

DEMONS AND THE ISOLATION ARGUMENT

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Justifying a belief gives reason to think that the belief is true. So our concept of justification contains a 'truth connection'. I canvass a number of proposals for analysing this. In the end, two competing conceptions of the truth connection remain: the first, that justifying a belief makes the belief objectively probable, the second, that justifying a belief makes the belief probable in a world which would make true our other beliefs. I discuss reasons for embracing and rejecting these two versions of the truth connection. Ultimately, the two versions appear to represent distinct but equally plausible conceptions of justification. I conclude by rejecting the proposal that these truth connections respectively capture internalist and externalist conceptions of justification.

I. INTRODUCTION

The justification of a belief is intimately connected with our epistemic aim of seeking truth. Justification should be orientated towards truth.

This feature of our concept of justification is pervasive in epistemological discussions. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate. Richard Fumerton writes:

Can we find a way of characterizing epistemic justification that is relatively neutral with respect to opposing analyses of the concept? As a first stab we might suggest that whatever else epistemic justification for believing some proposition is, it must make probable the truth of the proposition believed.¹

Laurence Bonjour:

If epistemic justification were not conducive to truth in this way, if finding epistemically justified beliefs did not substantially increase the likelihood of finding true ones, then epistemology justification would be irrelevant to our main cognitive goal and of dubious worth.²

¹ R. Fumerton, 'Theories of Justification', in P. Moser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology* (Oxford UP, 2002), pp. 204–33, at p. 205.

² L. Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Harvard UP, 1985), p. 8.

And Alvin Goldman:

... which species of belief-forming (or belief-sustaining) processes are intuitively justification-conferring? They include standard perceptual processes, remembering, good reasoning and introspection. What these processes seem to have in common is reliability: *the beliefs they produce are generally true*.³

Indeed, the thesis that justification is truth-linked is put to use in a wide range of discussions. In the passage quoted immediately above, Goldman uses it to support the development of the reliabilist theory of justification.⁴ BonJour (pp. 30–3) uses it to attack foundationalist theories of justification. Crispin Sartwell, after pointing out that ‘on any good account of justification, there must be reason to think that the beliefs justified on the account are likely to be true’, defends the claim that knowledge does not involve justification at all, but is *merely* true belief.⁵ And finally, in a later incarnation, BonJour uses the thesis to criticize coherence theories of justification.⁶ These philosophers defend their reliance on the important link between justified belief and true belief by appealing to our intuitions, the thought being that the link is a central component of our shared ‘folk’ concept of justification. Yet very few have devoted much attention to spelling out that link in any detail.⁷

The aim of this paper is to explain more precisely how our concept of justification connects justification with truth. I call this connection, i.e., the conceptual relationship between justifying a belief and our epistemic aim of having true rather than false beliefs, *the truth connection*. It is important to emphasize that this topic concerns facts about our concepts, in particular a fact about how we think about justification. Accordingly, the correct account of the truth connection need not turn out to be something that can actually be instantiated in the world (although this in itself would be an interesting discovery). As this paper develops, it will become apparent that there are two competing versions of the truth connection, both of which are plausibly supported by well known intuitions about justified belief. One of these concepts fits neatly with paradigmatic instances of ‘internalist’ theories

³ A. Goldman, ‘What is Justified Belief?’, in G. Pappas (ed.), *Justification and Knowledge* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), pp. 1–23, repr. in *Liaisons* (MIT Press, 1992), at p. 10; my italics.

⁴ See Goldman, ‘What is Justified Belief?’, and also his *Epistemology and Cognition* (Harvard UP, 1986).

⁵ C. Sartwell, ‘Why Knowledge is Merely True Belief’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 89 (1992), pp. 167–80.

⁶ BonJour, ‘The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism’, in J. Greco and E. Sosa (eds), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 117–42. See also M. Williams, ‘Scepticism’, in Greco and Sosa, pp. 35–69, for basically the same application of this insight.

