

# STRANDED RUNNERS: ON TRYING TO BRING JUSTIFICATION HOME

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ABSTRACT: Those who endorse a knowledge-first program in epistemology claim that rather than attempting to understand *knowledge* in terms of more fundamental notions or relations such as *belief* and *justification*, we should instead understand knowledge as being in some sense prior to such concepts and/or relations. If we suppose that this is the correct approach to theorizing about knowledge, we are left with a residual question about the nature of those concepts or relations, such as justification, that were thought to be first but are now second. Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa has recently proposed that we understand justification in terms of *potential* knowledge. Ichikawa combines his view of knowledge and justification with what initially seems to be a natural complement, *epistemological disjunctivism*. While Ichikawa focuses on hallucination, I shift the focus to illusion. I argue that the combination of justification as potential knowledge and epistemological disjunctivism entails that perceptual beliefs that arise from illusions are not justified.

KEYWORDS: illusion, disjunctivism, Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa

Those who endorse a knowledge-first program in epistemology claim that rather than attempting to understand *knowledge* in terms of more fundamental notions or relations such as *belief* and *justification*, we should instead understand knowledge as being in some sense prior to such concepts and/or relations.<sup>1</sup> If we suppose that this is the correct approach to theorizing about knowledge, we are left with a residual question about the nature of those concepts or relations, such as justification, that were thought to be first but are now second. While it is open to the knowledge-first theorist to become an eliminativist about justification, many appear to want to still make room for justification. Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa has recently proposed that we understand justification in terms of *potential* knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. Ch 3.

<sup>2</sup> I do not discuss Ichikawa's endorsement of epistemic contextualism. Ichikawa himself notes that it doesn't "play a central role in the discussion or defense of JPK." See Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa, "Justification is potential knowledge," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 44, 2 (2014): 184-206 and Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa, *Contextualising Knowledge: Epistemology and Semantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 120.

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Ichikawa combines his view of knowledge and justification with what initially seems to be a natural complement, *epistemological disjunctivism*.<sup>3</sup>

According to the epistemological disjunctivist, there is an important and fundamental epistemological difference between certain cases of veridical perception and corresponding cases of hallucination.<sup>4</sup> In standard cases of veridical perception, say looking at a maple tree in autumn, a subject sees the tree and comes to know that there is a tree on the basis of the factive mental state – *seeing that*. In contrast, in a case of hallucination, where there is no maple tree, there is no *seeing that* state on which to base a perceptual belief. The epistemological disjunctivist claims that the support provided by the veridical perceptual experience of seeing the tree is both different in kind and epistemically superior to the mere appearance of a tree. That there is a significant epistemological difference between the two cases would seem to fit well with the knowledge-first program and has not surprisingly been endorsed by some knowledge-firsters.<sup>5</sup> If both subjects are equally well positioned with respect to justification or evidence, then we may be tempted to understand knowledge as true belief + the relevant shared epistemic properties. Such a maneuver is in tension with the claim that knowledge cannot be understood in terms of more fundamental notions such as justification. As we will see, the combination of justification as potential knowledge and epistemological disjunctivism has an apparent cost; perceptual beliefs that arise from illusions are not justified.

## I.

Here is Ichikawa's statement of the view that justification is potential knowledge.

(JPK) S's belief is justified iff there is a possible individual, alike with respect to all relevant basic evidence and cognitive processing, whose corresponding belief is knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The criticism leveled here is admittedly narrow in that it applies to a fairly specific combination of positions, but as I note, the combination should be for some an attractive one.

<sup>4</sup> A difference over and above the fact that in standard cases of hallucination, knowledge is ruled out by factivity. See Alex Byrne and Heather Logue, "Either/Or," in *Disjunctivism: Perception, Action, Knowledge*, eds. Adrian Haddock and Fiona Macpherson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 314-319, John McDowell, *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2011), John McDowell, "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982): 455-479, and Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemological disjunctivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*.

<sup>6</sup> Ichikawa, *Contextualizing Knowledge*, 119.

