Knowledge Needs No Justification

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Abstract and Keywords

The Standard View in epistemology is that knowledge is justified, true belief plus something else. This chapter argues that Standard View should be rejected: knowledge does not require justification. The nature of knowledge and the nature of justification can be better understood if we stop viewing justification as one of the necessary conditions for knowledge.

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The Standard View in epistemology is that knowledge is justified, true belief plus something else. There is a very large volume of literature on the question of what that something else might be. And there is a very large volume of literature on the question of what justification might be, subject to the assumption that justification is one of the necessary conditions for knowledge. That knowledge requires justified, true belief,
however, remains a fixed point around which much\(^1\) of the literature in epistemology revolves. In this chapter\(^{(p.6)}\) I argue that the Standard View should be rejected: knowledge does not require justification. We may better understand the nature of knowledge, and we may better understand the nature of justification, if we stop viewing justification as one of the necessary conditions for knowledge.

1

For more than twenty years, epistemologists have been arguing over whether a proper account of justified belief should involve a commitment to internalism or externalism.\(^2\) Internalists have argued that the features of a belief in virtue of which it is justified must, in some sense, be internal to the agent who holds it. Thus, on certain versions of internalism, an agent must be able to tell, by way of introspection alone, whether a belief is justified; on other versions, the features of a belief that make it justified are internal to the agent in that they are restricted to features of the agent's mental states. Externalists, however, deny that the determinants of justification are restricted in any such way. Thus, for example, reliabilists hold that a belief is justified just in case it was produced or sustained by a reliable process; but the reliability of a belief producing (or sustaining) process is not a fact about features wholly internal to an agent.

Now it is interesting to trace the early history of this debate. When Alvin Goldman first presented his causal account of knowledge, he broke with the Standard View that knowledge requires justification. In “A Causal Theory of Knowledge”,\(^3\) Goldman argued that knowledge that \(p\) is nothing more than true belief caused by the fact that \(p\). And when this account was modified (in “Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge”\(^4\)) to deal with a number of difficulties, Goldman again presented an account of knowledge that required no justification: knowledge was seen as true belief that is produced by the exercise of certain discriminatory capacities. Roughly contemporaneous accounts of knowledge by Armstrong\(^5\) and Dretske\(^6\) also left justification out of the picture. But, in “What is Justified Belief?”,\(^7\) Goldman returned to the fold. The
reliability account of knowledge was now presented, not as an alternative to the Standard View, but rather as a consequence of that View when conjoined with a reliability account of justification. And it was this move on Goldman’s part—reading the reliability requirement on knowledge back into the theory of justified belief so as to conform to the Standard View—which gave rise to the debate between internalists and externalists about justification.

For those who are sympathetic with a reliability account of knowledge, what reason is there to follow Goldman here and, by way of the Standard View, opt for a reliability account of justification, rather than follow Armstrong and Dretske in rejecting the Standard View, thereby leaving justification out of the picture entirely? Surprisingly, Goldman has said relatively little in print about this issue. Thus, in “What is Justified Belief?”, Goldman remarks, “In previous papers on knowledge, I have denied that justification is necessary for knowing, but there I had in mind ‘Cartesian’ accounts of justification. On the account of justified belief suggested here, it is necessary for knowing, and closely related to it.” But this, of course, does not explain why we should follow Goldman rather than Armstrong and Dretske. Problems with Cartesian accounts of justification can be dealt with either by reliabilizing justification (with Goldman) or by simply doing without it altogether (with Armstrong and Dretske).

Goldman’s distinctive move is, I believe, motivated by two ideas. The first of these is that justification is a legitimate and important epistemic category in its own right. The second has to do with considerations of theoretical simplicity, considerations that are deemed sufficient to motivate viewing justification as a necessary condition for knowledge rather than as a separate, though important, epistemic category. Justification is seen as important because knowledge is important, and justification is a necessary condition for knowledge.

I am entirely sympathetic with the first of these two motivations. Justification is, I will argue, an important epistemic category, and we should not simply do without it. But the second motivation, the argument from theoretical
simplicity, is one I do not endorse, and I will argue against it here.

