

Is Justification Dialectical?

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Abstract

Much of present-day epistemology is divided between internalists and externalists. Different as these views are, they have in common that they strip justification from its dialectical component in order to block the skeptic's argument from disagreement. That is, they allow that one may have justified beliefs even if one is not able to defend it against challenges and resolve the disagreements about them. Markus Lammenranta recently argued that neither internalism nor externalism convinces if we consider the argument in its most interesting format. In this paper I zoom in on this debate, and fix further details of Lammenranta's lead. Specifically, I will side with skepticism that justification is dialectical, yet only if certain conditions are in place.

Keywords

justification; dialectic; disagreement; scepticism; internalism; externalism; truth

1. Introduction

Much of present-day epistemology is divided into two camps. On the one hand, there are the internalists who maintain that the justification of our beliefs comprises only internal factors. On the other hand, there are the externalists who defend external factors instead. The internal/external distinction can be taken in several ways, but it is commonly characterized in terms of accessibility (cf. Pappas 2005, §3). If the justification of a subject S's belief P is internal, then S has access to what makes P justified. If justification is external, then S has no such access.

Different as these views are, internalism and externalism have in common that justification has no dialectical component. Specifically, they accept that one does not need to be able to defend one's beliefs against challenges in order to be justified in holding them. Or again, they allow that one may have justified beliefs even if one cannot resolve the disagreements

about them. The question I want to address in this paper is whether this non-dialectical view of justification is correct. Should one not be able to defend one's beliefs in order to be justified?

That justification should be dialectical is a widely shared assumption among the Pyrrhonists. Pyrrhonism is a variety of skepticism which not only maintains that justification is dialectical, but also that justification is something we should not hope for in the first place, and that we should suspend our beliefs in order to be rational. Pyrrhonists employ various argumentative strategies to obtain this result, and we shall turn to them soon. For the moment, let us keep two things in mind. First, Pyrrhonism is not to be conflated with its Cartesian cousin. The main difference is that the latter is typically concerned with knowledge of the external world, whereas Pyrrhonism concerns beliefs in general.¹ (Please note that whenever I speak of skepticism in the following I mean Pyrrhonism.) Second, suspension of belief is not to entail suspension of investigation. On the contrary, Pyrrhonists as described by Sextus Empiricus are the typical truth-seekers who never take up any standpoint, and always continue investigating²:

Some have said that they have discovered the truth, some have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still investigating. [...] The skeptics are still investigating. (PH 1.1–3, transl. Annas & Barnes)

This interest in truth will prove important later on.

Taking up a lead by Lammenranta (2008, 2011b), in this paper I consider the debate between proponents and opponents of the dialectical conception of justification, viz. between skepticism vs. internalism and externalism. My contribution will consist in providing further details of the skeptic's argument as reconstructed by Lammenranta and explicating its basic assumptions. I will proceed in three parts. First, I introduce the skeptic's argument from disagreement (Sections 2–3). Second, I show how internalism and externalism try to resist the argument but face serious difficulties in this (Sections 4–5). Last, I will introduce a problem for Pyrrhonism, and discuss to what extent it can be met (Sections 6–8).

¹ For further differences, see Mates (1996), 5–6.

² The skeptic's claim that continuation of investigation goes hand in hand with global suspension is not uncontroversial. For accounts of how these two elements can coherently be combined, see Perin (2010), ch. 1, and Machuca (2011).

2. Argument from Disagreement

Here is the skeptic's argument as set out by Lammenranta (2008, 18):

- (1) S believes that p.
- (2) S* believes that it is not so that p.
- (3) At most one of them is right.
- (4) The disagreement between S and S* is irresolvable.
- (5) Hence: S and S* must suspend their beliefs about whether p.

Let me explain this argument in some detail. I have seven points. First, the argument is rather a template or schema for obtaining conclusions of the form "S and S* must suspend their beliefs about whether p." To get specific arguments, "p" is to be replaced with a full declarative sentence, and "S" and "S*" with names of two, not necessarily distinct, persons. That is, S* might be an imaginary opponent. If we did not allow this, and I will say more about this later, we could avoid skepticism by killing our opponents.³

Second, there is one inference, i.e., from premises (1)–(4) to the conclusion in line (5). The reasoning is that if there is a disagreement which is such that there are two parties which cannot both be right, yet it cannot be shown who is wrong (viz. (1)–(4)), then we should suspend belief about who is right and not (viz. (5)). Or in brief: it reasons from disagreements to suspension.

