

## Evidentialism and Truth

One might well begin a discussion of epistemic justification by wondering why a philosopher should be particularly interested in the concept. And perhaps the most natural answer is that justification is important because it has some sort of connection to *truth*. After all, as cognitive agents our primary concern is to arrive at the truth concerning matters about which we are curious. And if having justified beliefs makes it no more likely that we have true beliefs, why would we *care* whether or not we have justified beliefs? And herein lies a superficially powerful argument for various versions of externalism. The externalist will often proclaim that only externalist accounts of justification manage to secure the crucial connection between having justified beliefs and having beliefs that are (mostly) true. If this claim is correct, versions of evidentialism might face a powerful objection.

Ironically, this very feature of externalism that its proponents claim as a strength is also one of its great vulnerabilities. Having *too* strong a connection to truth is a double-edged sword. First, it is surely a datum that there can be epistemically justified false beliefs. I can have powerful evidence that your name is “Fred” when it isn’t, that I was born on October 7th when I wasn’t, that I will arrive safely in Chicago on Tuesday when I won’t, and so on. If these justified beliefs can be false, then why can’t most or, even all of my justified beliefs be false?

An affirmative answer to the question posed in the consequent of the above conditional doesn’t follow, of course, from its antecedent. Such a presupposition commits the fallacy of composition. But the fallacy of composition isn’t one of those charges that one should just wave around in dismissing an argument. There is, to be sure, such a fallacy. One can’t infer that my car weighs under 200 pounds, because each of its components weigh under 200 pounds. One can’t infer that it is possible for (P and not-P) to be true because it is possible for P to be true and it is possible for not-P to be true. But on the other hand there does seem to be an intimate connection between all of the components of my car being made of metal and my car being made of metal. And if P and Q are logically independent propositions, and it is possible for P to be true and it is possible for Q to be true, then surely it is possible for P and Q to be true. One needs an explanation of why the world won’t allow most justified beliefs to be false even if it allows each individual justified belief to be false.

Additionally, most evidentialists (and, more generally, most internalists) will argue against many forms of externalism by describing hypothetical situations in which it seems to them obvious that there can be subjects enjoying perfectly rational, justified beliefs despite the fact that through deception or bad luck they are doomed to massive error. The so-called “new evil demon problem” is a thorn in the side of most externalists. After seeing movies like *Total Recall* or *The Matrix* it is even easier now than it has ever been to imagine victims of massive hallucination. Computers have replaced evil demons, but the plot is essentially the same. In *The Matrix* the subjects undergoing vivid hallucination surely have reached perfectly reasonable conclusions about their whereabouts even though such conclusions are nearly always false.

The new evil demon problem is most acute for reliabilists—philosophers who try to define justified beliefs as reliably produced beliefs, and who understand, in turn,

reliably-produced beliefs as beliefs that are usually true relative to the way in which they were formed (at least when the input beliefs are true).<sup>1</sup> But variations on the problem of massive deception will face just about any version of externalism. Michael Bergmann, for example, eschews reliabilism for the view that beliefs are epistemically justified when (in part) they are produced by processes that are functioning as they were originally designed to function (2007, p. 133). The process in question need only be reliable when operating in the environment for which it was designed. Bergmann can, then, allow that one can move *into* a demon world and still have justified beliefs provided that our dispositions to respond to sensation with external-world beliefs were designed for a non-demon environment. It doesn't matter how long one is deceived, or how often one falls into error—the justificatory status of the beliefs remains positive because the mechanism that produces them is still conforming to its design plan—a design plan that was reliable in the environment for which it was designed.

But a view like Bergmann's might be accused of having the worst of two worlds. It fails to secure a tight connection between having justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs, and it is still vulnerable to a variation on the evil demon argument. The fundamental intuition driving the above objection to externalism is the thought that cognitive agents who are massively deceived in the way envisioned will still have justified beliefs. And we can easily imagine a world *designed* by a demon to deceive people. Why would our intuition be any less strong that the victims designed and chosen for deception nevertheless still have justified beliefs?

In what follows I want to explore more carefully the implications of various views for the connection between justification and truth, and address the more important question of what one *should* take the relevant connection to be.

