

GOLDMAN ON EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

WILLIAM P. ALSTON

This essay will be focused on Goldman's treatment of epistemic justification in *Epistemology and Cognition*¹ (hereinafter, 'EC'), with a few side glances at his treatment of knowledge. To be sure, this is not the most distinctive feature of the book. That title, rather, belongs to Goldman's stimulating and provocative defence of the view that epistemology must make use of the resources of cognitive science if it is to carry out its mission effectively, a defence richly illustrated with specific material from cognitive science. Nevertheless, on Goldman's own showing the account of justification provides an essential part of the conceptual foundations of epistemology, and hence it is well worthy of our attention. I should warn the reader at the outset that I will not be subjecting the account to radical criticism. On the contrary, I feel that the view is very much on the right track and only needs to be set straight on a few points. This will not be a knock down drag out fight, but just a family squabble.

I

Surprisingly for an epistemologist whose basic orientation is reliabilist, Goldman opts for an account in terms of the permission of a belief by a system of rules. Reliability comes in, not as an account of what justification is, but as a constraint on a system of justificational rules being a *right* system. Indeed, in his earlier essay, "What is Justified Belief?"² (hereinafter 'WIJB'), Goldman had written:

The term 'justified', I presume, is an evaluative term, a term of appraisal. Any correct definition or synonym of it would also feature evaluative terms. I assume that such definitions or synonyms might be given, but I am not interested in them. I want a set of *substantive* conditions that specify when a belief is justified. (1)

The discussion in EC is in this spirit, except that now 'justified' is further specified as a normative or, as we might say, "deontological" term.

Calling a belief justified implies that it is a *proper* doxastic

attitude, one to which the cognizer has an epistemic right or entitlement. These notions have a strong denotic flavor... They are naturally captured in the language of 'permission' and 'prohibition', which readily invite a rule formulation. (59)

And thus the justification of belief is said to be a matter of the belief's being permitted by a suitable system of rules.

The trouble with countenancing rules that permit, require, or prohibit belief is that they would seem to presuppose that belief is under effective voluntary control. They do not necessarily presuppose that belief is under the *direct* control of the will in the sense that one can believe or refrain from believing that *p* at a given moment just by willing (deciding, intending) to do so. But they would seem at least to presuppose that belief is as much under voluntary control as is, e.g., closing a door in normal situations, where bodily movements that are under my direct voluntary control in the strict sense can confidently be relied on to get the door closed. For if it is not within my power to bring it about right on the spot that I either believe or refrain from believing *p*, what sense would there be in rules or principles that require, prohibit, or permit believing or refraining from believing that *p* at that moment? How could such rules make any effective contact with my situation? If I don't have an effective choice between doxastic attitudes toward *p* at *t*, what is the point of requiring me to take up a certain such attitude at *t*?

But then any rule account is in big trouble, for it seems that, at least for the most part, I have no such powers. With respect to ordinary perceptual, introspective, memory, and simple inferential beliefs, and, more generally with respect to all those cases in which it seems perfectly clear to me that something is or is not the case, I have no capacity to make an effective decision as to whether to believe. If it seems obvious to me that *p* then I believe that *p*, willy nilly; if it seems obvious to me that not-*p*, we get an analogous result on the other side. Permissions and the like have no role to play.

Epistemologists who invoke something like Goldman's permission rules typically claim that their doing so presupposes not that we have an immediately effective choice between propositional attitudes, but only that we have longer range control over them.³ However this fails to obviate the difficulty. Even if we had much more long range control over our propositional attitudes than we in fact do, that would not be a sufficient ground for a requirement or prohibition of my believing that *p* at *t*; at most it would provide for the appropriateness of a requirement or prohibition of my taking those steps that would (probably) bring about the propositional attitude in question. Consider the following

GOLDMAN ON EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

analogy. I am situated with respect to organic conditions like blood pressure much as I am with respect to belief. In neither case can I bring about a certain state of affairs (a certain blood pressure or a certain belief) just by willing it, or even by willing states of affairs that can be depended on to bring it about right away. But I can do various things that may have a longer range effect on my blood pressure or my beliefs. But it is clearly ridiculous to speak of requiring or permitting me to have a certain degree of blood pressure at a certain moment. It would sound equally absurd to speak of permissions, etc., with respect to a belief at a time were it not for the lingering effect of the assumption that belief is under immediate effective voluntary control, an assumption it is easier to disavow overtly than to banish from one's breast.⁴

Although I take the permissive rule framework to be a serious disability of Goldman's account as stated, I believe the substance of that account to be easily disengaged from that framework. Just replace rules of permission with principles of evaluation. Thus (P1) on p. 59 runs as follows:

- (P1) S's believing p at time t is justified if and only if
S's believing p at t is permitted by a right system of justificational rules.

