Epistemic Norms and Epistemic Functions

Mona Simion

COGITO Epistemology Group, University of Glasgow
mona.simion@glasgow.ac.uk
Preface

Some of the material in this book draws on and further develops ideas that have been published in earlier papers. Here is a relevant overview:

Chapter #1:

Chapter #3:
(Forthcoming) Knowledge First Functionalism. Philosophical Issues: A Supplement to Nous.

Chapter #5:

Chapter #6:
(Forthcoming) Testimonial Contractarianism, Nous;

Chapter #7:
# Table of Contents

Preface 2

Foreword 4

Part 1: Epistemic Normativity: Foundational Issues 8

Chapter 1: What Are Epistemic Norms? 9
Chapter 2: Knowledge First Functionalism 30

Part 2: Norms of Belief 64

Chapter 3: Knowledge, Belief and Warrant 65
Chapter 4: Reasons, Evidence and Defeat 87
Chapter 5: The Belief/Assertion Commonality Assumption 112

Part 3: Assertion, Action, and Reasoning 130

Chapter 6: Assertion, Knowledge, and Function 131
Chapter 7: No Epistemic Norm for Action 160
Chapter 8: Practical and Theoretical Reasoning 169

References 180
Foreword

This study develops an integrated, naturalistic account of epistemic normativity. Its central thesis is that the epistemic is an independent normative domain organized around one central etiological function: generating knowledge.

We often believe without sufficient evidence, assert based on hunches, or rush into action without checking the facts. When we do, we are subject to criticism. This suggests that our beliefs, assertions and practical reasoning are governed by epistemic norms. The issue of what these epistemic norms are has been the subject of hot debates in recent literature. Say that it turns out that one of the extant accounts of the normativity of practical reasoning, assertion or belief is correct; will that fully meet our concern with the relevant norm? The answer is ‘no’. One crucial question still remains to be answered, i.e., the rationale question (RC): why that particular action/mental state is/should be governed by the respective epistemic norm in the first place.

With very few exceptions, RC is not addressed by contributors to the debate. However, in the absence of a rationale, it is not clear why a different norm might not have come to be governing the act/mental state in question. The need for rationale is pressing in its own right, independently of finding a satisfactory account of what the correct norm at issue is: an extensionally adequate theory is not the same as an explanatorily adequate theory. Furthermore, an integrated account of the epistemic normativity of belief, assertion, practical and theoretical reasoning, grounded in such a rationale, is still missing on the market.

In this book, I take on the rationale project; my primary aim is to develop a functionalist, integrated account of the normativity of reasoning, assertion and belief, in conjunction with
a general account of epistemic functions and their normative import. The view of epistemic normativity defended here has two main ambitions: naturalistic friendliness and normative independence. It is naturalistically friendly in that the thesis that lies at the heart of this account is that reasoning, assertion and belief have etiological epistemic functions that give rise to prescriptive epistemic norms. As such, the epistemic norms governing reasoning, assertion and belief are taken to drop right out of their etiological epistemic functions in a unitary, integrated way. The account is, at the same time, a declaration of independence for epistemic normativity: the epistemic is taken to be an independent normative domain, organized around the function of generating knowledge.

Here is the game plan:

Part 1: Epistemic Normativity: Foundational Issues

Chapter 1. What Are Epistemic Norms? What makes an epistemic norm distinctively epistemic? According to the received view, it is content that matters: if a norm N specifies the epistemic properties required for permissibly believing, asserting, acting etc., then N is an epistemic norm. The central aim of this chapter is to show that the received view is false: in line with general normativity, content is not a reliable indicator of normative source. Norms with epistemic content need not be epistemic norms. I put forth an alternative, value-theoretically neutral way to individuate epistemic norms, and show that it is superior to the received view.

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1 The main ambition of this book is constructive. As such, I will spend less time on critical discussion of rival views, and restrict my discussion to the closest-in-spirit and most prominent competitors to the various accounts I will develop here.
Chapter 2. Knowledge First Functionalism. This chapter motivates and develops the central functionalist approach to epistemic normativity, which will be employed throughout the book. On this view, epistemic norms are generated by associated epistemic functions, in the same way in which biological norms are generated by biological functions. Finally, I compare my account with its main functionalist competitors and show that it does better in terms of normative and extensional adequacy.

Part 2: The Norm of Belief

Chapter 3. Knowledge, Belief and Warrant. This chapter develops a novel account of the norm for belief. According to this view, epistemically permissible beliefs are beliefs formed via properly functioning processes that have the function of generating knowledge. The account is functionalist in that it takes the norm of belief to be generated by the epistemic function of our belief forming processes. It is knowledge first in that it takes the function at stake to be the generation of knowledge.

Chapter 4. Reasons, Evidence, and Defeat. This chapter is up to an ambitious task: it aims to develop an integrated account of warrant, reasons, evidence and defeat. On the view developed here, normative reasons for belief are indicators of norm compliance: they indicate that, conditional on proper basing, the corresponding beliefs will be knowledgeable. They are essential good-making building blocks of the warrant-conferring belief forming process: one way in which the process can fail to function properly is by taking up the wrong kind of facts.

Chapter 5. The Belief/Assertion Commonality Assumption. This chapter mounts a case against the widely accepted ‘commonality assumption,’ that is, the thesis that belief and assertion are subject to the same epistemic normative
requirements. I look at extant arguments in defence of the commonality assumption and show that they rest on incorrect value-theoretic assumptions.

Part 3. Assertion, Action, and Reasoning

Chapter 6. Assertion, Knowledge and Function. This chapter develops a novel view of the normativity of assertion, which I dub *Assertion Functionalism*. In a nutshell, on this view, knowledge is both necessary and sufficient for epistemically proper assertion in virtue of assertion’s epistemic function of generating testimonial knowledge in hearers. It is a constitutive norm, in that assertion’s function of generating knowledge contributes to the explanation of the continuous existence of the speech act.

Chapter 7. No Epistemic Norm for Action. The literature tends, with very few exceptions, to lump discussions of the epistemic norm of action together with discussions of the epistemic norm of practical reasoning. This chapter argues that this generates important theoretical costs. Since epistemic norms are associated with epistemic functions, epistemic norms will only govern particular action types that have distinctively epistemic functions. However, while there is no epistemic norm of action in general, the question as to whether there is an epistemic norm of practical reasoning remains open.

Chapter 8. Practical and Theoretical Reasoning. I argue that practical reasoning serves the epistemic function of generating knowledge of what one ought to do. In virtue of this, practical reasoning will be governed by a corresponding epistemic norm, borne out by this function. This picture, if right, sharply separates action and practical reasoning normatively. At the same time, it provides us with an exciting opportunity to unify reasoning: practical and theoretical reasoning will turn out to be governed by
the same epistemic norm – knowledge - in virtue of serving the same epistemic function: generating knowledge of the conclusion.

Part 1:

Epistemic Normativity: Foundational Issues
Chapter 1

What Are Epistemic Norms?

1.1. Introduction

What makes an epistemic norm distinctively epistemic, as opposed to say, moral, prudential, aesthetic, etc.? It is fair to say that the most widely accepted answer to this question is that a norm is epistemic just in case it regulates the epistemic properties required for permissibly phi-ing. For instance, if a norm regulates how much evidence for \( p \) I need in order to permissibly believe that \( p \), then it is an epistemic norm.\(^2\) Let’s call this view CONTENT INDIVIDUATION (CI).

At the same time, not everyone is on board with CI. What’s interesting is that, among recent critics of the view, the perhaps most prominent view is eliminativism about the epistemic. Roughly, the thought here is that there is no satisfactory answer to be found to the question as to what makes a purportedly epistemic norm distinctively epistemic and that, as a result, the thing to do is simply remove the term ‘epistemic’ from the philosophical lexicon, at least as a modifier of norms.\(^3\)

This chapter shares the pessimism of eliminativists about CI and the optimism of champions of CI about there being such things as distinctively epistemic norms. It argues that our technical term ‘epistemic norm’ will be perfectly able to pick out a

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\(^2\) See e.g. (Benton 2014), (Brown 2010), (Maitra 2011), (Lackey 2013), (Gerken 2014); see also Section #1.4 for discussion.

\(^3\) See e.g. (Hazlett 2016): ‘I argue that “epistemic” is ambiguous: it is sometimes used to mean “of or relating to knowledge” and sometimes to mean “of or relating to belief.” I raise some worries about this ambiguity, and sympathetically consider the prospects for eliminating “epistemic” from our philosophical lexicon.’ See also (Cohen 2016) and section #3 for discussion.
respectable normative category once we abandon CI as individuation procedure. The chapter has two aims: first, it argues that CI is both normatively and extensionally inadequate, and that it gets us in trouble in several debates in epistemology and beyond. Second, I propose a better way to individuate epistemic norms. In a nutshell, according to the proposal I will develop here, epistemic norms should be individuated by their association with distinctively epistemic values. What makes a norm a distinctively epistemic norm is the fact that it is associated with an epistemic value. I dub this view VALUE INDIVIDUATION (VI).

Here is a game plan: Section #1.2 motivates the need for an individuation criterion. In Section #1.3 I identify a set of desiderata for a satisfactory way to individuate epistemic norms. Section #1.4 takes a closer look at CI and argues that it fails, as it does not satisfy a number of the relevant desiderata. In Section #1.5, I introduce VI and defend it. Finally, in the last section (#1.6), I conclude.

1.2. Epistemic Norms: Why Care?

Consider the term ‘moral’. It is no exaggeration to say that this term is reasonably well understood even among non-philosophers and that we competently deploy it frequently. Just note how often we say things like ‘That’s immoral’ or ‘The morally right thing to do is such-and-so,’ etc.

In this respect there is an important difference between the term ‘moral’ and the term ‘epistemic’. The latter is neither well understood, nor is it competently deployed very frequently. We don’t say things like ‘That’s unepistemic’ or ‘The epistemically right belief to form here is such-and-so,’ etc. Unlike ‘moral’, ‘epistemic’ is (still) philosophers’ jargon.
One important consequence of this is that the need for a criterion for individuating type-specific norms is particularly pressing in the case of epistemic norms. Of course, it would be nice to have a precise criterion for what makes a certain norm a distinctively moral norm. Even so, it may be less pressing here since we have some independent handle on the issue thanks to our understanding of the term ‘moral’. What’s more, we can use intuitions about when ‘moral’/’not moral’ are correctly applied, which embody this understanding, in an effort to (at least partly) reverse engineer a relevant criterion. In contrast, in the case of ‘epistemic’ we don’t have an independent handle on the issue, or at least not an equally good one. Likewise, we have considerably less reason to be optimistic about a reverse engineering project.

Of course, this is not to say that we cannot use intuition at all. For instance, it seems pretty clear that the norm that one ought to change a flat tire on one’s car is not an epistemic norm. Rather, the point here is that while the meaning of ‘moral’ may well be sufficiently settled to delineate a class of distinctively moral norms, the same is not true of ‘epistemic’. By the same token, the onus is still on us epistemologists to delineate a class of epistemic norms with sufficient clarity. There is a particularly pressing need for an individuation criterion here.

Furthermore, note that even if one is a sceptic about epistemic normativity per se, it is undeniable that ‘epistemic norms’ exist as a technical term: philosophers have been debating over the correct ‘epistemic norm’ for belief, judgment, practical reasoning, action, assertion, telling, explaining and so on for several decades already. Here is Stew Cohen (who credits Jessica Brown):

> Perhaps technical expressions can have more in common with natural language expressions than I am allowing. How do natural language expressions get their meaning? Certainly, a large part of the story is
that they acquire their meaning by being used in a particular way by a community of speakers. Can we say that a technical term like 'epistemic' acquires its meaning by being used in a particular way by a very specialized community—the community of epistemologists? If so, then when epistemologists talk about epistemic justification, what they are talking about is determined by how they have been using that expression (2016, 7).

Even if one doubts the normative force of the epistemic domain, then, there is still pressing need to get clear on what we are talking about (or in the business of talking about) when we talk about epistemic norms. Indeed, sceptics themselves need a clearly defined technical notion of 'epistemic norm' in order to even get started in the business of denying that the technical term maps on to anything in the normative landscape proper.

This need is further exacerbated by the fact that, without a clear individuation criterion, epistemologists might end up talking past each other when they debate such things as epistemic justification, the epistemic norm of assertion, etc. This worry has been voiced by Jennifer Lackey in connection to the epistemic norm of assertion:

For now, whenever evidence is adduced that concerns the epistemic authority requisite for proper assertion, it may bear on the norm of assertion or it may bear on these other [...] norms. [...] It will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to tell which is being defended (Lackey 2011, 277).

Consider, also, Stew Cohen’s (admittedly somewhat more general) worry about this issue:
Epistemologists’ use of the term ‘epistemic’ has led to serious confusion in the discussion of epistemological issues. The source of the problem is that ‘epistemic’ functions largely as an undefined technical term. This confusion has infected discussions of the nature of epistemic justification, epistemic norms for evidence gathering, and knowledge norms for assertion and belief (2016, 839).

These considerations all highlight that giving a clear enough criterion for individuating epistemic norms (or ‘epistemic norms’) is a task we epistemologist need to tackle with some degree of urgency.

1.3. Desiderata

Now that we have a good understanding of just why we need an individuation criterion for distinctively epistemic norms, let’s ask what makes a candidate criterion a good one? I would like to propose the following fairly minimal desiderata.

1. INDEPENDENCE. We want the criterion to delineate a class of norms that is independent from other classes of norms.4

2. GENERALITY. We want our criterion to be generalizable, in the sense that it can, after normative-domain-relative interventions, be employed not only to delineate distinctively

4 Wouldn’t pragmatic and moral encroachers disagree with INDEPENDENCE? Two things about this: first, not all champions of these views would. In particular, if one favors a picture like Stanley’s (2005), knowledge is encroached upon via practical demands conjoining epistemic demands rather than encroaching upon them. Second, importantly, even by the lights of the most notable foes of classical invariantism (CI), CI is the default theoretical position: we need to be argued out of it: “Anyone who has even passing knowledge of analytic epistemology in the last fifty or so years knows that moderate invariantism is the orthodoxy. It is the view to beat” (Fantl and McGrath 2009, 37). If that is so, INDEPENDENCE is a reasonable assumption to start with.
epistemic norms but also distinctively moral norms, prudential norms, etc.

3. **THEORETICAL ADEQUACY.** We want our individuation recipe to enjoy normative prior plausibility; that is, to accommodate properties of type-specific norms that are widely recognized in the general theory of normativity. What's more, we'd want this to be the case not only for the specific criterion for epistemic norms but also for the generalized version of it (by GENERALITY).

4. **INTUITIVE ADEQUACY.** Finally, we want the criterion to be extensionally adequate in the sense that it makes correct classifications: ideally, we want it to successfully capture our intuitions when it comes to classifying all epistemic norms as epistemic and all non-epistemic norms as non-epistemic. Also, again, we want this to be the case not only for specifically epistemic norms but (by GENERALITY) also for other types of norms (prudential, moral, etc.). To repeat, since our handle on the meaning of ‘epistemic’ is less than perfect, we’ll have to proceed with care. That said, there do appear to be some clear-cut cases. For instance, whatever the individuation recipe we come up with for epistemic norms, it should better not classify ‘One ought to change a flat tire on one’s car!’ as an epistemic norm. What’s more, in cases involving at least some non-epistemic norms, e.g. moral ones, we have a better handle on the meaning and so we may be better positioned to make the relevant verdicts.

5. **THEORY NEUTRALITY.** We want our individuation recipe to be theory neutral; that is, we do not want to individuate the epistemic in such a way as to, for instance, only vindicate epistemic externalism; rather, what we need is for epistemic normativity, whatever it turns out to be, to still allow questions such as: ‘Does epistemic permissibility depend on factors external
to the mind? to afford a non-trivial answer.

THEORY NEUTRALITY may seem pretty straightforward. And one even may wonder whether it’s worth mentioning at all. After all, won’t any criterion for individuating epistemic norms satisfy it? The answer here is no. To see why, consider the following criterion, which is popular especially among epistemologists in the reliabilist camp:

**GOAL INDIVIDUATION (GI).** A norm N is an epistemic norm if and only if following it is conducive to reaching epistemic goals (like truth, knowledge etc.).

The trouble with GI is that it does not satisfy THEORY NEUTRALITY. Here is an argument by Stew Cohen to this effect:

Evidentialists, and in particular mentalist evidentialists, hold that the justification of a belief supervenes on the internal states of the subject. It is consistent with such a view that subjects with justified beliefs are radically deceived. To say at the outset that necessarily most justified beliefs are true would disqualify mentalist evidentialism by description of the subject matter (2016, 840).

The result is that THEORY NEUTRALITY isn’t straightforward at all. In fact, a growing number of epistemologists have been rather pessimistic about the prospects of satisfying this desideratum (e.g. Cohen (2016), Alston (2005) and Hazlett (2016)). In fact, Cohen and Hazlett both go on to argue that, as a result, we should eliminate ‘epistemic’ from our philosophical

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5 Here is a characteristic expression of GI by Peter Graham: “Epistemic norms in this sense govern what we ought to say, do or think from an epistemic point of view, from the point of view of promoting true belief and avoiding error” (Graham 2012).
lexicon altogether. According to Cohen, for instance, we should “simply identify epistemic justification with the rationality of belief […]. The virtue of this approach is that we could simply dispense with the problematic technical vocabulary replacing it with a natural language expression.” And here is Hazlett’s recommendation:

I propose an exercise along these lines. Take any contemporary philosophical essay, and consider each use of “epistemic.” I submit that each is either superfluous – in which case to be stricken – or replaceable with alternative jargon – in which case to be so replaced (2016, 547).

Given that several epistemologists have been pessimistic about the prospects of satisfying THEORY NEUTRALITY, and have even taken this to motivate as drastic a view as eliminativism about the epistemic, the importance of offering an individuation criterion that satisfies this desideratum cannot be overstated.

1.4. Content Individuation

With these desiderata in play, let’s return to the received view in epistemology. Here it is:

**CONTENT INDIVIDUATION** (CI). A norm, N, is a distinctively epistemic norm if and only if it regulates the epistemic properties required for proper phi-ing.

In more transparent talk, CI says that when we ask what the epistemic norm for phi-ing is, what we are asking is, roughly: how much warrant does one need for permissible phi-ing? One can find CI implicitly assumed in most of the literature discussing the
epistemic normativity of belief, assertion or action in the last
decade. Philosophers ask, for instance, whether justification is
enough for permissible assertion/belief/action etc., or more –
knowledge, certainty – is needed. When they ask these questions,
they take themselves to be inquiring into the epistemic norms for
assertion/belief/action. Furthermore, CI is also, often enough,
explicitly endorsed; take, for instance, the following passages:

[The problem with the agents in the above cases is
that it is not epistemically appropriate for them to flat-
out assert that $p$ [...]. One reason this is clear is that
the criticism of the agents concerns the grounds for
their assertions. (Lackey 2013, 38)

According to Lackey, then, insofar as one is criticized for the
grounds for their assertion, the criticism is warranted by a
corresponding epistemic norm. Here is also Ishani Maitra:

Assertions are governed by an alethic or an epistemic
norm – that is, a norm that specifies that it is
appropriate to assert something only if what is
asserted is true, or justifiably believed, or certain or
known.” (Maitra 2011, 277).

In Maitra’s view, then, when a norm stipulates an epistemic
condition (justification, knowledge etc.) for appropriate assertion,
the norm in question is epistemic. From a different angle, Alan
Hazlett makes a methodological claim that points in the same
direction:

[The epistemic] is sometimes used to mean (roughly)
“of or relating to knowledge” [...]. However,

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For an excellent overview, see (Benton 2014). For recent work see (Littlejohn
and Turri 2014).
“epistemic” is sometimes used to mean (roughly) “of or relating to belief.” (Hazlett 2016, 540).

On the face of it, CI appears to satisfy all of the desiderata. After all, CI does offer necessary and sufficient conditions for what it takes for a norm to count as distinctively epistemic as INDEPENDENCE requires. It also appears to be generalizable into a criterion for typing norms other than epistemic norms (GENERALITY). In the absence of any specific reason for thinking THEORETICAL ADEQUACY isn’t satisfied, there is no direct cause for concern on this front either. Finally, it seems to make acceptable classifications: For instance, the norm that requires you to assert only what you know comes out as epistemic, as does the norm that requires you to believe only what you have evidence for. On the other hand, the norm that tells you to change a flat tire on your car doesn’t. Finally, CI promises to satisfy THEORY NEUTRALITY. After all, while CI individuates epistemic norms by epistemic content it remains neutral on what counts as distinctively epistemic content. To the extent that concerns about THEORY NEUTRALITY has fuelled pessimism about offering a workable criterion for individuating distinctly epistemic norms, CI holds out the hope of resisting such pessimism.

Unfortunately, on closer inspection, there is reason to think that CI remains unsatisfactory after all. And it is not THEORY NEUTRALITY that causes trouble here. Rather, as I am about to show, CI satisfies neither THEORETICAL nor INTUITIVE ADEQUACY. I’ll discuss the former first and then move on to the latter.

Recall that THEORETICAL ADEQUACY requires champions of CI to accommodate properties of norms that are widely recognized in the general theory of normativity, both for epistemic norms and in general. To assess whether CI can satisfy THEORETICAL ADEQUACY, we first need to have a quick
look at what the generalized version of this criterion. The key is of course that type-specific norms in general are individuated by their content, in the relevant way. Here is a straightforward proposal for such a generalization:

**CI-GEN:** A norm, N, is a norm of type T if and only if it regulates the properties of type T required for proper\footnote{Of course, propriety itself comes in types, i.e. epistemic, moral, prudential etc. See below for this.} phi-ing.

With CI-GEN in play, I’d now like to look at a widely-recognized property of norms in the general theory of normativity. Norms can come in conflict with each other. When this happens, one norm may override another. Moreover, there are at least two ways in which normative overriding may pan out. Here is one:

**OVERRIDE1.** Norm N1 of type T1 (moral, prudential, etc.) permits phi-ing. N1 is overridden by another norm, N2 of type T2 (moral, prudential, etc., which may but need not = T1), which prohibits phi-ing, with the result that phi-ing is all-things-considered improper altogether.

By way of illustration, consider a case in which you are playing chess,\footnote{For the purposes of this chapter, I employ a very permissive sense of ‘norm’ to include hypothetical, as well as categorical imperatives, constitutive as well as merely conventional regulations etc. Nothing hinges on this.} and someone shows up, puts a gun to your head and threatens to kill you unless you move the bishop horizontally. Here, doing what is permissible by the norms of chess – moving the bishop diagonally – is all-things-considered improper: an overriding prudential norm renders the relevant action altogether improper.

It’s important to note that, while OVERRIDE1 is one way in which normative overriding can manifest itself, it isn’t the only way in which this can happen. Consider:
**OVERRIDE2.** Norm N1 of type T1 (moral, prudential, etc.) permits \( \phi_1 \)-ing conditional on having enough of gradable property P. N1 is overridden by another norm, N2 of type T2 (moral, prudential, etc., which may but need not = T1), which modifies the P-threshold for all-things-considered proper \( \phi_1 \)-ing up or down.

By way of illustration, consider a case in which you are driving down a road such that the traffic norm in place requires you to drive between 40 and 70mph. Unfortunately for you, your kidnapper is holding a gun to your head and threatens to kill you unless you drive between 80 and 100mph. Once again, a prudential norm overrides – in this case the traffic norm in place. Unlike in the chess case, here the overriding norm does not render the action – driving - altogether improper. Rather, what happens is that prudential requirements modify the all-things-considered proper speed up.

Here is another important property associated with overriding:

**OVERRIDE-FORCE.** When a norm N1 of type T1 is overridden by a norm N2 of type T2 such that T1 ≠ T2, N1 remains the relevant norm of type T1 in place.

For instance, in the above chess case, when prudential norms override the chess norm that permits you to move the bishop diagonally, this norm remains the relevant chess norm in place. In other words, the threat to your life does not change the rules of chess. Likewise, when moral/prudential norms override the traffic norm requiring you to drive between 40 and 70 mph, this norm remains the traffic norm in place. In other words, a threat to your life does not change the traffic norm.  

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9 Otherwise put, the traffic requirement is merely overridden rather than swamped at the context.
Of course, in order to satisfy THEORETICAL ADEQUACY, CI-GEN must accommodate normative overriding. That is to say, it must allow for normative overriding along the lines of both OVERRIDE1 and OVERRIDE2 whilst respecting OVERRIDE-FORCE. Unfortunately, there is excellent reason for thinking that CI-GEN doesn’t deliver on this front. In particular, it cannot accommodate OVERRIDE2 whilst respecting OVERRIDE-FORCE. To see why not, let’s return to the above case in which the operative traffic norm requires driving between 40 and 70mph. In the case under consideration, your kidnapper will kill you unless you drive between 80 and 100mph, with the result that the traffic norm is overridden by a prudential norm, which modifies the requirement for the all-things-considered proper speed upwards (as per OVERRIDE2). At the same time, by OVERRIDE-FORCE, the traffic norm remains unchanged. The threat to your life doesn’t change the traffic norms in place.

The trouble for CI-GEN is that it cannot accommodate this account of what is going on here. According to CI-GEN, norms are typed by the type of property they are regulating. The operative traffic norm is a traffic norm in virtue of the fact that its compliance condition features a traffic-related property, i.e. speed. Note, though, that if driving at a speed between 40 and 70mph is a property pertaining to traffic, then so is driving at a speed between 80 and 100mph. CI-GEN is thus firmly committed to holding that the norm requiring you to drive between 80 and 100mph in this case is also a traffic norm, in virtue of regulating a traffic-related property, i.e. speed. CI-GEN must thus hold that, in the case at hand, the threat to your life does change the traffic norm in place, contrary to OVERRIDE-FORCE. As a result, CI-GEN fails on THEORETICAL ADEQUACY. And that’s of course bad news for CI, too.

It will come as no great surprise that CI-GEN also fails on INTUITIVE ADEQUACY. In the traffic case, for instance,
the norm requiring you to drive between 80 and 100mph is clearly not a traffic norm. CI-GEN’s failure here is already bad news for champions of CI. Furthermore, notice that the case of traffic is hardly isolated. Similar examples can be construed for many types of normativity, provided that the norms in question regulate how much of a gradable property one’s phi-ing needs to enjoy in order to be permissible. It can be, for instance, morally appropriate to drive faster or slower, to have a better or a worse grade average, to wear a brighter or a darker shade of blue at a funeral, to speak louder or more quietly – all this, in spite of the fact that speed, grade average, shade darkness and loudness of speech are not moral properties. Just because a norm regulates the appropriate shade of blue for one’s outfit, it need not follow it is a fashion norm. Just because a norm has T-content, that is, it regulates a T-property, it need not follow it is a T-norm.

Finally, there is even reason to think that CI itself does little better. To see this, consider:

**SING.** One must: only sing songs one knows.

**JUMP.** One must: jump in the lake only if one knows how to swim.

**TOUCH.** One must: touch the wire only if one is certain that it is not live.

I submit that SING, JUMP and TOUCH are not epistemic norms. What seems much more plausible, intuitively, is that SING is an aesthetic norm while JUMP and TOUCH are prudential norms. At the same time, it is undeniable that all three norms have epistemic content, i.e. their compliance conditions feature epistemic properties. This means that CI readily classifies them as epistemic norms. Since that’s at odds with intuition, there is reason to think that CI does not satisfy INTUITIVE ADEQUACY.
While CI may initially have seemed to do well when it comes to satisfying the desiderata on an adequate individuation criterion for types of norms, on reflection, it turns out that appearances are misleading. CI fails to satisfy two key desiderata, to wit THEORETICAL and INTUITIVE ADEQUACY. What’s worse, the bulk of these failures are not specific to CI. Rather, the generalized version of CI, CI-GEN, does so too. By the same token, there is excellent reason to think that the prospects for individuating norms by their content are dim. We’ll do well to look for an alternative and less problematic criterion.

Before moving on, I’d like to offer a brief diagnosis of just why CI and CI-GEN fail. The trouble with both CI and CI-GEN is that the standard story about overriding in the general theory of normativity rests on a distinction between norms of a certain type, T, and non-T norms with T-content – i.e., regulating T-properties. What’s going on in the problematic cases is that a norm of one type, T1 (traffic/epistemic), is overridden by a norm of a different type, T2 (moral/prudential), that has T1-related (traffic/epistemic) content and calls the shots for the all-things-considered proper action. And, of course, that just couldn’t be the case according to CI and CI-GEN. After all, according to these views, norms are typed by content, there cannot be distinction between a norm of type T and a norm with T-related content.

1.5. Value Individuation

The ambition of this section is to propose a novel way of individuating epistemic norms that improves on CI - in that it is both theoretically and intuitively adequate - and on GI - in that it is theory neutral. To lay my cards right on the table, here is the proposal:
VALUE INDIVIDUATION (VI). A norm N is of type T if and only if it is associated with values of type T.

For instance, norms are prudential norms if and only if associated with prudential goods, norms are moral norms if and only if they are associated with moral goods and so on. All normative domains have goods (values) that are central to them, in virtue of the kind of normative domains they are: survival is a prudential good; promise keeping is a moral good; politeness is a social good; beauty is an aesthetic good; money is a financial good. Similarly, if etymology is a guide to what normative domain ‘the epistemic’ is supposed to delineate, knowledge is an epistemic good. On pain of legitimacy loss, philosophers cannot just stipulate that, starting tomorrow, they will use ‘moral’ to refer to a type of normative domain that does not care about promise keeping, but does care about money, or ‘financial’ to refer to a domain of which the chief good is safe driving. Similarly, it would be odd to count wealth and having short nails amongst epistemic goods. If all this is the case, however, it will be helpful to individuate norms by the goods associated with them, in virtue of the latter being (more) easily identifiable.\(^\text{10}\)

Now, VI is still rather vague, and, on pain of ad-hocness, the association relation at stake should better be spelled out in more detail. After all, one way in which a norm can be associated with a particular good is by requiring more or less thereof; this, however, of course, will get us back in the same trouble as CI: just because a norm requires me to know how to swim in order to jump in the lake, and is thereby somehow associated with an epistemic good – i.e., knowledge – it does not follow it is an epistemic norm.

The proposal here is this: the association relation stands for direction of explanation: either the axiological explains the deontic, or the other way around. That is, either goods explain the

\(^{10}\) Many thanks to Stew Cohen for pressing me on this point.
norms – i.e. the norms are there in order to guide us in reaching the goods –, or the other way around, i.e. we only value the relevant goods to begin with in virtue of the associated norms.

More about this in a short while; for now, with VI in play, let’s ask how this view fares with respect to our desiderata. I take it to be obvious that INDEPENDENCE and GENERALITY are satisfied and for that reason won’t discuss them in any detail here. What I’d like to focus on instead is the remaining ones, starting with INTUITIVE ADEQUACY.

Let’s start by returning to the traffic case. As a first observation, I take it that the fundamental value in the domain of traffic is, roughly, the safe coordinated passage from one location to another. According to VI, then, a norm is a traffic norm if and only if it is associated with the traffic value of safe coordinated passage. In the case we were considering, driving between 40 and 70mph is clearly thus associated. As a result, the norm requiring you to do so is a traffic norm, which is of course the desired result. In contrast, in the case in which you face death unless you drive between 80 and 100mph, driving at this speed is not associated with the traffic value of safe coordinated passage, especially when everyone else is bound by the standard traffic norm. Rather, what it is associated with is a prudential value: your survival. VI thus delivers the correct result that the norm requiring you to drive between 80 and 100mph is a moral/prudential norm, not a traffic norm.

It is also not hard to see that the same goes for the non-epistemic norms with epistemic content that caused trouble for CI. SING, which requires you to sing only songs you know, is associated with the aesthetic value of harmony and so comes out as an aesthetic norm. JUMP, which requires you to only jump into the lake if you know how to swim, and TOUCH, which requires you only to touch the wire if you know it’s not live, are associated with the prudential value of your survival, and thus are (adequately) classified as prudential norms. In this way, VI can
avoid the threat to intuitive inadequacy that CI succumbs to.