⁷ S. Cohen, ‘Justification and Truth’, *Philosophical Studies*, 46 (1984), pp. 279–96, is the exception.

of justified belief, the other with 'externalist' theories. It would be natural, of course, to conclude that we have before us an explication of the way in which the internalist and externalist concepts of justification, respectively, understand the link between justification and true belief. But I shall conclude this paper by showing that this is a mistake: in fact the distinction between these two versions of the truth connection is orthogonal to the distinction between internalist and externalist concepts of justification. Moreover, the two concepts of the truth connection explain differences between various theories of justification in a more illuminating way than does the distinction between internalism and externalism.

II. THE ISOLATION ARGUMENT AND THE COHERENCE THEORY OF JUSTIFICATION

I start by examining the 'isolation argument', one case where the truth connection is used to defend an epistemological conclusion. This will provide convenient constraints on how to develop a characterization of the connection.

The isolation argument is typically pitched as an attack on coherence theories of justification, and it claims that the criterion for justification proposed by those theories is insufficient to ensure likelihood of truth. For a coherence theory of justification, the distinctive feature of a belief system composed of mostly justified beliefs is that there is no *privileged* set of justified beliefs: there is no belief or set of beliefs which comes to be justified in a way that does not involve the agent's other beliefs. For the coherentist, no belief has privileged status, because the justification of every belief will depend at least partly on that belief's relations to many of the agent's other beliefs. Of course, in putting things thus, I am assuming that if we embrace coherentism, this does not automatically commit us to the claim that the justification of a belief is determined *entirely* by the relations that belief has to other *belief* states. Both Christopher Peacocke and Pollock and Cruz have argued that relations between beliefs and (non-belief-like) experiences can also be relevant to the justification of a belief.⁸ As I see it, coherence theories can leave open this possibility. Nevertheless, it is distinctive of coherence theories that the justification of a belief always depends on at least *some* other beliefs.⁹ This can be contrasted with foundationalism, according to which justified beliefs get their justification, directly or indirectly, from a set of

⁸ C. Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts* (MIT Press, 1992); J. Pollock and J. Cruz, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, 2nd edn (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

⁹ See, for example, K. Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), pp. 64ff.

'foundational' beliefs, whose justification in turn does not depend on any other belief.

The *isolation argument* against coherentism begins with the idea that justification is intimately connected with the epistemic aim of getting truths: it does not make sense to suppose that the justification of one's beliefs could float free from our interest in having true beliefs. A theory of justification must preserve the connection between a belief's being justified and a belief's being likely to be true. Unfortunately, runs the objection, coherence theories fail to respect this connection, since they allow for the possibility of alternative systems of false, but justified, belief. I can make this point vivid in the following way: take any system of belief you like, it does not matter how badly or how well my beliefs about the external world fit the facts; so long as these beliefs fit together in the right way, I am justified in what I believe. Coherence theories fail to respect the truth connection, and are therefore not plausible candidate theories of justification. (I should note that the argument I am calling 'the isolation argument' is slightly different from another argument going by the same name, which is endorsed by Pollock and Cruz. They claim that the important lesson we learn from the point about alternative systems is that any theory which makes the justification of *S*'s belief solely a function of *S*'s other beliefs faces the problem of cutting off justification from the world, since it cuts justification off from perception. Steup says something similar.¹⁰ But this line of thought assumes that a coherence theory is committed to the claim that *only* the agent's other beliefs are involved in the justification of the target belief. And as I pointed out above, I do not think that the coherentist is necessarily committed to that claim.)

In recent literature, we find various versions of the isolation argument like the one described above. Bonjour, once a very prominent proponent of the coherence theory, now writes '[It is] impossible to respond to the alternative coherent systems objection or to argue for the connection between coherence and truth' ('The Dialectic of Foundationalism', p. 130). And Michael Williams remarks

A coherence theorist who understands truth 'realistically', as some kind of 'correspondence' to an 'independent' reality, faces the difficult, perhaps insuperable, problem of explaining why satisfying the criteria of coherence makes our beliefs likely to be true (hence why coherentist 'justification' deserves to be thought of as justification at all).¹¹

¹⁰ M. Steup, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1995).

