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The Hedonic Value of Justification

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The Hedonic Value of Justification

...as it (the understanding) is the most elevated faculty of the soul, so it is employed with a greater and more constant delight than any of the others. Its searches after the truth are a sort of hawking and hunting, wherein the very pursuit makes a great part of the pleasure.
(Locke)

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The value problem of justification

One debate in epistemology is to explain why justification is valuable. Why is it better to have a *justified* true belief (JTB) than a mere true belief (TB)?

-Two senses of justification:

- a justifier (= another belief, a perception or any other truthbearer)
- an activity (to justify oneself = to exhibit a connection between a belief we endorse and another truthbearer).

The debate focuses on the second sense, justification as activity

-Link with the problem of the value of knowledge: If knowledge has to be analysed in terms of justified true belief, then the solution to the value problem of justification is at least a part of the solution to the value problem of knowledge.

Two main solutions

Grounded on *two conceptions of justification as activity*:

1. The reliabilist solution

Grounded on a reliabilist conception of justification

2. The credit solution

Grounded on a credit conception of justification

➔ If the two notions of justification are compatible, then these two solutions to the value problem may be complementary.

1. Objections to the reliabilist account of the value of justification

The first reliabilist solution

The reliabilist conception of justification: A JTB is a TB being produced by a reliable process. (Process reliabilism, Goldman 1979)

First reliabilist solution to the value problem:

A reliably produced true belief (JTB) has more value than a TB because the former does not only possess an intrinsic value: the value of truth. It also possesses an instrumental value: the value which characterises the reliable process as leading to a TB.

The swamping problem

The fact that a tasteful cup of coffee has been produced by a reliable coffee machine does not enhance the value of the tasteful coffee.

The instrumental value that the reliability of the machine is supposed to add to the value of the coffee is *swamped* by the fact that the coffee is already tasteful

In the same way:

The instrumental value that the reliable process is supposed to add to the value of the true belief is swamped by the fact that the true belief is already true.

The refined reliabilist solution

A reliably produced true belief (JTB) has more value than a TB in virtue of “making it likely that one’s future beliefs of a similar kind will also be true” (Goldman & Olsson forthcoming)

- ➔ A JTB draws its additional value from the value of *future true beliefs* of a similar kind.

Two hard cases for the refined reliabilist solution

1. *God* necessarily possesses every justified true beliefs.

The reliabilist cannot say that God's reliably produced true beliefs enhance his probability to acquire *further* true beliefs since he already possesses all the true beliefs.

Still, it is better for God to possess *justified* true belief than mere true ones.

2. *Epistemic twins*: one of the twins is a patient searcher. Each of her new discoveries goes directly into her sister's lazy mind by transmission of thought.

The reliabilist cannot say that the first twin is more likely to gain new true belief, since those beliefs are automatically transmitted into his sister's mind.

Still, it seems that the first twin is in a better epistemic state than the second.

- ➔ The reliabilist solution to the value problem cannot explain these two intuitions.

2. The credit theory
account of the value of
justification: a need for
specification

The *credit* conception of justification

When an explanatory causal relation holds between a subject S (one of her competences) and a valuable state of affairs, S deserves credit for the occurrence of such a valuable state of affairs

Example: When Federer performs a winning passing-shot, he deserves credit for it because one of his competences is the most salient cause of the occurrence of such a valuable state of affairs.

Amy does not deserve credit for performing the same passing-shot when it is the accidental product of Amy's try to drive off a mosquito.

The credit conception of justification: a JTB is a TB whose occurrence is causally explained by a subject's competence.

The credit solution to the value problem of justification

Moreover Federer's performance seems *better* than Amy's because it can be credited to him.

The attribution of credit seems to add value to the valuable state of affairs produced by Federer

There is a "credit value": a value that a result possesses in virtue of being causally explained by a subject's competence.

