

Trent Dougherty, ed.
Evidentialism and its Discontents.
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Over the past few decades, Earl Conee and Richard Feldman have defended and developed an evidentialist approach to epistemic justification. On their view, one's doxastic attitude is justified iff it fits one's evidence. Their view plays a significant role in the internalism/externalism debate. They maintain that one's evidence supervenes upon one's mental states and so deny that contingent facts about the environment and one's relation to it that don't supervene upon one's mental states have any bearing on the justification of belief. In Dougherty's recent collection, a number of leading epistemologists discuss issues related to Conee and Feldman's evidentialist approach. *Evidentialism and its Discontents* is a welcome addition to the literature, one that helps to clarify the evidentialist's commitments and sharpen the contrast between evidentialism and its rivals.

It would be impossible to discuss the sixteen excellent papers along with Conee and Feldman's responses to them in this review, so I shall focus on a handful of papers that address an interconnected series of problems.

In their previous work, Conee and Feldman defended two supervenience theses. The first is that (propositional) justification supervenes upon one's evidence. The second is that one's evidence supervenes upon one's mental states. These supervenience theses tell us something about justification, but little about four important issues: (i) what one's evidence is, (ii) how one's evidence must be related to one's beliefs in order to justify it, (iii) what it takes for one's beliefs to be well-founded, and (iv) whether facts about evidence are explanatorily prior to facts about justification. In recent work, Conee and Feldman have drawn a distinction between one's ultimate evidence (i.e., that which is evidence without one needing further evidence for it to be evidence) and one's derivative evidence (i.e., that which is evidence, but only because one has further evidence that confers this status upon it) and argued that one's ultimate evidence consists of experiences. In some places, they say that a belief has adequate propositional justification if it 'fits' one's evidence. In others, they say that a belief has adequate propositional justification iff it is supported 'on balance' by one's evidence. It is not clear that these claims are equivalent. The notion of fit cries out for explication. On a natural reading, one would have on balance support for p iff the evidential probability of p on one's evidence is greater than $\neg p$. That seems rather implausible, since one does not have on balance support for the proposition that the next roll of a fair die will not come up 1 or 2. Unfortunately, nothing in the collection advances our understanding of how relations between one's evidence and one's beliefs justify them when they do. (DeRose, Goldman, and Greco do challenge the idea that there is an adequate notion of fit that would enable the evidentialist to say that fittingness is the essence of justification.) The volume contains little discussion of the basing relation. There are some interesting discussions of the explanatory virtues of the evidentialist approach to justification. I shall focus on papers that focus on (i), (iii), and (iv).

One could characterize evidence functionally as that which justifies belief. As Goldman notes, this characterization of justification will not suit Conee and Feldman's purposes, if their aim is to explain justification in terms of evidence. Some independent characterization of evidence is needed, one that would explain why we should believe that one's evidence supervenes upon one's mental states and depends upon nothing further ('Mentalism') and the further claim that one's ultimate evidence consists of experiences ('Experientialism'). Conee and Feldman suggest that we can get a fix on the notion of evidence by reflecting on various platitudes about evidence that capture our 'ordinary notion'.

What is the ordinary notion of evidence that Conee and Feldman think that they've captured by adopting Mentalism and Experientialism? Evidence might be understood as an indicator, the information that one has to go on, or in terms of reasons. Unfortunately, it is hard to see how a view that combines Mentalism and Experientialism could accommodate any of these suggestions. Goldman and Rysiew's papers in this volume discuss these problems in detail. Goldman suggests that the notion of a reliable indicator is not available to Conee and Feldman because of their commitment to Mentalism and rejection of reliabilism. For their part, Conee and Feldman agree, but they insist that the notion of an indicator *is* available to them and that it is plausible to think of experiences as things that indicate various external things. Their suggestion that the notion of reliability is not implied by the notion of indication is *prima facie* implausible. The claim that certain spots indicate measles certainly commits one to the further claim that there is a reliable connection between spots and measles. While Conee and Feldman might want to introduce some 'subjective' notion of indication, it will be difficult to do so without introducing an absurdly permissive account of justification. If a subjective indicator as of p needn't reliably indicate p but merely dispose someone to believe p , it doesn't seem terribly plausible that justification arises by virtue of fit between indicators so understood and beliefs. To meet Goldman's challenge, Conee and Feldman need a robust notion of indication that doesn't invoke the concept of reliability.

Feldman's suggestion that one's evidence might be information that one has to go on is also in tension with Experientialism as information is typically understood in terms of truths and experiences are never understood in terms of truths (208). In his contribution, Dougherty develops Williamson's propositional conception of evidence. The propositions that one has in mind if one takes experience at face value might be reasons that figure in reasoning and so have a plausible claim to be thought of as evidence. Conee and Feldman resist Dougherty and Williamson's suggestion. While they agree with Dougherty and Williamson that we should understand evidence as the sort of thing that can be explained, they insist that events, not propositions, are what we explain. If events are what's explained, perhaps experiences would belong to the right ontological category to be evidence. Unfortunately for Experientialism, the idea that we explain concrete particulars rather than fine-grained entities like propositions or facts is one that is difficult to sustain.

In his contribution, Steup offers an evidentialist response to skepticism by citing the evidence we have to believe that we're not brains in vats (BIVs). There is, he notes, no chapter on envatment in neurophysiology texts and no class on how to envat a brain offered at any university. Conee and Feldman seem unimpressed. They seem to think that we have this evidence, but they deny that one's ultimate evidence could ever consist of something that wasn't

had as evidence by a BIV. On the view that one's ultimate evidence consists of experiences, this might be right. If they were forced to abandon Experientialism, however, (as Dougherty, Williamson, and Pritchard urge) and embrace a conception of evidence as facts, it would be difficult for them to maintain both their anti-skeptical stance with their Mentalism. Once we move to the view that evidence consists of facts, we have to settle difficult questions about possessing evidence. A natural thought, in keeping with their characterization of ultimate evidence, would be that one's ultimate evidence includes facts known non-inferentially. That view, if combined with their anti-skeptical views, would lead immediately to the denial of Mentalism. There's clearly a motive for them to embrace Experientialism even if Experientialism isn't terribly well-motivated.

In their exchange with Pritchard, they respond critically to his proposal that experience can provide factual support for one's beliefs about the external world. They say that they can't see any reason, "why the perceptual state would be stronger evidence [when veridical] than the counterpart illusion" (291). This isn't Pritchard's proposal. His proposal is that the fact that one sees p is one's evidence, not a perceptual state. The reason one would have stronger evidence when one sees p than when one doesn't is that the fact that one sees p is better evidence for believing p than the fact that it merely appears to one that one sees p. If they fail to show that facts are in the wrong ontological category to be evidence and have to accept that perceptual states provide reasons without being reasons, it's difficult to see how they avoid having to embrace a view like Pritchard's on which our reasons include more than just facts about ourselves without embracing the seemingly skeptical view that experiences can't provide us with ultimate evidence.

My overall impression was that Conee and Feldman's critics raise a number of plausible objections to their view, objections that call for careful reflection and possibly call for substantial revision of their current formulation of their view. While none of these objections are utterly decisive against the core commitments of evidentialism, they show that there will be lively debates about the nature of justification and evidence for a long time to come.

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