

Epistemological Disjunctivism and Rationality of Perception

Paweł Grad, University of Warsaw, pawelgrad@uw.edu.pl
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1. THE MASTER QUESTION & RESEARCH TASK

MASTER QUESTION: How should we understand rationalizing vs. justificatory powers of experience?

Dialectics of perceptual epistemology

(Thesis) Internalism: a perceptual belief that p is justified by perceptual experience with content P as the subject's reason for that belief.

(Antithesis) Externalism: Perceptual belief that p is justified by perceptual experience having property X and this doesn't need to be accessible for the perceiver as her reason for belief to justify it.

E.g. of X : being the outcome of a reliable process, being a reliable indicator, being factive...

(Synthesis) Epistemological disjunctivism (ED): Perceptual belief that p is justified if perceiver has factive perceptual experience with content P as her reason for that belief (McDowell 1995, Pritchard 2012).

General Problem for ED: How can you *have* factive experience as a subjective reason, assuming indiscriminability? (Wright 2002, Ranalli 2017, Mitova 2019)

The problem of Instability: Either untenable internalism: disjunctivism about rationality (Schroeder 2021) or externalism: factive experience justifies, but is not the subject's rational support (Greco 2014).

Task: Toward a more stable version of ED.

2. THE PROBLEM OF HIJACKED EXPERIENCE

Hijacked experience: Perceptual experience with content P modified by an irrational mental precursor (prior belief, desire etc.) in a way, which makes it inaccurate. Example: Vivek vain performer (Siegel 2017, p. 3)

The problem of hijacked experience: Is it rational to endorse perceptual belief p based on hijacked experience with content P (H-belief), if the perceiver doesn't know that that experience is hijacked (H-experience)?

Responses to the Problem:

Phenomenal conservatism (PC): Yes, it is rational. It is always rational, absent defeaters, to follow the phenomenal character of perceptual experience in forming a perceptual belief because the phenomenal character of experience with content P provides *prima facie* justification for the corresponding belief that p . (Cf. Huemer 2001).

Downgrade thesis (Siegel): No, it isn't. It isn't rational in the case of H-experience, absent defeaters, to follow the phenomenal character of the experience in forming H-belief because

epistemic power of the experience to make subsequent belief well-founded is downgraded below the base-line by the influence of previous irrational belief. (Siegel 2017, p. 64).

3. EVALUATING RATIONALITY

Reasons

Normative reason: R is the N-reason to φ , iff there is a norm, which says that R speaks in favor of φ .

Subjective reason: R is S-reason to φ , iff subject has access to R and R is N-reason.

Objective reason: R is O-reason to believe, iff R is N-reason independently from being S-reason.

Competition of reasons: if R_1 speaks in favor of φ , but R_2 speaks in favor of not to φ , then there is competition between R_1 and R_2 (cf. Schroeder 2021).

Epistemic justification of belief

belief is justified...

in the light of subjective vs. objective vs. normative reason

in the light of some reason vs. reason that wins the competition (local vs. overall)

(It is content rather than a dispositional understanding of rationality of belief [Williamson 2017])

Local subjective/objective/normative justification of belief: belief is locally and subjectively/objectively/normatively justified when there is at least one S-reason/O-reason/N-reason to believe.

Overall subjective/objective/normative justification of belief: belief is subjectively/objectively/normatively justified overall if there is an S-reason/O-reason/N-reason that wins the competition.

Rationality vs. justification

Rationality of belief (standard view): belief is a rational full stop if it is subjectively justified overall.
(Rationality of belief = propositional justification)

Basis of PC's prediction: PC prediction about **The Problem of Hijacked Experience** is based on the observation that the phenomenal character of experience is the only subjective reason for H-belief, hence it automatically wins the competition and makes H-belief rational.

(Access) internalism about epistemic justification: overall subjective justification of belief = justification simpliciter = rationality of belief

Externalism about epistemic justification: overall objective justification of belief = justification simpliciter

(+ optional **Relevance condition:** N-reason can justify belief iff it is sufficiently relevant for belief formation. S-reasons are taken to automatically meet the condition by meeting the access condition).

The internalist flavour of reasons-talk: Even if N-reason is analytically prior to S-reason, the whole reasons-talk would be probably abandoned in favour of typically externalist warrant/entitlement-talk, if only N-reasons that play a justificatory role are O-reasons.

Striking Feature of Siegel’s position: Externalist view on doxastic justification and rather internalist identification of rationality and justification. → terminological deflation?

4. DISJUNCTIVE PHENOMENAL CONSERVATISM

What’s wrong with Phenomenal conservatism (according to Siegel)?

Epistemic Symmetry: epistemic standing of a subject having H-belief and a subject with a normal perceptual belief is fully symmetrical in terms of justification and rationality.

Phenomenal Ground: Epistemic power of experience is grounded in its phenomenal character because content presented in phenomenal character belongs to one’s outlook on the world (Siegel 2017, p. 44-51).

