FOUNDATIONAL EVIDENTIALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF SCATTER

Ted Poston

Abstract

This paper addresses the scatter problem for foundational evidentialism. Reflection on the scatter problem uncovers significant epistemological lessons. The scatter problem is evaluated in connection with Ernest Sosa's use of the problem as an argument against foundational evidentialism. Sosa's strategy is to consider a strong intuition in favor of internalism—the new evil demon problem, and then illustrate how a foundational evidentialist account of the new evil demon problem succumbs to the scatter problem. The goal in this paper is to evaluate the force of the scatter problem. The main argument of the paper is that the scatter problem has mixed success. On the one hand, scatter undermines *objectual evidentialism*, an evidentialist theory that formulates principles of basic perceptual justification in terms of the objects (or properties) of perceptual states. On the other hand, the problem of scatter does not undermine *content evidentialism*, an evidentialist view that formulates its epistemic principles in terms of the assertive content of perceptual states. The significance of the scatter problem, especially in concert with the new evil demon problem, is that it provides an argument for content evidentialism.

The problem of scatter is a significant and neglected epistemological problem. Ernest Sosa has done the most in developing the scatter problem. In this paper my central focus shall be Sosa's use of the scatter problem as an argument against foundationalist evidentialism. The scatter problem, however, is larger than just an epistemological problem. In its most general form it is a problem for certain types of non-consequentialist normative theories. The introductory section places the scatter problem within the larger context of types of normative theories and then proceeds to develop the epistemological problem of scatter. The second section develops Sosa's use of this problem. The third section argues that scatter afflicts objectual evidentialism but not content evidentialism. The final section addresses a worry about the truth connection that arises from reflection on epistemological scatter.

I. Introduction

Normative theories fall into two kinds: consequentialist and non-consequentialist theories. Consequentialist theories explain the normative in terms of value and production. A consequentialist theory of right action, for instance, explains right action in terms of the good and ability to produce the good. Mill's utilitarianism is a prime

example of a consequentialist theory. On Mill's view the right act produces the most value. In epistemology Alvin Goldman's early theory of process reliablism is a good example of a consequentialist epistemological theory.[1] On Goldman's view a belief is justified only if it is caused by a truth-productive process, i.e., a process that tends to produce more true beliefs than false beliefs. In general a consequentialist epistemological view explains justification in terms of truth and ability to produce true belief.[2]

Non-consequentialist theories explain the normative in some other way. These theories are primarily characterized by a negative thesis: the normative is not properly explicated merely in terms of value and production. W.D. Ross's ethical intuitionism is a non-consequentialist theory of the right.[3] The right act, it is claimed, is not properly analyzed in terms of value and production. Rather, according to Ross, it is a matter of an action *fitting* the circumstance. In epistemology evidentialism is a non-consequentialist theory of justification. The evidentialist holds that facts about justification can't be explicated merely in terms of truth and ability to produce true belief. Rather a belief is justified only if it fits one's evidence. For instance, Feldman and Conee propose:

EJ Doxastic attitude *D* towards proposition *p* is epistemically justified

for S at *t* if and only if having *D* towards *p* fits the evidence S has at *t*.[4]

Facts about whether a belief fits the evidence are not simply a matter of whether the belief is produced by a truth-productive process.

Non-consequentalist theories face the scatter problem when their normative principles do not display any deep explanatory unity. Chisholm's epistemological theory is an example of a non-consequentalist theory that suffers the scatter problem because he offers a bevy of basic normative principles—ten to be exact.[5] Ross's ethical theory faces the scatter problem as well. Ross offers a list of "prima facie duties". These include duties of fidelity, reparation, gratitude, non-injury, etc.[6] These prima facie

---

[1] Goldman (1979).
[2] I assume that gaining truth and avoiding error are the only items of final epistemic value.
[3] Ross (1930).
[4] See Feldman and Conee (2004:83).
[5] See Chisholm (1989:62-72).
[6] See Ross (1930:18-36).

ethical principles work together with a general principle of fit—the right act is one that fits the occasion—to explain what is the right act. Yet there is no explanation for the diverse facts about fit. The evidentialist faces a similar problem. Though the evidentialist offers a single normative principle—Feldman and Conee's principle EJ—there is little explanation regarding why certain beliefs fit the evidence while other beliefs do not fit the evidence.

