Evidentialism

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1.   Introducing Evidentialism

At the core of evidentialism lies a very plausible claim: rational thinkers follow their evidence. While this seems to be a very intuitive, almost trivial, claim, providing a full and complete evidentialist theory is complicated. In this section, I begin with elucidating what kind of theory evidentialists aim to provide us with. In Section 2, I will show that to provide a complete evidentialist theory, we have to provide a lot of details on what evidence is and how it relates to the proposition it's evidence for, as well as the agent possessing such evidence. Section 2 will also consider objections arising for the most popular answers one can give to such questions. Section 3 will consider challenges that arise for evidentialism regardless of the specific version one endorses.

What is evidentialism?

The first thing worth mentioning is that evidentialists have traditionally provided a theory of *epistemic justification*, rather than knowledge.[1] However, on the assumption that knowledge requires epistemic justification, evidentialist theories of justification naturally lead to an evidentialist conception of knowledge too. In this entry, I will mostly consider issues related to evidentialist accounts of justification.

The second thing to note is that some views might allow for evidence to be relevant, or even necessary, for justification without representing a genuine evidentialist theory. Reliabilists, for instance, will say that justification for a proposition depends on the reliability of the belief-forming process. At the same time, if it turns out that following one's evidence is a reliable way to form beliefs, then the reliabilists will plausibly grant evidence to be relevant for justification.[2] However, what makes a theory *evidentialist,* is the idea that the only thing that matters for (propositional) justification is the evidence one has. One way to understand evidentialism is in terms of the following supervenience claim:

> *Supervenience evidentialism*: One's epistemic justification supervenes on one's evidence.[3]

Let me say a few things about this formulation. First, note that this supervenience claim surely captures the idea that what matters to justification is only the evidence one has, but it doesn't say how justification and evidence relate to each other. However, it's plausible to understand the evidentialist project as an *explanatory* project. That is, evidentialists will plausibly endorse the following claim:

> *Grounding evidentialism*: Facts about one's justification are fully grounded in facts about one's evidence.[4]

Here's an example of how one can endorse supervenience evidentialism without grounding evidentialism. Consider the following two theses, popular amongst defenders of knowledge-first epistemology:

> *E=K*: Evidence is all and only the propositions one knows.[5]

J=K: One's belief that p is justified iff one knows that p.[6]

E=K and J=K together entail supervenience evidentialism. However, knowledge-firsters would probably reject grounding evidentialism, for their project explicitly rejects the idea that knowledge can be factorised into more basic components like justification and evidence.

Second, supervenience evidentialism fails to capture what I take to be the compelling motivation behind the evidentialist view: it's not only important that we have evidence that offers support for our beliefs, but also important that we respond correctly to this evidence. To use Conee and Feldman's terminology, not only our belief should *fit* the evidence we have, but our beliefs should be *well founded* on the evidence:

> When Alfred has strong evidence for *q*, his believing *q* is epistemically justified. […] However, if Alfred's basis for believing *q* is not his evidence for it, but rather the sound of the sentence expressing *q*, then it seems equally clear that there is some sense in which this state of believing is epistemically "defective"—he did not arrive at the belief in the right way. The term 'well-founded' is sometimes used to characterize an attitude that is epistemically both well-supported and properly arrived at. (Conee & Feldman, 2004: ch 4)

Using a bit of technical jargon, while supervenience evidentialism is generally thought of as concerning *propositional* justification, i.e., the justification that a proposition has given one's evidence, a full evidentialist theory is meant to provide us with an account of *doxastic* justification, i.e., an account of what it takes for one's belief to be justified given the evidence one has. We thus have two evidentialist notions of justification:

> *Evidentialist propositional justification* (EPJ): A proposition p is justified for S iff S's evidence provides adequate evidential support for p.

> *Evidentialist doxastic justification* (EDJ): S's belief that p is justified only if S believes on the basis of one's supporting evidence.

Supervenience evidentialism merely entails that if two subjects S and S* differ in the justification they have, then they differ in the evidence they have. Supervenience evidentialism is true, in the eyes of the evidentialist, only if understood as pertaining to propositional justification. For take two subjects S and S* who have the exact same evidence. It is possible to have a case in which S has a justified belief that p, while S* does not. This could happen in cases in which S* believes that p while failing to base such belief on her supporting evidence, or when S* fails to believe that p in the first place. This is unsurprising given evidentialists traditionally maintain the orthodox relation between propositional and doxastic justification, on which the latter entails the former but not *vice versa*.

