

Is There Immediate Justification?

I. James Pryor (and Goldman): Yes

A. Justification

- i. “I say that *you have justification to believe P* iff you are in a position where it would be epistemically appropriate for you to believe P, a position where P is epistemically likely for you to be true. I intend this to be a very inclusive epistemic status.” (181)
- ii. “If there is some state or condition you are in *in virtue of which* you have justification to believe P, I’ll call it a “justification-making condition,” or a *justification-maker* for short.” (182).
- iii. We can draw a distinction between *having justification to believe P* and *appropriately believing P*. For the former, you needn’t actually believe P, there simply must be things that would make your believing P appropriate. For the latter, you must actually believe P and satisfy several other conditions, like believing P for good reasons and taking proper account of any evidence that may undercut your reasons for believing P. (Does this distinction betray a type of internalism?)

B. Immediate Justification

- i. The distinction between mediate and immediate justification is about *type* of epistemic support, rather than either strength of support or how the belief was arrived at.
- ii. Some justification is *mediated*. That is, sometimes your justification for believing some proposition is constituted in part by the justification you have for other propositions. This is one of the two ways that justification can be inferential. (Gas Gauge example)
- iii. Immediate justification does not come from nowhere. It is precisely only justification that does not come from justification for other beliefs.
- iv. Although immediate justification does not *come from* other beliefs you have, it may be the case that you need to have other beliefs in order for you to have the belief for which you’re immediately justified (e.g. beliefs that may be required in order for you to have relevant concepts).
- v. Immediately justified beliefs will usually be defeasible.
- vi. Beliefs can be “epistemically overdetermined”; you can be justified in believing one and the same thing both mediately and immediately.

C. Why Believe in Immediate Justification?

- i. The (Justification-Making) Regress Argument

- a) Four different options
 - Justificatory chain goes on forever.
 - Justificatory chain includes some closed loops.
 - Justificatory chain ends in unjustified belief.
 - Justificatory chain ends in justified belief that is not justified in virtue of any other belief.
 - b) Foundationalist argues that first two are untenable (but, according to Pryor, whether or not they are is not simply obvious, so it's better to turn to a different argument).
- ii. The Argument from Examples
- a) “Suppose I feel tired, or have a headache. I am justified in believing I feel those ways. And there do not *seem* to be any other propositions that mediate my justification for believing it. What would the other propositions be?” (184)
 - b) “I am imagining my grandmother. The way I am imagining her is sitting in her kitchen. Or at least I believe it is. And it seems I could be *justified* in that belief. Again, it is hard to see what other propositions might mediate this justification.” (185)
- iii. (A methodological point: Goldman says that the defender of immediate justification must answer three different questions: Are there immediately justified beliefs? How is immediate justification possible? What is it in virtue of that some states give rise to immediately justified beliefs? Pryor, in this paper, seems only to be concerned with answering the first two. How important, then, should we think answering the third is?)

D. The Master Argument for Coherentism

- i. Foundationalist views and Given Theories are two non-identical subsets of views that believe in immediate justification.
- ii. Coherence theories deny that there is any immediate justification – all justification, they say, comes at least in part from justification of other beliefs.
 - a) Pure coherentists claim that a belief can *only* be justified by other beliefs.
 - b) Impure coherentists claim that some non-beliefs can play a justifying role (such as experiences).
- iii. (A separate problem from Goldman: Justification is, at least in inferential beliefs, *transferred* from one belief or set of beliefs to another. But that which gives rise to the justification in these basic beliefs is not itself justified. So where does the justification come from? Is it just created *ex nihilo*?)

- iv. The Master Argument (historically directed at the Given Theory): In order for any cognitive state to justify any other state, it must have “assertive” or “representational” content. But any state which has such content must itself be justified.
- a) The Content Requirement: In order to be a justifier, you need to have (assertive) propositional content.
 - Only propositions can stand in logical relationships with one another. The most that a sensation can have with a belief is a causal relationship, which cannot show how or why the belief is justified (cf. Davidson quote pp. 186-187)
 - b) Only beliefs or states like beliefs which require epistemic justification have (assertive) propositional content.
 - c) Conclusion: Only beliefs (or similar states) can be justifiers.
- v. Worries about the argument
- a) It could be that all beliefs “require” justification, but are sometimes able to justify others without being justified themselves. If so, the beliefs so justified would count as immediately justified.
 - b) Is this really an argument for coherentism? Where does coherence come in? Coherence is not a belief. (Coherentist reply: justification always comes from content of beliefs, coherence is just shorthand for talk about which sets of beliefs justify and which don't)
 - c) Experiences have assertive propositional content but are not beliefs or even very similar to beliefs. For one, they aren't the types of things it seems possible to justify. Therefore, the Master Argument has not given us reason to exclude experiences from the ranks for justifiers. (Counterexample to 'Only Beliefs').
 - d) (From Goldman on Pryor: For one, it is questionable whether experiences have assertive propositional content. Some, like the experience of a headache, seem not to, and even if they did, you'd need to say what the relationship is between the belief content and the experience content such that the one can justify the other (cf. Goldman on Feldman))
- vi. What about the Content Requirement?
- a) Seems to be motivated by Premise Principle: The only states with propositional content that can be justifiers for P are those that can stand in an inferential relation to P; that is, those that can be used as premises in an argument for P.
 - b) Experiences cannot fit this requirement because the contents of the experiences