Ernest Sosa has recently used the scatter problem as an argument against foundationalism evidentialism.[7] Sosa's earlier writings appeal to the scatter problem as a reason to reject contemporary forms of internalistic foundationalism. In "Epistemology Today: a perspective in retrospect"[8] Sosa writes,

> The strategy of some contemporary foundationalism (sic) now seems clear: multiply epistemic principles in order to provide for the sources of justification required for our rich knowledge in its various dimensions. But the danger in a free use of such a strategy also seems clear, for a wide scattering of diverse principles does not make for a satisfactory epistemology.[9]

In "Theories of justification: old doctrines newly defended"[10] Sosa presses the scatter problem against evidentialism. Sosa describes evidentialism as the "view that there is a relation among propositions – 'fitting' or 'being supported' or the like – such that a proposition is justified for one iff it 'fits' or 'is supported by' the relevant evidence that one 'has'."[11] Against such a view Sosa complains,

> John Stuart Mill would often object to 'intuitionist' moral theories by deploring their lists of retail intuitions with no apparent unity, thus charging them with a problem of 'scatter.' Suppose evidentialism stops with a scattered set of principles. For example, suppose it includes principles admitting green and blue but ruling out bleen and grue, and supposed it includes principles that allow direct introspection of triangularity but not direct introspection of octagonality or of 23-sidedness. Obviously there would then be a problem of scatter – and that does not yet consider the appropriate experience-introspection ties suitable for extraterrestrials. The problem is that if we hold the abstract level of *fitting* to be *fundamental* we may then lack the resources for greater theoretical unity.[12]

---

[7] Sosa in BonJour & Sosa (2003:164-5).
[8] See Sosa (1991:65-85).
[9] Ibid:73.
[10] Sosa (1991:108-130).
[11] Ibid:127.
[12] Ibid:128.

These quotes bear out that the scatter problem is the problem of theoretical unity. If epistemic principles for perceptual justification are conceived as underwriting transitions from perceptual states to doxastic states the scatter problem arises when a theory licenses different transitions with distinct, fundamental principles. Sosa's mention of the grue problem is illuminating. If an epistemic principle licenses the move from a perceptual state to the belief that something is green then, unless there is something about the perceptual states that indicates green rather than grue, the principle should license the move to the belief that something is grue. The strategy of handling multiple transitions by distinct epistemic principles gives the suspicion that one is merely describing intuition at the level of theory and accordingly not offering a significant explanation about the data.

The problem of scatter arises as well for evidentialist views that try to account knowledge or justification from multiple sources. Consider for instance the following putative sources of knowledge.[13]

1. Perception, by means of the external sense organs;

2. Memory;

3. "Inner consciousness," or the apprehension of our own states of mind – for example, our awareness of our own sensations, of our beliefs and desires, of how we feel, of what we are undertaking to do;

4. Reason, as the source of our a priori knowledge of necessity – our knowledge, for example, of some of the truths of logic and mathematics;

5. Moral consciousness;

6. Intuitive understanding;

7. Religious consciousness;

8. Social understanding, or the apprehension of social facts – for instance, that Jones is uncomfortable around Bill or that Smith has overdrawn his bank account.

