

Littlejohn, C. *Justification and the Truth Connection*, Cambridge University Press, 2012

Reviewed by Martin Smith

One of the most lively exchanges in recent epistemology has been that between internalists and externalists about epistemic justification. According to internalists, roughly speaking, the only factors that can determine whether a belief is justified are factors that are internal to the believer's mind or perspective – factors that, as it is sometimes put, supervene upon the believer's non-factive mental states. According to externalists, on the other hand, whether a belief is justified can depend in part on factors that concern the world beyond the believer's mind. In the opening two chapters of *Justification and the Truth Connection* Littlejohn provides a very thorough introduction to the internalist/externalist debate, outlining and evaluating a number of the arguments that might be mounted on each side.

Littlejohn finds many of the internalist arguments wanting and goes on to endorse a radical form of externalism about justification – a view on which a belief is required to be *true* in order to count as justified. Littlejohn dubs this 'Factivity_J'. While it may take a certain kind of externalist sensibility to its logical conclusion, Factivity_J is very much a departure from business as usual in the internalist/externalist debate. The idea that false beliefs can sometimes be justified would be common ground to most internalists and externalists. In the remaining chapters of the book, Littlejohn outlines a number of arguments in favour of Factivity_J. Along the way, he defends some intriguing views about reasons and evidence (chaps. 3 and 4), the norm of assertion (chap. 5), the norm of action (chap. 6) and the norm of belief (chap. 7).

The idea that false beliefs can sometimes be justified is, admittedly, not something that epistemologists tend to argue for at length. But it is no mere dogma. Consider the following:

- If I have a clear visual experience as of a chair before me, and I have no defeating evidence, then I would be justified in believing that there is a chair before me.
- If a reliable and trusted colleague tells me that she won't be at work tomorrow, and I have no defeating evidence, then I would be justified in believing that she won't be at work tomorrow.
- If I see that my friend has reddened eyes, a downcast expression and tearstained cheeks, and I have no defeating evidence, I would be justified in believing that he's feeling upset.

Each of these generalisations presupposes that false beliefs can sometimes be justified. If Factivity_J is correct, then none of these generalisations, or any that are like them, will be true. If Factivity_J is correct then, for the most part, it simply won't be possible to formulate informative principles about defeasible reasoning – principles about the beliefs that certain bodies of evidence serve to defeasibly justify.

Another thing to consider is that, in a broad class of cases, the way in which we reach a judgment as to whether a subject's belief is justified is by first determining whether we would have arrived at the same belief if placed in the subject's circumstances. This method will lead us to judge false beliefs to be justified on occasion, in that we all recognise that there are possible circumstances

in which we would be lead to believe falsehoods. Suppose it is the middle of winter and the forecast was for snow. Suppose that Agnes is sitting shivering in her office, gazing out at the dark, overcast sky when she notices white flakes drifting down and gathering on the ground. She immediately comes to believe that it's snowing. In actual fact, it isn't snowing but, unbeknownst to Agnes, a film crew have set up a snow machine on the roof of Agnes's building. Factivity_J predicts that Agnes's belief is unjustified, but such a judgment feels almost hypocritical given that any of us would surely believe exactly the same thing if placed in Agnes's circumstances.

None of this should make us think that Factivity_J is completely off the table, but the stakes here are high – Factivity_J is something we should be cautious about accepting without compelling arguments in its favour. As I've mentioned, Littlejohn does outline a number of arguments in favour of Factivity_J, – though they tend to rely upon somewhat technical premises that can be difficult to assess at a glance. I will consider only one of Littlejohn's arguments here – the first such argument that he offers, drawn from section 4.2. The argument begins from the claim that if a belief is justified, it must be based upon a reason and that reasons must be facts or truths. Let's grant these assumptions for present purposes. Say that two possible subjects are 'epistemic counterparts' iff they share all of the same non-factive mental states (section 1.3, pp124). The second assumption required for the argument is what Littlejohn calls *Same Basis*:

If S justifiably believes P on the basis of some reason Q then any epistemic counterpart of S that justifiably believes P on the basis of a reason will believe it on the basis of Q.

If the only facts that can serve as reasons for one's beliefs are facts about one's own non-factive mental states (as a certain kind of internalist might think) then, given the definition of epistemic counterparts, Same Basis looks to be fairly secure. But if one's reasons for belief can include facts about the world at large, then Same Basis immediately looks suspect. If one's reasons for belief can include facts about the world then, given the definition of epistemic counterparts, it's clear that counterparts' beliefs need not be based upon the same reasons at all.

Littlejohn attempts to defend Same Basis with the following example: Suppose Audrey thinks that the conservatives will do badly at the upcoming election and her reason for thinking this is that they overreached in the recent budget negotiations. According to Same Basis, Audrey's epistemic counterparts must believe what Audrey believes for the same reason, otherwise their belief will be based on *no reasons at all* (pp123). Let's try and fill in a few more details of this case: Suppose that Audrey knows that the conservatives overreached in the recent budget negotiations after watching a report on the news. Consider an epistemic counterpart of Audrey's – Audrey* – who watched an identical report, but in a world in which the report was in fact erroneous and the conservatives did not overreach in the recent budget negotiations. Audrey*'s reason for believing that the conservatives will do badly at the upcoming election cannot be that they overreached in the recent budget negotiations, since this is not true at her world. But are we really to accept that Audrey*'s belief is then based on *no reasons at all* – or that it's unjustified, as Same Basis implies? No one who is doubtful of Factivity_J could be expected to accept such a verdict. We could easily imagine ourselves believing what Audrey* does if placed in her situation.

Same Basis would only be generally acceptable if one's reasons for belief were restricted to facts about one's non-factive mental states. Littlejohn, however, rejects this idea (and argues against it in chapter 3). Furthermore, if we do make this restriction, then the remainder of

Littlejohn's argument for Factivity, does not go through. The final assumption needed for the argument is one that he calls *J-Closure*:

If S justifiably believes P, then S could come to justifiably believe at least one of P's logical consequences by competently deducing it from P.

Suppose S justifiably believes P. By J-Closure, there is a consequence R of P that S could come to justifiably believe by competently deducing it from P. Suppose S does competently deduce R from P. According to Littlejohn, there will be an epistemic counterpart of S, in a P-world, who justifiably believes R and for whom P is his reason for believing R. By Same Basis it then follows that P must be S's reason for believing R in which case, since reasons must be true, P must be true, as required. But if one's reasons for belief are restricted to facts about one's non-factive mental states, and P is an ordinary proposition about the world, then there *couldn't* be an epistemic counterpart of S for whom P is his reason for believing Q, and the argument will be effectively blocked. This argument may serve to show that, if we grant the initial assumptions about justified beliefs having to be based on reasons and reasons having to be true, then justified beliefs about one's own non-factive mental states would have to be true. But this is perhaps not such a surprising result and is, in any case, a long way from something like Factivity. It's important to stress that this is just one of the arguments that Littlejohn offers. While many of the others do have a similar feel to them, they proceed from different starting points and are not touched by what I have said here.

Justification and the Truth Connection is a bold and provocative book. While I do have serious misgivings about Factivity, the book is undoubtedly a valuable contribution of the 'let's give an unorthodox idea a fair shake' kind of genre. It should be of considerable interest to epistemologists and moral philosophers and indeed to anyone working on normativity more generally.