Third, an example to illustrate. Suppose you and I are driving south. We both took our GPS, and set course for the shortest route to our holiday destination. At one point, your GPS says to turn left and mine says to turn right. We have no independent reason to distrust our device, so we disagree on which route is the shortest. For the rest we also suppose we know that there can be only one shortest route (otherwise we can both be right, even if we disagree). And even if we arbitrarily take one direction (for practical considerations), we suspend belief on which route was in fact the shortest.

Fourth, the argument has deep historical roots. Aenesidemus' ten modes, which identify disagreements among animals, human beings, our senses, circumstances, positions, etc., can be seen as specifications of (1) and (2). In each case, something appears such and such relative to perspective or parameter X whereas that same thing appears differently

³ Lines (1) and (2) might capture many, yet not all, disagreements. See Barnes (1990, ch. 1) for discussion.

relative to perspective or parameter Y. Hence appearances often conflict and consequently give rise to disagreements (cf. Annas & Barnes 1985).

Fifth, (4) and (5) allow of two different readings: the psychological and the normative one. The psychological reading says: If we are unable to decide who is right, because both positions appear equally convincing, then we must suspend. This reading has two crucial aspects. First, the inability to decide reduces to psychological, subjective difficulties. It is not assumed that there are further, more objective difficulties. Second, by this reading the “must” in the conclusion is to be read causally, not normatively. It is not assumed that it would be correct to suspend, only that I shall suspend (when I have psychological difficulties to decide) as a matter of causation.

Parts of this reading have been suggested by, e.g., Annas & Barnes (1985, 49–50) and Williams (1988), yet according to Lammenranta the second, normative reading is the more interesting one. By that reading, by contrast, it is assumed that disagreements are irresolvable due to objective (rather than psychological) difficulties, and that suspension is to follow in the normative sense: it would be correct to suspend. Lammenranta’s objection to the psychological reading is this: It hardly ever occurs that the pros and cons for a certain standpoint appear equally convincing and that one has subjective difficulties to decide. If so, the skeptic’s argument has almost never sound instances. Yet, if the skeptic’s argument is to have any significant force, this cannot be right and we should consider another reading, i.e., the normative one (Lammenranta 2008, §2).

Sixth, as we have just seen, the normative reading needs a structural, objective explanation for (4), viz. for why disagreements are irresolvable, and cannot invoke contingent, subjective obstacles. This explanation can be provided by Agrippa’s modes (another part of the ancient skeptical toolbox). If someone wants to deny (4), she has to explain how the disagreement is to be resolved. Yet, any such explanation faces the following difficulty:

If he gives a reason *r* for his belief that *p*, it is pointed out that there is also an irresolvable disagreement about *r*. If he admits this, he also admits the irresolvability of the original disagreement. If he denies it, he is asked how the disagreement about *r* is resolved, and so on. (Lammenranta 2008, 18)

The assumption here is:

- If there is a disagreement about *P*, and *Q* is a reason in support of *P*, then (i) there is a disagreement about *Q* as well, and (ii) if the disagreement about *Q* is irresolvable (or entails a regress), then the disagreement about *P* is irresolvable.

In terms of the GPS example: If there is a disagreement about the shortest route, and my the reliability of my GPS is a reason for believing that turning right is the shortest route, then (i) there is a disagreement about the reliability of my GPS as well, and (ii) if the disagreement about my GPS is irresolvable (or entails a regress), then the disagreement about the shortest route is irresolvable. This is a general argument and purports to show that disagreements are essentially irresolvable: all of them.⁴

Seventh, by Lammenranta's reconstruction, the mode of disagreement is the central one and all of Agrippa's other modes are subordinate to it (see the previous point). Yet, this departs from the more standard reading which regards the modes of hypothesis, circularity, and regress as the central ones (hence "Agrippa's trilemma"), and usually ignores the two modes of disagreement and relativity (e.g., Klein 2010, §7). By the standard reading, the skeptic's argument is rather as follows:

- (i) In order to be justified in believing something, one must believe it on the basis of good reasons.
- (ii) Good reasons must themselves be justified beliefs.
- (iii) Hence: In order to be justified in believing something, one must believe it on the basis of an infinite number of good reasons.
- (iv) No human being can have an infinite number of good reasons.
- (v) Hence: It is humanly impossible to have justified beliefs.
(Lammenranta 2008, 11)

Lammenranta's objection to this reconstruction is that if this were the right reconstruction, then skeptics would have to buy epistemological assumptions, viz. premise (i), (ii), and the inference step to (iii), which are exactly the infinitist's assumptions. Infinitism is the position which holds that justification comprises an infinite number of good reasons (cf. Klein 2010, §10). Moreover, if skepticism would rely on infinitism, then the former could be resisted by denying the latter and indeed one of the lines (i), (ii), or (iii). Yet, if the argument from disagreement (viz. (1)–(5)) relies on less controversial assumptions (i.e., which cannot be resisted likewise), then that argument is the more interesting one.

