

Handout #5: Goldman's Reliabilism

1. The Project: Conceptual Analysis of 'Justified Belief'

- a. Not a definition: a definition (or synonym) would contain normative terms.
- b. Terms of analysis mustn't contain normative or epistemic terms.
- c. Conditions must be appropriately "deep"
- d. Initial neutrality on several substantive issues

"I leave it an open question whether, when a belief is justified, the believer knows it is justified. I also leave it an open question whether, when a belief is justified, the believer can state or give a justification for it. I do not even assume that when a belief is justified there is something "possessed" by the believer which can be called a "justification." I do assume that a justified belief gets its status of being justified from some process or properties that make it justified. In short, there must be some justification-conferring processes or properties."

Questions: Why should we think there is an analysis of this sort for 'justified'? (See Kim's account of the supervenience of epistemic on non-epistemic properties for a rationale.)

2. Some Possible Candidates

- a. Structure of the theory is "recursive": It contains base clauses, recursive clauses, and a closure clause.

An example: Syntax of propositional logic; "definition" of *sentencehood*. Base clause: [p1]...[pn] are sentences. Recursive clauses: if [p1] is a sentence then [p1&pn] is a sentence. If [p2] is a sentence [p1→pn] is a sentence. If [p1] is a sentence then [¬p1] is a sentence. Etc. Closure clause: there are no other sentences than these.

On Goldman's conception of it, the base clauses will give justification conditions for basic or "foundational" beliefs. The recursive clauses will give justification conditions for "inferential" beliefs (beliefs justified in terms of other beliefs). If a theory has non-empty base clauses of this sort then it is **foundationalist**. (Goldman's theory is a form of foundationalism on this conception of things.)

Initial Candidates for base clauses:

- (1) If S believes p at t, and p is indubitable for S (at t), then S's belief in p at t is justified.

Problems: (a) if 'indubitable' means the subject had no *grounds* for doubt then as 'grounds' is an epistemic term, the analysis is inadmissible. (b) if 'indubitable' just means psychologically impossible for S to doubt than the analysis is too weak.

Question: Which examples lead Goldman to think the analysis is too weak? Are they convincing?

- (2) If S believes p at t and p is self-evident, then S's belief in p at t is justified.

Problems: (a) If 'self-evident' means something like intrinsically or immediately justified, the analysis contains normative/epistemic terms and is inadmissible. (b) If it means impossible to understand without believing p we must come to grips with the kind of impossibility in question. Psychological impossibility may not be enough. (Goldman's example is "Every event has a cause." Is this a convincing example?) What about logical impossibility? There are no such truths, Goldman argues.

(3) If p is a self-presenting proposition, and p is true for S at t, and S believes p at t, then S's belief in p at t is justified.

(SP) Proposition p is self-presenting if and only if: necessarily, for any S and any t, if p is true for S at t, then S believes p at t.

Again, we must interpret 'necessarily'. First, the nomological reading (natural necessity): Goldman replies with his "brain surgeon" example. Is it convincing? Second, logical reading (logical or, rather, conceptual necessity): 'I am awake'. "The truth of the proposition logically guarantees that the belief is *held*, but why should it guarantee that the belief is *justified*?"

(4) If p is an incorrigible proposition and S believes p at t, then S's beliefs in p at t is justified.

(INC) Proposition p is incorrigible [infallible] if and only if: necessarily, for any S and any t, if S believes p at t, then p is true for S at t.

Goldman's Critique of (4): (a) Brain surgeon counter-example. Again, how convincing is this? (b) Goldman asks, "Why should the fact that S's believing p guarantees the truth of p imply that S's belief is justified?" *Question*: How good is this criticism? Doesn't it rule out the very possibility of a purely reliabilist epistemology? (c) View has implausible consequence that beliefs in logical and mathematical truths are all justified. (d) Even when restricted to contingent truths the principle is implausible: see Humperdink and Elmer Fraud example.

3. Goldman's Reliabilist Base Clause

(5) If S's believing p results from a reliable cognitive belief-forming process (or set of processes) then S's belief in p at t is justified.

(a) What is a process? Goldman: "a functional operation or procedure. Something that generates a mapping from certain states—"inputs"—into other states—"outputs." *How are processes individuated?* Goldman hasn't much to say though he suggests that they must be "topic neutral."

(b) What is meant by 'reliability'? Goldman: a tendency to produce more (or much more) true than false beliefs. *Question*: Is this modal or temporal frequency? Goldman: The pre-theoretic concept of justification we are explicating is vague on this dimension.

4. Goldman's Recursive Clauses

Conditional Reliability: A process is conditionally reliable when a sufficient proportion of its output-beliefs are true given that its input beliefs are true.

Belief-Independent process: A process none of whose inputs are belief states.

Belief-Dependent process: A process some of whose inputs are belief states.

(6A) If S's belief in p at t results ("immediately") from a belief-independent process that is (unconditionally) reliable, then S's belief in p at t is justified.

(6B) If S's belief in p at t results ("immediately") from a belief-dependent process that is (at least) conditionally reliable, and if the beliefs (if any) on which this process operates in producing S's beliefs in p at t are themselves justified, then S's belief in p at t is justified.

Initial Problem: Lottery paradox. What is Goldman's response? (See footnote 10.)

Other Problems: (a) Molecule for molecule duplicates can differ as to the justifiability of their beliefs if they have different causal histories. (b) Possible worlds at which wishful thinking is reliable. (Question: Is this a problem? How plausible are Goldman's four replies to it?) (c) Allows that a person's belief may be justified even if she believes (or justifiably believes) that her belief is not justified.

Goldman's Fix:

(10) If S's belief in p at t results from a reliable cognitive process, and there is no reliable or conditionally reliable process available to S which, had it been used by S in addition to the process actually used, would have resulted in S's not believing p at t, then S's belief in p at t is justified.

Problems: How do we sum the respective causal impacts of processes? What is it for a process to be available?