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Reasons as Evidence and the Asymmetry Charge

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(Received 22 July 2025; revised 3 March 2026; accepted 15 March 2026)

Abstract

This essay raises a novel objection against Kearns & Star's (Kearns S. and Star D. 2008. 'Reasons: Explanations or Evidence?' *Ethics* 119(1), 31–56; Kearns S. and Star D. 2009. 'Reasons as Evidence.' *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 4: 215–42.) influential account of normative reasons – the Reasons as Evidence (short: RaE) view. The RaE view's basic idea is that normative reasons can be analysed in terms of another concept, namely evidence for ought-propositions. This view, I argue, faces an 'asymmetry charge'. That is, evidence for ought-propositions and reasons relate differently to (potential) ought-facts and behave differently in our deliberations about what we ought to 'do' (in a broad sense, including action and belief). On the one hand, normative reasons, if sufficiently strong, are connected to a determinate ought (statement). On the other hand, evidence for ought-statements, even if strong and assessed correctly, can be misleading. I consider potential replies to the alleged asymmetry of reasons and evidence for ought-propositions – either accommodating it or explaining it away. These replies, based on different (perspectivist and objectivist) accounts of 'ought', however, are inconsistent with the RaE view – or so I argue. This essay focuses on epistemic normativity, i.e. on reasons and oughts that are concerned with beliefs (not actions). I think, however, that similar arguments could be made about cases of practical normativity (concerned with action) as well.

Keywords: Normativity; epistemic reasons; epistemic ought; evidence; reasons as evidence

1. Introduction

Normative reasons (henceforth: reasons) are most naturally thought of as facts that count in favour of various 'responses' such as beliefs or actions – in the sense of providing (*pro tanto*) justification. Some authors claim that no non-circular analysis of reasons can be given (cf. e.g. Scanlon 1998: 17). On the contrary, Kearns & Star defend

RaE. Necessarily, a fact *F* is a reason for an agent *A* to ϕ if and only if *F* is evidence that *A* ought to ϕ (where ϕ is either a belief or an action) (Kearns and Star 2009: 216; cf. also Kearns and Star 2008, 2011, 2013).

I assume that RaE leads to a similar claim about bodies (i.e. sets) of evidence and reasons. The rationale is that we can apply RaE to every single fact within a body of evidence (or reasons) in turn. Thereby, we get

RaE (Total). Necessarily, a set of facts *S* constitutes *A*'s total reason to ϕ if and only if *S* constitutes *A*'s total evidence that *A* ought to ϕ .

A's total evidence that *A* ought to ϕ (*A*'s total reason to ϕ) is constituted by all individual pieces of evidence that *A* ought to ϕ (all individual reasons to ϕ) that are part of *A*'s whole body of evidence (reasons). There are two ways to understand '*A*'s whole body of evidence (reasons)'. First, for a fact *F* to be part of these bodies, *A* must have the relevant kind of epistemic access to *F*.¹ Second, for a fact to be counted as part of *A*'s body of evidence (reasons), it suffices that *F* is 'out there' – without the need for any epistemic relation between *A* and *F*. To make this distinction explicit (when needed), I will speak of 'available' and 'unavailable' evidence (reasons).

Kearns and Star (2008: 39ff; 2009: 224ff) seem to think that deliberating with evidence for ought-propositions and with reasons fulfils the same function (see Section 3 for further details).

[A]ny fact used appropriately in deliberation that helps determine what one ought to do will count as a reason. This is because such a fact will help an agent determine what she ought to do by being evidence about what she ought to do (Kearns and Star 2008: 41).

In any case, given the necessary equivalence of (bodies of) evidence for ought-propositions and reasons, the RaE view is, minimally, committed to

Interchangeable. If we spell out agent *A*'s deliberation processes in terms of reasons or terms of evidence for ought-propositions, respectively, the 'results' must be coextensional.

In deliberation processes, where *A* tries to determine what she ought to 'do' (understood, in this essay, broadly including action and belief), *A* arrives at certain deliberative conclusions. That is, *A* positions herself towards (e.g. affirms) certain ought-propositions such as 'I ought to believe that *p*' (i.e. 'OB(*p*)'). Given RaE (and RaE (Total)), necessarily, the same set of facts constitutes one's reasons to believe that *p* and one's evidence that one ought to believe that *p*. Therefore, the same set of facts is invoked independently of whether *A*'s deliberation processes are in terms of reasons or evidence for ought-propositions. Thus, I assume, the results (i.e. the propositions 'reached' at the end) of these two deliberation processes must be coextensional. That is, 'OB(*p*)' is true given a reasons perspective if and only if 'OB(*p*)' is true given an evidence for

¹If read in this sense, *A* must arguably also have epistemic access to relevant background information that lets her "see" that, e.g., the fact that it's raining constitutes evidence for some ought-proposition (a reason). For simplicity's sake, I omit this additional assumption in the following discussion. Further, in this essay, I remain agnostic about the nature of the relevant epistemic access. This could be specified, e.g., in terms of knowledge, justified belief, or position to know. Moreover, I assume, following Kearns and Star (2008: 37f; 2009: 234f), that the relevant epistemic access is of the same kind when it comes to evidence and reasons.

ought-propositions perspective.² As I will argue in Section 3, however, given certain assumptions, Interchangeable does not hold. This asymmetry of ‘deliberative results’ between reasons and evidence for ought-propositions contradicts a (minimal) commitment of the RaE view.