It is exceedingly difficult to unify these distinct sources of knowledge within an evidentialist framework. It's quite natural then to see the role for the concept of fit within an evidentialist framework. However, I agree with Sosa that if the facts about fit

---

[13] The list is taken from Chisholm (1982:114-5). I have added social understanding to Chisholm's list since this does seem an area of knowledge and it does not fit well with the other sources.

are fundamental then this makes for a less than desirable epistemology. In this paper I shall focus on Sosa's use of the scatter problem in connection with an evidentialist account of perceptual justification. I shall argue that scatter can be avoided by appealing to assertive mental content. Though I shall not stress it I think this solution can handle the problem of scatter that arises for multiple sources of knowledge or justification as well.

As mentioned Sosa's most recent use of the scatter problem focuses on internalist foundationalist accounts of perceptual justification, particularly in connection with the new evil demon problem. He argues that attempts to uphold the internalist intuition contained in the new evil demon problem succumb to the problem of scatter. But, as I shall argue, Sosa's objection has mixed success. On the one hand, scatter undermines *objectual evidentialism*, an evidentialist theory that formulates principles of basic perceptual justification in terms of the objects (or properties) of perceptual states. On the other hand, the problem of scatter does not undermine *content evidentialism*, an evidentialist view that formulates its epistemic principles in terms of the assertive content of perceptual states. The significance of the scatter problem, especially in concert with the new evil demon problem, is that it provides an argument for content evidentialism.

II. Sosa, Scatter, and Demon-world perceptual justification

Sosa's discussion on the scatter problem is situated within a discussion of the new evil demon problem.[14] The new evil demon problem concerns subjects who have the same beliefs and experiences that we do but, because of the presence of a controlling demon, their beliefs are false and their experiences falsidical. Nevertheless there is a strong intuition that these subjects as just as much justified in their beliefs as we are in ours. This intuition supports the key internalist claim that justification is not merely a matter of truth and production. As evidentialists would put it, in the demon world those subjects have good evidence for their beliefs because their beliefs fit their experiences. This intuition is straightforwardly a problem for externalist theories of justification because such theories require beliefs to exhibit alethic production for the kind of justification necessary for knowledge.

---

[14] Sosa in BonJour & Sosa (2003:162-5).

In Sosa's discussion of this intuition he lays out three internalist attempts to explain the rational appropriateness[15] of the demon-worlders' perceptual beliefs and claims that the most plausible version faces the scatter objection. The three theories Sosa considers are Foley-rationality,[16] a deontological account of justification, and an evidentialist account that Sosa calls "the good reasons" account. Although Sosa does not explicitly acknowledge this the first two internalist theories do not face the scatter objection because they exhibit theoretical unification. Foley's account of rationality offers the single principle that a belief is justified just in case were one to reflect on one's deepest standards one would be satisfied with the belief. This avoids the scatter problem because the same principle is invoked to explain every justified belief. Similarly a deontological account of justification avoids the scatter problem, for it invokes the same principle to explain each justified belief. Nevertheless, Sosa find these theories suspect. Although Sosa does not put it this way his main reason for rejecting these theories lies in the fact that the theories deny a logical (or modal) connection between justification and truth.[17]

Having rejected these accounts he turns to the good reasons view, i.e., evidentialism, to account for the intuition that the beliefs of the subjects in the demon world are rationally appropriate. The good reasons view maintains that the perceptual beliefs of the denizens of a demon world are rationally appropriate because they have good reasons for their beliefs. The good reasons view as such is uninformative because "good reasons" stands as much in need of explanation as "rational appropriateness." It is no improvement to say that their beliefs are rationally appropriate because their beliefs fit their experiences. A more informed attempt will explain when a perceptual experience provides a good reason for (or when it fits) a perceptual belief. Sosa offers the following suggestion on behalf of the good reasons account:

> One might suppose that there is a state with an intrinsic mental character whose intrinsic mental character makes it properly characterizable as a state of experiencing thus (as a state of experiencing a white, round item, or the like), and this with logical independence of any modal relation that such a state, with

---

[15] Sosa describes the problem in terms of "subjective appropriateness" (see pp. 162-3). I prefer "rational appropriateness" because what is at issue is rational belief.
[16] See Richard Foley (1993).
[17] For the reasons see Sosa in BonJour & Sosa (2003:159 & 164).

