

Against factive theories of justification

1. Factive theories of justification have grown in popularity

(J = K) S's belief that p is justified iff S knows that p.

Versions of these thesis is defended by e.g.: Sturgeon (1993), Merricks (1995), Sutton (2007), Williamson (2018, *forthcoming*), Littlejohn (2012, *forthcoming*)

Veli Mitova: "epistemology has taken a factive turn" (2018).

2. In favour of factive theories

- Mitova cites three reasons: John McDowell on perception (1982, 1988), Timothy Williamson on knowledge (2000), and Jonathan Dancy on reasons (2000)
- Additional reasons:
 - Theoretical neatness
 - Moral/social/political reasons (Srinivasan 2014, 2020)

Compare:

BRAIN-IN-A-Vat:

JaneBIV is a handless brain-in-a-vat, subjected to a compelling electrochemical illusion to the effect that she is a normally embodied person. (Srinivasan 2020, p.406)

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

Radha is a woman who lives in rural India. Her husband, Krishnan, regularly beats her, explaining that the beatings are her own fault for being insufficiently obedient and caring. Radha reflects on whether these beatings are in fact her fault and comes to believe that they are. This belief is reinforced by the fact that her parents, elders, and friends agree that if she is being beaten it must be her fault, and no one she knows has ever offered a contrary opinion (Srinivasan 2020, pp.398-9).

3. Against factive theories

Zoe Johnson King: "[I]o say that her belief is unjustified because it is suffused with patriarchal ideology is to act as if Radha had no agency in her belief-formation and belief-revision process. But that is not true (...) she has amassed a set of mutually supporting metaphysical and moral arguments that collectively support the conclusion that she sometimes deserves to be beaten. And, when she has subjected these arguments to critical scrutiny, she has come back to them every time. Therein lies Radha's moderate degree of justification. By acknowledging it, we acknowledge the epistemic agency that she still has within her patriarchal environment (2022, p. 59)

4. Why justification matters

Johnson King also writes that in order to make progress in the internalism/externalism debate, we must:

move beyond characterizing internalism and externalism as a supervenience claim and its denial. (...) Nobody in this literature is kept up at night by the thought that a certain pattern of facts

might hold or fail to hold across worlds. Rather, we have deep theoretical intuitions that drive some of us toward externalism and others towards internalism (p.55).

Johnson King's deep theoretical intuition: to "reward people who are trying" (ibid.)

My deep theoretical intuition: how we treat other people is deeply related to our assessments of their mental life and whether it is meeting epistemic standards

5. Strawson's transcendental argument

- What Strawson is trying to do: ultimately show a theoretical conclusion (about free will) follows from consideration of certain everyday practices essential to our humanity
- In characterizing these everyday practices, he draws a distinction between two modes of interaction: the objective and the participant (interpersonal) stance
 - Objective stance:
 - "To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken account, perhaps precautionary account, of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided, though this gerundive is not peculiar to cases of objectivity of attitude" (Strawson, 1962/2008, p. 9).
 - "To the extent to which the agent is seen in this light, he is not seen as one on whom demands and expectations lie in that particular way in which we think of them as lying when we speak of moral obligation; he is not, to that extent, seen as a morally responsible agent, as a term of moral relationships, as a member of the moral community" (ibid., p. 18).
 - Participant stance: a moral/epistemic equal, a fellow human being, a participant in ordinary human relationships, a member of the moral/epistemic community, target of reactive attitudes like resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, and love

6. Kate Manne on internalism about reasons

(P1) A reason is a consideration that can be used in the activity of reasoning with someone.

(P2) If a reason is a consideration that can be used in the activity of reasoning with someone, then internalism about reasons is true.

C) Internalism about reasons is true.

Support

- (P1):
 - o Rejection of externalist picture according to which practical reasons are "the basic unit of practical normativity"
 - "I'm not convinced that there is anything like a sub-atomic particle when it comes to practical normativity. I'm not convinced that practical normativity works in such a way." (Manne 2013, p.295)
 - "What I need you to accept, going forward, is the following of Strawson's suggestions: it is only insofar as one adopts the interpersonal [participant] stance towards someone that it is possible to reason or argue with them, or offer them collaborative advice or friendly suggestions, about what they ought to do. As Strawson elegantly puts it: "If your attitude towards someone is wholly objective, then though you may light him, you cannot quarrel with him, and though you may

talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him. You can at most pretend to quarrel, or to reason, with him.” (1962/2008, p. 10, cited in Manne 2013, p. 296)

- (P2):
 - o Imagine trying to reason with someone. Does it work when you cite considerations they are not at all motivated to accept? No!

7. An argument against factive theories of justification

- (P1) If factive theories are true, then whenever you know someone’s belief is false, you know that their belief is unjustified.
- (P2) To know someone’s belief is unjustified is to be precluded from taking the participant stance towards them in a number of interpersonal interactions.
- (P3) But we regularly do take the participant stance towards others in such interactions when we know their beliefs are false!
- (C) Therefore, factive theories of justification are false.