Of course, to fully understand JPK and its implications, we need to ask about basic evidence and cognitive processing. Ichikawa provides further explanation by revising an earlier view<sup>7</sup> of which facts are relevant

[i]t [JPK] has it that there can be no difference in justification facts without a corresponding difference in the subject's relevant situation. Although I do not (any more) assume that all such relevant facts are geographically internal- I allow that factive perceptual states are relevant features- JPK is still a *mentalist internalist* approach to justification; differences in the external world that do *not* make a difference with respect to a subject's mental states do not affect whether a belief is justified.<sup>8</sup>

JPK so understood is able to capture two aspects of justification with which it has often been associated. JPK allows that there can be subjects with false, but justified beliefs. To see this suppose that my extremely trustworthy friend Aman tells me that she went to see a movie last Thursday. Suppose further that Aman is right that she went to a movie last week but it wasn't on Thursday but Wednesday. It seems easy to imagine an alternative scenario in which all of my relevant evidence and cognitive processing remains the same, but Aman goes to the movie on Thursday. In such a case, I would presumably know that she did. And if this is in fact possible, JPK delivers the result that my false belief is in fact justified. JPK is also consistent with Gettier's<sup>9</sup> true, justified beliefs that do not amount to knowledge. My knowledge that Trip is in a European capital, on the basis of his postcard from Madrid, might be destroyed by his last minute trip to Berlin, but not necessarily my justification. Had Trip remained in Madrid, I might have known that he was in a European capital. Thus, my current belief is justified according to JPK.

Ichikawa is aware that on our reading of JPK, it conflicts with what he labels the New Evil Demon Intuition,<sup>10</sup> the intuition that me and my subjectively indiscernible BIV-twin are equals with respect to the justificatory status of our beliefs about the external world. My BIV twin, who lacks certain factive mental states, fails to be justified in his beliefs about the external world. If JPK is correct, and my twin *is justified*, then there must be a possible individual sharing all the same basic evidence and cognitive processing who also possesses knowledge about the world. But this possible individual will not share all the same basic evidence due to the fact that the knowledge will be based on factive mental states; states that my BIV

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<sup>7</sup> Ichikawa, "Justification is potential."

<sup>8</sup> Ichikawa, *Contextualizing knowledge*, 116.

<sup>9</sup> Edmund L. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23, 6 (1963): 121-123.

<sup>10</sup> Stewart Cohen, "Justification and Truth," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 46, 3 (1984): 279-295.

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twin does not have as part of his basic evidential set. Ichikawa does not see respecting the intuition as a requirement of a satisfactory account of justification.

So I no longer consider respecting the New Evil Demon intuition in generality a central desideratum for a theory of justification. I continue to recognize it as somewhat intuitive, but I now categorize it with other internalist intuitions that I am comfortable rejecting if necessary.<sup>11</sup>

Given that there are extant views of justification, certain forms of reliabilism for example, that also reject the New Evil Demon intuition, the combination of JPK and epistemological disjunctivism should not be rejected solely for this reason.<sup>12</sup> We have also seen that JPK, even when combined with epistemological disjunctivism, allows for justified beliefs to possess features thought to be required of the correct theory of justification.

## II.

Consider now the case of illusion. Suppose that I am looking at a table in what I take to be normal circumstances. I do not know it but the table is white and lit with a red light. Since I am unaware of the non-standard conditions, I believe that the table is in fact red. Further, since the table is not red, I cannot know that it is. I am though justified in believing the table to be red. What is the status of my belief according to JPK? Here is the relevant bi-conditional.

(JPK-Table) My belief that the table is red is justified iff there is a possible individual, alike with respect to all relevant basic evidence and cognitive processing, whose corresponding belief is knowledge.

The problem is that once we have endorsed epistemological disjunctivism, we have ruled out such a possible individual. Notice that my evidence cannot include the factive mental state seeing that the table is red given that the table is not in fact red. I, looking at the red-lit table, and a possible individual who knows that the table is red according to the epistemological disjunctivist will thus not be alike with respect to all relevant basic evidence. We will differ in at least one important respect; he will *see that* the table is red.<sup>13</sup> Further, introducing the possibility that my epistemic

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<sup>11</sup> Ichikawa, *Contextualizing Knowledge*, 110

<sup>12</sup> Not all forms of reliabilism must reject the intuition. Leplin (Jarrett Leplin, "In Defense of Reliabilism," *Philosophical Studies* 134, 1 (2007): 31–42) and Graham (Peter J. Graham, "Epistemic Entitlement," *Noûs* 46, 3 (2012): 449–483) propose ways of understanding the relevant notion of reliability that allow my BIV twin to have justified perceptual beliefs.