A position of the sort I favor may seem to open up the possibility of a rapprochement between internalism and externalism. If justification is not a necessary condition for knowledge, then one might hold that externalists were right about knowledge, but wrong about justification, while internalists were right about justification, but wrong about knowledge. And this might be thought to be a happy result: each side was right about something, but wrong about something else; the debate between the two sides was merely a matter of each talking past the other. This would, perhaps, be a happy result, but it is one I will not endorse. While rejecting the view that knowledge entails justification makes logical room for this sort of view, I do not believe that it is correct. In particular, I do not believe that internalism will prove to be right about justification, even once we divorce our account of justification from our account of knowledge. So I will not be arguing for a simple and equitable resolution of the internalism/externalism debate. The payoff for divorcing justification from knowledge will need to be found elsewhere.

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What then is justification, and why have epistemologists been interested in it? Let us look at the way in which the topic of justified belief is introduced by a number of epistemologists.

Roderick Chisholm introduces the topic of justified belief by way of the idea of Socratic questioning.

We consider certain things that we know to be true, or think we know to be true, or certain things which, upon reflection, we would be willing to call evident. With respect to each of these, we then try to formulate a reasonable answer to the question, “What justification do you think you have for counting this thing as something that is evident?” In beginning with what we think we know to be true, or with what, after reflection, we would be willing to count as being evident, we are assuming that the truth we are seeking is “already implicit in the
mind which seeks it, and needs only to be elicited and brought to clear reflection”.

Chisholm is quite frank that, in conceiving of justification in this way, he is stacking the deck in favor of internalism, but there is no denying that this idea of linking justification to Socratic questioning is extremely natural. Richard Foley makes a similar suggestion, linking justification to belief in a proposition that is the conclusion of an argument “such that were the individual in question to be carefully reflective, he would think that it is sufficiently likely to be truth preserving”. While Foley's account of justification, unlike Chisholm's, is highly subjective—since reflective individuals must merely think that the arguments supporting their beliefs are likely to be truth preserving—in both cases the notion of justification is linked to arguments that individuals might provide to themselves in support of their beliefs. Laurence BonJour is of a similar turn of mind: “Perhaps the most pervasive conviction within the Western epistemological tradition is that in order for a person's belief to constitute knowledge it is necessary (though not sufficient) that it be justified or warranted or rationally grounded, that the person have an adequate reason for accepting it.”

BonJour makes clear that reasons, on his view, are cognitively accessible to those who have them; he is an internalist about justification. While noting that reliabilists have rejected such a conception of justification, BonJour comments: “My conviction is that views of this kind are merely wrong-headed and ultimately uninteresting evasions of the central epistemological issues.”

It is not hard to see why BonJour has this attitude toward reliabilism. If reliably produced belief is all that is necessary for justification, then believers may be justified when they have no conception whatever as to why they should think their beliefs to be true; worse still, they may be justified even when they possess excellent reason to think their beliefs to be false. The very idea of justification, if it is to make contact with important epistemological issues, it seems, must be tied to the having of reasons, and this means that an agent who is justified is in possession of an argument in favor of the belief in question. It is for this reason that I have referred to this conception of justification as the arguments-on-paper view.
While Chisholm, Foley and BonJour develop the arguments-on-paper conception of justification as a form of internalism, it is important to see that the connection between justification and available argument does not require internalism at all. Robert Brandom and Michael Williams, for example, who insist on what they call the “default and challenge structure of justification”, tie justification to the ability to respond to challenges, not from oneself, but from members of one’s community. Since an agent may be ignorant of challenges that the community might present, as well as the defaults that the community might permit, this conception of justification is a form of externalism. Nevertheless, unlike reliabilism, it ties justification to the ability to present an argument. Chisholm, Foley, and BonJour are concerned about being able to present arguments to oneself; Brandom and Williams are concerned about being able to present arguments to one’s community. Either way, justification is seen as a matter of the ability to present arguments in support of one’s beliefs.

This dialectical conception of justification is, to be sure, an important one. We are, at times, reflective creatures, and when we reflect on our beliefs, we sometimes wonder about what reason there is, if any, for holding the beliefs we do. In many cases, it seems, we are able to provide reasons in favor of our beliefs; in others, however, we cannot. And this seems to be a noteworthy difference: that some of our beliefs are ones that we can support by way of argument, while others are not. Similarly, there are challenges to our beliefs that stem not from self-examination or unaided reflection, but from outside us, from our communities. Here, too, there is a noteworthy distinction between those beliefs that we are in a position to defend against challenge and those that we cannot. Philosophers whose conception of epistemology derives from Descartes are more likely to see the first sort of challenge as primary, while those who are influenced by Hegel, the later Wittgenstein, or, on one conception, Wilfrid Sellars, are likely to see social challenges as more basic. But there is a common idea here, and it is the ability to respond to challenges.