Replace this with:

- (P1*) S's believing p at time t is justified if and only if
S's believing p at t would be evaluated positively by a right system of justificational principles.

Everything can then proceed as before, merrily or not as we shall consider. To avoid undue tampering with the text I shall continue to use Goldman's formulation in terms of permission, remembering that it can always be replaced in the way just explained.

One other feature of Goldman's account should be mentioned for the sake of completeness, though it will not figure in the further discussion. Goldman supplements P1 with a "no undermining" requirement, where the permission generated by a right system of rules could be *undermined*, e.g., by S's being permitted to believe that the belief that p is not permitted, or by S's just believing that the belief that p is not permitted.

II

Let's now consider the form that J-rules take for Goldman. On p. 77 he suddenly introduces, without any supporting considerations, the suggestion that J-rules permit "cognitive state transitions", i.e., "transitions from prior cognitive states to beliefs". For example (where

'M' is the permission operator and '/' indicates a state transition):

I. If (q & r & s) logically implies p, then M (Bq & Br & Bs / Bp).

I want to consider what Goldman does, or might have to say in support of his preference for J-rules that take the history of belief formation to be what is crucial for the belief's justificational status. But first we must work our way toward his final account of the shape of J-rules.

With respect to a rule like I., Goldman points out that one might move from the premise beliefs to the conclusion belief without the latter being justified, even if the premise beliefs are justified and even if the premises entail the conclusion. For a subject, Claude, might just have a hunch that the conclusion is true, without seeing that the argument is valid, or taking someone else's word that the argument is valid. (84). Goldman draws the following conclusion from the consideration of such cases.

Instead of conceiving of them (J-rules) as specifying mere cognitive-state transitions, we must conceive of them as specifying cognitive *processes*, where by 'process' we mean a determinate kind of causal chain. (85)

To be right, J-rules should not merely permit state transitions; they should permit selected cognitive operations or processes — processes that sometimes output beliefs. (86)

As Goldman is thinking of it, this kind of rule, unlike the pure cognitive-state transition rules, would not permit a conclusion arrived at by a hunch or as a guess, since the kind of *process* that is involved in arriving at beliefs in that way would not be permitted. Then just what sorts of processes would be permitted for inferential belief generation? On this Goldman is strangely silent. He seems to be assuming that there is some respectable way of getting from premises to conclusions, and that this way is quite different from the way involved in simply proceeding on a hunch, but we are left in the dark as to what that might be. Goldman does reject certain obvious suggestions. Thus he rejects the requirement that the process go through a belief by the subject that the argument is valid, on the grounds that many persons form justified beliefs by inference before acquiring the concept of validity. But then just what does an inferential process have to contain in order to be permissible? This lacuna does not attach only to deductive inference. Nowhere does Goldman so much as attempt to characterize a permissible process. If challenged on this, he would probably reply, in the general spirit of the book, that the specification of cognitive processes is a very difficult matter, on which we need a lot of help from

cognitive psychology, and that discipline is not yet in a position to give us enough help.

However, I am inclined to think that we need not get into the question of what processes are involved in cognitive state transmissions in order to formulate appropriate J-rules. We could instead concentrate on the notion of a input-output mechanism for forming beliefs, one that works according to a certain "function" for producing a belief that is that function of the input. Thus a modus ponens mechanism would take beliefs of the form 'If p then q, p' and yield a belief of the corresponding form 'q' as output. A visual belief mechanism would take a visual experience with certain features as input and produce a belief that there is a sphere in front of one as output.⁵ This way of thinking about the matter is suggested in WIJB.

We need to say more about the notion of a belief-forming '*process*'. Let us mean by a 'process' a *functional operation* or procedure, i.e., something that generates a *mapping* from certain states — 'inputs' — into other states — 'outputs'. The outputs in the present case are states of believing this or that proposition at a given moment. (11)

With this idea in mind let's go back to our unfortunate reasoner, Claude, who jumps to the conclusion on a hunch. Without going into the question of what specific processes underly this particular transition, we can bring out what is amiss with Claude as follows. His belief in the conclusion was not produced by a reliable belief forming mechanism. For the function embodied by the mechanism that was operative here could be formulated as follows.