Another aspect of evidentialism that is worth clarifying is that, traditionally, it provides us with a *synchronic* account of justification. That is, evidentialism tells us whether one's belief-state is the epistemically permissible state to be in at a time, given the evidence one has. Relatedly, evidentialism takes justification to be always subject-relative in the sense that justification is taken to be a function of the evidence *one has*.[7]

2.   The Fundamental Questions

The idea that we should follow our evidence might seem obviously true. And yet, coming up with a complete evidentialist theory has proven harder that it might seem. A complete evidentialist theory will have to answer the following four questions:

> *Nature of Evidence*: What *is* evidence?

Evidence Possession: What does it mean to *possess* evidence?

Evidential Support: What does it take for evidence to *support* a proposition?

Evidential Basing: What does it mean for one to *base* her belief on one's evidence?

Depending on how we fill in the details, we will have different varieties of evidentialism.

2.1.   The nature of evidence

Chapter 3 of Conee and Feldman's seminal (2001) book is entitled "Internalism Defended". It's not surprising that epistemologists have often associated evidentialism with internalism about evidence. While they reject internalist views of justification that posit an accessibility requirement, they defend "mentalism", the view on which the justification supervenes on one's non-factive mental states, e.g., beliefs and sensations.[8] Mentalism is a claim about one's epistemic justification, but when taken together with the idea that justification supervenes on one's evidence, we have the following Internalist account of evidence:

Evidential internalism: One's evidence supervenes on one's non-factive mental states.[9]

While philosophers endorsing evidentialism have tended to endorse evidential internalism (Conee & Feldman, 2004) (McCain, 2014), evidentialism is perfectly compatible with the following evidential externalist claim:

Evidential externalism: It is not the case that one's evidence supervenes on one's non-factive mental states.[10]

One could defend the evidentialist thesis that one's belief is justified only if it is based on supporting evidence, while claiming that evidence is constituted of true beliefs, or even knowledge.[11]

This brings me to note a second important point, namely, that both evidential internalism and evidential externalism are silent on what evidence *is*. The question of whether evidence supervenes on the mental is orthogonal to the question of what evidence is constituted of. A very popular view amongst evidentialists is the following:

Psychologism: evidence is constituted of mental states.

Traditionally, evidentialists have endorsed both internalism and psychologism. For instance, Conee and Feldman (2004; 2008) have endorsed the view on which paradigmatic cases of evidence are ultimately experiential.[12] Similarly, McCain (2014) has explicitly endorsed evidentialism while signing up to the view one which "[one]'s evidence *just is* [one's] non-factive mental states". [13] However, by defending the idea that evidence is constituted of only *true* beliefs, Mitova (2014) provides us with an example of how to endorse psychologism together with evidential externalism.

One reason why evidentialists have been attracted to psychologism is that it allegedly captures how we ordinarily talk about experiences as being our evidence. My feeling of the heat is my evidence that I am warm. My perceptual experience that there is a laptop is my evidence that there is a laptop.[14]

The alternative view on the table is propositionalism:

Propositionalism: evidence is constituted of propositions.

The most notorious defence of propositionalism comes from Williamson (2000: ch. 9). According to Williamson, experiences can provide us with evidence, but they are not themselves evidence. By considering the role evidence plays in inference to the best explanation and probabilistic reasoning,

Williamson argues that only known propositions can play this role. Note, however, that endorsing propositionalism doesn't force you to be an externalist about evidence. For one could have a view on which evidence is constituted of the propositional content of one's experiences.

Whether one should be a propositionalist or a psychologist, or an evidential internalist or an evidential externalist, is not something I will settle here. What matters for the purpose of this entry is to get clear on the following points. A complete evidentialist theory will have to say something about the nature of evidence. To do so, there are two aspects that the evidentialist might want to consider: i) whether evidence supervenes on non-factive mental states or not; ii) whether evidence *is* constituted of mental states or propositions. Given these two criteria are orthogonal to each other, this gives us four different options: psychological evidential internalism; psychological evidential externalism; propositional evidential internalism; propositional evidential externalism.

2.2. Evidence possession

Once the evidentialist has picked her favourite view of what evidence is, she will have to address the following question: *when* does one possess e as part of one's evidence?[15]

One could have more or less restrictive views on evidence-possession. One could have a very restrictive view and argue that knowledge that p is required for p to be part of one's evidence. One serious problem affecting this view is that we can be justified in believing propositions (and even know them) by inferring them from falsehoods. Here's the case offered by Rizzieri (2011: 3):

> "I believe that nobody can enter my office (O for now) because I believe that I have just locked the door (LD for now). Let us stipulate that I have inferred (O) from (LD). I pushed the lock in and gave it a quick twist to the left, which usually does the trick; however, my lock is damaged and does not work. Hence, (LD) is false."