What about THEORETICAL ADEQUACY? There is reason to believe that VI also does well on this front. To return to the traffic case once more, we have already seen that the norm requiring you to drive between 40 and 70mph is a traffic norm and the norm requiring you to drive between 80 and 100mph is a prudential norm. What is going on here according to VI, then, is that the prudential norm overrides the traffic norm and calls the shots for the all-things-considered proper speed. More specifically, it modifies the all-things-considered proper speed up, just as OVERRIDE2 would have it. At the same time, it leaves the norm requiring you to drive between 40 and 70 mph untouched. That is to say, this norm remains the operative traffic norm, in line with OVERRIDE-FORCE. As a result, VI improves on CI here, too.

Finally, let's turn to the troublesome THEORY NEUTRALITY. Recall that the association relation stands for one or another direction of explanation: either the values explain the norms, or the other way around. To see how this goes, it may be worth noting that VI is widely uncontroversial and value-theoretically neutral in the sense that it does not come with any substantive commitments about the relation between the axiological and the deontic. That is because the association claim between norms and goals of the same type does not imply any particular direction of explanation. As a result, it is compatible with both of the two leading views on the market about the relationship between the axiological and the deontic. The teleologist (e.g. Moore (1903), Sidwick (1907), Slote (1989)) explains the ‘ought’ in terms of the ‘value’; she will say that the norm of type X is there to guide us in reaching the value of type X. Here is one (although, by no means, the only) easy teleological way to spell VI out:

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11 In what follows, to be clear, I am only spelling VI out for illustration purposes; many more incarnations than the ones proposed are possible, of course. For instance, note that VI-TEL is explicitly formulated in rule-
VI-TEL. A norm N is of type T if and only if complying with it is conducive to acquiring values of type T.\textsuperscript{12}

In contrast, the deontologist (e.g. Scanlon (1998) Ewing (1947), Rabinowicz and Rönnow-Rasmussen (2004)) reverses the order of explanation: according to ‘Fitting Attitude’ accounts of value, for instance, the values of type X are only valuable to begin with because the norm of type X gives us reasons to favour them. Here is one shape this could take:

VI-DEO. A norm N is of type T if and only if it gives you reason to favour values of type T.\textsuperscript{13}

To see the difference between the teleological and the deontological direction of explanation more clearly, consider the epistemic norm that requires you to believe only what you

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\textsuperscript{12} One legitimate worry that can arise at this point concerns the sufficiency direction of VI (thanks to Kurt Sylvan for pressing me on this point): some values are, at the same time, plausibly, of more than one type. Take, for instance, knowledge: it is plausible that, apart from it being a fundamental epistemic value, it is also – likely, derivatively – a prudential value, since it promotes our survival. But then could it not be that the sufficiency claim involved in VI will mistakenly classify a prudential norm that is associated with knowledge as epistemic? The answer is ‘no’: VI will, indeed, classify any norm that is associated (in the relevant way, see the discussion about unpacking the association claim) with knowledge as epistemic, in virtue of knowledge being (also) an epistemic value. But that is perfectly fine. To see why, note, first, that one and the same norm can be of several types. For instance, the norm: ‘Drive safely!’ is a traffic norm, but also, plausibly, a prudential norm and a moral norm. Now, take, for instance, a teleological direction of explanation: say that, in virtue of knowledge being practically useful, you will have a practical norm that asks you to go to school and study hard (in order, say, to acquire lots thereof, and thereby become rich). The question is: is it fine to classify this practical norm: ‘Go to school!’ as also being epistemic? The correct answer seems to be ‘yes’. After all, this norm is just as conducive to epistemic flourishing as is, for instance, ‘Follow your evidence!’ (which, again, is plausibly both an epistemic and a practical norm). In fact, in virtue of the fact that, plausibly, epistemic values are generally speaking also practically and morally valuable, this should hardly be surprising.

\textsuperscript{13} For a general overview of the relevant literature in value theory, see e.g. (Schroeder 2012).
Let’s also assume that knowledge is a distinctively epistemic value. Here is one way to spell out the teleological direction of explanation: complying with the norm of believing only what you know is conducive to acquiring knowledge. And since knowledge is an epistemic value, the knowledge norm of belief is conducive to acquiring an epistemic value and so comes out as a distinctively epistemic norm.

In contrast, the deontologist does not take the norm to derive from the value. Rather, the thought here is that the norm requiring you to believe only what you know is fundamental and the fact that it gives us reason to favour knowledge explains why knowledge is a value in the first place. Since knowledge is an epistemic value, however, and since the knowledge norm of belief gives us reason to favour an epistemic value, it comes out as a distinctively epistemic norm. Crucially, in either case, the mere association claim at issue in VI holds.

Since VI can be unpacked along both teleological and deontological lines, it promises to satisfy THEORY NEUTRALITY. In particular, note that even if Cohen is right and a teleological version of VI rules out evidentialist mentalism as a view about distinctively epistemic justification (because it requires conduciveness to an epistemic value), the deontological version of VI can certainly accommodate the evidentialist mentalist since it just takes the relevant norm the view espouses

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14 Defended, most notably, in (Williamson 2000).
15 Both the teleological and the deontological version of VI work in this case. Crucially, this is not to say that they will both work equally well in all cases. Straightforward incarnations of the teleological view, for instance, run into trouble with cases like the following, which are all too familiar from the ethics literature: Let’s grant happiness is a moral value and consider a case in which you can make twenty people extremely happy by killing one scapegoat. The relevant straightforward teleological incarnation of VI would appear to predict that there is a moral norm requiring you to kill the scapegoat, which doesn’t seem right. But that’s not reason to think that VI isn’t correct or theory neutral. Rather, it’s just reason to think that the straightforward teleological incarnation of VI is false. Or take the VI-Deo verdict on SING: since SING gives one reasons to favor knowledge, it would seem to classify it as an epistemic norm. Again, this is not a problem for VI, but rather for the deontologist: teleology will just do better on this count. Importantly, VI stays neutral on which of these incarnations is the correct one.
as fundamental and explains the corresponding value in terms of it.

1.5. Conclusion

This chapter defended a novel way to individuate epistemic norms - *Value Individuation*, and argued that the proposed individuation scheme does well in meeting a number of desiderata for any such account. In a nutshell, the proposal is to type norms by the type of good they are associated with, where the association relation is spelled out as direction of explanation.
Chapter 2
Knowledge First Functionalism

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter proposed to individuate epistemic norms by their association with epistemic values (VI). I have argued that, importantly, VI is value-theoretically neutral, in that it can accommodate many ways to spell out the association relation.

This chapter takes a naturalistic stance on how to spell out the association relation. It develops my favourite incarnation of the value individuation thesis: a functionalist account of the epistemic. The aim is to develop a novel, naturalistic account of epistemic normativity, in conjunction with a general account of epistemic functions and their normative import. At the heart of this account is the thesis that our epistemic practice of inquiry has an etiological epistemic function - generating knowledge - that gives rise to epistemic norms.

In that, the normative view defended in this book has at its core a strong independence claim for epistemology from other normative domains: on my view, our epistemic practice of inquiry is a critical normative domain, organised around an epistemic value that is good for its own sake, relative to the domain – knowledge – which, in turn, is the central source of epistemic normativity.
The chapters to follow will look at the epistemic norms that drop out of this picture for particular moves in the practice of inquiry: belief, assertion, practical and theoretical reasoning.

2.2 How to Get Norms from Functions

In light of the previous discussion about VALUE IINDIVIDUATION, if one is interested in identifying the epistemic norms governing our epistemic practice, the following question immediately arises: what is our epistemic practice good for? After all, by VI, if there are such things as epistemic norms governing our epistemic practice, they will stand in the association relation to epistemic goods. What epistemic goods is our epistemic practice meant to deliver?

According to the view I will develop here, our epistemic practice aims to generate knowledge. Indeed, this is its main epistemic function. In turn, this epistemic function generates epistemic norms governing moves in our epistemic practice, such as belief, assertion, reasoning, judgment and so on. In what follows, I aim to put argumentative flesh on this, I submit, eminently plausible thought.

Here is the normative picture I favour: in traits, artefacts and practices alike, functions generate norms. There is such a thing as a properly functioning heart, a properly functioning can opener and a proper way to make coffee. If that is so, what we need in order to identify a particular type of norm governing a particular type of practice, is to first identify its function.

On the etiological theory of functions, 16 functions turn on histories that explain why the item exists or operates the way it

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16 Defended by people like e.g. David J. Buller (1998), Ruth Millikan (1984), Karen Neander (1991). The etiological theory of functions is, by far, the most widely endorsed view in the literature. Its main competitor is the ‘systemic’ theory of functions, notably defended in (Cummins 1975). Systemic functions describe how something works or operates—what it does—as a part of a larger system. Functions, in this sense, are the causal role capacities of parts that
does. Take my heart; plausibly, tokens of the type pumped blood in my ancestors. This was beneficial for my ancestors’ survival, which explains why tokens of the type continue to exist. As a result, my heart acquired the etiological function (henceforth also e-function) of pumping blood. Acquiring an etiological function is a success story: traits, artefacts and actions get etiological functions of a particular type by producing the relevant type of benefit. My heart acquired a biological etiological function by generating biological benefit. Through a positive feedback mechanism – the heart pumped blood, which kept the organism alive, which, in turn, insured the continuous existence of the heart - our hearts acquired the etiological function of pumping blood.

Now, one question that arises concerns how much history is needed for function acquisition. After all, surely, not all functional items follow the model of the heart: there will be cases where a requirement of selection over generations for function acquisition will seem implausibly strong (Sosa 1993). The paradigmatic case is that of beneficial macro-mutations, also known as hopeful monsters (Graham 2014, 30). Most mutations are harmful (think of extreme birth defects); once in a while, though, a happy accident happens: someone is born with an almost entirely new trait or organ, very different in kind from its ancestral trait, which actually benefits the recipient. Since they are mutations, they don’t have an evolutionary history; they are “first generation” traits. Still, they can acquire functions. What matters contribute to some capacity of the containing system. Systemic functions are widely believed to lack normative import, which is what explains, to a large extent, both the popularity of the competing, etiological account and why the latter is thought to be much better suited for applications to normative domains like epistemology.

17 Take Davidson’s Swampman, for instance (1987, 443). Swampman comes into existence as a result of a lightning hitting a swamp and strangely rearranging gas molecules into the exact duplicate of some ordinary person. Now, according to Graham, justified beliefs are beliefs formed via cognitive processes that have the function of reliably producing true beliefs; since function acquisition requires history, and since Swampman’s processes lack any, it would seem as though, on Graham’s account of justification, he cannot have justified beliefs. However, intuitively, at least after acquiring the necessary concepts, Swampman’s belief that he is sitting in a swamp seems perfectly justified (Sosa 1993).
is that the existence/continuous existence of a trait is explained via a history of positive feedback.

While etiology does require some history, then, it does not require an awful lot of it; there are several ways to cash out the etiological requirement that do not presuppose directional selection, i.e. selection over generations. A trait can also acquire a particular function by ongoing, maintenance selection, or through a learning process, or even by the metabolic activity of the organism itself. What it all amounts to is explaining the existence/continuous existence of a trait through a longer or shorter history of positive feedback. Here is Peter Graham:

Functions arise from consequence etiologies, etiologies that explain why something exists or continues to exist in terms of its consequences, because of a feedback mechanism that takes consequences as input and causes or sustains the item as output (Graham 2014, 35).

Here is, then, on a first approximation, what it takes for a trait to have an etiological function of a particular type:

E_FUNCTION*: A token of type T has the e-function of producing effect E in system S iff (1) tokens of T produced E in the past, (2) producing E benefitted S or S’s ancestors and (3) producing E’s having benefitted S or S’s ancestors contributes to the explanation of why T continues to exist in S.

Before moving on, one more important thing to be discussed is the typing of the relevant e-functions; after all,

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18 See (Buller 1998) for an excellent overview of etiological theories of function.
19 I adapted this definition from the ones on offer in (Buller 1998). The account departs in a crucial way from (Millikan 1984) in that it drops the requirement for selection over generations.
functions can be of different sorts: there are biological functions, aesthetic functions, social functions, etc.

The account defended here departs from the way in which the e-functionalist picture has been traditionally applied to epistemological matters (and outside biology in general) by people like Peter Graham (2012) and Ruth Millikan (1984) in one crucial way: Graham and Millikan take biological benefit to correspond to the acquisition of all types of e-functions. I will go back to their view later in the chapter.

In contrast to the Graham/Millikan view, the account defended here takes functions to be typed by the corresponding benefit. As such, on my account, if a trait produces a benefit of type B in a system, the function thereby acquired will be a function of type B. If it is biological benefit that is at stake in function acquisition, what we get is a biological function. On this view, the heart’s function to pump blood is a biological function in virtue of the fact that the produced benefit is also biological – i.e., survival. The function of music is an aesthetic function in virtue of the fact that the produced benefit is an aesthetic benefit. And so on. Now, of course, aesthetic benefit might, and often will, also result in biological benefit. What is important to keep in mind, though, is that the benefit that is essential to aesthetic function acquisition is the aesthetic one. The fact that biological benefit is also associated with the latter is, at best, a contingent matter of fact. Here is, then, the full etiological account to be employed throughout this book:

**E-FUNCTION**: A token of type T has the e-function of type B of producing effect E in system S iff (1) tokens of T produced E in the past, (2) producing E resulted in benefit of type B in S or S’s ancestors and (3) producing E’s having B-benefitted S or S’s ancestors contributes to the explanation of why T continues to exist in S.
Now, with the full account in play, note that the etiological account is an account of functions as purposes: by being selected for it, our hearts have acquired the purpose of pumping blood in our organisms. Reaching that purpose – i.e., successfully pumping blood – will amount to function fulfilment. But purposes will also come with associated norms prescribing the right way to proceed in order to reliably reach the corresponding purpose in normal conditions. Because its function contributes to the explanation of its very existence, the trait in question *ought* to perform in a way that is associated with likely function fulfilment. Now, according to the etiological theory of functions, this is but the way in which the trait functioned back in the day when it acquired its function. Your heart will pump blood in normal conditions, i.e., conditions similar to those in which it was selected, when functioning normally, that is, when functioning in the way in which it was functioning when it was selected for its beneficial effects. Plausibly, in normal conditions, a normally functioning heart will fulfil its function of pumping blood in your system by beating at a particular rate. According to the etiological theory, then, normal functioning is proper functioning: a heart functions in the way it ought to function (i.e., by the norm) when it functions in the way it did back in the day when it acquired its function: when it beats at a particular rate.

Note, then, that there are two ways a functional device might go right, and two ways it may go wrong. The unhappy cases are: breach of the norm, i.e., malfunction (in the case of the heart, not beating at the relevant rate) and failure to reach the corresponding purpose, i.e. failure to fulfil its function (not pumping blood). The happy scenarios are, of course, proper functioning (beating at the relevant rate) and function fulfilment (pumping blood).

Crucially, failure/success in one respect need not imply failure/success in the other. A trait can be malfunctioning – thus, in breach of the norm – and still fulfil its function (i.e., reach its
aim), and the other way around: proper functioning need not imply function fulfilment. To see this, think of a situation where a surgeon takes the heart out of your chest, places it in a vat full of nutrients for a short while and plugs it to a pipe circuit filled with orange juice (Graham 2012, 449). Your heart, of course, will fail to fulfil its function of pumping blood under these circumstances; it will, as a matter of fact, be pumping orange juice. But this does not make it into a malfunctioning heart; to see this, compare it to a heart that has stopped pumping blood because it has been stabbed by a dagger.

When functioning normally – whether in normal conditions or not – your heart will function properly, i.e. it will meet the norm constitutively associated with the purpose of pumping blood. It will work the way it is supposed to work, where the right way of working is partly constituted by fulfilling its function in normal conditions.

Also, not only need proper functioning not imply function fulfilment, but the other direction of the entailment need not hold either. After all, your dagger-stabbed heart can fulfil its function in spite of being malfunctioning, through some lucky circumstance, say, a blood circulation triggering magnetic field of sorts being in place.

Let us take stock: the etiological theory of functions aims to give a respectable naturalistic gloss to otherwise suspicious entities like norms and purposes: on this account, norms drop right out of functions, which, in turn, explain why the trait in question still exists. A trait’s ‘purpose’ is identified with function fulfilment, while the associated norm corresponds to normal functioning. Your heart ‘aims’ at pumping blood because successfully reaching this aim contributes to its continuous existence. Also, your heart ‘ought’ to beat, because that is the way in which it fulfilled its function back at a particular rate the point of function acquisition, and, as such, in normal conditions, if it beats, it reliably reaches its aim to pump blood.
It turns out, then, that the e-functionalist picture constitutes itself in a fairly straightforward norm-identification machinery; here is how: first, what we need is to take a look at the relevant function plausibly served by the trait/artefact/practice in question. Once the function is identified, the question we need to ask ourselves is: how did the trait/artefact/practice plausibly fulfil its function at the moment of function acquisition? The answer to this question will give us normal functioning which, on the etiological account, corresponds to proper functioning. In turn, the relevant trait/artefact/practice will be functioning permissibly if and only if it is properly functioning; like this, we get the content of the norm we are after.

Furthermore, on this picture, we also get an easy way to identify the type of norm at stake: norms will be typed by the corresponding functions, which, in turn, are typed by the produced benefit. The norm ‘hearts ought to beat at this-or-that rate’ is a biological norm in virtue of the fact that it serves a biological function – pumping blood – which, in turn, produces a biological benefit.

\[2.3 \text{ Knowledge As the Function of Our Epistemic Practice}\]

In line with traits and artefacts, our practices too have etiological functions. They are the functions that contribute to the explanation of the continuous existence of the practices in question. Take medicine: it is plausible that generating health is the etiological function of the practice: that’s why we continue engaging in it.

I think of our epistemic practice along similar lines. I will dub the totality of our epistemically significant endeavours ‘the practice of inquiry.’ Nothing hinges on this: it’s a technical term meant to encompass our epistemic endeavours, broadly conceived, in the same way as ‘medicine’ encompasses our health-
generating scientific endeavours, broadly conceived.\textsuperscript{20}

The view I favour takes knowledge to be the function of our epistemic practice of inquiry.\textsuperscript{21} If this is right, we have all we need to move on to identifying particular epistemic norms that we are interested in. Here is why: by stipulation (i.e., by the way I defined my technical term ‘inquiry,’ as encompassing all things epistemic), I take epistemically significant actions and states such as believing, judging, asserting, reasoning etc. to be moves in the practice of inquiry. Further on, it is plausible that moves in practices aim to fulfil the function of the practice; diabetological consults, brain surgeries etc. aim at generating health, in virtue of being moves in the practice of medicine; accelerating, breaking, stopping at the red light aim at safely getting you to your destination in a reasonable amount of time in virtue of being moves in the practice of driving, and so on. If that is the case, moves in the practice of inquiry – that is, all epistemically significant states and actions – will be governed by norms borne out by this central knowledge function of the practice.

Several people in the literature have given compelling arguments in support of the claim that knowledge is the fundamental epistemic value (e.g. Williamson 2000, Simion & Kelp 2015), the goal of inquiry (Kelp 2005, Millar 2015), the function of (some of) our epistemic practices (Turri In Press, Simion, Kelp & Ghijsen 2017). I will not rehearse these arguments here; nor is the ambition of this book to defend the knowledge-function thesis at length against its competition; rather, the central aim is to show that the knowledge-first picture I favour is theoretically very fruitful, by making available to us a nice, unified picture of epistemic normativity with great explanatory power and extensional adequacy.

\textsuperscript{20} In this, ‘inquiry’ as used here will be a broader term than the folk usage of ‘inquiry,’ in that it will not necessitate conscious wondering or question asking. Forming beliefs about one’s surroundings while walking down the street, for instance, will be a move in inquiry. See also (Kelp 2014, MS) for a similar technical usage.

\textsuperscript{21} See also (Kelp 2014, MS) for a book-length discussion supporting the knowledge function claim.
That being said, in what follows, I will offer further support for the knowledge-function thesis, from two angles.

First, I present two more reasons that move me to believe that generating knowledge is the function of our practice of inquiry. The first argument is abductive: I argue that knowledge, in virtue of being the most valuable achievable epistemic state, is the goal of our epistemic practice. The second relies on my functionalist framework: it argues from the claims that (1) knowledge is the strongest state that meets E-Function, (2) knowledge is distinctively more valuable than lesser epistemic states and (3) permissible function attributions track value, to the knowledge-function conclusion.

Second, in the following section, I compare my knowledge-based functionalist view to its main competition, truth-first functionalism, and argue that my account is normatively and extensionally superior. This should give us further, indirect reason to like a knowledge-based picture.

2.3.1 An Abductive Argument for the Knowledge Function

Inquiry is an epistemic practice. Practices have main intrinsic goals, or functions:22 roughly, the practice of driving mainly aims at safely getting one to one’s destination in a reasonable amount of time; that’s its main function. The practice of cooking (intrinsically) mainly aims at producing tasty and nutritious food, the practice of medicine intrinsically aims at generating health and so on.23

The restriction to intrinsic here is crucial; importantly, but less so for my purposes here, practices can – and usually do – have extrinsic aims too. Plausibly, the practice of inquiry and the practice of medicine share their extrinsic aim: the biological aim

22 Here and below, the sense of ‘goal,’ ‘aiming’ etc. is one that is devoid of intention: practices and moves in practices have an intrinsic goal in this non-intentional sense. One illuminating way to think about this is as the ‘point’ of the practice/move.
23 Or plug in your preferred aim for these practices, nothing hinges on this.
of survival. Knowledge and health are, plausibly, good for survival. Compatibly with that, these two practices will have different intrinsic aims. Ideally, though, when the intrinsic aim of the practice is achieved, it reliably serves the achievement of the corresponding extrinsic aim. This, however, may not be the case. Some of our practices are bad for us.

Ernie Sosa (2007) defends a similar value-theoretic picture that might help the reader to see the landscape I have in mind: in Sosa’s view, there are such things as critical domains, which are associated with goods or values for that domain. Any critical domain has at least one central value. This central value is fundamental to the domain in the sense that the central value is valuable for its own sake, relative to the domain. Crucially, central values organise the evaluations in that domain in the sense that all other domain specific values and norms will be derivative from the central ones: they can be explained fully in terms of the central values. I think of practices and their intrinsic functions along similar lines: practices are critical domains and their intrinsic functions are values for their own sake relative to the domain in question.

Now, importantly, note that, when it comes to their goals, practices tend to strike a good balance between value and achievability; that is, practices are often aimed at the most valuable achievable intrinsic goal. The value at stake is not good simpliciter, to be sure; many of our practices have horrible goals! Again, what is at stake is domain-specific goodness. Driving does not aim at teleporting you to your destination. Nor does it aim at safely getting you one mile away from your destination. It aims at getting you to your destination – which is the most valuable target in the domain – in a reasonable amount of time – which is an achievable goal. Similarly, cooking aims at producing tasty food – which is the most valuable achievable goal the practice of cooking can plausibly have. Its goal is not to produce, say, self-generating nutrients (not achievable), nor to produce half-baked goods (not
the most valuable). Medicine aims at generating health, not at making us immortal – not achievable –, nor at keeping us barely alive – not the most valuable goal to have. Practices often strike a good balance between the value and achievability of their intrinsic goals.

With that in mind, note first, that I is widely accepted that knowledge is, epistemically, more valuable than any lesser epistemic standing. The way in which knowledge is thus more valuable has been a fairly hot topic of debate in the last years (see, e.g. (Pritchard 2010)). It is, however, assumed by the vast majority of actors in the debate, that knowledge is, as a matter of fact, more valuable than true belief; the challenge is to explain how, not to argue that it is: little doubt has there been expressed – since Plato’s *Meno* - with regard to the superiority in value thesis itself. Furthermore, several people think that knowledge is not only more valuable than its lesser epistemic counterparts, but also distinctively so. That is, the difference is rather one in kind than in degree.

Second, note that, in most epistemic walks of life, knowledge is readily available: we are fairly well endowed epistemic agents, living in an extremely friendly epistemic environment. Furthermore, knowledge is much more readily available, and thus much more easily achievable, than both lesser and stronger epistemic standings.

When it comes to stronger states – such as certainty or understanding - , that should be easy to see. It takes us quite a bit of time and effort – and, arguably, a fair amount of knowledge – to achieve understanding. Furthermore, epistemic certainty is well beyond our reach.

To see it for states that fall short of knowledge too,

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24 But see (Kvanvig 2003) and (Pritchard 2010) for skepticism about the value of knowledge.
25 See (Pritchard 2010) for a statement of this thesis and (Simion and Kelp 2017) for a vindication.
26 This claim concerns Cartesian certainty. Weaker views on certainty may falsify it; but then it is not clear that the state in question is different from knowledge.
consider first perceptual beliefs about middle-sized dry goods. My belief that there is a computer on the desk before me qualifies as knowledge: it is produced by a highly reliable ability to recognize computers in an epistemically hospitable environment, I have good reasons/evidence to believe it is a computer etc.

Now the crucial point is that, for beliefs in this range, formation by suitable processes in hospitable environments is the norm; formation of beliefs by unsuitable process, or in inhospitable environments is the exception. If this isn’t immediately clear, consider again my belief that there is a computer on the desk before me and ask yourself what would have to be the case for my belief to remain true but fall short of knowledge. Those with some training in epistemology will find it easy to answer this question: I mistake a hologram for a computer, whilst unbeknownst to me there is a computer somewhere else on the desk, I acquire my belief by a highly unreliable process such as a coin-toss, etc. While any of this might come to pass, it is undeniable that, as a matter of fact, it only rarely does.

Consider, also, testimonial belief about propositions of crucial practical importance in our lives: propositions about bills that need to be paid, the nature of your sickness and the medication that will cure it, what’s available at the local restaurant, etc. Or consider inferentially supported beliefs that exploit a variety of natural and social regularities: that my couch is still in my living room, that Paris is still the capital of France, etc. Here too, when beliefs in these ranges are formed by suitable processes in sufficiently hospitable epistemic environments, they will qualify as knowledge.

These considerations suggest that, in a wide range of

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27 One could wonder whether this is not too optimistic a claim; after all, what about, for instance, political environments heavily populated with fake news? Isn’t the hostile environment the new norm? This chapter does not deny that there are environments that are less epistemically friendly than others. Rather, the (much more modest, but admittedly still optimistic) claim made here is that, overall, we are still doing fairly well. The hostile environments are the exception to the rule.
cases, knowledge is easily achievable. All we have to do to acquire knowledge is open our eyes, listen to what other people tell us, attend to our feelings, etc. In comparison, in those areas, true belief that falls short of knowledge is a rare commodity that exists only in very special environments. What is readily available, in contrast, is true belief that is knowledge.

Why not say that the aim of belief is truth (not true belief that falls short of knowledge, but truth simpliciter)? If we aim at true beliefs generally, every instance of knowledge will accomplish this aim, and so will some true beliefs that aren’t knowledge. So true beliefs will be an easier aim to achieve than knowledge.

If I am right and the goal of a practice is often defined by the best score on both achievability and value, however, in virtue of the distinctive value of knowledge, knowledge and not true belief is plausibly the goal of the practice, even if the latter is present whenever the former is present and, sometimes (but not often) when the former is absent. To see this, note that, similarly, getting one to one’s destination is more plausibly the goal of driving than getting one to a point that’s situated precisely one inch before one’s destination, in virtue of the fact that the former is more valuable than the latter (in spite of the fact that the latter is always achieved when the former is, and, likely, in virtue of being more easily achievable, on some cases when the former is not).

To take stock: We have seen that goals of practices tend to strike a good balance between value and achievability: they are the most valuable achievable goals. I have argued that knowledge is more valuable than lesser epistemic standings and much more easily achievable than both weaker and stronger states.

I submit, in the light of all this, that we have good reason to believe that knowledge is the most valuable achievable epistemic state, and thus the function of the epistemic practice of inquiry.

Importantly, that is not to say that some particular species
of inquiry can’t aim at stronger epistemic states: to the contrary, I’m fairly convinced that, for instance, scientific and moral inquiry aim at understanding the relevant phenomena. Note, though, that this is perfectly compatible with our general practice of inquiry aiming at knowledge, since species of a genus are bound to have extra-properties, on top of those of the genus itself. Also, compatibly, some species of inquiry might aim at epistemically stronger standings due to prudential reasons: law and medicine are plausibly like that.

Perhaps more surprisingly, my view is also compatible with particular species of inquiry aiming at less than knowledge, in spite of being proper species of the genus. Here is why: a well-researched category in normative ethics is that of ‘contrary-to-duty imperatives.’ Very roughly, these are norms that step in when one is in breach of a norm. You break your neighbour’s window; that’s in violation of quite a few types of norms – moral, social, prudential etc. Now, the contrary-to-duty imperative asks you to apologize: it’s what one ought to do given that not breaking the norm is not an option that’s still on the table. It’s the next best thing to do.

Similarly, there are domains where and situations when knowledge is not attainable. Some think philosophy is a domain like that; if this is true, we should expect this sub-domain of inquiry to be aimed at less than knowledge – roughly, to be aimed at the next best epistemic standing. Alternatively, one might be in a situation where urgency makes it unlikely knowledge is achievable in the available amount of time: reporting is often like that. In these situations, as I have argued at length elsewhere, one’s reporting should be based on the best achievable epistemic standing. Again, all this is perfectly compatible with the framework I am developing here.

28 I am assuming (without argument, since it falls way outside the scope of this book) a view on which understanding implies knowledge (see e.g. (Kelp 2015). For non-factive views of understanding, see e.g (Elgin 2017).
29 See e.g. (Goldberg 2017). I do not wish to take a stance on the issue.
30 Simion 2016.
2.3.2 A Functionalist Argument for Knowledge as the Function of Inquiry

Importantly, the functionalist picture defended here offers further support to the knowledge-function hypothesis. To see this, note that knowledge meets E-Function:

**E-FUNCTION-INQUIRY**: The practice of inquiry has the epistemic e-function of generating knowledge in the population iff (1) inquiry has produced knowledge in the past, (2) producing knowledge resulted in epistemic benefit in the population and (3) the fact that (2) contributes to the explanation of why the practice of inquiry persists in the population.

(1) is overwhelmingly plausible on pain of generalised scepticism: our practice of inquiry has produced knowledge in the past; (2) is the widely accepted distinctive epistemic value of knowledge thesis; finally, plausibly (but see below for further defence), the fact that it was successful in generating knowledge contributes to the explanation why our practice of inquiry has not been discontinued (3).

If this is the case, it follows that knowledge is, at least, *one* epistemic function of inquiry. Why think it is *the main* function? Why not truth? Isn’t it more plausible that it reliability in generating true beliefs is what *mainly explains* the fact that the practice of inquiry kept going?

First, note that it is easy to see that, since knowledge is a stronger epistemic standing than truth, arguing from the claim that generating knowledge is *one* epistemic function of inquiry to the stronger, contrastive claim that the relevant function is generating knowledge rather than truth will be fairly easy. After all, knowledge implies truth; if pumping blood in our circulatory system is one biological function of the heart, it will be fairy
implausible to hold that, alongside this particular function, the heart also has the function of pumping.

Note, also, that what the case of the heart suggests is that proper function ascriptions are value loaded: that is, the proper description of the function corresponds to the (most) valuable contribution of the respective trait to the relevant system. The function is pumping blood in the circulatory system – not just pumping blood, since pumping it anywhere else would fail to be valuable for the organism; also, not just pumping something in the circulatory system, since pumping orange juice would also fail to do the work. On the other hand, the function of the heart is not ‘pumping blood and making a beating sound’ either; plausibly, that is because pumping blood and making a beating sound does not seem to be in any way more valuable to the organism than merely pumping blood.

Again, one thing is that is assumed by the vast majority of actors in the debate is that knowledge is, as a matter of fact, more valuable than true belief. If that is the case, however, it looks as though, similarly to the case of the heart, value considerations give us reason to believe that proper function attribution involves knowledge rather than true belief.

2.5 The Competition

Let’s take stock: we are interested in epistemic norms governing moves in the practice of inquiry, such as beliefs, assertions and reasoning. We have identified the central epistemic function of the practice: generating knowledge. We have also assumed that, plausibly, moves in practices aim at fulfilling the function of the practice. If that is so, it follows that all moves in inquiry – that is, all epistemically significant actions and mental states - have the function of generating knowledge.