When confronted with a set of beliefs, form whatever belief you have a hunch is true.

And there is no reason to think that this function can be depended on to give us a true output when the input beliefs are true. If, on the other hand, Claude's belief had been produced by the modus ponens mechanism (assuming that the inference in question was of that form), then his belief was the output of an inferential belief producing function (or mechanism embodying such a function) that can be depended on to regularly give true output beliefs from true input beliefs. This would seem to be a way of thinking about the matter that is not subject to Goldman's objections to "pure cognitive state transition rules", while at the same time not requiring us to go into the details of just what psychological processes were involved. So long as the mechanism is one that maps inputs onto outputs according to a reliable function, we don't

have to worry about the details of what is going on in the black box. We don't care (epistemologically, not psychologically) how it does it, so long as it is doing it in a generally reliable way.⁶

"Why suppose that your suggestion is opposed to Goldman's? After all, in the passage you quoted from WIJB Goldman explained a belief forming process as just consisting of an input-output mechanism of the sort you have been describing." Well, if that is how he is thinking of processes in EC, he is remarkably secretive about it; he doesn't give any hint that this is what he has in mind. Moreover, the overall aim of the book is to emphasize the ways in which cognitive psychology can contribute to epistemology, and ways in which epistemology needs those contributions. And one of the central ways has to do with the identification and investigation of belief forming processes. That suggests that in EC Goldman is thinking of processes as the actual psychological goings on — mostly hidden from introspection — that cognitive psychology is trying to discover and describe. And the contents of Part II of EC bear this out. So I think there is an issue here. But if Goldman is thinking of belief forming processes in the earlier way in EC, then he is welcome to the fold. In any event, in the sequel I shall continue to use Goldman's 'process' language, but understand it in terms of his explanation of processes in WIJB.

III

Now I want to return to the question of why we should take (features of) the history of belief formation as what is crucial for justification.⁷ I noted above that Goldman just lays down a form of J-rules that embodies this suggestion. But this is misleading. Goldman explicitly elsewhere⁸, and implicitly in EC, argues for the dependence of justification on causal history. He goes over a variety of alternative views of the determinants of justification (what evidence one in fact has whether it functions as a basis for this belief or not, the logical features of an inference, the necessary truth of the proposition believed, what one could say in support of the belief), and he provides reasons, in the case of each, for denying that it provides sufficient conditions for justification. The common theme that runs through these criticisms is the one we saw coming into the discussion of Claude's logical leap: that the alleged sufficient condition could be satisfied even though the belief is formed on palpably inadequate grounds, or otherwise in a markedly irrational way. Since I feel that Goldman has done a superb job of setting out the reasons for, as I like to put it, a "source relevant" conception of justification, I shall say no more about that here.

Having nailed down a "process format for J-rules" (95), Goldman

goes on to develop a criterion of rightness of J-rules. He distinguishes deontological and consequentialist criteria and suggests that no criteria of the former sort have proved satisfactory (97). He then considers a number of candidates for the crucial consequences: coherence, explanation, biological survival, and so on, and gives what I consider to be excellent reasons for concentrating on *verific* consequences. More specifically, he suggests that the ratio of true to false beliefs yielded by a process is what is crucial for the evaluation of a J-rule that permits this process. Here, as elsewhere, Goldman's discussion is noteworthy for its careful consideration of a variety of alternatives. He distinguishes a "resource-relative" version from a "resource-independent" version. The former "fixes an acceptable truth ratio as a function of the target cognitive system's resources, in the present case, human cognitive resources" (104). A resource-relative criterion might "say that a rule system is right if and only if the processes it permits would maximize truth ratio... relative to humanly available processes" (104). Or it might "say that a rule system is right just in case the processes it permits have a truth ratio of a level humans commonly attain, or that it is easy for them to attain" (104). A resource-independent criterion, by contrast, will fix an absolute standard, one not relative to the facts of human capacities or habits. Goldman, rather tentatively, opts for a resource-independent criterion, which he thinks of as requiring a ratio of greater than .50 true beliefs. He doesn't settle on any particular such ratio, but he does seem to think in terms of requiring a single minimum ratio for all belief forming processes. And from this last point I must dissent. It seems to me unreasonable to expect the same degree of reliability for all belief producing mechanisms. We learn by experience how reliable different cognitive operations are, and we judge particular instances accordingly. Consider complex reasonings to the best explanations, which are, by common consent, highly fallible at best. Suppose S believes that Jim's dominant aim is to become president of the company, on the grounds that this is the best explanation of recurrent patterns in Jim's behavior. Furthermore, S has carefully considered alternative explanations and has even critically reflected on the canons that guide his choice. In that case, I don't see how we could deny that Jim's belief is justified, despite the fact that reasonings of this sort produce at best a much lower proportion of true beliefs than, say, normal perceptual and memory processes. It is just very difficult to find out what other peoples' motives are, and we don't expect the success rate here that we do in seeing things right in front of one's nose.