¹¹ Williams, 'Scepticism', p. 64 fn. 11; see also his *Unnatural Doubts* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

I shall represent the isolation argument against coherentism as follows:

1. Any acceptable theory of justification must respect the truth connection (it must respect the relationship between justification and truth described by our shared concept of justification)
2. If a theory of justified belief allows the possibility of radically false, but justified, systems of belief, then the theory does not respect the truth connection
3. The coherence theory of justification allows the possibility of radically false, but justified, systems of belief
4. Thus coherence theories of justification are not acceptable theories of justification.

Coherentist replies to the isolation argument have tended to focus exclusively on premise (3). Keith Lehrer and Lawrence Bonjour (in his earlier work) have both tried to show that a coherent system of belief cannot radically misrepresent the external world it purports to be about. In Bonjour's 1985 defence of coherentism, he argued that belief systems are 'delicate entities', and consequently, over the long run, only a system of belief comprised mostly of truths will survive. Lehrer has provided a different kind of argument, one that relies on his notion of 'undefeated justification'.¹² It is not easy to do justice to Lehrer's argument without at the same time introducing the technical definitions which he employs. But the basic idea can be conveyed as follows. 'Undefeated' justified belief is justified belief which is not based in error. Moreover, the isolation argument is itself an objection which one can be justified in accepting or rejecting. Accordingly, I am justified in rejecting the proposal that I am isolated only if my rejection of this proposal is undefeated by error. Thus according to Lehrer's brand of coherentist justification, a justified system of belief – in particular, an undefeated justified system of belief – cannot be a radically false system of belief.

Rather than addressing premise (3), my focus in this paper is premise (2), the claim that any theory allowing the possibility of justified, but false, systems of belief fails to respect the truth connection. In order to assess the plausibility of premise (2), I must make clear what the truth connection is.

So I turn to the issue of the truth connection. How must we understand the conceptual connection between justification and our epistemic aim of getting truths?

¹² Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 143–4. See also his 'Justification, Coherence and Knowledge', *Erkenntnis*, 50 (1999), pp. 243–58, and *Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd edn (Boulder: Westview, 2001), for a slightly modified version of his notion of undefeated justification.

III. THE OBJECTIVE TRUTH CONNECTION AND COHEN'S DEMON INTUITION

A natural proposal, one suggested by both Fumerton and Williams in the passages quoted above, is the idea that the justification of a belief should make that belief likely to be true, or more likely to be true. I state this thought as follows:

TC. If S 's belief that p is justified, then the belief that p is likely to be true.

(TC) is intended as a *schematic* version of the truth connection, for it leaves open what it means to say that a belief is *likely to be true*. Filling out the schematic version of the truth connection is a matter of providing a detailed explication of this expression. It is a matter of explaining how our concept of justification understands making a belief more likely to be true.

The most obvious proposal for explicating (TC) is to exploit 'objective' probabilities. We might claim that our concept of justification connects justification and truth by requiring that a belief's being justified makes it objectively probable that the belief is true. In other words,

TC₁. If S 's belief that p is justified, it is objectively probable that p is true (or alternatively, p is objectively probable).

(TC₁) makes justification straightforwardly truth-conducive. Having the properties that make a belief justified would give the belief a propensity for being true in the actual world. A critic of coherentism will find (TC₁) attractive, for (TC₁) is a version of the truth connection that makes premise (2) of the isolation argument true. Assuming (TC₁) is true, premise (2) tells us that any theory allowing the possibility of radically false but justified belief systems does not respect the truth connection, since justification must tend to make justified beliefs true. Coherentism would then not adequately capture this feature of our shared concept of justification, and in turn must be a false account of our concept of justification.