If knowledge that p is required for p being part of one's evidence, then the subject in the above case is doing something impermissible. And yet, according to Rizzieri, inferring beliefs from other beliefs one has, like the subject in the above case is doing, seems to be a paradigmatic case of properly basing one's belief on one's evidence.[16]

One alternative is to opt for a slightly weaker view and say that for p to be part of one's evidence one should justifiably believe that p. What reasons one might have to go for a justification condition on evidence possession? Beddor (2016) motivates this account by appealing to the following principle:

> *Justificatory Role*: If S has p as evidence, and S competently infers q from p, then (typically) S will be justified in believing q.

Beddor's idea is that, if S was not justified in believing that p, then it's not clear how p could play its justificatory role for S when S infers q from p. For imagine that Sarah believes that p out of wishful thinking, and p entails q. We wouldn't want to say that one is justified in believing that q. Another reason to find this view appealing is that, contrary to E=K, it can allow for justification from falsehood (on the assumption that justification is non factive). However, Beddor argues, once we put a justificatory restriction on evidence possession, we run into a circularity problem. After all, as mentioned in the introduction, the evidentialist wants to *explain* justification in terms of evidence. Crucially, by putting this justification requirement on evidence possession, we are appealing to the notion of justification to explain when p counts as evidence for S.

Another option, is to defend (following Conee and Feldman (2004)) the following view:

> *Occurrent-Belief View of Evidence Possession* (OVP): "S has p as available evidence at t iff S is currently thinking of p" (2004, 232).

While OVP is more liberal than the justification and knowledge accounts, it's nevertheless restrictive enough to avoid counting some cases as justified when, intuitively, they are not. For consider the alternative view:

> *Dispositional-Belief View of Evidence Possession* (DVP): S has p as available evidence at t iff S has an occurrent or dispositional belief that p.

Imagine now that Sarah has a stored/dispositional belief that p that she could retrieve only by years and years of psychotherapy. Imagine further that p does in fact support q. It would be implausible to say that S would be justified to believe that q. On the one hand, such cases seem to speak in favour of OVP. On the other hand, however, it seems plausible to say that at least *some* of our dispositional beliefs could count as evidence. After all, as Moon's cases suggest, it would be weird to say that we can lose all our evidence and justification while we're asleep. OVP seems too strong.[17] Following McCain (2012: 51), one might opt for a view that is more restrictive than DVP in some respects and more liberal than DVP in others:

> *Moderate View of Evidence Possession* (MVP): S has p available as evidence relevant to q at t iff at t S is currently aware of p or S is disposed to bring p to mind when reflecting on the question of q's truth.

2.3. Evidential support

As mentioned above, evidentialism captures well the intuitive and popular idea that rational agents respect their evidence. But this invites the question: *why* is it the case that rational agents respect their evidence? One way to motivate this thought is to appeal to *veritism*, roughly put, the idea that the ultimate epistemic value that we should care about is truth. If veritism is correct, then given evidence is taken to be an indication of the truth, we have a reason to endorse evidentialism. However, given factivity of knowledge, those who are sympathetic with *gnosticism*—the view on which knowledge (as opposed to truth) is the ultimate epistemic value we should care about—will also be attracted to evidentialism.[18] Rational thinkers respect their evidence because evidence is what tells in favour of a proposition p. For this reason, we need an account of what it means for evidence to "tell in favour" of a proposition. That is, we need an account of evidential support.

2.3.1. Probabilistic accounts

One way to capture the idea that evidence indicates the truth is to say that evidence e supports a proposition p when e entails that p. In this case, evidence would indicate the truth of p by guaranteeing p's truth. But this seems to raise the standards for justification too much. After all, the thought goes, we rarely have entailing evidence![19] An alternative way to go is to cash out evidential support in terms of probability: in order for evidence to favour p over not-p, it's enough that it raises its probability, as opposed to guaranteeing its truth. A probabilistic account might involve endorsing the following:

> *Probability Raising Principle* (PRP): e is evidence for p iff $P(p|e) > Pr(p)$

PRP says that evidence supports p when it raises p's probability. But PRP alone is insufficient for propositional justification. For it's possible for the posterior probability of p to be higher than the prior probability of p, while the probability of p remaining very low – too low to make p justified. The following threshold requirement is also needed:

> *Threshold Requirement* (TR): S is justified to believe that p given e only if e is evidence for p and $P(p|e) > t$.

TR says that e tells in favour of p, when it makes p sufficiently likely.[20] Assuming there's a principled way to determine where this threshold might be, one might still worry that TR alone is also insufficient. Given the axioms of probability, any necessary truth will be assigned probability 1, thereby meeting any possible threshold. TR would hence make an infinite number of arbitrarily complex propositions (propositionally) justified for S. I'm personally not bothered by this consequence. But those who are could endorse both TR and PRP to avoid such consequence. However, the cost of doing so is that, given PRP, necessary propositions will never be justified (for there's no evidence that increases the probability of maximally probable propositions).