31 See (Kelp 2012) and (Simion and Kelp 2016) for arguments against value of knowledge skepticism.
Furthermore, we have seen that, as soon as we have identified the function at stake, the e-functionalist picture constitutes itself in a fairly straightforward norm-identification machinery; the question we need to ask ourselves is: how did the trait/artefact/action plausibly fulfil its function at the moment of function acquisition? The answer to this question will give us normal functioning which, on the etiological account, corresponds to proper functioning; therefore, the answer to this question delivers the content of the norm we are after. Starting with the next chapter, I will employ the functionalist machinery with an aim at identifying the epistemic norms for some of the most epistemologically-central moves in inquiry: belief, assertion, practical and theoretical reasoning.

Before that, however, I will very briefly compare the normative picture defended in this chapter with its main truth-first functionalist competitors on the market, and argue that it wins the day in terms of normative power and extensional adequacy. If this is correct, we have further reasons in support of a knowledge-based picture.

2.5.1 Reductivist Truth-First Epistemic Functionalism

As advertised, the normative view defended in this book has at its core a strong independence claim for epistemology from other normative domains: on my view, our epistemic practice of inquiry is a critical domain, organised around an epistemic value that is good for its own sake, relative to the domain – knowledge – which, in turn, is the source of all epistemic normativity.Compatibly with this, I have argued, the practice will also have extrinsic aims that are, ideally, reliably served by the intrinsic aim of the practice: in the case of inquiry, I take it to be plausible that knowledge is reliably conducive to the biological aim of survival. Importantly, though, this is a contingent matter of fact, with no normative import. In this, on my view, the epistemic is a fully
independent normative domain, organised around generating knowledge.

In contrast to the view defended here, Peter Graham and Ruth Millikan have provided powerful functionalist accounts that reduce the normative power of the epistemic to a history of generating biological benefit. According to Graham, for instance, a belief is warranted – and thus, epistemic-norm-conforming - if and only if formed via a properly functioning cognitive process that has the etiological function of reliably generating true beliefs, where the latter is acquired through a (longer or shorter) history of biological benefit.

The picture defended by Graham and Millikan differs from the view defended here in that it is a strongly reductivist picture. Recall that my functionalism takes the function at stake, as well as the type of norms borne out by the function, to be typed by the corresponding benefit. In contrast, on the Graham/Milikan view, functions, irrespectively of their type, are generated by a feedback loop involving biological benefit. Just like in the case of the heart, where the biological function is acquired via biological benefit, Graham and Millikan take epistemic functions to be generated by biological benefit. Here is the picture defended in (Graham 2012): our cognitive processes reliably generated true beliefs in us/our ancestors. In turn, this was beneficial to our survival as a species: we were thereby able to find food, reproduce, and stay safe from predators. In turn, our cognitive processes were thereby maintained in us/our species. In this way, a feedback loop of biological benefit generated the corresponding epistemic function of our cognitive processes: the function of reliably generating true beliefs. In turn, this etiological epistemic function generated epistemic norms: one’s cognitive processes are properly functioning when functioning in the way in which they did at the moment of function acquisition, and malfunctioning when they fail to do so. On strongly reductive functionalism, then, warranted beliefs – i.e., beliefs that are well
(epistemically) formed – are generated by cognitive processes that meet two conditions: (1) they have the etiological function of reliably generating true beliefs, which, in turn, implies a history of generated biological benefit and (2) they are properly functioning. In this, epistemic warrant depends on a history of biological benefit.

The view enjoys great theoretical benefits: most importantly, at first glance, the view straightforwardly handles the two main extant worries for epistemic externalisms: the New Evil Demon Problem for externalist necessity claims and, respectively, the Clairvoyance Problem for externalist sufficiency claims. Let’s look at them in turn.

The New Evil Demon problem has been put forth in Lehrer and Cohen (1983) and it’s meant to create difficulties for externalism that impose a de facto reliability condition on epistemic warrant; the thought is that an envatted perfect duplicate of mine seems to be as entitled to her beliefs as I am, although, in fact, her cognitive processes hardly ever deliver truths. De facto reliability of the processes used seems to be too strong a condition on justification.

It is easy to see that Graham’s account has no problem accommodating the intuition of justification here; after all, my envatted duplicate does form beliefs via properly functioning cognitive processes that have the function of reliably generating true beliefs (in this particular case, perception) and, in normal conditions, reliably deliver true beliefs.

Concerning trouble for the reliabilist sufficiency direction, here is the famous case by Laurence BonJour:

32 Most notably associated with Alvin Goldman (1979).
33 The variation of the New Evil Demon Problem at stake here is one where the victim is envatted after having inhabited the normal environment. As such, the processes at stake will have acquired the relevant function. This solution will, of course, not work for cases of envatment at birth; such cases will be elegantly handled via content externalism (see e.g. Putnam 1975).
Norman, under certain conditions, which usually obtain, is a completely reliable clairvoyant with respect to certain kinds of subject matter. He possesses no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. One day Norman comes to believe that the President is in New York City, though he has no evidence either for or against this belief. In fact the belief is true and results from his clairvoyant power under circumstances in which it is completely reliable (BonJour 1985, 41).

Classical process reliabilism, roughly put, claims that one is justified in holding a belief if and only if one has acquired it via a reliable process. The case of Norman sheds doubt on the sufficiency claim. Norman’s clairvoyance is, by stipulation, a very reliable process; however, we are not inclined to think that Norman is justified in his belief that the President is in New York.

Graham’s account does not, on the face of it, share this weakness with classical process reliabilism, for, in his view, epistemic entitlement does not supervene on the de facto reliability of the process used. Rather, the thought is that not just any reliable process would do for entitlement; this is where the etiological constraint steps in to the rescue. Norman’s clairvoyance does not have the function of reliably producing true beliefs, in virtue of not having generated the relevant positive feedback loop necessary for function acquisition, i.e., n virtue of not enjoying a history of biological benefit. Since it has no function, there is no such thing as functioning properly either – it is not subject to any epistemic norms regulating its functioning - and, consequently, cannot confer warrant on Norman’s beliefs.

34 But see (Simion 2017) for an argument that reductivist functionalism does not get clairvoyance cases right.
In what follows, I will put forth two worries for this view that I take to motivate the functionalist to move away from the reductive ambition. The first worry targets the necessity claim involved in reductivism, while the second aims to shed doubt on the corresponding sufficiency claim.

The first problem concerns reductivism’s conditions for function acquisition; in particular, the worry targets the biological benefit necessity claim. In what follows, I will show that this requirement risks to under-generate etiological functions; that is, to leave a significant amount of intuitively proper function attributions unexplained. Traits, artefacts and practices alike can have etiological functions even when biological benefit is absent. To see this, let’s start with the easy case: artefacts. Some things have design functions (d-functions). The dishwasher is a paradigm example of an item with a d-function. Its d-function is to clean dishes. Items with d-functions have their d-functions in virtue of the intentions of the designer. The reason why the dishwasher has the d-function of cleaning dishes is because the inventor of the dishwasher intended it to clean dishes. Crucially, e-functions are different from d-functions. For starters, there are things that have e-functions but not d-functions. The heart is a clear example here. At the same time, there are things that have d-functions but not e-functions. The reason for this is that e-functions require a

35 For an epistemic functionalism about knowledge built on design functions, see (Plantinga 1993). This book does not engage with Plantinga’s picture for two main reasons. First, I don’t share Plantinga’s reductive ambitions when it comes to knowledge. Second, most importantly, I don’t believe I have the requisite philosophical competence to discuss Plantinga’s view. Here is why: one notable problem for taking design functions to ground epistemic normativity is the fact that design functions need not imply success: the Museum of Failed Inventions stands proof to that. Now, Plantinga might want to appeal to the theological ambitions of his project to escape this problem: after all, if God is omnipotent and omni-benevolent, his designs will, as a matter of fact, imply success. The problem for this move is explaining widespread epistemic failures: we do, as a matter of fact, get it wrong quite often. What this amounts to, eventually, I gather, is solving the well-known ‘problem of evil,’ as applied to the epistemic. It is crucial to note that the usual moves in the relevant debate will not do the trick when it comes to epistemic failure: for instance, appealing to God’s interest in us having free will to explain the presence of epistemic evil will not do, in virtue of the plausibility of non-voluntarism about belief. Since I am hardly competent in issues concerning philosophy of religion, however, I will stop the discussion here.
history of success. The heart could only acquire the e-function of pumping blood because token hearts successfully pumped blood in the past. Exhibits in the Museum of Failure in Sweden have d-functions but no e-functions: they just didn’t work.

At the same time, many items with d-functions also acquire e-functions. Consider, in particular, new products that are launched on a competitive market. These products have d-functions. They are meant to do something. If they are successful, they will in addition acquire an e-function. If all goes well, these products will initially be bought to do what they are designed to do and subsequently will continue to be in demand (if all goes well) in virtue of the fact that they did the things they were designed to do and that this was beneficial to consumers. But given that they continue to be in demand, they will continue to be produced and bought. It is now easy to see that we have exactly the kind of feedback loop going that is characteristic of e-functions. In this way, d-functional items may acquire e-functions. In fact, a plausible aim of designers who develop new products to be launched on a competitive market is for the d-functions of their products to turn into e-functions of the sort just mentioned.36

What I have said so far is perfectly compatible with strong reductivism. Here is where the problem emerges, though: for the relevant feedback-loop to be instantiated, the benefit at stake need not be biological. Take, for instance, carbonated drinks: they have the d-function to generate pleasant gustatory experiences in quenching our thirst. Plausibly, they have also acquired the associated e-function: their continuous existence is explained by the fact that they generated some variety of benefit – plausibly aesthetic, i.e. pleasant gustatory experiences – which, in turn, made them fairly popular, and profitable for their producers. However, clearly enough, the benefit at stake is not biological: to the contrary, carbonated drinks are paradigmatically and

36 See (Simion and Kelp 2019) for an application to conceptual engineering projects.
uncontroversially bad (biologically) for us. Biological benefit is not necessary for e-function acquisition outside the domain of biology.

To see the issue further, let’s also look at artefacts that do, plausibly, in fact, generate biological benefit. Take, for instance, knives. Like all artefacts, knives have a d-function: they are meant, by design, to cut. Compatibly with that, though, they may never succeed at cutting, in spite of their design plan: design functions do not imply success. In order for knives to also acquire the etiological function of cutting, a history of success is needed. It needs to be the case that tokens of the type successfully cut, which generates some variety of benefit, which, in turn, explains the continuous existence of knives: we keep producing them because they successfully cut, which is good for us. Now, note that there is a plausible story to be told here on the part of the strong reductivist: having tools that cut is, and has always been, very plausibly, biologically beneficial to us, as a matter of fact. I would like, however, to invite you to consider a scenario in which we retroactively discover that, as it turns out, we would have been much better off – as a species – without knives. Maybe we would have had a healthier, more seeds-based diet; maybe we would have gone to war less, or wars would have been less dramatic. Does that now mean that knives have never had the etiological function to cut? The intuitively plausible answer is ‘no.’ Even if their effect was not biologically beneficial, their function goes well beyond mere design function: they were, as a matter of fact, sustained by their success in cutting. That’s why we kept producing them. What explains their continuous existence is their success in cutting, together with our interest in cutting things, independently of whether cutting is, as a matter of fact, biologically good for us: we are often interested in things that harm us.

Crucially, note that the worry does not restrict to artefacts. Consider also, for instance, e-functions acquisitioned via
a learning process. It does not seem right to say that whether I am tying my shoelaces properly depends on whether it was ever biologically beneficial to me to tie them up. It is easy to imagine scenarios where that is not the case, which, however, will do little to affect whether I’m properly tying up my shoelaces. If that is the case, the norms governing this practice are independent of any history of biological benefit. A biological benefit condition on etiological function acquisition is too strong.

At the same time, the reductivist biological benefit requirement is also too weak. To see this, say that, in line with the previous imagined scenario, blunt knives would have been excellent for our species: we would have been only able to use them for minimal survival-related projects, such as cracking nuts and digging for roots, but the latter would have been a very reliable route to a healthy diet. Is it plausible to think that, in this scenario, the selection process would have selected the blunt knives over the sharp knives? Hardly. In spite of their (stipulated) wonderful effects on our health, we would have (and did, as a matter of fact) preferred to produce sharp knives over blunt knives.

If all this is right, the reductivist picture of functionalist normativity is not right: it’s both too weak and too strong. The problem that transpires from the above discussion is that biological benefit and any other type of benefit - call it benefit of type B - can come apart, they need not be instantiated at the same time, even if they normally are. However, if we have a biological benefit requirement on functions of type B, since norms are taken to drop out of the corresponding functions, we will have a biological benefit requirement of the norm of type B being met. In cases where the two types of benefit will come apart, that will give the wrong result: intuitively, propriety by norm B will co-vary with benefit of type B rather than with biological benefit.

Let’s now go back to epistemic normativity. To see how the sufficiency worry affects reductive functionalist epistemology,
note that it is plausible that there will be ways of belief formation
that are intuitively epistemically deficient but biologically
advantageous: Alvin Goldman (2002: 146-153), for example,
points to research on the part of cognitive psychologists
indicating that human beings tend to rely on heuristics when
engaged in probabilistic reasoning, heuristics making people
prone to commit elementary probabilistic fallacies. Evolutionary
psychologists argue that, given the limited information and
computational power with which organisms must contend, an
inference mechanism can be advantageous if it often enough (for
biological purposes, such as survival) draws accurate conclusions
about real-world environments, and does so quickly and with little
computational effort (2002: 152). The heuristics humans rely on
in probabilistic reasoning, some of these psychologists maintain,
are mechanisms of just that sort. If that is the case, what we have
is a situation in which an epistemically deficient belief formation
process gets it right often enough for biological benefit – survival
– although not often enough for the kind of reliability required
for justification. A history of biological benefit is not sufficient
for justification.

To put the worry in more theoretical terms, here is the
problem: if epistemic functions are grounded in biological benefit,
the relevant reliability threshold will also be set by biological
needs. Our belief producing processes will only be as reliable as
needed for biological benefit. However, there is nothing to insure
that the biologically-set threshold will coincide with the
epistemically-needed threshold. That is, the threshold of reliability
required for epistemic purposes may well be higher than what is
needed for biological benefit. Biologically enough need not coincide
with epistemically enough.

To see why the reductivist necessity claim is too strong,
think of the epistemological equivalent of a full-body mutation:
Davidson’s Swampman (1987, 443). Swampman comes into
existence as a result of a lightning hitting a swamp and strangely
rearranging gas molecules into the exact duplicate of some ordinary person. Now, say that none of the true beliefs Swampman ever acquires in the swamp benefit him biologically, since they result in a terrible depression; rather, he would have been better off not believing any truths about his horrible environment. Still, after acquiring the relevant concepts, he seems perfectly justified in believing he is sitting in a swamp. In contrast, if, say Swampman engages in wishful thinking and thereby forms a bunch of beliefs about him sitting in a heavenly garden, no matter how much this benefits him biologically, he would still not end up being epistemically justified in so believing.\footnote{Note, too, that nothing as exotic as Swampman is needed for this worry to go through; several empirical studies\footnote{See (Elga 2003) for discussion.} show that most of us have a tendency to think unreasonably highly about ourselves. And that is good for us (biologically). In contrast, accuracy in this respect tends to be correlated with depression. Still, we want to say that the depressed are the epistemically justified, in spite of the associated biological downsides.}

2.6 Non-Reductive Truth-First Functionalism

The previous section argued that reducing the epistemic to biological benefit will get us into trouble with both the necessity and the sufficiency direction of our normative account.

Tyler Burge (e.g. 2003, 2010) gives a truth-centric, non-reductive account of epistemic warrant in terms of a priori necessary, representational functions and norms: on his account, epistemic normativity turns on natural norms, which turn on representational functions.

Burge endorses a right to left direction of explanation of what I dubbed VALUE INDIVIDUATION in Chapter #1:

\footnote{For more discussion, see (Simion 2016).}
VALUE INDIVIDUATION (VI). A norm N is of type T if and only if it is associated with values of type T.

According to Burge, whenever there are functions or, more generally, wherever there is purposiveness, there are standards for realizing the function or the end state of the purposiveness (2010: 339). This applies, he says, “to all biological organisms and their subsystems, to artefacts, to animal agency, to perception and belief, to inference, to knowledge” (2010: 339). The standards in question are natural norms, in that they drop right out of the purpose in question: nothing metaphysically suspicious is going on.

According to Burge, every false belief is a failure qua belief. Attributively, then, Burge takes it that good belief is true belief. Since, according to Burge, failure is evidence of function, it follows that the function of every token belief is to be true (2003: 509; 2010; 2019).39

Importantly, according to Burge, and contra the Graham/Millikan picture, this representational function does not reduce to a biological etiological function. This does not mean that belief-forming structures cannot have forming true beliefs as a biological etiological function too; it just follows that the latter is a contingent matter. As such, the fact that beliefs have the function of being true does not hinge on biological benefit. Nor is the latter enough for generating the relevant representational function. It is easy to see, then, that Burge’s view will not share in the problems previously identified for reductionist views.

Unfortunately, as I’m about to argue, Burge’s purist view also fails to enjoy some of the most important benefits of the reductivist view, to wit naturalistic friendliness and support for a reliability norm dropping out of the function in question.

39 Just a brief note: this argument from attributive goodness only supports the necessity of truth for good belief, not it's sufficiency. To see this, note that the equivalent argument can be put forth for the thesis that good belief is knowledgeable belief. See (Williamson 2000) and Chapter #3.
According to Burge, epistemic warrant requires (1) that the belief was formed or sustained through a competence whose outputs have a very high ratio of true beliefs over false beliefs, and (2) that the belief was well-formed (not through malfunction). In short, warranted beliefs will be beliefs formed via a properly functioning and reliable representational competence.

In turn, importantly, Burge thinks this norm of belief drops straight out of belief’s representational function: in this, it’s a natural norm.

One important problem for Burge is how to account for the fact that many unreliable representational systems can be found in nature. Furthermore, these systems seem, intuitively, to be properly functioning in spite of their unreliability. Here is Peter Graham (2019):

The rabbit is a skittish creature. At the slightest sign of danger, it runs away. But it is nearly always running away from nothing. Are its beliefs (suppose it has them) reliable? In a sense, the rabbit’s danger belief is highly reliable: if danger is present, it believes danger is present. Harty Field (1990) called this “world-to-head” reliability: if the world is a certain way, the odds are very high you believe it is that way. Given what the rabbit needs to produce—a danger belief in the presence of danger—the rabbit’s beliefs are world-to-head reliable. But the rabbit’s beliefs are not reliable in the “head-to-world” direction: if it believes the world is a certain way, it probably isn’t. It has a dependable but not a ratio-reliable “design.” If truth over error is your goal, don’t ask a rabbit (2019, 21).

In short, the problem goes as follows: Burge’s account takes it for granted that systems that have generating truth as their function
will do so reliably in normal conditions. The case of the rabbit seems to prove otherwise: indeed, plausibly enough, this is how the rabbit's representational systems are supposed to work to begin with: world-to-head reliability keeps the rabbit alive. Head-to-world reliability does not.

Burge discusses this problem in many places (e.g. 2003: 517-518, 537). He acknowledges that reliable representation need not be biologically good representation, nor the other way around. Even so, he argues that the danger representation in rabbits, qua representational kind, should be head-to-world reliable. That is because, given a representational function, the corresponding reliability norm applies.

The thought is that, even if head-to-world reliability would be biologically bad for the rabbit, it would be representationally good. Being reliable is always a representational norm, given a representational function.

Burge and I agree on one important count: the independence of epistemic norms from biological norms. However, Burge’s view, but not mine, encounters one important problem. Recall that according to Burge, the representational reliability norm drops right out of the representational function. The thought is that if a trait T has the function to generate truths, it should do so reliably. Recall, also, that Burge takes this principle to be perfectly general. Let’s spell this out:

**FUNCTIONALIST RELIABILITY CLAIM**: For any function F of system S, system S should\(^6\) generate F reliably (where should\(^6\) is a should typed by the function in question).

Why think, in line with Burge, that the FUNCTIONALIST RELIABILITY CLAIM holds? At first glance, one might believe it to be quite a simple and plausible idea: if the function of a system S is to produce apples rather than pears, it'd better be the case that S does so more often than not.
That is, that more often than not, S successfully produce apples rather than pears. Similarly, if S’s function is to produce true beliefs rather than false beliefs, it’d better be the case that S does so more often than not.

Note, though, that this plausible thought is not enough for Burge’s purposes: after all, not just any reliability rate is enough for epistemic purposes: epistemic normativity requires a very high level of reliability (50% +1 just won’t do!). If so, the general principle that we actually need is much more stringent: it should be the case that, when something T has the function F in S, T Fs with a very high degree of reliability:

**FUNCTIONALIST RELIABILITY CLAIM**: For any function F of system S, system S should generate F with a high degree of reliability.

Is **FUNCTIONALIST RELIABILITY CLAIM** plausible? For some systems, it seems to hold: Think of coffeemakers; their function is to produce coffee. If they fail to do so very reliably, they’re bad coffee makers: they don’t meet the reliability norm for coffee makers.

Note, however, that what is enough, reliability-wise, for norm conformity seems to be domain specific, and to vary from high thresholds to, indeed, quite low requirements. The example of the coffee machine is one where high reliability seems required for norm conformity. In other domains, however, the degree of reliability in reaching the aims internal to the domain required for norm conformity seems quite low. Consider, for instance, baseball: good players rarely even reach 30% reliability, but that’s fine. They are not thereby falling short in any way. Similarly, consider sperm: the biological function at stake – reproductive – is extremely unreliably fulfilled, and that’s biologically perfectly fine: indeed, too much reliability would likely be disastrous for the species. The **FUNCTIONALIST RELIABILITY CLAIM** is
false.

If that is the case, however, Burge seems to lack support for the normative claim that systems with a function (domain-restrictedly) should reliably fulfil the function in question.

One obvious way out for Burge at this point would be to make the claim less ambitious, by restricting the FUNCTIONALIST RELIABILITY CLAIM* in the following way:

FUNCTIONALIST RELIABILITY CLAIM**: For any function F of system S, system S should generate F with a D-appropriate degree of reliability (where D stands for the normative domain at stake).

At least on the face of it, the FUNCTIONALIST RELIABILITY CLAIM** seems correct. The problem with it, though, is that it fails to serve Burge’s purposes in two ways. Recall that Burge wanted functions to deliver norms. It is plain to see, though, that the content of the norm outlined by the FUNCTIONALIST RELIABILITY CLAIM** is not fully delivered by the function at stake anymore, but rather it hinges on independent assumptions about the domain at stake. More reliability in function fulfilment is required for some functions than for others, depending on how the relevant domain D is regulated. Nothing in the description of the function of coffee machines – making coffees – determines how reliable coffee machines should be: rather, further details pertaining to the domain of coffee making are what sets the threshold for tolerance for error: how hard or easy it is to produce a coffee is likely relevant, for instance. Similarly, think of baseball again: there’s nothing about the function of scoring that delivers the relevant reliability threshold. Rather, other details about the domain step in: likely, e.g., how hard or easy it is to produce a base hit.

If that is the case, however, the representational function
will not deliver the high reliability threshold for Burge; rather, further assumptions about the domain are needed in order to set the reliability norm in place. If this is so, however, we are back to square one: warrant is not (fully) grounded in our cognitive capacities’ representational functions.

Second, another problem for Burge’s view thus spelled out is that, if the function does not fully determine the content of the norm, the claim that the norm in question is a natural norm remains undefended.

Note that, importantly, my knowledge-function view does not share in the problems facing Burge’s view: first, we have seen that it is empirically plausible that knowledge meets e-function: that’s because, in a nutshell, it is empirically plausible that our cognitive processes have produced knowledge in the past and that was good for us. Furthermore, if knowledge is the function of our cognitive capacities, reliability is not needed for warrant. For a process to be a warrant generator, it suffices that it be properly functioning, and that it will have generated knowledge in the past enough times to have acquired the knowledge function. Second, the norm corresponding to epistemic warrant is solely derived from this knowledge function: the system should operate properly, i.e. in the way it did back in the day when it acquired the function of generating knowledge. In this, my view delivers a natural norm in a way in which Burge’s does not.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter developed a view of epistemic normativity as borne out by the etiological function of our practice of inquiry of generating knowledge. The view has three main advantages: first, it is naturalistically respectable: epistemic norms drop out of epistemic functions which, in turn, exist in virtue of contributing to the continuous existence of our epistemic practices. Second, the account puts forth a declaration of independence for
epistemology from other normative domains: knowledge is the intrinsic final value that the epistemic practice is organised around. Third, importantly, the view developed here constitutes itself in a straightforward norm-identification machinery: in virtue of being moves in the practice of inquiry, beliefs, assertions, reasoning etc. will aim at fulfilling the function of the practice: generating knowledge. If that is so, what is left to be done is investigating what epistemic norms drop out of this epistemic function. The following chapters will do just that.
Part 2
Norms of Belief
Chapter 3
Knowledge, Belief, and Warrant

3.1. Introduction

Several philosophers argue that, in an interesting way to be further specified, when it comes to epistemological affairs, knowledge comes first. In Chapter #2, I have offered reason to believe that one important claim at the heart of the knowledge first picture is correct: knowledge is the function of our epistemic practice of inquiry.

Beliefs are moves in inquiry. Moves within practices aim at satisfying the relevant goals of the practice. In virtue of being a move in inquiry, belief will be aimed at satisfying the intrinsic goal of the practice. Belief will be aimed at knowledge.

Against this backdrop, in what follows, I will try to identify a normatively satisfactory account of epistemic justification for belief that does justice to this claim. One important disclaimer before we proceed: in what follows, I will be using epistemic justification, epistemic warrant and epistemic entitlement interchangeably: in my view, there is no normative distinction between these terms. This way to talk about the normativity of belief is not universally endorsed: indeed, several philosophers\(^{40}\) find it useful to identify two permissibility notions for belief, one that carries a more internalist flavour – justification - , while warrant and entitlement play the role of externalist

\(^{40}\) See e.g. (Burge 2010).
permissibility. I am part of the camp that does not endorse any such distinction: I believe we can do all the epistemic work with only one notion of justification. As such, in what follows, I will use justification, warrant and entitlement interchangeably.

Justification is widely taken to be normative. The following is an attractive way of capturing this thought:

**The Deontic Thesis (DT).** One’s \( \varphi \)-ing is prima facie practically, morally, epistemically, etc. justified if and only if one prima facie practically, morally, epistemically, etc. permissibly \( \varphi \)s.\(^{41}\)

If DT captures the way in which justification is normative, then, plausibly enough, the following captures the sense in which the epistemic justification of belief is normative:

**The Deontic Thesis for Belief (DTB).** One’s belief that \( p \) is epistemically justified if and only if one epistemically permissibly believes that \( p \).\(^{42}\)

That said, given a substantive account of permissible belief, we can, of course, use DTB to derive a substantive account of justified belief and vice versa. Crucially, also, given DTB, desiderata for satisfactory accounts thereof will be reciprocally inherited: our account of justification had better be a normatively satisfactory account. Similarly, our account of the norm of belief had better accommodate our intuitions about justification.

This chapter is concerned with the former. That is, in what follows, I will examine norm-based accounts of justified belief in the knowledge-first camp and compare their normative credentials to those of the account I prefer. Importantly, this will not exhaust the field: several knowledge-first epistemologists have

\(^{41}\) For the purposes of this chapter, I will bracket the phenomenon of defeat. For that reason I will henceforth take the *prima facie-proviso* as read. See Chapter #4 for discussion.

\(^{42}\) I will use ‘justification’ as shorthand for ‘epistemic justification,’ unless otherwise specified.
proposed virtue-based rather than norm-based views (e.g. (Kelp 2016, 2018), (Miracchi 2015)) that follow a similar normative pattern to the view defended in this chapter. As such, they will likely enjoy similar normative benefits to the view proposed here, insofar as their proponents want to incorporate DTB in their accounts. The focus of his chapter, then, is restricted to proposals that incorporate DTB, either explicitly or implicitly, in their knowledge-first accounts of justified belief.

Here is the game plan: #2 puts forth three minimal normative desiderata that any account of justification that incorporates DTB needs to satisfy. In Section #3 and #4 I argue that several popular norm-based knowledge first views fall short of meeting at least one of the normative desiderata identified. In #5, I defend my view, Knowledge First Warrant Functionalism, and argue that it does better than its rivals. According to the view defended here, a belief is epistemically justified if and only if it is formed via a properly functioning cognitive process that has the etiological function of generating knowledge.

3.2. Normative Desiderata

We have seen already in Chapter #1 that theories about stuff X, be they scientific, philosophical or about how to make the best cheesecake, can be better or worse: they can, that is, display more or less theoretical virtues. Here are a few such virtues: evidential adequacy, causal adequacy, explanatory depth, internal consistency, internal coherence, prior plausibility, generalizability, beauty, simplicity, unification, durability, fruitfulness, applicability… Now, doing well on all of these counts is notably hard, in particular since some theoretical virtues seem to come in

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43 See, however, Chapter #4 for why we should prefer proper functionalism over virtue epistemology on a more general normative level, pertaining to the resources that these accounts have for accommodating ignored evidence, propositional warrant and defeat.

44 See (Keas 2017) for a nice taxonomy.
conflict at times; importantly, though, it is not the case that anything goes either: evidential accuracy, prior plausibility and generalizability are arguably (some of) the most stringent requirements for acceptable theories of X:

**PRIOR PLAUSIBILITY:** Theory T is externally coherent (it fits widely accepted claims in T’s domain of inquiry).

**GENERALISABILITY:** Theory T can be successfully applied to settings other than that in which it was originally tested.

**EVIDENTIAL ADEQUACY:** Theory T fits the evidence well.

Now, recall that, given DTB, desiderata for satisfactory accounts of justification, respectively the norm of belief, will be reciprocally inherited; here are, then, three minimal normative desiderata that get inherited via DTB right to left: First, one’s account of justification had better enjoy minimal prior plausibility; i.e., sit nicely within general normativity theory:

**NORMATIVE PRIOR PLAUSIBILITY:** Theory T is externally coherent (it fits widely accepted claims in the theory of normativity).\(^{45}\)

Alternatively, if the proposed account of justification takes epistemic normativity to work in special ways in one respect or another, a good case should be made for this claim.

Second, note that epistemologists do not enjoy exclusivity on justification. Justification can be e.g. practical, moral or social alike; also, both states and actions can be justified. Ideally, then, we want our account of justification to be generalizable:

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\(^{45}\) That is not to say that epistemic normativity should behave similarly to all, or even most other types of normativity. Rather, it should not be the case that the account proposed comes in conflict with overwhelmingly plausible claims about general, un-typed normative behavior.
NORMATIVE GENERALISABILITY: Theory T can be successfully applied to normative settings other than that in which it was originally tested.

That is, we want T to be generalizable to other normative domains – prudential, moral etc.—and to other targets of application—actions, other types of states etc. Again, alternatively, if this fails, we should be given a good reason to believe epistemic justification is somehow special.46

Last, the account proposed should exhibit minimal intuitive adequacy in normative respects. In a nutshell, this desideratum asks for the proposed account to be able to account for intuitively distinct normative statuses:

NORMATIVE EVIDENTIAL ADEQUACY: Theory T fits normative intuitive data well.

I take these three desiderata to be fairly minimal, and thus fairly uncontroversially constraining any account of justification that accepts DTB. In the light of this framework, in what follows I will (1) check the normative credentials of several popular, DTB-friendly knowledge first accounts of justification in the literature, against the desiderata identified (2) offer a novel, knowledge first functionalist account of justified belief and (3) argue that the account put forth does better than the competition in meeting the minimal normative desiderata identified.

3.3. Simple Knowledge First

46 This is not to say that epistemic justification should behave in identical ways to all other types of justification, but rather that it will nicely drop out of a general account of (un-typed) justification. Domain-specific differences between species of the general type are to be expected, of course.
Several philosophers believe that knowledge is the norm of belief:

**KNB**: A belief is epistemically permissible if and only if knowledgeable.

DTB in conjunction with KNB gives:

**JB=K**: One’s belief that $p$ is epistemically justified if and only if knowledgeable.


**JB=K** faces one important objection: on JB=K, the concept of justification seems to fail to play some of the most important roles we have historically wanted it to play. In particular, it looks as though the view is too strong: it fails to grant justification to both deceived and Gettierized victims\(^47\) — after all, they don’t know — and, by factivity of knowledge, it fails to allow for justified false beliefs.