To be sure, Goldman distinguishes between *processes* and *methods*, more or less on the basis of a native-acquired distinction. (See especially

pp. 93–95.) Presumably an argument to the best explanation falls on the “method” side of this distinction, since the capacity to engage in such argumentation is hardly something we are born with.⁹ But the criterion for J-rules we are considering is advanced by Goldman only as having to do with what he calls “primary epistemology”, which is concerned with native cognitive processes. However the same point can be made there. We don’t expect the same degree of reliability for memory of early events in one’s life as we do for seeing things in good light directly in front of one. If my visual beliefs about things directly in front of me exhibited no higher a ratio of true beliefs than peoples’ memories of early events in their life do, we might well deny that such visual beliefs of mine were justified. And yet it is surely possible for people to be justified in memory beliefs concerning events in their early life. Hence it appears that we expect less in the way of truth ratio in some cases than in others.

The moral I draw from this is that it is a mistake to try to lay down a single required minimum truth ratio for all belief forming processes. We need a “resource-relative” criterion, at least to the extent of considering what it is realistic to expect from different sorts of belief forming processes. That is not to say that any process whatever will be approved by a J-rule, since it will, overall, come up to what can reasonably be expected of it, in the light of our experience with its use. We can still have absolute minimum requirements for what will count as sufficiently reliable. Nevertheless, it would seem preferable to set requirements above the absolute minimum for many processes, taking into account what we have learned of their powers.

IV

Next let’s consider just what truth ratio, of whatever magnitude, is constitutive of justification. That is, when we ask about the ratio of true beliefs among those approved by a certain system of rules, what class of beliefs must we examine? The most basic issue here concerns whether we are to consider only those beliefs that are (have been, are, and will be) actually produced by the processes approved by the rule system, or whether we must also consider non-actual beliefs as well, i.e., whether we must consider what beliefs would be produced by these processes in various non-actual circumstances. Goldman doesn’t meet just this issue head on in EC, though he does in WIJB.

I have characterized justification-conferring processes as ones that have a ‘tendency’ to produce beliefs that are true rather than false. The term ‘tendency’ could refer either to *actual long-run frequency*, or to a ‘*propensity*’, i.e., *outcomes that would occur in merely possible realizations of the process.* (11)

GOLDMAN ON EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

Though I doubt that 'tendency' is properly used for an actual long-run frequency, the alternative that Goldman sets out here is unquestionably the crucial one. But, unfortunately, he declines to resolve it.

Which of these is intended? Unfortunately, I think our ordinary conception of justifiedness is vague on this dimension... Since the purpose of my present theorizing is to capture our ordinary conception of justifiedness,... it is appropriate to leave the theory vague in the same respect. (11)

However, by EC Goldman had obviously changed his mind, for there he rules that justifiedness depends on a favorable truth ratio in *normal worlds*.

We have a large set of common beliefs about the actual world: general beliefs about the sorts of objects, events, and changes that occur in it... Our beliefs on this score generate what I shall call the set of *normal worlds*... Our concept of justification is constructed against the backdrop of such a set of normal worlds. My proposal is that, according to our ordinary conception of justifiedness, a rule system is right in any world W just in case it has a sufficiently high truth ratio in *normal worlds*. (107)

Here there is no suggestion that justifiedness can be a function of the actual track record of the process issuing in the belief; it is rather a function of the track records in a set of worlds, more specifically, those that conform to certain of our general beliefs.

