
UNIT 4 JUSTIFICATION: MODERN APPROACH

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

Often today's world gets defined as knowledge world. But what knowledge itself is something that demands priority over the various types of knowledge that we value today. Knowledge when gets analyzed carries justification as one of its prime conditions. This unit aims to define justification and segregate epistemic justification from other varieties of justification. Then we shall explore the relation between justification and truth. Different theories of justification are propounded on the basis of the conception how inferential justification chain gets terminated. The major theories of justification, namely Foundationalism, Coherentism, Contextualism and Reliabilism will be analyzed separately. Towards the end a brief sketch of the well known controversy between internalism and externalism will be detailed.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Analysis of knowledge concentrates on that category of knowing which philosophers sometimes call factual knowledge. This is roughly knowing that such and such is the case, in the contrast of knowing how to do something, or knowing a person. This information sense of knowledge, from the time of Plato, has been accomplished by its subjective requirement, namely belief, and objective requirement namely truth. However, Plato himself concealed that it is not enough for one's belief hits the truth. This belief must not be true by chance, the person acquiring it must use some reliable method appropriate for acquiring such a belief. This is called Justification. In fact, justification of belief is said to constitute the subject matter of epistemology. Why is justification considered as the central theme in knowledge analysis? Does it carry more weightage than the other two conditions of knowledge, namely truth and belief? This unit intends to address these questions in detail.

Of late epistemologists have realized that the major pitfall in the historical form of standard analysis, namely the JTB analysis is that we have not adequately explicated the connection between justification and truth. In any case, as Chisholm says, at present our understanding of what is it for a proposition to be justified is very much similar to what is it to be moral or well mannered. This vagueness has caused an eventful era in the history of epistemology, known as

Gettier era. This begins in 1963 when Edmund L. Gettier has published a two paged article titled 'Is justified true belief knowledge?'. Herein Gettier advocates two counter examples to the existing form of standard analysis. A Gettier counter example is one in which a person has a justified but false belief by inference from which he justifiably believes something which happens to be true. As a result he arrives at a justifiably true belief which is not knowledge.

The Gettier aftermath has prompted philosophers to revise knowledge analysis and the crucial revisions were effected in justification condition. The traditional internalistic conception of justification has been identified fallible and this made them think of an externalistic alternative to justification. In fact the externalistic tendency in epistemic justification should be read together with other contemporary trends like naturalism in epistemology. It is our experience that we have at our disposal certain beliefs which are instances of justified belief and few others which are unjustified ones. While the laymen are neither conscious nor capable to discern the criterion of their distinction the epistemologist takes upon himself this task of eliciting their criterion. 'What could be the necessary and sufficient conditions of belief being justified?' Different answers lie at the root of the different theories of justification. The exact significance of the concept of justification is this that it evaluates the cognitive agent to have immediate accessibility to truth, which otherwise is external to him.

In order to understand the notion of justification there are two questions we need to ask: first, what is the strength of justification needed for knowledge and second, what is the underlying nature of justification itself? Before addressing these questions, it is essential that we discern that variety of justification called epistemic justification.

4.2 THAT SPECIES OF JUSTIFICATION CALLED EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

It is evident that knowledge is not simply true belief. An epistemic acceptance (belief) which happens to be true does not suffice for knowledge. A groundless conjecture, say a superstitious man walking inadvertently under a ladder might believe that he was about to suffer some misfortune and it may turn out to be true as well, but still we would not credit knowledge to him. For here he arrived at his conviction by a process of reasoning which is unreliable. This necessitates that true belief qualifying as knowledge must be based on good evidence. The condition may be formulated thus:

"If S knows that *p*, then S is *completely* justified in accepting that *p*"

The italicized term *completely* in the locution requires a further explanation. The reason for necessitating that a person be completely justified rather than simply justified is to indicate that slight justification is not enough.

As we know, there are many specific varieties of justification in use in our daily life. There fore, it is imperative that we distinguish epistemic justification, as that species of justification which is appropriate to belief or judgments rather than to actions, decisions and so on. But this classification would not take us a long way since there are other species of justification which also can apply to beliefs.

Epistemic justification in our sense is disinterested justification, for the epistemic justification of a belief does not depend on person's desiring that belief to be true. It is clear that a belief's being in one's best prudential interest is never a sufficient condition

for that belief's being epistemically justified. Therefore, epistemic justification may be distinguished from prudential justification.