So far I have clarified the argument from disagreement. Most importantly, according to Lammenranta, the argument is to have a normative rather than a psychological reading, and it prioritizes the mode of disagreement

⁴ In the following, I will assume this in full generality, but I am aware this is controversial. For example, Lammenranta (2011a) restricts it to controversial issues in philosophy, science, politics, and religion.

over the others. The latter is the reason why he labels the argument as the “dialectical problem,” and I will say more about this term soon. In the end, I will not accept that the argument from disagreement does not rely on the epistemological assumptions (i)–(iii), but I will explain my reasons in due course. The question I will address next is: How can internalism and externalism be seen as a response to this argument?

3. Space of Resistance

Lammenranta’s own position, in his 2008, is that all strategies to block the argument from disagreement are unsuccessful, but that the skeptical conclusion is not acceptable either. According to him, the argument forms a true paradox, viz. a situation with only unattractive horns. So let us see about the strategies to block the argument. If we agree that (1) and (2) are unproblematic (viz. that sometimes people indeed do disagree), then there are three options to resist:

- Reject premise (3).
- Reject premise (4).
- Reject the inference to (5).

(3) can be rejected by defending relativism or anti-realism. Relativism blocks the argument by saying that both disagreeing parties are entitled to their position and are in that sense not at fault. Anti-realism blocks the argument by saying that both disagreeing parties get the (perspective-dependent) facts right and are in that sense not at fault.⁵ (4) can be rejected by defending contextualism or (Cartesian) foundationalism, viz. that a certain special sort of reasons can resolve disagreements. And the step to (5) can be rejected by defending internalism or externalism, viz. that we can have justified beliefs and need not suspend even if we cannot resolve the disagreements about them.

The strategies of rejecting (3) and (4) are of a different nature from the strategy of rejecting (5). The former say that even if the argument from disagreement is valid, i.e., (5) follows if (1)–(4) are in place, it is hardly ever sound because either (3) or (4) is almost never true. That is, even if it is true that one must suspend whenever there is an irresolvable disagreement, there are almost never irresolvable disagreements. By contrast, the latter

⁵ Relativism and anti-realism differ as entitlement is weaker than, and does not entail, getting the facts right.

strategy says that even if (1)–(4) always have true instances, it is not the case that (5) follows. That is, even if all disagreements are irresolvable, it does not follow that one must give up one's position.

Lammenranta also presents the three strategies in terms of what he calls the dialectical principle. This principle underlies the argument from disagreement, and states that one has to resolve disagreements in a non-question-begging way (2008, 21). If you reject (3) or (4), then you may well accept this principle and hold that disagreements could be resolved on the basis of non-question-begging reasons. If you reject the step to (5), then you have to reject the dialectical principle and hold that disagreements could be resolved on the basis of question-begging reasons.

Lammenranta does not explain what is meant by “question-begging reason” and it is easy to misunderstand the notion. Ordinarily, P is a question-begging reason for Q just in case Q already figures in the support of P itself. For example, if one would believe that torture is against the law because it is morally bad, then appealing to the fact that torture is against the law would be a question-begging reason for the claim that it is morally bad. In terms of persons, person A begs the question against opponent B just in case A assumes, rather than demonstrates, that she is right and B wrong.

However, this is not exactly how Lammenranta uses the notion. Rather, the following notion seems at play:

- Q is a question-begging reason for P only if Q itself is disputable (and cannot resolve the disagreement about P unless the disagreement about Q has been resolved).⁶

For example, the reliability of my GPS is a question-begging reason for the claim that turning left is the shortest route just in case it is open to disagreement, and cannot resolve the initial disagreement unless its own disputability has been dealt with. In terms of persons, person A begs the question against opponent B just in case A relies on disputable, rather than indisputable, grounds to decide their disagreement.

Other terms used by Lammenranta in connection with question-beggingness are “impartiality” and “rationality,” and I will return to these later (Section 7). In the following, I will focus on the dialectical principle and see how internalism and externalism violate it. So in order to discuss the dialectical principle, I will accept premises (3) and (4), and hence

⁶ The condition is not sufficient without a further clause that P and Q be suitably connected (viz. that Q would support P if there would not be a disagreement about Q or if it would have been resolved).

leave theories like relativism, (Cartesian) foundationalism, and contextualism aside.