such an intrinsic character, may bear to the presence of or absence of a white and round item.[18]

Sosa objects that the good reasons account faces the problem to "explain how such states could possibly give a reason to believe that there is something white and round before one."[19] He anticipates that the defender of this view will claim that the state just does provide such a reason. To this Sosa rejoins with the problem of scatter. He writes,

> And now one will face the following prospect: the need for a boundless set of principles each with fundamental status, connecting various intrinsically characterized mental states with paired external facts of specific sorts. Even though there is no modal relation between a given intrinsic mental state and its paired external fact type, that state might nevertheless serve as a reason to believe in its paired fact. And this will be so even when, as in the demon world, that sort of intrinsic mental state may in fact – when combined with the modally stable presence of the controlling demon – be a modal *counterindication* of its paired sort of external fact. Each such rational relation uniting the supposed mental/external pairs would be postulated as holding primitively, despite there being no modal relation among the mates, and even when the mental state modally counterindicates the paired external fact (assuming the presence of the demon to be modally quite stable relative to the world).[20]

We can isolate two issues here. First, Sosa claims that the good reasons account implies a "boundless set of principles each with fundamental status, connecting various intrinsically characterized mental states with paired external facts of specific sorts." Second, Sosa avers that these rational relations between a mental state with such and such intrinsic character and a belief about an external fact hold independently of any modal relation between the state and the external fact. This is claimed to be especially implausible because in a demon-world the mental state with such and such intrinsic character is a counterindication of its paired external fact.

The second objection is significantly different than the first. The first objection is the scatter problem. The quotes from Sosa's earlier use of the scatter problem bear out that the essence of the scatter problem is the lack of theoretical unity regarding a theory's normative principles. The second objection is the problem of the truth connection. These problems are clearly separable. This can be seen from the fact that the problem of the truth connection arises for the good reasons account, Foley-

---

[18] Ibid:164.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid:164-5.

rationality, and a deontological account of justification, whereas the scatter objection arises only for the good reasons account. One common objection to Foley-rationality and a deontological account is that the putative rational relations between the justifiers and the justified hold independently of modal relations between the justifiers and the truth of the justified.

Though the scatter problem and the problem of the truth connection are separable, the problem of scatter raises concern over how a non-consequentialist epistemological theory relates its principles to truth. The scatter problem arises because of a concern about theoretical unity—there seems to be no unifying feature that ties together distinct, fundamental epistemic principles. A consequentialist theory avoids scatter by connecting the epistemic principles to the central epistemic item of value, truth. Thus, the consequentialist maneuver to avoid scatter simultaneously provides an answer to the truth connection. It is understandable, therefore, why Sosa ties these two objections together. Accordingly, an adequate non-consequentialist treatment of the scatter problem should have something to say about the problem of the truth connection. The final section sketches in outline a non-consequentialist account of the truth-connection.

III. Dispersing the Scatter Problem

The scatter problem can be dispersed by recognizing that there are two ways of unpacking the notion of the intrinsic mental character of a perceptual state to yield principles of perceptual justification. One way is to unpack the notion in terms of the objects of the perceptual state. To mesh with the intuition in the new evil demon problem these objects need be logically independent of empirical objects. A sense-datum or a property based view fits the requirement of logical independence. For simplicity, I shall work with a sense-datum view. On this account principles of perceptual justification mention the objects of the perceptual state in the antecedent. For instance, a perceptual state having a round, red sense-datum (or collection of sense-data) provides prima facie justification for the belief that there's a red, round object.

A different way of unpacking a state's intrinsic mental character is in terms of mental content, where the content has the kind of independence Sosa refers to. The

content of the perceptual state may be nonconceptual in nature[21] or it may be conceptual.[22] On either view a perceptual state that has the assertive content that p (or as if p)[23] yields prima facie justification for a belief whose content matches the content of the perceptual state.

