

## SOME PROBLEMS OF THE RELATION BETWEEN RELIABILITY AND JUSTIFICATION

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The problem of generality appears when we take the reliability theory of justification in its simple form. This problem can be avoided if we require (as Goldman does) that besides actual reliable processes there must not be available other reliable processes which would lead us to reject the present belief. For a process to be reliable it is necessary that it preserves the truth. If it would lead us to believe true propositions as well as false ones then it is not reliable.

Reliability theory of justification is a theory of justified belief and not a theory of justified believer. This suffices to show that reliability is both a sufficient and necessary condition of justification.

The simple version of the reliability theory of epistemic justification can be formulated in the following way:

a belief is justified if and only if the process which leads to that belief is reliable.

A certain cognitive process is reliable if it generally produces true beliefs (perception, memory) and it is unreliable if it generally produces false beliefs (guessing, wishful thinking). However, for belief forming processes it is necessary to make a type/token distinction, that is, the distinction between a kind of belief forming process and individual, specific process which results in a belief. Furthermore, as each belief is a result of more process types we have to determine the *relevant type* for each belief. Now, for each process token which resulted in a belief there is some relevant process type whose reliability determines the justifiability of the beliefs produced by that token. Now, the reliability theory can be formulated in this way:

a belief is justified if and only if the process which produces it is a process token whose relevant process type is reliable.

There are two problems for the reliability theory of justification formulated in the above way. Namely, it is not clear how to characterize these relevant types — narrowly or broadly. If we take them very broadly and say, for example, that for each visual perception the

relevant reliable type is simply visual perception then we come to »The No-Distinction Problem«. This problem consists in the impossibility of making any epistemic difference among beliefs of obviously different epistemic status. Every case of, say, visual perception would be equally justified because they are produced by processes of the same relevant type. But, this is obviously not the case. There are, of course, some visual beliefs which are justified and some which are not.

But, if we characterize relevant types very narrowly then we come to »The Single Case Problem«. It will be the case that for some or all process tokens there will be only one instance of the relevant type, and it will be that token itself. Were we have the identification of relevant type and its token which is only one. The result of this identification would be epistemically unacceptable. Namely, if a process token results in a true belief then its relevant type is absolutely reliable and the resulting belief is justified and vice versa. In those cases when every relevant type would have only one instance it would be the case that all true beliefs are justified and all false beliefs are unjustified. But, this is quite unacceptable.

Can the reliability theory of justification be defended in spite of these objections?

One way of defending it is the one proposed by Alvin Goldman when he was about to abandon The Standard View concerning relevant types. According to this view the relevant types are: perception, memory, correct reasoning and intuition. Having recognized that this leads the reliability theory to »The No-Distinction Problem«, Goldman proposed that relevant types should be taken more narrowly. It is obvious that hasty and incautious perception is not a reliable process and resulting beliefs are not justified. That is, cautious perception is a different relevant type from the incautions one. Seeing a nearby object turns out to be a different process from seeing a distant object. The process operative when I see a nearby object is more reliable than the process operative when I see a distant object. Now we have avoided both »The No-Distinction Problem« and »The Single Case Problem«. As for the first one now we are in a position to differentiate among more and less justified beliefs because we will say that only seeing a nearby object is a relevant type and seeing a distant one is not. The second problem does not appear because it is not the case that relevant types have only one instance.

The bad side of this position is that it is not purely cognitive, but calls for help the factors external to the believer, those which are not inside of the organism and this is not compatible with the reliability theory which should use only cognitive processes. Can the reliability theory be successful using only cognitive processes?

Let us consider the following case: a) I climb the mountain and suddenly a mountain-goat appears in front of me. I form the belief: »The animal I see is a mountain goat.«

b) I see an animal far from me standing on the rock and form the belief: »The animal I see is a mountain goat.« In the first case my belief is justified and in the second it is not. How can this be explained without any reference to the external factors, that is, using only cognitive processes? Once again Goldman must be called for help. Namely, in his theory of justified belief he recognized that we can not decide the justificational status of a belief only on the basis of actually employed cognitive processes but also on the basis of those processes which could and should be employed. So he says:

»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.«<sup>1</sup>

According to this principle the above case can be explained by means of cognitive processes without any external factors involved. The first belief is justified because there is no reliable process available to the subject which would, if it were used, make him refrain from believing it. The second belief is not justified because such processes are available to the subject. Namely, memory, previously acquired evidence and correct reasoning would result in S's not believing that he sees a mountain goat. It is not enough that a belief is produced by means of reliable processes. It is necessary that there are no other processes which are reliable and would make a subject stop believing the belief in question. Here it is also necessary to stress the point that the belief-forming processes must be globally and locally reliable because if they were only globally reliable that would make this position open to the objection raised, among others, by Richard Feldman.