The credit solution to the value problem: A JTB is better than a TB because a JTB is not only valuable because of being true. It is also enhanced by credit value.

➔ This solution is able to account for the two cases seen before (God and the epistemic twins).

Credit value is not an instrumental value

If the credit value were an *instrumental* value, the credit value would be a value that a competence possesses only because it causes a valuable result.

When the occurrence of a true belief is causally explained by a subject's competence (JTB), the additional value of the JTB (the credit value) would be a value that the competence possesses in virtue of causing a TB.

Objection:

The causal role of the competence is supposed to account for the *additional* value of the JTB. It is what adds credit value to the value of truth.

But if the competence possesses its credit value instrumentally, in virtue of causing a TB, then its credit value is *swamped* by the fact that the JTB is already true.

Conclusion: The credit value cannot be an instrumental value because, if it were the case, the credit solution would also be confronted to the swamping objection.

Credit value: the need for a new intrinsic value

1. *Either* credit value is an *intrinsic value* of a JTB

JTB is more valuable than TB because of one of its intrinsic properties

2. *Or* credit value is an *extrinsic value* of JTB but not an instrumental one.

JTB is more valuable than TB because one one of her extrinsic properties which is not the property of causing true beliefs.

(The most plausible candidate: JTB is more valuable than TB in virtue of possessing *consequential* value: the value that an effect possesses in virtue of its valuable cause)

➔ Both cases require that *another* intrinsic value than truth enter into the explanation of why JTB is better than TB.

= A new intrinsic value is necessary to explain either (1) what makes one of the intrinsic properties of JTB a valuable intrinsic property or (2) what makes the cause of JTB a valuable cause.

Two questions for credit theorists

1. What is the bearer of the new intrinsic value?

2. What is this new intrinsic value?

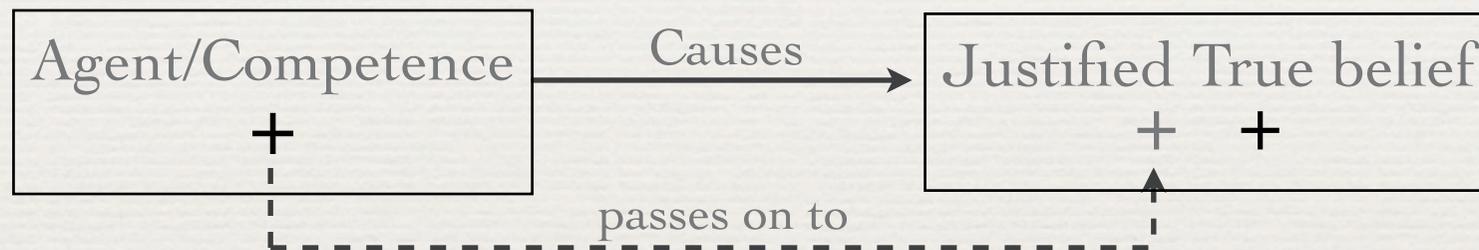
3. The value bearer problem for credit theory

The value bearer problem

- ♦ Two options for the credit theorist:
 - ♦ either the bearer of the credit value is external to the JTB and causes it. (JTB has an additional *consequential* value).
 - ♦ or the bearer of the credit value is a constituent of the JTB (JTB has an additional *constitutive* value)

The consequential value option

- ♦ First option: the true belief caused by an intrinsically valuable agent/competence, is better than the true belief deprived of such valuable causal antecedent.



- ♦ The JTB caused by an agent that has intrinsic credit value is conferred a *consequential* value.

Instrumental value: the value that a cause has in virtue of the value of its effect.

Consequential value: the value than an effect has in virtue of the value of its cause.

A first problem for the consequential value option

- ♦ Sosa (2007) argues that consequential value is not less mysterious than instrumental value. If causation is value-conferring in one sense, it should be value-conferring in the other sense as well. Is it so obvious?
 - ♦ After all, causation has a direction, why should it be value-conferring in both senses? Why should we desire to possess the effects of good things? They are of no help in the attainment of good things in themselves.
 - ♦ That some people *value* all of an idol's doings does not show that they are right in doing so. That effect of noble causes are often valued does not show that they are valuable.