My general objection against the RaE view proceeds by considering different views of ‘ought’ – something Kearns & Star do not discuss in relevant detail.³ Before that, I introduce two principles that intuitively indicate the asymmetry between evidence for ought-propositions and reasons in the way they relate to (potential) ought-facts and figure in our deliberations (Section 2). Building on these principles, I show that combining the RaE view with perspectivism about the ought stemming from reasons (specified below) is inconsistent (Section 3). This is because a perspectivist RaE view either (i) cannot make sense of updating one’s evidence for ought-propositions or (ii) leads to a violation of Interchangeable. Section 4 considers how (pure) objectivism about ‘ought’ might avoid my asymmetry charge. I argue, however, that objectivism, for a different reason, is incompatible with the RaE view.

2. The asymmetry charge (intuitively)

This section establishes two principles – one applies to evidence and the other to reasons – which lead me to the asymmetry charge.

Regarding evidence, consider Anna’s body of available evidence regarding proposition *q*: there is no cat in Anna’s drawer. This evidence strongly indicates that *q* although *q* is, in fact, false. As this suggests and as I assume here, at least for a non-normative and contingent proposition *p*, the following holds:

Misleading Evidence. Some evidence that *p*, even if it strongly outweighs the evidence that not-*p*, could be misleading. That is, for some set of evidence *e*, *p* is strongly supported by *e* but still might be false.

Misleading Evidence applies if *e* does not entail that *p* and, hence, does not exclude the possibility that not-*p*. Nonetheless, we can say that the balance of evidence *e* strongly, or decisively, supports *p* – as in the case of Anna.⁴

The default position is to assume, as I do, that Misleading Evidence also holds for *some* ought-propositions. Let me illustrate this assumption’s intuitive appeal. Suppose that Anna’s body of available evidence *e* contains just a few facts, which together strongly support the proposition OB(*q*): Anna ought to believe that *q*. Now we add facts to this initial evidence set *e*, which leads to the updated evidence set *e**. Given the more

²One could object that necessary coextensionality between reasons and evidence for ought-propositions, as affirmed by RaE and RaE(Total), is not sufficient for Interchangeable. As we are talking about an agent’s deliberations, we need to invoke some kind of cointensionality or cohyperintensionality. I avoid this issue by postulating that the agents in question believe in the RaE view and its principles. If considering such agents leads to contradictions on the RaE view, this suffices to discard this view. See fn.12 for further discussion.

³See Kearns and Star (2008: 50f) for short remarks on different “oughts”, unrelated to the issues of this paper.

⁴See Kelly (2008: 934ff) on the notion of “balance”, which e.g. could be spelled out in probabilistic terms or what is rational to believe. Note that, in the (intuitive) sense I use “decisive”, one can have decisive evidence for contingent, potentially false, propositions. Further, I won’t discuss the exact nature of the possibility invoked here. For current purposes, it suffices to simply stipulate that the “might” (and the other modal notions) in question is the one that figures in our intuitions about Anna’s and similar cases.

extensive set e^* , $OB(q)$ is not or only weakly supported. What this shows is that we are certainly entitled to stipulate that $OB(q)$, in fact, is false. Thus, given that the facts in e do not contradict the described update to e^* , we get Misleading Evidence (see Section 3 for further discussion). It is possible that, despite being strongly supported by e , it is not the case that $OB(q)$. Therefore, there is a *potential gap* between Anna's strong, but potentially misleading, evidence e for $OB(q)$ and the (potential) occurrence of the corresponding ought-fact.

Turning to reasons, as commonly agreed, reasons play a contributory, i.e. *pro tanto*, role in justifying answers to the deliberative question about what you ought to do.⁵ These considerations suggest

Determinate Ought. Necessarily, if A has decisive total reason to ϕ , then A ought to ϕ .