4. Internalism and Externalism

Basically, internalism and externalism identify justification with factors that have nothing to do with dialectic. That is, they reject that S is justified in believing P only if S can resolve the disagreement about P, viz. defend P to opponents (be it in a non-question-begging way or otherwise). And hence they can hold that one does not have to suspend whenever there is an irresolvable disagreement (viz. the step to (5)). It is in this way that they can be taken as a response to skepticism, and so if they succeed, then their motivation (partly) consists in that they are successful alternatives to skepticism.

Let us examine these views in some more detail. As said, internalism is the view that justification comprises internal factors, viz. factors that are accessible to the subject. A main version of this view is evidentialism, which holds that S is justified in believing P iff sufficient evidence for P is available to S. Evidentialism blocks the dialectical principle because two disagreeing persons may both be justified (i.e., if they both have sufficient evidence for their beliefs), and persist in their beliefs even if they cannot demonstrate that their own position is better. Take the GPS case again. You and I both have sufficient evidence for our position (namely, the evidence provided by our own GPS), and so by evidentialism we are both justified in our beliefs, yet we cannot demonstrate that our position is better.⁷

Lammenranta's reasoning suggests three related objections against evidentialism: an intuition pump argument, an argument from impartiality, and one from truth (2008, §8; 2011b, 209–10). The first objection is that evidentialism predicts justification for both parties in cases like the GPS example (or the thermometer case discussed by Lammenranta), and this makes justification, intuitively, too easy. The second argument is that any impartial observer, viz. an observer who has access to the evidence of both disagreeing parties, cannot say who is mistaken, and so must suspend. Why should the situation be any different for the disputants themselves?⁸

⁷ There could be versions of evidentialism which do not allow that the pieces of evidence provided by my and your GPS are to be kept distinct. Yet, the important point in this section is that there is nothing about internalist or externalist views which requires that we should resolve disagreements in order to be justified.

⁸ Whether this is so has received much recent attention. See Christensen (2009) for an overview of the debate.

If there is no such difference, the disputants should suspend as well and this is incompatible with evidentialism. Third, anyone interested in the truth of the matter could not reasonably persist in her belief, given the irresolvable disagreement about it, even if she possesses sufficient evidence. This is again incompatible with evidentialism.

Lammenranta's objections to externalism run fairly parallel. Externalism is the view that justification comprises external factors, viz. factors that are not accessible to the subject. So externalism is not to be the weaker view that the justification factor does not *need* not to be accessible.⁹ For this would imply that external factors might well be accessible even though this is not required for justification. There are well-known difficulties with the accessibility of external factors, and I will turn to these in the next section.

A main version of externalism is reliabilism, which holds that S is justified in believing P iff P is produced by a reliable process. Reliabilism blocks the dialectical principle as well: one of the disagreeing parties may be justified (i.e., if her belief is in fact produced by a reliable process), and persist in her belief even if she cannot demonstrate that her position is better (as she has no access to the reliability of her sources). So in the GPS case either you or I may be justified if one of our GPS devices is in fact reliable, yet neither can demonstrate that this is so.

There are again three closely related objections to reliabilism (Lammenranta 2008, §9; 2011b, 209). The first objection is that reliabilism predicts justification for one of the parties in cases like the GPS example, and this makes justification, intuitively, also too easy. Second, any impartial observer, viz. an observer who is in the same predicament as the disputants (i.e., for which the reliability of their sources is inaccessible), cannot say who is mistaken, and so must suspend. If there is no difference between the observer and the disputants, then the disputants should suspend as well and this is incompatible with reliabilism. Last, anyone interested in the truth of the matter could not reasonably persist in her belief, given the irresolvable disagreement about it, even if her sources, unknowingly to her, are in fact reliable. This is again incompatible with reliabilism.

This argument against externalism is nicely supported by Sextus' dark room analogy:

For if we were to imagine some people looking for gold in a dark room containing many valuables. [...] None of them will be sure that he has encountered

⁹ Lammenranta is not explicit about this. Yet the stronger view is needed for the skeptic's argument, as I will explain soon.

the gold—even if it turns out that he absolutely has encountered it. And so, too, into this universe, as into a large house, a crowd of philosophers has passed on the search for the truth, and the person who seizes it probably does not trust that he was on target. (M 7.52, transl. Bett)

I think this analogy can best be taken as follows. Identifying which valuables are gold in a dark room is analogous to identifying which propositions are justified without access to the justification factor.¹⁰

The arguments just discussed add up to the already existing complaints which internalism and externalism have against one another (cf. Steup 2008). Common objections to internalism are that it cannot account for the objectivity of justification needed for knowledge, nor explain how small children and animals might have justification, nor solve Cartesian skepticism about the external world. Common objections to externalism are that it cannot account for the responsibility component of justification (that if you are justified, you are accountable), nor explain why brains-in-vats can be justified in the same way as we can be, and that it solves Cartesian skepticism only implausibly.