Traditionally, JB=K theorists appeal to normative pluralism to escape objections along these lines. The move is one whereby they distinguish between blameworthiness and norm violation; the two are distinct normative concepts, and can be independently instantiated. According to the JB=K theorists, we are not very good at distinguishing between intuitions pertaining to these two different normative concepts; the ‘warm and fuzzy feeling’,\(^48\) as it were, that we get when we consider the unfortunate epistemic situation of, for instance, the deceived victim (or the Gettierized victim, or the epistemically conscientious false believer), we confuse for approval sourced in

\(^{47}\) See (Gettier 1963) and (Goldman 1976).

\(^{48}\) Clayton Littlejohn (pc).
compliance the norm of belief, when, in fact, its source is mere blameless norm violation.\textsuperscript{49}

Now, of course, since blamelessness is, itself, a normative notion, there are conditions—i.e. normative constraints—that one needs to meet in order to qualify as a blameless norm violator. Here are but a few identified in the relevant literature: lack of control over one’s actions, ignorance ((Kelp and Simion 2017), (Littlejohn Forthcoming), (Zimmerman 1997)), being generally disposed to conform with the norm, acting as one who is so disposed (Williamson Forthcoming). The question, then, becomes: what is the status of these further constraints in the normative landscape?

According to Tim Williamson, these normative constraints are, crucially, derivative of the primary norm at stake—in our case, the knowledge norm of belief (Forthcoming, 7-8). There is an important difference to be made between the normative status conferred by the primary norm governing \( \varphi \)-ing—mapping on to justified \( \varphi \)-ing—and the normative status conferred by mere compliance with the derivative norms—mapping on to blameless norm violating \( \varphi \)-ing. In this vein, according to Williamson, the deceived, the Gettierized victim and the conscientious false believer, while doing what someone disposed to comply with the norm of belief would do—and thereby complying with the relevant blamelessness conferring derivative norm—they fail to comply with the primary, justification conferring norm.

Insofar as it is overwhelmingly plausible that, in general, norms can be blamelessly broken, the JB=K line drops out nicely from general normativity theory, and thereby meets NORMATIVE PRIOR PLAUSIBILITY.\textsuperscript{50}

There are two different normative-theoretic problems with this move, though. The first pertains to the account’s

\textsuperscript{49} (Littlejohn Forthcoming), (Williamson Forthcoming).
\textsuperscript{50} For worries, see (Gerken 2011), (Brown 2018).
potential to capture all the needed normative distinctions these cases point to (NORMATIVE EVIDENTIAL ADEQUACY). In a nutshell, here is the worry: there intuitively seems to be an epistemically interesting normative distinction between massively deceived and Gettierized victims, or everyday conscientious false believers on one hand, and merely well-meaning believers, blamelessly employing epistemically dubious methods and processes in forming beliefs on the other, which are not easily explained by any of the extant accounts of blameless norm violation in the literature. Consider, for instance, Ben, Alvin Goldman’s (1988) benighted cognizer: this fellow forms beliefs about the outcome of the battle based on astrological readings, due to the fact that this is how he has been culturally determined to proceed, by stipulation, through no fault of his own. Goldman’s benighted guy is in breach of any plausible norm of belief, however blamelessly so, both intuitively and by any account of blamelessness in the literature. There seems, however, to be an important difference between Ben and, say, the Gettierized victim, and the difference seems to be a distinctively normative one: the Gettierized is just better off, epistemically, than Ben. To see this, note that if we were to get the opportunity, it would be fine for us to tell Ben to change his epistemic ways, but we would definitely not want to do the same in the case of Gettierized victims. To the contrary, we want to encourage the Gettierized victim to persist in her epistemic practices. The JB=K blamelessness strategy, however, stays silent on this intuitive distinctively normative difference. The view is too coarse grained to be able to capture it: according to JB=K champions, Ben and the Gettierized fellow are both in mere blameless breach of the norm of belief. Furthermore, on all accounts of blamelessness in the literature, they come out as being in the same boat, i.e. blameless in the same way: they are both unaware of being in breach of the knowledge norm, being so is beyond their

51 See also (Kelp 2016, 2018), (Miracchi Forthcoming) and (Simion et al. 2016).
control, they are both the kind of people who do what a good believer would do in their circumstances etc. As such, for now, it is hard to see how the JB=K picture can explain the intuitive normative difference between the two.

Second, and most importantly, the failure of the JB=K view to allow for justified false belief is problematic for failing to meet NORMATIVE GENERALISABILITY. To see this, note that, it looks as though, in other normative domains, justified action is distinct from successful action. Giving money to charity is a morally justified action even though, on a particular occasion, due to a strike of bad luck, it fails to reach its intended target, i.e. achieve success. Morally justified action is distinct from morally successful action. Similarly, I am justified to take Euston road to King’s Cross, given that I’ve done so successfully hundreds of times in the past, even if, on this particular occasion, a jokester daemon moves the station with the result that I fail to get there (no success). Practically justified action comes apart from practically successful action. It is not clear, then, why it should be the case that in the case of epistemic justification, things are different; that is, why justified and successful (i.e. knowledgeable) belief should amount to one and the same thing.

However, on the JB=K knowledge first picture, successful belief and justified belief coincide: they both amount to knowledgeable belief. This turns the concept of epistemic justification in an odd ball in the normative landscape; as such, the JB=K theorist owes us an explanation as to why this should be so.

In sum: the simple variety of knowledge first justification picture we have been looking at—JB=K—scores well on NORMATIVE PRIOR PLAUSIBILITY: in general, norms can be broken blamelessly. However, the view does less well in accounting for all the intuitive normative distinctions needed (i.e., NORMATIVE EVIDENTIAL ADEQUACY), and fails to allow

52 For normative distinctions along these lines, see also (Simion et al. 2016), (Greenough 2012), (McHugh 2012), and (Jarvis-Thompson 2008).
epistemic justification to fit in the same normative boat with justification of other sorts – thus scoring badly on NORMATIVE GENERALISABILITY. What I will do next is look at how more complex incarnations of the knowledge first view fare with regard to these desiderata.

3.4. Complex Knowledge First

In response to worries along the previous lines, several more complex knowledge first views have been put forth in the literature. The recipe is, again, normative pluralism. This time around, though, contra JB=K, the permissibility at stake in DTB is taken to map on to milder, non-factive norms.

To see how this goes, note that DTB makes no mention of what norm the permissibility at stake—i.e. the one mapping on to justification—pertains to. Of course, if there is one and only one norm of belief, the answer is easy. On a normative pluralist picture, however, what we need is a more restricted version of DTB, that makes it clear to what norm the permissibility at stake relates to. For instance, the Williamson view can be seen as defending the following restricted variety of DTB:

**DTB**: One’s belief that \( p \) is epistemically justified if and only if one’s belief that \( p \) is permissible by the *primary* epistemic norm of belief.

We have a normative pluralist picture with several norms that derive from a primary one, but, crucially, the latter is the one which, when met, confers the status of justified to the relevant belief. All the derivative norms only map on to blameless belief.

We have seen that there are several normative issues with this view, however, sourced in its being too strong. That, though, need not mean that one needs to abandon either KNB or DTB.
To the contrary, one can just go for normative pluralism in conjunction with a different, milder restriction on DTB. On this type of view, while knowledge is a norm of belief—regulating what a successful belief is—justification will not map on to permissibility by the knowledge norm, but by a weaker (derivative) norm governing belief.

Roughly, according to the champions of this family of views, what justification maps on to is what is happening internally in cases of knowledge. According to people like Alexander Bird (2004), Jonathan Ichikawa (2014) and Steven Reynolds (2013), justification is, in a sense to be specified further, would-be-knowledge; that is, it maps on to some internal features of the believer, which, in conjunction with friendlier external conditions, constitute knowledge.

When it comes to fleshing out what the relevant internal state may be, the accounts are quite different: for Bird, what matters is that the believer at stake have the same mental states at this world as a knower does at a different possible world. Roughly, then, the view takes it that justification “is a certain kind of approximation to knowledge, […] where the failure to know (if any) is explained by factors external to the subject’s mental states.” (Bird 2007, 86) According to Jonathan Ichikawa, “a subject’s belief is justified just in case her intrinsic state is consistent with her having knowledge” (2014, 189). Reynolds goes one step further in the direction of internalism, imposing a (non-stringent) accessibilist condition on justification: on his account, justification is the appearance of knowledge, where appearance is taken to be a fairly non-sophisticated second-order state, in order to accommodate non-sophisticated cognizers (2013, 369).

Let’s start with NORMATIVE GENERALISABILITY. Recall that we have seen that, when it comes to justification in general, successful \(\varphi\)-ing comes apart from justified \(\varphi\)-ing. At this point, it should be fairly easy to see that, at least at first glance,
internalist-friendly knowledge first views vindicate this thought, and thus score better than JB=K on this count. According to its champions, knowledge is the goal of belief—as such, successful belief will be knowledgeable belief—while the permissibility at stake in DTB maps on to a weaker state: would-be-knowledge.

When it comes to NORMATIVE PRIOR PLAUSIBILITY, some of the views in this family have better answers than others. Here is how: the question that naturally arises is: why should we care about would-be-knowledge? Why should we think it has the normative significance ascribed to it by these views? This is a central concern for the internalist-friendly knowledge firster to address. The champions of the view are themselves fairly concerned with answering this worry. In a nutshell, here are the three proposals they put forth:

Reynolds takes the normativity of assertion to aid explain the normative status of possible knowledge. According to him, knowledge is the norm of assertion, and, one needs to keep ones beliefs in constant check for assertability. Awareness of knowledge, then, is instrumental to permissible assertion, which explains its distinctive normative status (Reynolds 2013, 367).

There are two main problems with this move: First, assertion is a social phenomenon. Surely, though, we already had justified and unjustified beliefs before living in a society. As such, it seems fairly implausible that the normative significance of justified belief derives from the normative significance of permissible assertion.

Second, crucially, note that for Reynolds’ argument to work, what is needed is a fairly sophisticated second order state of awareness, rather than the very basic one Reynolds advertises when putting forth the view. That is, quite a bit of reflective work seems needed for selecting assertable beliefs; it seems implausible that someone who does not have the relevant concepts—i.e., of assertion, permissibility, belief etc. —is able to assess a belief for assertability. If that is so, though, non-sophisticated awareness of
knowledge will be of no use. The alternative, of course, would be to make the view stronger than that, but then it would lose much of its externalist appeal, in virtue of lack of friendliness towards non-sophisticated cognizers.

Ichikawa identifies a different normative source: he takes matters internal to the believer to map on to blamelessness. According to him, then, justified belief is a kind of blameless belief, which explains its normative significance (Ichikawa 2014, 193). Accordingly, then, Ichikawa’s view shares with JB=K its NORMATIVE PRIOR PLAU SIBILITY: blamelessness is a perfectly respectable normative phenomenon. On this view, then what we get is two normative dimensions: good belief—i.e., knowledgeable belief, mapping on to permissibility by the knowledge norm—and justified belief—mapping on to permissibility by a blamelessness conferring norm that is restricted to regulating the internal features of the believer.

Bird disagrees; according to him, there is a clear normative difference between blamelessness and justification; justified belief is not merely blameless, but praiseworthy (2007, 108). Accordingly, then, on Bird’s view, we get three important normative distinctions: successful belief (knowledge), praiseworthy belief (justified belief) and blameless belief. In aiming at knowledge, one can fail to reach one’s aim while doing nothing wrong (blamelessly); that is, for instance, the case of someone who is brainwashed into believing a falsehood. In contrast, one can fail to believe knowledgeably while, at the same time, doing something right, i.e. praiseworthy. This latter normative dimension, according to Bird, maps on to justified belief, and regards one’s proper ‘ordering’ of one’s mental life (2007, 108).

Importantly, note that, while NORMATIVE PRIOR PLAU SIBILITY dismisses Reynolds’ answer, it does nothing to adjudicate between Ichikawa’s and Bird’s. After all, both blamelessness and praiseworthiness are perfectly respectable
normative categories, so whichever of the two justification maps on to will do just fine.

Alas, though, the move will get the complex knowledge firster in trouble elsewhere. And here is why: first, in virtue of borrowing the normative framework form the JB=K view, Ichikawa’s account inherits both its ups and its trouble. Recall Ben, the believer in astrology: no account of blamelessness in the literature is able to explain why there seems to be an important, epistemically normative difference between him and, say, the Gettierized victim. Of course, Ichikawa’s account has a clear answer to why the latter is justified in her beliefs, while Ben is not: Ben fails to have would-be-knowledge, in the relevant sense. Note, though, that we are after is the normative significance of would-be-knowledge. If all there is to it is blameless norm violation, it follows that Ben’s blameless beliefs are normatively on a par with those of Gettierized agents. This, of course, does not get NORMATIVE EVIDENTIAL ADEQUACY right, in virtue of missing important normative distinctions.

Bird’s proposal does better on this front, in virtue of being more fine-grained. According to Bird, justified believers are better off than mere blameless believers: they are not only not deserving of a negative normative evaluation, but they are even worthy of praise.

Unfortunately, Bird’s account of praiseworthiness is too externalist for NORMATIVE PRIOR PLASIBILITY. To see this, note, first, that one can either think that praiseworthiness is a purely internal matter, or not. The first option looks normatively more plausible: it makes sense to have some positive evaluation for agents who do internally perfectly fine in one respect or another, but fail to reach their goal due to external factors. Bird himself motivates his view along such lines:

[Some] failures can be laid at the door of the believer, because the source of failure is one or more of the
believer's mental states, and some failures can be ascribed to mischance, in that the failure is due to some mentally extraneous factor. The role of the concept notion of justification is to mark the difference between these different sources of failure (Bird 2007, 96)

According to Bird, then, the crucial role played by the concept of justification —i.e. epistemic praiseworthiness — is to mark the difference between failure that is due to our environment and failure that is due to us. Now, here is the problem: Bird accepts content externalism. As such, what mental states one is in will not merely supervene on internal features of the subject. Bird’s justification preserves externalist flavour in that it is not entirely dependent on matters internal to the believer. But then, it is not clear how his account of justification—and, in turn, epistemic praiseworthiness—fits the motivations put forth in its support. After all, given that my mental states are not entirely an internal affair, they are still dependent on environmental luck. Failure to be in the right mental state is not, as Bird puts it, something that can be ‘laid at the door of the believer’ exclusively, any more than knowledge is. They both depend on cooperation of the environment. In this, the view remains silent on the normative significance of would-be-knowledge after all.

3.5. Knowledge First Warrant Functionalism

The worry I closed the last section with was one of ad hoc-ness: if we are to draw the line between justified and unjustified belief somewhere in the environment, rather than along the agent’s skin, we need a good (normative) reason to draw it there. The view I will be proposing in what follows purports to do just that.

Before doing so, however, I will try to figure out what
might have gone wrong with the accounts we have been looking at on a more general normative level. To this effect, it will be useful to have a look at a widely employed distinction in normativity theory: the distinction between evaluative and prescriptive norms. Prescriptive norms are primarily about what one ought to do. Paradigmatic examples of prescriptive norms include moral norms such as ‘Don’t steal’ or ‘Don’t lie’ but also traffic norms such as ‘Drive at most 30 mph within city bounds’ and rules of games such as ‘only move the bishop diagonally’ in chess.

In contrast, evaluative norms are ought-to-bes rather than ought-to-dos: they regulate what it takes for a token of a particular type to be good or bad with regard to its type. Take, for instance, the norm that a good hospital is a clean hospital, that a good knife is sharp or that good driving is safe driving. Evaluative norms use ‘good’ in Geach’s (1956) attributive sense, where “good” functions as a predicate modifier, rather than as a predicate in its own right. When the evaluative norm states that good knives are sharp, it merely states that knives qua knives are good only if they are sharp. It does not entail that good knives are good simpliciter, or good for some purpose or another.

Evaluative and prescriptive norms can come apart. It is entirely possible for an evaluative norm to be violated without a corresponding prescriptive norm being violated. Consider for instance the evaluative norm: ‘hospitals ought to be clean’, and one of its prescriptive counterparts: ‘hospital management ought to hire cleaning personnel’. The management team in question may have complied with the prescriptive norm, while the evaluative norm may still be violated – if the personnel in question was negligent, or ill equipped etc. And, conversely, it is possible to violate a prescriptive norm without violating any

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53 See (McHugh 2012) for discussion on the evaluative vs. prescriptive status of a truth norm of belief.
54 This is not to say that they need be action guiding in a strongly internalist sense. On the contrary, I take it that most prescriptive norms are not thus operationalizable.
evaluative norm. Suppose, for instance, no cleaning personnel is hired, but the doctors and nurses decide to work extra hours to clean the hospital – and successfully do so.

While evaluative norms thus differ from prescriptive norms, the two may still be related. In particular, prescriptive norms often enough derive from evaluative norms. They serve to ensure that evaluative norms are likely enough complied with. For instance, prescriptive norms of driving, such as the norm ‘Drive no more than 30mph within city bounds’, serve to ensure that the evaluative norm of driving—according to which good driving is safe driving—is likely enough complied with. In this way, evaluative norms often come first and prescriptive norms are in their service.

With the distinction between prescriptive and evaluative norms in play, let’s return to the case of belief. In particular, let’s ask whether the accounts of justification/the norm of belief we have been looking at should be considered as mapping on to evaluative or prescriptive norms. One answer to this question is suggested in the following passage from Williamson:

“If justification is the fundamental epistemic norm of belief, and a belief ought to constitute knowledge, then justification should be understood in terms of knowledge too” (2014, 5).

It would seem that what Williamson has in mind is an evaluative norm, stating that what it takes for a belief to be a good belief is for it to be knowledge. After all, what Williamson says here is that a belief ought to be knowledge and we saw that ought-to-be is the stuff that evaluative norms are made of.55 How about would-be-knowledge? Is this condition plausibly an

55 This also gets further confirmation in several other places in Williamson (2000, 2014). For instance, according to Williamson, “[k]nowledge sets the standard of appropriateness for belief. […] Mere believing is a kind of botched knowing. In short, belief aims at knowledge” (2000, p.47).
evaluative or a prescriptive norm? I want to suggest the former. After all, again, would-be-knowledge accounts purport to tell us what a belief ought-to-be: it ought to be the internal duplicate of a knower’s belief, or it needs to bear the appearance of knowledge etc.

Now, we have seen that, generally speaking, evaluative and prescriptive norms can come apart in the sense that it is at least in principle possible to violate a certain evaluative norm without violating any prescriptive norm and vice versa. Contra the accounts we have been looking at, the key hypothesis that I want to defend next is the following:

**NORMATIVE HYPOTHESIS:** The norm a stake in DTB is a prescriptive norm.

The idea is to allow that, in the case of belief too, the evaluative and prescriptive norms can come apart. In particular, it is possible to violate the evaluative norm of belief (i.e., in our case, knowledge) whilst complying with the prescriptive norm. This will allow us to adopt a knowledge evaluative norm of belief, whilst leaving room for a prescriptive norm that is weaker than knowledge.

The view I want to propose in what follows is one that follows this normative pattern. I dub the view *Knowledge First Warrant Functionalism*. The account is functionalist in that it takes the epistemic normativity of belief to drop out of the epistemic function of our cognitive processes. It is knowledge-first epistemological in that, unlike traditional, truth-first functionalism, it unpacks the function at stake in terms of knowledge. Here is the view:

**KNOWLEDGE FIRST WARRANT FUNCTIONALISM** (KFWF): A belief is warranted if and only if it is generated by a properly functioning cognitive process that has the epistemic
etiological function of generating knowledge.

We have seen that, on the etiological theory of functions, functions turn on histories that explain why the item exists or operates the way it does. Functions can be of different sorts: there are biological functions, aesthetic functions, social functions, etc. We have also seen that, in contrast to both the Graham/Millikan biological reductionist view, my account takes functions to be typed by the corresponding benefit. As such, if a trait produces a benefit of type B in a system, the function thereby acquired will be a function of type B. The heart’s function to pump blood is a biological function in virtue of the fact that the produced benefit is also biological – i.e., survival. The function of art is an aesthetic function in virtue of the fact that the produced benefit is an aesthetic benefit. Now, of course, aesthetic benefit might, and often will, also result in biological benefit. This, however, in no way renders the function at stake a biological function. What is important to keep in mind is that the benefit that is essential to aesthetic function acquisition is the aesthetic one. The fact that biological benefit is also associated with the latter is a mere contingent matter of fact. Recall the view:

**E-FUNCTION:** A token of type T has the e-function of type B of producing effect E in system S iff (1) tokens of T produced E in the past, (2) producing E resulted in benefit of type B in S or S’s ancestors and (3) producing E’s having B-benefitted S or S’s ancestors contributes to the explanation of why T continues to exist in S.

Recall, also, that etiological functions are successes. They explain the continuous existence of the trait that bears them because that is so. The etiological economic function of knife producing economic systems is not just that of producing knives; it’s to produce good, sharp knives. To see this, note that the positive
feedback loop that is presupposed by etiological function acquisition—the trait produces the effect, the effect benefits the system and thereby contributes to the explanation of the continuous existence of the trait—presupposes a history of success. What contributes to the explanation of the continuous existence of knife producing economic systems is their producing good, sharp knives. Blunt ones would plausibly not have done the trick.

Just as the economic function of knife producing systems is to produce good, sharp knives, the epistemic function of our belief forming systems is to produce good beliefs. Mere belief, then, is a failure on the part of our cognitive system to fulfil its epistemic function just as blunt knives are failures on the part of knife producers to fulfil their economic function.

Note, also, that knowledge meets E-Function: (1) our cognitive processes have produced it in the past (in our friendly epistemic environment, knowledge is readily available), (2) this benefitted our ancestors (the widely accepted value of knowledge thesis), which (3) contributes to the explanation of why our cognitive systems continue to exist.

Here is the view, fully spelled out (KFWF-Full): S’s belief B is warranted if and only if it is generated by a properly functioning cognitive process that (1) is a token of a type that has generated knowledge in the past, (2) it’s having generated knowledge resulted in epistemic benefit in S or S’s ancestors and (3) the fact that generating knowledge has epistemically benefitted S or S’s ancestors contributes to the explanation of why the process continues to exist in S.

Recall that there are two ways a functional device might go right, and two ways it may go wrong. The unhappy cases are: breach of the norm, i.e., malfunction (in the case of the heart, not beating) and failure to reach the corresponding purpose, i.e. failure to fulfil its function (not pumping blood) (Graham 2012, 449). The happy scenarios are, of course, proper functioning
(beating) and function fulfilment (pumping blood). Crucially, recall that failure/success in the former respect need not imply failure/success in the latter: proper functioning need not imply function fulfilment.

To return to belief: on this view, epistemic justification supervenes on the proper performance of cognitive systems that have generating knowledge as their epistemic function. The standards for proper functioning are thus constitutively associated with promoting knowledgeable beliefs.

Of course, proper functioning need not imply function fulfilment; our cognitive processes can function normally, but still fail to produce knowledgeable beliefs. It is easy to see that, in virtue of this feature, KFWF enjoys excellent NORMATIVE GENERALISABILITY: just like in many other normative domains, epistemic justification and epistemic success can come apart: our belief acquisition processes can function properly and still fail to fulfil their function, due to unfriendly environmental conditions.

In virtue of its normative richness, KFWF also scores well on NORMATIVE EVIDENTIAL ADEQUACY. Gettierized, deceived victims, and conscientious false believers alike, employ properly functioning cognitive processes that have the function of generating knowledge, and thus come out justified. In contrast, mere blameless believers such as Ben do not—albeit, through no fault of their own.

Last, there are two ways in which KFWF does exceptionally well on NORMATIVE PRIOR PLAUSIBILITY. First, on KFWF, epistemic normativity drops right out of functions and, thereby, it has a nice explanation of how normativity exists in nature. This is not all there is to it, though. Note that KFWF employs a historical account of functions, and justification is analysed in terms of knowledge. The cognitive processes at stake need to first produce the success—i.e. knowledge—a few times, in order to acquisition the relevant
function via producing the relevant type-specific benefit. Since justification supervenes on proper functioning, and there is no proper functioning unless the trait in question already has a function, justification will come second temporally. This picture receives strong naturalistic support: after all, this is how evolution works: it all starts by something good, a good trait or mutation which is randomly produced, and then reproduced in future generations due to its benefits. Note, also, that this story gets further support if one accepts the Williamsonian ‘knowledge is a state of mind’ picture. After all, if knowledge is a state of mind in its own right, it makes sense for it to be generated independently, rather than to be generated from a different state of mind.

6. Conclusion

Knowledge comes first in our epistemic affairs; keeping this value-theoretic point fixed, I have asked what the most normatively fit way to conceive of epistemic justification might be. I have argued that the geography of our normative landscape has difficulties in accommodating popular knowledge first accounts of justification, and I have defended an alternative view. On this account, beliefs are justified if and only if generated by properly functioning cognitive processes that have generating knowledge as their epistemic function. The account is proper functionalist in that it takes the epistemic normativity of belief to drop out of the epistemic function of our cognitive processes. It is knowledge-first epistemological in that, unlike traditional proper functionalism, it unpacks the function at stake in terms of knowledge.
Chapter 4

Reasons, Evidence and Defeat

4.1. Introduction

Most externalisms don’t sit comfortably with reasons, evidence and defeat. On the one hand, if you are someone who thinks that the permissibility of a token belief hangs in important ways on the epistemic credentials of the process or ability involved in its formation, talk of reasons, evidence and defeat is just not very easy to accommodate: what are reasons for belief, and, more importantly, how do they fit in this ‘machine-product model’\(^{56}\) of epistemic justification? What happens when we base beliefs on reasons, and how is that a good thing, epistemically?\(^ {57}\) How about evidence and defeat?

On the other hand, reasons, evidence and defeat are important normative categories, they seem to have magic normative power, and they are ubiquitous in both everyday and philosophical normative talk. So if externalism is to be a respectable normative theory, we’d better have something to say about reasons, evidence and defeat.

This chapter is up to an ambitious task: it aims to put forth an integrated externalist account of propositional warrant, reasons, evidence and defeat. To this effect, I first outline the basic structure of the account and define its building blocks (sections #2 to #6). Along the way, I also look at rival externalist proposals on the market, and I argue that my account wins the day in terms of theoretical virtues. In #7 I conclude.

\(^{56}\) (Zagzebski 2003)

\(^{57}\) For notable anti-reasons epistemologies, see e.g. (Lyons 2009) and (Kornblith 2015).
4.2. Reasons For Belief

Here is how I think about these things: Some reasons – be they for belief or action - are normative reasons: they explain why you ought to/are permitted to \(phi\) (believe, act etc). Some are motivating reasons: they explain why you \(phi\) in a normatively loaded way: in \(phi\)-ing, you \textit{treat} them as normative, which is why you \(phi\). They are putative normative reasons: In the good case, they actually are normative. In the bad case, they are not. Importantly, ‘treating’ is not a cognitively sophisticated affair: I can treat my cat as a friend without being aware that I do. In particular, when it comes to putative normative reasons that are not normative reasons, awareness of their (non)normative status will often come as an obstacle to ‘treating’ them as normative. Think, for instance, of wishful thinking: were you to know you’re basing your beliefs on wishes, one of two things would happen: either (ideally) you would abandon said beliefs, or, should you continue to hold them, you would not count as wishfully thinking anymore: rather, your beliefs would just be garden variety irrationally stubborn beliefs against all evidence. For generality’s sake, I will call these reasons putative reasons henceforth, rather than ‘motivating;’ (since voluntarism about belief is controversial).

Reasons are facts. They can, however, be facts about the world around us, or mere facts about a subject’s psychology. My having a perception as of a table in front of me is a psychological fact; it \textit{(pro tanto, prima facie)} supports the belief that there is a table in front of me. So does the fact that there is a table in plain view in front of me. My hearing you say that the Arctic Monkeys are playing supports my going to the concert. So does the fact that the Arctic Monkeys are playing.\(^{58}\)

\(^{58}\) This chapter focuses exclusively on reasons for and against belief. I think my view can be nicely generalized to reasons for and against action; that being said, the generalization is not straightforward (many thanks to Daniel Whiting for pressing me on this and for extremely useful comments on an earlier version of this chapter): it requires a lot of work that falls outside the scope of this chapter.
According to the view I will develop below, normative reasons for belief are indicators of norm compliance.\textsuperscript{59} The fact that there is a table in front of me is a \textit{pro tanto, prima facie} (epistemic) reason for me to believe that there is a table in front of me. It is a \textit{(pro tanto, prima facie)} indicator that if I form the belief that there is a table in front of me, my belief conforms to the (epistemic) norm of belief.

Here is the account:

\textbf{Reasons as Indicators of Norm Compliance:} A fact R is an epistemic reason to believe iff, in normal conditions, it reliably indicates that believing conforms to the evaluative epistemic norm for belief.

For the sake of readability, I will henceforth talk of ‘reasons as indicators’ for short. I will now run through the details of the view and motivate them in turn.

First, importantly, normal conditions will be the conditions in which our belief forming processes acquired their epistemic function of generating knowledge.

The norm featured in the account is an evaluative one: it’s an ought-to-be, rather than an ought-to-do. It tells us what a good belief is. On the view developed in the previous chapter, good beliefs are knowledgeable beliefs: knowledge is the evaluative epistemic norm of belief:

\textbf{KN*B:} A belief ought (epistemically) to be knowledgeable.

\textsuperscript{59} For simple indicator-based reliabilist theories see e.g. (Dretske 1971, 1981), (Alston 1988) and (Swain 1981). One account of reasons that is superficially similar to my view is Daniel Star’s ‘reasons as evidence of oughts’ account. According to this view, a normative reason to A is evidence that one ought to A. I think there are three main problems with this view, all related to its failing to generalize to reasons for belief: first, epistemic norms are permissions not obligations; second, if you find the thought that reasons for belief constitute evidence for believing plausible at all, the account is circular. Furthermore, it overkills normativity-wise: it unmotivatedly builds in two normative notions – evidence and oughts – where only one is needed (and plausible) to begin with: reasons for belief are evidence for the permissibility of believing in virtue of being evidence for believing.
As such, epistemic reasons for belief will be facts that, in normal conditions, reliably indicate that my corresponding belief, properly based on them, will be knowledgeable.\(^6^0\) The Gettierized victim has a reason to believe there is a sheep in the field: In normal conditions, the fact that they have a perception as of a sheep is a reliable indicator that their belief that there’s a sheep in the field will be knowledgeable. Norman the clairvoyant does not have reason to believe the President is in New York: in normal conditions, clairvoyant experiences do not reliably indicate that the corresponding belief will be knowledgeable.

Reliable indicators of norm compliance are facts that increase the probability of norm compliance: conditional on basing beliefs on them, your beliefs are more likely to be knowledgeable. Not just any psychological facts, then, will be reasons to believe that there is a table in front of me: my having a perception as of a table will fit the bill in virtue of having the relevant indicator property: perceptions are reliable knowledge generators; when I have a perception as of a table, the probability of my knowing that there’s a table goes up (conditional on proper basing; more on this below). The fact that I wish that there was a table in front of me will not fit the bill, even if, unbeknownst to me, my table wishes are strongly correlated with the presence of tables. The former, but not the latter, is a reliable indicator of norm compliance: wishes are not knowledge generators. For the same reason, mere beliefs, as opposed to justified and knowledgeable beliefs, will not be reasons material; they lack the normative power in virtue of lacking the relevant reliable indicator property.\(^6^1\)

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\(^6^0\) Again, importantly, reasons are mere *pro tanto*, *prima facie* indicators: they may not be weighty enough to give you all the normative support you need for knowledge, or it may be that your corresponding belief ends up not being knowledgeable because it’s improperly based on the relevant reason, or because reasons against outweigh the reason for, and so on.

\(^6^1\) How will warranted but false beliefs be able to act as premises in reasoning? After all, if I falsely but warrantedly believe it’s raining, I seem to be
4.3. Basing

One important bit of theory that is still needed in the account is a theory about basing.

Causal theories of the basing relation hold that for a belief to be based on a reason, the reason must cause the belief in an appropriate (non-deviant) way. For instance, according to (Moser, 1989, p. 157): S's believing or assenting to $P$ is based on his justifying propositional reason $Q$ if and only if S's believing or assenting to $P$ is causally sustained in a nondeviant manner by his believing or assenting to $Q$, and by his associating $P$ and $Q$.