A further problem faced by the propositional account of evidential support is the so-called problem of statistical evidence. That is, if evidence justifies a proposition p when it makes it sufficiently likely, then why does it seem wrong to believe that my lottery ticket is the loser purely on the basis of the fact that it's highly likely given my evidence?[21] Conee (2020: ft. 11) also worries that the probabilistic account of evidential support gets the order of the explanatory relations wrong, given that probabilistic relationships themselves have to be explained in terms of evidential support.[22] While it captures well the idea that evidence is an indicator of the truth, the probabilistic account doesn't come without problems, and providing a full defence of this account is not as straightforward as it might seem. [23]

2.3.2. Explanationist accounts

A different account is the so-called "explanationist" view of evidential support. On this view, evidential support is a matter of explanatory relations between the evidence and a target proposition p:

> *Explanationism*: e offers evidential support for p for S, iff p is part of the best (and sufficiently good) explanation available to S at t for why S has e.[24]

A few clarificatory points. First, the "sufficiently good" clause has the same function played by the threshold in TP. Second, note that, according to the explanationist view, for e to be evidence for p for S, p doesn't have to be part of *the only* best explanation of why S has e. Consider two explanations E1 and E2, both equally good explanations of e. As long as p is part of both E1 and E2, and there's no explanation E3 that explains e equally well and that doesn't include p, then e is evidence for p. Third, note that explanationism does not by itself require that S draw any inference to the best explanation. Rather explanationism merely says that what matters for evidential support (and, in turn, for propositional justification) is that certain explanatory relations hold between one's evidence and a target proposition.

Evidentialists, e.g., Conee and Feldman and McCain, have traditionally preferred explanationism over a probabilistic account of evidential support. However, explanationism doesn't come without its challenges. One issue is that, in order to provide a complete explanationist account, we need to say something about what makes an explanation the "best" available one. Explanatory virtues will be taken into consideration here—e.g., simplicity, explanatory power, parsimony. The question that arises, however, is how to balance such virtues, and which virtues should have priority.

Another problem is that we intuitively want to allow for justification in cases in which one comes to believe a proposition p in light of some logical relations between evidence one has and p. But explanationism doesn't seem to allow for justification in these cases, for logical relations are not explanatory relations.[25] McCain, however, has provided an easy fix to this problem by adding a disjunct in the above definition of explanationist evidential support:

> *Explanationism**: e offers evidential support for p for S, iff p is part of the best (and sufficiently good) explanation available to S at t for why S has e, or p is available to S as a logical consequence of the best explanation available to S at t for why S has e.

2.3.3. Normic accounts

Finally, let me briefly consider a non-probabilistic account of evidential support alternative to the explanationist account, namely, the normic account defended by Smith (2016). According to Smith, justification requires normic evidential support:

Normic Evidential Support: E provides evidential support for p iff the case in which E and not-p is more abnormal than the case in which E and p.

While there's a sense in which our use of the terms "normal" and "abnormal" track the frequency of an event, the sense of normalcy involved in this account of evidential support is different. While it's hard to pin down exactly how we should cash out the notion of normalcy, one possibility is to say that e normically support p for S given E, iff the case in which E and not-p obtains would call for a mitigating explanation. To see how this works, consider again the proposition that my lottery ticket is the loser. The normic account of evidential support can explain why we are not justified in believing that my lottery ticket is the loser merely on the basis of the odds involved. This is because, given the evidence I have (which only includes facts about the likelihood involved in winning the lottery), it would not be abnormal for my lottery ticket to be the winning one. I wouldn't need to appeal to anything other than the random nature of the event involved. Compare this with the case in which I read on a newspaper that my lottery ticket is the loser. The normic account of evidential support (allegedly) predicts that I am justified in believing that my lottery ticket is the loser on the basis of a newspaper report. This is because, if my belief turned out to be false, I would have to look for a mitigating explanation of what went wrong. For instance, I would have to appeal to the fact that there was a misprint in the newspaper, or someone wanted to play a prank on me.

The normic account of evidential support has gained a lot of attention over the past few years. Due to space constraints, I won't be able to do justice to the view. However, let me point out one potential issue for this view. First, it's not clear whether one has to appeal to any mitigating circumstances in cases involving belief that p based on testimony or a newspaper report. As soon as a potential explanation of p's falsity becomes available, then no mitigating explanation is needed anymore (Backes, 2019). The problem is that, as I argue in (Fratantonio, 2021), potential explanations of why testimonial evidence, as well as newspaper reports, might turn out to be misleading (and thus p false) are very often commonly and easily available to us. What's more is that, amongst these reasons, we can easily have information about how *often* newspaper have misprint. So it looks like we can easily explain p's falsity by appealing to statistical considerations *even* in cases in which our belief is based on testimonial evidence.