To be sure, Lammenranta discusses only one variety of internalism and of externalism, and so it would be useful to ask whether the objections to them are general enough. I think the objections can be generalized on the condition that the following two assumptions are in place:

- It is essential to internalism that the justification factor does not entail truth.
- It is essential to externalism that the justification factor is not accessible.

To be sure: these are no definitions of internalism and externalism. They merely identify what about those views should be true in order for the objections to them to go through. Specifically, the idea is that the internal factor, whatever it is, is not to be indefeasible (viz. entail truth) such that two disagreeing parties can both be justified, even if at least one has a false belief, and even if they cannot defend their position against one another. Also, the external factor, whatever it is, is not to be accessible such that two disagreeing parties cannot find out who is justified (if one of them is).

¹⁰ For extensive discussion of this analogy, and especially whether it assumes the KK-thesis (viz. that justification or knowledge requires some reflexive component: you know something only if you know that you know), see Barnes (1990), 136–44, Sosa (1997), and Bueno (2011).

By these assumptions, all objections above remain in force even if we replace evidentialism and reliabilism with other, less common varieties of internalism and externalism. Before I introduce a worry about the objections, I will briefly put the two assumptions to closer inspection.

5. Higher-Order Justification

Lammenranta notes:

Things might be different if I were justified in believing that my thermometer was reliable, or that my evidence was indicative of the truth. (201b, 210)

Things would be different because, if I had such higher-order justification, then disagreements could still be resolved. For example, if I were justified in believing that my GPS (rather than yours) was reliable, or that the evidence provided by my GPS (rather than yours) was indicative of truth, then our disagreement could be settled after all. Yet the question is: How to obtain such higher-order justification?¹¹

Before I turn to this issue, it should be noted that there is a relevant difference between such high-order justification is possible vs. such high-order justification is possible and required for first-order justification (viz. “S is justified in believing P only if S has evidence E for P, and S is justified in believing that E is indicative of truth only if P is produced by a reliable process and S is justified in believing that P is produced by a reliable process”).¹² We are interested in the weaker, first issue only.

So the queries will be: Is it possible within evidentialism to be justified in believing that one’s evidence is indicative of the truth? And is it possible within reliabilism to be justified in believing that one’s sources are reliable? Lammenranta argues that in either case higher-order justification is either too easy or impossible (201b, 211–4). Below I shall reconstruct his reasoning, agree that such justification is problematic, but add that this need not be worrisome.

In the evidentialist’s case, I might argue as follows:

- (i) My GPS reads that turning left is the shortest route.
- (ii) Hence: Turning left is the shortest route.
- (iii) Hence: My evidence is indicative of the truth on this occasion.

¹¹ The justification is higher-order because it does not concern ordinary beliefs but beliefs about their justification factor.

¹² For this difference, see Bueno (2011), 183–6. Yet he exploits it in another way.

By this argument I get what I want: (iii). All three lines are justified: (i) is justified by my visual evidence; (ii) is justified by (i), i.e., (i) is sufficient evidence for (ii); and (iii) is justified by (i) and (ii) (at least if we also assume that: If my evidence E says that p , and p , then E is indicative of truth on this occasion).

There is just one problem: My opponent (viz. you) can obtain (iii) in the same way. So this way of proceeding is too easy. Of course, (ii) can be reached from (i) and (iii), but that would make the reasoning circular. Yet, if we do not admit the step to (ii), then the justification for (iii) is not possible within evidentialism.

In the reliabilist's case, I would argue in a comparable, yet slightly different way:

- (i) My GPS reads that turning left is the shortest route.
- (ii) Turning left is the shortest route.
- (iii) Hence: My GPS is reliable on this occasion.

By this argument I again get what I want: (iii). All three lines are justified: (i) is justified by my reliable vision; (ii) is justified if my GPS is in fact reliable; and (iii) is justified by my reliable deductive capacities (again assuming that: If my source says that p , and p , then my source is reliable on this occasion). My opponent cannot obtain (ii) and hence (iii) in the same way (or if she can, I cannot).¹³

There is again one problem: I cannot appeal to (ii) as I have no access to its justification (viz. the reliability of my GPS). Of course, you and I can both simply *say* that our GPS is reliable and persist in our beliefs, but this makes life once again too easy. Also, (ii) can be reached from (i) and (iii), but that would make the reasoning circular. And if we do not admit (ii), then the justification for (iii) is not possible within reliabilism.