The main competitor on the market is the doxastic view (e.g. Tolliver 1982). Doxastic theories of the basing relation hold that having an appropriate meta-belief to the effect that a reason is a good reason to hold a belief is sufficient for the belief’s being based on the reason.

I think there are ups and downs to both these views. The causal view excels in capturing the explanatory aspect of believing based on reasons, but it fails to capture its normative aspect: when I base a believe on a reason, I treat it as though it is a normative reason. Reasons are not just explanations: they are explanations with normative flavour. When I believe based on a reason or a putative reason, the reason in question does not just

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epistemically permitted to reason from 'It's raining' to 'It's wet outside.' But, of course, since it's not really raining, there is no fact that I am reasoning from.

I'm not very worried about this: first, because this is a general problem for people who think, like I do, that reasons are facts, not a particular problem for my account. People tend to think what is needed here is something like 'apparent facts' that you reason from. I don't like this view: reasons are facts, not apparent facts. One thing that I find plausible to say in these cases is something that the literature on knowledge from falsehood has explored thoroughly – and with nice results – already: sometimes, a particular bit of reasoning inherits epistemic lifting from neighboring epistem good makers. I find it plausible that what does the epistemic lifting here is the warranted belief that it's raining – a psychological fact with warrant-making properties: where the agent to reason from that – which he does not, this is not an error theory! - , he would be in the clear. If you don't like this solution, though, my account is not wedded to it: any alternative way to deal with this that has been proposed in the reasons-as-facts literature will do.
cause my belief – brainwashing could do that just as well. It
causes it in virtue of a (n alleged) support relation. Even when
we base our beliefs in the wrong way – for instance, on wishes –
there is a normative dimension to the basing relation: we treat
wishful thinking as a reason for believing. To see this, note that if
we don’t, it fails: wishful thinking does not work well with
awareness of wishful thinking.

The doxastic view captures the essentially normative
aspect of basing: the believer forms the corresponding belief in
virtue of what she takes to be a good support relation. It does so
at a very serious over-intellectualization cost, however.

I want to suggest that a very serious competitor is mostly
absent on the basing market: for now, we have a purely
explanatory, non-normative account, and an over-intellectualized,
internalist normative account. We are (mostly) missing externalist
normativity (but see below).

My view on basing aims to capture both its explanatory
and its normative dimensions - which I take to be jointly
necessary and sufficient for basing - but in externalist terms.
Unsurprisingly, the view relies on my account of reasons.

I construe basing as indicator following: Reasons are
indicators of norm compliance, and the basing relation consists in
following these indicators. Here is the view:

**Basing as Following Indicators:** A belief B/action A is based
on a reason R iff, in believing B/doing A, the subject is treating R
as an indicator of norm compliance and thereby follows R.

The fact that I have a perceptual experience as of a table in front
of me is a reason for me to believe that there is a table in front of
me because it (normally) reliably indicates that my corresponding
belief will comply with the norm of belief – i.e., on my view, it
will be knowledgeable. In turn, my belief that there is a table in

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62 One important exception is Sylvan & Sosa’s (2018) competence condition
on basing. See below.
front of me is based on the fact that I see a table in front of me if, in so believing, I treat this fact as an indicator that my belief will comply with the norm of belief and thereby follow it.\textsuperscript{63}

The ‘following’ relation, in turn, is unpacked in terms of psychological proper functioning: I follow the relevant indicator in believing iff my belief forming process (i.e., process with the function of forming beliefs) is properly functioning. What is proper function? It is the way in which the process worked at the time of function acquisition. Importantly, again, proper function does not imply function fulfilment: it may be that the conditions are not normal conditions – i.e., conditions similar to those present at the moment of function acquisition. Just like a properly functioning heart can fail to pump blood if removed from the chest and placed in a vat with orange juice, my belief forming processes may fail to produce beliefs.

If we understand what we do when we follow traffic indicators, we should be able to sympathize with this account of basing. Not just any pathway from input – the fact that here is an indicator to the right – to output – my turning right - will do for counting as having followed the relevant indicator. It needs be a properly functioning one.

Note the following theoretical goods that come with this account of basing: first, no unsatisfactory talk of ‘causing in the right way’ is needed to handle cases of weird causation. If the presence of a traffic indicator pointing to the right makes it such that my guardian angel generates a strong wish in me to turn right, and I thereby do so, I will not thereby have followed the relevant indicator in my turning right. Similarly, if the presence of a table in front of me makes it such that my guardian angel generates a belief in me that there’s a table, I will not have followed this indicator – the fact that there is a table in front of

\textsuperscript{63} Isn’t this just another way to spell out non-deviance? The answer is ‘no.’ Causation – deviant or not – is not a normative relation. What this account amounts to is a view on basing that ads normativity to causation. Many thanks to Jack Lyons for pressing me on this point.
me – in my forming the belief that there’s a table in front of me.

Second, the account is very friendly to unsophisticated cognizers: treating some fact like an indicator need not be accompanied by the corresponding belief that that particular fact is an indicator. It’s a completely lowbrow affair.

4.4. Reasons for Me to Believe

Some reasons to believe are available to me, some are not. Not just any facts, then, will be reasons for me to believe: they need to, somehow, be within my reach. Mere strong correlation in normal conditions is not enough: Peano axioms will not be reasons for me to believe all arithmetical truths (alas). The initial state of nature and its laws will not be reasons for me to believe all historical truths (or for anybody with my limited cognitive capacities, for that matter). All these facts, while reliable indicators of norm compliance in normal conditions, are not available to me.

Again, reasons may be facts ‘in the head’ or facts in the world. Some reasons - whether they are in the head or in the world, it does not matter – are available to me, they are, as it were, ‘at hand’ in my (internal or external) epistemic environment. Some – whether in the head (think of cognitive biases, for instance) or in the world, it does not matter – are not thus available to me.

Here are, for starters, some paradigmatic cases that illustrate what I’m talking about: If there is a table in front of me, but I’m not paying attention to it, there is a reason available for me to believe that there is a table in front of me. If, totally out of the blue and unbeknownst to me, a generous local joiner decided to make me a table for my birthday and placed in on my porch while I’m out of town, the fact that there is a table on my porch is reason to believe that there is a table on my porch, but it’s not available to me: it’s not a reason for me to believe there’s a table on
my porch. Similarly, if I have some mental state that’s so deeply buried in my psychology that I can’t access it, it constitutes a reason that exists but is unavailable to me.

Here is some theory about the notion of availability at work here: first, we are cognitively limited creatures. There is only so much information we can access: the fact that there is a table in front of me is something that I can easily access. The fact that, completely unexpectedly, the town joiner made a grand gesture on my birthday is not something I can easily access. As a first approximation, then, my notion of availability will track a psychological ‘can’ for an average cognizer of the sort exemplified. This psychological ‘can’ will be further restricted by features of the (social, physical) environment: we are supposed to check whether there are crocodiles in the lake, but not in the fridge; that’s because we are too limited to check everywhere, and our physical environment is such that they are more likely to be in the lake than in the fridge. We are supposed to read the newspaper on the table in front of us, but not the letter under the doormat. That’s because we are limited creatures – we can’t read everything – and our social environment is such that written testimony is more likely to be present in the newspaper on the table than under the doormat. Availability is easy enough availability.

There is one further psychological restriction on my notion of availability: reasons are not available to you if you can’t process the support relation. The fact that your car is in the driveway is a reason for me to believe you’re home. But it’s not a reason for my three-year-old son Max to believe that you’re home. Max is not sophisticated enough to be attuned to the support relation, and thus to process it into a belief that you’re home.

On a first approximation, then, a reason R is available to one insofar as one has a process with the function of generating beliefs that can easily uptake R, (in the sense and with the
restrictions) described above. What we are after is psychological availability for the type of cognizer in question:

**Availability**: a reason R is available to one iff one has a process with the function of generating knowledge that can *easily uptake* R (in the sense and with the restrictions described above).

### 4.5. Evidence and Defeat

In my view, evidence and defeat amount to available reasons for and, respectively, against believing. In this, I conceive of the evidential relation as a relation between states of the world – facts – and doxastic states, rather than propositions. Here is why I think that’s the right thing to think: I take it that Peano axioms are not evidence for all arithmetical truths, nor are the initial state of nature and its laws evidence for all historical truths. Conversely, Peano axioms are not plausibly defeaters for all arithmetical falsehoods. If that is the case, evidence and defeat imply an availability relation. They consist in reasons for one to believe. Being a reason is a two-place predicate: something can be a reason for believing, acting etc. Being evidence, in my view is a three-place relation: it consists in a fact being a reason *for one* to believe.¹⁶⁴

To be clear, I don’t want to say that the only evidence for climate change are the facts that are reasons for me to believe climate change is happening. There are also reasons for the science community to believe climate change is happening that are not available to me. The point is, rather, that *my* evidence will consist in reasons *for me* to believe climate change is happening (and, of course, the scientific community’s evidence will consist in reasons *for them* to believe climate change is happening).

Let us state this nicely for clarity:

¹⁶⁴ Thanks to Jack Lyons for helping me clarify this.
**S’s Evidence**: S’s available reasons to believe.

**S’s Defeat**: S’s available reasons against believing.

Given my proposed view on reasons, then, what we get is that S has evidence that there is a table in front of her iff she has available to her (normally) reliable indicators that her belief that there is a table in front of her will be knowledgeable. Conversely, defeaters are available indicators of norm violation: S has defeaters against there being a table in front of her iff she has available to her (normally) reliable indicators that her belief that there is a table in front of her will not be knowledgeable.

Some reasons for me to believe/against believing are reasons that I take up into my belief formation machinery. Some I fail to take up. In turn, then, my evidence that I fail to take up will constitute my propositional warrant for p – warrant that I have, but I fail to form beliefs in virtue of - while my defeat that I fail to take up will constitute my (mere) normative defeat for p:

**Propositional Warrant**: S’s not-uptaken available reasons to believe.

**Normative Defeat**: S’s not-uptaken available reasons against believing.

Note a few advantages of this view; first, it nicely explains why higher-order evidence of reliability of the source of support for p is evidence for p. To see this, consider an easy case of testimony: say that at t1 Mary tells me that the train to London is leaving at 8pm (p). At t2, Anna tells me Mary is very reliable when it comes to the schedule of trains to London. Whatever your view on testimony, one thing that’s clear is that I should be more confident that the train to London leaves at 8pm at t2 than at t1.
My view neatly explains this: in virtue of the evidence relation being unpacked in terms of doxastic support, higher-order evidence for \( p \) is evidence for \( p \). Mary’s having said that \( p \) is (normally) a \((\text{pro tanto, prima facie})\) reliable indicator that my belief that \( p \) based on her testimony will be knowledgeable. Anna’s testimony too is (normally) a reliable indicator that my belief that \( p \) based on Mary’s testimony is knowledgeable.

Conversely, this view neatly explains undercutting defeat: undercutting defeat just is a \((\text{pro tanto, prima facie})\) indicator my belief is not knowledgeable, just like rebutting defeat. On this view, then, there is nothing special – i.e., unfamiliar – about defeat. Defeat is the counterpart of evidence, and just like evidence, it can come in two forms: it can affect the belief via speaking to the likelihood of the proposition in question, or via speaking to the credentials of the belief-formation process.

In virtue of all this, the view nicely explains away the akratic puzzle: since undercutting defeat just is an indicator against norm conformity for my belief, while evidence is an indicator in favour of the norm-conformity of my belief, they are properly weighed against each-other. Epistemic akrasia is, on this view, equally irrational to garden-variety cases of mis-weighing opposing evidence.

One interesting consequence that might worry some readers is that, on my account, there is no such thing as mere psychological defeat.\(^{65}\) Since normative reasons can be facts in the world or psychological facts, all defeat is normative. I would like to embrace this consequence. I want to say that if I now fully irrationally believe – for no normative reason, based on, say astrological predictions - that I will win the lottery tonight, I am not thereby entitled to abandon my belief that I will go to work tomorrow. Psychological defeat needs to be normative in order

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\(^{65}\) Pollock and Cruz (1999) motivate this category with a case of belief from a lying testifier. I think the category remains unmotivated: indeed, on most, if not all, accounts of testimony, one can gain justified beliefs from an instance of lying testimony, insofar as: the testifier is otherwise reliable (anti-reductionism), or one has independent reasons to believe the testifier (reductionism).
for it to be defeat in the first place.

Last but not least, one important advantage of this view of evidence and defeat is that it explains cases of failure to take up propositional warrant and its converse, normative defeat. What I have in mind are cases in which we want to criticise agents for their epistemic failure to take up available evidence or defeaters. Consider the case of Bill, the stubborn supporter of President Dump. In spite of a lot of the evidence that is readily available to him (via mainstream media, Dump’s own actions and public statements etc.) suggesting that Dump is a bad president, Bill stubbornly refuses to believe that Dump is a bad president. Furthermore, he even goes as far as to stubbornly believe that Dump is a good president, against all available defeat. Intuitively, we want to say that Bill is properly criticisable epistemically.

The account defended here delivers on this intuition: Bill has evidence for believing that Dump is a bad president, in virtue of there being available reasons for Bill to believe that Dump is a bad president. That is because media testimony, Dump’s statements etc. in question are available, (normally) reliable indicators that the belief that ‘Dump is a bad President’ will be knowledgeable. Conversely, the view also delivers the result that Bill’s belief that Dump is a good President is defeated normatively: Bill has available reasons against believing that Dump is a good President. The media testimony, Dump’s statements etc. are available, (normally) reliable indicators that the belief that Dump is a good president will not be knowledgeable. 66

4.6 The Competition

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66 Can’t the intuition of badness here be explained in ethical rather than epistemic terms? Can’t we just say that Bill is ethically blameworthy for his beliefs? The answer is ‘no.’ To see this, note that the vast majority of the accounts of blame defended in the literature impose an epistemic condition on blamelessness (see Chapter #3). If this is correct, ethical blameworthiness implies epistemic blameworthiness of sorts. We are back where we started.
Crucially, competing externalist views of evidence, defeat and propositional warrant will have trouble explaining the epistemic badness intuition in cases of failure of uptake.

To see this, consider, first, Tim Williamson’s E=K view: according to Williamson, Bill’s evidence is Bill’s knowledge. However, Bill does not believe, and therefore does not know that Dump is a bad president, and thus, on this view, has no evidence that Dump is a bad president. But if that’s the case, it is mysterious why we should think there’s anything epistemically criticisable about Bill’s doxastic attitudes in this case.

Note, also, that no obvious way to twist the view would easily deliver this result either: consider a view on which Bill has propositional warrant for p: ‘Dump is a bad President’ in virtue of the fact that, although p is not known to Bill, it follows from his extant knowledge. This, in turn, explains the intuition of criticisability. Unfortunately, this view will still not deliver the needed result if we describe the case as one in which Bill's system of (false) beliefs about Dump being a great guy is perfectly coherent, although completely unjustified: p will not follow from any piece of knowledge Bill has.

Furthermore, the view will end up being too externalist: after all, again, Peano axioms do not constitute my evidence for all arithmetical truths. However – on the assumption that I know Peano axioms – all arithmetical truths will follow from knowledge that I already have.

One alternative way to develop E=K in order to account for cases like that of the Dump supporter would be by employing the notion of being in a position to know. Plausibly, the thought would go, the Dump supporter is in a position to know that Dump is a bad president: that’s what explains our intuition that he’s falling in important ways, epistemically, when he fails to form the corresponding belief.

A few things about this: first, note that a lot will hinge on

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67 Carlotta Pavese suggested this to me in conversation.
how the relevant notion of being in a position to know will be spelled out. Here is one straightforward way to do it: S is in a position to know that \( p \) iff, were S to believe that \( p \), S would know that \( p \). Bill, then, on this account, is in a position to know that Dump is a bad president iff, were he to form the relevant belief, he would come to know that Dump is a bad president.

Unfortunately, the view thus spelled out will not deliver the needed result, and here is why: on one hand, if we keep Bill’s psychology otherwise fixed, and all that changes is his forming the relevant belief, it will fail to constitute knowledge in virtue of its acute incoherence with the rest of his belief system. On the other hand, if, in order to assess Bill’s actual epistemic situation, we go and look at the closest world where Bill’s psychology is radically different,\(^68\) such that, indeed, were he to form the belief that Dump is a bad president, it would constitute knowledge, our account of propositional warrant becomes too strong. To see this, consider, again, Ben, the benighted cognizer (discussed in Chapter #3). Plausibly, Ben does not have evidence/propositional warrant for ‘Astrology is an unreliable way to form beliefs.’ However, at the closest world where his psychology is different enough (say that Ben leaves his benighted community and joins in the epistemic practices of the rest of the world), such that now he believes the relevant proposition, he knows it. As such, the account over-generates propositional warrant.

Of course, all that I’ve said so far is compatible with there being a way to spell out ‘being in a position to know’ such that it delivers the right result. I take myself to have provided just that: my view on propositional warrant is one way to spell out being in a position to know that will get us out of the Dump supporter trouble.

One last move available to the defender of \( E=K \)\(^69\) is to argue that the case of the Dump supporter is not one where the

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\(^{68}\) Thanks to Amia Srinivasan for pressing me on this point.

\(^{69}\) In conversation, Tim Williamson expressed a preference for this option.
relevant facts indicating that Dump is a bad president are not evidence, but rather potential evidence: evidence that Bill, had he not had bad epistemic dispositions, would have had. One important problem with this move, however, is that it is both too weak and too strong. To see why it is too weak, consider the case of two detectives, D1 and D2, investigating a crime scene with the aim of determining whether the butler did it. D1 is rather lazy and distracted: he shallowly looks around the crime scene a couple of times, fails to notice anything of importance, and concludes that there’s no evidence to suggest that the butler did it. As a result, he suspends judgment. In contrast, D2 is extremely thorough, but, at the same time, a close friend of the butler’s. D2 finds conclusive evidence that the butler did it at the crime scene—the butler’s gloves covered in blood, his fingerprints on the murder weapon, a letter written by the butler confessing to the crime— but fails to form the corresponding belief: D2 just can’t get herself to believe her friend, the butler, would do such a thing: she, too, suspends judgment.

I submit that both D1 and D2 are rather rubbish detectives. Compatibly, I submit, there is an important epistemic difference between D1 and D2: D2, but not D1 has evidence in support of the hypothesis that the butler did it, and fails to form the relevant belief nevertheless. Note, however, that both D1 and D2 display petty bad epistemic dispositions: D1 is a sloppy epistemic agent, while D2 fails to believe what the facts support. In virtue of this, the defender of the ‘potential evidence’ view in terms of bad epistemic dispositions will have a hard time accommodating the crucial epistemic difference between D1 and D2. What is needed is a principled way to identify the dispositions that matter.

To see why the view is also too strong, note that one need not have bad epistemic dispositions in order to fail, epistemically, in the way in which Bill does: it can be a one-off affair. Maybe Bill is an excellent epistemic agent in all other walks of life: it’s only
this particular belief – that Dump is a bad president – that he refuses to form against all facts speaking in favour of it.\textsuperscript{70}

Let’s move on: Sandy Goldberg (2016) also likes a view in the vicinity of the ‘potential evidence’ view. On his account, the Dump case comes out as a case of evidence Bill \textit{should} have had, rather than one of evidence Bill has. According to Goldberg, the relevant ‘should’ here is social: social norms are such that one is supposed to read the newspaper on the table, but not the letter under the doormat. In virtue of this, he thinks, what’s printed in the newspaper on the table is evidence one should have had even if one fails to read it. Two things about this view: first, it’s not clear to me that we want to allow social normativity to interfere into our epistemic affairs so abruptly: after all, social norms can be bad, epistemically. In many places, social norms are such that one should believe white men but not women or people of colour. Surely, we don’t want to licence (epistemically) the corresponding belief formation strategies. Second, recall the case of the two detectives above: they both (socially) should do better in acquiring evidence, but only one of them is, intuitively, refusing to believe the butler did it in the face of evidence.

Consider another externalist view of reasons and propositional warrant, the virtue-theoretic view defended by e.g. (Burge 2013), (Sylvan and Sosa forthcoming) and (Turri 2010). According to these authors, competences come first in epistemic normativity. The only way in which a reason can have any epistemic normative standing is if it is competently taken up and processed by the agent. At root, it is reliable epistemic competence that is doing the epistemic warranting work, even when reasons are involved. “[W]e think these claims [about reasons supporting a species of justified belief] could only be true if possession and proper basing are themselves grounded in a

\textsuperscript{70} One way for Williamson to escape this problem is by making the view one that not only asks for the relevant dispositions to be present, but also exercised (thanks to Chris Kelp for pressing me on this point). I agree that this might be the way forward here. The account, however, remains problematic even if this move turns out to be successful, in virtue of its being too weak.
deeper normative property of competence” (Sylvan & Sosa 2018).

How do reasons fit with competences? The thought is, roughly, that sometimes beliefs are properly based on reasons, and therefore warranted; both possession of the relevant reasons and proper basing require competence. As such, the authors take competences to be the fundamental building blocks of epistemic normativity.

One question that comes to mind is: isn’t focusing on reasons the agent has to believe too narrow a focus to justify the bold claim that competences lay the foundation of epistemic normativity? Here are Sylvan and Sosa on this:

[O]ur discussion will center on possessed normative reasons for doxastic attitudes rather than unpossessed normative reasons, for the simple reason that these are the reasons most clearly suited to ground paradigmatic epistemic statuses like justification and rationality.

The thought is, then, that since the ambition is to incorporate reasons in one’s theory of doxastic justification, it’s not that interesting to look at reasons the agent does not have.

I disagree: focusing on the good case is misleading. As I am about to argue, it renders the view both too weak and too strong.

Here is why it’s too weak: normative reasons to believe are, as the name suggests, normative (epistemically), whether you have them or not. In that, the competence-based view seems to put the cart before the horse: plausibly, what it is to be a competent believer is, among other things, to uptake the right things as inputs to your belief processes. Norman the clairvoyant is an incompetent believer, in a way in which I’m not. That is because I employ the right kind of facts in my belief formation, and he does not.
Think, also of cases of (mere) propositional warrant, like the case of the Dump supporter; this is warrant that is not competence-generated – since not taken up. There are two options here: either the agent’s competences will not be basic to epistemic normativity, or you will have to have a view on which propositional warrant is explained as derivative of doxastic warrant. John Turri defends a view like this. According to him, for all \( p \), \( p \) is propositionally warranted for a subject \( S \) iff \( S \) possesses at least one means to come to believe \( p \) such that, were \( S \) to form the relevant belief via one of these means, \( S \)’s belief would be doxastically warranted. In turn, doxastic warrant is unpacked in terms of epistemic virtue: \( S \) is doxastically warranted to believe \( p \) iff \( S \)’s belief is the product of a reliable belief formation ability of \( S \)’s. It is easy to see that Bill does not fit the bill: by stipulation, Bill has no epistemic virtue available to him for taking up the available evidence and defeat. To see this, note that epistemic abilities are traditionally unpacked as dispositions to believe truly (Sosa 2016), or know (Kelp 2016, Miracchi 2015). By stipulation, though, Bill does not have the relevant disposition in the case discussed. Bill is, by stipulation, not an epistemically virtuous agent.

On Turri’s view, then, at first glance, we get the counterintuitive result that Bill is exempt from criticism just because he is epistemically vicious.\(^71\) Turri sees the worry, but

\(^71\) I am not discussing here Alvin Goldman’s (1979) process reliabilist unpacking of defeat: according to Goldman, \( S \)’s belief is defeated as long as there are alternative reliable (or conditionally reliable) belief-forming processes available to \( S \) such that, if \( S \) had used those processes in addition to the process actually used, \( S \) wouldn’t have held the belief in question. Importantly, though, Goldman explicitly excludes consulting new testifiers (or other such ‘external’ sources, for that matter) from the alternative processes in question. Goldman writes: [I]t seems implausible to say all ‘available’ processes ought to be used, at least if we include such processes as gathering new evidence. Surely a belief can sometimes be justified even if additional evidence-gathering would yield a different doxastic attitude. What I think we should have in mind here are such additional process as calling previously acquired evidence to mind, assessing the implications of that evidence, etc. (Goldman 1979) By stipulation, though, the case of Bill is one where the available evidence is external, i.e. it consists of media testimony etc. For Goldman’s account in detail and some problems, see (Beddor 2015). For a novel alternative-process-based view of defeat, see (Lyons MS).
sticks to his guns and dismisses it with an error theory: according to him, there are times when we attribute propositional warrant based on what the agent herself has the ability to believe, and times when we do so based on what the type of agent at stake has the ability to believe.

I don’t think an error theory will do the work here: we are intuitively right to say that Bill has warrant to believe that Dump is a bad president. More generally: We don’t want to say that, merely in virtue of the fact that you are an irresponsible believer, you are exempt from the normative pressure of available evidence. This seems to suggest that there’s something more basic, less agent-centred at the foundation of epistemic normativity.

Note too that this is hardly a peculiarity of epistemic normativity: we want to say that there are moral and prudential reasons to act in particular way that put pressure on the agent, even if the agent is normatively sloppy.

Importantly, that this difficulty will be shared by any virtue-theoretic account that takes doxastic warrant to be more basic than propositional warrant, and thereby attempts to analyse the latter in terms of the former. If epistemic virtues underlie doxastic warrant, and doxastic warrant underlies propositional warrant, we get a view whereby the presence of epistemic virtues is necessary for the presence of propositional warrant.

What to do? I believe there is one plausible move to be made here on behalf of the virtue theorist: one standard virtue reliabilism, epistemic virtues are cognitive abilities. Abilities, in turn, are generally unpacked in terms of (normally) reliable cognitive dispositions. Dispositions can fail to manifest themselves when ‘masked:’ consider the fragility of a vase. When in a room filled with pillows, the vase is still fragile, although its disposition to break cannot manifest itself. Similarly, virtue theorists could argue, Bill has an epistemic ability to form the relevant true belief about Dump, but it’s ‘masked’ by the presence of many incompatible – though false – beliefs.
The problem with this move, however, is that it threatens ad-hoc-ness: how are we to distinguish between agents who lack the relevant epistemic ability altogether, and agents whose ability is merely ‘masked’? One straightforward way to do this seems to be suggested by the case of the vase: abilities, just like dispositions, can be masked due to environmental conditions (e.g. Fara 2008). For instance, one could argue, Ben, the benighted cognizer, has a masked cognitive ability: were he to move to a friendlier epistemic environment, he would employ the right kinds of methods of belief formation. There are two problems for this route. First, again, it places Ben and Billy in the same normative category; however, intuitively, Ben does not have any evidence available to him/propositional warrant for the proposition ‘Astrology is a bad way to form beliefs.’ Second, note that Bill’s environment, as opposed to Ben’s, does not seem to be the culprit for his failure: there is, by stipulation, plenty of evidence suggesting that Damp is a bad president available in Bill’s environment. Bill’s failure is sourced in its epistemically vicious cognitive machinery, not in his environment. The virtue theorists, thus, needs to tell us more about how we should understand the relevant notion of ‘masked ability,’ and how it differs from garden-variety lack of ability.

As it stands, the competence-based view, then, in virtue of being overly agent-centered, is too weak to account for all epistemic normativity. Interestingly, though, that the view is also in an important way too strong, for the same reason - i.e. agent centrism. This worry concerns the virtue-theoretic account of basing. The view accounts for having reasons and basing on reasons in terms of epistemically competent handling. On the upside, that nicely provides an instance of externalist normativity at work in the service of an account of basing. The problem with the resulting view, however, is that it lacks generality: it only explains epistemically proper having and basing, and fails to capture ‘bad’ having and basing. When we base our beliefs on e.g. wishes or astrological predictions, or, more generally, on facts
that bear no normative support to the belief in question, we seem to be non-epistemically-virtuously engaging in having and basing, but engaging, nevertheless. Norman the clairvoyant and wishful thinkers alike have putative reason to believe and they base their beliefs on them; since the facts in question, though, are mere putative normative reasons rather than normative reasons – wishes and clairvoyant experiences – they end up unwarranted in their corresponding beliefs.

If that is the case, it cannot be that epistemic virtues are what we were looking for to account to the way in which basing is essentially normative. What is more plausible is that virtues do the epistemic lifting in cases of proper basing – i.e., they turn basing into proper basing – rather than that they are somehow essentially part of the basing relation itself. That is not to say that the account can’t, maybe, be somehow generalized; just to point out that it will surely not be trivial, for epistemic virtues are epistemically good traits, while believing based on wishes is an epistemically bad habit.

It turns out, in sum, that, by going agent-centred, the virtue-based account builds too little normativity in reasons available to the agent, and too much normativity in the basing relation.

4.7. Reasons, Evidence and Doxastic Warrant

Final question: how does this account of reasons, evidence and defeat fit within my account of doxastic epistemic warrant?

Recall that in my view knowledge is the evaluative norm of belief (KN'B), and that my view on doxastic epistemic warrant also has a knowledge-first spin to it:

**Knowledge First Warrant Functionalism (KFWF):** A belief enjoys epistemic warrant iff formed via a properly functioning
belief forming process that has the function of generating knowledge.

Importantly, recall that KFWF is weaker than KNeB. On this view, doxastic epistemic warrant maps on to permissibility by a prescriptive norm of belief, an ought-to-do, not an ought-to-be (KNpB). It stipulates the conditions that the belief formation process needs to meet for the output belief to enjoy epistemic entitlement. Beliefs will meet this norm when epistemically properly formed.

Note, though, that KFWF is stronger than the conjunction of Reasons as Indicators and Basing as Following Indicators. That is because processes that only get it right by accident are not warrant generators. To see this, consider a case in which I form the belief that \( p \) based on \( q \& r \), where \( q \& r \) are sufficient abductive reason to believe that \( p \); however, my belief that \( p \) is formed via faulty deduction from \( q \& r \). My belief that \( p \) is not warranted, although based on the right reasons: more is needed. My basing needs to be epistemically proper. On top of having the function of generating beliefs, for doxastic warrant, the relevant process has to have the function of generating good, i.e. knowledgeable beliefs.

What is the relationship between warranted beliefs and the normative reasons for which the beliefs are held? Normative reasons are pro tanto, prima facie doxastic warrant makers: they are inputs to the process of belief formation, and when the latter has the function of generating knowledge and is properly functioning, the resulting belief is epistemically warranted. One illuminating analogy here is the proper functioning of the lungs: as opposed to functional traits whose proper function is not input-dependent (e.g. hearts can function properly in vats with orange juice, even though they fail to pump blood), what it is for our lungs to function properly is, partly, for them to take up the right stuff, i.e. oxygen, from our blood stream. Lungs that fail to do so are
improperly functioning. Similarly, on my view, since reasons are facts that (normally) reliably indicate that the beliefs based on them will be knowledgeable, they are essential good-making building blocks of the warrant-conferring belief forming process: one way in which the process can fail to function properly is by taking up the wrong kind of facts.

4.8. Conclusion

I have argued that my view wins the day in terms of normative generalizability and extensional adequacy: first, my view allows for basing on bad reasons. Second, on my view, sloppy cognizers are not exempt from epistemic norms: available reasons have normative strength in virtue of their indicating norm-compliance whether particular agents take them up and base beliefs on them or not. Epistemic normativity is not agent based, it is function based.

Here is what happens, in my view, when all goes well: environmental conditions are normal, the inputs to the process of belief formation are normative epistemic reasons – i.e. they are (normally) reliable indicators that that beliefs based on them will be knowledgeable –, the process of belief formation has the function of generating knowledge and is functioning properly head to toe – uptakes the right kind of reasons and processes them properly into beliefs.

Very briefly: Think again of the two main worries for externalisms: the New Evil Daemon problem for the necessity direction and the clairvoyance problem for the sufficiency direction of externalist accounts of justification. The (later-in-life-envatted) BIV has reasons to believe (i.e. evidence) there’s a tree in front of her because her corresponding perceptual experience does meet the indicator condition, her belief forming processes have the function of generating knowledge and they are
functioning properly. Norman the clairvoyant does not have reasons to believe (i.e. evidence) that the President is in New York; clairvoyant experiences lack the relevant indicator property, and so aren’t normative reasons in the first place. Rather, they are putative reasons: Norman treats them as though they are normative, although they’re not.
Chapter 5

The Belief/Assertion Commonality Assumption

4.1. Introduction

It looks as though there’s a clear sense in which you should only say things you actually believe; after all, we criticize each other all the time for doing otherwise: ‘You don’t believe that yourself?’, or ‘Why would you say such a thing? Do you really believe it to be true?’ are fairly common ways to challenge assertions. Several philosophers take this to suggest that, if there is such a thing as a particular epistemic standard governing our speech acts and mental states, in the case of belief and assertion, it is one and the same. This has become known in the literature as ‘the belief/assertion norm commonality assumption’ (henceforth the commonality assumption, or CA for short). If this assumption is correct, the view of the normativity of belief developed in Chapter #3 would trivially apply to the normativity of assertion as well.

