

## Epistemic Conservatism and Huemer's Phenomenal Conservatism

### Background: Some Epistemology of Perception

#### Epistemic Justification

- justification and knowledge (see first page of Gettier)
- epistemic justification
  - epistemic vs. pragmatic
  - epistemic as the kind of justification relevant to knowledge
- the case of (the usually more careful) Ann and (the usually less careful) Bob: who is more justified?
- pluralism about epistemic justification: what it is; how to proceed – see Srinivasan (“many concepts of epistemic justification”)

#### Epistemic Conservatism

- IUPG: see Wolterstorff (I)
- But it still seems a form of “conservatism” after one makes the Huemer/Tooley move of adding an “at least some degree of” qualifier
- EC going beyond Huemer's formulation, as an account of where our epistemic justification generally comes from – see my note on Descartes
- What's the, or an, alternative? EC vs. broad evidentialism
  - the propositionality of evidence
  - the place of evidence on a conservative view

### Huemer

#### 1. “Phenomenal Conservatism”: Huemer's and the Real Thing

- Huemer's: If it seems to S that p, then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that p. (p. 30.5)
- A “more thorough-going” PC: appearances are where all our justification comes from: see 3H, bottom paragraph of p. 25, and see n. 31, on the bottoms of pp. 25-26 for remarks on Huemer's relation to this more exciting PC

#### 2. The Nature of Seemings/Apearances

- H: “I take statements of the form ‘it *seems* to S that p’ or ‘it *appears* to S that p’ to describe a kind of propositional attitude, different from belief, of which sensory experience, apparent memory, intuition, and apparent introspective awareness are species. This type of mental state may be termed an ‘appearance’.” (p. 30.7, *emph. added*)
  - another important appearance verb: *looks*.
- H: Appearances are not beliefs: CPC 30.9-31.2; nor dispositions or inclinations to form beliefs: CPC 31.3-31.8
- But see 3H, first paragraph of n. 36 (on p. 28) for a response to Huemer's argument
- And see 3H, p. 27 thru the top paragraph of p. 29 (including n. 36, and especially that note's last sentence) for a view on which appearance claims do report inclinations to belief

from Amia Srinivasan, “Does Feminist Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?”, pp. 12-13:

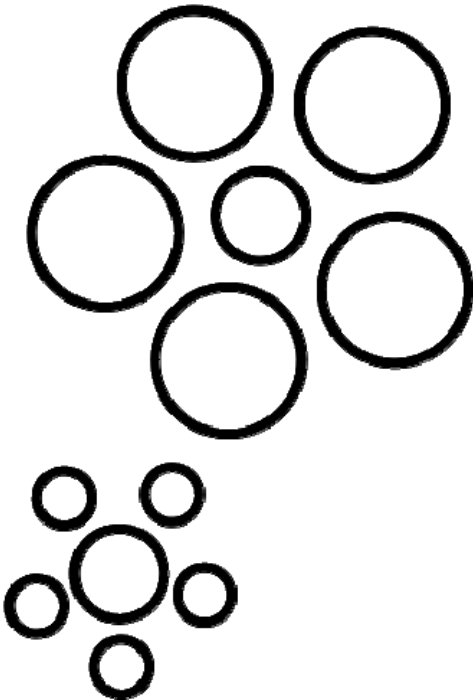
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I want to suggest that at least in some cases it’s philosophically legitimate to argue for views that one does not oneself hold. And I want to suggest that this is something philosophers do very often.

For example, when I write and talk about epistemology, I often advocate for an externalist conception of epistemic justification. And in so doing, I offer reasons for believing that externalism is true, and reasons for believing that internalism is false. Indeed I *present* myself as believing that externalism is true, and that internalism is false. But in reality I’m not convinced that there is really a substantive debate here. For I think there are many concepts of epistemic justification, some externalist and some internalist, and so it doesn’t really make sense to talk about which is the ‘correct’ theory of epistemic justification. In some sense, I am inclined to think that internalists and externalists are having a merely verbal dispute, talking past each other. So I don’t really believe that externalism is true and that internalism is false, although I present myself as believing just that. So why do I do this?

I engage in the debate, and present myself as believing in externalism, because I think there is a good question about which concept of justification is *best* to use—by which I mean, which concept of justification can be best put in service of radical politics. My own view is that externalist epistemology has enormous radical political potential, for reasons I won’t go into here. But suffice to say when I offer arguments for epistemic externalism, I am not making a claim about what justification really is, but instead am trying to persuade others to adopt a concept of justification that I think will advance justice. Of course, if enough people were to join me in doing this, and our efforts were successful, then our concept of justification really would be externalist, precisely because the content of our concepts is determined by how we use those concepts.

