

A Two-Factor Theory of Epistemic Justification

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In this talk, I want to present a theory of non-inferential or foundational justification that I label “Phenomenal Reliabilism”. This theory incorporates elements from M. Huemer’s theory of “Phenomenal Conservatism” and J. Comesaña’s “Indexical Reliabilism”, without being either a version of conservatism or pure reliabilism. The main purpose of my talk will be to outline my theory and argue that it is superior to other positions advocated in the literature. My talk is supposed to consist of three main sections. In the first section, I shall present the theory I favor in some detail. The second section is devoted to a discussion of rival theories that were proposed in the literature. In the final section, I shall address some objections to the theory presented in this talk.

Section 1: The basic idea of the theory to be presented in this talk is that some mental states contribute to the epistemic justification of beliefs in a twofold way, namely (i) due to certain phenomenal properties and (ii) due to fact that they are actual reliable indicators of the truth of their contents. Examples of mental states that satisfy these conditions are intuitions, perceptions, memorial and introspective seemings (that were of course traditionally regarded as providing non-inferential or foundational justification). The theory to be proposed in this talk can be stated by the following principle:

(PR) If (i) *it seems to S to be the case p* due to S’s being in mental state *m* and (ii) *m* is an *actual reliable indicator of the truth of p*, then S has at least prima facie justification to believe *p*.

The first condition of this theory, as stated in clause (i) of the antecedent, maintains that some mental states contribute to the justification of beliefs because they possess a certain phenomenology. I assume that the relevant phenomenal properties consist therein that the states present their contents as true. Due to this component, the theory is able to accommodate internalist intuitions that have been an obstacle for certain externalist views like process-reliabilism. According to the second condition of (PR), only those mental states contribute to the justification of beliefs that are actual reliable indicators of the truth of their contents. In interpreting reliability in this “indexical” sense, I follow Comesaña’s (2002). The basic idea of this understanding of reliability is the following: If “actual” is conceived of as indexical expression being governed by a so-called “two-dimensional” semantics, then there are different propositions expressed by attributions of reliability, namely a so-called “diagonal proposition” and so-called “horizontal proposition”. The diagonal proposition states that the mental state in question is a reliable indicator of the truth of *p* in worlds in which the state is possessed, whereas the horizontal proposition states that the mental state is a reliable indicator of the truth of *p* in worlds that are considered. Due to this understanding of reliability, the view proposed in this talk does not imply that persons in skeptical scenarios do not possess mental states that are reliable indicators of the truth of their contents. Their mental states are reliable indicators of the truth of *p* in the horizontal sense, but not in the diagonal sense. Hence, the view adopted in this talk is able to deal with the so-called new evil demon problem that, for instance, theories like process-reliabilism are unable to deal with.

Section 2: I shall argue that the theory proposed in this talk is superior to rival theories that exist in the literature. In particular, I want to take a closer look at theories like Huemer’s

Phenomenal Conservatism (see Huemer (2001) & (2007)), Chudnoff's Phenomenal Dogmatism (Chudnoff (2010)), Goldman's Process Reliabilism (Goldman (2008)) and Feldman's Evidentialist treatment of immediate of foundational justification (Feldman (2003)).

Section 3: In this final section, I shall discuss some objections to the theory presented in this talk. One objection that I'd like to discuss is as I call it "the argument from the ontology of epistemic reasons". The basic idea of this objection is that the theory proposed in this talk is a non-starter, since only propositions or facts can be epistemic reasons, but not the states invoked in this talk. I shall argue that this worry is unwarranted, since the view accepted in this talk is able to satisfy all main desiderata for a theory of reasons. Furthermore, the alternative accounts of epistemic reasons briefly mentioned, namely as consisting in propositions or facts, are faced with severe problems. Another problem that I want to discuss is that it could be contested that the perceptual, intuitive, memorial or introspective states do not possess the phenomenal properties assumed in this talk. In particular, it could be argued that some of the states mentioned in this talk, like intuitions or perceptions, are rather belief-like states, then they are not suitable for providing and epistemic agent with foundational justification. I will argue that it is not plausible to assume that the states invoked in this talk are doxastic states. My main argument will be that there exist linguistic data that suggest that these states are non-doxastic states.

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