2.4.   Evidential basing

In the previous sections, we have seen that, in order to provide an account of justification in terms of evidence, the evidentialist has to say something about what evidence is, what it means for someone to possess evidence, and what it means for evidence to provide evidential support for p. Answering these three questions will allow the evidentialist to have a full account of propositional justification. However, if we want to provide an evidentialist account of *doxastic* justification, we also need to explain what it means for someone to base one's belief on one's supporting evidence.

There are many ways in which one can cash out the basing requirement for justification. I will here only briefly consider the two main proponents.[26] We can distinguish views of the basing relations into those which require a causal relation between one's evidence for p and one's belief that p, and those which deny such causal requirement. One notorious problem with causal theories of basing relation concerns deviant causal chains.[27] The problem is that all sorts of things can cause one to have a certain belief, but not all sort of things would qualify as providing one with justification. To use an example from Plantinga (1993, 69):

Suddenly seeing Silvia, I form the belief that I see her; as a result, I become rattled and drop my cup of tea, scalding my leg. I then form the belief that my leg hurts; but though the former

belief is a (part) cause of the latter, it is not the case that I accept the latter on the evidential basis of the former.

This case seems to suggest that causation isn't sufficient for proper basing. Another objection is meant to suggest that causation is not necessary for proper basing. The case traditionally used to show this point involves a superstitious lawyer who believes that his client is guilty, but who also tends to believe what his tarot cards say. He consults his tarot cards which indicate that the defendant is innocent. This makes him re-examine the evidence. Upon re-examining such evidence the lawyer is convinced that in fact the evidence supports the innocence of the client (Lehrer, 1971); (Kvanvig, 1985). This is presented as a case in which the lawyer believes on the basis of the evidence, and yet the evidence didn't cause the lawyer's belief (for this has been caused by the tarot reading in the first place).

An alternative view is the-called doxastic view of basing. On this view, appropriately basing one's belief that p on one's evidence requires one to have a meta-belief about one's evidence supporting p. This view can accommodate the intuition that the superstitious lawyer does have justification after all, despite his belief not being cause by the evidence. However, one worry with this account is that it overintellectualises things too much. Such meta-belief doesn't seem to be necessary for justification. Another problem, raised by (Turri, 2010), is that it seems possible for one to have a meta-belief that e supports p, while believing p for reasons that have nothing to do with e. On this line of objection, having a meta-belief is not sufficient for justification.[28]

3.   Objections to Evidentialism

3.1.   Evidentialism, suspension, and inquiry

We have seen that evidentialism provides an intuitive account of when we are justified in believing or disbelieving that p. Recently, however, some epistemologists have argued that evidentialism cannot make sense of the idea that suspension of judgment of whether p can be based on supporting evidence, as required by evidentialism.[29] The evidentialist will probably say that suspending judgment on p is justified for you when your evidence doesn't favour p over not p. But how is this going to work? Let's assume a probabilistic picture of evidential-support. Evidentialism will say that your belief that p is justified if it's based on evidence that makes p sufficiently likely; your belief that not-p will be justified when based on evidence that makes not-p sufficiently likely. There just can be no evidence that makes suspension justified in the way required by the evidentialist. Perhaps the evidentialist can insist that if suspension over p is reduced to a belief that p or not p, then she could explain how we can be justified in suspending judgment. After all, one's evidence entails that (p or not-p)! But surely we aren't *always* justified in believing that p or not-p. Suspension seems to involve something else than merely believing that p or not p.

The problem with suspension can be seen as a specific instance of a more general problem related to the synchronic nature of evidentialism. That is, Evidentialism merely tells you whether your belief-state at time t is justified given the evidence you have, but it doesn't tell you *to what extent* and *how* you should *acquire* evidence. While Feldman (2000) explicitly says that these are *practical* issues, over the past few years some epistemologists have argued that what evidence we should gather (or should have gathered) is also something that belongs to the domain of epistemic appraisals. For instance, Flores and Woodard (forthcoming) have recently provided an argument for thinking that there are *epistemic* norms of evidence-gathering. The argument rests on the idea that there are legitimate practices of *epistemically* criticising people for how they gather their evidence. But, they argue, when we have legitimate practices of criticising people, it's also reasonable to think that there are norms that are violated and that explain such practices and criticisms. If all this is true, then we should expect epistemic norms of evidence-gathering.