♦

A second problem for the consequential value option

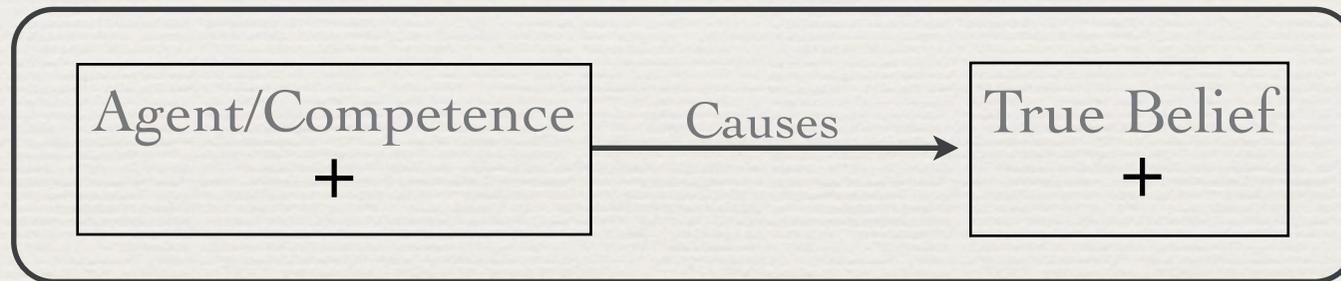
- ♦ Consequential value is a type of *extrinsic final value*. Final value= value that a thing has when it is valuable for its own sake. Extrinsic value= value that a thing has in virtue of its extrinsic properties.
 - JTB is valuable for its own sake in virtue of its extrinsic properties (=being caused by a valuable agent/competence).
- ♦ Extrinsic final values are contentious. How can an axiological property be dependent on two things (the JTB and the agent), but be the property of only one of these thing (the JTB)? One cannot pass from:
 - A. There are things that are *valued* for they own sake in virtue of their extrinsic properties. To:
 - B. There are things that are *valuable* for their own sake in virtue of their extrinsic properties.

A may be false: either because there is no value to be refered to, or because the real bearer of the value refered to is indeed a relational fact (Bradley, 2002).
- Credit theory would be safer if it could avoid commitment to final extrinsic values.

The constitutive value option

- ♦ One way out is to claim that the agent or faculty doesn't confer value to the JTB by causing it, but by being a part of it. What has more value is the whole relational fact of an agent causing a true belief. This is this whole fact that deserved to be called a JTB:

Justified True Belief

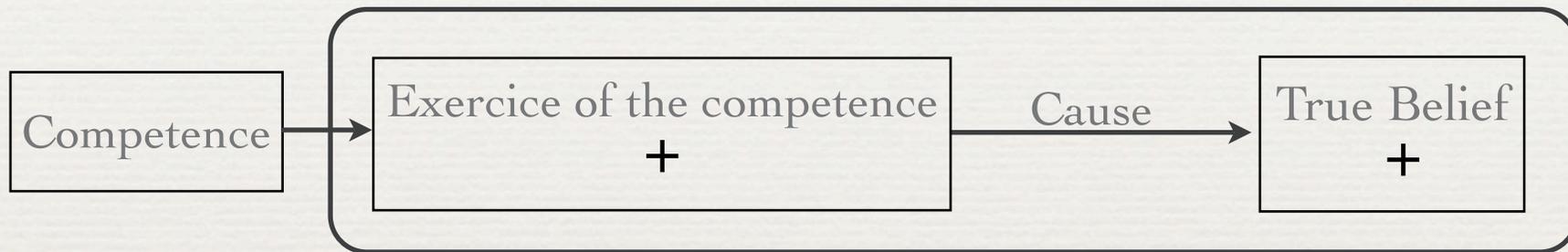


- ♦ Consequential value is replaced by constitutive value, but at the price of making the agent (or its competences) a constituent of the JTB. How can such a long-standing object or competence be part of a possibly shorter state, such as JTB? Competences are not parts of JTB.

