Introduction to Philosophy
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Epistemology: Epistemic Justification

The JTB+ Analysis of Knowledge

> S knows that p = S has a justified true belief that p that meets some further condition, e.g., no false grounds.

The Epistemic Regress Problem

We do not want to believe at random, we want our beliefs to be justified—that is, we want there to be a reason to believe the propositions we believe. But those reasons will be further propositions, and if our initial belief is to be justified, so surely must the reasons for that belief be, and so we must appeal to yet more propositions, and so on.

How are our reasons related to one another and to the beliefs in order for the beliefs be justified? Or what is the structure of reasons for a justified belief?

Responses to the Epistemic Regress Problem

1. The chain of reasons continues infinitely.

   Infinitism: The correct structure is an unending continuation of reasons, without repetition or end. A justification tree for each inferentially justified belief contains roots that never end and never contain repetitive nodes.

2. The chain of reasons circles back on itself.

   Coherentism: The correct structure is one in which some of the roots circle, or loop, back on themselves. In other words, some nodes reappear earlier in the chain. Thus, the regress has no end points. At the same time, it is not infinitely long.

3. The chain of reasons comes to an end.

   Foundationalism: The correct structure is a tree with roots of finite length. Each root has a terminal, or final, node that represents a justified but noninferred belief. Such beliefs are foundational, or basic, beliefs. All justified beliefs that are not themselves basic, however, ultimately derive their justification from one or more other beliefs that are basic. So, all justification ends at-or begins with-basically justified beliefs.

4. There is not such a chain of reasons.

   Skepticism About the Regress: None of the first three solutions to the regress problem is satisfactory. One cannot get justified belief via any of the structures they describe. Because those other three solutions jointly exhaust the possibilities for a positive solution, there is no way by which inferential beliefs can be justified.

Infinitism

The structure of justificatory reasons is infinite and non-repeating.

The Unexplained Origin Objection

If a justification tree goes back infinitely far, then there seems to be no point at which justification originates. But how can there be any justification to transmit to higher nodes?

Infinitism: The objection already assumes that inference cannot originate justification, it can only transfer it from premises to conclusion. Why cannot justification emerges from inference?

The Finite Mind Objection

We have finite lives and finite minds. Given the way that we are actually constituted, we cannot produce an infinite series of reasons.

Infinitism: In addition to occurrent beliefs and first-order dispositional beliefs, second-order dispositional beliefs also count as beliefs. In contrast to occurrent beliefs and first-order dispositional beliefs, second-order dispositional beliefs are neither currently being considered nor in the mind though it is properly "hooked up with" our other occurrent and first-order dispositional belief. It could become an occurrent belief or a first-order dispositional belief under the appropriate circumstances. For instance, the proposition that *Helena is the state capital of Montana* is available to us if we have the disposition to check the state capital listings in the World Almanac under the appropriate circumstances, though we are not able to access the proposition from memory or infer it from occurrent beliefs.

Coherentism

> A belief is justified, just in case the belief coheres with a set of beliefs, the set forms a coherent system which, in turn, should display a high degree of mutual interdependence, not just logical consistency.

Is coherence sufficient for justification?

The Isolation Objection: Coherentism fails to recognize the indispensable role that experience plays in justifying our beliefs about the external world. Coherentism gives no essential role to experience follows from the fact that the states that suffice to justify our beliefs are, on this view, limited to other beliefs.

The Alternative Coherent Systems Argument: For each system of coherent beliefs, there are multiple alternative systems – alternative because they include beliefs with different, logically incompatible, contents – that are just as coherent. However, if there are plenty of highly, equally coherent, but incompatible, systems, and if few of these systems do an adequate job of faithfully representing reality, then coherentism is not a good indicator of truth. Since this line of reasoning is readily knowable, beliefs that coherently fit together are not, at least by virtue of their coherence alone, justified.

Is coherence necessary for justification?

The Preface Paradox: The paradox questions whether logical inconsistency, an obvious mark of incoherence, really entails a lack of justification.

Foundationalism

(a) Immediate Justification: There are some "basic" or "foundational" beliefs that are justified without depending on any other beliefs for this status, and (b) Mediate Justification: any other beliefs that are justified must depend, ultimately, on foundational beliefs for this status.

Foundational Beliefs: Doxastic Foundationalism vs Non-Doxastic Foundationalism

Doxastic Foundationalism: Foundational beliefs are self-justified. The content of the basic beliefs are typically perceptual reports but one's corresponding perceptual state is not a reason for the belief.

Non-Doxastic Foundationalism: Foundational beliefs are justified by non-doxastic states like experiences.