### *Some Terminological Issues:*

This book focuses on evidentialism and its discontents. You will already have noticed that I have been playing rather loose with the term “evidentialism,” often using it almost interchangeably with the term “internalism.” I've always been a bit uncomfortable with the term “evidentialism” and its corresponding slogan that it is only one's evidence that justifies one's beliefs. Conee and Feldman, the philosophers most closely associated with the label, are clearly sympathetic to a version of foundationalism according to which there are noninferentially justified beliefs. To be sure, any plausible version of foundationalism will still hold that there is some feature of a noninferentially justified belief that gives it that special epistemic status, but it is often a bit strained to characterize the feature in question as *evidence* possessed by the believer. That aside, I will proceed on the assumption that an evidentialist allows that S's belief that P can be epistemically justified even if that justification is not derived from the having of other justified beliefs.

As I understand the current debate, self-proclaimed evidentialists are certainly on the side of internalism when it is understood a certain way. Unfortunately, as many have illustrated in some detail, there is no one universally accepted way of understanding the

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<sup>1</sup>As we'll discuss in more detail below, the reliabilist will almost certainly distinguish between noninferential and inferential justification, and further will struggle to define more precisely (and more plausibly) the critical notion of reliability.

internalism/externalism debate in epistemology. Painting with a broad stroke, we should distinguish at least the following versions of internalism (and corresponding versions of externalism):

*Access Internalism:*

The access internalist is committed to the view that something J can justify S in believing P only if S has actual or potential access to the fact that J is a justifier of S's belief that P. (Where we distinguish one's possessing evidence and the fact that the evidence makes likely P for S, I am using J to refer to the conjunctive fact that S possesses the evidence and that it does make likely P for S). The access in question is often taken to be direct access in the form of introspection coupled with, perhaps, a priori knowledge of evidential connections). Almost all versions of access internalism flirt with vicious regress and the evidentialists we are considering here reject the view.

*Mentalism or Internal State Internalism:*

Conee and Feldman introduce the term "mentalism" to refer to the version of internalism they accept (2001). The heart of the view is that the epistemic status of a belief supervenes exclusively on the mental states of the believer. The strongest version of the view holds that the relevant epistemic properties of a belief at t supervene exclusively on S's mental states at t. A weaker version of mentalism might allow that one's *past* mental states can still play an epistemic role in justifying present beliefs.

There are two potentially misleading features of this initial characterization of the view. The first is that it seems to leave out of consideration the critical evidential connections between justification and what it justifies. But Conee and Feldman could take evidential connections between the relevant mental states and what they justify to hold necessarily. On such a view, because a necessary truth is entailed by everything, there is a *sense* in which if mentalism is true, the epistemic status of a subject's belief will still be entailed by the mental states themselves.

The second complication concerns the ongoing internalism/externalism controversy concerning the content of mental states themselves. It is almost the received view now (though it is, I am convinced, mistaken) that the content of intentional states is ontologically fixed in part by features of the world external to the subject in that intentional state. If a "mentalist" in epistemology is a content externalist, then one must worry that the "internalism" espoused by the mentalist might be an externalism in disguise. It is for that reason that I prefer the less elegant locution "internal state internalism" to refer to the kind of view that I think Conee and Feldman have in mind by "mentalism." For these purposes we can understand S's internal states as states of affairs that can obtain even when no entity other than S exists.

*Inferential Internalism:*

In what follows I'll sometimes make reference to a view that I call inferential internalism. This is a view about what is necessary for inferential justification. The inferential internalist claims that for S to be inferentially justified in believing P on the

basis of E, S must be aware that E makes likely P (where E's entailing P can be viewed as the upper limit of E's making likely P). Because the inferential internalist emphasizes the importance of access to evidential connections the view can easily be confused with access internalism. But it is quite distinct. Inferential internalists may deny that one needs access to noninferential justification in order to possess it, and, indeed, may deny that one needs access to inferential justification in order to possess it. The view requires only access to the connection between one's premises and one's conclusion in order for one to acquire inferential justification for believing the conclusion on the basis of justified belief in the premises.

With these distinctions in place, let us return to questions concerning the connection between having justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs.