Important as this is, justification in this sense seems to me a very poor candidate as a necessary condition on knowledge.
Consider, first, the social version of this requirement, the ability to respond to challenges that one's epistemic community might provide. In the case of scientific theories, for example, the public defense of theories against available challenge is surely a central feature of their justification. Proponents of a theory endeavor to show that their preferred view is superior to alternatives available within the community of scientists. The public airing of such argumentation is a crucial part of justifying one's views. Theories that cannot respond to available challenge are rightly taken to be, in important respects, epistemically deficient. More than this, the social character of justification does not seem limited, by any means, to scientific claims. In mundane matters of all sorts, from views about the fastest way to get from Boston to New York to views about moral and political matters, the dialectic of challenge and response plays an important role in our epistemic practice. But while these examples do illustrate the importance of the epistemic practice of giving and asking for reasons, they do not, I believe, make a case for any sort of necessary connection between knowledge and the ability to defend one's belief in this sort of way.

Note, in particular, that the social airing of scientific theories takes place against the background of a highly idiosyncratic epistemic community. Members of this community are very highly trained; they are extremely well informed; and they are extremely adept, among other things, at the public presentation of reasons. Not all epistemic communities are like this. Consider the case of a community that regularly conducts its affairs by consulting astrological charts; where the reading of tea leaves is seen as a reliable indicator of future events; and crystals are seen as possessing magic powers which assure their owners of lasting health and startling insight. In this community, the public practice of giving and asking for reasons, or what passes for reason in this community, serves not only to spread false belief, but to misdirect the community's epistemic efforts so as further to entrench their misguided epistemic practices. While one might reasonably think that scientists who cannot answer the challenges of their peers should, perhaps, withhold claims to
knowledge, one might also think that the challenges that issue from deeply deviant epistemic communities, such as my community of astrologers, do not deserve the same amount of deference. Social practices of giving and asking for reasons—patterns of challenge and default—are not all, epistemically, on a par. There are certain communities in which it is no epistemic defect to be unable to respond, in terms the community would find compelling, or even relevant, to the socially available challenges to a body of beliefs. In such circumstances, opting out entirely of the social practice of giving and asking for reasons would be far superior, epistemically, from lowering oneself to the challenge with which the available social practice presents one. But opting out of this deviant social practice surely does not rob one of knowledge. And, if this is so, being in a position to respond to socially available challenges to belief cannot be a necessary condition on knowledge. If justification is identified with the ability to respond to socially available challenges, then justification is not a necessary condition for knowledge.

Similar considerations apply to contextualist accounts of knowledge. Contextualists have urged that the standards for knowledge vary widely from context to context. If my wife asks me whether I know where her car keys are, the standards that are in play dictate that, if I am looking directly at them, my claim “I know they are on the kitchen table” is true. But, contextualists say, if a skeptic should ask me the very same question, or, rather, ask a question using the very same words, immediately after having raised the possibility of deception by an evil demon, then if I should utter, “I know the keys are on the table”, I am saying something false. What the standards are for knowledge, according to contextualists, depends on contextually salient standards, and the skeptic has raised the standards so high that nothing could possibly pass them. My wife, on the other hand, who is far more forgiving, has standards for knowledge that make knowledge possible. When I am looking at her car keys, I do know where they are, relative to her standards, and it would thus be false for me to state, under those conditions, “I don’t know where your keys are”.

Contextualists do not merely claim that there is some small amount of vagueness inherent in the notion of knowledge and that contextually salient standards serve to locate the standards we have in mind within some already narrowly defined range. Rather, contextualists have been eager to use their contextualism to address, as they see it, the skeptical problematic, arguing, as my example above indicates, that the range of contextually available standards may vary at least from the everyday standards my wife uses when she wants to know where her keys are to the ultra-high standards that the skeptic brings to bear when he wishes to insist that no one has any knowledge at all. Contextualists want to insist that the knowledge claims each of these speakers make are just plain true: my wife truly states “You did know where my keys were”, while the skeptic truly states “You didn’t know where the keys were”. Since contextually indicated standards serve to determine what proposition is being expressed, we can consistently insist that, in this case, both parties are correct. And this result, contextualists insist, allows us better to appreciate the skeptical problematic, for we may give the skeptic his due (in skeptically heightened contexts) while going on exactly as before in everyday situations.