In sum: higher-order justification in both the evidentialist's and the reliabilist's case is either too easy or impossible. It is worth noting that these arguments are related to the so-called problem of epistemic circularity. This problem concerns the procedure of obtaining beliefs about sources by using those very same sources (and beliefs about evidence by using that evidence). This problem received quite some attention in the literature. It seems fair to say that the consensus is that epistemic circularity is sometimes alright, and sometimes not.¹⁴ It is alright only if the reliability

¹³ To obtain justification about general reliability, one could use so-called track-record arguments (cf. Alston 1986). Yet, they are mere repetitions of this simple case, and do not structurally differ in any other way.

¹⁴ See Bergmann (2008) for an overview of the discussion initiated by Alston (1986).

(or evidence) is no point of discussion. However, in cases of disagreement, these are exactly the things that are disputed, and so the epistemic circle does pose a problem.

However, contra Lammenranta, I do not regard this as problematic for evidentialism and reliabilism themselves. Recall their very rationale as understood within the context of the skeptic's argument from disagreement: evidentialism and reliabilism are varieties of the strategy that blocks the inference from (1)–(4) to (5). That is, they hold that one may have justified beliefs even if one cannot resolve the disagreements about them. In order to defend such a position, one does not need to show that those disagreements could be resolved after all (*viz.* on the basis of higher-order justification, or perhaps even otherwise).

6. A Problem

So far I have been rather sympathetic to the skeptical approach. In the remainder of the paper I want to address a worry. The question will be: Does skepticism not beg the question (*i.e.*, in the ordinary sense of the term)? That is: Does it really demonstrate, rather than merely assume, that internalism and externalism are false? Let me explain why one might think that this is not an unfair query.

Internalism as understood in the foregoing does not require that justification is indefeasible. As a consequence, beliefs could be justified, yet fail to be true. In the case of evidentialism, one may have evidence (and so a justification) for a false belief. As it turns out, the skeptic refuses to accept this: we should not want justification for false beliefs for in that case justification is useless to deal with disagreements. As internalism rejects that justification has anything to do with dialectic, is the skeptic not just begging the question?

A similar worry may be addressed on behalf of externalism. Externalism as understood in the foregoing identifies the justification factor with something that is inaccessible to the subject. As a consequence, beliefs could be justified, even if one cannot be aware of this. In the case of reliabilism, one's belief may be reliably produced (and so be justified), even if one has no access to this fact. As it turns out, the skeptic refuses to accept this: we should not want that the justification factor be non-accessible for in that case justification is useless to deal with disagreements. Again, is the skeptic not begging the question here?

7. Dialectical Justification

Plausible as it may seem, I think skeptics have some resources to meet the problem just set out. Before I turn to this, let us ask the following: What is distinctive about the dialectical conception of justification (viz. the conception that internalism and externalism reject) in the first place? Basically it just seems to claim the following:

Dialectical Assumption

S is justified in believing P only if S can defend P to opponents.

In other words, whatever further components justification might have, its dialectical or defensibility aspect is to be among them. Furthermore, the skeptic's argument from disagreement would rely on this assumption, and internalism and externalism would violate it. But do they? Here are two relevant distinctions, i.e., between (a) vs. (b) and between (c) vs. (d), which complicate the matter. S is justified in believing P only if

- (a) S can defend P to actual opponents;
- (b) S can defend P to actual *and* possible opponents;
- (c) S can defend P to opponents in whatever way;
- (d) S can defend P to opponents *in a non-question begging way*.

To be sure: (b) + (d) are what skeptics want. Actual disagreements have to be resolved, viz. disagreements that happen to exist as a matter of contingent fact, but possible or imaginary opponents have to be dealt with too. And they have to be resolved without begging the question, viz. on the basis of indisputable grounds. It is worth pointing out that rejecting either of them has weird consequences. If (b) is false, one may obtain justified beliefs by killing one's opponents (cf. Lammenranta 2011b, 209). And if (d) is false, one may obtain justified beliefs on the basis of power, money, rhetorical tricks, or other arbitrary grounds.

Given the charge against skepticism from the previous section, one may wonder how the combination of (b) + (d) differs from non-dialectical principles as: S is justified in believing P only if S's evidence entails the truth of P, or only if P's source is reliable and S has access to this fact. Indeed, how do (b) + (d) not entail that it is required that S can defend that all non-P possibilities are false, and or that P's source is reliable?

