Review of *Justification as Ignorance* by Sven Rosenkranz

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The idea at the heart of *Justification as Ignorance* can be put simply: one has justification for a proposition P just in case one is in no position to know that one is in no position to know P. If we let J abbreviate 'One has justification for…' and K abbreviate 'One is in a position to know…' we have the principle JP <–> ~K~KP. While there are some anticipations of this idea in earlier literature[1], in the context of current epistemology, it represents something very original – a new development in the 'knowledge-first' enterprise of analysing justification in terms of knowledge (of which more soon). Perhaps even more significant than the idea itself is the precise formal framework that Rosenkranz develops in order to explore its consequences – consequences that turn out to be far-reaching. By the end, Rosenkranz offers striking, novel views on a number of topics in contemporary epistemology. I will highlight a few of these, before giving a brief chapter summary and then pursuing one line of thought in a bit more detail.

Epistemologists standardly draw a distinction between *propositional* justification – having justification *for believing* a proposition – and *doxastic* justification – being justified *in believing* a proposition. Rosenkranz offers an analysis of doxastic justification that mirrors his analysis of propositional justification: one has doxastic justification for a proposition P just in case one is in no position to know that one does not know P. If we let D abbreviate 'One has doxastic justification for …', and k abbreviate 'One knows…' we have the principle DP <–> ~K~kP. While this makes for a pleasing symmetry between the two kinds of justification, the analysis has an unusual consequence: having doxastic justification for a proposition does not imply that one believes it – at most, it implies that one is in no position to know that one does not believe it (pp108-109)[2]. This might be seen as an immediate reason to reject the analysis – after all, doxastic justification, as the standard definition makes clear, is supposed to be a *property of beliefs*. But to simply dismiss the analysis would be much too hasty. What Rosenkranz effectively shows here is that there is conceptual space for a *threefold* distinction – for a notion that sits 'in between' propositional justification and justified belief, and which has the potential to transform our understanding of the connection between the two (section 7.5). One of the most significant benefits of a meticulous formal framework – of the kind that Rosenkranz provides – is that it has the potential to reveal new possibilities which could remain forever obscured in informal discussion.

Another example of this comes in Rosenkranz's insightful discussion of *internalism* about justification (chap. 10), in which he uses his framework to tease apart several doctrines that tend to be grouped together under this label. Justification, for Rosenkranz, is a *luminous* condition – JP –> KJP (~K~KP –> K~K~KP) and ~JP –> K~JP (K~KP –> KK~KP) are both theorem schemas in his system (sections

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[1] Lenzen (1978) and Stalnaker (2006) propose a principle on which one believes P just in case one does not know that one does not know P (using Rosenkranz's symbols this would be bP <–> ~k~kP). Stalnaker also considers a corresponding principle for justified belief (Stalnaker, 2006, p180), which is one step closer to Rosenkranz's view, but largely focusses on the belief version of the principle. See also the '~K~K rule' described (but not endorsed) by Smithies (2012, p270).

[2] It is generally accepted that knowledge requires belief – ~bP –> ~kP – and this is, plausibly, something that we are in a position to know, giving us K(~bP –> ~kP). While the **K** (distribution) axiom fails in general for the K operator in Rosenkranz's system (pp64-65), if we accept this particular instance, we have K~bP –> K~kP and, by contraposition, ~K~kP –> ~K~bP.

4.2-4.3)[3]. As a result, Rosenkranz is able to capture one key commitment of internalism: whenever one has, or lacks, justification for a given proposition, one is in a position to know this. And yet, as Rosenkranz shows, this does *not* mean that justification must reside in conditions that are internal to one's mind or accessible on reflection, as internalists have traditionally supposed. Rosenkranz (chap. 9) introduces a grounding relation into his system and shows that the luminosity of justification is compatible with its being grounded in conditions that are not themselves luminous. In fact, Rosenkranz is sympathetic to the knowledge-first idea that justification may, in the best cases, be grounded in *knowledge* – when KP is true, JP is grounded in KP – even though KP is not a luminous condition, as the KK principle (KP –> KKP) fails in the system.