It is not at all clear that this kind of approach to the semantics of the term ‘knowledge’ is as charitable a reconstruction of what the different parties mean as the contextualist suggests. In particular, it is worth noting that the contextualist reconciliation of the debate between the skeptic and the common-sense philosopher (who insists that we do know a great many things, after all) has the defect, common to many forms of relativism, that it ends up denying that these two really disagreed in the first place. Although the common-sense philosopher uttered the words “I do know many things about the external world”, and the skeptic replied, “You’re mistaken; you don’t know anything”, the contextualist must insist that, because the standards for knowledge attribution have shifted from the first comment to the second, both the knowledge claim and the denial of the knowledge claim are true. But this then makes no sense of the fact that both parties believe that they disagree; indeed, this is why the skeptic insists that the common-sense philosopher is mistaken. If everybody is right,
relative to their own standards, then no one is mistaken. Nevertheless, both parties in this dialogue believe that they have denied what the other has asserted.

The contextualist attempts to resolve the debate between the skeptic and the common-sense philosopher by making everyone happy: “Stop,” the contextualist says, “you’re both right.” But this attempt charitably to reconstruct what each party means is not, in the end, very charitable, for it undermines one extremely important point on which skeptics and common-sense philosophers agree—namely, that they do disagree after all. While both parties do agree that, when I am looking straight at my wife’s keys on the kitchen table, I meet certain standards and fail to meet others: one party to the debate believes that I actually meet the standards which knowledge requires; the other wishes to deny that very claim. Contextualism is forced to deny this. As an account of the semantics for the term ‘knowledge’, this seems terribly implausible.

But, while I think it important to reject what contextualists have to say about knowledge, much of what contextualists have to say about justification is, I believe, both true and important. Contextualism offers a deep understanding of the conversational dynamics of challenge and response, the ways in which demands for reasons depend on a shared background of beliefs about what may be taken for granted and how it is that justifications are to be structured. But when justification is viewed in this way, important as it is, it is not a necessary condition on knowledge.

The challenges that issue from a community of inquirers, or from a single interlocutor, may not reasonably be seen as setting the standards for knowledge, even if, as seems more plausible, they are intimately tied to our notion of justification. But what about the Cartesian-inspired idea that the standards for justification are set by private reflection on our reasons for belief? This dialectical, but individualist, notion of justification may seem a more plausible candidate for an account of justification that is itself a necessary condition on knowledge. While meeting the standards of the epistemic community in
which I am situated, however deviant it may be, does not seem necessary for knowledge, nor does meeting the standards of whatever interlocutor I happen to encounter, private reflection on my reasons for belief seems to offer an epistemic standard that is both less idiosyncratic and more demanding of my attention than the various socialized versions of the dialectical conception of justification. As such, it may seem more plausible that this conception of justification provides a necessary condition on knowledge.

There are, I believe, two importantly different motivations for this Cartesian conception of justification. Philosophers who are inclined toward some sort of rationalism will see the standards that are set by private reflection as ones that enjoy a certain sort of objectivity; the exercise of reason, on this view, puts us in touch with the one true standard for justification, and, in virtue of its objectivity, this standard may properly be viewed as setting a necessary condition for knowledge. Quite a different motivation, however, comes from noting that, when I reflect on my beliefs, I am able to discover whether they meet my standards, rather than someone else's. I might dismiss out of hand the standards of my community, or some individual interlocutor, if they are different enough from my own, even if I cannot explain to my challenger, in terms that will be found persuasive, why it is that I regard the challenge as unworthy; but I cannot, it seems, responsibly take the same attitude toward my own standards. The epistemic standards that I hold on reflection are, after all, mine, and that fact alone gives them a certain authority over me.