### The Ebbinghaus Illusion:





Says Reid: "when our faculties ripen, we find reason to check that propensity to yield to testimony and to authority, which was so necessary and so natural in the first period of life. We learn to reason about the regard due to them, and see it to be a childish weakness to lay more stress upon them than reason justifies." (*Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, VI,5)

Thus it is Reid's view that we are *prima facie* justified in accepting the deliverances of the credulity disposition until such time as we have adequate reason in specific cases to believe the deliverances false, or until such time as we have adequate reason to believe the deliverances unreliable for certain types of cases. Our situation is not that to be rationally justified in accepting the deliverances of the credulity disposition we need evidence in favor of its reliability. Rather, we are rationally justified in accepting its deliverances until such time as we have evidence of its unreliability for certain types of cases. The deliverances of our credulity disposition are **innocent until proved guilty, not guilty until proved innocent.**

So, I suggest, it is **in general – with one important exception** to be mentioned shortly. A person is rationally justified in believing a certain proposition which he does believe unless he has adequate reason to cease from believing it. Our beliefs are rational unless we have reason for refraining; they are not nonrational unless we have reason *for* believing. They are innocent until proved guilty, not guilty until proved innocent. If a person does not have adequate reason to refrain from some belief of his, what could possibly oblige him to give it up? Conversely, if he surrenders some belief of his as soon as he has adequate reason to do so, what more can rightly be demanded of him? Is he not then using the capacities he has for governing his beliefs, with the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality, as well as can rightly be demanded of him?

The exception to which I alluded was this: Suppose that someone has **undertaken** to alter some native belief disposition, or to cultivate some new belief disposition, for **perverse** reasons, **or for reasons having nothing to do with getting in touch with reality.** The extent to which such undertakings, such resolutions, can be successful seems to me severely limited. But no doubt they sometimes have their effect. For example, it may well be that if some person undertakes to disbelieve everything another says, not because of his experience that what the other says is often false, but rather because of his hostility to that person, this will eventually result in his granting the speech of that person less credibility than otherwise he would – *and less than he ought.*

Above I affirmed the innocent-until-proved-guilty principle for beliefs. Here we are dealing with noninnocent belief *dispositions*. And it seems evident that the outcomes of a noninnocent disposition should not be accorded the honor of innocence until their guilt has been proved.

I suggest that, from the standpoint of rationality and its governing

goal of getting in touch with reality, the only acceptable reason for undertaking to revise one of one's belief dispositions is that one justifiably believes it to be unreliable. (It is to be remembered here that many of our belief dispositions *get* revised by conditioning; we do not *undertake* to revise them.) If one **undertakes** to revise it for some other reason, and succeeds, then the disposition, with respect to the points of revision, is no longer innocent with respect to rationality. It has been **culpably revised.** Now if a given belief is produced by a culpably revised disposition, and *solely* by such a disposition, then it is not a belief rationally held. Correspondingly, if a person's *not* believing something in a certain situation is due to the working, or the nonworking, of a culpably revised disposition, then his *not*-believing is not rational.

The innocent-until-proved-guilty principle which I have affirmed for beliefs must be understood as applying just to those not produced by culpably revised dispositions. A person may well find himself in the situation where he does not have adequate reason to surrender a belief produced by a culpably revised disposition. Nonetheless the belief is not held rationally, for the disposition producing it was not innocent on this matter.

What we have so far then is this:

- (I) A person *S* is rational in his eluctable **and innocently produced** belief *B<sub>p</sub>* if and only if *S* believes *p*, and it is not the case that *S* has adequate reason to cease from believing *p*.

Rationality in one's beliefs does not await one's believing them on the basis of adequate reasons. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of having reasons does play a central and indispensable role in rationality – a rationality-*removing* role.

But formula **(I) is only a first approximation.** A number of revisions are necessary before we have a satisfactory criterion. First, though, an explanation is necessary of what I have in mind by "adequate reason." Perhaps it can rightly be said of a person who has the belief that he feels dizzy that he has a *reason* for that belief – namely, *his feeling dizzy*. In that case his reason would be a particular event. Perhaps, too, it can rightly be said of a person who believes that he is seeing a red car, in an ordinary case of perception, that he has a *reason* for this belief – namely, *its seeming to him that he is seeing a red car* (that is, his having a red-car-seeing experience). In this case, too, his reason would be a particular event. In short, sometimes the reason for a belief of ours may be the event which caused the belief (the event which triggered the operative disposition).

But when here I speak of "reason," that is not what I have in mind. I do not mean the disposition-triggering event. What I mean by "reason" is to be explained by reference to the workings of Reid's reasoning disposi-