typically say nothing about *who* is experiencing them.

- The Premise Principle is about what justifies beliefs, not the process by which you come to have beliefs. So it is possible for your belief to be supported by inferential relations without your actually inferring anything. So, the experience “as of your having hands” could justify your having hands, even if the experience gives your belief justification immediately.
- The Premise Principle does not straightforwardly entail coherentism. (It allows that an experience “as of your having hands” could justify the belief that you have hands)
- “Nor is the Premise Principle *implied by* the view that perceptual justification is mediated. For the latter view says nothing about what justifies our beliefs about our experiences. Perhaps, *contra* the Premise Principle, we are justified in those beliefs merely *by virtue of having* the experiences.” (191)

c) Why believe the Premise Principle...

E. Avoiding Arbitrariness

- i. Objection: If experiences have no representational content, it would just be arbitrary to say they support any one belief rather than another.
- ii. Possible response: Perhaps experiences do have representational content, or some other sort of content or logical structure (like some philosophers think events have) by which they can serve as justifiers.
- iii. (Question: Is this response enough? Depends on where the burden of proof lies.)

F. Evidence and Reasons

- i. Justifiers are things that make your beliefs epistemically appropriate. Often, in the place of “justifier,” philosophers will use words like “evidence” or “reasons.” But insofar as evidence and reasons are things that can probabilify hypotheses, and are things that the hypotheses can be inconsistent with or explain, it seems there is good reason to think they must be propositional.
- ii. Response: “Evidence” and “justifier” may not be perfect synonyms. “Consider that we sometimes use the terms 'belief' and 'desire' to refer to *propositions that* one believes and desires, rather than to *one's states* of believing or desiring them. Similarly, I think, sometimes we use 'evidence' to refer to *propositions that are evident* to one, rather than to the states that make them evident.” (193)
- iii. Typically, when we ask for someone's reasons or justification for some belief, we are

looking for an argument. But an argument has premises, and only propositions can be premises.

- iv. Response: This way of using the word “reason,” which we can call the dialectical notion of a reason, need not be the only one. We can make a distinction between justification-showers and justification-makers.

G. Grounding and Being Guided by Norms

- i. What does it take for a belief to be properly grounded? A natural thought is that your belief in P is properly grounded if you are in some condition C and your belief is formed (or sustained) in a way that is guided by the epistemic norm “When in C, believe P.”
- ii. An epistemic norm is “a claim about how we should be, in epistemic matters.” (195)
- iii. We can make a distinction between believing in accordance with an epistemic norm and being guided by an epistemic norm, just like we can make a distinction between acting in accordance with a reason and acting for that reason.
- iv. So what is it to be guided by an epistemic norm? Since we can do things all the time that involve being guided by norms without actually thinking about the norms (like figuring out why a computer isn't working or playing a musical instrument), we must not have a view that requires too much reflectiveness or deliberateness. We must be even more skeptical of such a view given that it doesn't seem believing is ever an action of ours.
- v. Until we do have a satisfactory view about this, there's no guarantee that it will be one that vindicates the Premise Principle.