»Assume that my reflective process is generally reliable, but in this case I am relatively incautious regarding my belief that the distant object I see is a mountain-goat. Were I to reflect on that, I would still believe it. The current proposal makes this belief justified. But if it was correct to say that the belief was not justified earlier, then surely it remains unjustified if we add to the story that I would have retained the belief on reflection.«<sup>2</sup>

But, if reflective process is not only globally but also locally reliable it will not happen, that using such processes we will still believe the unjustified beliefs. Using them we will not believe (or will stop

<sup>1</sup> Alvin Goldman, »What is Justified Belief«, *Naturalizing Epistemology*, The MIT Press, 1985, str. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Feldman, »Reliability and Justification«, *The Monist*, vol. 68, NO, 2, 1985, str. 166.

believing) the second belief in the above case. The root idea is that the actual cognitive processes which form beliefs must preserve the truth. They must discriminate truth from falsity if they are to be called reliable.

The second group of objections concerns the reliability theory of justifiedness as the theory which presents reliability as the sufficient condition of justified belief. There are several counterexamples to this theory and we will mention only two of them. The first one comes from Laurence Bonjour and goes like this: Norman is an absolutely reliable clairvoyant but he has no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power, or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. But Norman believes that the President is in New York City now. Is he epistemically justified in believing this?

By hypothesis he has no reason to believe that he is a reliable clairvoyant and if he does his belief is unjustified. If he does not have any belief about the reliability of his clairvoyance his belief about the President's whereabouts is again unjustified because it is epistemically irrational and irresponsible.

The second counterexample comes from Carl Ginet and goes like this: »Suppose some film makers have made a film that has a happy ending although things look very bad for the protagonists most of the way through. These same film makers had earlier put out a tragic film that had greatly upset many viewers. They want viewers of the new film not to suffer undue anxiety and so they introduce into the film the subliminal message, »Don't worry! Everything turns out all right.« That is, this message appears on the screen at frequent intervals but for such a short period each time that it can be perceived only subliminally: the viewers see it but do not know they are seeing.«<sup>3</sup> So, they believe that everything will turn out right but they do not know how they came to believe it. Ginet concludes that their belief is not justified and that, accordingly, reliability is not a sufficient condition for justification.

The third group of objections is directed against reliability as a necessary condition of justifiedness, that is, these objections want to show there can be justified beliefs even if they are not produced by reliable processes. To illustrate this let us see what Richard Foley says on this point. He considers the possibility of the demon world or of the world which is ruled by a deceitful god. This is the situation: in the world in which we would be systematically deceived in the sense that all our beliefs in that world would be identical with our beliefs in this world we would not be able to distinguish these two epistemic situations. This means that though our beliefs in the demon world would be all false we would not be able to recognize their falsity and epistemically would be in the same world. Now, if some of our beliefs in this world

<sup>3</sup> Carl Ginet, »Contra Reliabilism«, *The Monist*, vol. 68, NO. 2, 1985. str. 177—178.

are justified then they are justified in the demon world too, because we are not in the position to distinguish them epistemically.

But, what if our world is the demon world too? We could not know that and would consider many of our beliefs justified though they would be false. Thus, it is possible that all beliefs we think justified are in fact false and this means that reliability is not the necessary condition of justifiedness. In the demon world all the cognitive processes would be unreliable but our beliefs would still be rational and justified. Foley says:

»The point here is a simple one. In effect, I am asking you: aren't some of the propositions you believe epistemically rational for you to believe? And wouldn't whatever it is that make those propositions epistemically rational for you also be present in a world where these propositions are regularly false, but where a demon hid this from you by making the world from your viewpoint indistinguishable from this world (so that what you believed, and what you would believe on reflection, and what you seemed to remember, and what you experienced were identical to this world? I think that the answer to each of these questions is »yes« and I think you do too.«<sup>4</sup>

However, these two kinds of objections seem to attack the reliability theory of justification from the Cartesian point of view, that is, from the internalist conception of justified belief. Namely, what is essential for internalism is that according to it a subject must be aware of the reasons which make his belief justified. He must do his best (in the epistemic sense) to be as rational as he can and only by epistemically responsible he makes his beliefs justified. The basic supposition is that what makes our beliefs justified is also transparent to the object and what appears to him as justification conferring is really justification conferring. Bonjour and Foley think in these terms when they attack the reliability theory which is essentially externalist. According to externalism, for a belief to be justified it is neither sufficient nor necessary that a subject has cognitive grasp of the factors which make his beliefs justified. The sources of justification can be external to the believer and he can be quite unaware of them. In case of perceptual beliefs, for example, we generally do not ask questions as to epistemic responsibility or rationality and still these beliefs can be justified and they generally are. This means that the internalist requirement is not necessary. It is not even sufficient because a believer can reasonably believe something which is based on false principles.

