17. Schoenfield 2020, You just believe that because...

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We all can recognize **arbitrary influences** on our beliefs: things that led you to (dis)believe q without being evidence for (or against) q.

- (Non-)religious upbringing $\rightarrow$ (a)theistic beliefs.
- Liberal institutions and social groups $\rightarrow$ liberal beliefs.

And vice versa for conservative.

Even if some people can avoid these dynamics, *most* of us can't—or, at least, don't have any reason to believe that we *have*.

Recall McGrath on unique green

E.g. Schoenfield (let's imagine) was raised by atheists, and is one now. She's glad she is, but she acknowledges that she would believe otherwise (and be glad of it) if she were raised by theists.

Schoenfield says would have all the same evidence, but interpret it differently. If "evidence" in the broad sense (Kelly 2008), maybe not. Still:

- Selective scrutiny (Kelly 2008)
- Selective memory (Singer et al. 2019)
- Selective trust (O'Connor & Weatherall 2019)

Distinguish normative vs. descriptive interpretations of these models.

The upshot is the same: predictably, our upbringing shapes our view of the (shared and unshared) evidence.

The **You-Just-Believe-That-Because (YJBTB) challenge:** Once we're aware of the arbitrary influences on our beliefs, can we still be justified in believing them?

Reply 1: arbitrary influences are, by definition, *irrelevant* to q, so can't undermine our beliefs.

Problem: Compare thermometer designed to tell me temperature in Fiji. I believe $q =$*it's 75 degrees in Fiji*. You tell me $r =$*your thermometer isn't hooked up*. I reply: "But r is irrelevant to q!"

Surely I can't maintain my belief.

Anti-Bootstrapping version of YJBTB: A belief generated by method M is justified only if it's recoverable from the *perspective of doubt* that doesn't take the verdicts of M for granted.

- Some beliefs meet this challenge, e.g. M = vision.
- Others don't, e.g. M = use the Fiji-thermometer.

"Bracket" your beliefs, and try to justify them. Recall Elga and gas gauge.

Reply 2: Sure, the method "believe whatever your community believes" is unreliable. But my method was "believe what *this* community believes". And, lucky for me, they use reliable methods!

It's like learning I bought my thermometer, the XT-100, from a store that sells many unreliable ones. If *Consumer Reports* says the XT-100 *is* reliable, no need to worry.

Problem: This response only works when you have an *independent* check on the reliability of the method. But the belief that *this* community is reliable is *itself* induced by living in that community.

More like: rival magazines, saying other thermometers aren't reliable.

I might think: 'Luckily, I was raised by people who are well-educated, take science seriously, and aren't in the grip of old-fashioned religious dogma.' But if I were a theist, I would think something along the lines of: 'If I'd been raised among arrogant people who believe that there is nothing greater than themselves, I might never have personally experienced God's grace, and would have ended up with a completely distorted view of reality.' (2–3)

Argument:

P1 A belief formed by method M is justified only if we can recover it from the perspective of doubt about M.

P2 Once we realize the extent of arbitrary influences on religious (political, ...) beliefs, they are no longer recoverable from the perspective of doubt.

C So our religious (political...) beliefs are unjustified.

Q: What do you think?