This would be the end of the matter if the objective truth connection did not face a disturbing objection, one raised by Stewart Cohen. Suppose that none of us occupies the world we think we do. We are instead all radically deceived by a malevolent demon. And yet despite sharing this unfortunate position, there would continue to be important epistemic differences between us. Some of us would still reason poorly, jump to conclusions, form beliefs on the basis of wishful thinking, and so on. Others of us would do better. We would, among other things, be reasonable, careful in our

arguments, and wary of the influence of our hopes and preferences. In short, despite the deception, many of us would remain more epistemically 'virtuous' than others. Cohen insists, I think rightly, that it is perfectly proper to say that the beliefs of the virtuous are justified ('Justification and Truth', p. 281). For the sake of convenience, I shall call this the *demon intuition*: one can have mostly justified beliefs even in the case where one inhabits a radically deceptive demon world. If this is right, then (TC₁) is wrong. The demon case shows that our concept of justification licenses calling the bulk of a system of beliefs justified even though they are false. Justification need not be truth-conducive.

Yet matters are not so simple. While Cohen's demon intuition provides a compelling consideration against (TC₁), one cannot help but notice that the isolation argument seems to provide the same kind of support in favour of (TC₁) and against whatever concept of the truth connection the demon intuition exploits. I shall turn to examining other possible versions of the truth connection, and in particular, focus on trying to give an account of the truth connection exploited by the demon intuition.

IV. SUBJECTIVE PROBABILITIES

Having noted how *objective* probabilities can be used to make sense of the truth connection, one might start by using 'subjective' probabilities instead. I shall take a moment to examine whether this will work.

Subjective probabilities are distinguished from objective probabilities in the following way. Objective probabilities are assigned to propositions as a way of indicating the likelihood of a proposition's actually turning out to be true, as when we say that there is a 50% chance that the coin will land heads up. Subjective probabilities on the other hand are assigned to the contents of our beliefs as a way of measuring our degree of commitment to the proposition, as when I say I am 90% sure that Hume died in 1776.

It should be clear that a version of (TC) which exploits subjective probabilities is not adequate for our purposes. A subjective version of the truth connection can be stated as follows:

TC₂. If *S*'s belief that *p* is justified, then *p* is subjectively probable for *S*.

(TC₂), while perhaps true, is not an explication of the truth connection, for it gives us no insight into the connection between justification and truth. *S*'s believing that *p* implies by itself that *p* is subjectively probable for *S*. Whether the belief is justified is irrelevant. (TC₂) is true for the sole reason that if *S* has the belief that *p*, then *p* is subjectively probable for *S*. Subjective

probabilities are useful for explicating the way in which truth is involved in the concept of belief, but they do not help us to understand the relationship between truth and justification described by our concept of justification.

V. CONDITIONED OBJECTIVE PROBABILITIES

I have offered two explications of the truth connection: the subjective and the objective. The subjective truth connection, while perhaps true, is not the interesting conceptual connection between truth and justification. The objective truth connection is interesting, but falls prey to the demon intuition.

Perhaps one can exploit objective probabilities in a somewhat more *indirect* way, and thus formulate a version of an objective truth connection that underlies the demon intuition. Instead of supposing, with (TC₁), that justification must be truth-conducive, one might suppose that the property of being justified is a truth-directed property, because a belief that *p* is not justified unless *p* is likely to be true against the background of how one takes the world to be – that is, against the background of all one's evidence. In other words, the content of a belief should be likely to be true, *so far as one knows*. The strategy here is to relativize the objective probability of a belief content to the contents of one's other beliefs. John Pollock and Joseph Cruz express something akin to this idea when they write 'What determines whether a belief is justified is what else the epistemic agent *believes* about the world (and what other directly accessible states he is in) – not what is in fact true about the world' (*Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, p. 141).

Lehrer's coherentist theory of justification provides another example of this strategy (*Theory of Knowledge*, ch. 6). For Lehrer, 'personal' (as opposed to 'undefeated') justification arises when one seeks to accept truth and avoid error by accepting what is most reasonable against the background of one's prior set of beliefs (or what Lehrer calls 'acceptances'). In appealing to one's prior set of beliefs, one is, in effect, asking whether it is reasonable to believe that *p*, given that the world is as one takes it to be. Generalizing somewhat, Lehrer's idea is that a tenable theory of justification must ensure that having justified belief involves the following: when we accept that *p* with the aim of getting truth and avoiding error, we satisfy this aim by testing the plausibility of *p*'s being true against what we already believe about the character and contents of the world.