An evidentialist account that unpacks the notion of intrinsic mental character the first way may be called *objectual evidentialism* and an evidentialist view that take takes the second option *content evidentialism*. The scatter problem arises for objectual evidentialism but not content evidentialism. That content evidentialism accounts for the intuition in the new evil demon problem and avoids the scatter problem constitutes a significant reason for it. Moreover, as explained in the final section, content evidentialism can also account for the problem of the truth connection. The following explains how scatter afflicts objectual evidentialism and how content evidentialism avoids the problem.

A. *Objectual Evidentialism*

It should be fairly obvious by now that objectual evidentialism is afflicted by the scatter problem. Consider its epistemic principles. These principles have the form: when certain sense-data are present one has a good defeasible reason to believe that such and such physical object is present. Different sense-data justify different empirical beliefs. However, not every object (or property) that figures in a perceptual state provides a good reason to believe the appropriate proposition. Plausibly, a perceptual state that includes a large green item provides a good reason to believe that a green item is present but not a good reason to believe that a grue item is present. Moreover, a perceptual state can exhibit more detail than we are plausibly justified in believing is present. Consider the perceptual state that results from looking at an office building. On a sense-datum view the state may include objects that correspond to a specific number of windows, say 23. But one isn't justified in believing that there are 23 of the relevant objects present. One simply can't tell on the basis of a look that an image has some specific, complex property. So the objectual evidentialist is committed to the claim that perceptual states

---

[21] See Heck (2000) & (forthcoming); also Peacocke (2001).
[22] See McDowell (1994).
[23] The "as if" qualification is needed to bring in nonconceptualist views. For one use of the "as if" formulation see Pollock & Ovid (2005). They defend direct realism, formulated as "(DR) For appropriate P's, if S believes P on the basis of being appeared to as if P, S is defeasibly justified in doing so" (p. 325)

provide good reasons to believe that *certain* objects and properties are present but not a good reason to believe of *every* object and property that it is present. However, on an objectual evidentialist account there is nothing about the perceptual state that explains this difference. So the objectual evidentialist is saddled with the scatter objection.

B. Content Evidentialism

Content evidentialism avoids the scatter problem. This view unpacks the notion of the intrinsic mental character of a perceptual state in terms of mental content. It holds, for instance, that when one is in a mental state with assertive content p (or as if p) then one has a good reason to believe that p is true. Assertive contents are contents that are presented as true.[24] In the Müller-Lyer illusion, for instance, one hosts the assertive content that the lines are of unequal length. This content provides a good defeasible reason to believe that the lines are incongruent. It should be noticed that a consequence of content evidentialism is that there exist a potentially boundless number of epistemic principles. But importantly these principles are consequences of the more general and fundamental epistemic principle that a state with the assertive content that p provides prima facie justification for p.

Content evidentialism can avoid the grue problem and the specificity objection that plagued objectual evidentialism. A plausible development of content evidentialism is that a state with assertive content as if (e.g.) *there's a green object* provides a good reason to believe that *a green object is present* but not a good reason to believe that *a grue object is present*. The problem with objectual evidentialism is that it lacked a principled reason for this asymmetry. The content evidentialist, however, has the reasons to explain this asymmetry. The content of the state is that *a green object is there*, not a grue object. That is, the state has a projectible content that is incompatible with grue-like properties. Most states do not represent grue-like properties. What is needed for the content evidentialist here is to ride piggy-back on solutions to the disjunction problem in the philosophy of mind.[25] Presumably content evidentialism can align itself with a view of mental content that avoids the disjunction problem. For

---

[24] Heck (2000) makes similar use, as well, of the notion of assertive contents.
[25] See Fodor (1990).

instance, the view may be joined with a teleological account of content.[26] Teleological accounts of content avoid the disjunction problem by appealing to the function of the state to represent (e.g.,) green instead of grue.[27]