But if there are such epistemic norms, what are they, and how do they affect one's epistemic justification? Goldberg (2017), has argued that one's (false) belief that p can be unjustified at t even if

one's total evidence supports p at t. This is because, according to Goldberg, there might be evidence that *you should have known*, and which act as a defeater for your belief that p at t.[30] Other approaches, instead, turn to virtue epistemology for help. Miracchi (2019) and Sosa (2021), for instance, provide a virtue theoretic account on which rationality is not merely a matter of believing on the basis of one's evidence. Instead, it's a matter of manifesting a competence to know. In particular, for Miracchi (2019) it's a matter of manifesting a practical respect towards the ultimate aim of inquiry, namely, knowledge. This will sometimes require you to stop inquiry; other times it will require you to gather more evidence. Appealing to virtue-epistemology also helps explaining the rationality of suspension: suspension is rational when it's the manifestation of a competence to know.

3.2. Evidentialism and morally problematic beliefs

Another important challenge to evidentialism comes from defenders of moral encroachment.[31] According to moral encroachment, moral factors can affect the evidentiary standards one needs to meet in order to count as justified. If true, this view amounts to a rejection of supevenience evidentialism. For it would allow for cases in which two subjects S and S*, have the same evidence, but they are justified to believe different things.[32]

Moral encroachment is generally motivated by considering cases that are clearly ethically problematic, but that, on the face of it, seem to be perfectly ok from an epistemic point of view. Consider the following case:

> **Administrative Assistant.** A consultant visits an office. He knows that few people visit the office who are not employees of the firm and that almost every woman employee is an administrative assistant. The consultant sees a woman walking down the corridor and forms the belief 'she is an administrative assistant'.

Moral encroachment seems to pose the evidentialist with a dilemma: either the evidentialist says that the consultant is justified in believing that the woman is an assistant, but then they will have to say that we are sometimes justified to believe morally problematic things; or they deny that his belief is justified, but then they have to explain how that fits the evidentialist picture of justification. How can the evidentialist have the cake and eat it? One thing the evidentialist could do is to insist that the consultant's belief is *epistemically* defective. For instance, one could point out that the target evidence in **Administrative Assistant** is statistical, and that, as we mentioned above, statistical evidence alone never warrants justified belief (Gardiner, 2018). Alternatively, one could say that the consultant should have gathered more evidence and this is something that can be explained from a purely epistemic perspective (as we have seen in the previous section). However, another option for the evidentialist is to say that we should judge on a case by case basis. It might well be that sometimes our ethically problematic beliefs are also epistemically defective; other times our justified beliefs are morally problematic. However, I suggest that what the evidentialist can say is that when epistemic norms clash with what's morally permissible, we shouldn't sacrifice the epistemic for the moral. That is, we shouldn't give up on our justified belief. Instead, the evidentialist could point out that rational but morally problematic beliefs are beliefs that are in fact significant, for they're exactly the ones that will very likely point to instances of structural injustices. In other words, they're exactly the cases I should pay attention to.

3.3. Evidentialism, non-inferential justification, and perceptual basing

In his *Sense and Sensibilia*, Austin noticed that there's something weird about talking of "evidence" in cases of perception:

> The situation in which I would properly be said to have evidence for the statement that some animal is a pig is that, for example, in which the beast itself is not actually on view, but I can see plenty of pig-like marks on the ground outside its retreat. If I find a few buckets of pig-food, that's a bit more evidence, and the noises and the smell may provide better evidence still.

> But if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; its coming into view doesn't provide me with more evidence that it's a pig, I can now just see that it is, the question is settled. (Austin, 1062: 115)

One might think that there's a way in which we can identify evidence even once the pig is standing "plainly in view". For instance, one can pay attention to what it looks like, what it sounds like, and what it smells like. But whatever one makes of Austin's pig case, there's something intuitively compelling about the idea that when we perceive things we are not basing our beliefs on evidence – or at least not in the same way in which we do in cases of inferential knowledge. Various epistemologists have often challenged evidentialism on the basis that it struggles explaining cases of non-inferential justification. For instance, Lyons (2009), has argued that perception is not based on evidence by considering the Sellarsian dilemma. One can ask: what is my perceptual knowledge that there's a laptop in front of me based on? It can be either based on a belief-state, or not. If it's based on a belief-state, then such belief will have to be itself justified (and thus based on evidence), thereby running into an infinite regress. So the ultimate justifier must be a non-belief state that is not itself based on any evidence. But then the evidentialist needs to answer the following question: in virtue of what can such non-belief state provide justification to other beliefs?[33]