Importantly, (b) + (d) do not entail this, yet internalism and externalism cannot accept (b) + (d) either. To see this, let us reconsider the connection between these dialectical assumptions and their epistemological

counterparts. In section 2, we saw that, according to Lammenranta, the argument from disagreement does not rely on epistemological assumptions. In particular, it would not rely on infinitism (rather than foundationalism or coherentism). Yet, if we consider the dialectical assumptions in their strongest format, viz. in the form of (b) + (d), then the difference between dialectic and epistemology vanishes. Indeed, there is no interesting difference between (b) + (d) (i.e., S is justified in believing P only if S can defend P to a possible opponent in a non-question begging way) and the following assumption:

Epistemological Assumption

S is justified in believing P only if S can appeal to a reason R for P and S is justified in believing R.

So my contention is that having justified reasons for one's belief is the only way to defend it to a possible opponent in a non-question begging way.¹⁵ If this is right, then (b) + (d) entail, via a regress, that S is justified in believing P only if S can appeal to an infinity of reasons (not an infinity of reasons for P, but an infinity of reasons where each is a reason for the former). As S can never appeal to so many reasons, S is never in the position to do what is required to be justified in believing P.

Hence, (b) + (d) do not require that S can show that her evidence indicates truth, nor that S can show that her sources are reliable. They just require that S is always ready to defend her beliefs and provide reasons against possible challenges, and indeed that S suspends her beliefs in the meantime. It is exactly the latter which is incompatible with internalism and externalism, viz. views which hold that S may well be justified and hold beliefs as soon as she has sufficient evidence or as soon as her beliefs have reliable sources. This is important. If skeptics can show that (b) + (d) have an independent motivation, then they can use this motivation against internalism and externalism (which violate (b) + (d)). Indeed: in that case skepticism demonstrates, rather than merely assumes, that internalism and externalism are incorrect, and in that case it would not beg the question.

Three brief comments before I turn to a possible motivation. First, as just argued, skepticism does rely on infinitism. Still, this does not mean that the views are identical. Both might well accept the same necessary conditions for justification (and agree that suspension is called for unless or until

¹⁵ If S might be the possible opponent of her own beliefs, then the dialectical aspect of justification entails nothing social (vs. Lammenranta 2011a, 10–1).

those conditions are fulfilled), but still differ on the issue whether those conditions are ever fulfilled: non-skeptical infinitists would say Yes, and skeptics No.

Second, sometimes Lammenranta does not speak of avoiding begging the question, but of rationality and impartiality:

One should look for impartial grounds for one's beliefs. This, at least, is what the skeptic's dialectical norm suggests. (2008, 20)

What, then, is needed for the rational resolution of a disagreement in this dialectical sense? (2011b, 206)

(d) can be read accordingly: S is justified in believing P only if S can defend P to opponents *in a rational and impartial way*. Yet: if rationality involves reasons, and impartiality involves non-arbitrary or justified reasons, then this amounts to nothing but the Epistemological Assumption just identified.

Third, the combination of (b) + (d) should not be read as: S is justified in believing P only if S can successfully defend P against a possible opponent, viz. convince her. For in that case justification would depend on one's opponent's capacity to become convinced (she might be stubborn, or easily be persuaded instead). (b) + (d) just require that one be able to defend one's belief to a possible opponent in order to have a justification for it, irrespective of what the opponent takes from it.

8. Interest in Truth

Having clarified (b) + (d), I can think of the following independent motivation for them. The basic idea is that it should follow from something that justification depends on dialectical success which is non-accidental and non-arbitrary.

As Lammenranta's reasoning suggests, this 'something' could precisely be one's interest in truth. You cannot both want the truth and rely on accidental factors (as actual opponents) or arbitrary factors (as question-begging reasons, power, money, etc.) in your search at once. If you really want to find out whether a certain belief is true, you cannot be said to have a justification for it unless you are able to defend it against a possible opponent without begging the question (which is, as I argued above, to provide a justified reason for it). Or again: anyone who is seriously engaged in the investigation of whether one of her beliefs is true should be in the position to explain why she thinks that it is true if she is to have a

justification for them. If this is right, then (b) and (d) are entailed by an interest in truth.

Clauses (b) and (d) are stronger than (a) and (c) in the sense that they are harder to satisfy, and in this respect it is worth pointing out that not even the latter are wholly uncontroversial in the literature. Taking up a lead by Alston (1985, 58) among others, Rescorla (2009a, 49–50) lists two sorts of counterexamples where one might want say that S is justified in believing P even if S cannot defend P to actual opponents in whatever way. A first category concerns certain beliefs which one has on the basis of perception, testimony, or memory and which are justified even if indefensible. For example, even if it is plausible to think that my belief that “Turning left is the shortest route” is not justified unless I can defend it to anyone who disagrees with me, why suppose that my (different) belief that “My GPS reads that turning left is the shortest route” should be defensible in order to be justified? A second category concerns justified beliefs of small children and perhaps animals which have no money, power, or whatever other means to defend them to actual opponents.