Determinate Ought says that, if the strength of A's total reason to ϕ is stronger, by some margin, than A's total reason to do anything else (in the given situation), then A ought to ϕ (cf. e.g. Maguire and Lord, 2016, 8ff). Hence, given the decisive strength of one's reasons, there is *no gap* between what one has decisive reason to do and what one ought to do.⁶

Consider the following rationale. Suppose Anna concludes that her reasons to believe that q (i.e. to $B(q)$) outweigh her reasons to not- $B(q)$ decisively and judges 'I ought to $B(q)$ '. I assume, first, that Anna recognises correctly which facts constitute her (relevant) reasons. Second, she does not make any other mistake in her deliberative processes. Hence, she judges correctly that she has decisive reason to $B(q)$. Given these assumptions, it is unclear what could undermine the fact that Anna ought to $B(q)$ – without also undermining the claim that Anna has decisive total reason to $B(q)$.⁷ Thus, Determinate Ought holds (in the case of Anna at least).

Misleading Evidence and Determinate Ought already suggest the asymmetry of evidence and reasons in one's deliberation and in their relation to (potential) ought-facts. Evidence for ought-propositions, even if strong, only indicates and, hence, can be misleading. Reasons, if sufficiently strong, are connected to a determinate 'ought' (which is not potentially misleading in the same way). In the next two sections, I consider this asymmetry in light of different views about 'ought'.

⁵The "ought" that is invoked here in connection with reasons is the "deliberative ought". The deliberative ought figures in conclusive, all-things-considered deliberations about what to do. See, e.g., Kiesewetter (2017: 9f).

⁶Similar principles like Determinate Ought are discussed by, e.g., Broome (2008), Kiesewetter (2017: ch. 1), Lord (2017), Maguire and Lord (2016) and Setiya (2014). Most of them hold the stronger "if and only if" claim – which I do not need for current purposes. Some provide a perspectivist reading (see Sect.3). Note that I am *not* committing to (nor denying) the view that reasons can be *fundamentally analysed* in terms of their explaining oughts, i.e. their making it the case that ought-facts obtain. Such a view is defended by Broome (2004, 2013: ch. 4) and rejected by Kearns and Star (2008, 2013). Determinate Ought is only concerned with the material implication from decisive reasons to oughts, not with fundamental metaphysical connections. Hence, I am also not committing to the "right-making view", which Kearns & Star discuss at various points (cf. 2009: 233f; 2011; 2013: 71ff).

⁷There are, plausibly, some background conditions that apply to ought-facts and which are not themselves reasons. (Although the RaE view might need to deny this (cf. Kearns and Star 2009: 235f; Setiya 2014: 233).) For example, many hold that there are certain ability ("can") conditions necessary for ought-facts to obtain. However, as Lord (2017: 1146f) plausibly points out, the same background conditions also apply to having decisive reasons.

3. Perspectivism about ought of reasons leads to the asymmetry charge

In this section, I assume perspectivism about the ought of (decisive) reasonhood – as it features in Determinate Ought. This, together with Misleading Evidence, leads to my asymmetry charge – a contradiction for the RaE view (Section 3.1). I discuss two potential ways to resolve the alleged asymmetry. The first way, I argue, fails to make sense of cases of reasoning with one's evidence for ought-propositions, in particular cases of updating this kind of evidence (Section 3.2). The second potential response leads to a violation of Interchangeable and, thus, cannot avoid the asymmetry between reasons and evidence for oughts (Section 3.3).

3.1. The asymmetry charge given by perspectivism

Perspectivism holds that, when determining what an agent ought to do, only facts that are epistemically accessible (in a sense to be determined, see fn.1) are relevant. On the contrary, according to (pure) objectivism, epistemic circumstances of the agent are entirely irrelevant for the question of what she ought to do.⁸ Thus, on a perspectivist view, the ought of reasonhood is only sensitive to and only depends on (epistemically) *available* reasons – unavailable reasons are irrelevant (cf. Lord 2015) or epistemically inaccessible facts cannot constitute genuine reasons at all (only 'potential reasons') (cf. Kiesewetter 2017, 199f). Hence, a perspectivist version of Determinate Ought amounts to

Determinate Perspectivist Ought. Necessarily, if A has decisive total *available* reason to ϕ , then A ought to ϕ .

Now, to spell out the asymmetry charge, I assume that Anna has decisive total available reason to B(q). That is, given Anna's epistemic circumstances, Anna's available reasons to B(q) strongly outweigh her available reasons against B(q).

Given Determinate Perspectivist Ought, we get

(1) Anna ought to B(q).

What happens if we consider Anna's case in terms of evidence (see Interchangeable)? We get that her total available evidence supports (strongly) that OB(q). Still, I can assume that Misleading Evidence applies. Anna's total available evidence is potentially misleading. To see this, note that I can assume that the balance of Anna's evidence changes (against OB(q)) if her total available evidence *e* were updated with new, so far unavailable evidence (see Section 2). Postulating that Anna's evidence that OB(q) is, in fact, misleading, we get

(2) It is not the case that Anna ought to B(q).

