

What are the Problems for Ininitism?

Senior Honors Thesis Advised by Prof. Peter Klein

Paul Jones

Rutgers University

April 19, 2014

Outline

1. Interpreting Informatism

- The Problem
- Key notions
- The argument

2. Defending Informatism

- Ginet's "Reply to Klein"
- Bergmann's Dilemma to Klein

3. Objecting to Informatism

- Introduction
- Key notions
- Analysis

4. Q&A

Interpreting Informatism

The Problem

The Regress Problem

- Informatism is a response to the epistemological regress problem.
- Take a belief of your own, and ask yourself, what reason do I have for believing this?
- What will be the structure of these responses? The *right* structure?
- More succinctly,

(RP) *Which type of series of reasons and the account of justification associated with it can increase the credibility of a non-evident proposition? (Klein and Ginet 2014)*

Responses

- There are four possible responses to the question,
 1. Will have a *foundational* reason;
 2. Will be a *coherent* set of reasons;
 3. Will be *infinitely* long;
 4. Does not exist, so we should be *skeptical*.
- Oftentimes, like with infinitism, the argument pattern for these views is *eliminative*.
 - With infinitism, Klein leaves skepticism for discussion elsewhere and shows that neither foundationalism nor coherentism can solve (RP).

Key notions

Doxastic vs. Propositional Justification

- There are two questions a solution to (RP) can address:
 1. What does it take for a *proposition* to be justified?
 2. What it takes for a *doxastic attitude* to be justified?
- This comes from ambiguity in the word “belief”, where when we says that “S is justified in believing *p*”, it could mean either:
 1. If S were to believe *p*, S would be justified.
 2. S does believe *p*, and S is justified.
- For (RP), are we interested in whether a *proposition* is justified or whether a *belief* is justified?
 - Perhaps both, but at least doxastic justification is necessary for actual believers to be justified.

Transfer vs. Emergent Justification

- There are at least two ways of conceiving of justification.
 1. It could be *transferred* from an epistemically prior proposition or belief to an epistemically later proposition or belief.
 2. It could *emerge* out of a set of propositions or beliefs.
- On its own, *emergence* is a metaphysical concept.
 - It is an important part of the infinitist response to (RP) because infinitism takes justification to be emergent property.

Transfer Justification

- Foundationalists think that justification is a property of a single proposition that “flows” from the justified foundational belief to all the others via some proper rules for reasoning.
- Foundationalist hold that justification originates in that basic proposition and is *transferred* to epistemically latter propositions.
- But coherentists cannot hold this view, it would commit them to endorsing circular reasoning. So what’s the alternative?
 - First, we’ll have to investigate the notion of emergence.

What are Emergent Properties?

- Consider some phenomena like, “animal.”
- What is not an animal?
 - A biological cell on its own is not an animal.
 - Any single organ or even organ system does not constitute an animal.
- The property of “being an animal” *emerges* out of many animal cells and organs working in a certain functional relationship to one another.

Emergent Justification

- What reason is there for thinking that justification is a property of a set of propositions and not any particular proposition? Consider these two propositions:
 1. No human is a horse.
 2. Plato is not a horse.
- Take “Plato is not a horse.” to be the questioned proposition, and your justifying reason was that “No human is a horse.”,
 - Notice the statements *mutually support one another*.
- If you have a list of n humans and their statuses as horses, then the propositions in the set would all mutually support one another in this way.
- The rational credence for every member of the set would raise with every subsequent “X is not a horse.” proposition. This is how justification can be emergent.

What's the argument?

- The logical space:
 1. Justification-transfer foundationalism;
 2. Justification-emergent foundationalism;
 3. Justification-transfer coherentism;
 4. Justification-emergent coherentism;
 5. Justification-transfer infinitism;
 6. Justification-emergent infinitism.
- (2) isn't tenable because it is just to say that the foundational property confers justification to a set.
- (3) isn't tenable because it endorses a thinly-disguised form of circular reasoning.
- (5) isn't tenable because it would be arbitrary in practice, some epistemic prior would always be posited to have the justificatory power

What's the argument?

Informatism is like the warrant-emergent form of coherentism because it holds that [justification] for a questioned proposition emerges as the proposition becomes embedded in a set of propositions.