How can this idea be transformed into a more precise version of the truth connection? Again Cohen offers a suggestion. Having rejected the objective truth connection, he suggests (p. 287) that the 'connection between

justification and truth lies at the subjective or doxastic level'. According to this 'doxastic' approach, 'in order for S to be justified in believing b , S must believe that certain conditions obtain which make the truth of b probable' (p. 288). On the doxastic version of the conceptual connection between justification and truth, one must, when justified in believing that p , also *believe* that p is likely to be true, given that the world is as one takes it to be. In other words,

TC₃. If S 's belief that p is justified, then S believes that p is objectively probable (or alternatively: if S 's belief that p is justified, then S believes that the world is thus and so and believes that the world's being thus and so makes p objectively probable).

The problem with this proposal, as Cohen himself notes, is that it relies on what he calls the *intellectualist model* of justification. If beliefs about objective probabilities were an essential component of one's theory of justification, we would be forced to embrace a kind of unpalatable scepticism. Ordinary people do not possess such beliefs, at least not in any abundance. Are we to suppose that they have correspondingly few justified beliefs? Since this runs against the common sense supposition that 'the folk' really do have roughly as many justified beliefs as they seem to, one must conclude that theories of justification which give a central role to beliefs about objective probabilities fail. In short, (TC₃) cannot be right, for it saddles theories of justification with the false supposition that in order to have a justified belief, ordinary people must have many beliefs it is implausible to suppose they have.

(TC₃) embraced the thought that having justification makes the belief that p likely to be true against the background of the agent's other beliefs. But (TC₃) runs up against a serious anti-sceptical and anti-intellectualist objection. What we need is an alternative way of explicating (TC) that continues to embrace the thesis described by Pollock, Cruz and Lehrer. I believe that the following explication of (TC) accomplishes this.

TC₄. If S 's belief that p is justified, then p is objectively probable under the assumption that S 's other beliefs about the character and contents of the world are true.

(In order to avoid worrisome counter-examples, I suspect that I shall have to narrow the set of beliefs against which the objective probability of the target belief is fixed. For the purposes of the present discussion, the clumsy version of the conditioned truth connection will be adequate.) I call this the *conditioned version of the objective truth connection*,¹³ for it makes the objective

¹³ Something like the conditioned version is endorsed by Goldman in his *Epistemology and Cognition*. I discuss his theory in the next section.

probability of p conditional on the truth of the agent's other beliefs. (TC₄) succeeds in making sense of the claim that the justification of a belief makes the belief likely to be true against the background of what the agent takes the world to be like.

(TC₄) does not fall prey to the problems which plague (TC₂) and (TC₃). Starting with (TC₂), is the conditioned version of the truth connection really a disguised version of the subjective truth connection? Definitely not, for the conditioned version of the truth connection does not exploit subjective probabilities in any interesting way. Subjective probabilities describe degrees of commitment to particular propositions. Accordingly, the assessment of the subjective probability of a proposition p is solely a function of properties of the individual belief that p . Figuring out whether a proposition has a high *objective* probability conditional on one's background system, on the other hand, is a matter of determining whether the proposition p would be objectively probable were the world to be as one thinks it is. Suppose Martha believes that Hume died in 1776. For Martha, this proposition may possess a high subjective probability, 90%, for example. But this high subjective probability notwithstanding, she may have no evidence supporting the belief: that is, against the background of her conception of what the world is like, this proposition may possess a very low objective probability.

It should also be obvious that the conditioned version (TC₄) is not equivalent to (TC₃), Cohen's doxastic version of the truth connection. (TC₄) does not rely on the intellectualist model of justification, for there is no requirement that one must believe that p is probable against the background of one's prior beliefs. Instead, the contents of one's background beliefs about what the world is like constitute a kind of 'virtual' world. The content of the belief whose justification we are assessing must be probable in this virtual world for the belief to be justified. This kind of conditioned objective probability can accrue to a belief that p independently of whether one has *beliefs* about the probability of p against the background of one's prior beliefs.

