because it’s constitutive of being a father that a father has this obligation; a judge has the obligation to do what’s reasonably expected to ensure that justice is served, because it’s constitutive of being a judge that a judge has this obligation; and a believer has the obligation to do what he is reasonably expected to ensure that he holds a true belief, because it’s constitutive of being a believer that a believer has this obligation. So, in Defective Inquiry, George is irresponsible in his belief-formation: as a normal adult living in the 21st century, he is expected to be aware of the well-publicized evidence supporting the harmfulness of second-hand smoking. His ignorance of the evidence shows that he doesn’t do what’s reasonably expected to ensure that he holds a true belief about the issue.

What emerges from the above discussion is the following characterization of responsibility:

(R) One is responsible in holding a belief that *p* just in case that, in forming and maintaining the belief, one does what’s reasonably expected to ensure that one believes that *p* if and only if *p* is true.

I will leave it vague as to what counts as ‘reasonable expectation’ except to say that it depends on the agent’s evidential situation. This is appropriate, considering that responsibility in other areas is also not a clear-cut notion. When we claim that a judge is responsible in ruling a case when he does what’s reasonably expected to ensure that justice is served, the claim is well understood even if the notion of reasonable expectation is also left vague. Similarly, our intuition in Defective Inquiry is clear that George doesn’t do what’s reasonably expected to ensure that he holds a true belief about whether second-hand smoking is harmful, even though the notion of reasonable expectation is vague.

The idea that justification requires the sense of responsibility as is put in (R) is not new. It’s suggested in Chisholm (1977), Kornblith (1983), and Wedgwood (1999). The idea has recently been defended by a series of works of Peels (2016a, 2016b), who argues—convincingly in my opinion—that the responsibility condition is under-appreciated in the literature on theories of justification.[[15]](#footnote-15) I won’t repeat their arguments here. Rather, I will defend this idea by explaining its power in handling higher-order defeat.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**4.2 How the Responsibility Condition Accounts for Higher-Order Defeat**

Consider this common case of *moral* irresponsibility. A judge is about to be assigned to a case. But then he gets strong (although misleading) evidence that the defendant in the case is his old lover who has cheated on him. Given his conflicted feelings toward the lover, there is no way to predict how he will perform on the ruling. Perhaps his residual feeling will lead him to rule in her favor, or perhaps his hatred will lead him to rule against her. Despite the conflicted feelings, the judge refrains from recusing himself.

The judge in this example is being morally irresponsible. Given the evidence, he should think that it’s not very likely for him to rule justly. If so, our reasonable expectation is that he recuses himself from the case. So, when he refrains from recusing himself, he is not doing what’s reasonably expected to ensure that justice is served.

Intellectual responsibility works in the same way. When you get evidence that you are not very likely to reach a true belief in the situation, deciding to keep your belief is intellectually irresponsible. You would not be doing what’s reasonably expected to ensure that you hold the belief if and only if it’s true. In fact, as long as the HOD is present, *there is no responsible way* for you, or for any person in your current evidential situation, to maintain the belief at the moment. This is why HOD makes you no longer have propositional justification to hold your belief. So, here is my ‘responsibility proposal’:

(PJR) S is propositionally justified at t in believing that p only if, in principle,

there is a responsible way for a person in S’s evidential situation at t to hold

the belief that p.

Two notes about PJR are in order.

First, PJR is about what *propositional* *justification* requires, and thus it’s more specific than the above-mentioned idea that justification requires responsibility. That idea merely says that doxastic justification requires that one’s belief is actually responsibly held; it leaves open whether responsibility is a requirement of propositional justification or a requirement of proper basing.

Second, as a requirement on propositional justification, PJR requires only that there is *in principle* a responsible way to hold the belief; it doesn’t require that there is a responsible way for the subject in question. And in determining whether there is a responsible way in principle, we should not factor in the subject’s cognitive limitations but should consider whether a somewhat idealized person can responsibly hold the belief in the subject’s evidential situation. So, when S has evidence that P and also evidence that P entails Q but is so dead drunk to responsibly coming to believe Q by performing the simple inference of modus ponens, S still has propositional justification for believing Q because a person with better cognitive capacity than S at the moment can responsibly come to believe Q by performing the inference.[[17]](#footnote-17)

I hope that these notes make PJR clearer. In what follows,I explain PJR in greater details and I argue that it has various important virtues in dealing with the phenomenon of higher-order defeat.

