

15. Begby 2018 & Siegel 2018: Externalism and blame

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I. Propositional and doxastic justification

Standard to distinguish:

Propositional justification: You have evidence that justifies believing that p

Doxastic justification: Your belief that p is justified.

Doxastic justification requires believing *for the right reason*.

E.g. looking at Tim.

Since doxastic justification requires the right chain of causes, it's sometimes called *well-foundedness*.

II. The Irrationality of Perception

Meet Talya, who's worried that Tim is angry at her. Contrast:

1) **Bad inference:** Is normal →→ looks normal →!→ believe angry

2) **Bad perception:** Is normal →!→ looks angry →→ believe angry

Siegel: If we agree the belief in (1) is ill-founded (so irrational), why can't we say the same about (2)?

Objection: appearances are involuntary

Reply: So are beliefs in the relevant sense.

Recall: believing for practical reasons?

Objection: Appearances aren't subject to voluntary control.

Reply:

- Direct control? Many beliefs aren't either.
- Indirect control? Both belief and perception are.

Patterns of attention, etc.

Argument: If we think (2) can't be irrational, it's *too easy to get off the hook*.

Recall Kelly (2008)—if different evidence just strikes people differently, *real easy* to rationally polarize.

Q: Do people agree that (2) can be ill-founded? Irrational? Are there important differences between (1) and (2)?

III. The Irrationality of Prejudice

Meet Whit, who grows up in a White-dominated culture. Contrast:

1') **Bad inference:** Equally nice →→ normal culture →!→ racist belief.

2') **Bad culture:** Equally nice →!→ racist culture →→ racist belief.

Whit believes "White people are nicer than non-White people".

Begby: the two cases are not analogous. In (1'), Whit could've done (epistemically) better; in (2'), what else is he supposed to believe? If it's irrational, then it's blameworthy; but how can Whit be blamed?

"I don't think White people are nicer, though all[?] my evidence suggests as much."

Siegel: The same could be said of (2), but we agree that that would be letting Talya off the hook too easily.

We can imagine a symmetric case, where *each member* of Whit's culture is in a similar position. That lets bad cultures off the hook too easily!

We need a concept that diagnoses what goes wrong here. So we should use an **externalist** notion of well-foundedness

→ Externalist notion of "ill-founded" doesn't imply blameworthiness.

Q: Who do you think's right—Begby or Siegel—and why?

You can fail to follow a rule without knowing you did, and hence without being blameworthy. E.g. "Don't talk s*** about Kevin when he's nearby."