I think Goldman is quite right to reject the idea that justification hangs on actual track record. The consideration of processes that never occur, or occur only once or a very few times, is sufficient to dispel that notion. For surely a process (or an instrument) could be highly reliable even if it is never used. And a highly unreliable process (or instrument) that is used only once might, by chance, yield an accurate belief (reading), so that on the actual track record interpretation, it would have to be judged reliable. A reliable process is, surely, one that *would* yield a sufficiently high ratio of true beliefs in a suitably long and varied spread of cases, whether such a spread actually occurs or not. But I am equally convinced that Goldman has made the wrong choice of the set of possible worlds to be taken into account. His main reason for the choice of normal worlds seems to be the widely shared intuition that in a "Cartesian demon" world where our perceptual beliefs are all or mostly false, we would still be justified in our normal perceptual beliefs, as justified as we are in the actual world (assuming that most such beliefs are true in the actual world).¹⁰ However, there are what I take to be

clearer intuitions that tell against the view. Consider cognitive subjects in a non-normal world, where the processes that produce mostly true beliefs are of a quite different sort from those that do so in normal worlds. In world, W1, let's say, forming beliefs on the basis of spontaneous trains of fantasy, just as we ordinarily form beliefs on the basis of perception, is a highly reliable process. (An indulgent Deity sees to it that such beliefs are generally true. He has also pre-established a harmony that prevents massive contradictions between such beliefs.) According to Goldman's proposal, the inhabitants of W1 would not be justified in beliefs formed in this way, for this process is not reliable in "normal" worlds; but this just seems dead wrong. Let's assume that the denizens of W1 have innate, hard-wired tendencies to form beliefs in this way, and that the basic structure of the world guarantees that most such beliefs are true. How, from a reliability point of view, could we deny that their beliefs are justified?¹¹ That would be (normal world) chauvinism of the most blatant sort.

I won't belabor this point since Goldman has changed his view again. In a recent paper, "Strong and Weak Justification",¹² he makes a distinction between deontological justification ("weak justification") and the property a belief has if it is "a *well-formed* belief, a belief formed (or sustained) by proper, suitable, or adequate methods, procures or processes" (52) ("strong justification"). In term of this distinction the denizen of the Cartesian demon world is weakly but not strongly justified in this perceptual beliefs. As for the theory developed in EC it is, of course, to be viewed as an account of strong justification. To return to the point at issue, in "Strong and Weak Justification" Goldman takes the position that a J-rule system R is right in a possible world W iff R has a sufficiently high truth ratio in the worlds close to W (63).¹³ This seems to be on the right track. There are still problems concerning the relevant dimensions of closeness. I would put it this way, as a start. Restricting ourselves to systems for evaluating human beliefs, the system is required to have a sufficiently high truth ratio in circumstances of the sort we typically encounter. That is vague, but it seems clear that the concept of epistemic justification is no more precise.

V

Thus far the discussion has been basically sympathetic to Goldman. I have argued for a bit of tidying up here and there, but the outcome of my discussion is still recognisably in the same ball park as Goldman's view.¹⁴ However I now come to a more fundamental criticism. Goldman's criterion for justifiedness (more accurately, this criterion for J-rule rightness) shares with other "purely reliabilist" criteria the

disability that it allows beliefs to be justified when they are not “based on” anything of which the subject is, or could easily become, aware as a basis. They allow S to be justified in believing that p when S is not aware of the belief’s being based on anything that S would, if sufficiently reflective, take to constitute a sufficient ground (support, basis) for the belief.

Now it is clear that most of our beliefs that are commonly taken by epistemologists to be justified, and are commonly taken by people in general to be OK and to figure in knowledge, *are* based on something of which the subject is aware and which would be plausibly regarded as a sufficient ground or support. This is obviously the case with inferentially grounded belief, but it is equally obvious for perceptual beliefs which are based on sensory experience, and introspective beliefs, which are based on one’s awareness of the introspected state (which in some cases may not be distinguishable from the state itself). Doubts may be raised with respect to memory beliefs and beliefs in self-evident propositions. But with the former I take the conscious basis to be the “sense of pastness” with which the proposition comes to one; and as for the latter there is the air of obviousness (“clear and distinct perception”) that accompanies the entertainment of the proposition. Moreover, from a reliabilist perspective the natural way to determine whether the ground of a belief is an adequate one (provides sufficient support) is to consider whether beliefs formed in that way on that ground are or would be mostly true, i.e., whether the ground is sufficiently indicative of the truth of the belief. Thus if one develops a reliabilist theory of justification from the initial conviction that justification is a matter of the ground of one’s belief being an adequate one, reliability will attach to the connection between the ground of the belief and its truth value. A justified belief will be one whose basis is a reliable indication of its truth.¹⁵