**4.2.1 Accounting for how pure HOD defeats justification.** Note that the judge in the above example doesn’t have evidence that he will be likely to rule *unjustly*; he only has evidence that it’s not very likely that he will rule justly. And this evidence is enough to make it irresponsible for him not to recuse himself. Similarly, for HOD to imply irresponsibility in retaining belief, it doesn’t need to be evidence of anti-reliability (i.e. evidence that you are likely to reach a false belief). It only needs to be evidence of unreliability (i.e. evidence that you are not likely to reach a true belief). Therefore, PJR can nicely account for how *pure* HOD defeats justification.

**4.2.2 Accounting for all cases of higher-order defeat.** Unlike PB, PJR applies to all cases of higher-order defeat. All cases of higher-order defeat involve evidence of unreliability in reaching a true belief. No matter whether the unreliability in question is unreliability in assessing evidence or unreliability in other respects like collecting or identifying evidence, when you acquire evidence of unreliability, maintaining your belief is not doing what’s reasonably expected to ensure that you hold a true belief.

Note that, for HOD to defeat justification, it doesn’t matter whether you form the higher-order belief that you are unreliable. For instance, in Drug, even if the student stubbornly believes that he is not being drugged, it’s still irresponsible for him to retain his first-order belief about the solution to the logical puzzle. If he stubbornly believes that he is not being drugged despite the clear evidence suggesting otherwise, he is being irresponsible in holding the higher-order belief (the belief that he is not being drugged). This irresponsibility in holding the higher-order belief will trickle down to his first-order belief, since it’s clear that if the former is unlikely to be true then the latter would also unlikely to be true.

I should note that, although irresponsibility in one’s higher-order beliefs could trickle down to one’s first-order belief, irresponsibility in one’s first-order belief doesn’t always need to be traced back to irresponsibility in one’s higher-order belief. Especially, it doesn’t need to be traced back to irresponsibility in beliefs of the form ‘E supports *p*.’ Recall Defective Inquiry. George might justifiably believe (and thus also responsibly believes) that his memory evidence supports that second-hand smoke poses no risk to health. And yet he is still irresponsible in holding the first-order belief. So, unlike PB, PJR won’t lead to a regress.

**4.2.3 Accounting for the particular defeating effect of HOD.** PJR not only explains how HOD defeats justification but also captures the particular defeating effect that defenders of higher-order defeat have in mind. In my discussion of PB, I have mentioned that HOD is typically taken to require one to suspend judgment, not just to hold the belief in a new way. This defeating effect is captured by PJR because, when you have HOD, there is simply no way for you or any other person in your evidential situation to responsibly hold the belief. As long as you have the HOD, it will be irresponsible to maintain the belief, no matter how you revise the basing process of the belief. Of course, there will be a responsible way to hold the belief if you do further check and find that the HOD is misleading (for example, you can collect further evidence and find that you are actually not drugged). But this would place you in a different evidential situation. What matters is that, *given* your current evidential situation, there is in principle no way to responsibly hold the belief.

To further see how PJR accounts for the particular defeating effect that proponents of higher-order defeat have in mind, it’s helpful to consider what happens when you lack HOD and yet out of paranoia you form the higher-order belief that you are unlikely to reach a true belief about *p*. In such a case, this paranoid belief would also make it irresponsible for you to maintain the belief that *p*. (That is, although believing that you are *not* being drugged when you have the drug evidence wouldn’t save you from being irresponsible, believing that you *are* drugged without the relevant drug evidence would make you irresponsible). However, this paranoia doesn’t imply that you no longer have propositional justification to hold your belief. This is because, given your evidential situation, there *is* in principlea responsible way to hold the belief, a way that is available for another person who doesn’t have your paranoid higher-order belief. So, what you should do is to give up the paranoid belief of being drugged, not your original first-order belief.