Descartes, of course, was motivated by both these considerations, as are many contemporary philosophers, but it is, nevertheless, important to recognize the very different sort of motivations that these two considerations provide. One might, in particular, be moved by the second consideration—that my standards, are, after all, mine—even if one is not convinced by the first—that the standards so revealed are automatically objectively correct. But any philosopher who endorses only the second of these two motivations, thereby allowing that the standards that private reflection sets may be no more reasonable, in any objective sense, than those of the
deviant epistemic communities or random interlocutors we have already discussed, thereby acknowledges that such a conception of justification cannot plausibly be seen as a necessary condition for knowledge. Indeed, this is precisely why Richard Foley, who endorses a highly subjective conception of justification of this very sort, has argued that justification should not be seen as a necessary condition on knowledge. If private reflection does not set objective standards, and justification is determined by the standards it sets, than knowledge does not require justification.

The case for a standard for justification which is both tied to private reflection and, at the same time, required as a necessary condition for knowledge thus depends on the first of the two motivations described; ultimately, it is founded in a commitment to a robust rationalism. While the most common version of such a rationalist epistemology is wholly internalist, even some philosophers who favor versions of externalism show a real sympathy for rationalist epistemology. Thus, Ernest Sosa defends a distinction between what he calls “animal knowledge” and “reflective knowledge”.

One has animal knowledge about one's environment, one's past, and one's own experience if one's judgments and beliefs about these are direct responses to their impact—e.g., through perception or memory—with little or no benefit of reflection or understanding.

One has reflective knowledge if one's judgment or belief manifests not only such direct response to the fact known but also understanding of its place in a wider whole that includes one's belief and knowledge of it and how these come about.

Sosa defends the view that reflective knowledge is “better knowledge”; it is the kind to which human beings should aspire. But what is it about reflective knowledge, according to Sosa, that makes it better, a fit object of human aspiration? This is where Sosa's rationalism comes in: “Since a direct response supplemented by such understanding would in general have a better chance of being right, reflective knowledge is better justified than corresponding animal knowledge.” Reflecting
on our beliefs, rather than merely allowing our native
cognitive processes to go to work on whatever input the
environment may happen to provide them with, increases the
likelihood, Sosa claims, that the beliefs thereby produced are
correct. This is, of course, an empirical claim about the effects
of reflection. In order to see whether it is true, we need to look
at some of the psychological literature about what actually
happens when people reflect on their beliefs.

What Sosa refers to as reflection is not, from a psychological
point of view, a single type of process. Instead, there are many
different processes that go to work when people reflect on
their beliefs, and it would be a mistake to try to provide a one-
dimensional evaluation of these diverse processes. In
particular, they are not all reliability enhancing. Consider, for
example, the phenomenon of belief perseverance. Once a
belief is formed, individuals have a tendency to continue in
their belief, and the way in which they deal with evidence
manifests this tendency. Evidence in favor of pre-existing
beliefs is largely taken at face value; contrary evidence is
subjected to great scrutiny, and typically found wanting. In
addition, evidence acquired that supports existing beliefs is
well remembered, while evidence against existing beliefs is
more easily forgotten. This kind of biased recall has the effect
that, when an agent surveys his evidence in quiet moments of
reflection, the evidence surveyed, more often than not, tends
to support the belief being evaluated, largely independent of
the support it enjoys from evidence the agent has considered.
Far from making us more reliable, these mechanisms of
reflection merely serve further to entrench whatever beliefs
we already have. Reflection, in these cases, does not
act as a check on our first-order processes of belief
acquisition, raising the reliability of the resulting total
package of cognitive mechanisms. Instead, it acts as a kind of
cognitive yes-man, offering up its approval of whatever the
first-order processes happen to produce. In the process,
reflection tends to produce a more confident agent, one who is
better able to articulate, both to himself and to others, a wide
range of reasons in support of his beliefs. But increased
reliability is not a product of the mechanism of belief
perseverance.
I do not mean to suggest that reflection never serves to increase the reliability of agents who make use of it; clearly this is not true. More than that, my point is that any such unitary evaluation of reflection is insufficiently attentive to epistemically relevant details of the many mechanisms of reflection. Reflection can, at times, serve as a useful check on first-order processes of belief acquisition, as Sosa suggests; but it can also serve merely to entrench pre-existing beliefs, of whatever merit; and, in other cases, it may act as a monkey wrench in the otherwise smooth working of first-order mechanisms, thereby lowering the reliability of the overall process. It will not serve any useful epistemic purpose to try to lump all these disparate processes together and ask for a single evaluation of the package as epistemically beneficial or epistemically harmful. But, if this is the case, we should not simply endorse the entire package of mechanisms of reflection as one. And we cannot reasonably insist that knowledge, or the kind of knowledge to which humans should aspire, must involve reflection, whatever its effects. Reflection, in Sosa's sense, cannot reasonably be viewed as a necessary condition on knowledge.²⁰