He endorses (6), then. His argument, described below, will be eliminative and have the following form:

1. We can be justified.
2. (2), (3), and (5) are not tenable.
3. We cannot practice (1) and (4).
4. \therefore The correct view is (6).

Doxastic Justification Emergence

- We now have at our disposal a distinction between doxastic vs. propositional justification and transfer vs. emergent justification.
 - How are these views related?

S is justified in p if and only if S has embedded p in a set of believed propositions by tracing the reasons in virtue of which S is justified in p from which the emergent justification is enough to satisfy the requirements of some context C.

Principles for Informatism

- Klein argues that informatism follows from two epistemic principles, the Principle of Avoiding Circularity (PAC) and the Principle of Avoiding Arbitrariness (PAA).

(PAC) *For all propositions, x , if x is warranted for a person, S , at t , then for all y , if y is in the reason-ancestry of x for S at t , then x is not in the reason-ancestry of y for S at t .*

(PAA) *For all propositions, x , if x is warranted for a person, S , at t , then there is some reason, r_1 , available to S for x at t ; and there is some reason, r_2 available to S for r_1 at t_1 etc., and there is no last reason in the series.*

The argument

The Interrogation Argument

- Klein argues that neither foundationalism nor coherentism can solve (RP), and because we're not skeptics, the only option is infinitism.
- He shows this by means of a conversation between two agents, representing the viewpoints of a foundationalist, coherentist, and a doubter.
- The Interrogation Argument concerns doxastic justification, as it actually instantiates the propositions as beliefs.
- It does not argue that foundationalism or coherentism are wrong, but that they are **inconsistent** or **arbitrary** *in practice*.

(USP) An account of justification should be useable by a self-conscious practitioner to increase the credibility of questioned propositions.

Infinitist Dialogue

1. Ivan: p
2. Doris: Why believe that p ?
3. Ivan: r_1
4. Doris: Why believe that r_1 ?
5. Ivan: r_2
6. ...
7. Doris: Why believe that r_{n-1} ?
8. Ivan: r_n

The Trilemma

Fred's options:

1. He can hold that autonomously justified propositions are somewhat likely to be true in virtue of the fact that they are autonomously justified.
2. He can deny that autonomously justified propositions are somewhat likely to be true in virtue of the fact that they are autonomously justified.
3. He can withhold whether autonomously justified propositions are somewhat likely to be true in virtue of the fact that they are autonomously justified.

Defending Informatism

Ginet's "Reply to Klein"

Interpretation

- Fred is trying to raise the rational credence for the following:

(1) *Little Benny has been in the living room with blue paint on his hands.*

- Doris asks Fred why he thinks this is so:

(2) *There is a blue smear on the wall.*

- Predictably, Doris ask for Fred's reason, to which Fred responds:

(p) *I see a blue smear on a white surface right in front of me.*

- Ginet says that Fred has run out of reasons he could infer (p) from.

Eminently Reasonable

- He says that Fred "has no reason for thinking that [he] see[s] a blue smear on a white surface" in the sense which there is a premise and conclusion, but it is "eminently reasonable" because of:

(C) My visual experience is as if I see such a thing and I am aware of no reason to think that my visual experience might in this case be misleading me.

- Breaking a bit from her usual style, Ginet's Doris points out that (C) commits Fred to the following two conjuncts:

(r₁) When (C) obtains, it is likely to be true that I see a blue smear on a white surface.

(r₂) (C) does obtain.

Retreating Slightly

- And Doris further asks whether it is only because these beliefs are available to him as reasons for believing p that he is justified in believing p .
- Fred sees what is coming, the hard trilemma of the Interrogation Argument, and so retreats somewhat on r_1 to a weaker first half of the conjunct:
 (r_1^*) *When (C) obtains, it is reasonable for me to believe that (p).*
- Ginet notes that he is not persuaded that this reason for p constitutes *Fred's actual reason* for believing it, but assumes for the sake of argument is "at least part of" Fred's justification.