⁸See, e.g., Fox (2019: 224f), Kiesewetter (2017: 196) and McHugh and Way (2017: 122ff) for this distinction. In Sect.4, I explain why I (only) consider *pure* objectivism. Regarding the epistemic ought, some version of perspectivism seems to be the mainstream view. For explicit defences, see Conee and Feldman (2004), McHugh and Way (2017) and Gibbons (2013). Proponents of pure objectivism (or a closely related view) include Littlejohn (2012) and (potentially) Shah (2003, 2006). Note that the debate between perspectivists and objectivists is supposed to be a substantial debate about the central, deliberative ought (see fn.5), not a merely verbal dispute.

The *seeming* contradiction of (1) and (2) poses a problem for the RaE view. Reasons and evidence for ought-propositions cannot be (necessarily) equivalent – as RaE and RaE(Total) claim – if considering reasons and considering evidence for ought-propositions leads to contradicting results (see Interchangeable).

However, as the attentive reader will have noticed, it seems that the oughts in (1) and (2) are different. By assumption, ‘ought’ in (1) is the perspectivist ought constrained by Anna’s epistemic perspective. On the contrary, by arguing for (the application of) Misleading Evidence in deriving (2), I appealed to the case of updating Anna’s evidence that $OB(q)$ with so far epistemically unavailable facts (evidence). Hence, the ‘ought’ in Anna’s evidence that $OB(q)$ cannot be perspectivist as this ought is sensitive to the epistemically inaccessible. Given this observation, there are two (ultimately unsuccessful) responses available for the RaE proponent – still assuming perspectivism about the ought of reasonhood (this assumption is lifted in Section 4).

3.2. Updating one’s evidence for ought-propositions: against a perspectivist reading of ‘ $OB(q)$ ’

First, the RaE proponent might demand a perspectivist reading of the ought that features in Anna’s available *evidence* that $OB(q)$. This move could be used to deny the application of Misleading Evidence, which was necessary to derive (2). In this case, the perspectivist RaE proponent would deny the possibility that Anna’s decisive total evidence that she ought to $B(q)$ could be misleading. However, this reply, I argue, is not available for the RaE view. *Given RaE’s commitments*, the nature of evidence is incompatible with perspectivism about the ought that figures in evidence *for ought-propositions* (i.e. in short, about the ought of evidence). That is, *given* that the RaE view identifies reasons with evidence for an ought-proposition, the ‘ought’ occurring in such evidence statements cannot be treated as shifting with the agent’s epistemic circumstances. Otherwise, it would undermine the idea that one is updating evidence for ought-propositions in analogous ways as one is updating one’s reasons to $B(q)$. This, however, conflicts with Kearns & Star’s claim that reasons and evidence for ought-propositions function analogously in one’s deliberation processes – a claim central to their overall argument for RaE.

Let me expand on the updating-evidence case from Section 2. At time t_1 , Anna’s total available evidence for the statement ‘Anna ought to believe that q ’ (i.e. ‘ $OB(q)$ ’) is constituted by the body of evidence e . Given perspectivism, the ought in ‘ $OB(q)$ ’ is only sensitive to those facts that are (in the relevant sense) epistemically available. That is, this ought is indexed to Anna’s epistemic circumstances C_1 at t_1 . Hence, only facts available given C_1 are relevant for assessing the truth of ‘ $OB(q)$ ’. At time t_2 , Anna’s total available evidence for ‘ $OB(q)$ ’ is now constituted by a larger body of evidence e^* . Some facts within e^* , the ‘new evidence’, were not available under C_1 . The ought in ‘ $OB(q)$ ’ now, at t_2 , is indexed to new epistemic circumstances C_2 .

Therefore, the oughts that figure in ‘ $OB(q)$ ’ at t_1 and t_2 are indexed to different epistemic circumstances. Different sets of facts are relevant for assessing the truth of the statement ‘ $OB(q)$ ’ at t_1 and t_2 . Thus, the ought-propositions, for which Anna is supposed to have evidence and which are expressed by ‘ $OB(q)$ ’, are different at t_1 and t_2 . That is, the ought-proposition, for which Anna has evidence, itself changes with what evidence is available for this very proposition.

This suggestion, however, can make no sense of the idea of updating Anna's total available evidence *that* $OB(q)$ – i.e. her evidence for *one and the same* ought-proposition – with new, so far unavailable, input. To be counted as a case of genuine updating, the new evidence, added at t_2 , must bear on the same 'question' or subject matter as the initial set e . That is, the initial set e and the updated set e^* must be concerned with the same ought-proposition. Hence, the content of ' $OB(q)$ ' must remain fixed and the relevant 'ought' sensitive to the same set of facts across t_1 and t_2 . Thus, we must read the ought-proposition $OB(q)$ in 'Anna has evidence that $OB(q)$ ' as being concerned with a (more) objectivist ought that is not constrained by Anna's current limited epistemic perspective. Therefore, there is no perspectivist reading of the ought that figures in evidence for ought-propositions – as there is for the ought of reasonhood featuring in Determinate Perspectivist Ought.⁹