Epistemic justification may also be distinguished citing differences between doxastic and propositional justification. The former (doxastic) variety of justification amounts to a person's being justified in believing some proposition and the latter (propositional) is suggestive of some propositions being justified for a person. It is obvious that the doxastic justification is that which is essential for epistemic justification, for otherwise a proposition could be justified for S even if S were not justified in believing it.

Within epistemic justification we could also distinguish between one's being justified in believing that p and one's justifying belief that p . The former is justification before the event and the latter justification after it where one is doing something to show that p , to exhibit that one's belief is justified. Epistemic justification currently under consideration runs in terms of the former since that alone is the type of justification which speaks of a state or condition one is in not anything one does or any upshot there of.

Roderick M. Chisholm remarks that the term 'justify' in its application to a belief is used as a term of epistemic appraisal. The term epistemic appraisal is suggestive of two things:

1. The term *justify* is a term of appraisal, and hence it, like the concepts of validity or rightness and unlike the concept of sweetness or softness is an evaluative concept.

2. The evaluation is epistemic in nature and hence to be distinguished from other kinds of evaluations like moral, legal, religious or prudential. The evaluation is done here from the epistemic viewpoint. The epistemic viewpoint may be defined by the aim at maximizing truth and minimizing falsity in a large body of beliefs. In fact what distinguishes epistemic justification from other kinds of justification is its special relation to truth. The epistemic subject ought to keep before himself the goals of believing the true and not believing the false.

The above discussion speaks of distinctive features of epistemic justification. However, it is not clear as to what it is for a belief to be justified. Generally a person is said to be justified in believing that p iff his belief is based on adequate grounds. What is it for a subject to have adequate grounds? As W.P. Alston observes, it is to say that the present belief could be inferentially drawn from the other beliefs or experiences which are strongly indicative of the truth of the belief. Let us explore further the so called *adequate grounds* or evidences and their relation to justification.

4.3 JUSTIFICATION AND EVIDENCE

Philosophers commonly think of epistemic justification as evidence or warrant for a proposition. However there is a disagreement over what exactly qualifies as justifying evidence. All evidences for a belief may not be justifying. Evidence is justifying if it consists of good and relevant reasons. Keith Lehrer suggests that evidence represents the conviction of a man concerning the chances of truth of a sentence in the light of his experience, reason and testimony of others and therefore, is entirely subjective. Following Lehrer we may stipulate the rule for the selection of evidence thus: accept a

sentence as evidence if it has a higher subjective probability than any sentence with which it competes for the status of evidence. In order to work out this method of choosing evidences, we must first of all specify with which empirical sentences a given sentence must compete. Whether a sentence is to be accepted as evidence invariably arises in some context and with regard to some hypothesis. Let us call it *touchstone hypothesis*. The sentences that compete for the status of evidence are the ones that are relevant to the touchstone hypothesis. A sentence S is relevant to a hypothesis H if the probability of H , $P(H)$ is either less than the probability of H on S , $P(H/S)$ in which case S is favorably relevant to H , or $P(H)$ is greater than $P(H/S)$, in which case S is unfavorably relevant to H . Assuming that the class of sentences thus chosen is a finite one, we may place them in numerical order S_1, S_2, \dots, S_n . Further we may attempt to reduce the members of this class by constructing maximal conjunction containing every S , or its negation, but not both. Such a net of proposition may be called the conception set for H . With this we shall formulate the condition for the acceptance of sentences as evidence: accept e as evidence relevant to H if e is member of the competition set C for H and $P(e)$ is greater than $P(s)$ for any S in C with which e competes.

This clearly points out that the prime role of justification is to connect knowledge with the truth. Therefore, let us address the relation between justification and truth.

4.4 TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION

One can speak of a two fold relation between epistemic justification and truth: In a trivial sense, to say that one is justified in believing a given proposition is the something as to say that one is justified in believing that the proposition is true. Secondly, in the non-trivial sense, if I want to believe what is true and disbelieve what is false, then the most reasonable thing for me to do is to believe what is rationally justified and not to believe what is not justified. To say differently, one should accept those propositions alone which have good reasons to support. To accept a belief in the absence of such reasons is held to be epistemically blameworthy because it neglects the epistemic pursuit of truth.