Reflection on one's beliefs thus seems like a good idea when one assumes, with Sosa, that it will inevitably increase the reliability of one's first-order processes of belief acquisition, or, at a minimum, fail to make one's epistemic situation worse. But, once we recognize that this is not generally true of reflection, the case for singling out reflection as an epistemic good in itself is severely compromised. The rationalist view on which reflection is endowed with special powers that allow it to tap into truth conducive methods of belief modification turns out not to be true. But when we reject this rationalist view of reflection, we thereby undermine the case for viewing reflection as a necessary condition on knowledge.

The dialectical conception of justification, whether in its social form—which requires an ability to justify one's beliefs to one's community—or in its more individualist form—which requires that one be in a position to justify one's beliefs to oneself, does not present us with a plausible necessary condition on knowledge.
Dialectical accounts of justification fail to provide us with a necessary condition on knowledge because they fail to be sufficiently objective. But this then just motivates a conception of justification that requires that certain more objective standards be met: certain logical constraints on inference; standards of probabilistic consistency; or de facto reliability and the like. Precisely because these standards are objective, they do not suffer from the problems to which the dialectical conception gave rise, and, for that very reason, they seem far more plausible as necessary conditions on knowledge, although obviously any particular account of this sort would need to be examined in detail. What I want to argue, however, is that, the more objective we set our standards, the less plausible it is that these standards are standards of justification.

Consider, for example, requirements of probabilistic consistency. Idealizing somewhat, we may assign subjective probabilities to each of an agent's beliefs. Thus, for example, although I believe that the sun will rise tomorrow and I also believe that I have more than $100 in my checking account right now, I do not assign equal probabilities to these two claims, even though I reviewed my account balance only yesterday. I have made too many mistakes in my checking account over the years to attach anything like the same probability to these two claims. But the various beliefs I have are not probabilistically independent of one another, and there are consistency constraints that the probability calculus lays down so that, once I have assigned probability assessments to some of my beliefs, probability assessments of others are thereby determined. The probability calculus may, therefore, be seen as laying down certain objective requirements on my distribution of probabilities.

May we therefore view the probability calculus as laying down certain objective constraints on justification? It seems to me that we may not. Probabilistic relations of consistency are objectively difficult to determine. Suppose I believe even as few as one thousand probabilistically independent propositions. In addition to these propositions, I believe
logically complex conjunctions, disjunctions, and conditionals in which they are embedded. The probabilities of these complex propositions is entirely determined by the probabilities of their atomic constituents (together with the probability calculus), but figuring out those probabilities may be far beyond anything of which I am remotely capable. This is not merely a result about mathematically dim-witted agents, for the problems of computational complexity which arise here make calculations of this sort ones that are beyond the calculational capabilities of any physically embodied agent.\textsuperscript{21}

Why should this count against viewing the constraints of the probability calculus as constraints on what I am justified in believing? There is something odd, to be sure, about a conception of justification that makes assessments of justification hopelessly beyond the reach of any possible human agent. If a particular belief of mine is probabilistically inconsistent with others I hold, but determining that would take from now until the end of the next millennium, the suggestion that I am, nevertheless, unjustified in this belief sets a standard for justification that can play no possible role in governing my beliefs. To the extent that a theory of justification is designed to provide us with epistemic advice—guidance as to what we ought to believe—the unusability of the probability calculus automatically takes it out of the running as an account of the conditions required for justification.

The same is true, of course, for various logical requirements among my beliefs, now viewed in a binary, all-or-nothing fashion, rather than subject to differences of degree, as the probabilistic account would have us view it. Tracing out the logical implications of my beliefs will, like the probabilistic consistency requirement, run into problems of computational complexity.\textsuperscript{22} If I cannot even tell whether my beliefs satisfy the logical requirements, and no physically embodied agent could possibly tell before the end of the next millennium, then the standard set by the logical requirements does not propose a meaningful requirement for justification.