The specificity objection is that the objects of perceptual states can be much more specific than one has justification for the appropriate belief. For instance, a perceptual state may contain a 13-sided figure but that state doesn't yield prima facie justification for the belief that the figure has 13 sides. This is a problem for objectual evidentialism because it has no principled reasons for holding a difference in justification between which objects and properties figure in the perceptual state. The content evidentialist can avoid this problem by appealing again to the content of the perceptual state. Perceptual states may not carry contents that match every object or property of the perceptual state. When looking at an office building one may be in a perceptual state that has the content that there are many windows, but not the content that there are 23 windows even though the perceptual state carries information that are 23 windows. There is much detail that needs to be filled in to this general picture but it is plausible that content evidentialism is much better positioned to handle the specificity objection than objectual evidentialism.

As I mentioned earlier the scatter problem arises in regard to difference sources of knowledge. My proposal is that content evidentialism can be extended to cover difference sources of knowledge in so far as these sources generate assertive contents. This allows us to view content evidentialism as a principled and theoretically unified account of epistemic justification.

C. A Worry

Let us consider another worry about content evidentialism. Content evidentialism solves the scatter problem by appeal to the assertive content of perceptual states. Yet every mental state with assertive mental content requires justification. So these perceptual states require justification. Hence at some point the content evidentialist will

---

[26] See for example Millikan (2000). For a survey of teleological theories of mental content see Neander (2004).
[27] Admittedly this is complicated by the fact that content evidentialism needs to align itself with an internalistic account of mental content. It doesn't seem incompatible, however, to align a broadly teleological account of content with internalism.

require saying how non-contentful states can provide justification. But then the scatter problem will re-arise. So, content evidentialism has, at best, postponed the problem.

This objection has its roots in a problem first noted by Wilfrid Sellars.[28] A fully adequate treatment of this problem is beyond the scope of this paper. But it is not implausible that the objection runs awry by requiring that *every* mental state with assertive content requires justification. In ordinary language perceptual states are not candidates for justification. We don't ask what justifies one's perceptual experiences. It seems strange to ask, for instance, what justifies it looking to you as if a blue cup is on the table. Similarly, in the Müller-Lyer case we don't hold you accountable for it looking as if the two lines are incongruent. As long as the content evidentialist can resist this universal demand for justification the objection is unsuccessful.

IV. Content Evidentialism & the Truth Connection

The scatter problem raises concerns about the theoretical unity of an epistemological account: what underlying features, if any, unify the account's epistemic principles? A natural answer to this question is to appeal to the connection to the central item of epistemic value, i.e., truth. This is the consequentalist (i.e., the externalist) option that explicates justification via truth and production. The production concepts appealed to— e.g., *causation*, *reliability, sensitivity, safety*, *truth-tracking, truth-aptness*—share the central feature that there is a modal connection between justification and truth. The intuition embodied in the new evil demon problem undermines a modal connection between justification and truth and so raises concern about scatter and the truth connection. Content evidentialism handles the scatter problem by appealing to the notion of assertive mental content. This content, though, is modally independent of its truth. And this leads to worries about the truth connection. How does assertive content that is modally independent from the truth of the presented content give one a good *epistemic* reason to believe that the content is true? The following sketches an account of the truth connection that allows for the modal independence of justification and truth.

Content evidentialism denies a constitutive link between justification and truth and production. This denial is motivated by thought experiments illustrating that a belief

---

[28] See Sellars (1963) "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" for the original statement of the problem and Bonjour (1985) Chapter 4 "The Doctrine of the Empirically Given" for the canonical development of the Sellars' problem.

may be justified even though one's justification is modally independent from the belief's truth. The general feature of such thought experiments is to imagine circumstances in which justified belief and belief caused by a truth-productive process come apart. For ease of reference I shall call a belief that is caused by a truth-productive process a "productive belief". A key argument for externalism is that epistemically justified belief is assessed as to how well the belief fares with respect to the goals of attaining truth and avoiding error.