<sup>13</sup> There of course might be some overlap in evidence between myself and this possible individual. For example, I see that the surface of the table appears red and he does as well. However, the epistemological disjunctivist is committed to there being a significant difference in the evidence

twin, with respect to basic evidence and cognitive processing, might know that the table is red without seeing that the table is red will not help. The reason is that my twin will have to have some additional (non-basic) evidence, perhaps testimonial, to know that the table is red.<sup>14</sup> Counting this individual as relevant to determining whether my belief is justified makes it much too easy to arrive at a justified belief. Imagine a subject who makes a perceptual judgment about an object in the distance under far from ideal circumstances. That we can also imagine a similar subject with knowledge due to being told that the judgment is correct should not lead us to think the original judgment is justified.

It should be stressed that denying justified belief in the case of the table appears worse than denying the New Evil Demon intuition. That this is so allows us to respond to a worry about the argument offered above.<sup>15</sup> The concern that might be voiced is that all that we have accomplished is to point out a consequence of Ichikawa's view, a consequence that Ichikawa might well be aware of and happy to accept. I don't however believe that being aware of a commitment and being content to accept it are necessarily sufficient to defuse the strength of the objection to Ichikawa on offer. In fact, Ichikawa's own discussion of a version of JPK (applied to perception) is telling.

But given the disjunctivist neo-Moorean position gestured at in the previous chapter, we may also wish to be open to factive perceptual states as among the relevant respects. If so, then JPK will not entail JPK*i*. It is possible, for instance, for two intrinsically identical subjects to differ with respect to their factive perceptual states; JPK allows that this may suffice for a difference in justification. If Despard sees that a villager is sick, and Margaret has an intrinsically identical hallucination, Despard's belief may be justified (indeed, it is knowledge), even though Margaret's is not (since her basic-evidence counterparts are hallucinating). So I am now more attracted to this *perception* emphasizing version of JPK:

**JPK<sub>p</sub>** S's belief is justified iff there is a possible individual, alike to S with respect to all relevant factive perceptual states and cognitive processing, whose corresponding belief is knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

There are features present in the above case that may help mitigate any theoretical costs to rejecting what amounts to a variant of the New Evil Demon intuition (i.e. that Margaret possesses a justified belief that the villager is sick). First, Margaret (like

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or facts available.

<sup>14</sup> And if the table seems red to my twin, and he knows that the table is red without further evidence, then presumably my twin sees that the table is red. Thus, he is not alike with respect to all basic evidence.

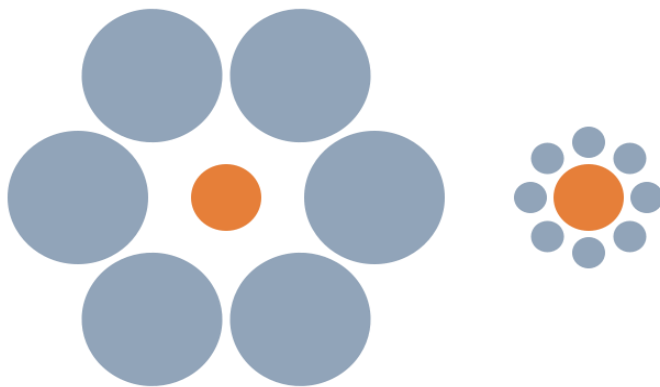
<sup>15</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this objection.

<sup>16</sup> Ichikawa, *Contextualizing Knowledge*, 115–6

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my BIV twin) is cognitively detached from her environment; she is not perceiving anything since she is hallucinating. Since Margaret is not in perceptual contact with her environment, many may find the denial that she has a justified perceptual belief in this case acceptable. However, notice that in the case of the table, one is in fact in perceptual contact with the table; and as others have noted, one sees the table in part by being seeing the (apparent) color of the table.<sup>17</sup> This difference makes JPK's commitment in the case of the table less appealing. Second, many of us have never experienced hallucinations that are qualitatively identical to everyday perceptual experiences. The fanciful nature of the thought experiment, as with the BIV case, can be used to sow doubt as to the accuracy of the intuitions it generates. This feature is also not present in the table case. Most of us have been the victim of some type of perceptual illusion.

If you haven't, please compare the circles below.<sup>18</sup>



Given the context, it may not be too surprising to learn that the two orange circles are the same size even though the circle on the right appears larger. Imagine confronting the images without knowing about the illusion. Suppose also that forming a justified perceptual belief that the circle on the right is larger is possible.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Arthur David Smith, "Disjunctivism and Illusion," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 80, 2 (2010): 384-410.

<sup>18</sup> This is the Ebbinghaus Illusion, named for its discoverer Hermann Ebbinghaus ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebbinghaus\\_illusion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebbinghaus_illusion)).