VI. INTERNALIST AND EXTERNALIST CONCEPTS OF JUSTIFICATION?

I am finally in a position to compare (TC₄) with (TC₁). (TC₁), the straightforward objective truth connection, has it that justification always ensures objective likelihood. Justifying our beliefs will make many of them true. The conditioned version does not do this. If one's background beliefs turn out to be false, then having justified beliefs will not make getting truths very likely. Nevertheless, both versions are meant to respect our intuitions that the truth

connection is in some sense an objective connection between justification and an external reality. But which one is right?

I have already examined a counter-example undermining (TC₁), Cohen's demon case. (TC₁) insists that justification is necessarily a vehicle for getting truths. Consequently, radically false but justified systems of beliefs are ruled out. But the demon intuition seems to show that such a system of beliefs is possible. Hence (TC₁) is suspect.

Yet an entirely analogous argument can be levelled against (TC₄). After all, the isolation argument itself gets its impetus from a brute intuition, the thought that there is something deeply troubling about a radically false system of belief. A justified belief should somehow be beholden to the world. If we instead take *this* intuition as a starting-point, we seem compelled to reject any version of the truth connection (and in turn the corresponding concept of justification) which disconnects the justification of the belief that *p* from the actual truth of *p*.

Taking our intuitions as good evidence for the structure of our concepts seems to suggest that we have more than one concept of justification. This is not a new proposal: philosophers have tried to resolve the tension between so-called internalist and externalist theories of justification by embracing the two-concept view. Very roughly, an internalist concept of justification makes the justification of belief a function of 'internal' properties – properties of belief which are in some sense directly accessible to the agent. The externalist concept on the other hand makes the justification of a belief a function of 'external' properties – properties, for example, of one's cognitive belief-forming mechanisms.¹⁴ One cannot help noticing that these rough characterizations are not very informative, since they define internalism and externalism in terms of internal and external properties. Until an illuminating account of these properties is provided, grouping theories of justification under the rubric of internalism and externalism is a mainly a matter of instinct and intuition. More on this in a moment.

In the light of this, it is not implausible to suggest that (TC₁) and (TC₄) help to give additional content to this distinction. (TC₁) characterizes the way in which the externalist's concept of justification links justified belief to true belief, while (TC₄) characterizes the truth connection implicit in the internalist's concept of justification. Lehrer writes (*Theory of Knowledge*, p. 166):

¹⁴ A good deal of literature has been devoted to the difference between epistemically external and internal properties. For valuable discussions, see W. Alston, 'An Internalist Externalism', *Synthese*, 74 (1988), pp. 265–83; Sosa, 'Scepticism and the Internal/External Divide', in J. Greco and E. Sosa (eds), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 145–57.

The objection raised by Cohen is that if we are deceived in such a way that we are invincibly ignorant of the deception, we are justified in what we believe, none the less.... The example shows that it is internal factors, not external ones, that make us justified.

It does not work out in this way, though: the distinction between (TC₁) and (TC₄) is orthogonal to the distinction between internalism and externalism. It is possible, for example, for an externalist theory to explicate the concept of justification described (in part) by the conditioned objective truth connection (TC₄). And so the difference between internalism and externalism is not captured by different versions of the truth connection. Moreover, (TC₁) and (TC₄) take one further than the distinction between internalism and externalism in understanding the way in which different theories of justification aim at capturing different concepts of justification. To put it simply, it is better to be in the position of having to give names to the accounts, as in the case of (TC₁) and (TC₄), rather than having to provide accounts for the names. It is not hard to see that epistemologists are in the latter position with respect to internalism and externalism. A quick survey of the literature reveals that as much effort goes into trying to understand what the distinction is as goes into arguing in favour of one side.¹⁵ Counter-examples will show that these distinctions are in fact orthogonal.