This intuition about a significant truth-connection can seem to cut against non-consequentalist epistemic theories because those theories deny that justification can be properly explicated merely in terms of productive belief. But I think that the evidentialist has more to say about this than is usually recognized.[29] The difficulty for the content evidentialist is to explain how justification is connected to truth in more than the uninformative way that justification implies that one is epistemically justified in thinking that one's belief is true. This is trivial because (e.g.) prudential justification implies that one is prudentially justified in thinking one's belief is true.

The options for the content evidentialist are twofold: claim that there's nothing more to say about the truth connection than the above platitude or explicate the connection with some non-production concept. The first option is not promising because it does not distinguish epistemic justification from other kinds of non-epistemic justification. In the following I explore the second option. The main problem with this approach is that the non-production concept involved is often not distinctly epistemic. For instance, the central non-production concept in Foley-rationality is that of acceptance, specifically acceptance on one's deepest standards after careful reflection. Acceptable belief and productive belief come apart, so it is judged that Foley-rationality is not an adequate account of epistemic justification. A similar problem afflicts deontological accounts as long as responsible belief is analyzed in a way in which it isn't modally connected to productive belief.

The concern that non-consequentalist epistemological accounts do not uphold a strong enough truth connection is largely correct. It shows the need to incorporate productive concepts in one's account of the truth connection. In order to accomplish

---

[29] In Cohen's article (1984) he finds it intuitive that there is some connection between epistemic justification and truth but every account he surveys he finds lacking (see Cohen's conclusion pp. 292-3). For other discussions of the nature of the truth connection see Conee (1992) and Hendricks (2005).

this, however, one needn't appeal to production concepts directly. Rather a plausible account of the truth connection may appeal to production concepts indirectly. The view I propose holds that one's justification implies propositional justification for believing that one's belief is truth-productive. In the abstract this view explicates the truth connection via an epistemically justified belief whose content involves a production concept. On this view the following principle is true: *If S is justified in believing p then S has justification for believing that S's belief that p is caused by a truth-productive process.*

This account of the truth connection is inspired by remarks by Kant and Chisholm. First, Chisholm. In his book *Perceiving* Chisholm writes:

> We hope… that our marks of *evidence* will also be marks of *truth*. We hope that, if there is some general mark of evidence, a certain type of state M which is a mark of evidence for a certain type of hypothesis H, then M will be a reliable criterion of truth; we hope that, more often than not, when we believe H while we are in state M, we will believe H truly.[30]

It is intriguing that Chisholm talks in terms of hope. If hope is simply belief under a different guise then the claim is that persons in fact believe that marks of evidence are marks of truth. This seems right as far as it goes. But the central epistemological issue is whether the belief is rational or not. If the belief that our marks of evidence are marks of truth is not rational then the fact that persons have this belief does not contribute anything to a solution of the problem of the truth connection. If, however, this belief is rational it may provide an interesting solution that fits well with an epistemology that eschews a direct tie between justified belief and productive belief.

An account that the belief that marks of evidence are marks of truth is rational can be made by appropriating the Kantian idea of rational hope. With respect to practical rationality the Kantian hope is that persons are free. This hope is a postulate of practical reason, as such people are rationally entitled to believe that they are free. Although this may not be Kant's rationale the claim that we are free can be justified in the following way. This avoids the embarrassing result that the postulate is an arbitrary assumption. The idea is this. The justification for the postulate lies in the connection between freedom and moral obligation. Practical reason issues moral directives (e.g.,

---

[30] Chisholm (1957:38).

you ought to respect persons). But these moral directives are binding only if persons are free. By acting on moral directives persons exemplify themselves as free beings. That is, by acting on moral reasons persons represent themselves as free beings in a way that carries justification for the postulate. On this conception of Kant's reasoning, moral action implies epistemic justification for the postulate. Kantian hope, in this way, involves epistemically rational belief.