*Noninferential Justification and True Belief: Internalist and Externalist Perspectives:*

There is considerable irony in the fact that most contemporary externalists stress the importance of securing a connection between justification and truth, while their internalist critics often attack externalism by denying the relevant connection. Descartes, the patron saint of many internalists, was clearly obsessed with finding an internal feature of beliefs that distinguish the true from the false. His search for the foundations of an ideal system of knowledge just was the search for beliefs supported in such a way that the support precludes the possibility of error. If we think of the foundations he wanted as noninferentially justified beliefs, then he seemed to want being noninferentially justified to *entail* being true.

It is not only the desire for certainty that has led some philosophers to seek infallible foundations. Some philosophers (C. I. Lewis, 1946; Tim McGrew, 1999) have argued that there must be epistemically infallible beliefs if there is to be any weaker sort of justification. The gist of the claim is that a claim about epistemic probability is always implicitly relativized to evidence. So P can be probable for S only relative to some other proposition E1. If E1 is itself merely probable it will of necessity be probable only relative to some other proposition E2, and so on ad infinitum. The whole point of foundationalism is to avoid such regresses, so to find a foundation that accomplishes its goal we are going to need to find propositions that are not merely probable for us. The argument has never seemed to me plausible. As we shall see shortly, there are versions of internalist foundationalism that seek to explain fallible foundational justification without relativizing the merely probable foundation to some other known or justifiably believed proposition.

There are different ways of embracing an infallibilist account of foundationally justified belief. On one approach, the search is for a *belief* the mere existence of which guarantees its truth. The paradigm for Descartes is, of course, your belief that you exist. On another approach, however, the search is for a kind of justification one might possess where the *justification* guarantees the truth of what is believed. So on my view, for example, the paradigm of noninferential justification consists in direct acquaintance with a correspondence between thought (the bearer of truth value) and the fact that is the truth-maker for that thought. Since direct acquaintance is a real relation that guarantees the existence of its relata, it is trivially true that one's being acquainted with the fact that P

entails that P is true. Furthermore, the entailment is nontrivial in the sense that the truthmaker is a constituent of the justification. This last point helps deal with the technical problem that all necessary truths are (again, trivially) entailed by everything—it allows us to introduce the concept of an epistemically *relevant* entailment.

Internalists aren't the only philosophers trying to build truthmakers into the justification for foundationally justified belief. Armstrong's (1973) externalist paradigm of foundational knowledge is a belief caused by the fact that makes it true. If we extend the concept of justification to this property of a belief, then, again, the justification for the belief will (trivially) entail the truth of the belief. So the internalist/externalist controversy doesn't necessarily divide philosophers over the connection between noninferential justification and truth. Each side can maintain a very tight connection—each side can identify noninferential justification with infallible justification.

Furthermore, just as both internalists and externalists might identify noninferential justification with justification that guarantees true belief, so also each side may have the resources to weaken the connection between noninferential justification and truth. Most obviously, perhaps, the reliabilist can allow for noninferential justification that is no stronger than the weakest of inferential justification. On standard versions of reliabilism a belief is noninferentially justified when it is produced by a reliable process where either the input to the process is something other than a belief (e.g. a sensation), or where the input includes belief states, but where the epistemic status of the input belief states is irrelevant to the epistemic status of the “output” belief (e.g. introspection of what one believes). In Goldman's classic original presentation of reliabilism, he described the processes that yield noninferentially justified beliefs as unconditionally reliable belief-independent processes. The process is described as unconditionally reliable because its reliability isn't conditional on the input beliefs being true. On the crudest characterization of the view, an unconditionally reliable process is simply one that produces mostly true beliefs. A process can be reliable in this sense if only 51% or the beliefs it produces are true. But we still appear to have a tight conceptual connection between having noninferentially justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs.

Appearances can be deceiving, however. As Goldman and others would be quick to admit, everything depends on one's characterization of reliability. As I indicated above, the crudest version of the view defines an unconditionally reliable process as one that produces mostly true beliefs. Such a view secures the connection between having noninferentially justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs, but it also faces the same objections encountered by equally crude characterizations of probability defined in terms of relative frequency. On the crudest relative frequency conception of probability, the probability of a's being G relative to its being F is simply a function of the actual percentage of F's that are G. But on such a view, if there is only one silver coin (with a heads and a tail) and it is tossed only once, then the probability of its coming up heads will be either 1 or 0. And that's an absurd consequence of the view. In the same way, the reliabilist must allow for the possibility of a belief-independent process that kicks in only once producing either a true or false belief. It would be equally absurd to suppose that the process in question was, *for that reason*, either completely reliable or completely unreliable. The moral seems to be that one must abandon actual frequencies in defining both the relative frequency conception of probability, and the critical concept of

reliability needed to analyze the base clause in a reliabilist's recursive analysis of justification.