Edmund L. Gettier while challenging the JTB definition of knowledge makes it clear that there are two presuppositions involved in his counter examples: first one is that a false belief can be justified. This has in fact questioned the close relation between epistemic justification and truth. While one could view these two as conceptually distinct components of knowledge, a variety of philosophers from Descartes to the present, have presupposed the view that justification and truth are conceptually related. It is conceived that there is an internal connection between a belief's being justified and being true. The strongest view regarding truth connection is affirming that the connection is logical. That is to say that if conditions (e) justify a belief for a person, then those conditions logically entailed that the belief is true. This Cartesian view has been discarded by contemporary philosophers who have instead adopted a fallibilistic theory of justification. A fallibilistic theory allows that when e make p justified for S , it is still possible that p is false. The condition under which we are justified in believing p in the requisite sense failed to guarantee the truth of p . Why fallibilism in epistemic justification? Let us explore further.

From the cognitive agent's view point there seems to be no difference between ascertaining that *somebody is justified in believing that it is true that p* and *it is true that p*. That is to say, in order to ascertain that the truth condition is satisfied there is nothing one has to do or can do in addition to ascertaining that the justification condition is satisfied. That is why some philosophers at least consider truth condition as redundant in knowledge analysis. In knowing truth there is nothing that the knower can do except having a fully justified belief in what he supposes to be true. In fact, no subject can supply the truth condition: it has to be satisfied only by the proposition or by the object about which the subject wants to assert. All that the knowing subject can do is to go on collecting maximum evidences to strengthen his justification in favour of the truth of the proposition in question. But the truth of the proposition does not lie within the justification of the believer. If a belief is true, it is true not because the believer has made it true but because it corresponds to fact. Hence it is observed that the satisfaction of justification condition, however complete it may appear, does not entail satisfaction of the truth condition. In brief truth and justification are two conceptually independent concepts. Granting this, we may better settle down with a fallibilist theory of justification which would permit us to claim atleast a few cases of knowledge where we are fortunate enough to hit at the truth. It is hoped that if our standards of epistemic justification are appropriately chosen, bringing it about that our beliefs are epistemically justified will also tend to bring it about that they are true.

The only obvious way to show that an empirical belief *p* is justified is by producing an argument to the effect that it is shown as justified by citing some other empirical belief, *q* and pointing out that *p* in some acceptable way can be inferred from *q*. In an inferential justification, it is not necessary that the person explicitly rehearses the justifying argument in question to others or to himself, that would be a luxury one indulges in only in special situations. All that is required is that this inferential route be available to the agent so that in case that belief is called in to question she should be able to make it explicit. A little reflection would reveal that one has to clearly stipulate theories regarding how she wishes to terminate this inferential justification chain. Depending on how one wishes to terminate this inferential justification chain, philosophers have conceived different theories of justification. What follows is a brief enumeration of major theories of justification.

4. THEORIES OF JUSTIFICATION

Foundationalism: This is the oldest of all theories according to which inferential justification chain terminates with belief that are immediately justified, beliefs that do not depend on any other beliefs for their justification. It is claimed here that if we try Socratically to formulate any claim to know we will come to a stopping place where the fact that *P* is the sole reason for my justifiably believing that *p*. Chisholm call these stopping place as directly evident propositions. In brief foundationalists distinguish two kinds of justified beliefs: some beliefs that are justified independently of their relationships to other beliefs, and some other beliefs that are justified because of their relationship to other beliefs. The first sort of belief is called *foundational* and second sort is called *nonfoundational*. The central thesis of foundationalism thus can be presented in the following arguments: a) Some empirical beliefs possess a measure of epistemic

justification which is somehow immediate or intrinsic to them, and do not depend, inferentially or otherwise on the epistemic justification of other empirical beliefs, and b) the basic beliefs (foundational beliefs) are the ultimate source of justification for all empirical knowledge. All other empirical beliefs derive their justification from standing in appropriate inferential evidential relation to the members of this epistemically privileged class. To borrow the Leibnizian terminology, the self moved movers of the epistemic realm contribute the foundation upon which empirical knowledge rests.

Now what are the conditions for a belief to be basic? For a belief to be basic it must meet two conditions: 1) It must be self justified and must not be justified by any non basic belief and 2) it must be either irrefutable or if refutable, must only be refutable by other basic beliefs.

The above picture of foundationalism suggests that the structure of justified thought is like a building. The foundation of the building rests on the strong basic / foundational belief which is irrefutable (ideally). They are self justified. The higher levels of the building consisting of mediate beliefs which get justified because of their relationship to other beliefs. The analogy is perfect, just as the upper parts of the building rest on its foundation so too the non basic beliefs rest on the basic beliefs.