A perspectivist defender of RaE might reply that there is no illicit change of subject between t_1 and t_2 : throughout, Anna is concerned with the question whether q , and she updates her evidence *for* q as she acquires new information.¹⁰ Before the update at t_1 , she considers her evidence for q and, based on it, concludes that ' $OB(q)$ ' – with the perspectivist ought being indexed to C_1 . During the update, she considers new facts that bear on the same question, namely whether q is the case. After the evidence-update, the more extensive evidence set e^* only weakly supports the proposition q . Thus, at t_2 , after the update, Anna concludes that it is not the case that $OB(q)$ – with the perspectivist ought being now indexed to C_2 . Given this framing, we can coherently describe the relevant evidence-updating process in terms of our evidence for q – while holding on to a perspectivist interpretation for our ought-statements at t_1 and t_2 , respectively.

This seems to be a sensible explanation of the described case of evidence-updating and corresponding intuitions about ought-statements.¹¹ Be that as it may. This position is not available to the RaE proponent (or at least comes at very high theoretical costs, see fn.12). *Without* a commitment to RaE and RaE (Total), we could just consider how a fact F or a set of facts S constitute evidence *for* p and also corresponding reason to believe that p (given relevant background assumptions, see fn.7). We could then consider how an agent A 's epistemically available body of evidence is updated (e.g. if fact F is added to the previously available evidence constituted by S). At any point in this updating process, we could consider what this means for relevant ought-statements regarding the proposition ' A ought to $B(p)$ ' – without considering how the evidence *for* ' A ought to $B(p)$ ' is itself updated.

However, for the RaE view, evidence for ought-propositions is not an afterthought. On the contrary, a fact F is a reason for $B(p)$ if and only if it is evidence that $OB(p)$. Moreover, reasons and evidence for ought-propositions fulfil the same deliberative function. As already indicated in Section 1, the normative deliberation of agent A must lead to the same results independently of whether they are spelt out in terms of reasons or evidence for the relevant ought-proposition (see Interchangeable). In fact, Kearns and

⁹The current updating issue should not be confused with the "better information problem" (cf. Gibbons 2010, Kiesewetter, 211ff), which poses a problem for perspectivism in general. My argument is concerned with the specific logic of updating evidence for ought-propositions – an issue that is only relevant for the RaE view and which does not apply to the case of updating *one's reasons* for $B(q)$ (see below).

¹⁰I am very thankful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection, as it helped me to clarify my argument.

¹¹Consider e.g. how proponents of perspectivism invoke intuitions about responsibility and blame, which can be applied to the current case. See e.g. Moore (1912) Gibbons (2006, 2013), Kiesewetter (2017: 205) for discussion.

Star explicitly discuss, as a deciding argument in favour of their view, the ‘phenomenology of deliberation’ (2008: 41) and, in particular, the analogous role that reasons and evidence for ought-propositions are supposed to play in practical (or epistemic) reasoning. They hold that such evidence is what the agent is looking for ‘[w]hen one is trying to work out what to do’ (2008: 41; see also quote in Section 1).

[T]hat [a] fact is *evidence* about what she ought to do [...] is why such a fact plays the practical role of helping an agent determine what to do. An agent can use a fact to help her work out what she ought to do just when this fact is evidence about what she ought to do (ibid: 40; their emphasis).

Thus, *given RaE*, we must be able to describe an agent’s reasoning process, also in the case of updating and expanding their epistemic perspective, *both* in terms of reasons to $B(p)$ and also in terms of evidence that $OB(p)$. As shown above, the idea of updating Anna’s total available evidence *that* $OB(q)$, however, doesn’t work if we assume that the relevant ought is the perspectivist ought.¹²

Note that the case of updating one’s available reasons for A to $\varnothing$ does not raise an analogous problem for perspectivism about the ought of reasonhood. Logically speaking, new, previously unavailable reasons bear on the same subject matter (‘question’) because they are concerned with the same ‘response’ ($\varnothing$ -ing) for the same agent (A). Anna is considering reasons *for* (or *against*) $B(q)$ when updating her reasons. Hence, the perspectivist assumption regarding the ought of *reasons* is not threatened by my argument.

Beyond my argument from evidence-updating, my anti-perspectivist conclusion about the ought of evidence for ought-propositions is also supported by more general considerations about the nature of evidence. According to Kelly (2016, Section 3), evidence is most naturally thought of as ‘reliable sign, symptom, or mark of that which it is evidence of’. Thus, evidence ‘points’ towards a fact of the matter, in our case an ought-fact, that is not constrained or influenced by what evidence for *this* fact is epistemically (un)available. Similarly, the fact that q is not influenced by what evidence is (un)available for it.