This chapter argues that the commonality assumption remains unmotivated. In order to do that, first, I identify two broad types of defence of CA: first, there are people who believe that, in a relevant way, belief and assertion are essentially the same kind of beast, only manifested in different environments (‘the belief-assertion parallel’, notably defended in Adler (2002)). Importantly, these philosophers also take this metaphysical parallelism to have import in the normative realm. Let us dub these arguments ‘normative correspondence’ arguments.

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72 Here and below, what is discussed is the necessity claim involved in whatever the norm at stake.
73 For champions of CA, see, e.g. (Bach 2008), (Hindriks 2007), (Douven 2006) (Williamson 2000).
Secondly, I will be looking at what Jessica Brown (2012) dubs ‘inheritance arguments’; according to these lines of defence, belief and assertion are governed by one and the same epistemic norm in virtue of the fact that they either inherit it from each other, or from a common source. For instance, concerning the latter, one popular line argues that, since both belief and assertion ultimately serve to store/communicate actionable information, they will both inherit their epistemic norm from action. I argue that both routes are in need of further defence.

4.2. Normative Correspondence

One can defend the commonality assumption without offering much in the way of theoretical grounds\textsuperscript{74} to believe it to be true. One can do this by merely independently defending one and the same norm, in our case, for both assertion and belief, or on mostly empirical grounds, by noting that intuitions concerning propriety tend to go hand in hand for the two. However, this view does not propose any deeper underlying motivation for assertion and belief being governed by one and the same norm. For all it is shown, norm commonality for assertion and belief might be a mere accident.

Since it is rather implausible that this should be so, for the purposes of this chapter, I would like to set this strategy aside; after all, it would surely be theoretically more satisfactory if we managed to identify a motivation to believe CA holds.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{74}I borrow from Brown’s (2012) illuminating discussion of assertion/action commonality when it comes to categorizing lines of defense.

\textsuperscript{75}Supporters of the first strategy might argue that theoretical considerations pertaining to parsimony recommend their theory over non-commonality. Note, though, that parsimony is only an all-else-equal virtue. For instance, we would not want to say that a theory that postulates commonality for inner city and Formula 1 driving is preferable to a theory that does not. What this seems to suggest is that commonality will be a virtue insofar as we have reason to believe that belief and assertion are, in some relevant respects, similar beasts. For discussion of this line of argument, see the next section.
And, indeed, several strategies proposed in the literature belong here. Let us start with what I have dubbed ‘the normative correspondence proposal’. Recall that one very widely spread assumption in recent literature on epistemic norms is that the ‘belief-assertion parallel’ (henceforth BAP) has a special kind of normative import. That is, several prominent philosophers (e.g. Williamson (2000), Douven (2006), Sosa (2010)) employ the thesis that, roughly put, belief stands to assertion like inner to outer, to argue from the epistemic norm governing one to the epistemic norm governing the other. It is assumed, then, that metaphysical parallelism licenses norm correspondence.

This section questions this extremely popular assumption. To this effect, I first argue that, in its most plausible formulation, the belief-assertion parallel lacks any normative import. Further on, I turn to two remaining possible readings of BAP in an attempt to shed serious doubts on their plausibility and normative strength.

4.2.1 Like Inner to Outer

In Timothy Williamson’s reading, the belief assertion parallel amounts to the claim that:

**BAP**: Believing \( \phi \) stands to asserting \( \phi \) as the inner stands to the outer (2000, 255-56).

Given BAP, and having offered extensive argument for a knowledge norm of assertion, Williamson goes on to argue for a knowledge norm of belief:

It is plausible […] that occurrently believing \( \phi \) stands to asserting \( \phi \) as the inner stands to the outer. If so, the knowledge rule for assertion corresponds to the

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76 For a more sophisticated version of this argument, see Simion (2017).
norm that one should believe \( p \) only if one knows \( p \).

(2000, 255-256)

Let us spell this out more carefully. It looks as though Williamson takes BAP to warrant the following normative claim:

**NORM CORRESPONDENCE (NC):** If belief (assertion) is governed by norm \( N \), then assertion (belief) is governed by norm \( N \) also.

To check the plausibility of this move from BAP to NC, let us ask ourselves how one should read BAP in the first place. After all, the fact that some \( x \) stands to some \( y \) like inner to outer affords at least three possible readings: first, it could be that \( x \) and \( y \) are species of the same type, active in different environments. Alternatively, one might be a species of the other: \( x \) is but an inner manifestation of \( y \), or the other way around. I will start with the most plausible reading, which also seems to be the one readily suggested by Williamson’s formulation:

**BAP1:** Belief stands to assertion like inner \( \phi - \text{ing} \) to outer \( \phi - \text{ing} \),

where \( \phi \) is to be replaced by whatever it is that belief and assertion share, in spite of their differences in environment. Now, what \( \phi \) stands for is of little importance for us here, but just for illustrative purposes, let us go along with Sosa (2010) and call it affirmation. As such, we get:

**BAP1\*:** Belief stands to assertion like inner affirmation to outer affirmation.

Note that, at least at first glance, this formulation looks fairly plausible. One could, of course, object to BAP1 on metaphysical grounds; after all, belief is a state while assertion is
an action. This, however, will arguably not constitute an insurmountable difficulty for the champion of BAP1; she could, for instance, replace belief by judgement, or belief-formation. Apart from this minor setback, though, both BAP1 and BAP1* look good: intuitively, belief does seem to be, in some sense, the inner counterpart of assertion.

Note, however, that BAP1 fails to offer the desired kind of normative import, i.e., norm correspondence. That is, one cannot use BAP1 together with one’s preferred account of the normativity of either belief or assertion in order to derive the relevant corresponding norm. After all, on this reading, belief and assertion are but species belonging to the same type. The fact that one is governed by a particular norm tells us precious little about what norm governs the other. To see this, consider waltzing and tango dancing; though they are both species of dancing, it does not follow that if N is a norm for waltzing, then N is also a norm for tango dancing. Similarly, on BAP1, one cannot argue from N being the norm for assertion to N being the norm of belief. On this reading, metaphysical parallelism does not warrant norm correspondence.

On a first approximation, what seems to be needed is that the type is itself governed by the relevant norm; if N is a norm for dancing in general, it will be inherited by all species of the type. If that is the case, what needs be the case is that N is a norm governing the type, i.e., in our example, affirmation, and thus gets inherited by both belief and assertion.

Crucially though, even so, the desired normative claim will still fail to come through. To see why, it will be useful to first turn to the alternative possible readings of the BAP and their purported normative import.

4.2.2 Waltz Shoes
The obvious alternative reading is to take the claim to be that one is a species of the other, which triggers norm transfer. Here is one such formulation, defended by people like Jonathan Adler (2002, ch. 10) and Igor Douven (2006):

**BAP2**: Belief is a species of assertion, to wit, subvocalized assertion or assertion to oneself (Douven 2006, 453).

The thought would be, then, that norm commonality readily drops out of this way to read BAP, since whatever the norm for assertion, it will govern all incarnations thereof, including subvocalized varieties, i.e. beliefs. Alternatively, of course, one might hold that, to the contrary, assertion is a species of belief (presumably vocalized belief), and the norm gets inherited in the other direction. Call this BAP3. At first glance, both of these formulations seem to do the required normative trick. Think about dancing again: it looks as though, if there is a norm requiring one to wear light shoes for all dancing, one must, thereby, also wear light shoes for waltzing.

Alas, though, this normative import claim does not withstand closer value-theoretic scrutiny either: norm transfer need not imply norm correspondence. To see why, note that the relevant norm for the type of shoes required for waltzing might be more demanding than the one governing dancing in general. This should be fairly easy to see: after all, what distinguishes waltzing from just any dancing is the fact that it is governed by some distinctive norms on top of the ones governing the type it belongs to. In virtue of this, it can be that the relevant norm for waltzing is *stronger* than the one for mere dancing: and, as a matter of fact, waltz shoes are not just any light shoes, but medium heel, pointy, cross strapped light shoes.

If that is the case, though, again, correspondence need not follow from either BAP2 or BAP3. That is, just as in the case of waltz shoes, it can be that the epistemic requirement on the
species is stronger than that on the type. For instance, BAP2 does nothing to exclude the case of assertion being governed, say, by a justification norm, while belief is governed by a stronger, knowledge norm. In a parallel fashion, BAP3 is nicely compatible with a normative picture whereby assertion is only epistemically permissible if knowledgeable, while belief is governed by a less demanding norm.

To see this even more clearly, consider also the case of constitutive norms; these norms are not mere conventions, they constitute the activity in question, in the sense in which, essentially, every token of that particular activity will be governed by the norm in question. Classical examples of norm-constituted activities are games and languages. According to Williamson, the norm of assertion is such a constitutive norm: all assertions are essentially governed by the knowledge norm. Consider, then, how Norm Correspondence from type to species fares when it comes to constitutive norms. Take the following plausible constitutive norm for dancing: N: ‘One should perform a selected sequence of movements following a rhythmic pattern.’ This requirement should be transmitted from dancing in general to waltzing on pain of waltzing not being a species of dancing to begin with; however, type membership merely requires that the corresponding constitutive norm governing waltzing is not weaker than N. The norm governing the species may be stronger, in which case Norm Correspondence fails. Here is the corresponding constitutive norm for waltzing: ‘One should perform a triple-time sequence of movements in close position.’ Every instance of waltzing will be governed by this norm. Similarly, every instance of tango dancing will be governed by a norm along the lines of: ‘One should perform a sequence of movements following a 2/4 or 4/4 rhythmic pattern, in two or three parts repeating in patterns such as ABAB or ABCAC.’ 77 In fact, a particular sequence of

77 Note, furthermore, that the norms at stake here are not merely constitutive (i.e. essentially governing every instance of the activity at stake) but strongly
movements will not qualify as waltzing, respectively dancing to begin with if it does not comply with these norms.

Similarly, again, one can have a picture where assertion is constitutively governed by a justification norm, while belief is governed by a stronger, knowledge norm.

If that is the case, though, all in all, we seem to lack much in the way of motivation to believe normative correspondence is true. I say ‘not much’ rather than ‘any’ because, for all has been said here, there is still room for correspondence insofar as what is defended is a maximally strong norm for both. That is, BAP in all readings will do the intended work unaffected by the argument made here, on the assumption that what is at stake is a certainty norm, for instance. It is easy to see, then, that the normative requirement will merely be transferred from type to species unaffected.

Note, though, a few things: first, again – depending, of course, on how the relevant notion of certainty is spelled out - many people will most likely fail to feel the attraction of defending such a demanding norm for either assertion or belief. Second, more importantly for present purposes, note that this still robs BAP of its advertised normative strength: after all, on this picture, BAP will only work in conjunction with a good defence of the relevant epistemic norm for whichever of the two – assertion or belief – is taken to be the type.

And third, even if we leave all this aside, on closer look, there is reason to doubt that even this pale claim to normative relevance stands. Here is why: recall that both BAP2 and BAP3, taken at face value, suffer from some degree of metaphysical awkwardness. It is, after all, a bit weird to claim that a mental state is a species of a speech act, or the other way around. What needs be the case, then, in order to avoid such aberration, is that

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78 Importantly, Williamson defends a knowledge norm where knowledge is understood to imply epistemic probability 1.
we read both BAP2 and BAP3 non-literally, as making a restricted claim of the form:

**BAP2**: Belief is, in a relevant way, a species of assertion, to wit, subvocalized assertion.

What BAP2* attempts to do is get rid of the metaphysical weirdness of the original formulation. The claim is that, for all we care, that is, in all respects that are relevant for the present discussion, belief is a species of assertion. Not in the sense that it is, itself, a speech act rather than a mental state, but in the sense that these considerations do not matter for the present concerns.

Note, though, that this restriction robs BAP of even its last bit of normative flavor: after all, what this restriction amounts to saying is that belief and assertion share some features, and not others. Again, however, just as in the case of them being species of the same type, the features they don’t have in common can make all the normative difference.

One last thing still needs to be discussed: recall what was said at the end of section 3.2.1 about affirmation: I was suggesting there that, even if we take assertion and belief to be species of the same type, i.e. affirmation, and we find that a particular norm, call it N, governs the type, norm correspondence will still fail to follow. Now we are in a position to easily see why: first, it can still be the case that, although both assertion and belief inherit N from affirmation, one of them is governed by a stronger norm N+. And again, this will be the case for constitutive norms also: even if N is constitutive of affirmation, it can still be that (one of) the corresponding constitutive norms for assertion and belief is/are stronger, just like the constitutive norms for waltzing and tango dancing vis-à-vis the constitutive norm for general dancing. We can, for instance, have a picture where truth is the norm for affirmation, knowledge is the norm of belief and certainty is the norm of assertion. If that is the case, the type-species claim will
be of little help for establishing norm correspondence. Second, even on the assumption that what is at stake is a maximally stronger norm, the normative import we get is less than satisfactory; i.e., normative correspondence fails to obtain. Recall that the thought was that what we wanted was to be able, in virtue of BAP, to come to deduce the norm of belief from knowing the norm of assertion or the other way around. On the picture we are left with, however, this will not work. After all, if we buy into BAP1, and come to discover that the norm of, say, assertion is certainty, we will still not be able to ascertain whether that particular norm is inherited from the type — affirmation — as is, and therefore to be expected to govern belief also, or affirmation is governed by a weaker normative requirement, in which case there is little we can ascertain about belief.

To sum up: we have looked at three possible readings of the belief-assertion parallel and argued that the BAP popularity in normative circles is not straightforwardly justifiable. On the one plausible, metaphysically unproblematic reading, BAP turned out to have zero normative strength. We have then explored the readily available thought that, in order to make sense of its employment in support of one normative account or another, BAP needs to be spelled out as making a (metaphysically weird) type/species claim. However, it’s not at all clear that the price is dialectically worth paying given that, as it turns out, even on this reading, BAP fails to deliver.

4.3. Inheritance Arguments

If norm commonality does not follow from the belief-assertion parallel, that is, from metaphysical relations of sorts between the two, perhaps the target norm can be plausibly inherited through some variety of normative relations. One way this might be the case is through internal normative relations between belief and
assertions themselves. Let us call this internal inheritance. Alternatively, inheritance can also come through some external route, from a third entity that bears some interesting normative relation with the two.

4.3.1 Internal Inheritance Arguments

Stipulating internal normative inheritance is the route pursued by Kent Bach (2008) and Frank Hindriks (2007). Roughly, the idea is that a knowledge norm for assertion (KNA) can be derived from taking assertion to be the linguistic expression of belief, which gives rise to a belief rule\(^\text{79}\) on assertion, and a knowledge rule on belief. This idea has been developed in more detail by Hindriks. He starts from the following idea:

(1) To assert that \(p\) is to utter a sentence that means that \(p\) and thereby expresses the belief that \(p\).

Hindriks goes on to argue that, in situations of normal trust, which obtain unless it is permissible to lie, assertion is governed by a sincerity rule to the effect that one must express an attitude only if one has it. This gives us:

(2) In situations of normal trust, one must: express the belief that \(p\) only if one believes that \(p\).

(1) and (2) imply

(3) In situations of normal trust, one must: assert that \(p\) only if one believes that \(p\).

Furthermore, Hindriks takes (3) to ground norm inheritance; that is, he takes it to be the case that, if (3) holds, and say:

\(^{79}\) I use norm and rule interchangeably; nothing of essence hinges on this.
(4) One must only believe what one knows (the knowledge norm of belief, KNB),

it follows that

(5) In situations of normal trust, one must only assert what one knows (the knowledge norm of assertion, KNA).

In sum, the thought behind the Bach/Hindriks line is simple and elegant: since it is plausible that there is a belief norm on assertion, whatever the norm for belief is, it will get inherited by assertion.

Now, plausible as this might sound, there are, as a matter of fact, two important ways in which normative inheritance might fail to go through, in spite of normative dependence; first, there is a quantitative problem: transmission might fail. That is, it might be that, somewhere down the road, the norm in question gets affected – for instance, weakened or strengthened – by further normative requirements stepping in and, as a result, it fails to be inherited in its initial shape.

Second, there is a qualitative danger, pertaining to the type of norm we are talking about. That is, given that what we are after is an epistemic norm, we want to make sure the requirement that gets inherited strictly pertains to epistemic normativity.

Now, concerning the latter, doubts have been expressed in several places in the literature (e.g. Ball (2014), Simion and Kelp (2016)) regarding the validity of the Bach/Hindriks derivation, worrying that an equivocation on ‘must’ is at play in the argument. Roughly, the thought is that the Bach/Hindriks line attempts to derive an epistemic must – the epistemic norm of assertion in (5) – from a moral must governing ‘normal trust’ situations ((3)).
Even so, it may yet be possible to rescue Hindriks’s argument. Why exactly should a moral sincerity rule be governing assertion in the first place? Why should we find it morally objectionable to make insincere assertions? One plausible answer is that insincere assertions are prone to induce false beliefs in others and that’s something bad. But now notice that false beliefs are in the first instance an epistemic bad. One might think, then, that the moral sincerity rule is ultimately grounded in an epistemic sincerity rule, which, in turn, exists in order to minimize the epistemic bad of false belief.

What I will argue next, however, is that even if we charitably interpret the Bach/Hindriks line to keep with sheer epistemic obligation from beginning till end, their conclusion still fails to follow.

Here is why: according to the Bach-Hindriks line,

(1) In normal trust situations, it is permissible to assert p only if you believe p.
(2) It is permissible to believe p only if you know p,
(3) Therefore, in normal trust situations, it is permissible to assert p only if you know p.

It is easy to see that, since the first premise features belief, while the second stipulates necessary conditions for permissible belief, and since belief does not imply permissible belief, the Bach-Hindriks line fails: deontic 'possible' does not work like this.\(^80\)

There will be worlds where you believe impermissibly, but you still do, therefore you can permissibly assert. Obligation just does not transmit like the Bach/Hindriks line needs it to transmit. The

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\(^{80}\) I take the broad philosophical point to be enough here. Here is, though, the same point, but in more detail: on a narrow scope interpretation of the deontic claims in the argument, the conclusion fails to follow. On a wide scope interpretation, standard deontic logic vindicates the conclusion; however, this is widely taken to be a problem rather than a feature of standard deontic logic; very roughly, one core problem (but hardly the only one) for deontic inheritance is that ‘ought’ is context sensitive. For discussion, see, e.g. (McNamara 2014).
lesson to take home, then, is the following: you might be criticisable for your beliefs, for breaking the norm of belief (say, for believing non-knowledgeably). However, insofar as you keep with the norm of assertion – in our case, the sincerity norm requiring you not to say things you don’t believe yourself - your assertions will be criticism-proof.

One way to try and save the Bach/Hindriks argument, then, is to modify the second premise so as to feature permissible belief:

(1) In normal trust situations, it is permissible to assert p only if you permissibly believe p.
(2) It is permissible to believe p only if you know p,
(3) Therefore, in normal trust situations, it is permissible to assert p only if you know p.

However, while this refurbished version of the Bach/Hindriks argument is, indeed, valid, it is not clear what in the Bach/Hindriks story can be taken to offer support to premise (1). It is plausible that normal trust situations are such that you should not assert things you don’t believe yourself, i.e., as Bach and Hindriks would put it, you should not express a belief that you don’t have. However, it is not clear why trust situations should also imply the stronger requirement of only expressing permissible beliefs. After all, according to the Bach/Hindriks line itself, assertion is an expression of mere belief, not of permissible belief.

4.3.2 External Inheritance Arguments

Here is one plausible claim: likely, our epistemic capacities are mainly meant to help us act well; as such, the kinds of things we believe and assert will, all things being equal, be the kinds of considerations we act upon. Here is, for instance, Robin
McKenna on this issue: “[...] beliefs are the sorts of things that lead to actions and assertions. What each of us believes influences what we act on and assert, and in turn influences what those around us believe, act on, and assert (McKenna, Forthcoming).

In the light of this, another popular line of defence of CA in the literature takes commonality to follow from pragmatic considerations concerning what, at the end of the day, belief and assertion are, plausibly, for: storing/transmitting actionable information. As such, it seems fairly plausible that, whatever the norm for action will turn out to be, belief and assertion alike will stand to inherit it.

Note that this argument very closely resembles the Bach-Hindriks line, with the exception that the source of inheritance is taken to be an external one. That is, people defending this line want to get normative dependence between action on one hand, and belief and assertion on the other, to deliver normative inheritance. But, of course, one worry that readily arises is: if this line is but an external incarnation of the Bach-Hindriks argument, will it not suffer from the same transmission problems?

Fortunately, the answer is ‘no’. And here is why. Recall that the Bach/Hindriks line turned out to be invalid. The problem was that, while the permissibility claim for assertion featured mere belief, knowledge was only necessary for permissible belief. Since the former does not imply the latter, the derivation failed. Now consider, in contrast:

(1) It is permissible to believe/assert \( p \) only if it is permissible to act on \( p \).

(2) It is permissible to act on \( p \) only if you know \( p \).

(3) Therefore it is permissible to believe/assert \( p \) only if you know \( p \).

This derivation, of course, is fine, transmission-wise: the first premise stipulates necessary conditions for permissible
assertion/belief that pertain to permissible action. Further on, the second premise also stipulates necessary conditions for permissible action. As such, in this case, normative transmission is successful.81

Here is this my worry concerning this line of argument, though; consider the following examples (some of which are already familiar):

**SING.** One must: sing only songs one knows.

**JUMP.** One must: jump in the lake only if one knows how to swim.

**ASSERT.** One must: only assert that p if one knows that p.

It seems pretty obvious (and I have already argued for this at length) that ASSERT, in contrast to SING and JUMP, is a genuinely epistemic norm. What can we say about SING and JUMP? Well, for what is worth, they surely are norms guiding particular types of action; furthermore, they specify a particular amount of epistemic support needed for permissible action of these particular types. What type of permissibility are we talking about, however? Again, plausibly, aesthetic permissibility in the case of SING and prudential in the case of JUMP. The upshot is, once more, that just because a norm regulating action features epistemic content – that is, just because it stipulates a particular amount of warrant needed for permissible phi-ing – it need not follow it is an epistemic norm.

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81 Also, the Deontic Transmission principle is, in this case, instantiated. Here is how the argument goes if we make DT explicit: (1) One ought to be in a position to permissibly act on p in order to permissibly believe/assert that p. (2) One ought to know in order to be in a position to permissibly act on p. (3) If one ought to X in order to Y and Z in order to X, then one ought to Z in order to Y (DT). (4) Therefore, one ought to know in order to permissibly assert (from (1), (2) and (3)).
If that is the case, though, that is, if the ‘must’ at stake in (2) need not be an epistemic must, the above derivation fails to go through. The defender of external inheritance needs to narrow down the permissibility at stake in her argument such that it is not at danger of equivocating on the relevant notion of ‘must.’

Given that what we are interested in are epistemic norms governing assertion and belief – as opposed to, say, prudential, aesthetic or moral norms – we want to make sure that we are employing an epistemic must all through the argument. To this effect, what we need is a principled way to individuate epistemic norms for action from their prudential, aesthetic etc. counterparts, that does not merely rely on their featuring epistemic content. Absent such an account, the external inheritance derivation does not go through.

Now, given that her argument will only work in conjunction with an individuation proposal for epistemic norms for action, I take it that it is on the shoulders of the defender of external inheritance commonality to put forth such an account that does not assume individuation by content, but still serves her purposes well.

For now, let us take stock: we have seen that extant arguments, which aim to offer a rationale for the Commonality Assumption, fail. First, as it turns out, metaphysical parallelism (i.e., the belief-assertion parallel) does not support normative correspondence. Second, we have looked at people trying to derive normative inheritance from normative dependence. The internal variety thereof was shown to not go through due to transmission failure. The external incarnation, while successfully transmitting, was shown to be in danger of normative equivocation, absent a principled way to individuate epistemic norms.

4.4. Conclusion
This chapter has offered three reasons to distrust norm commonality for belief and assertion. I have looked at the extant arguments for the claim that assertion and belief are governed by one and the same epistemic norm, and concluded they fail. First, the belief-assertion parallel was shown to lack the advertised normative strength. Second, the claim that assertion inherits the norm of belief in virtue of being an expression thereof turned out to rest on a failed instance of deontic transmission. Third, the inheritance argument from the norm for action was proven suspicious of deontic equivocation.

If this is correct, we are left without one important resource for deriving the norm of assertion: assertion’s intimate relationship to belief. In what follows, I develop an account of the normativity of assertion as borne out by assertion’s epistemic function. According to the view I favour, the commonality assumption is false: permissible beliefs are beliefs produced by properly functioning cognitive processes that have the function of generating knowledge, while the norm of assertion is a stronger, knowledge norm.
Part 3
Assertion, Action, and Reasoning
Chapter 6
Assertion, Knowledge, and Function

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have argued that there is little theoretical reason available in support of a normative commonality claim for assertion and belief. If that is correct, here is where we stand so far: there’s bad news and good news. The bad news is that we won’t get an easy derivation of the epistemic norm of assertion from the epistemic norm of belief in virtue of some metaphysical relation between the two: we need to put in some extra work. On the bright side, however, we don’t need to derive the norm of assertion form the norm of belief, because the normative framework I have developed in Part 1 will allow a direct, independent derivation of assertion’s epistemic norm from assertion’s epistemic function. This chapter will do just that. Here is the game plan: Section #2 performs the derivation and outlines the view, which I dub Assertion Functionalism (AF). In a nutshell, on the view defended here, knowledge is both necessary and sufficient for epistemically proper assertion (KNA) in virtue of assertion’s epistemic function of generating testimonial knowledge in hearers. It is a constitutive norm, in that assertion’s function of generating knowledge contributes to the explanation of the continuous existence of the speech act. The remaining section is concerned with arguing that AF displays exceptional explanatory power; to this effect, (#3) argues that AF is better positioned than its Williamsonian counterpart to explain several data points that are widely taken to motivate a knowledge norm of assertion, including the intuition that KNA is not a merely regulative norm, the paradoxical soundingness of Moorean assertions, “how do you know’ challenges, and the intuitive
shiftiness of proper assertion with practical stakes. In #4 I conclude.

6.2 Assertion Functionalism

Recall that Chapter #2 argued at length that the functionalist picture constitutes itself in a fairly straightforward norm-identification machinery; here is how: first, what we need is to take a look at the relevant function plausibly served by the trait/artefact/action in question. Once the function is identified, the question we need to ask ourselves is: how did the trait/artefact/action plausibly fulfil its function at the moment of function acquisition? The answer to this question will give us normal functioning which, on the etiological account, corresponds to proper functioning; in turn, permissible phi-ing corresponds to proper phi-ing. As such, the answer to the function question delivers the content of the norm we are after.

Furthermore, on this picture, we also get an easy way to identify the type of norm at stake: norms will be typed by the corresponding functions, which, in turn, are typed by the produced benefit. The norm ‘hearts ought to beat’ is a biological norm in virtue of the fact that it serves a biological function – pumping blood – which, in turn, produces a biological benefit.

To see how this works for assertion, note that our practices too can, and most – hopefully! - will serve etiological functions, which, again, will come with associated norms. Now, plausibly, if there’s such a thing as an epistemic norm for assertion out there in the first place, it is likely there to ensure that assertion delivers the epistemic goods we are using it for (Goldberg 2015, Grice 1989, Kelp 2016, Reynolds 2002). What epistemic goods is assertion meant to deliver?

Although not essentially – I can, say, make assertions in a diary, which are usually not intended to affect any audience in any way –, characteristically, assertions will aim at generating
testimonial knowledge in the audience. Plausibly, this is the main epistemic function of assertion (see, e.g., (Kelp 2018), (Reynolds 2002), (Turri In press)). Due to our physical and cognitive limitations, a lot of the knowledge we have is testimonial; thus, assertion is one of our main epistemic vehicles. Now, of course, one could wonder whether all knowledge is on a par in this respect; after all, some items thereof seem entirely useless (e.g. about the number of blades of grass on my lawn). Perhaps, then, it is more plausible to think that the epistemic function of assertion is generating interesting knowledge. For the purposes of this chapter, I will take any such restriction on the relevant epistemic goal as read.

Just like hearts were selected for their reliability in generating biological benefit, I submit, the speech act of assertion has been selected for its reliability in generating epistemic benefit, i.e. testimonial knowledge. As such, our assertoric practice acquired the epistemic etiological function of generating testimonial knowledge in hearers. In turn, because it generated testimonial knowledge in our ancestors, it enabled them to survive – find out about the whereabouts of dangerous predators, find food and so on – and reproduce, thereby replicating the same practice with the same function in their descendants. As such, the fact that assertion generates testimonial knowledge in hearers explains the continuous existence of the practice. Dan Sperber puts this point succinctly: “From the point of view of receivers, communication, and testimony in particular, is beneficial only to the extent that it is a source of genuine […] information” (2001, 404). However, if the practice stops being beneficial to the hearers, it will plausibly be discontinued. Here is, also, Peter Graham:

82 For hearer-oriented functionalist accounts of assertion, see (Garcia-Carpintero 2004) and (Kelp 2018). For an anti-reductionist view of testimonial entitlement replying on a functionalist knowledge account of assertion, see (Simion Forthcoming).
Speakers and hearers both need some reason (motive) to participate. Speakers, presumably, benefit in some way by affecting hearers. If hearers receive no benefit from being so affected, they will probably stop responding in the desired way. So unless hearers get something out of accepting reports, they will not accept them. And if they will not accept them, speakers will not benefit by making them. Then they will not get made. Hearer benefits (partly) explain speaker production (Graham 2010, 161).

Just like your heart’s pumping blood keeps you alive which, in turn, contributes to the explanation of the continuous existence of the heart, the function of assertion is a stabilizing one, for it “encourages speakers to keep using the device and hearers to keep responding to it with the same (with a stable) response” (Millikan 2005, 94).

Now, recall that functions of a particular type come with associated norms of the corresponding type, which regulate the correct procedure to follow in order to reliably reach them. My heart will reliably pump blood in my system when in normal conditions, i.e. conditions similar to those of function acquisition, when functioning normally, i.e. in the way in which it did when it was selected for pumping blood. Given its biological etiological function, then, my heart will count as functioning properly – i.e., by the biological norm - when functioning normally, i.e. when it functions in the way it did back when it acquired its biological e-function. A biologically proper heart, therefore, will pump blood in my system in normal conditions by beating.

Similarly, the speech-act of assertion will reliably generate testimonial knowledge in hearers in normal conditions, i.e., conditions similar to those in which it was selected, when functioning normally, that is, when functioning in the way in which it was functioning when it was selected for its beneficial
epistemic effects. When functioning normally, the speech act of assertion will fulfill the epistemic norm constitutively associated with its epistemic e-function of reliably generating testimonial knowledge; it will work the way it is supposed to work, where the right way of working is partly constituted by reliably delivering the epistemic goods in normal conditions. Thus, an epistemically proper assertion will be one that, in normal conditions, generates knowledge in the hearer in the way it did back when it acquired its epistemic function.

The question to ask, then, if we want to know the content of the epistemic norm we are after is: how did assertion fulfill its function of generating knowledge in hearers at the moment of function acquisition?