Typically foundationalists claim that beliefs about our perceptual states are self evident and infallible. This is objected. Many philosophers point out that perceptual belief cannot be included in the list of infallible propositions. On the other hand, if we have any indubitable beliefs, they are so few in number that they could not provide a foundation for the rest of what we obviously know. Apart from this, there is also the problem about the way non foundationalist beliefs are said to rest on foundational beliefs. The Foundationalist has two options: one might require foundational beliefs logically to imply non foundational beliefs or one might relax this requirement. As we shall see neither option seems to work. If the foundationalist requires foundational beliefs logically to imply non foundational beliefs, then most beliefs turn out to be unjustified. The foundationalist then must claim that the foundational beliefs need not logically imply non foundational beliefs. This means that foundational beliefs can be non-logical evidence for non-foundationalist beliefs. But non logical evidence is called as non defeasible evidence. If E is non- logical evidence for some proposition C then it will be possible to defeat E's support for C by adding new information. With this foundationalism is in for trouble, for if foundational belief is defeasible evidence for non foundational beliefs then it fails its very definition. As we know, one of the conditions of foundationalism is that the foundationalist beliefs must not be defeated by other things one believes. Subsequently we realize that foundationalism depend on the global condition that no defeats be present for those foundational beliefs.

To conclude, it is not clear that we have indubitable beliefs. And even if we admit foundational belief, they are realized as those which are defeasible . This suggests that our proposition get justified because of the way our evidence globally fit together. This is suggestive of coherent theory of justification. On the Coherentist solution to the regress problem, there need not be any basic beliefs because all beliefs may be justified by their

relation to others by mutual support. The edifice of justification stands because of the way in which the parts fit together and delicately support each other. Coherentists also deny the claim that the justification need proceed until all claims to knowledge are themselves justified. Justification of knowledge claims need proceed only as long as some claims to knowledge is disputed.

There is a general distinction drawn between negative and positive epistemic **Coherentism**. Negative Coherentism asserts that a person justifiably believes a proposition so long as he does not have a reason to refrain from believing it. Positive Coherentism assigns a positive function to reasons, to produce positive support. For justified beliefs Keith Lehrer has suggested the following scheme for the positive coherence theory: a person S is justified in believing a proposition P *iff* P coheres with the other beliefs belonging to a system of beliefs kind K. Two immediate question spring from into: 1) what kind of system is kind K? and in what way must a belief cohere with other beliefs belonging to a system of belief to be justified. To consider the second question first; the traditional defenders of Coherentism, namely idealist have conceive coherence relation, as a relation of necessary connection, or entailment. This requirement of classical coherentists is untenable: Philosophers have come to an agreement that such a logical entailment is not necessary for complete justification. The second issue addresses the problem 'what kind of a belief system must a justified belief cohere with?' There are, for example, certain science fictions that are obviously erroneous and the coherence of a belief with system of that sort is not sufficient for justification. Infact, the proponents of a coherence theory of justification have not yet arrived at a uniform resolution of this problem. Thus the notion of maximal coherence is intolerably vague. Philosophers of the present have attempted to meet this requirement and have offered modified versions of coherence theory of justification.

Contextualism - Contextualism is yet another theory of justification. Contextualist maintain that in the context of an inquiry or discussion, the truth or acceptability of some proposition will be taken for granted by the discussion. These proposition though themselves are unjustified can be used to provide inferential justification for other proposition. Contextualists seem to be holding that the foundation of justification are those beliefs that a certain community of believes takes for granted or accepts without any reasons. But they do not specify who the relevant fellow believers are and what is the minimum number of believers required for a belief to be justified. These apart S's awareness of the consensus of his fellow believers is left out totally. Above all this social consensus cannot provide the required reason to believe anything to be true. Social consensus will empower one to say only what is believed by certain people. But being believed cannot be a good reason for being qualified as true. Further, the concept of social consensus is laden with vagueness. Nothing is specified about whose consensus in epistemically significant, and what kind of consensus constitutes epistemic consensus. Last but not the least, being preoccupied with the social consensus contextualists has ignored the individual's epistemic perspective which has a priority over other social consensus.

4.6 INTERNALISM VS EXTERNALISM

Of late philosophers have noted that the regress problem has two versions : One version deals with people's abilities to be justified in holiday beliefs. Questions about the nature and extend of believer's awareness of their justification are not directly relevant to this version of the problem. The second version, on the other, addresses people in abilities to identify their justification responsive to the issue of being justified and being able to identify justification are respectively called externalism and internalism. As the labels indicate, internalist theories try to account for justified through appeal to internal features of S, and externalist theories try to do the same through appeal to external features of S.