There are, of course, alternatives. Most obviously one can turn to counterfactuals. What makes a belief-producing process reliable (whether or not it ever actually processes any input) is that it *would* produce mostly true beliefs if it *were* used indefinitely many times, where the percentage in question would continue to converge on some particular percentage the more the process were employed. Turning to counterfactuals takes care of some of the most obvious counterexamples, but still, of course, faces the new evil demon problem. The existence of the unrelenting demon makes it true not only that the actual frequency with which perceptually-based beliefs are true is very low—it also makes it true that beliefs produced that way would continue to be false no matter how many times the process were employed. But in addition, counterfactual reliability severs a necessary connection between having noninferentially justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs. Just as one can toss a fair coin twenty times and have it turn up heads all 20 times, so also on this conception of justification one can, in principle, have indefinitely many justified false beliefs in the actual world.

As we noted, earlier Bergmann's proper-functioning account of epistemic justification doesn't avoid variations on the demon problem and, importantly for the present discussion, fails to preserve not only an actual connection between justification and truth, but also fails to preserve even a counterfactual connection between justification and truth. And so it goes for other attempts to avoid counterexamples. Goldman himself once tried to define epistemic justification in terms of "normal worlds" reliability (1986). Roughly, normal worlds are worlds in which things are *fundamentally* as they are believed to be in this world. Reliability is defined in terms of truth ratio of output beliefs in normal worlds. But given that this might not be a normal world, there is obviously no necessary connection on this account between having justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs, or even having justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs in "close" possible worlds.

David Henderson and Terrence Horgan (2007) have toyed with the idea of introducing the notion of transglobal reliability (a kind of super reliability) in defining a concept of epistemic justification. A process is transglobally reliable if it yields mostly true beliefs in most possible worlds. Again, justification defined in terms of transglobal reliability allows for the possibility that most actual justified beliefs are false. It even allows for the possibility that most justified beliefs in close possible worlds are false. I suppose the idea is that one can still take comfort in the fact that it is unlikely (in a frequency sense) that the actual world or its close counterparts are worlds in which one has mostly false justified beliefs. But as Henderson and Horgan know full well, the very notion of transglobal reliability is problematic. For any belief-producing process that is only contingently (actually or counterfactually) reliable there are infinitely many possible worlds in which the process is (actually or counterfactually) reliable and infinitely many possible worlds in which that same process is (actually or counterfactually) unreliable. It's hard to understand the sense in which any such process could be reliable in "most" possible worlds.

To be honest, however, I actually agree that there is an intuitive sense we can make of the critical concept upon which Henderson and Horgan rely. Suppose, for example, that someone is asked to randomly select a number. Intuitively, there are more

possible worlds in which the number selected is not 2 than there are possible worlds in which the number selected is 2, and that is the case even though there are infinitely many possible worlds in which the number selected is 2, and infinitely many possible worlds in which the number selected is not 2. But I suspect that our intuitive understanding of this sort of talk is parasitic upon our prior understanding of epistemic probability. The fact is that we know that it is unlikely relative to our evidence that a person will select the number 2 and that is all we mean by saying that there are “more” possible worlds in which that doesn’t happen. If I’m right it is not even clear that justification defined in terms of transglobal reliability is an alternative to evidentialism (as defined above).

I have argued that paradigmatic externalists can attempt to understand noninferential justification without building the truth conditions for a belief into the having of noninferential justification. But I have also argued that plausible attempts to do so run the danger of severing the connection between having noninferentially justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs. But a similar problem will probably affect the internalist who moves towards a “modest” foundationalism that allows for fallible noninferential justification. So I have argued, for example, that one might allow that one can have a noninferentially justified false belief that P when one is directly acquainted with the thought that P and a “quasi-correspondence” between that thought and a fact very similar to the fact that P. At the very least it seems to me plausible to suppose that one can recognize that beliefs under such circumstances enjoy more justification than other obviously absurd beliefs.<sup>2</sup> If one allows that direct acquaintance with a fact other than the truthmaker for a belief can yield noninferential justification, it is hard to see how one could put an a priori limit on the number of such noninferentially justified beliefs. And once again, one runs the danger of severing a conceptual connection between having noninferentially justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs. To be sure, the acquaintance theorist might argue that there is still a connection between having noninferentially justified beliefs and having beliefs that are at least “almost” true, but being almost true isn’t as good as being true.