**4.2.4 Accounting for why evidence of irrationality that is not evidence of unreliability lacks defeating power.** In section 2, I have argued that we should characterize HOD as evidence of unreliability rather than evidence of irrationality. This claim is nicely vindicated by PJR, for PJR implies that evidence of irrationality has no defeating power when it’s not also evidence of unreliability. When evidence of irrationality is not also evidence of unreliability, it doesn’t make it irresponsible for one to hold the belief. This is because, as I’ve said, responsibility is tied to obligations. We have responsibilities to do what we are obligated to do. And our most fundamental intellectual obligation as a believer is to make sure that we hold true beliefs. We might have further obligations, such as obligations to make sure that our belief is rational or is knowledge, but these obligations are derivative from the obligation to believe the truth.[[18]](#footnote-18) So, we don’t have responsibility to ensure that our beliefs are rational that is *above and beyond* the responsibility to ensure that our beliefs are true. Therefore, we cannot be accused of being irresponsible if we maintain belief in the presence of evidence of irrationality when that evidence is not also evidence of unreliability.

**4.2.5 Dissolving a putative dilemma resulted by higher-order defeat.** The last but not the least important virtue of PJR is that it can dissolve a putative dilemma resulted by higher-order defeat (or by the level-bridging principle). The dilemma arises in those cases where one’s total evidence still supports the believed proposition when gaining HOD. In those cases, one is required to keep one’s belief since one is required to believe whatever is supported by evidence, but one is also required to suspend judgment given the HOD (otherwise one will violate the level-bridging principle.)

Thus far, reactions to the dilemma include: to deny higher-order defeat and perhaps also the level-bridging principle (Lasonen-Aarnio, 2014)[[19]](#footnote-19); to claim that we are not required to believe what’s supported by evidence at all (Worsnip, 2015; Littlejohn, 2015); and to simply accept the dilemma (Christensen, 2007a; 2010). All options have serious costs.

PJR can dissolve the dilemma without incurring any costs. It will claim that, although we normally have the obligation to believe whatever is supported by evidence, we don’t have such obligation when there is HOD. Consider this question: why would we think that we have the obligation to believe whatever is supported by evidence? A plausible answer is that believing according to evidence is normally the best way to try to fulfill our intellectual responsibility, namely, to ensure that we hold true beliefs. But when we acquire HOD, this is no longer the best way to try to fulfill our responsibility. Instead, we would violate our responsibility with regard to truth if we maintain the belief that is in fact supported by evidence. So, it’s no wonder that evidential support would lose its normative power when we have HOD.

The key to this dissolution of the dilemma is to recognize that we don’t have *fundamental* intellectual obligation to believe whatever is supported by evidence, and we don’t have *fundamental* intellectual obligation to respect HOD (or the level-bridging principle.) The only fundamental intellectual obligation we have is to do what is reasonably expected to ensure that we hold true beliefs. So, when the norm of believing what’s supported by evidence gives a verdict inconsistent with the one given by our fundamental norm, the norm’s normative power will be overridden. It’s the same case with the norm of respecting HOD. In our actual world, respecting HOD is largely helpful in fulfilling our fundamental obligation. But if you were to live in such a world where you find that respecting HOD has systematically led you to miss out on true beliefs (because, unlike our world, HOD in that world is largely misleading), then the norm of respecting HOD would not help fulfilling our fundamental obligation and thus would lose its normative power.

To sum up, PJR has various benefits: It covers all cases of higher-order defeat; It avoids the problems that PB faces; It captures the distinctive defeating power of HOD; It explains why evidence of irrationality that is not also evidence of unreliability has no defeating power; And it dissolves an important dilemma resulted by higher-order defeat. Besides, PJR is not ad hoc. As above-mentioned, PJR is in line with the idea that justification requires responsibility, an idea that has a prominent history and has received serious defense recently. So, we should seriously consider the idea that propositional justification (and thus doxastic justification) requires intellectual responsibility.