The Arbitrariness Objection

Stopping the epistemic regress at any point, e.g., a self-justifying belief or an experience, is arbitrary.

Foundationalism: There are epistemically certain foundations.

The Sellarsian Dilemma

For non-doxastic foundationalism: Either experience has assertive representational content, i.e., content that is presented as being true but may, in fact, be false, or not. If experience has assertive representational content then one needs an additional reason to think that the content is correct. If experience lacks this content then experience cannot provide a reason for thinking that some proposition is true.

The Level Ascent Argument

It is not enough for the premises to be true. It is also necessary that the believer be justified in believing the premises.

i. Belief B has feature Φ.
ii. Beliefs having feature Φ are highly likely to be true.
Therefore, B is highly likely to be true.

Foundationalism: The argument is committed to a conceptual confusion: the concept of a belief's being justified vs the concept of engaging in some kind of activity vis-a-vis the belief that reflects on it and establishes its legitimacy. There is no need to have a higher-order justified belief.

Internalism vs Externalism

Justifier: Anything that helps make a belief state justified or unjustified. In other words, it's anything that contributes, positively or negatively, to the justificational status of a belief.

Are justifiers internal or external?

Internalism: All justifiers are internal in the sense that they are constituted solely by factors that are directly accessible to S via reflection (accessibilism) or they are constituted solely by S's mental states (mentalism).

Externalism: At least some justifiers are external, e.g., reliability.

Evidentialism as Internalism

S has justification to believe p = S's total evidence supports p.

What is your total evidence?

Evidence refers exclusively to mental states, e.g., experiences and beliefs, S is in at a specific time.

What is it for your evidence to support something?

Inferential Support vs Non-Inferential Support

Three types of inferential support:

1. *Deductive* support (also called *entailment*). E.g.:
e = there is a fox in the yard
h = there is a mammal in the yard
e *deductively* supports h: given e, it's impossible for h to be false; e entails h

2. *Inductive* support. E.g.:
e = In the past whenever smoke emanated from a certain location, fire was also present at that location, and Smoke is now observed at location L.
h = Fire is also present at L.
e *inductively* supports h: given e, h is inductively supported

3. *Abductive* support (also called *explanatory* support). E.g.:
e = the bloody glove was found in Smith's trunk
h = Smith is the murderer
e *abductively* supports h: h *explains* why e is true, h is the *cause* of e

Is Evidential Co-presence Sufficient for Justification?

No, the mere co-presence of a belief with evidential states that it fits is not enough for its justifiedness. It is crucial that appropriate evidential states actually cause the belief via suitable thinking.

Is Evidential Co-presence Necessary for Justification?

No, justification seems to be held even if there is no relevant evidential states in, at least, some cases.

Reliabilism as an Externalist Account of Justification

Reliabilism is an alternative to evidentialism. It gives a different answer to the question: what is justified belief? Here is the simple version of the reliabilist's answer:

S's belief that p is justified = S's belief that p was caused by a reliable process.

A reliable belief-forming process is one that tends to lead to true beliefs. Reliability comes in degrees. Justified belief does not require perfect reliability.

Reliabilism fits our intuitions about justified belief in many cases: perception, introspection, testimony, introspection deductive, inductive, abductive reasoning; and underwrites a close link between justification and truth.

Unconditional Reliability vs Conditional Reliability

Unconditional Reliability: A belief B is justified if it is produced by a belief-forming process that is unconditionally reliable, which does not take a prior belief as inputs.

Conditional Reliability: A belief B is justified if (i) B is produced by a belief-forming (or belief-retaining) process that is conditionally reliable, and (ii) all of the belief inputs to the belief-forming (or belief-retaining) process that causes B are justified.

The official theory:

(R) S has a justified belief that p =
(i) S's belief that p was formed by a unconditionally reliable belief-independent process or
(ii) S's belief that p was formed by a conditionally reliable belief-dependent process whose input beliefs were justified.

Potential Problems for Reliabilism

1. Accidental / unknown reliability. Clairvoyance, True Temp, etc.

2. Brain-in-a-vat (also called the "new evil demon problem").

My brain-in-a-vat twin's perceptual beliefs are all based on completely unreliable processes. So they're not justified, according to the reliabilist. But that seems wrong.

A tentative solution to 1 and 2: two-stage theory of justification attribution.

3. The generality problem. Any process is an instance of many distinct types; whether it's reliable is a matter of whether other instances of that process-type lead to true beliefs. But what are the relevant process types?

Reliablism as a Theory of Knowledge

Reliabilism yields a non-evidentialist version of JTB theory: knowledge that p = true belief that p caused by a reliable process.