3.3. A hybrid view about ought?

A second way to resolve the seeming contradiction of (1) and (2) is to accept a hybrid view – reading ‘ought’ in (1) in a perspectivist and in (2) in an objectivist sense.

¹²One might insist that RaE is only a co-extensionality thesis and need not track agents’ internal deliberation (see fn.2). However, as just argued, this conflicts with Kearns & Star’s own statements regarding the supposedly analogous function of reasons and evidence for ought-propositions in one’s reasoning and deliberation processes. More importantly, a revised RaE view without this “analogous function” commitment has very high theoretical costs – to the point of making it very implausible to pursue. First, Kearns & Star themselves rely heavily on this “analogous function” claim, when arguing that their view can further explain the way we deliberate with reasons (in terms of evidence for ought-propositions). They argue that RaE holds *because* reasons and evidence for ought-propositions behave analogously in our deliberation and reasoning (cf. 2008: 39ff; 2009: 224ff). Second, even if one would lift this general “analogous function” claim, it must be possible that this claim holds at least for a particular agent (even if not generally). I can postulate that Anna believes in the RaE view and its principles (see also fn.2). In this case, Anna’s internal updating processes for reasons and corresponding ought-propositions must function in the same way – something which, as I have shown, is not the case given a perspectivist reading of ought in $OB(q)$. If RaE cannot coherently accommodate such agents who believe in RaE, this undermines the general RaE claim.

This approach, although (arguably) generally plausible, is inconsistent with the RaE view. This is because it conflicts with an essential commitment of the RaE view, namely Interchangeable. As discussed in Section 1, the RaE view must hold that deliberation with reasons and evidence for the relevant ought-proposition must lead to coextensional deliberative results. However, on the hybrid view, reasons and evidence are used for different kinds of deliberation processes with different outcomes. Deliberating with one's available reasons leads to a conclusion about a perspectivist ought. On the contrary, deliberating with one's available (misleading) evidence is concerned with and, hence, leads to a conclusion about an objectivist ought. Thus, the ought-propositions 'reached' when relying on reasons and evidence for ought-propositions, respectively, are not coextensional. 'Anna ought to B(q)' is true if 'ought' is understood as the perspectivist ought of reasonhood (see (1)). 'Anna ought to B(q)' is false if 'ought' is understood as the objectivist ought of evidence (see (2)).

Therefore, a hybrid view (with its perspectivism about the ought of reasonhood) violates interchangeable. Given this section's assumption of perspectivism about the ought of reasonhood, the RaE view cannot avoid my asymmetry charge. The only option left for the RaE view is to read the ought of reasonhood in the same objectivist way as the ought of evidence.

4. Against a pure objectivist way out of the asymmetry charge

This section shows, first, that the 'objectivist' response to prevent my asymmetry charge forces the RaE proponent to adopt a 'pure objectivist' view – a strong theoretical commitment. Second, I draw on Fox (2019) to argue that pure objectivism is committed to claiming that independent evidence for p cannot be a reason to $B(p)$. This objectivist's commitment, I show, is incompatible with the RaE view. Thus, given that Fox's argument holds, the only way left to avoid my asymmetry charge, i.e. adopting pure objectivism, is not available to the RaE view.

According to McHugh and Way (2017: 123), the paradigmatic version of objectivism regarding the epistemic ought holds: for all p , an agent A may believe that p if and only if p is true. For current purposes, we only need a logical implication of this claim, namely

Pure Objectivism. For all p , A ought to believe that p *only if* p is true.¹³

Let me first show why I consider this 'pure' objectivism about ought (and not some weaker version). Recall the case of updating evidence for ought-propositions. Suppose now, Anna's total available evidence e^+ contains all facts that bear on the question of whether $OB(q)$ except q itself. It makes sense to say that her total available evidence that $OB(q)$ would be updated if we added q to e^+ . As argued in Section 3, the idea of updating one's evidence presupposes that the initial and the resulting set of evidence bear on the same ought-proposition. Hence, the ought that figures in Anna's available evidence that $OB(q)$ must be sensitive to all 'potential updaters' of that evidence. Thus, whether q is true or not must be taken into account by the ought that figures in the proposition

¹³A ought to ϕ only if A may ϕ . Given that A may ϕ only if p , it follows that A ought to ϕ only if p (by transitivity). As McHugh and Way (2017: 123) point out, objectivists should not claim that you ought to believe every (trivial) truth. However, to keep the objectivist spirit, whatever the additional and jointly sufficient conditions for an epistemic ought are, they are not (directly) connected to A 's epistemic circumstances. Among these additional background conditions might be, e.g., that A attends to the question of whether p .

OB(q), for which Anna has evidence. The same holds for the ought of reasonhood – to avoid a hybrid view (see Section 3).