I submit that the overwhelmingly plausible answer is: by being knowledgeable. And here are some reasons that, in my view, leave room for very little doubt that this is so: first, on most if not all accounts of testimony in the literature, in the vast majority of cases, the speaker needs to know in order to be able to generate knowledge in the hearer. Furthermore, knowledge is all the speaker needs to this effect when it comes to her epistemic standing vis-à-vis p. Also, exceptions to this rule describe extremely unusual scenarios, which renders them highly unlikely to affect the functionalist derivation from testimony to the knowledge norm in any way. After all, if the function of assertion is generating testimonial knowledge, and in the vast majority of the cases

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83 See Lackey (2008) for a nice overview.
84 Williamson (2000, 256) makes a similar point, although he does not pursue this line any further: “Although there are special cases in which someone comes to know p by hearing someone who does not know p assert p [...], the normal procedure by which the hearer comes to know p requires the speaker to know p too.”
85 Exceptions are few, and they roughly boil down to two types of cases: first, we have, again, ‘selfless asserters’, asserting on knowledge-level justification without belief (Lackey 2007). These speakers assert to what is best supported by evidence, although they cannot get themselves to believe it due to some rationality failures. Secondly, we have ‘Compulsive Liar’ cases (Lackey 2008). Roughly, what happens in these cases is that, although the speaker intends to lie on a regular basis, some external intervention makes it so that she safely asserts the truth.
knowledge on the part of the speaker is both needed and enough for generating testimonial knowledge in the hearer, it makes sense to have a knowledge norm governing assertion. To see this, consider driving: norms regulating speed limit within city bounds are presumably there to make it so that we arrive safely at our destination. Surely, though, driving 30 mph within city bounds is not always the ideal speed; there are instances when, for instance, overtaking at 80 km/h will avoid a major accident. However, presumably, the reason why the norm says ‘Drive at most 30 mph within city bounds!’ is because, most of the time, that is the ideal speed for safety purposes.

On top of all this, recall that, in the friendly epistemic environment we inhabit, knowledge is readily available (See Chapter #2 and Simion & Kelp 2015). All we have to do to acquire knowledge is open our eyes, listen to what other people tell us, attend to our feelings, etc. As such, KNA is not a very stringent norm, it amounts to a fairly user-friendly way to ensure reliable function fulfilment. If that is the case, again, it is plausible that, back at the time of function acquisition, assertion fulfilled its function of generating knowledge in hearers by being knowledgeable.

In sum, things seem to stand as follows: In the friendly epistemic environment we inhabit, knowledge is readily available. On top of this, knowledge on the speaker side is both necessary and sufficient for generating knowledge on the hearer’s side in the vast majority of the cases. Very plausibly, then, the way in which assertion generated knowledge in hearers at the moment of function acquisition was by being knowledgeable. As such, KNA is vindicated: an epistemically proper assertion will be one that, in normal conditions, is able to fulfil its epistemic function of generating knowledge in hearers by being knowledgeable.

Now, recall that the etiological theory of function aims to offer a naturalistically friendly explanation of the existence of normativity. As such, the coming into being of the respective
norms is hardly an accident: it is sourced in considerations pertaining to what benefits the system at stake and what does not. Note that what this amounts to is a constitutivity claim: due to being sourced in e-functions, which, in turn, contribute to the explanation of why the trait/artefact/practice in question continues to exist, the functionalist norms are constitutively associated with the corresponding trait/artefact/practice: they are constitutively associated with its continuous existence. When functioning properly (i.e. beating) — whether in normal conditions or not — the heart will meet the norm constitutively associated with its continuous existence. Similarly, when functioning properly — i.e. being knowledgeable — whether in normal conditions or not — assertion will meet the norm constitutively associated with generating knowledge in hearers and, correspondingly, with its continuous existence; it will work the way it is supposed to work, where the right way of working is constituted by generating knowledge in normal conditions.

6.3 What About a Truth Function?

Before proceeding, it would be good to look at an alternative functionalist proposal on the market. One popular view is that assertion’s function is to generate true beliefs in hearers. Ruth Millikan (1984) and Peter Graham (2010) defend a view along these lines. If they are right, one could wonder, would it not be reasonable to suppose that assertion is governed by a corresponding truth norm?

On closer inspection, however, it turns out that (1) the truth function hypothesis is fairly implausible, and (2) even assuming a truth function, what the etiological machinery bears out is a knowledge norm rather than a truth norm.

Let us start with the first problem: recall that the etiological account of functions is a historical account. The
thought is that a particular trait generated some benefit and that’s how it acquired its function. However, mere true belief is a fairly rare good, while knowledge is readily available. All I have to do in order to come to know that there’s a table in front of me is have a look. For me to get a non-knowledgeable true belief, however, the world needs to fail to cooperate in fairly weird ways (like in Gettier cases, for instance), or else I need to radically change my epistemic behaviour (say, start forming beliefs on coin tosses).

Since it is less than plausible, historically, that any of this was the case when assertion acquired its function, we can safely assume that the epistemic benefit generated by assertion at the time of function acquisition was knowledge.

Now, of course, Millikan and Graham could argue, the function at stake need not be mere true belief. After all, true belief is implied by knowledge. Furthermore, the champion of the truth account could argue, on the etiological account, one easy way to ascertain whether a trait T has a function F is by checking whether doing F contributes to the explanation of why tokens of T continue to exist. The fact that it pumps blood in our circulatory system contributes to the explanation of why hearts continue to exist: if they stopped doing it, plausibly, they would cease to exist.\(^{86}\) Generating true belief, the argument would go, easily meets this condition: plausibly, even if assertions stopped generating knowledge in hearers and only produced true belief, that would be sufficient: we would not discontinue the practice. If that is the case, however, why think that the relevant function is knowledge rather than true belief?

Several people in the literature have adduced reasons to believe the function at stake is, indeed, knowledge rather any lesser epistemic standing. Turri (In Press), for instance, puts forth experimental philosophy results suggesting that folk intuition designates transmitting knowledge as the “main point” of asserting. In previous work (Kelp & Simion 2019), as well as in

\(^{86}\) But see (Buller 1998) for an argument to the contrary.
Chapter #2 of this book, I have also argued that, in virtue of being the stronger and more valuable epistemic state, knowledge is the function of our epistemic endeavours, assertion included.

What I will do next is try to offer further functionalist considerations that seem to speak in favour of the knowledge account of assertion when considered against the competing truth account.87

First, it is not clear to me that, in the scenario described above, where assertions would only generate true beliefs, we would not, as a matter of fact, discontinue the practice. Let us try and add details to the envisaged scenario: first, note that what the defender of the truth account needs, this time around, for her argument to go through, is for mere true belief generation to be sufficient for keeping the practice alive. For if she wants to make use of, say, Gettiered belief, the suspicion would be that what is doing the trick in preventing the practice from being discontinued is truth plus the corresponding warrant, rather than truth alone.

However, a world of mere true believers involved in asserting things to each other is not very easily conceivable. Note that, what would, presumably, have to be the case, would be something along the following lines: the members of this population would form beliefs on coin tosses, wishful thinking and other such epistemically barren methods, they would all happen to be true, they would assert them to each other and they would all respond with belief to the corresponding assertions. Note, though, that what also needs to be the case is that the members of this population have no clue that the relevant assertions happen to be true – that is, that their peers always luckily hit the truth. Otherwise, the generated beliefs would fail to amount to mere true beliefs, since the believer will have some

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87 The argument to follow does not address the possibility of any epistemic standing that falls short of both knowledge and truth being the function of assertion. That is because I take it to be extremely plausible that if assertion would systematically fail to generate true beliefs in hearers, the practice would be discontinued. Note, however, that nothing in what follows excludes the possibility of the relevant function to be generating justified true beliefs (JTB) rather than knowledge.
evidence concerning some good features of the speaker as epistemic agent. This assumption, in itself, is hard to square with our everyday epistemic practices; after all, each and every member of this population will see her peers successfully walking the streets, avoiding obstacles, going to work, doing grocery shopping etc. All this will suggest that these people do form some true beliefs, and thus add warrant to the beliefs generated in their hearers.

Also, this story gives rise to two possible scenarios: either the receivers of testimony are aware that the testifiers are engaged in such dubious epistemic practices, or they are not. If they are aware, I find it empirically fairly implausible that, under these circumstances, the practice of assertion will be maintained, since this piece of information is likely to act as a very serious defeater for believing the asserted content. On the other hand, a scenario where each and every member of this population forms beliefs on coin tosses but has no clue that everyone else does the same is fairly implausible.

Last but not least, returning to point (2) above: even if it turns out that Millikan and Graham are right, after all, and the function of assertion is generating true belief, it is still easily arguable, on e-functionalist grounds, that the norm that drops out of this functional schema is a knowledge norm. Here is how: recall that proper functioning is normal functioning, i.e., functioning in the way the trait did back in the day when it acquired its function. Plausibly, again, given considerations pertaining to ready availability, back in the day, assertion performed its function of generating true belief by being knowledgeable.

6.4 What Assertion Functionalism Explains
This section compares AF to Williamson’s simple constitutivism about KNA, and argues that AF is explanatorily superior to the Williamsonian model on at least four counts: (1) explaining the high plausibility of the thought that the norm of assertion is not a merely contingent, regulative convention, in line with, say, norms of etiquette; (2) explaining the paradoxical soundingness of Moorean statements of the form ‘\( p \) but I don’t know that \( p \)’; (3) explaining intuitively permissible ‘How do you know?’ challenges, and (4) explaining the shiftiness of epistemic standards for proper assertion with practical stakes.

6.4.1 The Constitutivity Claim

Intuitively, KNA did not just come to govern assertion at random, by mere convention: it is fairly implausible to think that our assertions could have been easily governed by a completely different norm, like for instance ‘One must: assert that \( p \) iff one wears pink.’ According to Tim Williamson (1996, 2000), this intuition is explained by KNA being a constitutive rule of assertion just like rules of games are constitutive; that is, each and every instance of this speech act is governed by KNA. In fact, according to Williamson, KNA is the uniquely constitutive rule of assertion and assertion is the only speech act whose unique constitutive rule is KNA (1996, 2000). If that is the case, of course, what we seem to get is a pretty strong support for KNA: after all, its normative strength will be sourced in the very nature of the speech act itself. As such, the thought would go, no further rationale for KNA is needed: we don’t need further rationales for why chess is governed by a norm that says ‘Don’t move the rook diagonally!’ That’s just what chess is: a game that involves this norm.

According to Williamson, KNA is uniquely constitutive of assertion in the same way in which rules of games and languages are constitutive. Importantly, that is not to say, of course, that if
one breaks the norms one stops playing the game or speaking the language. All constitutivity implies is that all moves in the relevant game, and, respectively, utterances pertaining to the relevant language, are essentially governed by the constitutive norms in play. Similarly, according to Williamson, just by breaking KNA one does not hereby fail to assert.

One problem with this constitutivity model, however, is that, when taken in conjunction with the uniqueness claim, it is implausibly strong.88 To see this, note, first, that there are limits to how persistently and systematically one can break the constitutive rules of an activity while still engaging in the constituted activity. To see why, suppose you are playing a game of draughts with a friend. It may be that your friend cheats, perhaps even often. That’s fine (well, it’s not fine, but it’s compatible with your friend still counting as playing draughts). But now suppose you are attempting to play a game of draughts with a friend only to find that he persistently and systematically moves the pieces horizontally and vertically rather than diagonally. In this case, your friend is not really playing draughts. Alternatively, suppose you wanted to strike up a conversation in English with him. It may be that he breaks the rules of English and perhaps he does so frequently. That’s fine too. But now consider a case in which he persistently and systematically utters only strings of the phoneme ‘ka’. When you ask him how he is doing he responds: ‘Kakaka’, when you ask him whether he is feeling well his answer is: ‘Kaka kakaka ka’, and so on. If he persists in this behaviour too systematically, he is not speaking English.

Furthermore, even more plausibly, if a game is governed by a unique rule, and someone breaks it on a regular basis, they don’t count as playing the game anymore. Consider, for instance, a card game, call it ‘Ace of Spades’ in which the only constitutive rule is that one must continue to turn over cards from a standard deck until one turns over the ace of spades. If you violate this rule

88 See also (Cappelen 2011), (Maitra 2011), (Kelp&Simion 2015)).
with near maximum systematicity, say because you regularly stop turning over cards when and only when you turn over the three of hearts, you are not playing Ace of Spades.

However, it does not look as though someone who is constantly lying does not count as asserting. To the contrary: since (on most accounts of lying in the literature)\(^9\) lying implies asserting, one would not even be able to lie without continuing to assert. If this is true, however, the games/language model is too strong a model of constitutivity for the normativity of assertion.

One way out of this problem for the defender of the simple constitutivist claim would be to abandon the uniqueness claim. The problem with this move, however, is that there is reason to doubt the force of the constitutivity claim in isolation when it comes to explaining the intuition that we started with, i.e. that it is not a mere accident that assertion came to be governed by KNA rather than some different norm. That is because constitutivity without uniqueness looses much of its normative strength. To see this, note that, when it comes games governed by one and only one constitutive norm, the game does, plausibly, live and die with the norm; this, however, is less plausibly the case when it comes to non-unique constitutive norms. Let’s first take chess as an example again. Why should chess be governed by one set of rules rather than another? For instance, why should chess be governed by a rule according to which the pawn can move two squares forward if it has not yet been moved, but only one square if it has already been moved (R1), rather than by a rule according to which it can always only move one square (R2)? No good answer to this question seems to be forthcoming: likely, that’s just because that happens to be the norm we decided upon. Note, importantly, that multi-norm games evolve over time: some rules get lost in the process, new ones come into play. It is, of course, plausible to think that we are, as a matter of fact, playing a different game if many rules, or one of the central rules are lost.

\(^9\) See (Mahon 2016) for an excellent overview.
over time. However, it looks somewhat implausible to believe that, say, just because, for user-friendliness considerations, R1 comes to replace R2 in time, we thereby stopped playing chess altogether. Even more implausibly, consider the case of languages: natural languages gradually change their rules over time without losing their identity.

At the same time, it seems also implausible that, in the case of norms of assertion, KNA could, at any point, disappear or be replaced by a different norm. In sum, supposing that assertion really is governed by KNA, it is somewhat less than plausible to think that we might end up using a speech act that is governed by a different rule instead at any point.

In contrast, the functionalist constitutivity claim defended here accommodates all these data nicely: recall that, on AF, KNA is constitutive of assertion in virtue of dropping out of assertion’s constitutive function of generating testimonial knowledge in hearers. In turn, the function’s constitutive nature is explained by the contribution it has to the continuous existence of the practice, in the same way as pumping blood is constitutive of the continuous existence of the heart. The view allows for compulsive liars to count as asserting. It predicts that much more than isolated lying is needed for assertion to risk being discontinued: the general practice of asserting needs to fail to reliably generate knowledge in hearers. In this way, AF also vindicates the Williamsonian intuition that, in an important way, assertion lives and perishes with KNA, while, at the same time, explaining the non-accidentality intuition: assertion could not have been governed by a norm that asks asserters to wear pink.

6.4.2 Moorean Assertions

It is widely thought that KNA offers a very straightforward explanation of why sentences such as ‘It is Wednesday but I don’t know that it is Wednesday’ sound paradoxical to us. Here is
Williamson’s explanation: If knowledge is the norm of assertion, on the plausible assumption that knowledge distributes across conjunctions, one is in a good enough epistemic position to assert ‘p but I don’t know that p’ only if one knows both conjuncts. However, since knowledge is factive, one only knows the second conjunct if it is true that one does not know that p. But that contradicts knowing the first conjunct. Thus, according to KNA, one cannot meet the conditions for making a proper assertion of the form ‘p but I don’t know that p’ (Williamson 2000, 253).

At a first glance, weaker norms of assertion do not seem to be able to give as good an explanation of the phenomenon. First, think of a truth norm of assertion: since it is definitely possible for it to be the case that there are things that I don’t know, there will be many instances of ‘p, but I don’t know that p’ that will come out as permissible on a truth norm. Consider, also, a rational credibility norm (RCNA), a la Lackey (2006) and Douven (2006). Given that rational credibility is not factive, again, it seems as though it can easily be the case that p is rationally credible to me but I fail to know p. No contradiction there.

However, Douven (2009) argues that, on more careful examination, RCNA is able to do as good a job as the knowledge norm in accommodating the odd-soundingness of Moorean statements. That is because, according to him, not only are the latter statements not knowable, but, on a Bayesian analysis, they are also not rationally credible, and, therefore, unassertable. Roughly, the argument goes as follows: first, Douven assumes that one plausible and fairly weak requirement on rational credibility is that a person believes p rationally only if it does not readily follow strictly on the basis of the assumption of her rationally believing p plus some fairly uncontroversial doxastic principles\(^{90}\) that her degrees of belief are not probabilities.

\(^{90}\) (1) if you rationally believe p and q you also rationally believe p; (2) rationally believing that p requires that your degree of belief that p exceeds your degree of belief that non p, and (3) if you rationally believe some p, then your degree
Second, Douven proves that, if one assumes, towards a reductio, that one rationally believes Moorean sentences, it does follow that one’s degrees of belief are not probabilities. Thus, Douven argues, Moorean sentences are not rationally credible and therefore not assertable. If Douven is right, it looks as though the paradoxical soundingness of Moorean assertions fails to support KNA over (arguably) its main competitor on the market.

In what follows, I will argue that AF does better than the Williamsonian model in getting KNA back on top. To begin with, note that, contra Williamson and Douven, mere unassertability—be it in virtue of KNA or any other norm—will not suffice for doing the intended work in explaining the paradoxical soundingness at stake here. I will focus on KNA to explain why this is so, but the argument is easily generalizable to a rational credibility norm.91 There are many sentences for which one cannot ever meet the conditions for assertability imposed by KNA; take, for instance, necessary falsehoods. By KNA, and given factivity of knowledge, ‘2+2=5’ is unassertable, due to its being necessarily false and, therefore, unknowable. However, the oddity involved in hearing someone assert ‘2+2=5’, if any, is definitely of a completely different sort than the paradoxical soundingness of Moorean statements; for one, it does not sound paradoxical. It just sounds wrong. To see this, note that an agent without basic mathematical knowledge would not hear any wrong-soundingness whatsoever in this case, while, at the same time, they would still hear paradoxicality in an assertion of the form ‘2+3=5 but I don’t know that 2+3=5.’

If that is the case, as things stand, we don’t yet have a satisfactory explanation of what’s going wrong in Moorean assertions that is sourced in the normativity of assertion.

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of belief that you believe p is at least as great as your degree of belief that you don’t believe p.

91 I respond to Douven along similar lines in (Simion 2018).
The AF explanation I want to propose has two components: first, in virtue of KNA, Moorean sentences are not assertable. Second, on the plausible assumption that ordinary speakers are attuned to KNA being in force when an assertion is made, when the speaker asserts that \( \neg p \), the hearer is led to believe that she knows that \( \neg p \) via an implicature generated by the assumption that KNA is in force; therefore, when one asserts the second conjunct of a Moorean statement, one denies what one has led one’s hearer to believe by asserting the first conjunct. This, in turn, explains the heard paradoxicality.

One interesting question that arises at this stage is this: if this is the correct explanation of what is going on, why is it that the second conjunct does not cancel the implicature generated by the first conjunct?\textsuperscript{92}

Here is where AF can help in a way in which simple constitutivism cannot. Recall that, on Grice’s picture, we have, roughly, two broad types of implicature: conversational and conventional implicatures. One important difference between the two, according to Grice, is that the former, but not the latter, are dependent on features of the conversational context. Another important difference is that conventional implicatures, in virtue of their context-independence, are not cancellable.

I want to suggest that the constitutive function of the practice of assertion explains why asserting ‘\( p \) but I don’t know that \( \neg p \)’ amounts to being uncooperative \textit{at any context}, and thereby the knowledge implicature of asserting ‘\( p \)’ cannot be cancelled. After all, if generating knowledge in hearers is the epistemic function of assertion, it is the epistemic function of assertion \textit{at any context} (although, of course, there will be contexts at which assertion also serves other types of functions, like social bonding or entertaining the audience, for instance). If that is the case, the knowledge implicature involved in asserting ‘\( p \)’ cannot be

\textsuperscript{92}Williamson (1996) considers an explanation based on Gricean implicature and dismisses it precisely on grounds of un-cancellability.
cancelled at any context, in virtue of assertion’s constitutive function.

But if I'm right and this particular implicature is not context dependent, it follows that we should expect it not to be cancellable.\footnote{I suspect and argue elsewhere (Simion 2019) that the category of conventional implicature is broader than Grice thought. In a nutshell, Grice thought that the category is sourced in semantics, i.e. in the conventional meaning of a term. I argue that what is essential to conventional implicatures is merely their context-independence, which, in turn can be delivered by conventions pertaining to both content and force. Assertion is a case in point. Consider, also, questions such as: ‘Where are you going but I know where you’re going.’ This question seems equally infelicitous as a Moorean assertion; plausibly, that’s because the function of questioning is alleviating ignorance, and, as such, the relevant implicature cannot be cancelled at any context.}

6.4.3 How Do You Know?

One data point that is widely taken to strongly support KNA\footnote{For an excellent paper showing how Moorean paradoxicality and ‘How do you know?’ challenges are intimately related data points, and how KNA is better positioned than other views on assertion to explain this, see (Benton 2011).} is the permissibility of challenging assertions with questions such as ‘How do you know?’, or the more aggressive ‘Do you know that?’, or ‘You don’t know that!’ The thought is, in a nutshell, that KNA is the source of this permissibility datum: since we are (implicitly) aware of KNA being in force when a speaker makes an assertion, we find it permissible to check that they are indeed in compliance with the norm, and, furthermore, to criticize them should we suspect they are not speaking knowledgeablely. To further see this, note that a response along the lines of ‘Oh, I don’t know this, I’m just saying,’ or, more aggressively, ‘Who are you to ask me whether I know or not?’ seems inappropriate on the speaker’s side.

Let’s try to make this plausible thought more precise. Something like the following bridge principle seems to be doing the work here:
KNA-Bridge: Criticising assertions for lack of knowledgeability is *prima facie* permissible iff KNA is true.

After all, for permissibility of criticism to be instantiated, it should be the case that anything less than knowledge would be impermissible – otherwise, why ask for it to begin with? – and that not more than knowledge is needed – after all, it looks as though, if the speaker were to show her knowledgeability when prompted, she would have thereby discharged her obligation to the challenging party. Last, the *prima facie* proviso is in place to rule out cases of normative overriding, in which criticism might not be all-things-considered appropriate.

While I don’t take issue with the necessity claim, in what follows, I will argue that the sufficiency claim is false. That is, even if correct, KNA is not sufficient for explaining the permissibility of knowledge-based challenges and criticism. To see why, it will be helpful to consider the generalised version of the above bridging principle:

**Bridge:** S’s criticising phi-ing for lack of property x is *prima facie* permissible iff there is a norm governing phi-ing that requires x.

Bridge looks good at a first glance. However, on closer inspection, it turns out that its sufficiency direction fails, and here is why: it is widely believed in the literature on responsibility, blame and criticism that there is such a thing as a *standing to blame* and criticise someone. It is also widely believed that blaming and criticising someone for the violation of a particular norm is not *prima facie* permissible when one lacks *standing* to do so. See e.g. Tognazzini and Coates (2018) for a nice overview.

95

To see how this can be the case, consider the fashion norm that forbids wearing sandals with socks. The classical example of lack of standing is that of the hypocritical criticiser. If I’m wearing pink at a funeral, I don’t have standing to criticise you for breaking
fashion norms in wearing sandals with socks. Bridge fails: you are in violation of the relevant fashion norm, but my criticising you for this is impermissible. Another condition people in this literature like is the ‘one’s business’ condition: very roughly, the thought is that one’s criticism is impermissible if the relevant norm violation is none of one’s business. If you wear sandals with socks on a regular occasion, and I criticise you for it, it is well in your right to reply: ‘Stay out of it, this is none of your business.’ This suggests my criticism is impermissible.

If this is the case, the sufficiency claim involved in Bridge fails. Here is, then, the restricted version that holds:

**Bridge*: S’s criticising phi-ing for lack of property x is *prima facie* permissible iff there is a norm governing phi-ing that requires x and S has the standing to perform the criticism.

As such, going back to assertion, we get the suitably restricted bridge principle for KNA:

**KNA-Bridge*: S’s criticising assertions for lack of knowledgeability is *prima facie* permissible iff KNA is true and S has the standing to perform the criticism.

Now, crucially, note that, while KNA was excellently equipped to explain permissible criticisms on KNA-Bridge, that is not the case anymore on KNA-Bridge*: more is needed to license it.

With all this in place, I would like to invite you to note an interesting data point: knowledge-based criticisms and challenges of assertions are *always* permissible (*prima facie*). Even if I’m known to be an unreliable asserter myself, it’s still perfectly fine for me to challenge your assertions for knowledgeability, or to criticise them for lack thereof. Even if it’s none of my business – say that you’re not talking to me, but to my colleague -, it is still perfectly appropriate for me to step up and criticise you or
challenge your assertion. This seems to suggest that (1) KNA is correct, but also that, furthermore, (2) hearers always have standing to criticize breaches of KNA.

Importantly, in contrast to the simple KNA account, AF has the resources to explain this phenomenon, and thereby make sense of hearer knowledge-based challenges. First of all, if generating knowledge in hearers is the function of assertion, it is always hearer’s business whether the assertion at stake is knowledgeable – after all, knowledgeable assertion is the most reliable way to generate knowledge in hearers. Secondly, in virtue of assertion’s function, the hypocrisy condition fails to apply to the case of assertion: even if I, as a speaker, failed to generate knowledge in you in the past, in virtue of my impermissible assertions, that does not excuse you from making your assertion one that has the disposition to fulfil its function of generating knowledge in me as a hearer. In this, AF, as opposed to the simple KNA account, does well by KNA-Bridge*.

6.4.4 Assertion, Knowledge and Context

Here are two very attractive theses: KNA and Classical Invariantism (CI). The former is familiar already. The latter states that knowledge and permissible knowledge attributions are insensitive to practical stakes. Both have been defended (albeit the latter only implicitly, so far) in this book.

Now, theoretical considerations speak in favour of not quickly abandoning either of these two theses. First, friends and foes alike agree that CI is the default epistemological position: we need to be argued out of it. Furthermore, note that a lot hinges on CI for the independence of epistemic normativity from the practical. To see why, assume CI is false: first, if one finds knowledge norms plausible at all, practical normative

96 “Anyone who has even passing knowledge of analytic epistemology in the last fifty or so years knows that moderate invariantism is the orthodoxy. It is the view to beat” (Fantl and McGrath 2009, 37).
encroachment on epistemic normativity/epistemic normative status attribution readily follows. Furthermore, even if one does not like knowledge norms, the threat of encroachment is still close: after all, what foes of CI widely take to be the subject of encroachment is the epistemic component of knowledge – i.e. knowledge-level justification. Assuming a deontic thesis for belief (DTB), again, we lose the independence of epistemic normativity from the practical.

Second, if knowledge is both necessary and sufficient for epistemically permissible assertion, 97 we have a very straightforward and elegant way of explaining quite a few otherwise puzzling linguistic data (some of which we have already seen), such as: the paradoxical soundingness of Moorean statements; the unassertability of lottery propositions; intuitively permissible ‘How do you know?’ challenges; last but not least, intuitively permissible criticisms such as ‘Why didn’t you say so? You knew it all along!’

Alas, popular as they might be, for the most part, the epistemological literature of the last decade takes KNA and CI to be incompatible. The culprit is the intuitive sensitivity of permissible assertion to practical stakes. Consider the following cases (henceforth also ‘contextualist cases’):

**ASPIRIN1.** You remember having bought aspirin last month. You are heading together with your sister towards your place for dinner, and she lets you know she has a minor headache. Your sister asks you: ‘Do you have aspirin at home, or should we go to the pharmacy?’ You flat out assert: ‘Don’t worry, I have aspirin at home, I remember having bought some’.

**ASPIRIN2.** You remember having bought aspirin last month.

97 Champions of KNA include Peter Unger (1975), Keith DeRose (2002), John Hawthorne (2004) John Turri (2011) and Timothy Williamson (1996, 2000). The most notable competitors on the market are the justification norm of assertion, defended in (Douven 2006) and (Lackey 2007) and the truth norm of assertion (e.g. Weiner 2005).
Your sister’s two years old baby is having a fever, and needs an aspirin as soon as possible. Your sister asks you: ‘Do you have aspirin at home, or should we go to the pharmacy?’. You give the matter a bit of thought, and answer: ‘Well, let’s drop by the pharmacy, just in case’.

Now, here is the thought behind the incompatibility claim. Since permissible assertion seems to require more warrant in high stakes than in low stakes scenarios, we are faced with the following dilemma (henceforth also the ‘Shiftiness Dilemma’, or SD): either we embrace KNA but then we’ll have to adopt a view that takes knowledge/knowledge attribution to be sensitive to practical considerations. Alternatively, we stick to our classical invariantist guns, but then we’ll have to give up the knowledge norm of assertion.

According to Williamson, however, SD is a false dilemma: what explains the normative profile of cases of shiftiness of proper assertability is the fact that the relevant agents lack higher order knowledge. The thought, roughly, goes as follows: high stakes contexts require prudent agents to stay on the side of caution in the sense that if you act without knowing that you are meeting the conditions for proper action you’ll be blameworthy. The case of assertion is an instance of this general principle: since knowledge is the norm for assertion, what’s expected from speakers in high stakes scenarios is that they know that they know before making an assertion. However, according to Williamson, contextualist cases are borderline cases of knowledge and therefore exhibit failure of luminosity.

According to Williamson, then, strictly speaking, you know that you have aspirin at home in both the ASPIRIN cases. As such, according to KNA, you are permitted to assert that you have aspirin at home. However, your memorial belief barely makes the threshold for knowledge, and thus, in both cases, you fail to know that you know, and therefore you fail to know that
your assertion is appropriate. Now, in Williamson’s view, it would be rather unreasonable to insist that you should have second order knowledge in the low stakes ASPIRIN1 case. However, given that you don’t know that you are meeting the condition for properly asserting, it seems unacceptable to do so in ASPIRIN 2, where your nephew’s health hinges on it.

Consider, however, the following pair of cases due to Jessica Brown:

**LO:** Suppose that Lo truly believes that the seaweed in front of her is correctly classified as of type F, on the basis of the testimony of an accompanying expert. She has no reason to doubt the expert’s competence and the expert is in fact reliable (Brown 2005, 323).

**HI:** Hi is in the same epistemic position as Lo; she truly believes that the seaweed in front of her is correctly classified as of type F on the basis of the testimony of an accompanying [reliable] expert […] However, [in her context], […] seaweed F could rapidly come to dominate the local seaweed population, leading to loss of the marine diversity for which the area is internationally renowned. The only way to prevent this loss would be a hugely expensive clean-up programme which would require closure of nearby tourist resorts. Further, in Hi’s context, various error possibilities have been raised, such as the possibility that the expert is mistaken (‘Experts do sometimes make mistakes’) (Brown 2005, 323).

It looks as though in HI, but not in LO, it is inappropriate to assert ‘The seaweed is of type F’ or to rely on the proposition that the seaweed is of type F in, say, deciding whether to close the local resort. Furthermore, it looks as though Hi should make further checks by asking one or more other experts for their opinion.
Note, though, that LO’s warrant is well above the ordinary standards for knowledge, and, as such, not a borderline case exhibiting failure of luminosity. As a result, the unassertability in high stakes cases cannot be explained in terms of the absence of second-order knowledge in virtue of failure of luminosity.

In response, Williamson ventures to handle such cases by employing contextual variability when it comes to the needed number of iterations of knowledge: the higher the stakes, the higher the order of knowledge required for permissible action. Accordingly, in Brown’s cases, in spite of being in a fairly strong epistemic situation, Hi still misses the contextually appropriate number of iterations of knowledge.

There is an important problem with this line of response, however: the main advantage of Williamson’s account is that it is but a special case of a more general phenomenon: again, the idea is that, in general, we tend to harshly judge people who, when a lot is at stake, act without knowing that they meet the condition for proper action. Consider, for instance, the following case:

**LOCK.** The company you work for operates a norm that the door be locked after 10pm. Moreover, the last employee is in charge with this. Today you are last employee and know this. You also know that it’s of special importance today that the door is locked as your company just received some valuable goods that are likely to be stolen unless the door is locked.

In this case, it’s plausible that Williamson is right in that you’ll be subject to blame if it turns out that you didn’t know that the door was locked after 10pm, even if, as a matter of fact, it was. By way of evidence, notice that if it does transpire that you didn’t know that the door was locked, we can legitimately criticise you by saying things like: “The door was locked. But you didn’t know that. You should have known.”
What is less plausible, however, is that, as the stakes go up, you need further iterations of knowledge. Consider:

**LOCK*. The company you work for operates a norm that the door be locked after 10pm. Moreover, last employee in charge with this. Today you are last employee and know this. You also know that it’s of vital importance today that the door is locked. Your company invested all its capital in certain goods that just arrived and are nearly certain to be stolen and result in the company’s bankruptcy unless the door is locked.