Of course, the attempt to understand noninferential justification in terms of direct acquaintance is only one version of evidentialism (internal state internalism). Conee himself seems to be sympathetic to a version of epistemic conservatism (2004). Like Mike Huemer (2001), Conee appears to think that the mere fact that it seems to one as if P can (noninferentially) justify one in believing P. And if this “seeming” is an intentional state that carries no guarantee of truth, there seems to be no reason why there can’t be indefinitely many noninferentially justified, but false beliefs. Indeed, more generally, any version of mentalism that allows a mental state to confer noninferential justification on a belief when the mental state does not include as a constituent the truthmaker for the belief will, I believe, be committed to the view that one can have mostly false noninferentially justified beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

So where are we? If we want a strong connection between noninferential justification and truth, who has the upper hand—the externalist or the evidentialist (internal state internalist)? We have seen that there are versions of both internalism and

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<sup>2</sup> See also Fales (1996).

<sup>3</sup> And this includes a plethora of mentalist accounts of noninferential justification. Chisholm’s foundationalism, for example, seems to allow for the possibility of indefinitely many noninferentially justified beliefs.

externalism that secure the tightest connection possible between noninferential justification and truth. We have also seen that there are also versions of both views that allow for fallible noninferential justification and that even *plausible* reliabilism allows for the possibility that most noninferentially justified beliefs are false. It is not clear that either side in this dispute is better positioned to develop an intimate conceptual connection between having noninferentially justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs.

Of course, any philosopher who has introduced the possibility of weak (fallible) noninferential justification can introduce a technical notion of *epistemic* probability. One can argue that a noninferentially justified belief is, by definition, a belief that is *epistemically* likely to be true. So even if one's noninferentially justified beliefs are mostly false, they can still be epistemically likely. But the technical concept of epistemic likelihood just obfuscates the issue we are discussing here. We were concerned with the question of who has the upper hand when it comes to securing a connection between having epistemically justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs. If our beliefs can be "likely" to be true while most of them are false, we have still lost the relevant connection between epistemic justification and truth.

#### *Inferential Justification and Truth: Internalist and Externalist Perspectives:*

While traditional (internalist) foundationalism can attempt to secure a tight connection between noninferential justification and truth, it will have a much more difficult time getting the connection between inferential justification and truth. At least this is so if the foundationalist allows for the possibility of fallible inferential justification. And any philosopher who doesn't allow for the possibility of fallible inferential justification will inevitably reach a relatively radical skeptical conclusion.

Earlier, I talked about inferential internalism—the view that one can be inferentially justified in believing P on the basis of E only if one can be aware that there is an evidential connection between E and P. The view isn't very popular these days (though it was once almost presupposed by most epistemologists, certainly those who took the challenge of skepticism seriously). But if one accepts the principle of inferential justification, one can avoid a vicious regress only if one allows that there are propositions describing evidential connections that can be known a priori. In short one would need to embrace a Keynesian notion of epistemic probability according to which claims that one proposition makes probable another are synthetic necessary truths knowable a priori. The only way that one can construe a probability claim as a necessary truth knowable a priori is to strip it of *empirical* content. And if one strips the claim of empirical content one severs the conceptual connection between having inferentially justified beliefs based on evidence and having inferentially justified beliefs that are mostly true.<sup>4</sup>

Although the evidentialists/mentalists might well reject the principle of inferential justification as requiring too much for inferential justification, they too are likely to end up committed to the view that propositions describing evidential connections are necessary truths. We saw earlier that the evidentialist is committed to the view that the epistemic justification one possesses for one's beliefs strongly supervenes on one's (internal) mental states. The mentalist's claim covers both noninferential *and* inferential

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of this issue, see Fumerton, 1995, Chapter 7, and Russell, 1948.



justification. Like virtually all other foundationalists, most evidentialists are committed to a recursive analysis of justification. One's understanding of inferential justification is parasitic upon one's understanding of noninferential justification—the base clause of the recursive account of justification is a statement describing conditions sufficient for noninferential justification. So the mentalist will want a subject's internal states to entail truths about that subject's noninferential justification. And the truths about noninferential justification will in turn entail truths about the subject's inferential justification for believing various propositions. But the existence of the inferential justification will obviously depend on the existence of evidential connections between propositions for which one possesses noninferential justification and the other propositions for which one possesses only inferential justification.