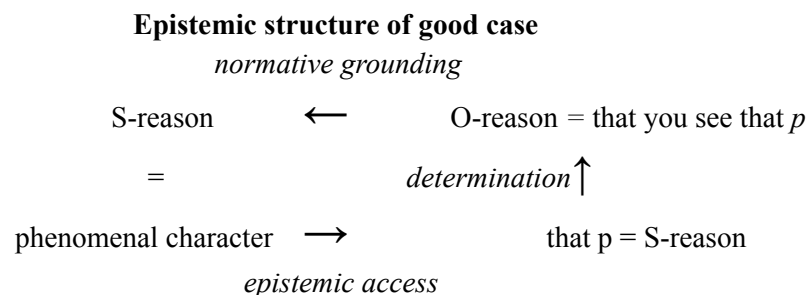
Suggestion: Why so internalist? (cf. Jackson 2011, McGrath 2013).

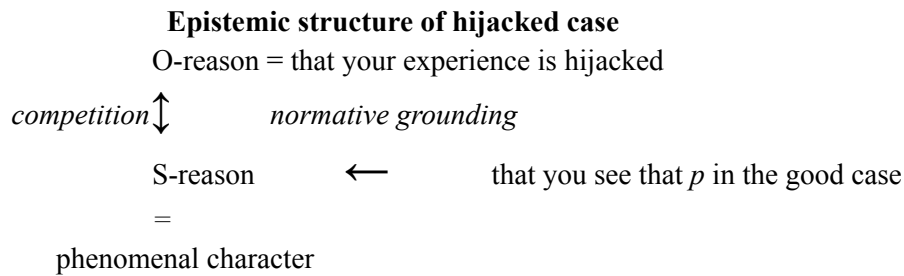
! Disjunctive Phenomenal Conservatism: Phenomenal character of experience in a good case provides a better perceptual reason for your belief than the phenomenal character of experience in a bad case.

Disjunctive Phenomenal Ground: Epistemic power of experience is grounded in its phenomenal character, because in the good case the content presented in phenomenal character is factive, ie. the very worldly fact is perceptually manifest for one.

Normative grounding of Phenomenal Reason in Factive Reason: Epistemic force of phenomenal character as S-reason (Phenomenal evidence) is grounded in the nature of factive perceptual experience as O-reason (Factive Evidence) which is determined by the worldly fact you perceive in a good case. Normative grounding is a normative counterpart of the metaphysical priority of good over bad cases (Schellenberg 2018). The same for Phenomenal and Factive Norm.

Epistemic access: In a good case, you have epistemic access to the worldly facts determining factive perceptual states which are O-reasons for belief. These facts are, in a good case, both S-reasons and O-reasons for your belief. (cf. Schmidt 2018). You don’t have this kind of access to the experience *itself*. (Having phenomenally conscious experience is not enough to be aware of the nature of that experience)





A tacit understanding of factive norm. Because of **Normative grounding**, the phenomenal reason is understandable only as a grounded in factive reason. Therefore if the perceiver has at least a tacit understanding of the phenomenal norm, it has also at least a tacit understanding of the factive norm and normative grounding.

This shows not only that phenomenal evidence and factive evidence are distinct (Schellenberg 2018), but also how they are mutually related in the epistemic structure of perceptual justification.

5. DISJUNCTIVIST EVALUATION OF EPISTEMIC STATUS

Disjunctivist PC on the Problem of Hijacked Experience

Epistemic Symmetry...

Rationality of belief. Both H-belief and perceptual belief in a good case are subjectively justified overall. Hence they both are (content rational) full stop.

(How H-belief could be irrational after all:

- the mental precursor *is* a subjective defeater [Cf. defeater approach in McGrath 2013]
- dispositionally irrational (Cf. Williamson 2017)

...and Epistemic Asymmetry

Overall justification: They differ in overall justification: H-belief is unjustified and perceptual belief in a good case is justified full stop (cf. “distinguish epistemic statuses approach” solution suggested by McGrath 2013, p. 233).

Objective reasons: H-belief is objectively defeated by hijacked experience, normal belief is justified by the factive perceptual state.

More subjective reasons: The perceiver in the good case has more subjective reasons for her belief than the perceiver in the hijacked case

Parasitic epistemic status (solace for Siegel):

Rationality of H-belief (due to **Phenomenal evidence**) is grounded in a norm that is met *only* in the case of perceptual belief based on veridical perception (**Factive Norm**). The same, *ceteris paribus*, for **Justification**.

Quantum of solace

Solace for externalists: O-reasons count for justification, and sometimes are decisive.

Solace for internalists: However perceiver has no access to the factive reason, it has access to (tacit understanding of) factive norm. Moreover, in an explanatory prior case (good case) her belief is justified for factual reason, which is both. (factual reason > factive reason > phenomenal reason)

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