The Conversation Completed

- Doris now asks for a reason to believe $(r_1*) \wedge (r_2)$, and Ginet would have Fred answer that: First, of (r_1*) ,

I need no premise from which to infer (r_1) . This is because (r_1*) is a basic a priori principle constitutive of the concept of justification for belief in a particular proposition like (p) : it is a principle that understanding it requires accepting it.*

- Secondly, of (r_2) , "Nor do I need a premise from which to infer (r_2) ." This is because the following is a "basic a priori principle constitutive of the concept of justification for conscious-state propositions like (r_2) ":

(r_3) : When (C) obtains, and one is prompted by that fact to believe that (C) obtains, then that belief is justified.

The Conversation In Full

$$(((r_3) \rightarrow (r_2)) \wedge (r_1*)) \rightarrow (C) \rightarrow (p) \rightarrow (2) \rightarrow (1)$$

Translated

$$(((r_3) \rightarrow (r_2)) \wedge (r_1*)) \rightarrow (C) \rightarrow (p) \rightarrow (2) \rightarrow (1)$$

When (C) obtains, and one is prompted by that fact to believe that (C) obtains, then that belief is justified." is the a priori principle from which Fred's belief about propositions like "(C) does obtain." follows from, which along with his belief that "When (C) obtains, it is reasonable for me to believe that (p)." justifies that "My visual experience is as if I see such a thing and I am aware of no reason to think that my visual experience might in this case be misleading me." which makes eminently clear that (p) which justifies that (2) which justifies that (1).

Criticism

- (r_3) is false or continues the regress.
- I think there are more reasons to think it is false.
- But even if it's true, it doesn't lift the weight from the Interrogation Argument off of foundationalism.

The Case that (r_3) is False

- This is the causal theory of knowledge from the perspective of justification.
- Where Ginet writes "prompted," I read it to be synonymous with "caused." This principle is the same as (r_3) :
(CJ) If (C) obtains and S is caused by that fact to believe (C) obtains, then that belief is justified for S.
- This is a bad requirement on justification, because there is a counterexample found in Kenneth Collier's "Contra the Causal Theory of Knowing."

Contra Causal Knowing

- Say that Doris, unbeknownst to Fred, administers to him a hallucinogenic drug, and one of the effects of the drug is that he believes that his hallucinations are actually not hallucinations, but real.
- One of the hallucinations this drug induces is that Doris gave the drug to Fred, and that he believes this hallucination to be real.
- Collier gives Ginet a dilemma, he must hold either that:
 1. Fred knows Doris gave him the drug;
 2. Fred does not know Doris gave him the drug.

How bad is the dilemma?

- If the causal theorist says that (1), Fred does know that Doris gave him the drug, then they need explain how this particular hallucination is different from other hallucinations.
 - Perhaps it's that this particular hallucination is not true, and that's what makes it different.
 - This won't help. Imagine that the drug causes the belief in a blue smear, and there just so happens to be a blue smear.
 - To say that there's no causal connection will be unsuccessful too, because just posit that Fred has been told of the blue smear or akin.
- If the causal theorist says that (2) Fred does not know, then there needs to be an account of proper causation not found in Ginet, but perhaps exists.

A Cautious Conclusion

- Perhaps you do not accept this argument
- Maybe you think that there are good candidates which are not *ad hoc* to defend against Colliers' counterexample.
- None of this will not save Ginet's reply, however, because the only conclusion my overall argument *needs* to draw from this is:
(RD) *One can understand (r_3) and have reason to doubt it.*

Even if (r_3) is True, it Fixes Nothing

- Relations like " p follows from the basic a priori principle q " and " p makes q eminently clear" are one which raise rational credence.
- When Doris asks Fred why he believes that (r_1^*) , (r_3) is a great reason to believe (r_1^*) , as it is the general form.
- One question that Doris can ask of Fred is, why does Fred believe that (r_3) ?
- There must be a reason for (r_3) to be true. This reason, say (r_4) , would raise the rational credence for a self-conscious agent in the questioned proposition. The regress has continued.

In Ginet's Defense

- Ginet will complain that he posited that to understand (r_1^*) requires accepting it, and that perhaps Doris is not understanding it.
- Understanding (r_1^*) does not require accepting it, because (RD).
***(RD)** One can understand (r_3) and have reason to doubt it.*
- I concluded from my discussion about the reasons to think that (r_3) is false is that, at very least, there is reason to doubt (r_3) , and because it is the general form of propositions like (r_1^*) , there is reason to doubt (r_1^*) as well.