How is this account related to Goldman’s? Leaving aside the rule system complication, if we explain ‘process’ as Goldman does in WIJB, my view amounts to holding that a belief is justified if (1) the process that yields it is such that the input to the mechanism is a reliable indication of the truth of an output formed from that input according to the function constitutive of that “process”, *plus* (2) the additional condition that the input be available to the consciousness of the subject.¹⁶ I take it that on the WIJB (and my) way of viewing “processes” (1) is a reasonable way to interpret the notion of a process yielding beliefs with a favorable truth ratio. Hence if Goldman were to follow me in reverting to WIJB for a conception of belief forming *processes*, the dispute between us would be confined to (2).¹⁷ We have noted that it

is typical for justified beliefs to be based on an adequate ground. But is this only the more usual case or is it necessary for, and partly constitutive of, justification. Is it a conceptual, or otherwise necessary, truth, that justified beliefs are based on an adequate ground of which the subject is aware?

To tackle this question let's consider a process that is reliable but in which the belief is not formed on the basis of something of which the subject is (easily can be) aware and which is easily recognizable by the subject as a basis. Suppose that Sam inexplicably finds himself with strongly held beliefs about the current weather in various parts of the globe. He has no idea how he came by these beliefs, nor did he acquire them by any of the usual routes (meteorological investigation, newspaper reports, etc.). He just finds himself frequently with a strong conviction that, e.g., it is now 66 degrees Fahrenheit and raining in Bombay. Furthermore these beliefs are almost invariably correct. This pattern persists for long enough to convince us (and make it reasonable to suppose) that these are not lucky accidents but that they stem from a process that is reliable, in the full blooded sense that it has a lawlike tendency to produce mostly true beliefs. Since it would be highly unreasonable not to suppose this, we must also suppose that there is some mechanism by the operation of which Sam is in effective cognitive contact with the weather in distant places, though we have no idea what this is. We have a highly reliable belief forming mechanism at work, but with an input that is not accessible to Sam's awareness.

Under these circumstances I would feel quite confident in attributing *knowledge* to Sam, knowledge of what the weather is like in Bombay at this moment, for example. After all, he is, in some way of which he and we are ignorant, registering the weather in distant spots in a highly accurate and effective way, a way that gives rise to confident beliefs on his part. He is receiving, recording, and utilising *information* about the weather in distant spots, he is *learning* about this, coming to *realize* what it is. But what about justification? Is he justified in believing that it is now raining in Bombay? I can't see that he is. After all, he has nothing to "go on" in forming a belief to that effect. If we ask him "How do you know?" or "How can you tell?", he is at a loss to respond. And by this I do not just mean that he cannot give a complete and adequate account of the processes involved in his forming these beliefs; that is typically the case in paradigmatic cases of knowledge. A person may have a great deal of perceptual knowledge of her surroundings while having little or no understanding of the processes that give rise to this knowledge. But Sam can't even specify what his supposition about the weather was based on, or what tipped him off to the rain in Bombay, what indication

of this he was relying on. Whereas in normal perceptual cases even the most unsophisticated perceiver can say something about what he was going on — at least that it was the way the thing looked. It is this lack on Sam's part that leads me to deny that he was justified in his belief. But I don't want to brand these meteorological beliefs as *unjustified*; it is rather that they lack justificational status. They are not the sorts of things to which the justified-unjustified contrast applies. We appropriately raise the question of justification only when there is something the subject was aware of (or could easily become aware of) on which he based his belief; and then the justified-unjustified issue hangs on whether that basis is an adequate one, whether it is sufficiently indicative of the truth of the belief.¹⁸

In "An Internalist Externalism" I speculate that the reason 'justified' carries this "accessibility of basis" requirement is that the concept of justification arises against the background of a practice of critical reflection on our beliefs and those of others, a practice of challenging their credentials and responding to such challenges — in short the practice of attempting to carry out the activity of justifying beliefs. I do not, of course, identify my *being justified* in believing that *p* with my carrying out the *activity of justifying* that belief; these are clearly distinguishable matters. But the suggestion is that it is only because we participate in such activities and are alive to their importance that we can have the concept of *being justified* in a belief; it is only on that condition that that concept can have a place in our lives. But whether or not this is the correct explanation of this feature of the concept of being justified, it is, I believe, intuitively clear that the concept does exhibit that feature.