One thing of which readers should be aware is that Rosenkranz's theory of justification doesn't take centre stage until relatively late in the book. While justification is discussed in chapter 1, which serves as a general overview of the book, it barely features in chapters 2-5, which are primarily concerned with developing an adequate epistemic logic for the K and k operators. Developing such a logic is, I think, an important project in its own right – though one that is not perhaps on the immediate agenda for many contemporary epistemologists. In any case, if readers do find themselves becoming impatient for a pay-off, I would encourage them to persevere with these chapters. Rosenkranz does come to a number of prominent contemporary topics before the end, and the theorems developed and defended early on are all put to use, even if their significance may not be initially clear.

The analyses of propositional and doxastic justification are introduced and defended in chapter 6. A series of familiar epistemic puzzles are discussed in chapter 7, including the lottery and preface paradoxes and the lottery-driven sceptical problem. Some competing views of justification – including the view that justification is a kind of would-be knowledge (more in a moment) and the normic theory of justification – are critiqued in chapter 8. Chapters 9 and 10 cover topics such as evidence, evidential probability, the grounds of justification, degrees of justification and internalism.

At the start of the review, I mentioned the recent project of analysing justification in terms of knowledge – which is notable for subverting the traditional priority between the two notions. In the post-Gettier literature, for instance, the ambition was to analyse knowledge in terms of justification (and other components). Attempting to do the reverse instead is very much in keeping with the *knowledge-first* movement, initiated by Williamson's *Knowledge and Its Limits*, which portrays knowledge as a resource to be used in analysing other epistemic properties and relations, rather than something that stands in need of analysis itself. While justification was not one of Williamson's primary concerns in *Knowledge and Its Limits*, the earliest knowledge-first analysis of justification is, arguably, to be found within its pages. Williamson identifies one's evidence with one's knowledge – a proposition P is part of one's evidence iff one knows P – and suggests that one has justification for a proposition P iff P is sufficiently *probable*, given one's evidence/knowledge (Williamson, 2000, chap. 9)[4].

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[3] This puts Rosenkranz on a collision course with Williamson's well known *anti-luminosity* argument (Williamson, 2000, chap. 4). Rosenkranz's attempt to deflect the argument, at least when it comes to ~K~KP, is found in section 4.3 (see also 5.3). While Rosenkranz does draw attention to a certain loophole in the argument, I am inclined to think the attempt is not ultimately successful. I won't discuss this here – but see Smith (forthcoming).

[4] Williamson doesn't endorse the view in this exact form – but it's clear that he understands justification in terms of support from one's evidence/knowledge, and that he understands support probabilistically (see in particular sections 9.1 and 9.2). In any case, for reasons that will emerge, this view makes for an instructive comparison with the view that Rosenkranz defends.

Interestingly, this can't be described as a *pure* knowledge-first analysis, since it appeals to another epistemic notion – a probabilistic support relation between evidence and propositions – that is not itself analysed in terms of knowledge (Williamson treats it as a primitive). A simpler, and more hard-line, approach is adopted by Sutton (2007) who argues that justification *just is* knowledge – one justifiably believes P iff one knows P. In more recent work, Williamson has expressed some sympathy for this (see for instance Williamson, 2013, section VI). Bird (2007) suggests that justification could be understood as a kind of 'would be' knowledge – roughly put, one justifiably believes P iff there is a metaphysically possible world in which one has the same non-factive mental states, and one's belief in P amounts to knowledge (a similar view has been defended by Ichikawa, 2014). Sutton and Bird focus here on doxastic justification but, if we're permitted to make use of the notion of being in a position to know, then we could perhaps extend their accounts to propositional justification as well – we could say that one has justification for P iff one is in a position to know P, or that one has justification for P iff there is a possible world in which one has the same non-factive mental states and is in a position to know P[5]. There have been several more recent developments in this literature, but here is not the place for a detailed survey (for other knowledge-first analyses of justification see Reynolds, 2013, Miracchi, 2015, Kelp, 2016, Simion, 2019, Dutant and Littlejohn, 2020, section 4, Dutant, forthcoming, for an overview see Silva, 2022). In any case, as noted above, it is natural to see Rosenkranz's view as another theory of this kind – perhaps the most thoroughly developed to date.