There are only two ways truths describing evidential connections could be entailed by truths about internal states. The first is the highly implausible view that propositions describing evidential connections just are, somehow, descriptions of the subjective states of individuals. One might hold, for example, that E is evidence for S to believe P when S *takes* E to make probable P (where the relevant notion of probability would need to be independently defined), or when S *believes* P as a result of believing E (where the causal connection itself supervenes strongly on internal states). Such views require a radical relativism and subjectivism about what constitutes evidence for what. Although we saw that Conee has some sympathy with epistemic conservatism, certainly Feldman would have little interest in defending a view that radical.

The other way that propositions describing evidential connections could be entailed by truths describing internal states is if such propositions are themselves necessary truths of the sort needed by the inferential internalist. On such a view, truths describing evidential connections would trivially be entailed by truths describing the internal states of believers (indeed would trivially be entailed by all truths). It is precisely because the entailment is trivial that one could still maintain, as the mentalist does, that both noninferential *and* inferential justification strongly supervene on the internal states of believers.

The point can be summarized easily. The existence of appropriate probabilistic connections (or on the inferential internalist's view, justified belief in the existence of such connections) is a necessary condition for one's possessing inferential justification. The truth of such propositions is either contingent or necessary. If such propositions are contingent and their content goes beyond a description of the subjective states of believers then the mentalist's thesis is false. But only the most radical versions of subjectivism and relativism would hold that propositions describing evidential connections are *contingent* propositions describing the subjective states of a believer. The only other alternative consistent with mentalism is the view that propositions describing subjective states are necessary truths trivially entailed by propositions describing the subjective states of believers. But a view that strips propositions describing evidential connections of empirical content severs a necessary connection between having inferentially justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs.

At first glance, then, an externalist, in particular, a reliabilist seems to have the upper hand when it comes to the possibility of securing a connection between having inferentially justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs. But as we saw earlier, appearances can be deceiving. Consider again the externalist view most explicitly

concerned with establishing a connection between justification and truth—process reliabilism.

As we saw earlier, the reliabilist cannot plausibly identify the reliability of a noninferential belief-forming process with the actual frequency with which it generates true beliefs. The same, of course, is true when it comes to defining the reliability of what Goldman (1979) once called a belief-dependent, conditionally reliable process. The reliabilist might again turn to counterfactuals, but the evil demon casts a pall over this attempt to save a plausible definition of reliability for use in an analysis of justification. You will recall that the demon could insure both the actual and the counterfactual reliability of noninferential belief-forming processes. The demon can achieve the same goal with respect to non-deductive, inferential belief-forming processes. The internalist and the mentalist are convinced that while the demon can deprive us of actual or counterfactual reliability, the demon cannot deprive us of epistemically justified beliefs. The moral they plausibly draw is that we cannot define epistemic justification in terms of actual or counterfactual reliability.

All of the moves available to the reliabilists in their attempt to analyze noninferential justification are available when attempting to analyze inferential justification. But the observations we made earlier in connection with those attempts to analyze noninferential justification apply *mutatis mutandis* to reliability analyses of inferential justification. Turning to proper function, normal worlds, or transglobal reliability severs the connection between having inferentially justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs.

Again, both sides can muddy the waters by appealing to a technical concept of epistemic probability defined in terms of epistemic justification. In one perfectly clear sense, *P* is epistemically probable for *S* when *S* is justified in believing *P* relative to *S*'s epistemic situation. The connection between epistemic justification and truth is then defined in terms of epistemic probability. An epistemically justified belief is, by definition, one that is epistemically *likely* to be true. There is therefore a connection between having justified beliefs and having beliefs that are likely (*epistemically likely*) to be true. But, as we noted earlier, this just obfuscates the answer to the question in which we are here interested. We want to know what the connection is between having justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs. And the fact is that there is *no* plausible account of corrigible epistemic justification on which there will be a conceptual connection between having justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs. There might be a trivial connection between having justified beliefs and having beliefs that are epistemically likely to be true—but the claim is trivial precisely because talk of justified beliefs and talk of beliefs likely to be true end up being alternative ways of saying the same thing. But the fear is that neither internalists nor externalists can secure a robust connection between having justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs.

