

Philosophy 311: Knowledge and Justification

Fall 2013, Northern Illinois University

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Handout 4: Justified Belief and Evidence

Moving now from question: *what is knowledge?* to question: *what is justified belief?*

Evaluations and descriptions

"Justified" = an *evaluative* term; justification = an *evaluative* phenomenon
Others: beauty (/ugliness), goodness (/badness), deliciousness (/ickiness)

"Belief" = a *descriptive* term; believing = a *descriptive* phenomenon
Others: physical characteristics (shape, mass, etc.), conscious states

Thesis: evaluative phenomena *supervene on* descriptive phenomena
A supervenes on B = no difference in A without a difference in B
So, thesis: evaluative differences imply descriptive differences
Feldman's example (40-41) of identical papers receiving different grades

Justified belief and justification to believe

Case of Careful and Hasty (Feldman, 39). Careful's belief is justified, Hasty's is unjustified.

First attempt at explaining what that means:

Careful's belief is one *he ought to have*; Hasty's belief is one *he ought not to have*

Justification to believe p = what you have when you *ought to believe that p*
Careful has justification to believe that Filcher did it; Hasty doesn't.

Justified belief that p = what you have when you believe p on the basis of whatever gives you justification to believe p

Careful could have justification to believe but lack a justified belief:

1. He may be overly cautious: he refrains from believing that Filcher did it
2. His belief may not be well-formed: he believes that Filcher did it on the wrong basis

What is it, the having of which, gives you justification to believe p?

Evidentialism

S has justification to believe p = S's total evidence supports p

Appears to explain why Careful's belief is justified but Hasty's is not.

What is a subject's total evidence? Tough question!

What is it for a subject's evidence to support something? Tough question!

The importance of "total": cases where your evidence is split.

An important distinction:

S does not have justification to believe $p \neq S$ has justification to believe not- p
When your evidence is split evenly, you have justification to believe neither

Some apparent counterexamples

The Optimistic Batter (Feldman, 43); Recovery (Feldman, 43); The Accusation (Feldman, 49).

Structure of the cases: S's evidence does not support p , but S ought to believe p
In OB & R, S's evidence supports not- p ; in A, S's evidence is split.

Standard evidentialist response to these cases:

There are different senses of "ought". Evidentialism concerns the *epistemic* or intellectual sense of ought; and in this sense S ought not to believe p . In OB & R, S ought to believe p in a *practical* or *pragmatic* sense; in A, S ought to believe p in a *moral* or *ethical* sense.

[Digression: Pascal's Wager]

Movie Times (47).

Structure of the case: S's evidence supports p , but S ought not to believe p

Feldman's response to this case (48):

S's belief that p is "epistemically irresponsible", but S has justification to believe p .
GP: I agree that the belief is epistemically irresponsible. But doesn't this imply that it's not justified? "Epistemically speaking, he ought to believe that p , though epistemically speaking, he's being irresponsible in believing that p ." ???

Could we say that evidence in the unread newspaper is part of professor's total evidence?

Or, maybe modify the thesis:

S is justified in believing p = S's total evidence, together with any evidence S could easily obtain from his environment, supports p