One More Time

- Much more straightforwardly, I see no defense in Ginet from Doris merely asking, "Why believe that (r_2) ?"
- That is, "Why believe that '(C) does obtain.?'"
- Ginet says "It is clear that (r_3) could not serve as a premise in an inference justifying belief in (r_2) ."
- Doris keeps doubting.

Bergmann's Dilemma to Klein

Interpretation

Criticism

Objecting to Informatism

Introduction

Motivations

- The primary motivation behind infinitism's cavalier rejection is that it is intuitively discordant with "how we actually could reason" on first gloss.
 - "We cannot believe infinitely many things, how could infinitism solve the regress problem when *it is the regress?*"
- One takeaway we could draw from this is that the pre-theoretical sentiment that some who raise this objection are expressing is that they want to find out "how we actually reason" and have this inform a response to (RP).
 - Ginet, in an aside, notes that he does not think that any claims about the theory of justification are Fred's "actual reasons" for believing perceptual claims.

Self-Conscious Practitioners

- Bergmann's article puts pressure on a similar point insofar as he wants to avoid "going meta" by blurring the line between agent and epistemologist.

(USP) *An account of justification should be useable by a self-conscious practitioner to increase the credibility of questioned propositions.*

- The meta-epistemological issues that Klein, Ginet, and Bergmann might disagree on are whether or not we should try to build our theory on "how people actually reason and are successful at it" or "what the epistemologist can successfully defend."

Key notions

Meta-level justifiers

- Consider the following two propositions:
***(PB)** There is a blue smear on the wall.*
***(FT)** Foundationalism is the correct solution to the regress problem.*
- A big part of the Interrogation Argument's weight is that Fred is the one who will jump from propositions about walls, tables, and chairs to propositions about epistemology.
- There is such a disconnect between (PB) and (FT), however, in the sense that when one removes oneself from that critical point in the conversation it is difficult to see how (FT) could raise the rational credence of (PB).

Well, Why?

- Do claims about epistemology ever raise the rational justification in beliefs about walls, tables, and chairs?
- If they can, epistemologists who have reasoned from everyday beliefs to their theory have higher amounts of justification in beliefs about walls, tables, and chairs than the average, everyday believer.
- My intuition is that a journalist sitting at her computer is as justified in believing her computer is in front of her as an epistemologist is when she is sitting in front of her computer.

Distinguishing theorists and agents

- Perhaps what's gone wrong with the Interrogation Argument is that Klein has conflated requirements *on a theory* with requirements *on an agent*.
- Consider this perhaps analogous example:
 - The epistemologist comes to accept the theory that "justified true belief is necessary on knowledge.
 - Any other epistemologist must account for the justified true belief theory in further theorizing.
 - Crucially, an agent need not *realize* that justified true belief is necessary on knowledge to come to know something.
 - Why think that in order for the (JTB) theory to provide an answer to the question of "What is knowledge?" it needs to be employable by a self-conscious practitioner for anything at all?

Applied to Foundationalism

- The dissenter of Klein's Interrogation Argument could claim the following:
 1. Meta-justificatory feature (F) is necessary for justification.
 2. A justification theorist must account for (F).
 3. A justification agent need not realize that (F) is a feature of justification to be justified.
- The move a foundationalist could make with this is: Meta-justification foundationalism need not be employable by an agent for that agent to be justified, rather, the justification theorist needs it to determine whether an agent is justified.
- Instead of answering Klein's trilemma, the foundationalist can complain that what has gone wrong with the Interrogation Argument is that Fred's attempting to practice the theory.

Analysis

Some Morals

- If the epistemologist has reasoned extensively about the computer in front of her and has more explicit justifications for its being there, then perhaps the correct response is that she *is* more justified than her journalist analogue.
- My worry about this is that Klein may have not found the solution to the regress problem, but rather, found a way that informatism can be used by a self-conscious practitioner, which might be more limited.
- To say that “this is the theory of justification” but that “this is not to be used by anyone for anything” is a high price to pay for a theory.
 - If a physicist had a theory about spaceflight that worked well until it was put into practice, it would quickly be disregarded.

Q&A