\textsuperscript{(p.20)} The standard of de facto reliability is, in this regard, importantly different. While it is always unreasonable to
believe that one's total body of beliefs satisfies standards of probabilistic consistency (it would surely be a miracle if they did), and the same is true of logical consistency, it is not unreasonable to think that we have beliefs that are formed by reliable processes.\[23\] We do sometimes check to see whether our beliefs are reliably produced, and this sort of checking can have useful consequences for the accuracy of our beliefs. The standard of reliability is one that is intimately involved in our justificational practices. What this shows, however, has little to do with reliability accounts of justification. According to reliability views of justification, it is the actual reliability of our processes of belief acquisition that determine whether a belief is justified, not their perceived reliability, nor even their perceived reliability after careful and responsible examination. There will, in principle and in practice, always be gaps between the actual reliability of processes of belief acquisition and their perceived reliability, no matter how carefully that may be investigated. But this is just to say that our justificational practice, while it attempts to realize a standard of genuine reliability, does not always meet it. Or to put the point only slightly differently, we may be justified without having succeeded in achieving the goal of reliable belief acquisition. Actual reliability is more plausibly viewed as the standard we set as our goal—a requirement for knowledge—than it is a requirement for justified belief.\[24\]

Let me briefly review. When we provide a subjective requirement on justification, as the various dialectical accounts do, we make it implausible that justification, so understood, is a necessary condition on knowledge. But the more objective we make our requirement for justification, thereby making room for a real connection with knowledge, the more implausible it is that the actual phenomenon of justification is captured by it. Knowledge requires that some sort of objective standard be met; justification requires the meeting of some more subjective standard; but knowledge does not require justification.

How did this state of affairs come to pass? In Descartes's view, of course, meeting the subjective standard guaranteed that
the objective standard was simultaneously met; on such a view, justification is reasonably thought of as a necessary condition on knowledge. But once we allow, as everyone now must, that the standards for justification, whatever they may be, may at times be met even by beliefs that are formed in ways that are, by any objective standard, very bad, the motivation for seeing justification as a necessary condition for knowledge is thereby undermined. We are right to see the justification of belief as an important epistemic practice, one that when properly carried out, may be conducive to knowledge. But, once we abandon Descartes's rationalist optimism about the fit between justification and knowledge, we should no longer believe that justification is required for knowledge.

But, if this is right, why then is the intuition that knowledge requires justification so extraordinarily robust? Why has it seemed for so long, and why does it continue to seem to so many, that justification is a necessary condition for knowledge? There are, I believe, a number of reasons for this. First, it is important to note that, when people find out that a belief of theirs is not justified, they typically withdraw any claim to knowledge. If I reflect on my beliefs and find that a certain belief fails to meet my standards for reasonable belief, I stop claiming to know that it is true. And, if I am challenged by my community, and I cannot meet their objections, I will also typically withdraw my claim to knowledge. We may explain why this should be so, however, without supposing that justification is necessary for knowledge. When I discover, on reflection, that a belief fails to meet my standards, I typically give up the belief. Because I believe that my standards at least roughly track the truth, failure to meet them is reason for thinking that I lack the objective connection with the facts that is required for knowledge. And, if I believe that the standards that prevail in my community are roughly truth-tracking as well, then my inability to meet them will also be taken by me as reason for thinking that I lack the connection with the truth that is required for knowledge. None of this requires that justification be seen as a necessary condition for knowledge. Failure to meet the standards of justification is, however, evidence that one does not know.
What about third-person cases? Suppose that Jack fails to be justified in a belief of his. Do we not ordinarily take this as sufficient reason to believe that Jack does not have knowledge, and does not this show that we regard justified belief as a necessary condition for knowledge? It is certainly true that, if Jack has a true belief that is merely a product of wishful thinking or the like, we deny that Jack genuinely knows. But this need have nothing to do with justification. Jack fails, in this kind of case, to meet the objective conditions on knowledge—for example, conditions such as those captured by de facto reliability requirements—that are not plausibly thought of as conditions on justification. What should we say about cases in which Jack does meet whatever objective conditions are required for knowledge—perhaps de facto reliability—but fails to meet the subjective requirements on justification? If Jack cannot, for example, meet the standards of his community, he will sometimes give up his belief for this very reason, and, since belief is, in everyone’s view, a requirement for knowledge, he no longer knows. In cases where Jack rejects the standards of his community, and goes on believing in the face of their objections, and where Jack’s belief genuinely is reliably produced, it is not at all clear that Jack does not know. Note in particular that this sort of case arises every time that a reasonable person fails to be bowed by the standards of a deviant epistemic community. Similar considerations apply to private reflection. In the most typical case, if Jack fails to meet his own standards, this will cause him to give up his belief, and the fact that belief is a necessary condition for knowledge explains why he no longer knows. In those cases where Jack notes that a belief of his fails to meet his standards but he maintains his belief nonetheless, it is not at all clear that he thereby fails to know even if his belief meets all the objective requirements on knowledge. So we may certainly explain why it is that, at least typically, failure to meet the standards for justification deprives one of knowledge even if justification is not a necessary condition for knowledge.