II. Michael Williams: No

A. What Are Basic Beliefs?

- i. To say that someone is justified in believing P is to say they are *epistemically entitled* to believe P.
- ii. Justification is a *normative* notion – it has to do with whether one's beliefs meet epistemic standards.
- iii. The purpose of the the standards must be that they somehow help us in our goal of having true beliefs.
- iv. The debate about basic beliefs is not just about whether there is a difference between things you conclude on the basis of argument and those you “just see.”
 - a) Basic beliefs are the “stock in trade” of foundationalists.
 - b) Theoretical commitments of foundationalists include:

- “Traditional foundationalism is *substantive*, rather than merely formal. According to substantive foundationalism, the class of basic beliefs is *theoretically tractable*. In particular, there are non-trivially specifiable kinds of beliefs, individuated by broad aspects of their content, that are fitted to play the role of terminating points for chains of justification. The distinction between basic and non-basic beliefs is thus ontological rather than merely methodological.” (203)
 - Foundationalism is *strong*. Basic beliefs are meant to be indubitable or (weaker) incorrigible. Basic beliefs always count as knowledge.
 - “Traditional foundationalism is *atomistic*. Basic beliefs provide absolute terminating points for justificatory chains. To do so, basic beliefs must be independent both *epistemically* and *semantically* of other justified beliefs. Since basic beliefs constitute *encapsulated* items of knowledge, there is no objection in principle to the idea of a first justified belief.”
 - “Traditional foundationalism is *radically internalist*. The justification-making factors for beliefs, basic and otherwise, are all open to view, and perhaps even actual objects of awareness. At the base level, when I know that P, I am always in a position to know that I know that P, and perhaps even always *do* know that I know that P.”
- c) Common-sense examples of non-inferential beliefs do not obviously meet these conditions.
- “Ordinary examples of non-inferential beliefs come in a bewildering variety, displaying no obvious theoretical integrity.”
 - “Ordinary non-inferential beliefs seem often to be only *prima facie* justified, hence corrigible.” (204)
 - Having ordinary non-inferential beliefs requires a mastery of concepts that makes the beliefs not semantically free-standing.
 - Many non-inferential beliefs result from the “unselfconscious” exercise of generally reliable faculties, without, it seems, any need for being able to assess the reliability of those faculties.
- v. “Basic belief” is a theoretical concept which plays a part in a distinctively philosophical program. Therefore, common-sense examples will not be enough to settle the issue of whether there are any basic beliefs.

B. The Agrippan Argument

- i. Foundationalists argue that if you aren't a foundationalist, you must be a coherentist, which is open to fatal objections. Coherentists argue that if you aren't a coherentist, you must be a foundationalism, which is open to fatal objections.
- ii. But why think these are the only two options? Why think we need to have a *theory* of knowledge at all?
- iii. Theories of knowledge can be seen as trying to answer skeptical arguments about the possibility of knowledge.
 - a) Agrippa's trilemma: Find a belief that is justified inferentially. Ask how that belief is justified. If further propositions are brought up, ask how belief in those is justified. If further propositions are brought up, ask how belief in those is justified....
 - Either the justificatory chain goes on forever.
 - The justificatory chain stops with a proposition for which there is no justification.
 - The justificatory chain eventually traces back to reasons that include the original belief for which justification was sought.
 - b) Most epistemologists accept one of the options, though they “put a better face on them.” Foundationalists take the second, but claim the chain-stopping belief can be justified all by itself. Coherentists take the third, but say that the circle is not vicious because justification is not linear.
 - For foundationalists, justification is *atomistic* and “bottom up.”
 - For coherentists, justification is *holistic* and “top down.”

C. Skepticism and Philosophical Understanding

- i. The skeptic's question, as mentioned above, is about the possibility of knowledge *in general*. Any explanation of knowledge that takes some things for granted as known will fail to satisfy the skeptic. The skeptic imposes a *Totality Condition* on a properly philosophical understanding to knowledge and justification.
- ii. The Totality Condition creates pressure to accept internalism about justification and knowledge, which says that in order to be justified in believing something, we must have some sort of cognitive access to the things by which the belief is justified.
- iii. Externalism, on the other hand, says that a belief can be justified simply in virtue of the process by which it is generated, irregardless of whether the believer has any knowledge at all about that process. “Presumably, the 'knowledge' we attribute to animals is like

- this. According to externalists, human knowledge is not *essentially* different.” (207)
- iv. “Prima facie, internalism is not particularly plausible, at least if it is taken as a fully general view of ordinary justification...However, *in the peculiar context of the skeptical challenge*, it is easy to persuade oneself that externalism is not an option.” (207)
 - v. The externalist can easily sketch a coherent way the world might be such that we have knowledge, but it is not enough to answer the skeptic to show that knowledge is a logical possibility. “We want a replay not just to the claim that we know nothing, but also to the meta-skeptical claim that for all we know, we know nothing. This too pushes us towards internalism.” (207)
 - vi. Also, philosophy is a reflective discipline and is usually conducted from a first-person standpoint. Externalism analyses knowledge from a third-person point of view.
 - vii. It is these internalist-leaning features of the skeptical problem that explain the “otherwise puzzling features of traditional foundationalism.”