**5. Conclusion**

In this paper, I have argued against the proposal that HOD defeats doxastic justification by making one’s belief improperly based, and I argue that it’s better to think that HOD defeats doxastic justification by defeating propositional justification. I cash out this idea by explaining how treating the condition of there being a responsible way to hold one’s belief as required for propositional justification can nicely account for higher-order defeat. My arguments, if successful, would lend strong support for the view that responsibility is required for propositional justification and thus is required for doxastic justification. After all, the issue of how the doxastic justification of a belief is defeated is closely connected to the issue of what doxastic justification involves. So, a theory of justification that can nicely explain defeat is preferable to a theory that cannot. And insofar as responsibility is closely connected to deontological theories and virtue theories of justification, this paper also supports thinking of justification in deontological or virtue-theoretic terms.[[20]](#footnote-20)

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1. Prominent proponents of the reality of higher-order defeat include: Christensen (2007a, 2007b, 2010), Elga (2013), Feldman (2005), Foley (2001), Huemer (2011), and Kelly (2010). However, although the phenomenon of higher-order defeat is widely noted, its reality is not uncontroversial. Deniers include: Coates (2012), Lasonon-Aarnio (2010, 2014), and Williamson (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All defenders of higher-order defeat listed in fn. 1 also accept level-bridging. Besides, Broome (2013), Greco (2014), Horowitz (2014), Ichikawa and Jarvis (2013), Smithies (2012), Titelbaum (2015), and Ye (2015) have defended level-bridging. And the deniers listed in fn. 1 also reject level-bridging. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For example, the principle is crucial in: Foley’s (1990) argument that it’s impossible to give a sufficient condition of rationality, Christensen’s argument (2007a; 2010) for epistemic dilemmas, Littlejohn’s (2015) argument against evidentialism, and Worsnip’s (2018) argument that epistemic rationality is not about believing what’s supported by evidence but about maintaining coherence. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. One might doubt whether this is possible by reasoning this way: If one correctly judges that one’s evidence E supports one’s belief p, then evidence that one is unable to notice potential disconfirming evidence is not a defeater, because if E supports p, it would also support that the potential disconfirming evidence is unlikely to obtain (that is, if P(p/E) is high and yet P(p/E&e) is low, then P(e/E) must be low). Therefore, evidence of deficient ability in collecting evidence is not a defeater, because one could be confident that a piece of disconfirming evidence would be unlikely to obtain even if one looks for it with good evidence-collecting ability.

   In reply, I think the above reasoning is correct in general, but not in those cases where P(p/E) is just a little higher than the threshold for rational belief and P(p/E&e) is just a little lower than that threshold. In such cases, P(e/E) needs not be below the threshold. That said, I should note that the possibility of such cases rests on the controversial assumption that there is a sharp threshold on how probable a proposition must be in order for one to rationally believe it. Thanks to a reviewer for raising the above objection and for pressing me to think about this issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In explaining how HOD differs from undercutting evidence, Christensen (2010, pp. 194-5) argues that the former often leaves the evidential support intact. It seems that this is not a good way to characterize the difference. For if one’s original evidence E supports *p*, undercutting evidence that E doesn’t support *p* also doesn’t need to make it the case that E no longer supports *p* (Worsnip, 2015, pp. 21-30). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The reverse might not be true: that you are quite *capable* in assessing the evidential connection can tell us something about the connection when we learn what your judgment about the connection is. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Note that this schema is neutral on which kind of justification is more fundamental. For instance, a reliabilist might think that doxastic justification is more fundamental because propositional justification can be defined in terms of availability of belief-forming process that would produce doxastically justified beliefs if operated. (Goldman (1979) defines ‘ex ante justification’ this way, which is a notion close to ‘propositional justification.’) This definition would still imply that doxastic justification is propositional justification plus proper basing, with the basing condition understood in this way: one’s belief is based on a process if it’s produced by the process. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Wietmarschen (2013, pp. 401-9) has argued that the HOD provided by peer disagreement doesn’t undermine evidential support when one’s original reasoning is close to ideal reasoning. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For example, Christensen (2010) argues that one should suspend judgment in those paradigm examples of HOD. Besides, both defenders and deniers of the level-bridging principle (as is listed in fn. 2) think that, if higher-order evidence has defeating power, it requires giving up the belief and not just rebasing it. See, for example, Lasonen-Aarnio (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This understanding can accommodate the proper basing of the evil-demon victims’ non-inferential beliefs, if we accept some reliabilist explanation of how these victims’ beliefs are in fact reliable. For example, we can follow Goldman by claiming that the victims’ beliefs are properly based because they are *actually* or *normally* reliable.