*Conclusion:*

So if the above conclusion is true, then why should the philosopher be interested in the concept of epistemic justification? There are at least the following four possible answers.

1) One might argue that possessing epistemic justification is simply intrinsically good. When we ask why something is good the context is usually one in which it is presumed that the thing is good, if at all, only for its consequences. But not all things are instrumentally good. There is nothing to stop a philosopher from arguing that a belief is intrinsically valuable just in virtue of its being epistemically justified (on one's favored account of epistemic justification). Argument tends to break down relatively quickly when it comes to debate over what kinds of things are intrinsically valuable. Moore thought that friendships are intrinsically valuable. Others would argue that friendships are valuable only for the pleasure they give. To settle the controversy we would need an account of both the metaphysics and epistemology of value judgments, a project that takes us well beyond the scope of the present paper.

2) Nothing in what I argued above shows that there isn't a *contingent* connection between having justified beliefs and having mostly true beliefs. And that is true on virtually *every* half-way plausible account of epistemic justification. Whether we identify the epistemic status of a belief with internal properties of the believer, coherence of beliefs, epistemic virtues of a believer, proper functioning of belief-producing mechanisms, or some sort of counterfactual reliability of the process that produced it, the (one and only) actual world might be co-operating so as to ensure a strong statistical correlation between a belief's being epistemically justified and that belief's being true. Indeed, I daresay almost every philosopher proposing an account of epistemic justification *believes* (truly or falsely, justifiably or unjustifiably) that most justified beliefs are true. If we define the instrumental value of something in terms of its actual consequences or its statistically likely consequences, then most philosophers will *believe* that epistemic justification has instrumental value because of its contingent connection with truth. To be sure, some philosophers have questioned the instrumental value of having true beliefs, but while one can certainly point out specific cases in which it would have been better to have a false belief than a true belief, one can give countless examples of situations in which one is better off with true beliefs. While believing that a justified belief has instrumental value doesn't give it instrumental value, we would at least have an explanation of why philosophers care about epistemic justification.

3) I have argued elsewhere (1990) that it isn't plausible to define what one ought to do in terms of actual or statistically probable consequences. It has always seemed more plausible to me to understand the relevance of consequences in deciding what one ought to do (including what one ought to be interested in) in terms of the *epistemic* probability of consequences relative to the evidential position of the actor. So to take a much-discussed recent example, the actual existence of so-called weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was quite irrelevant to the question of whether the U.S. ought to have gone to war with that country. What one ought to do is a function of the expected utility of an action, where that is a function of the value and disvalue of possible consequences of the action adjusted for the *epistemic* likelihood of them occurring. It might still turn out that we shouldn't have gone to war with Iraq, but the calculations that allow one to draw that conclusion are much more complicated than anything one can infer from post facto discoveries about what happened to be the case.

Now I argued earlier that there is a perfectly clear sense of epistemic probability that can be defined in terms of epistemic justification. I also pointed out that we might well need to distinguish clearly a belief's being *epistemically* likely from its having a high statistical probability of being true. Indeed, I argued that virtually any plausible account of epistemic probability will allow for the possibility that most *epistemically* probable propositions are false. But if what I have said above is plausible, that still allows us to explain why we ought to be interested in epistemic justification by appealing to that concept of epistemic probability. Provided that it is epistemically likely that having true beliefs will result from having justified beliefs, it will also follow on my account of rational action that we ought to be concerned with having epistemically justified beliefs. At least it will follow provided that the expected utility of having true beliefs is high. And as I pointed out above, there is a way of understanding epistemic probability so that it is virtually analytic that when one has an epistemically justified belief, the proposition believed is epistemically probable for one.

4) Lastly, of course, one might come to the somewhat surprising conclusion that our concept of epistemic justification is such that the epistemic status of a belief isn't very important. That wouldn't make the metaepistemological task of coming up with the correct analysis of justification any less important, for one would only be in a position to reach that surprising conclusion after one successfully completes one's analysis of our epistemic concepts.

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