D. The Appeal to the Given

- i. “Wilfrid Sellars coined the phrase “the Myth of the Given” to refer to the doctrine that some things are “immediately” known...In my view, Sellars's objections to the Myth have never been successfully rebutted. Recent would-be resurrections of traditional foundationalism are just attempts to square the same old circles. The repetitiveness of the debate reflects constraints on a solution to skepticism that are built into the way foundationalists understand the problem.” (209)
- ii. Basic beliefs are often said to be self-evident or self-justifying, but there must be a distinction between those involving necessary truths (like mathematical beliefs, where understanding a proposition is a sufficient condition for recognizing its truth), and those involving empirical judgments.
- iii. Schlick on the given
 - a) A priori judgments are analytic; that is, true by virtue of meaning.
 - b) Empirical judgments, though not analytic, *resemble* analytic judgments.
 - c) There are two sorts of meaning-generating rules
 - Discursive definitions, which generate analytic truths
 - Ostensive definitions, which introduce empirical content to the language
 - d) Basic observational judgments essentially involve indexical terms
 - e) Observation-terms (like “red”) can be understood phenomenally.
 - f) So, when I say, for example, “this is red,” I must both be focusing on something

currently present in my experience and I must have a good grasp of what sorts of things are called “red.” Given this, the only way I could be mistaken is by either focusing on the wrong thing or misapplying the rule for picking out red things. Since I am unlikely to be making those errors, its hard to see how I could be mistaken in my judgment, even though it reports a genuine empirical fact.

- iv. Since this account relies on my ability to consistently pick out red things, doesn't it sneak in a reliability condition?
- v. “The standard reaction to this question is to insist that purely phenomenal concepts must not just cancel any implications of extra-experiential existence: they must also be “non-comparative.” But how does “This is (non-comparatively) F” differ from “This is hat it is”? Basic judgments threaten to buy their immunity from error at the cost of being drained of descriptive content altogether” (210)
- vi. Traditional foundationalists think it is important that the contents of sensory experience are “directly apprehended.” Their view contains, then, three important elements: the sensory experience, the basic belief or judgment that the experience is of such and such a character, and some kind of relation between the experience and the judgment which underwrites the judgment's epistemic appropriateness. But what is this relation?
- vii. The contents of sense-experience have traditionally been thought of as pre-conceptual qualitative particulars with which one is directly acquainted. Knowledge comes from the conceptualization of this raw material.
- viii. But, Sellars asks, how can this raw material ever lead to belief without being conceptual? If it has no propositional content, it cannot function as a reason for a belief, and if it is, then we haven't really explained the epistemic authority of the knowledge.
- ix. “Russellian acquaintance is supposed to be *sui generis*, distinct from both knowing how and knowing that We have no pretheoretical understanding of the appeal of the given and, if the argument of the previous paragraph is correct, no theoretical understanding either. Talk of the given, or knowledge by acquaintance, is a *deus ex machina*, introduced to do the job epistemologists think that they need to get done. It has no other justification.” (211)
- x. Talk of acquaintance with facts won't help either: “Such understanding as we have of talk of acquaintance with facts is *derived from* our common-sense conception of seeing that things are thus and so.” (212)
- xi. Bonjour on the given

- a) Sensory awareness involves a constitutive non-apperceptive awareness of its content.
 - b) The relationship between the sensory content and judgment is neither logical nor causal – it is descriptive.
 - c) Descriptions will have more or less accuracy of fit with the object described (ie, the sensory content).
 - d) Since the object being described is a conscious state, it is one with which we are directly acquainted, so there is no need for further conceptual description.
- xii. Replies
- a) Bonjour still hasn't given any non-ad-hoc reason for thinking we can have a non-conceptual awareness of the content of our experiences.
 - b) Even if he had, he hasn't given any reason to think judgments come to in such a way would be *justified*. Maybe we are really bad at describing the contents of our experience.
 - c) Bonjour's motivation for saying that we can be directly aware of a judgment's fit with the contents of our experience is to stop an infinite regress, which he sees as artificial and not in need of answering. But the hardcore externalist says the same thing about the skeptical regress. Why accept this in one case and not the other?

E. Conclusion

- i. If we can't have basic beliefs, and coherentism is badly flawed, we may just have to give up on trying to get the type of philosophical theory of knowledge epistemologists have traditionally sought.
- ii. It may be the case that, like with rules of fair play, all we can give are some very specific constraints on justification and never a systematic theory.