Two sophisticated options

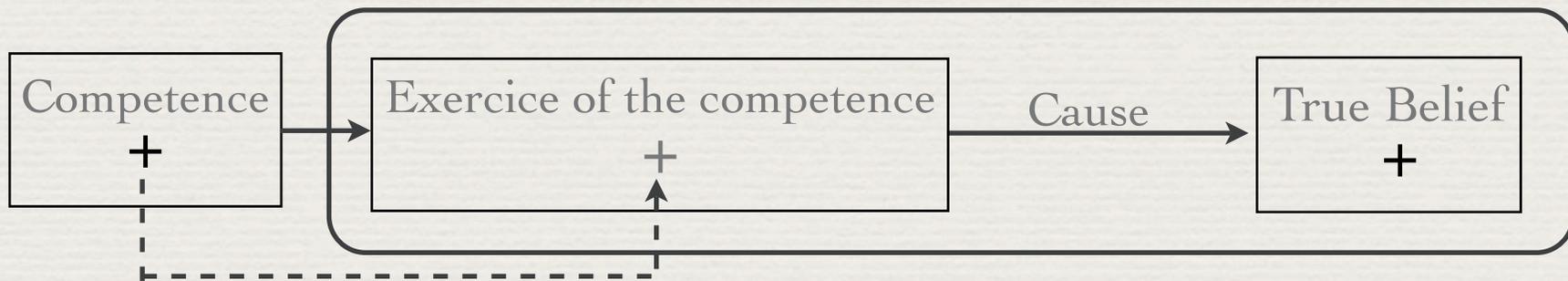
- ♦ First option. Distinguishing the competence from its exercise, one can claim that the bearers of intrinsic value are the exercises of the competence. This avoids both extrinsic final value and the view that agents are constituent of JTB.

Justified True Belief



- ♦ *Problem:* can we make sense of the exercise of a competence having intrinsic value independently of its effect (TB) and of the competence it actualizes?
- ♦ *Second option:* The bearer of intrinsic value is the competence (virtue theory), which transfer its value to its exercises:

Justified True Belief



- ♦ *Problem:* The value of the exercise is no more ungrounded, but final extrinsic values come back.

4. The problem of the nature of credit value

The virtue solution: the new intrinsic value is the value of virtues

- ♦ The hypothesis: some competences, namely virtues, have intrinsic positive values. Williams, 2002, truthfulness, the disposition to strive for truth, has intrinsic value independently of the truth it may help to discover.
- ♦ The worry: we have the strong intuition that the value of a competence derives from the value of its achievements.
 - ♦ as counterintuitive as saying that medicines do not possess positive value in virtue of their therapeutic effects but are good in themselves.
 - ♦ Let's consider an epistemic faculty that a subject possesses but which have neither good nor bad effects. It seems really counterintuitive to say that the faculty of detecting vampires could be intrinsically valuable. It seems that they would be valuable only if vampires were existing, and dangerous.
 - Strongly suggest that faculties are valuable only instrumentally. Recall, moreover that if faculty were intrinsically valuable, the additional value of JTB could be only an extrinsic final one.

Second question for the credit theorists

If competences doesn't have intrinsic value, the the new intrinsic value presupposed by the credit theory must be an intrinsic property of the exercise of a competence.

= why is the *exercise of a competence* something intrinsically valuable?

A weak agency solution

A first proposal is to equate the exercise of a competence with a weak notion of agency (Sosa, 2007). According to this weak notion, even artifact, or simple animals can perform actions: thermostat regulate temperature, insects eat.