Internalism: Internalist position will restrict justifies to items that are within the subject. Now the issue turns on what kind of access a thinker has to the feature in question. In this literature of internalism, we find two senses in which the phrase is used. 1. Being within the subject's perspective and 2. Being accessible to the subject in some special way. The former is called *perspectival internalism* and the latter *access internalism*.

According to both version of internalism, as the subject shifts from one situation to another, so longer his beliefs and sensory information remain constant, the evidential status of his belief also will remain constant. Clearly the truth of S's belief need not remain known after he has shifted to rigged circumstances. Thus, the justification theories, internalistically conceived cannot succeed become an epistemic situation that is not rigged may be doxastically similar to that of rigged.

Externalism: Externalism represents a substantial departure from it general tradition. Externalist claim that although there must indeed exist a reason why a basic empirical belief is likely to be true, the person for whom the belief is basic need not himself have the cognitive grasp of the reason. According to them epistemic justification of a basic belief derives from obtaining of an appropriate relation, causal or nomological between the believer and the world. If truth is an epistemic goal we may define justification in terms of this goal. Some relationship to the external world accounting for the truth of our belief suffices to convert true belief into knowledge without our having any idea of that relationship. It is not our conception of how we are related to a fact that yields knowledge but simply our being so related to it.

The most common version of externalism is Reliabilism. The idea is to ground justification in the reliability of belief forming processes. To specify the conditional:

“S's belief in P is justified *iff* S's belief in *p* is produced by a reliable process.”

Reliabilism is a plausible alternative for the following reasons.

1. Since truth is our epistemic goal, reliable belief forming mechanisms are the right means to this goal.
2. Just like justification, Reliabilism also comes in degrees. The greater the availability of evidences, the better will be the justificatory status of our belief. In brief the graded nature of justification matches the graded nature of reliability.
3. The rational and reliable belief forming processes do coincide. There is a close intuitive connection between epistemic justification and reliability.

Though Reliabilism emerges as a plausible solution to the problem faced internalism some nagging questions like, 'Is Reliabilism necessary for justification?' 'Is reliability sufficient for justification' etc reduce its colour.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

The following are the main derivations from this Unit

1. Propositional knowledge or complex relation between a person and a true proposition.
2. To have knowledge, a person must be fallibly justified in believing a true proposition.
3. It should be no accident that what the person believes is true.
4. Epistemic Justifications that species of Justification relevant to beliefs rather than actions. It is disinterested justification unlike prudential justification.
5. While collecting evidences one may use a touch stone hypothesis to create a competition set, from which one can draw the most suited ones as evidence.
6. There is an internal connection between truth and justification. Justification is the bridge between our subjective belief and objective truth.
7. Various theories of justification are formed according to one's conception of how inferential justification chain could be terminated.
8. Philosophers generally draw a distinction between internalism and externalism in epistemic justification.
9. Internalism maintains that the agent should have cognitive access to evidence while externalism insists that justification should be linked with truth.
10. Theories like Foundationalism, Coherentism and Contextualism are all internalistic theories. Reliabilism is a typical example for externalistic justification.

4.8 KEY WORDS

Justification:	Rational warrant for ones believing a particular proposition.
Fallibilism:	The possibility of a proposition or justification to fail.
Internalism:	A variety of justification where the agent will have the access to the evidences put forth for justification.
Externalism of <i>P</i> .	Epistemic theories that appeal to the external features of <i>S</i> for justification
Foundationalism:	A theory of Justification which claims that inferential justification chain get terminated with basic beliefs which are incorrigible.
Coherentism:	A theory of justification which proclaims that epistemic justification of a belief depends on its coherence with the ideal doxastic system <i>K</i> .
Contextualism	That theory which holds that basic beliefs are contextually justified.
Reliabilism	An externalist theory which holds that <i>S</i> 's belief in <i>P</i> is justified <i>iff</i> <i>S</i> 's belief in <i>P</i> is produced by a reliable process.
<i>iff</i>	If and only if – suggesting the set of necessary and sufficient conditions.

Questions

1. What is epistemic Justification?
2. Distinguish between internalism and externalism.
3. Discuss the process by which one may select evidences.

4. What is Foundationalism?
5. Is Coherentism a better option than Foundationalism?
6. What are the problems for internalist theories of Justification?
7. How far Contextualism tenable as a theory of Justification?
8. Discuss the Virtues of Reliabilism.

4.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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