3.4. Evidentialism, inferential justification, and defeat

While philosophers have mostly focused on the challenges evidentialism faces when confronted with non-inferential justification, Kearl (forthcoming) has recently argued that evidentialism might be in trouble even when faced with some cases of inferential justification. Kearl's argument can be summarised schematically as follows: (i) evidentialism is the claim on which evidence is the only thing that matters for justification. (ii) Basic inferential competences, e.g., inference to the best explanation, enumerative induction, can make a difference in what one is inferentially justified in believing. (iii) Basic inferential competences cannot be reduced to evidence. (iv) Therefore, evidentialism must be false.[34]

Given it's hard to deny that basic inferential competences can make a difference in what inferences I am justified in making, the plausibility of Kearl's argument mostly rests on the third premise: the idea that not all differences in inferential competences can be reduced to evidential differences. Here is one case Kearl invites us to consider to motivate (iii). Consider Moe. Moe withdraws 99 balls from an urn and sees that all of them have been black. Moe thus believes that the 100th ball will be black. In this case, Kearl argues, Moe's belief is the result of his basic inferential competence of enumerative induction. Kearl grants that, if evidence is propositional, such competence can easily be reduced the (propositional) evidence that if the last 99 balls were black, it's likely that the next one will be black (henceforth, O). But imagine now that Moe receives a misleading testimony that it's not the case that if the last 99th balls were black then it's likely that the 100th ball will be white. Moe believes what the misleading testifier says, i.e., not-O, but decides to ignore her: he infers that the next ball will be black. In such cases, Kearl argues that the subject still successfully employs some basic inferential competence. And yet, if inferential competences merely consisted of beliefs based on evidence of the form "if E, then probably H", then the evidentialist will have to say that Moe is not rational and less than fully competent. After all, the conditional O is not part of his evidence anymore: it got defeated by the misleading testimony.

To see what the evidentialist could say in response, let me consider Lasonen-Aarnio's challenge to evidentialism (Lasonen-Aarnio, 2020)[35]. On the one hand, Evidentialism requires you to track the evidential support offered by your evidence. On the other hand, it is sometimes possible to have the following evidence and misleading higher order evidence:

Evidence: It is likely that p on the evidence.

Misleading Higher-Order Evidence: It's unlikely that it's likely that p on the evidence.

If Evidence and Misleading Higher-Order Evidence are genuine possibilities, then it looks like evidentialism permits you to believe that p and that your evidence doesn't support that p. But this seems to clash with enkratic principles of rationality, which forbids you to fail to believe what you think rationality requires you to believe. Lasonen-Aarnio has argued that these cases are a special kind of epistemic failure: the subject manifests bad competence or dispositions. In particular, she fails to be sensitive to a special class of conclusive or conspicuous evidence (2010: 604).

I take it that Moe's case can be constructed as a special version of the cases discussed by Lasonen-Aarnio. And yet if this is correct, then it's not clear that Moe is actually manifesting an epistemically good, basic inferential competence after all.[36] However, regardless of the details of the case, while evidentialists have engaged with the challenges posed by basic non-inferential justification, Kearl brings up a new interesting option to consider: the case for basic inferential justification.

4.   Conclusion

The general idea behind Evidentialism is very compelling: rational agents follow their evidence. However, as this overview has shown, providing a full evidentialist theory of justification is far from trivial. For a full evidentialist theory has to answer four important questions: what *is* evidence, what it means for evidence to support a proposition p, what does it mean for someone to possess evidence, and what it means for someone to base one's belief on one's supporting evidence. While addressing each of these questions is a difficult task, it might be seen as a virtue of Evidentialism as it allows for the development of varieties of evidentialism.[37]

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Notes

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[1] The locus classicus Evidentialism is (Conee & Feldman, 2004). See also (McCain K. , 2014) for a ~~full~~ defence of the Evidentialist theory of justification.

[2] See (Comesaña, 2010).

[3] (Conee & Feldman, 2004).

[4] (Beddor, 2015).

[5] (Williamson, 2000: ch 9).

[6] (Williamson, Justification, excuses, and sceptical scenarios, forthcoming), (Sutton, 2007).

[7] Cf. Section 3.1 for views on which justification is also determined by the evidence you should have had.

[8] In (Conee & Feldman, 2004), Conee and Feldman do not put this restriction. They claim that justification supervenes on the mental. This claim is clearly compatible with the externalist view on which knowledge is a factive mental state. However, we can reasonably put the restriction in place here given this is what CF have in mind. The reason why they ignore the restriction in their 2004 is that they don't believe knowledge is a mental state.

[9] This is also called the *phenomenal conception of evidence* (Kelly, 2008) (Williamson 2000).