There are at least three possible reactions to such counterexamples. One could accept them, and restrict the dialectical conception; or accept them, and reject the dialectical conception; or reject them, and hold onto the dialectical conception.

First, one could accept both the counterexamples and the dialectical conception of justification by restricting the latter in the following way: S is justified in believing P only if either (i) S can defend P to opponents, or (ii) P is dialectically basic. Beliefs are dialectically basic just in case they do not require a defense when asserted and challenged. For example, if I assert “My GPS reads that turning left is the shortest route” and if this assertion is dialectically basic, then I do not need to defend it in case an interlocutor were to challenge it.¹⁶

Second, if one accepts the counterexamples, yet does not accept any restriction on the dialectical conception, then the dialectical conception has to go. In that case, justification has just nothing to do with defensibility, however it is taken (this is Rescorla’s position).

The skeptics follow neither of the latter routes: they opt for the third. Specifically, they accept the dialectical conception without any restriction,

¹⁶ Rescorla labels this view as “dialectical foundationalism.” For a version of this view, see Leite (2004, 2005), and for objections, see Rescorla (2009b). While Rescorla separates this view from its epistemological counterpart (*viz.* that some beliefs need no further reasons to be justified), Leite separates it from the internalism/externalism controversy.

and reject the counterexamples by just denying justification in such cases. More precisely: they would say that S cannot have indefensible, yet justified beliefs *as long as* S is concerned about their truth. Furthermore: if *we* are never justified in our beliefs, given the irresolvable disagreements about them, then why suppose children or animals be?

Nevertheless, one question remains: Why should internalists and externalists account for the interest in truth?

Skeptics do not argue for this, nor does Lammenranta, yet it turns out that this is the crucial assumption on which skepticism rests. Of course, it is controversial what theories of justification should and should not account for. For example, some philosophers suppose that they are primarily descriptive and capture the actual practice of justification-attributions, whereas others suppose that they are primarily normative and capture when people are responsible and accountable for their beliefs. To be sure, I cannot take up this major issue here, and will rest content with the following conditional, yet still far-reaching conclusion: Anyone interested in truth should take the dialectical component of justification on board in its strongest format. That is:

*Dialectical Assumption**

If S wants to find out the truth about a belief P, then S is justified in believing P only if S can defend P to a possible opponent in a non-question begging way.

If we assume that S satisfies the antecedent, then the inference from irresolvable disagreements to suspension (*viz.* from (1)–(4) to (5)) stands, and internalism and externalism are out.

9. Conclusion

Summing up, I have argued for four main points about the debate set out by Lammenranta, *i.e.*, the debate between skepticism on the one hand and internalism and externalism on the other:

- I showed how Lammenranta's reasoning against evidentialism and reliabilism can be generalized to internalism and externalism in general. (Section 4)
- I argued that internalism and externalism need not bother about the fact that higher-order justification (*i.e.*, about whether evidence is indicative of truth or sources are reliable) is problematic. (Section 5)
- Against Lammenranta, I demonstrated that the argument from disagreement does rest on epistemological assumptions by distinguishing

between weaker and stronger versions of the dialectical requirement. (Section 7)

- I introduced a problem for skepticism, namely, that it cannot just assume that justification is to be useful for dealing with disagreements. As indicated, a possible solution to this query is the skeptic's interest in truth: justification should be useful for dealing with disagreements because we want to find out whether our beliefs are true. (Sections 6, 8)

If this is correct, and the dialectical component of justification is in place, then skepticism stands. Yet, I do not think that this is an unwelcome or otherwise bad result. Indeed: what is worrisome about the skeptical position anyway? As made clear from the outset, suspension of belief is not to entail suspension of investigation. And what is more, the Pyrrhonists' promise is that suspension does entail something nicer: peace of mind¹⁷:

But when they suspended judgement, tranquillity followed as it were fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body. (PH 1.29, transl. Annas & Barnes)

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¹⁷ To be sure: many further puzzles arise from this promise, yet they will be addressed on another occasion. Many thanks to: Eline Scheerlinck, the reviewer and editors of the journal, and the members of the Dutch Research Seminar for Analytic Philosophy led by Herman Philipse. The author is PhD fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders.

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