Support:

- (P1) is implied by J=K
- (P3) should be plausible to anyone who accepts (P2)
- (P2) I can convince you is plausible. Admittedly, this requires saying something about which conversational contexts involve justifying ourselves to one another. I have in mind, the following:
 - o Debating/disagreeing/defending, but also: explaining one’s ideas, answering questions, trying to make oneself understood
 - o When we do this well (i.e. taking the participant stance), we do not behave as though we know their beliefs are not justified. We are open to learning their justification.
 - o There is a kind of open-mindedness to taking the participant stance that precludes behaving as though factive theories are true.
 - o Supported by an analogous argument to Kate Manne’s. We get our concept of justification from practices of justifying ourselves to one another!
 - Cf. “A common picture of justification among epistemologists is that typically when a person is looking at something red, her sense impressions pump in a certain amount of justification for the belief that there is something red in front of her; (...) the justification provided by the senses can be fully or partially undercut, say by evidence that the lighting may be bad: this involves creating a leak (perhaps only a small one) in the pipe from sense impressions to belief, so that not all of the justification gets through. On this picture, the job of the epistemologist is to come up with an epistemological dipstick that will measure what overall level of justification we end up with in any given situation. (Presumably the “fluid” to be measured is immaterial, so it takes advanced training in recent epistemological techniques to come up with an accurate dipstick)” (Field 2008, pp. 249-250).
 - “Of course there are plenty of variations in the details of this picture. For instance, it may be debated what exactly are the sources of the justificatory fluid. (...) Indeed, coherentists claim that the idea of sources has to be broadened: build a complex enough array of pipes and the fluid will automatically appear to fill them. There are also debates about the fluid dynamics. For instance, the question of what exactly are the circumstances under which a valid argument

“transmits justification” from premises to conclusion has been much discussed in recent years. (Ibid., p.250).

8. Problems

- Pretty different from at least some readings of Strawson (is it that determinism is false? or that determinism is/has to be compatible with our everyday responsibility practices).
- Makes justification too central a notion? Some think this is an epistemologist’s notion only (Dutant 2015). Jonathan Ichikawa thinks it leads to a kind of philosophical conservatism (2024).
- Is justification really so central to our practices of justifying ourselves to one another? (I.e. is premise 2 plausible?)
- Should I be more worried about P3?

9. Upshots

- A rationale for why justification is an important concept
- Another instance where thinking about our interpersonal practices tells us something about theoretical debates
- Avenues for future research: which kinds of interactions require justifying ourselves to one another, are there epistemic reactive attitudes? (Tollefson 2017)

References

- Dancy, J. (2000) *Practical Reality*. Oxford University Press.
- Dutant, J. (2015). The Legend of the Justified True Belief Analysis. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 29(1): 95–145.
- Field, H. (2009). Epistemology without metaphysics. *Philosophical Studies*, 143(2):249-290.
- Ichikawa, J. (2024) *Epistemic Courage*. Oxford University Press.
- Johnson King, Z. (2022). Radical Internalism. *Philosophical Issues*, 32(1): 46-64.
- Littlejohn, C. (2012). *Justification and the Truth Connection*. Oxford University Press.
- Littlejohn, C. (forthcoming). A plea for epistemic excuses. In *The New Evil Demon: New Essays on Knowledge, Justification and Rationality*. Oxford University Press.
- Manne, K. (2013). Internalism about reasons: sad, but true. *Philosophical Studies*, 167:89-117.
- McDowell, J. (1982). Criteria, defeasibility, and knowledge. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 68: 455–479.
- McDowell, J. (1988). Singular thought and the extent of inner space. In *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* (pp. 228–259). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Merricks, T. (1995). Warrant Entails Truth. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 55(4): 841-855.
- Mitova, V. (Ed.) (2018). *The Factive Turn in Epistemology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Srinivasan, A. (2015). Normativity without Cartesian Privilege. *Philosophical Issues*, 25(1): 273-299.
- Srinivasan, A. (2020). Radical Externalism. *Philosophical Review*, 129(3): 395-431.
- Strawson, P. F. (2008/1962). Freedom and Resentment. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 48(1-25). (Reprinted in *Freedom and resentment and other essays*, 2nd ed., pp. 1–28, New York: Routledge).
- Sutton, J. (2007). *Without Justification*. MIT Press.
- Tollefson, D. (2017). Epistemic Reactive Attitudes. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 57(4): 356-366).
- Williamson, T. (2000). *Knowledge and its Limits*. Oxford University Press.
- Williamson, T. (2018). Knowledge, Action, and the Practical Turn. In Mitova, V. (Ed.), *The Factive Turn in Epistemology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Williamson, T. (forthcoming). Justifications, Excuses, and Sceptical Scenarios. In *The New Evil Demon: New Essays on Knowledge, Justification and Rationality*. Oxford University Press.