[10] I take the terminology from (Silins, 2005), who allegedly provides an overarching case against Evidentialism Externalism. See (Fratantonio & McGlynn, 2018) for a defence of Evidential Externalism from Silins' attack. For an overview of the Evidential Internalism Evidential Externalist debate see (Fratantonio G. , forthcoming).

[11] See (Dutant, forthcoming). Williamson's knowledge-first view (2000) is also compatible with the idea that one believes on the basis of evidence, where evidence is knowledge. See Bergmann (2018) for an exploration of various externalist versions of evidentialism.

[12] More precisely, Conee and Feldman (2008: 88) have argued that experiences are evidence, and beliefs are only derivatively evidence.

[13] McCain 2014: 20. To be more precise, McCain's view is that evidence is either experiential or the propositional content of such experiences.

[14] See McCain 2014:20; For a recent defence of evidentialism against the background of a very internalist position, namely, phenomenal conservatism, see McCain and Moretti (2021).

[15] Note that there's another different yet important question one can ask: *in virtue of what* is e part of one's evidence? Given space constraints, I won't be able to address this issue here.

[16] For a response to this line of objection see Littlejohn (2016)

[17] See (Moon, 2012).

[18] See (Feldman, 2000).

[19] Some philosophers have argued against E=K on this basis (Bruckner, 2009); (Brown, 2013) (Brown, 2018). However, I think this is not a serious objection to E=K. E=K can perfectly accommodate the idea that we rarely have entailing evidence for propositions that *we come to know* while insisting that once we know the target proposition the evidence entails what we know. See (Fratantonio G. , 2018).

[20] Henceforth, when I say that e is evidence for p, I mean that e offers *enough* evidential support to p.

[21] For the lottery paradox see (Kyburg, 1961) (Nelkin, 2000). This problem has generated similar problems outside epistemology. See (Fratantonio G. , 2021).

[22] For an interesting novel objection to the probabilistic conception of evidential support see Humer (2018).

[23] For a new very interesting objection to the probabilistic account of evidentialism see (Huemer, 2018).

[24] See also McCain 2014: 65; Conee and Feldman 2008; Lipton 2004; McCain and Moretti 2021; Poston 2014.

[25] For this sort of objection see Lehrer (1974: 166) and Goldman (2011: 254-80).

[26]. See Korcz (2021) for an overview of the topic.

[27] See (Plantinga, 1993).

[28] There are also hybrid view of basing. See for instance Korcz's "causal-doxastic theory" (Korcz, 2000) . In fact, amongst causal theories, we can further distinguish theories on which the causal link between one's evidence for p and one's belief that is sufficient (Alston, 1988)), and those which require a further meta-belief about the fact that one's evidence supports p (Audi, 1993) (Moser, 1989). Finally, it's worth mentioning the dispositional account of basing. See (Evans, 2013).

[29] (Miracchi, 2019) (Sosa, 2021). For other virtue-epistemological approaches to evidentialism see (Sylvan, forthcoming), (Wright, 2018), (Baehr, 2011). For a new interesting account of evidence that makes sense of the phenomenon of suspension see (Simion, 2023).

[30] On Goldberg's view, one should have known evidence one is expected to know given her role in a specific practice. One worry I have is that, on this approach, norms of "should have known" are ultimately practical rather than epistemic.

[31] Defenders of moral encroachment includes (Basu, 2019) (Schroeder, 2018).

[32] I am talking about propositional justification here.

[33] For other arguments against evidentialism about perception see e.g. (Littlejohn C. , 2018)**.** I myself suggest that evidentialism struggles explaining cases of perception, by arguing that, no matter whether we endorse a propositionalist or a psychologist account of evidence, it's hard to identify the evidence that works as the basis of our perceptual beliefs. See Fratantonio (MS).

[34] To be more precise, Kearl has in mind Fumerton's formulation of evidentialism on which for an agent to be propositionally justified in inferring H on the basis of E, the agent must (1) be justified in believing E, and (2) be justified in believing that H makes E probable (also see Hasan 2013; Foley 1993: e.g., ch. 3, §2).

[35] Lasonen-Aarnio argues that this problem is not specific to evidentialism.

[36] Furthermore, note that, even if we granted such competence, it's not so straightforward that reducing such competence to evidence will have to say that Moe is irrational. To do so, the evidentialist has to explicitly endorse an enkratic requirement of rationality (although, admittedly that's something that they're probably going to do).

[37] Due to space constraints, I had to leave out some interesting challenges to evidentialism, including the forgotten evidence problem (McCain, 2015), and the problem of junk beliefs (Friedman, 2018). For a critical discussion of these objections to evidentialism see (McCain, 2018) and (Dougherty, 2011).