Given this result, it would be very odd to deny Pure Objectivism. It would amount to the claim: Although ‘ought’ is sensitive to whether q is true or not, it is possible that Anna ought to believe that q even if not-q is the case.¹⁴ Given the implausibility of this claim, assuming Pure Objectivism for the (central) ought of reasonhood and of evidence is the only option left for the RaE view.¹⁵

A pure objectivist might now claim the following in Anna’s example: First, given suitable background conditions (see fn.13), the fact that q constitutes decisive reason to B(q). This decisive reason, whether available to Anna or not, leads to the fact that Anna ought to B(q). Thus, Determinate Ought (without any perspectivist constraint) holds. Analogously, the fact that q will be part of Anna’s total (available plus unavailable) evidence. This evidence entails (non-misleadingly) OB(q) – again, given the same (non-epistemic) background conditions. Second, if not-q (or without the relevant background conditions), both total reason and total evidence will not lead to OB(q). Therefore, there is *no asymmetry* between one’s reasons and one’s evidence for ought-propositions. The apparent contradiction of Section 3, based on (partly) perspectivist assumptions, does not arise. Thus, pure objectivism seems to allow the RaE view to avoid my asymmetry charge developed above.

However, as I’ll now argue, the RaE view is, for different reasons, incompatible with pure objectivism about ought. I show this by applying (a particular step in) recent general arguments against objectivism made by Fox (2019) to my current discussion of RaE.

Fox (2019: 239f) argues that pure objectivists are committed to

No Independent Evidence. Independent evidence *cannot* be a reason to believe that p.

Instead, *only* the fact that p (i.e. only p’s truth) can be a reason to believe that p, i.e. to B(p). Other facts that only indicate that p, i.e. independent evidence that p, cannot be such a reason. If independent evidence (such as the fact F that a normally reliable adviser told A that p) was a reason to B(p), Fox holds, this would conflict with two plausible principles.¹⁶

First, we have

Impact Constraint. If R is a reason to ϕ , then R could make a difference, or contribute, to its being the case that one ought to ϕ (Fox 2019: 242).

¹⁴For this to be implausible, I need to stipulate that pragmatic considerations (e.g. based on the fact that you are offered money to believe that p) have no (decisive) influence on the ought concerning belief – at least in the cases discussed here. On the issue of pragmatic reasons for belief, see e.g. Reisner (2018).

¹⁵This doesn’t mean that one is rationally required to believe that p only if p is true – as one can have strong, but misleading, evidence that p that rationally requires one to believe that p. Objectivists readily acknowledge that on their view what one is rationally required to believe (or do) and what one ought to believe (or do) is not coextensional. See Moore (1912), Thomson (1990, 2008) or Graham (2010). See Lord (2017) and Kiesewetter (2017: ch.8), who argue that the separation between “rational requirement” and “ought” speaks against objectivism.

¹⁶For my argument, it suffices if the mentioned fact F cannot be a reason to B(p) – independently of whether other facts, which are not the fact that p itself, are reasons to B(p) or not. I, thereby, avoid Whiting’s (forthcoming) objections to Fox’s argument, which focus on specific kinds of derivative reason facts (explanatory related to p). The fact F, and similar ones, do not fall in this category. For simplicity’s sake, I avoid these complications.

Suppose we hold the fact that not- p fixed. Now, given Pure Objectivism, independent evidence that p , no matter how strong, can never be a ‘difference maker’ regarding the epistemic ought claim ‘A ought to believe that p ’ (i.e. ‘OB(p)’). Thus, given not- p , ‘there will not conceivably be a point at which enough independent evidence is added to make the belief that p permissible (or even required)’ (ibid.). Given this result, independent evidence does not fulfil Impact Constraint. Thus, on the objectivist view, we get No Independent Evidence.

The second principle that also leads us to No Independent Evidence is

Weighting Constraint. If R is a reason for or against ϕ -ing, then there is a conceivable situation where it makes sense to weigh up R and other reasons in deliberation about whether [one ought] to ϕ (ibid: 243).

The idea is that, for something to be a reason, it must at least be conceivable that it is weighted against other competing reasons in one’s ‘working towards an ought-conclusion’. Given Pure Objectivism, the fact that (not-) p is always relevant for ‘ought-conclusions’. If one holds (or even just stipulates) that p , however, it makes no sense to weigh the fact that p against independent evidence that not- p . As Kieseewetter (2017: 200) puts it in a similar context, ‘there is no single point of view from which those two facts can sensibly be weighed against each other’. Hence, the Weighting Constraint entails that the following:

- (3) The fact that p and independent evidence bearing on p could *not both* be reasons for (or against) believing that p .

Now, given Pure Objectivism, p is a necessary condition for OB(p) to be true. Therefore, it seems hard to deny that *the fact that p is evidence that OB(p)* – at least in some cases (while one case is enough for current purposes). This idea could, e.g., be spelled out in terms of a probability-raising account of evidence – which Kearns and Star (2009: 231f) endorse. Thus, given RaE, we get (at least for some p) that

- (4) The fact that p is a reason to B(p).¹⁷

(3) and (4) together entail that independent evidence that p cannot be a reason to B(p). Thus, taken together, the Weighting Constraint, RaE and Pure Objectivism entail No Independent Evidence.