It seems that internalism doesn't ask the question whether a belief itself is justified or not, but rather, whether a person has good reasons for holding a certain belief. On the other hand externalism is concerned with the properties which make our beliefs justified regardless how we come to hold them. That is, we have to keep apart these two aspects: the

<sup>4</sup> Richard Foley, What's Wrong With Reliabilism«, *The Monist*, vol. 68, NO. 2, 1985. str. 190.

objective and subjective one. The objective aspect can be said to ask the following question: What are the objective processes which make a certain belief justified? This is not to ask whether we can have a cognitive grasp of them, because even if we can not have this grasp the character of these processes would still be the same. The belief would be *de facto* justified though I would be ignorant of that. There is no proof that only those beliefs which appear to me (after my epistemically responsible action) as justified are justified, and there is proof that the beliefs which do not appear to me as justified are not justified.

The subjective aspect is concerned with the following question: what has the subject to do in order to make his beliefs seem justified to him? The subject can not allow that a belief endangers his epistemic integrity because he would not be epistemically responsible any more. Thus, a belief can be *de facto* justified but a subject can accept it without any justification in the sense of internalist requirement. It may be that he can not give any conscious account of why he holds that belief. On the other hand a belief can be *de facto* unjustified but a subject can have good reasons to accept it. We can say that internalism and externalism do not ask the same questions and these have to be kept apart. According to this, internalism would be a theory of justified believer and only externalism would be a theory of justified belief. This difference springs from the role which is assigned to beliefs in these two positions. For internalist theories the basic epistemological acts are beliefs and for externalist theories this is not the case. Namely, if rationality is basically characterized by truth, that is, the achievement of truth and avoiding error, then it can not be essential what we think about our beliefs, or how they appear to us. Now, we have to see how we come to believe what we do. We must investigate the cognitive processes which form our beliefs and see whether they are reliable or not. Processes and not beliefs are basic epistemic acts, because they fulfil the requirements of rationality in the best way, the requirement of achieving truth first of all.

Thus in the case of clairvoyance we can say that Norman's belief is justified but he *does not have* good evidence to accept it and this makes him the unjustified believer. It is useful to compare Norman's situation with our everyday perceptual beliefs. We are not required to give any account or explanation of our perceptual beliefs and still they are generally justified and give us knowledge. If I see a tree in front of me I know there is a tree in front of me in spite of my being unable to say anything about this belief's epistemic status. This becomes even more evident if we consider the cases of animal knowledge which has nothing to do with self-conscious and the epistemically responsible subject. These comparisons might seem inadequate but unless somebody provides the relevant difference we shall think them adequate.

In the case of the demon world the beliefs are unjustified but the victims of the evil god are justified in holding them. The victims have

no reason to doubt their beliefs, but the beliefs themselves are not justified because of their thorough falsity. Otherwise we should allow the possibility that a subject is rational although he believes all and only false propositions. But this seems to be quite unacceptable. What is rationality or what is intellectual virtue if it is not believing true and avoiding false propositions?

The reliability theory of justification is a theory of justified belief and not a theory of justified believer. After all, this seems to be the only way to stop the epistemic regress which internalism is unable to avoid. Namely, if my belief is justified but still I require that I must believe it is justified, then it is necessary to require that this belief must be justified and I must believe it is and so on ad infinitum. Thus, reliability appears to be both a sufficient and necessary condition for our beliefs to be justified. The question of justified believer doesn't belong here.

*Arne Markusović: NEKI PROBLEMI ODNOSA POUZDANOSTI I  
OPRAVDANOSTI*

S a ž e t a k

Problem općenitosti javlja se kada teoriju pouzdanosti uzmemo u njenoj jednostavnoj formi. Ovaj se problem može izbjeći ako postavimo zahtjev (kao što čini Goldman) da osim aktualnih pouzdanih procesa ne smiju postojati dostupni drugi pouzdani procesi koji bi doveli do toga da odbacimo prisutno vjerovanje. Da bi proces bio pouzdan nužno je da čuva istinu. Ako bi vodio do formiranja istinitih i lažnih vjerovanja podjednako onda ne bi bio pouzdan. Teorija pouzdanosti kao teorija opravdanosti je teorija opravdanog vjerovanja a ne opravdanog vjerovatelja. Ovo je dovoljno da se pokaže da je pouzdanost dovoljan i nužan uvjet opravdanosti.