Goldman's reliabilist theory of justification, defended in his book *Epistemology and Cognition*, is a version of externalism, but appears to reject the straightforward objective truth connection in favour of the conditioned version. Goldman calls his theory *normal worlds reliabilism* (henceforth NW reliabilism). According to the theory, *S*'s belief that *p* is justified if and only if the belief is formed by a cognitive belief-forming process that is reliable in normal worlds. The set of 'normal worlds' is generated by *S*'s general beliefs about the character and contents of the world. Possible worlds consistent with *S*'s general beliefs belong to that set. Thus justified beliefs are beliefs produced by processes that *would* be reliable *if* the actual world belonged to the set of normal worlds (see *Epistemology and Cognition*, pp. 106–7).

The conception of justification described by NW reliabilism fits extremely well with (TC₄), for it makes a justified belief objectively probable only in a world that corresponds in large part with *S*'s other beliefs. As one would expect, NW reliabilism is in keeping with the demon intuition and falls prey to the isolation argument. If we suppose that NW reliabilism is true, and

¹⁵ See, e.g., H. Kornblith (ed.), *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

that although my cognitive belief-forming processes would be reliable were I an inhabitant of the actual world (or the world we take to be the actual world), I am the victim of a malevolent demon and thus possess *de facto* unreliable cognitive processes. In this case, despite the fact that I am unreliable, my system of belief is nevertheless composed of justified beliefs, since my belief-forming processes would be reliable if the world were as I believe it to be.

Goldman's inclusion of the normal worlds apparatus is in fact explicitly aimed at ensuring that his reliabilist theory respects Cohen's demon intuition:

The justificational status of a W-world belief does not depend on the reliability of the causing processes in W. Rather, it depends on the reliability of the processes in *normal worlds*. Now an evil demon world is a paradigm case of a non-normal world. So it does not matter that the processes in question are highly unreliable in that world.

NW reliabilism also falls prey to a version of the isolation argument, a good indication that this argument does not pick out a special problem for coherence theories, but, rather, exploits an intuition against any theories of justification that adopt the conditioned truth connection. All that is required is that we replace premise (3) of the isolation argument against coherentism with a premise which states that NW reliabilism allows the possibility of radically false, but justified, systems of belief. We know that this premise is true, for that is shown by the fact that the theory agrees with Cohen's demon intuition.

One might try to defend NW reliabilism against isolation by claiming that coherence theories and NW reliabilism are not analogous to each other in the relevant respect – the respect that makes the coherence theory susceptible to the isolation argument. Alternative systems were brought to bear against coherentism. Take any system of belief you like: so long as the system is coherent, its constituent beliefs are justified. The point concerning alternative systems does not depend on radically deceptive possible worlds – the presence of a malevolent demon, for example, or brain-in-a-vat scenarios. Regardless of the external world concerned, an infinite variety of justified belief systems are possible, only a few of which happen to be true. Getting it right appears to be an accident. In contrast, according to NW reliabilism, if you occupy a normal world, you will get mostly true beliefs – alternative systems in the same world are made highly unlikely because we have settled on the processes by which those beliefs are formed. Thus NW reliabilism seems to avoid isolating justification from the world, and thus does not seem to fall prey to a version of the isolation argument.

This defence of NW reliabilism seems compelling. Unfortunately, it mistakenly assumes that in evaluating the possibility of alternative systems, we must keep fixed the processes by which our beliefs are formed. Without this assumption, NW reliabilism is susceptible to a version of the isolation argument. Coherence theories were susceptible because any system of belief, so long as it is coherent, is comprised of justified beliefs. On the theory offered by NW reliabilism, we can say something similar. Choose any system of belief you like and any set of belief-forming processes. If the processes would be reliable in a world consistent with the system of belief, then taking that system as the one that fixes normal worlds, we can arrange for our beliefs to come out justified, regardless of what the actual world is like. Thus for any combination of a system of belief and a set of belief-forming processes, so long as they agree in the relevant respect, the system of belief comes out justified. It may seem that NW reliabilism has an advantage over the coherentist by tying justification to belief-forming processes, for after all, surely it cannot be an accident if our belief-forming processes evolve in a way that makes them reliable. But this misses the point. NW reliabilism does not tie justification to the actual reliability of belief-forming processes. Instead, it makes the justification of a belief merely a matter of the proper co-ordination or agreement between belief-forming processes and the 'world' as described by our system of beliefs. Achieving this agreement is no surer guarantee of getting truth than is having a coherent belief system. Hence for NW reliabilism, getting it right appears to be as much an accident as it was for coherentism.