In general, pure objectivists might be able to accept No Independent Evidence. However, I do not have to engage in the debate about the general (im)plausibility of No Independent Evidence (cf. Whiting [forthcoming](#)). For, in any case, No Independent Evidence is incompatible with the RaE view. As I have just argued, given Pure Objectivism, the fact that p is (at least sometimes) evidence that OB(p). Thus, independent evidence that p occurs is (at least sometimes) *evidence that OB(p)* as well. A probability-raising account of evidence would, again, explain this.¹⁸ Hence, *given RaE*,

¹⁷For other arguments (not relying on RaE) that pure objectivists are committed to this claim, see Fox (2019: 239f).

¹⁸A pure objectivist might object: Only p itself is genuine evidence that OB(p). Independent evidence that p , at best, only *seems* to be evidence that OB(p). Such a radical restriction of what counts as evidence is, I think, very implausible. It rejects, e.g., an intuitively plausible probability-raising account of evidence

this independent evidence that p also *is a reason* to $B(p)$. This result, however, conflicts with No Independent Evidence – a commitment of pure objectivism.

Thus, given Fox's arguments, the RaE view is incompatible with pure objectivism about the epistemic ought. Therefore, to the extent this incompatibility claim holds, the objectivist reply to the asymmetry charge is of no help to the RaE view.¹⁹

5. Conclusion: reasons and evidence are different

The asymmetry charge raised in this essay states that evidence for ought-propositions and reasons behave differently in our deliberations and relate differently to (potential) ought-facts. Evidence, even if strong, only indicates the truth of an ought-statement and, hence, can be misleading. Reasons, if sufficiently strong, are connected to a determinate ought. Hence, reasons are not potentially misleading in the same way as evidence. The RaE view must explain away this alleged asymmetry (see Section 3). This is because a hybrid view, which accepts the asymmetry and, accordingly, reads the 'ought' of decisive reasonhood in perspectivist and the 'ought' of evidence in objectivist terms, violates Interchangeable – a minimal commitment of the RaE view.

Further, I argued that the ought that features in evidence for ought-propositions cannot be constrained by perspectivist considerations – as this violates RaE's idea that reasons and evidence for ought-propositions function analogously in deliberation. At least, the necessary revisions to the RaE view that would allow for the ought of evidence to be perspectivist seem very implausible (see fn.12). Thus, to develop and defend them would require much further positive argument on the side of the RaE view – to the point of making this line of defence, I think, unpromising.

To the extent this holds, to unify the sense of ought used, the RaE view must opt for pure objectivism about the ought of reasonhood and of evidence for ought-propositions (see Section 4). Therefore, I have at least shown an additional, highly contentious commitment of the RaE view, namely pure objectivism about the (epistemic) ought.²⁰ Such a commitment already gives *prima facie* grounds to prefer other, less committal accounts of normative reasons. Further, if pure objectivism is false, the RaE view must be rejected. Moreover, drawing on Fox (2019), I argued that the RaE view is incompatible with pure objectivism. This incompatibility claim needs to be analysed further (see esp. fn.19). In any case, my argument puts additional pressure on RaE proponents to spell out and defend a coherent (pure objectivist) version of their RaE view. To the extent that that incompatibility claim holds, however, the RaE view has no option to defend itself against the asymmetry charge – it cannot accept it nor explain it away.

(see above). This is because independent evidence that p would raise the probability of p and, hence, (at least sometimes) of $OB(p)$ too (see above).

¹⁹Given the limits of this essay, I cannot discuss the independent plausibility of Fox's Weighing or Impact Constraint in detail, but only indicate their incompatibility with an objectivist RaE view. See, e.g., Hawthorne and Magidor (2018: 132ff) for criticism of the general weighing model of reasons underlying the Weighing Constraint. See also Fox (2019: 244f), who briefly questions how Kearns & Star's RaE view might relate to the objectivist's theoretical commitments that he works out – although this is done in a different dialectical context.

²⁰Some authors argue that objectivism (and perspectivism) about the *epistemic* ought entails the analogous view about the practical ought (and vice versa). See Fox (2019), McHugh and Way (2017) and Way and Whiting (2016).

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer and an associate editor of this journal, as well as two anonymous BPhil essay examiners and, most especially, Joe Cunningham, for very helpful comments and suggestions. While working on this article, I was funded by the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes (German Academic Scholarship Foundation), for which I am extremely grateful.

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Cite this article: Schneider L. (2026). "Reasons as Evidence and the Asymmetry Charge." *Episteme* 1–14.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2026.10113>