Question: Why should such performances be valuable?

Answer: The exercise of a competence is good because it carries out the natural function of a subject (Plantinga) It is good for a knife to cut because this is what it is made for.

Worry:

Why do we value Federer passing shot's more than a robot's similar performance when the robot has been designed to play as well as Federer ? There is still an intuition that the weak agency solution leave unexplained.

A meritocratic solution

- ♦ *The hypothesis:* R. Federer's passing shot has more value than the robot's one because contrary to the robot, Federer worked hard in order to gain his competence.
 - ♦ *Meritocratic view:* credit value is proportional to the effort, pain or difficulty overcome by the agent in order to reach its goal. There is more value in a true belief resulting from an obstinate and perseverant inquiry, than in a true belief that was merely given to us.
- ♦ *The worry:* The meritocratic view manages to explain how exercises of faculties have intrinsic values. Unfortunately this value is negative. Pain being intrinsically bad it cannot add value to the true belief. One way out is to attribute some positive intrinsic value to pain (pain could be corporally bad, but spiritually good). But then the meritocratic view relies on some dubious protestant prejudice.

An hedonic solution

- ♦ “searches after the truth are a sort of hawking and hunting, wherein the very pursuit makes a great part of the pleasure.”(Locke)
- ♦ Locke’s view is that we take pleasure in the activity of searching, and not only in the event of finding out. Pleasure in activity (to enjoy playing) VS pleasure in attainment (to enjoy winning).
- ♦ If so, the very exercise of one’s epistemic competence bears an intrinsic positive value, namely, an hedonic value.

First objection to the hedonic solution

- ♦ *First Objection:* The additional value of justification is not epistemic.
 - ♦ *Answer:* True, but this is unavoidable if we accept (i) the swamping argument (ii) that truth is the only epistemic value.
 - ♦ Note that though the hedonic value of justification is not epistemic, it is nevertheless of some *epistemological importance*. Pleasure is a happy by-product of pursuing truth (we do not seek it, but we find it), which may in turn encourages perseverance in this pursuit.

Second objection to the hedonic solution

- ♦ *Second Objection:* often we get justified without having to perform any pleasant inquiries (in the case of perceptual or testimonial beliefs).
- ♦ *Answer:* If justification is polysemic, the explanation of its value can't be unique. The reliabilist explains the value of one weak notion of justification, reliability. The weak-agency explains the value of a stronger notion of justification, the exercise of a competence according to our design. The hedonic view explains a still more stronger notion of justification: the striving for truth.
 - ➔ Even if one does not gain all truths through hard inquiries, it is still important to explain why those inquiries seems intrinsically valuable. The reason why it is good to pursue truth, beside the value of truth itself, is that it is pleasant.

Conclusions

- ♦ First, we saw that credit theory, as it stands, needs further specifications regarding to two axiological problems (the bearer and nature of credit value)
- ♦ Second, we tried to solve these two axiological problems. We claimed :
 - ♦ (i) that the bearers of the additional value of JTB are the exercises of the competences.
 - ♦ (ii) that in some important cases, these exercises are intrinsically valuable because they are pleasant.

Presentation

that is, why justified true belief is better than mere true belief.

Our thesis is that there is a notion of justification, corresponding to the active exercise of a competence in order to attain truth, whose value is explained neither by reliabilism, nor by the usual versions of credit theory.

We claim that when justification is understood as an active exercise from the part of a subject, the additional value of justification consists in an intrinsic hedonic value.

1. Reliabilism cannot be the whole story about the value of justification.

2. We present credit theory showing that, as it stands, it requires further specifications. More specifically, we show that it requires in fact the introduction of a *new* intrinsic value.

3. This observation raises two worries: what is exactly the bearer of this new intrinsic value? What is exactly the nature of this intrinsic value?

4. We answer that when the bearer is an active exercise from the part of a subject, the new intrinsic value is an hedonic one.