<sup>19</sup> As an anonymous referee rightly notes, the table case and the circle case are not exactly similar. In the latter, the explanation for the illusion involves reference to biases built into our perceptual systems. I agree but would add that such biases are the product of the history and development of the human perceptual system. Thus, the illusions are in part explained by the fact that our systems, given facts about history and development, are functioning properly in such cases. Also, denial of justified belief in illusion due to bias cases brings along a commitment to unjustified belief not just

Is there a possible individual, like you with respect to all basic evidence and cognitive processing, who knows that the circle on the right is larger? If basic evidence includes factive states such as seeing that, the answer is no. For once again, that individual will see that the circle on the right is larger. And this you cannot do.

### III.

The preceding considerations highlight an arguably inescapable feature of knowledge-first approaches to justification that are coupled with epistemological disjunctivism.<sup>20</sup> Combining the two positions yields the result that knowledge is both prior to justification conceptually and of a significantly different epistemic kind than a merely justified belief. It is perhaps then natural to move towards a view of justification as a type of broken or failed knowledge, a state one gets oneself into when one does everything right but the world happens not to cooperate. However, there are numerous ways for the world to fail to cooperate. Sometimes such lack of compliance is consistent with my being in the same position with respect to my basic evidence. The case involving Aman above is of this type. We can alter the truth-value of what is believed without changing the basic evidence. This will not always be the case. In cases of perceptual illusion, the evidence possessed by the possible knower will necessarily be different once we require factive states to be part of the evidential set. It then becomes difficult to see how we can derive a proper theory of justification by focusing *solely* on cases of knowledge, be they actual or potential. To help us see this, let us consider another proposal<sup>21</sup> to understand justification in terms of potential knowledge.

(JuJu) If in a world  $w_1$  S has mental states M and then forms a judgment, that judgment is justified if and only if there is some world  $w_2$  where, with the same

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in unlikely but possible lighting conditions, but also in more mundane cases (e.g. illusions of angle of presentation caused by textural features). For more on both of these points see Tyler Burge, "Perceptual Entitlement," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67, 3 (2003): 503-548 and Tyler Burge, "Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology," *Philosophical Topics* 33 (2005): 1-78.

<sup>20</sup> Whether *every* view that combines knowledge-first epistemology with epistemological disjunctivism will possess this feature of course depends in part on which proposals are to count as knowledge-first versions epistemological disjunctivism. For example, an anonymous referee suggests the following and wonders whether it can avoid the commitments of Ichikawa's approach: my total justificatory support for my belief that P in the good case is better than my total justificatory support for my belief that P in the bad case. Given the characterization of epistemological disjunctivism offered here, it isn't obvious that this view is a version of epistemological disjunctivism.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Bird, "Justified Judging," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74, 1 (2007): 81-110.

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mental states M, S forms a corresponding judgment and that judgment yields knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

If JuJu is combined with the requirement that basic evidence include factive mental states, my belief that the table is red, when it is white but lit to look red, will not be justified. In order to know that the table is red, S must see that the table is red. Yet possession of this mental state will necessitate that S and myself do not share all the same mental states; thus ensuring that my current belief is not justified.

As Ichikawa does with respect to the New Evil Demon intuition, a proponent of knowledge-first epistemological disjunctivism might respond by rejecting the intuition that the false perceptual beliefs in question (i.e. that is a red table; that circle is larger) are justified. Such a move though is in danger of moving the position from one that is inconsistent with some of our intuitions concerning justification to one that is unacceptably counterintuitive. I agree with Ichikawa that an acceptable theory of justification should not be too “stingy;” theories of justification that rule out many of our ordinary beliefs as justified are *prima facie* troubling.<sup>23</sup> Since at least some of our ordinary beliefs involve illusions of the types discussed above, the combination of JPK and epistemological disjunctivism risks being cheap to a fault.

Finally, while a knowledge-first epistemologist need not endorse epistemological disjunctivism, the argument offered here helps stoke a general worry about any attempt to reconcile knowledge-first views with a plausible account of justification. One way to effect such a rapprochement is to understand justification in terms of knowledge. This strategy risks, as we saw with Ichikawa’s proposal, placing unacceptable demands on justified belief. Another route is to attempt to give an account of justification that does not rely on an account of knowledge. However, since knowledge has been assumed to be prior to justification, it is hard to see what would guide such an analysis.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bird, "Justified Judging," 84.

<sup>23</sup> Ichikawa, *Contextualizing Knowledge*, 111.

<sup>24</sup> Thanks to Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa and numerous anonymous referees for helpful comments.