Here too, it’s plausible that you’ll be subject to blame if it turns out that you didn’t know that the door was locked, even if, as a matter of fact, it was locked. What’s less plausible is that you’ll be subject to blame if the door is locked and you knew that it is locked but you didn’t know that you knew that the door is locked. By way of evidence, notice that if all this transpires, it doesn’t look as though we can legitimately criticise you by saying: “The door was locked. And you knew that. But you didn’t know that you knew. You should have known that you knew.”

What comes to light, then, is that while in general we legitimately blame those who don’t know that they comply with a certain norm, we can’t legitimately blame them in cases in which they comply with the norm and have some number of iterations of knowledge, but don’t attain some higher number of iterations for knowledge. But given that the case of assertion was meant to be but a special case of the general phenomenon, we’d expect assertion to behave in this way also. By the same token, we have reason to think that the Williamsonian explanation of contextualist cases remains unsuccessful.

Can AF do better? I will argue next that AF has an exceptionally easy time explaining away the Shiftiness Dilemma. Very roughly, according to AF, proper assertion varies with context. Crucially, however, it is all-things-considered propriety
that varies with context, not epistemic propriety. As such, AF accounts for contextualist cases in terms of practical norms overriding epistemic norms.

What we have so far is a functionalist account of KNA as a distinctively epistemic norm. This raises the question as to how the idea of overriding can be incorporated into the functionalist picture. To answer it, notice first that a given trait/artifact/act can have several functions simultaneously, even several functions of different types; take, for instance, the functions served by food for humans. One important such function will surely be a biological one, a nourishment function. Plausibly enough, though, on top of this, food also serves an aesthetic function, that of generating pleasant gustatory experiences. Now, normally, the aesthetic function complements the nourishing function. It serves survival by increasing the probability of us ingesting nourishing substances. This need not be the case, however; there can be situations where the two functions come in conflict, at which point the more stringent requirement will take precedence. In other words, when there is a conflict between the normative requirements associated with two functions, one requirement may override the other and dictate what’s the all-things-considered good to observe. By way of illustration, think of a case where I am on a desert island and all I can eat in order to stay alive are my boots; surely, against my aesthetic well-being, that is exactly what I should do, all-things-considered.

To repeat, the thought here is that we get overriding from conflicts between the normative requirements associated with functions. We can now take this idea and put it to use for our epistemological purposes. To see how, note first that it is highly plausible that the epistemic function is merely one of the many functions served by assertion. One other very important function

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Note that it is not in my intention to suggest that practical concerns will always override epistemic ones (or aesthetic ones, for that matter). The claim made by this chapter (and needed here) is weaker than that: practical requirements will, on occasion, do so, and the contextualist cases are cases in point. I gather that this is a fairly plausible thought.
of assertion, as with action in general, will be a prudential one, serving our practical ends. Again, just like in the case of food, the epistemic function will, in most cases, complement this prudential function. Generating testimonial knowledge in one’s hearer with regard to an imminent threat, or about the whereabouts of resources are paradigm cases. However, again, this need not be the case. The two functions can also come into conflict. For instance, even if one knows that one’s boss is bald, it may not be polite, prudent, or relevant to point this out to him (Brown 2010, 550): surely, here, the prudential function comes in conflict with the epistemic one. What’s more, it is also plausible that the prudential function overrides the epistemic. The result is that although it is epistemically permissible to assert that one’s boss is bald to him, it is not all things considered permissible for one to do so.

Finally, the phenomenon of conflict and overriding is precisely what explains the unassertability intuition in high stakes scenarios: in ASPIRIN2, strictly epistemically speaking, if you have memorial knowledge that you have aspirin at home, you are permitted to assert. You are in a position to make an assertion that can fulfil its epistemic function of generating testimonial knowledge in your hearer. However, prudential constraints concerning your nephew’s health come into conflict with these epistemic requirements. They override the epistemic constraint and drive the degree of warrant needed for all-things-considered permissible assertion up to a point the speaker does not reach. As a result, it will be all-things-considered impermissible for the speaker to assert in such a case, which explains why her assertion would seem improper to us.

6.6 Conclusion
I have developed a novel view of the epistemic normativity of assertion, which I have dubbed *Assertion Functionalism*. According to this view, knowledge is the constitutive norm of assertion in virtue of assertion’s function of generating knowledge in hearers. Requirements generated by other functions of assertion, though, such as its prudential and moral functions, can override the constraints imposed by the epistemic function, and render the knowledge requirement either too strong or too weak for all-things-considered permissible assertion.
Chapter 7
No Epistemic Norm for Action

7.1. Introduction

One central debate in recent literature on epistemic normativity concerns the epistemic norm for action. Several people think that, where one’s choice is \( p \)-dependent, it is appropriate to treat the proposition that \( p \) as a reason for acting only if one knows that \( p \)
(e.g. Hawthorne and Stanley (2008)). The most notable competing account puts forth a Bayesian norm, according to which it is rational to choose an act only if it maximizes expected utility (e.g. Douven (2008)).

This chapter argues that the debate is afflicted by a category mistake: strictly speaking, there is no such thing as an epistemic norm for action. To this effect, I will first go back to a distinction I identified in Chapter #1, that between epistemic norms and norms with epistemic content, and offer a pretty straightforward functionalist way to tell their requirements apart (§2). In §3 I will argue that, inasmuch as actions lack a characteristic epistemic function, they are not governed by epistemic norms, but by other (prudential, moral etc.) norms with epistemic content. This result will also shed new light on the debate concerning the assertion-action commonality assumption, i.e., the claim that action and assertion are governed by one and the same epistemic norm.

\[99\]While I will focus on the necessity direction of the norm, everything I say goes for the sufficiency direction, and therefore the biconditional version, too.

\[100\]For an overview of the debate, see (Benton 2014). For recent work, see (Littlejohn and Turri 2014).
7.2. Epistemic Norms and Norms with Epistemic Content

Let us, on a first approximation, formulate the norm we are talking about as follows:

**THE X NORM FOR ACTION (XNA):** One is in a good enough epistemic position to act on p only if p has X.

Now, as we have seen, there is no consensus in the literature as to what property X is supposed to stand for, whether it is knowledge, expected utility maximization etc. Many\footnote{There are a few important exceptions (many thanks to an anonymous referee for American Philosophical Quarterly for pointing this out). In particular, when it comes to the views defended by Tim Williamson (e.g. 2000) and Jeremy Fantl and Matt McGrath (e.g. 2002), whether they will eventually make the proper subject of this chapter will depend a lot on the details.} people,

On the Fantl&McGrath view, propriety of using p as a premise in practical reasoning and treating p as a reason for action can come apart from properly acting in the light of p in many ways; as such, they need not be committed to their being epistemic requirements on action. Plausibly, the view is perfectly compatible with a picture where it is fine to act on lottery propositions (say, sell the ticket) while, at the same time, it is impermissible to use such propositions in practical reasoning, or treat them as reasons for action, in virtue of not having knowledge-level justification. As such, while the view does want to say that epistemic requirements govern practical reasoning and treating p as a reason for action, it does not commit to the claim that action itself is the proper subject of epistemic evaluation.

Two things about this. First, I am in strong agreement with Fantl and McGrath concerning there being an epistemic norm governing practical reasoning, independently of any such norm governing action. More about this in Section #4 below. Secondly, though, depending on how it will be spelled out, I worry about ‘treating p as a reason for action’ not being the proper subject of epistemic requirements either, for just the same reasons as action: it is not clear to me what the epistemic function associated with either the former or the latter might be. Again, a lot will hinge on the details.
though, take it that XNA is a distinctively epistemic norm; according to Matt Benton, for instance, “[…] when one faces a decision over whether to act that depends on the truth of some proposition, then acting without knowing that proposition can seem epistemically suspect and deserving of criticism” (Benton 2014). According to Jason Stanley (2016), also, “[r]ational action, practical reasoning, intentional action, and skilled action all plausibly involve epistemic norms”. Similarly, Martin Montminy argues that “[i]t is epistemically appropriate to act on the belief that p if and only if that belief counts as knowledge” (2012, p. 63). Also in support of a knowledge norm, John Hawthorne wonders whether winners of a bet with extremely good odds are “epistemically laudable for taking the bet” (John Hawthorne 2004, p. 175).

Foes of the knowledge norm also agree about the genuine epistemic nature of the requirement on action at stake. According to Mikkel Gerken, for instance, “[..] if the profiles of epistemic assessment for action and assertion are relevantly similar, it is prima facie evidence for the assumption that the relevant epistemic norms are also relevantly similar” (Gerken 2014, p. 726).

Furthermore, there is one more thing several people involved in the debate seem to agree on: XNA is an epistemic norm in virtue of the fact that it concerns how good one’s epistemic position needs to be vis-à-vis p in order to make acting on p permissible. Thus, both sides of the debate seem to stand behind what I called Content Individuation:

**CONTENT INDIVIDUATION** (CI). A norm, N, is a distinctively epistemic norm if and only if it regulates the epistemic properties required for proper phi-ing.

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102 For exceptions, see anti-contextualist pragmatic warranted assertability maneuvers a la e.g. Rysiew (2001) and Brown (2006)). For explicit doubts about this recipe for individuating epistemic norms, see e.g. Hazlett, McKenna and Pollock (2012).
I have argued extensively that CI is false in Chapter #1. I will not rehearse the argument here. In a nutshell, the problem with CI is that it’s not a proper way to individuate norms of any type. When permissible action requires more or less of a gradable property G, all norms N regulating that particular type of action can fix the threshold for N-proper performance lower or higher on the G spectrum: it can be prudentially or morally appropriate to drive faster or slower, to have a better or a worse grade average, to speak louder or more quietly etc. Just because a norm is regulating the appropriate speed, it need not follow that it is a traffic norm; just because a norm regulates the appropriate tone of one’s voice, it need not follow it is a norm of etiquette; and so on.

Now, action is certainly governed by many norms – prudential and moral norms are the most obvious candidates – and justification is a gradable property. Therefore, unless we are given reasons to believe epistemic normativity is somehow special in this respect, we should expect norms regulating the degree of justification required for proper action to make no exception; we should expect that just because a norm N affects the amount of warrant needed for proper action, it need not follow that N is an epistemic norm. The fact that a norm regulates the appropriate speed does not imply it is a traffic norm, and, similarly, the fact that a norm regulates the appropriate amount of epistemic support does not imply it is an epistemic norm. Just because a norm regulates the amount of warrant needed for proper action, it need not follow that it regulates the amount of warrant needed for epistemically proper action.

Given that CI is false, however, there is no reason to think that XNA is an epistemic norm for action. Recall XNA: ‘One is in a good enough epistemic position to act on p only if p

\[^{103}\text{As far as I can tell, there is no argument to this effect in the literature. If the point made by this chapter goes through, there is reason to believe that we should not trust the prospects of one offering such an argument either.}\]
has X’. With CI out of the picture, good enough epistemic position need not mean epistemically good enough, that is, it need not mean good enough by the epistemic norm. One can be in a prudentially good enough epistemic position, a morally good enough epistemic position and so on.

7.3. Actions and Epistemic Functions

The previous section has shown that, since CI is false, there is no reason to believe that XNA captures an epistemic norm. This section argues that XNA is actually not an epistemic norm.

Recall, first, that Chapter #1 identified a fairly straightforward way to go about distinguishing epistemic norms proper from mere norms with epistemic content, what I dubbed Value Individuation:

**VALUE INDIVIDUATION** (VI). A norm N is of type T if and only if it is associated with values of type T.

Recall, also, that VI is value-theoretically neutral, in that it does not take a stance on what the correct direction of explanation is – whether norms are sourced in values, like the (broadly speaking) teleologist would have it, or values are sourced in norms, in a (broadly) deontological fashion. As such, on VI, XNA is going to express a genuinely epistemic norm just in case either the relevant action promotes some epistemic values (teleology), or, alternatively, XNA gives rise to some epistemic value (deontology). Note, however, that for your everyday token action, it’s not clear that either direction of VI will hold. Take action T: brushing my teeth in the morning. For XNA as applied to T to be an epistemic norm, it needs be the case that either T promotes some epistemic value (not clear what that might be, in the case of brushing my teeth) or give rise to some epistemic value. In other
words, it should be that XNA as applied to teeth brushing should explain why we value some epistemic stance. Again, I take, it, this is not obviously the case when it comes to brushing my teeth.

To see this difficulty more clearly, in what follows, I will show how it unfolds on the version of VI defended in this book, i.e. a teleological version that takes epistemic norms to be borne out by epistemic functions. It is important to keep in mind, though, that what the discussion above suggests is that the result obtained here holds in full generality: it drops out of any reading of VI, it is not restricted to my favourite incarnation thereof.

I have argued that a norm’s pertaining to one type or another has to do with the function it is borne out by. Thus, prudential norms will be borne out by prudential functions – maximizing practical utility –, while epistemic norms will be concerned with reliably fulfilling epistemic functions in normal conditions.

If that is the case, however, it is not clear why action in general would be governed by an epistemic norm to begin with. When does it make sense to regulate something X by a norm of type Y, such as a prudential, moral or epistemic norm? When X has a function of type Y. Consider antibiotics; the function of producing them is curing bacterial infections. As such, norms governing this activity will plausibly be there to insure that they reliably do so.

Conversely, when X does not have a type Y function, there is little reason to regulate X by a norm of type Y. Producing antibiotics will most likely not be governed by, say, aesthetic norms, given that the function of antibiotics is not to aesthetically please the consumer; antibiotics can be proper antibiotics even if they are not particularly pretty.

Notice that most actions do not have epistemic functions; my eating breakfast, running in the park, brushing my teeth, buying chocolate, helping my old neighbour cross the street are cases in point. Most of them are aimed at prudential goals, such
as maximizing expected practical utility, some of them at moral goals, maybe a few at aesthetic goals. In the absence of any characteristic epistemic function, though, there is little reason to think that these actions will be governed by an epistemic norm.

Consider, in contrast, asserting, perceiving, reporting, judging, learning, reading, applying to the university etc. These actions all have epistemic functions. As such, it makes sense for them to be governed by epistemic norms.

Thus, having an epistemic norm for action makes perfect sense when it comes to actions that have epistemic functions, like assertion. It makes sense to ask what property exactly one’s assertion must enjoy for it to be epistemically proper; that is, properly equipped to fulfil its epistemic function. However, just as in the case of producing antibiotics, there is no reason to think that my buying chocolate will be governed by an epistemic norm, due to the fact that it is not aimed at delivering epistemic goods.

One interesting by-product of this result concerns the assertion-action commonality assumption; that is, the fairly popular claim that, given that assertion is a type of action, the epistemic norm governing the former is going to be but an instance of the epistemic norm governing the latter. Notice that the above results undermine commonality, together with the motivation behind it: assertion is not governed by an epistemic norm in virtue of its being a type of action, but due to its characteristic epistemic function.

7.4 Action and Practical Reasoning

Note that nothing I have said so far concerns the epistemic norm for practical reasoning; that is because, while action doesn’t serve any epistemic function, it may still be that practical reasoning does. Here is one plausible thought: practical reasoning has the

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104 See Brown (2012) for discussion.
function of generating knowledge of what one ought to do. I will defend this view in the next chapter. Before proceeding, though, one question that arises is: couldn’t defenders of one account or another of the epistemic norm for action not worry too much about the results of this chapter, and merely retreat in a discussion about practical reasoning?

Two things about this; first, I would see this as a great success for this book. Secondly, and more importantly, though, the retreat would not be a ‘mere retreat’ at all, but it would rather require a fairly substantial revision of methodology. Here is why: most cases put forth in defence or one account or another in this literature appeal to intuitions about propriety of acting in a particular situation. If this chapter is right, however, the latter says little about the epistemic propriety of practical reasoning: prudential propriety of an instance of practical reasoning will likely depend on the prudential propriety of the generated piece of action; importantly, though, epistemic propriety need not. Thus, arguably, on pain of deontic equivocation, this methodology needs to be revisited: arguments pro and against one account or another of the epistemic norm for practical reasoning will have to stay clear of considerations pertaining to the prudential propriety of the corresponding action.

What is important for our discussion here is to note that, even if practical reasoning does turn out to have an epistemic function, and therefore will be governed by an epistemic norm, this will not transmit epistemic requirements to the generated action. And here is why: I take it that the transmission thought would go along the following lines: since one ought to know that \( p \) in order to use \( p \) in practical reasoning, and since one ought to only act on the conclusions of permissible practical reasoning, it follows one ought to know that \( p \) in order to act. Now, the problem is that deontic transmission need not preserve the type of permissibility at stake in the premise of interest to us. To see this, consider, again: one ought to drive 30 mph in order to get
safely at one’s destination (traffic norm); one ought to get safely at one’s destination in order to keep one’s promise to mom (moral norm); Therefore, one ought to drive 30 mph in order to keep one’s promise to mom (moral norm). Even if the first premise states a traffic norm, it need not follow that the conclusion does too. Similarly, in the argument above, even if the first premise states an epistemic norm, it does not follow the conclusion does too.

7.5 Conclusion

I have argued here that there is no epistemic norm governing action in general, although most actions will plausibly be governed by several other norms with epistemic content – like prudential or moral norms. I have also argued that, in order for a particular type of action to be governed by an epistemic norm, it needs be the case that it serves an epistemic function.

In the light of these results, it looks as if the question concerning what one’s epistemic relation to \( p \) has to be in order to render acting on \( p \) permissible should be framed as concerning a type of normativity that plausibly governs all types of action. Uncontroversially, I guess, the most obvious candidate is prudential normativity. Thus, what we are asking is what one’s epistemic relation to \( p \) has to be in order to render acting on \( p \) prudentially permissible. And what we are looking for is a prudential norm with epistemic content.
8.1. Introduction

There is no epistemic norm for action in general; rather, action is governed by other types of norms – prudential, moral – with epistemic content. What about practical reasoning?

Here is where the results above leave us: Many people lump action and practical reasoning together when it comes to discussions of epistemic normativity. If I am right, this is likely a mistake that generates important theoretical costs. Since action in general has no epistemic function, it is not governed by any epistemic norm. Rather, it generally serves prudential aims, and is therefore governed by prudential norms. At the same time, of course, practical reasoning will also serve a prudential function: that of leading to prudentially good action. In virtue of the latter, it will also be governed by prudential norms.

Compatibly with this, I will argue, practical reasoning also serves an epistemic function: generating knowledge of what one ought to do. If I am right, practical reasoning will be governed by a corresponding epistemic norm, borne out by this function.

This picture I favour, if right, sharply separates action and practical reasoning normatively. At the same time, it provides us with an exciting opportunity to unify reasoning: practical and theoretical reasoning will turn out to be governed by the same epistemic norm – knowledge - in virtue of serving the same epistemic function: generating knowledge of the conclusion.

I will start with outlining my view on the epistemic function and normativity of reasoning, and then move on to showing how it works for practical reasoning. I will conclude by
showing that the functionalist view defended here has an important advantage over extant defences of knowledge norms for reasoning, to wit, it easily explains why cases of knowledge from falsehood are not problematic for knowledge norms, and cases of (prudentially) permissible action and practical reasoning from less than knowledge.

8.2. The Epistemic Function and Epistemic Norm of Reasoning

At this stage, it will not come as a surprise that the view I want to defend when it comes to the epistemic function of reasoning (in general, be it theoretical or practical) is that it amounts to generating knowledge. Three reasons in support of this thought:

First, recall that I have argued (Chapter #2) that the practice of inquiry aims at generating knowledge: that’s its epistemic function. In turn, I have claimed that moves in practices aim at fulfilling the aim of the practice. Since I take reasoning to be a move in the practice of inquiry, what my normative picture straightforwardly delivers is a knowledge generating function of reasoning.

Second, recall that Chapter #3 argued that knowledge is the evaluative norm of belief (KN’B): good belief is knowledgeable belief. On the assumption that the output of reasoning is a conclusion belief, and since beliefs ought to be knowledgeable, it follows that the function of reasoning is to generate knowledgeable conclusion beliefs.

Third, note that knowledge meets E-Function for reasoning: instances of reasoning have delivered knowledge in the past (empirically highly plausible), this benefitted us epistemically (value of knowledge thesis), which contributes to the explanation

105 See (McHugh and Way 2018) for an excellent defense of an account of reasoning as a functional good-making kind.
of why we keep engaging in reasoning (highly plausible thesis, defended at length in Chapter #2).

If this is right, we can straightforwardly employ our functionalist machinery to the aim of figuring out what epistemic norm is borne out by this picture. What epistemic norm of reasoning will drop out of the knowledge function? Recall that in order to identify the corresponding norm, one needs to look back to when reasoning acquired its function, and ask the question: how did it work back then? How did it generate knowledge of its conclusion? I submit that the overwhelmingly plausible answer, given (1) the easy availability of knowledge thesis (defended in Chapter #2), and given that, in the vast majority of instances of reasoning, knowledge of the premises is necessary for achieving knowledge of the conclusion, is that reasoning generated knowledge of the conclusion from known premises. If this is right, knowledge is the epistemic norm of reasoning:

**KNR:** One (epistemically) must: employ p in reasoning iff one knows that p.

One question that arises at this point concerns the scope of the knowledge function and knowledge norm claims: is this result restricted to theoretical reasoning, or will it apply to practical reasoning as well?

The next section develops a unified view of the epistemic function and normativity of practical and theoretical reasoning. In order to do this, it outlines my preferred view of how practical and theoretical reasoning relate to each other.

### 8.3 Practical vs. Theoretical Reasoning

There are notable difficulties in offering a precise recipe for sharply distinguishing practical from theoretical reasoning. One
fairly straightforward way to go about it is to take theoretical reasoning to be concerned with answering descriptive questions (about matters of fact), while practical reasoning aims at answering distinctively normative questions (about what one ought to do). The problem with this straightforward recipe is that it is too simple. Here is why: on one hand, one can think that there are such things as normative matters of fact, i.e. facts about what one ought to do. Conversely, it is plausible to think that conclusions of theoretical reason carry normative power too: after all, it looks as though, very roughly, proper instances of theoretical reasoning make it permissible to believe their conclusions, while improper instances thereof deliver impermissible conclusion-beliefs. It is tempting, then, to think that theoretical reasoning too attempts to answer a normative question: the question of what one should believe (Moran 2001). Seen in this way, the contrast between practical and theoretical reason becomes essentially a contrast in target of normativity – i.e. belief vs. action: practical reason is concerned with answering the question ‘what should I do,’ while theoretical reasoning is concerned with answering the question: ‘what should I believe.’ Let’s call this way to distinguish practical from theoretical reasoning ‘the Simple View.’

Some philosophers are disenchanted with the Simple View: they think that there is more to the distinction between practical and theoretical reasoning than the Simple View suggests. In particular, they think that the two forms of reasoning differ not only in their target, but, importantly, also in their consequences: theoretical reasoning produces changes in one's overall set of beliefs, whereas practical reasoning gives rise to intentional action; it is practical not only in its subject matter, but also in its issue. According to the defenders of this view, then, practical reasoning leads to modifications of our beliefs, whereas practical reasoning leads to modifications of our intentions.

106 See (Wallace 2018) for a nice overview.
I sympathise with the Simple View. Here is why: as defenders of the Complex View themselves acknowledge, a more accurate way to represent the consequences of practical reasoning would be to say that deliberation about action generates appropriate intentions insofar as an agent is rational (Korsgaard 1996). After all, many of us display weakness of will. But if that is the case, intention seems to be a contingent consequence of practical reasoning, premised on the agent’s rationality. In other words, it’s a consequence practical reasoning should have, rather than one that it essentially has, in virtue of the type of reasoning that it is. To see this, note that we don’t want to say that, in cases of weakness of will, no practical reasoning was exercised, in virtue of no intention being generated. To the contrary, what plausibly goes wrong in cases of weakness of will is precisely that an instance of practical reasoning is at work, but the agent fails to form the intention corresponding to its conclusion. In other words, the agent knows what she should do but fails to form the intention to do it.

If this is the case, a more plausible picture is the one outlined by the Simple View.Compatibly, defenders of the Complex View can come back with a weaker proposal, on which they supplement the Simple View with a normative rather than a descriptive claim: On the Revised Complex View, an instance of reasoning will be an instance of practical reasoning just in case its target of application is action, and it should deliver a change in intention. I’m not particularly convinced by this version of the Revised Complex View either; after all, we can easily imagine instances of practical reasoning which deliver the result that some intention that I already had was correct; in this case, no change in intention should follow. That being said, I don’t need to settle this issue here, and I’m confident that more plausible ways to spell out the Complex View are available. The view I develop
below is perfectly compatible with both the Simple and the Complex View. Indeed, I believe it offers a nice compromise between them.

According to the view I favour, there is no distinction between practical and theoretical reasoning when it comes to the nature of their conclusion-attitudes\(^{107}\) (as per the Simple View): in both cases, the conclusion is a belief. The crucial distinction amounts to – in line with the Complex View – the *prudential* normative pressure that the conclusion exerts over one’s intentions and actions: in the case of practical reason, one’s actions and intentions (*prudentially*) should align with the conclusion belief: one (prudentially) should intend to do and do what one believes one ought to do as a result to one’s good practical reasoning.

We have already seen that, on the picture defended here, good belief is knowledgeable belief. As such, on this picture, in contrast to action, practical reasoning does also serve an epistemic function, on top of its prudential function: generating a good belief – i.e. knowledge - of what one ought to do. Note, also, that knowledge meets E-Function: instances of practical reasoning have delivered knowledge of what one ought to do in the past (empirically highly plausible), this benefitted us epistemically (value of knowledge thesis), which contributes to the explanation of why we keep engaging in practical reasoning (the argument for this claim will parallel the one developed for knowledge as the function of inquiry in Chapter #2, so I will not rehearse it here). If that is so, practical reasoning will, arguably, afford an epistemic norm.

But is this really *a* function of practical reasoning, one might wonder? Isn’t *the* function rather to generate an intention and/or the corresponding action, as the (Revised) Complex View would have it? And if this is so, will it not be the case that the arguments presented here against there being an epistemic norm

\(^{107}\) I follow (Broome 2013) in using this terminology.
A few things about this. First, note that the view defended here accepts that practical reasoning does have an important prudential function in generating prudentially proper intentions and actions. This prudential function will generate a prudential norm for practical reasoning. It is not my business here to discuss what the prudential norms for action or practical reasoning might be, I will leave that to practical philosophy to decide. What I am interested in is whether practical reasoning also has an epistemic function – and my answer is yes: to produce epistemically good conclusion beliefs – i.e. knowledgeable beliefs. Importantly, the Complex View does not exclude the possibility of practical reasoning also generating a conclusion-belief on top of the relevant intention (indeed, the possibility of weakness of will requires there to be something else that plays the role of the conclusion of the relevant instance of practical reasoning; belief seems well qualified to do so). All they need for their view is that practical, but not theoretical reasoning, also has/should have intention as a consequence.

Second, I would worry a bit about a picture on which knowledge of the conclusion has nothing to do with the propriety (of sorts) of practical reasoning, and the latter is only to be assessed in terms of the propriety of the resulting intention. To see why, consider a case in which I reason as follows: “It’s raining outside/If it’s raining, I ought to take an umbrella/Therefore, I ought not take an umbrella”. This is a bad instance of reasoning. Now, say that, in spite of my conclusion belief, I go ahead and take the umbrella anyway. A picture on which the prudential function is the only function of practical reasoning – in virtue of its only consequence being the corresponding intention - has trouble explaining what went wrong here. Here is why: a view like this will have to describe the case above as one where two pieces of reasoning are happening; one theoretical (the one with the bad conclusion belief) and one practical (the one with the good
conclusion-intention). After all, this view takes the issue of the relevant piece of reasoning to determine the nature thereof – theoretical or practical. So what we have above on this view is a correct instance of practical reasoning (from it’s raining and if it’s raining, I ought to take the umbrella to actually forming the intention of taking it and, in fact, taking it) and a bad instance of theoretical reasoning (to the conclusion belief that I ought not take the umbrella). This picture, however, fails to explain the following datum: it looks as though, my taking the umbrella after I reach the (mistaken) conclusion that I ought not do it makes things worse rather than better. After all, not only am I a bad reasoner, but my actions and my beliefs also seem to come in conflict with each other: after I take the umbrella, I’m rationally worse off. On the picture under discussion, however, we get the opposite result: after all, on this view, taking the umbrella just ads a good instance of practical reasoning to the previous states of affairs, that merely included a bad instance of theoretical reasoning. Things should be looking better. But they’re not.

Third, even if it is plausibly true that the prudential function is the main function of practical reasoning, it is perfectly compatible with practical reasoning having a prudential function (generating a prudentially good intention/intentional action) that it also has an epistemic function (generating knowledge of what one ought to do). Insofar as an epistemic function is present, an epistemic norm will drop out of it.

Last but not least, the (alleged) two functions might turn out to not be completely unrelated. Several people in the literature think that intentional action requires some epistemic standing for it to even be instantiated. One popular option is, indeed, knowledge (e.g. Anscombe 1957).

If I am right in thinking that theoretical and practical reasoning serve the same epistemic function – generating knowledge of the conclusion – the argument for the norm governing reasoning presented in the previous section will apply
to practical reasoning as well. What we get, then, is a knowledge norm for practical reasoning:

**K-NORM OF PRACTICAL REASONING:** One (epistemically) must: use \( p \) as a premise in practical reasoning iff one knows that \( p \).

Note that, importantly, the functionalist claim does not imply that knowledge of premises is always necessary for knowledge of the conclusion. After all, functionalist norms do not track necessary conditions for function fulfilment, but merely the most reliable ways to fulfil the corresponding functions in normal conditions. The claim is that reasoning form premises one does not know is always impermissible, although it might, on occasion, lead to function fulfilment.

To see why this an important advantage of the view, consider the following variation of the umbrella case above: The probability of rain is .98/If there is a .98 probability of rain, I should take an umbrella/Therefore, I should take the umbrella. Now, say that I’m wrong: the probability of rain is actually .97. Still, intuitively, I know the conclusion: I should take the umbrella.

Consider, also, a corresponding case of knowledge form falsehood in the case of theoretical reasoning: Counting with some care the number of people present at my talk, I reason: ‘There are 53 people at my talk; therefore my 100 hand-out copies are sufficient’. My premise is false. There are 52 people in attendance—I double counted one person who changed seats during the count. And yet, intuitively, I know my conclusion.

Cases like this are thought by many\(^\text{108}\) to be majorly problematic for knowledge norms of practical and, respectively theoretical reasoning. Crucially, they are not problematic for the

\(^{108}\) Weisberg (2013)
view defended here: just like hearts can pump blood even when improperly functioning, instances of reasoning can deliver knowledge when improper too. This, however, does not falsify the normative claim that reasoning should always proceed from knowledge.

In further good news, the picture defended here is also compatible with cases of intuitively permissible action (and intention) from (epistemically) bad reasoning. We are fallible creatures: We often rely on heuristics and habits when we act, and, short of disaster, that's perfectly fine: we have limited computing capacities. Also, we may often not even consider the option that corresponds to what we ought to do. We often also get our priorities wrong. We do things in the wrong order. However, we still get everything done (although perhaps with more effort) or at least well enough to avoid disabling disaster. Again this may happen quite often. On pain of extreme demandingness, one could argue, knowledge of oughts does not seem needed for permissible action in all walks of life. I don’t want or need to take a stance on this issue: my view is perfectly compatible with the prudential norm governing practical reasoning (and action) being much weaker than knowledge, or even stakes-variant. All my view requires is that knowledge of the premises be present for the epistemic norm of practical reasoning to be respected, which, in turn, in normal conditions, will reliably generate epistemic function fulfilment: knowledge of the conclusion. Compatibly, the epistemic norm may well be often overridden by prudential considerations, in which case less than knowledge will be needed for prudentially permissible practical reasoning. That’s fine (all-things-considered).

8.5. Conclusion
This chapter proposed a picture on which action and practical reasoning are, to some extent normative strangers: they share a prudential function, but not an epistemic function; as such, they are both governed by prudential norms, but the latter, and not the former, is also governed by an epistemic norm in virtue of its epistemic function of generating knowledge of what one ought to do. Excitingly, though, this picture unifies the epistemic normativity of reasoning: practical and theoretical reasoning share epistemic norm in virtue of sharing epistemic function: generating knowledge of the conclusion.
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