    Moreover, even if you have doubts about any such explanation and thus have doubts about whether reliability is necessary for proper-basing of non-inferential beliefs, presumably you can still accept that reliability is *sufficient*. This acceptance is enough for my purpose. For my criticism of PB in section 3.2 is that one’s non-inferential belief can still be properly based when gaining HOD because it can still be produced by a reliable process. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Note that here I am interpreting ‘taking E to support *p*’ as a belief that E supports *p*, in order to be most charitable to the PB theorist. If the taking is a belief, at least it initially sounds plausible to say that the belief is problematic because it is rendered unjustified by the drug evidence. But if the taking is not a belief but some state like a disposition to believe *p* given E, then it’s unclear how it could be rendered problematic by the drug evidence—the most natural way to problematize a disposition is to render it unreliable and the drug evidence won’t make the disposition unreliable. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for bringing up this possible answer: Perhaps the PB theorist could say that even if my reasoning doesn’t involve the belief that I am not drugged, it still presupposes this belief in the sense that the reasoning is incompatible with believing that I am drugged. My response is that it’s hard to see how the drug belief is incompatible with the reasoning. It seems that for a piece of reasoning to be good reasoning, it’s sufficient that all of its premises are justified (which I argue is possible in the latter discussion) and one infers the conclusion by following a good rule. Perhaps the belief that one is drugged can induce some higher-order doubt on whether one’s reasoning is good. But it seems that one could carry out a perfect reasoning while doubting whether the reasoning is good. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. To further support this point, consider a prominent theory about what these basic evidential beliefs are based on. According to Boghossian (2014), my basic belief that ‘P’ and ‘if P then Q’ supports ‘Q’ is based on my grasp of the meaning of the term ‘if.’ Since evidence that I am drugged so that I am not able to solve the logical puzzle needs not be evidence that I don’t grasp the meaning of the term ‘if,’ the drug evidence needs not be evidence that the above basic belief of mine couldn’t be properly based. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. On whether this deontological talk of justification is appropriate in the context of attacking evidentialism, see Baehr 2009, ft. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I should mention that Conee and Feldman (2004, p. 233) reject the idea that justification requires responsibility in their response to cases like Defective Inquiry. They distinguish ‘current-state justification’ from ‘methodological justification.’ The former is about what to believe given one’s current evidence; the latter is about what method to adopt given one’s goals (which might include one’s cognitive goals). So, George’s belief is justified in the former sense, although it’s unjustified in the latter sense since he has used a bad method in the past. Moreover, in an earlier paper (Feldman and Conee, 1985, pp. 21-3), they distinguish between epistemic justification from prudential justification to handle cases like Defective Inquiry, and they claim that George’s belief has the former although it lacks the latter.

    My response is that, even if their distinctions can handle cases like Defective Inquiry, it cannot explain higher-order defeat. Gaining HOD doesn’t imply that one has used a bad method in the past. (In some cases, HOD can be *evidence* that one has used bad method in the past, but this evidence can be misleading.) Besides, intuitively, HOD does make one’s belief *epistemically* unjustified. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Note that the requirement of responsibility is separate from requirement of proper basing. That one’s belief is irresponsibly formed doesn’t mean it’s improperly based. In Defective Inquiry, George’s belief is irresponsibly formed since he is lazy in collecting evidence. However, his belief is still a result of good reasoning from his evidence, so it’s still properly based on his evidence.  [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for the discussion here. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. One reason to think so is that we can easily explain where the fundamental obligation of believing the truths comes from—it comes from the constitutive truth aim of belief. But if we claim that believers also have fundamental obligation to make sure that their beliefs are rational or are knowledge, it’s hard to give a similar story: a belief doesn’t have a constitutive aim to be rational or to be knowledge. See Wedgwood (2002) for more discussion on the truth aim of belief. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Titelbaum’s (2015) position is subtler: he denies higher-order defeat but still maintains the level-bridging principle. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For comments and discussion, I am grateful to Sophie Horowitz, David Christensen, Nico Silins, Jin Zeng, Lu Teng, and Matt Lutz. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)