Goldman himself presents a certain case in such a way as to suggest that he too is alive to this feature of the concept of justification, despite his official theory. Early in Chapter 3 he discusses Armstrong's view that one knows that *p* if one's belief that *p* is nomologically sufficient for the belief's being true.¹⁹ To this view he poses the following counterexample.

Let *B* stand for a particular brain state, and suppose that whenever a human being believes he is in brain state *B*, this nomologically implies that he *is* in brain state *B*. This might happen because the only way to realize belief in this proposition is to be in brain state *B*. It follows from the reliable-indicator account that whenever any person believes he is in brain state *B*, and hence the content of that belief is true, this true belief qualifies as knowledge. But this result is readily susceptible to

counterexample. Suppose that what causes a given person to believe he is in brain state B is not any genuine understanding or information concerning brain states, in particular, no knowledge of the cited nomological fact. Further, suppose that he has no autocerebroscope to monitor his brain states and give readouts about them. He just has a firm hunch that he is in brain state B (it is a state he heard described in a recent lecture, but he dozed through most of that lecture and knows nothing of what was said about the state). Surely he does not *know* he is in brain state B, although his belief to this effect is a reliable indicator of the truth. (43–4)

As suggested by the above, I do not agree with Goldman's intuition that this is not (cannot be) a case of knowledge. At least I would say that it is knowledge, provided that the input-output mechanism responsible for this belief would, in a suitable spread of cases, yield mostly true beliefs. As a simple way of insuing that let's say that the mechanism only yields beliefs to the effect that the subject is in brain state B; since brain state B is, or is a crucial part of, the input that is needed to activate the mechanism, these beliefs are invariably true. I am also assuming that, as is presupposed by Goldman's specification of the content of the belief, the subject has enough grasp of the concept of brain state B to be credited with a belief that he is in such a state. Given all that, I would say that since he is forming a belief that *p* in a way that is firmly under the control of the fact believed, and hence that he is forming the belief in a way that is nomologically guaranteed to yield true beliefs, he thereby knows that *p*. He is getting true beliefs that *p* in a maximally veracious way; so how can it be denied that he is getting knowledge? But what about justification? Goldman must be taking the subject to lack justification for his belief. For Goldman, unlike myself, takes knowledge to entail justification, and none of the other requirements he lays down for knowledge (true belief and "local reliability" (pp. 46 ff.)) are violated in this case. Hence the lack of knowledge could only stem from a lack of justification. I agree that justification is lacking. But why is this? Or, more to the present point, why does Goldman think that the belief is not justified? What he points out is that the subject has "no knowledge of the cited nomological fact", i.e., the fact that the belief that *p* in this case nomologically implies *p*, and that the brain state is not perceptually presented to him via an autocerebroscope. I don't suppose that this was intended as an exhaustive list of what would inhibit justification; there are obviously other possibilities, e.g., sufficient testimony. But I do take it that Goldman intended this to be a representative list. And what is

GOLDMAN ON EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

common to the two items cited and that is missing from the case as described? Why, just what I, unlike Goldman, am explicitly requiring for justification: the belief's being based on an adequate ground of which the subject is conscious. Having adequate reasons in the form of other things one knows (justifiably believes), and being perceptually presented in a suitable way with the object the belief is about, are two prime examples of such grounds. Thus, when Goldman descends from his theoretical formulations to deal with particular cases, he exhibits the strong intuitive pull of the idea that justification requires an adequate ground of which the subject is aware.

VI

As foreshadowed at the outset, this critical examination of Goldman's account of justification has not revealed that he is fundamentally misguided in that account. On the contrary, I find his defence of a basically reliabilist approach to principles of justification to be brilliantly executed *and* fundamentally sound. He does an excellent job of disposing of ahistorical approaches to justification, according to which the justificational status of a belief is simply a function of what is in the subject's cognitive structure at the time, regardless of whether that is made use of as a basis for the belief. Once his account is freed of deontological excrescences, and once it is made explicit that justification requires an adequate ground or basis that is accessible to the awareness of the subject, we have an eminently perspicuous account of the matter.