A similar defense can be given for the Chisholmian hope that our marks of evidence are marks of truth. On this line of reasoning perceptual experience issues doxastic directives (e.g., believe that there are tables) but these directives are mandatory only if the perceptual experience is truth-productive. By forming beliefs based on the deliverances of perceptual experience one exemplifies experience as truth-productive. That is, by believing the assertive contents of perception one represents these assertive contents as worthy of belief, as that is truth-productive. In this way the epistemic practice of forming beliefs on the basis of presentational contents implies that one has justification for the proposition that presentational contents are marks of truth.

This analogy between Kantian and Chisholmian hope deserves more consideration than I can presently offer. However, it holds promise for our present difficulties. The problem is that, on the one hand, a consequentalist view about the connection between justified belief and productive belief seems required because of the distinctly epistemic nature of justification and yet, on the other hand, such a view seems false because of the new evil demon thought experiment. One needs a non-trivial account of the truth connection that is consistent with content evidentialism. This Kantian-Chisholmian account accomplishes this. Epistemic justification is connected to the truth not by a logical or modal relation but by an epistemic relation to believe that one's evidence is truth-productive.

In the end the content evidentialist agrees with the consequentalist that production concepts have a central role to play in the solution to the problem of the truth connection. The disagreement is over where to locate those concepts. The content evidentialist avers that reflection on the new evil demon problem provides an argument that production concepts should be located within content of epistemically justified attitudes. This provides a clear connection to the primary item of epistemic value without surrendering the key intuition contained in the new evil demon problem that the

nature of evidential fit is independent on any modal relation between the belief and the fact that makes it true.

Conclusion

Reflection on the scatter problem uncovers significant epistemological lessons. The scatter problem undermines objectual evidentialism. But it leaves unscathed content evidentialism. Content evidentialism provides a principle of justification that displays explanatory unity. Moreover, it holds promise for unifying diverse sources of knowledge within a non-consequentialist epistemology. Also, by appropriating a broadly Kantian view of rational hope the propositionalist may hold that the epistemic practice of forming beliefs on the basis of evidence justifies the proposition that the marks of evidence are reliably connected to truth.[31]

Ted Poston

University of South Alabama

poston@jaguar1.usouthal.edu

References

Bonjour, L. (1985) *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bonjour, L. and Sosa, E. (2003) *Epistemic Justification*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Chisholm, R. (1957) *Perceiving*, Binghamton, NY: Cornell University Press.

_____. (1982) *The Foundations of Knowing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

_____. (1989) *Theory of Knowledge* 3rd ed, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Cohen, S. (1984) 'Justification and Truth', *Philosophical Studies* 46, 279-95.

Conee, E. (1992) 'The Truth Connection', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, 657-669.

Conee, E and Feldman, R. (2004) *Evidentialism*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Fodor, J. (1990) 'Information and Representation', IN P. Hanson (ed.)*, Information, Language and Cognition*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Foley, R. (1993) *Working without a Net*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Goldman, A. (1979) 'What is Justified Belief?', IN G.S.Pappas (ed.), *Justification and Knowledge*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel, pp. 1-23.

Heck Jr., R. (2000) 'Nonconceptual Content and the "Space of Reasons"', *The Philosophical Review* 109, 483-523.

_____. (Forthcoming) 'Are There Different Kinds of Content?', IN J. Cohen and B. McLaughlin (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Hendricks, S. (2005) 'Demons and the Isolation Argument', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 55, 403-418.

McDowell, J. (1994) *Mind and World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Millikan, R. (2000) *On Clear and Confused Ideas: An Essay about Substance Concepts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Neander, K. (2004) 'Teleological Theories of Mental Content', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2004 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2004/entries/content-teleological/>.

Peacocke, C. (2001) 'Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?', *The Journal of Philosophy* 98:5, 239-264.

Ross, W. D. (1930) *The Right and the Good*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sellars, W. (1963) 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', IN *Science, Perception, and Reality*, Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, pp.127-196.

Sosa, E. (1991) *Knowledge in Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press.