This seems to show that the conditioned truth connection is perfectly consistent with externalist theories, and does not mark out the boundaries of internalism. Perhaps, however, theories like Goldman's NW reliabilism are not in fact externalist theories. What should one make of this suggestion?

Not much, I propose. NW reliabilism makes the justification of a belief depend on properties of our belief-forming processes that are well outside our immediate epistemic purview. Whether our belief-forming processes are reliable in normal worlds is a fact to which we as ordinary agents have no immediate access. But easy epistemic access is the hallmark of internalist theories. In general, it is important to see that many psychological facts can be epistemically external. Sosa makes this point, claiming in 'Scepticism and the External/Internal Divide' that it is a mistake to assume that epistemically external properties must be outside the mind. Internal properties must be directly accessible to the agent; but not all properties of the mind are accessible in this way. As a result, it is safe to assume that we are dealing with an externalist theory.

So it seems that the distinction between internalism and externalism is not fleshed out by the distinction between the objective truth connection and the conditioned truth connection. Some reflection suggests why this is the case. Above, I hinted that ‘internalism’ and ‘externalism’ are names in want of an account. As we collect tools for understanding our concept, or concepts, of justification, intuitive tools such as these should fall by the wayside.

Internalism and externalism capture a characteristic collection of features that together make up a concept of justification. Two of these features are particularly important. First, justification links our beliefs with truth. Some theories of justification hold that the justification of a belief depends exclusively on features distinct from the actual state of affairs which one’s beliefs are about. Such theories are committed to (TC₄), and these theories are typically associated with internalist intuitions. Other theories of justification hold that the justification of a belief is directly linked to the actual state of affairs which the belief is about. Such theories are committed to (TC₁), and these theories are typically associated with externalist intuitions. These associations are typical, but as I have shown, they are not inevitable.

The first feature, then, is the truth connection. This has been the topic of the present paper. The second feature important to our concept of justification is the character of epistemic relations, relations between beliefs and relations between beliefs and other epistemically relevant states.

When we talk about epistemic reasons, we typically posit relations between the target belief, the belief whose justification is at issue, and other beliefs one has. Intuitions about internalism and externalism appear to be at least in part a function of what kinds of relations obtain. This is made evident once one considers the following. Earlier, internalism and externalism were characterized, roughly, in terms of access: the justification of a belief is internal if an agent has relatively unmediated access to the grounds that justify a belief. This characterization is rough precisely because it is uncertain what is meant by ‘access’. Since it is plausible that an account of access begins with an account of the various possible ways in which epistemic relations might obtain, the problem of internalism and externalism reduces, in part, to an account of epistemic relations.

Disagreements about the truth connection and epistemic relations provide two important dimensions along which we can distinguish various theories of justification, and, possibly, distinct concepts of justification. With a discussion of the truth connection in place, the next task for a comprehensive understanding of justification is an examination of epistemic relations.

VII. CONCLUSION

In making sense of the way in which justification furthers our epistemic aim of truth, I have focused on two competing intuitions – the virtuous agent in the demon world, and isolation. These intuitions form the basis of disparate conceptions of the truth connection. Concepts of justification that embrace the conditioned truth connection make the justification of a belief depend exclusively on features distinct from the actual state of affairs one's beliefs are about. That is exactly what any theory committed to (TC₄) does. Coherence theories make justification a function of one's beliefs (and possibly of other things about one). NW reliabilism makes justification a dispositional property of one's cognitive belief-forming mechanisms, namely, their disposition to produce a greater percentage of true beliefs in normal worlds. The result is that these theories allow that one can have mostly false, but justified, beliefs; and thus these theories fall prey to concerns about isolation. Concepts of justification that embrace the straightforward objective truth connection make a justified belief likely to be true. But such theories fall prey to concerns about the virtuous agent in the demon world, someone whose system of beliefs is mostly false, but who nevertheless appears to have justified beliefs.¹⁶

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