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
SYRACUSE, NEW YORK 13244-1170
USA

NOTES

- ¹ Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- ² In G.S. Pappas, ed., *Justification and Knowledge* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1979).
- ³ See, e.g., Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God" and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Can Belief in God Be Rational if It Has No Foundations?", both in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. A. Plantinga & N. Wolterstorff (U. of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Paul Moser, *Empirical Justification* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1985), Ch. IV; Alvin Goldman, "The Internalist Conception of Justification", *Midwest Stud. Phil.*, Vol. 5 (1980). Goldman evinces no awareness of the problem in EC.
- ⁴ This reaction to deontological conceptions of epistemic justification is set out in much more detail in "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification", *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. II, 1988.

- 5 No doubt, this perceptual example is horribly oversimplified, but I cannot go into the details of perception here.
- 6 Note that my suggestion here is not at all incompatible with Goldman's insistence that it is the causal history of belief formation that is crucial for justification. Justifiedness still depends on the belief's having originated as the output of a mechanism that operates according to a certain function. It is just that we don't have to look into all the details of the causal history to determine its justificational status. Justifiedness depends on a causal history of type T, where that will have to do with the constituent function of the mechanism from which the belief in question issued.
- 7 It is often noted, by those who agree with Goldman that justification depends on the causal entanglements of a belief, that a belief may change its justificational status after its origin, e.g., by the subject's coming into possession of additional supporting evidence. Hence it can't be true that justification is solely a matter of the belief's *origin*, but may also be affected by causal dependencies that arise later in its career. Goldman does not take this explicitly into account in his general discussion of reliability in EC. But if he were to do so, it would not change the general character of his position but only complicate the formulations.
- 8 "The Internalist Conception of Justification" and WIJB.
- 9 Actually it is not very clear just how Goldman draws the native-acquired distinction; he says little about it. Nevertheless, I take it to be clear that on any remotely plausible way of drawing the distinction arguments to the best explanation will count as acquired.
- 10 EC, 108, 113.
- 11 We could, if we like, fill out the picture so that their beliefs also have as much right to be termed "justified" on an internalist conception of justification as, e.g., our normal perceptual beliefs. Let's say that not only are people programmed to form these beliefs spontaneously and to repose complete confidence in them, but also their experience rarely gives them reason to suspect such beliefs of being false. Moreover, those inclined to raise such questions would unhesitatingly take such beliefs to be justified. Given all that, these fantasy beliefs would be justified on typical internalist principles.
- 12 *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. II (1988).
- 13 This would imply, I take it, that our inhabitant of W1 would be strongly justified in the beliefs formed on the basis of spontaneous fantasy.
- 14 Goldman might feel that my discarding of the deontological character of his rule system goes beyond "tidying up".
- 15 I have spelled out this account of justification in "An Internalist Externalism", *Synthese* 74 (1988), pp. 265-283.
- 16 This, of course, only handles the justificational status of the belief at the moment of formation, leaving aside any further contributions in the course of its subsequent history. Let me also note that this last stipulation does not require that the reliability of the ground or other details of the "process" be open to the direct awareness of the subject. See "An Internalist Externalism" for more on this.
- 17 In the more complex formulation of "An Internalism Externalism" the analogue

GOLDMAN ON EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

of (2) requires only that the ground be of a sort that is normally open to conscious awareness. I neglect that nicety here.

- ¹⁸ If one takes *justifiably believing that p* to be necessary for knowledge that p, one will protest my attributing knowledge to Sam while denying that his belief is justified. And the view that justification is necessary for knowledge is widespread among contemporary American epistemologists, including Goldman. I, on the other hand, take cases like Sam's to be a good reason for rejecting this view; although I readily grant that most cases of knowledge involve justified belief. The crucial cases for this issue are those in which a true belief is generated by a reliable mechanism, but where the justification for that belief that would otherwise be thus provided is "undermined" by, e.g., reasons for supposing the mechanism not to be reliable. For example, we can envisage a person who has sufficient reasons for regarding her senses as unreliable, even though in fact they are quite reliable. When such a person forms a normal true perceptual belief, does this count as perceptual knowledge, even though the perceptual belief is not justified? For a positive answer to this question see my "Justification and Knowledge", *Proc. XVII World Congress Philos.* For a negative answer, see Goldman's WIJB and Carl Ginet, "Contra Reliabilism", *The Monist*, Vol. 68, no. 2 (April, 1985).
- ¹⁹ Armstrong's view is much more complicated than this, but the epicycles are not germane for the present discussion. See his *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), Ch. 12.