One feature of justification that knowledge-first analyses often struggle to capture is its *gradability*. While it is common to compare the strength of one's justification for different propositions, knowledge is usually regarded as being all-or-nothing. In a way, this observation already suggests that the traditional project of analysing knowledge in terms of justification may be more promising than the currently fashionable reversal. Put bluntly, it is easier to get something nongradable out of something gradable than the other way round[6]. I suspect that the knowledge-first analyses that will be best placed to accommodate the gradability of justification are those that appeal to another epistemic ingredient – like evidential probability – that is itself gradable. On Williamson's original theory, for instance, we could say that one's degree of justification for P is equal to the probability of P, given one's evidence/knowledge. This may give us the *structure* that is needed for making justification comparisons, but it turns out to be too limiting, and unable to capture the full range of comparisons that we would wish to make. The view makes it impossible, for instance, to distinguish the justificatory strengths of propositions that one knows – for all such propositions will be predicted to have a *maximal* degree of justification.

Rosenkranz uses the same general technique to secure the gradability of justification – that is, he offers a knowledge-first account of evidence and appeals to a notion of evidential probability[7]. For Rosenkranz, one's evidence consists of the set of propositions that one is in a position to know, and one's evidential probability function $\xi(\cdot)$ results from conditionalising a prior probability function (treated as primitive) on this set of propositions (section 9.2). But, rather than equating one's degree of justification for P with the evidential probability of *P*, Rosenkranz equates it instead with the

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[5] Rosenkranz suggests that, on close scrutiny, this natural extension of Bird's view is problematic and claims that the view may in fact be incapable of accommodating propositional justification (p176).

[6] In Smith (2016, section 5.1) several knowledge first analyses (Sutton, Bird, Ichikawa, Reynolds) are criticised for their failure to accommodate the gradability of justification (see also Brown, 2018, section 4.4).

[7] It is interesting to note that, for Rosenkranz, evidential probability only enters the picture when it comes to analysing degrees of justification – Rosenkranz's analysis of categorical justification (unlike Williamson's) remains 'pure' knowledge-first.

evidential probability of the proposition that *one is in a position to know P*. More precisely, according to Rosenkranz, the degree of one's justification for P is equal to $\xi(KP)$, provided $\xi(K{\sim}KP) = \xi({\sim}JP) = 0$ (section 9.4). If $\xi({\sim}JP) > 0$ then, since JP is a luminous condition in Rosenkranz's framework, ~JP follows, and one has no degree of justification whatsoever for P[8].

Unlike the Williamsonian approach, Rosenkranz's theory won't assign a maximal degree of justification to every known proposition – but it *will* assign a maximal degree of justification to every proposition that is *known to be known*. After all, if I know that I know P then, on Rosenkranz's view, the evidential probability of KP will be equal to 1, and my degree of justification for P will be maximal[9]. There is some tendency amongst epistemologists to think of second order knowledge – knowing that one knows something – as a special, enlightened, epistemic status. But this is the wrong picture. While second order knowledge may be somewhat more demanding than first order knowledge, it is nothing exotic.

Suppose I'm having coffee with Bruce when I get a message on my phone saying that a parcel has been delivered to my house and left at the front door. Assuming the message is genuine, and there is no Gettier-type interference etc. I will come to know that there is a parcel at my front door. If Bruce asks me what the message was, and I tell him, I will then know that Bruce knows that there is a parcel at my front door. But if I can know that *Bruce* knows this proposition, then surely I can also know that *I* know it. Or, from a different angle, when I tell Bruce about the message, he comes to know that there is a parcel at my front door and also comes to know that I know that there is a parcel at my front door. But if Bruce is in a position to know about my knowledge, then surely I am too – at least on the same basis as Bruce, but plausibly in a more immediate way than that[10].