(p.23) I have tried, throughout this chapter, to avoid taking a stand on just what the correct account of justification is and, similarly, to avoid taking a stand on what the correct account of knowledge is. Whatever one’s preferred account of justification, and whatever one’s preferred account of
knowledge, one should not view justification as a necessary condition for knowledge. 

Notes:
A version of this chapter was read at Tufts University and the Free University of Amsterdam. I am grateful to the audiences there, and especially Kate Elgin and Jonathan Vogel, for useful discussion. Additional comments on a written version of the chapter from David Christensen and two anonymous referees were particularly helpful.

(1) Most, but not all. Some (e.g. William Alston and Stewart Cohen) have argued that the notion of justification should simply be dispensed with. (See Alston, “Epistemic Desiderata”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54 (1993), 527–50, and Cohen, “Is There an Issue about Justified Belief?”, *Philosophical Topics*, 23 (1995), 113–27.) And some have tried to get around the Gettier problem, arguing that justified, true belief is not only necessary, but also sufficient for knowledge. Timothy Williamson (*Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)) holds instead that justification should be explained in terms of knowledge. Richard Foley has recently proposed exactly the view I defend here. He defends this view in “What Must Be Added to True Belief to Get Knowledge? Just More True Belief”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, forthcoming, where it is presented as a consequence of a very controversial account of knowledge (which I would reject), and also, independent of that account of knowledge, in his review of Williamson’s *Knowledge and its Limits*, in *Mind*, 111 (2002), 718–26. I am very much indebted to Foley here.

(2) Some of the central papers in this debate are collected in H. Kornblith (ed.), *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).


(12) Ibid. 1, n. 1.

(13) These two points are made by way of a justly famous series of detailed examples in Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), ch. 3.


(16) I have in mind here especially the work of Stewart Cohen, Keith DeRose, and David Lewis. See Stewart, Cohen, “Knowledge, Context and Social Standards”, *Synthese*, 73

(17) Although certainly not all. For further discussion of the shortcomings of contextualism, see my “The Contextualist Evasion of Epistemology”, *Philosophical Issues*, 10 (2000), 24–32.


(19) Ibid. 240.

(20) I have pursued this point at greater length in *Knowledge and its Place in Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), ch. 4, and especially as regards Sosa's view, in “Sosa on Human and Animal Knowledge”, in J. Greco (ed.), *Sosa and his Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming).


(23) One might think that the standard of reliability genuinely is on a par with logical and probabilistic standards for, although it is certainly reasonable to believe that many of one's beliefs are reliably produced, it would be completely unreasonable to think that all one's beliefs are reliably produced. By the same token, although it is completely unreasonable to think that one's total body of beliefs satisfy demands of logical or probabilistic consistency, one might reasonably think that some small subset of one's beliefs satisfy such standards. While the parallel does indeed extend this far,
this is of little help to those who would offer accounts of justification requiring logical or probabilistic consistency. On such accounts, given the total evidence requirement, it is logical or probabilistic consistency over one's entire body of beliefs that is required for justification. Reliability accounts of justification, on the other hand, make no requirement that all of one's beliefs be reliably produced.

(24) Would it help to distinguish here between the practice of justifying beliefs and the property which beliefs sometimes have of being justified? The suggestion would then be that my argument shows only that the practice of justifying beliefs does not require reliability. This is perfectly compatible, however, with the view that a belief has the property of being justified only if it is reliably produced. While I am fully convinced that the property of being reliably produced is a necessary condition for knowledge, the question at issue here is whether this property is usefully identified with the property of being justified. For the very reasons given in the text, it now seems to me that any such identification proves more misleading than illuminating.