

## 15. Begby 2018 &amp; Siegel 2018: Externalism and blame

Kevin Dorst  
kevindorst@pitt.edu

PHIL 1460

## 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  $\rightarrow \rightarrow$  looks normal  $\rightarrow ! \rightarrow$  believe angry

2) **Bad perception:** Is normal  $\rightarrow ! \rightarrow$  looks angry  $\rightarrow \rightarrow$  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  $\rightarrow \rightarrow$  normal culture  $\rightarrow ! \rightarrow$  racist belief.

2') **Bad culture:** Equally nice  $\rightarrow ! \rightarrow$  racist culture  $\rightarrow \rightarrow$  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.

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."

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