If I know that I know that there is a parcel at my front door then, on Rosenkranz's view, my degree of justification for this proposition must be maximal. But that hardly seems right – if I were back at home with the package right in front of me, then my justification would clearly be stronger. It's also clear that there are other propositions for which I have stronger justification – like the proposition that I just got a message on my phone or that I'm currently having coffee with Bruce etc. Rosenkranz's theory of degrees of justification may improve on the Williamsonian theory, but it is still not enough – the window of gradable justification remains too narrow. For a great many propositions, on Rosenkranz's theory, we will find ourselves either at the top of the scale (since we know that we know them) or off the scale altogether (since we know that we don't know them).

Another issue for the Williamsonian theory of degrees of justification is that it allows for justification comparisons to *reverse* as a result of factors that are completely external to one's own perspective. Consider two court cases. In the first case there are two independent eyewitnesses who

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[8] If JP then, by luminosity, it follows that KJP in which case JP is part of one's evidence and $\xi({\sim}JP) = 0$. As a result, if $\xi({\sim}JP) > 0$ then ~JP. Rosenkranz's theory predicts that categorical justification represents the very bottom of the degree of justification scale – in the sense that one must have categorical justification for P in order to have any degree of justification for P. Some would baulk at this consequence, but I am inclined to think it is acceptable (see Rosenkranz, pp216-217, Smith, 2016, section 5.2).

[9] From kkP we can derive KkP in which case, on Rosenkranz's view, kP will be a part of one's evidence. Since kP entails KP, it follows that KP will have an evidential probability of 1.

[10] These points about second order knowledge are keenly observed by Kripke in 'Two paradoxes of knowledge' (see Kripke, 2011, pp34-35). Indeed, Kripke suggests another pattern of reasoning which we could use here if desired: it is very plausible that, when I tell Bruce about the message, I come to know that *he* knows that *I* know that there is a parcel at my front door. But surely I can then know, by simple deduction, that I know that there is a parcel at my front door.

testify that the defendant is guilty, while the second case involves just a single eyewitness who testifies to the defendant's guilt. In both cases the eyewitnesses appear to be reliable and trustworthy, their testimony holds up under cross examination and no further relevant evidence is presented. If I were observing these cases, I would take myself to have more justification for believing that the first defendant is guilty than I do for believing that the second defendant is guilty – indeed, I would take this to be *obviously so*. But on the Williamsonian view, for all that has been said so far, this judgment could turn out to be incorrect.

Suppose that, unbeknownst to me, the first defendant is actually innocent (perhaps the eyewitnesses saw a lookalike or some such) while the second defendant really did the commit the crime in question and was seen by the eyewitness in a straightforward way. Given these facts, I could plausibly be said to *know* that the second defendant is guilty, while I couldn't, of course, know this about the first defendant. It follows that the proposition that the second defendant is guilty will have a probability of 1, given my evidence/knowledge, while the probability that the first defendant is guilty will, presumably, be somewhat less than 1. As a result, the Williamsonian view will predict that I have more justification for believing that the *second* defendant is guilty. This is the wrong prediction. If I were to eventually discover all of these facts, I wouldn't feel the need to go back and *revise* my earlier justification comparison – I would still regard it as having been perfectly correct, given the information that was available to me at the time.

Rosenkranz's theory is subject to the same problem. If we fill in the details in the right way, it's plausible that I can not only know that the second defendant is guilty – I can *know that I know* this. As a result, the evidential probability that I know that the second defendant is guilty will be equal to 1, while the evidential probability that I know that the first defendant is guilty will be less than 1. Rosenkranz admits that, on his theory, one's degree of justification for a proposition will not be luminous (even though justification itself is) and may depend on factors that lie beyond one's awareness (p227). Given this, results like the foregoing should perhaps come as no particular surprise. And yet, even if we concede that degrees of justification are not always luminous, that is not to say that we should be comfortable with any kind of luminosity failure whatsoever. In the example described, it is highly implausible that the truth of my justification comparison should be hostage to external factors in this way, even if we think that degrees of justification sometimes are.

I have highlighted here one aspect of Rosenkranz's view that I find problematic, but I will conclude by emphasising, once again, the significant and original contribution that this book makes. *Justification as Ignorance* should be read closely by those who work on epistemic justification, and I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in a fresh take on many of the epistemological issues of the day.

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