

EPISTEMIC RESPONSIBILITY: AN AGENT'S SENSITIVITY TOWARDS THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT: Stewart Cohen's epistemic responsibility conception of epistemic justification in illustrating the problem of the new evil demon is assessed through some virtue-theoretic attempts, notably by Timothy Williamson and Clayton Littlejohn, whose accounts provide a good departure point to differentiate epistemic blamelessness through epistemic excusability via exercise of epistemic competence with epistemic recklessness. Some failure of epistemic sensitivity is through epistemic recklessness, and its epistemic blameworthiness is understood thus. I shall, having set the stage of epistemic justification in relation to epistemic responsibility, present my theory of epistemic reason, and of reason in general, by describing reason as knowledge of obligation. Having distinguished reasonableness from rationality, I will also present a safety theory of reasonableness, and correspondingly a measure of reasonableness, beyond my knowledge of obligation conception of rationality.

KEYWORDS: new evil demon, epistemic responsibility, epistemic liability, scepticism, reason, rationality, reasonableness, justification

Sometimes, with cases of epistemic wrong, we assign credit and blame through evaluating whether the epistemic agent acted with any justification. Stewart Cohen, with his case of the new evil demon, motivates an epistemic responsibility conception of epistemic justification. Since the epistemic agent in the radical sceptical scenario is not to blame epistemically, he has as much epistemic justification as his good case counterpart has. I will present his case, and put forward an epistemic sensitivity understanding of epistemic responsibility. Epistemic sensitivity obligates belief with any facts, including the fact of one's epistemic error. If one committed an epistemic wrong of having believed falsely, epistemic sensitivity obligates at least doubting the corresponding putative fact. In the section that follows, I will present Timothy Williamson's diagnosis of the new evil demon. He points out that, using excusability, one could have explained the ethical data about responsibility just as well, while having restored epistemic justification's connection with the world through its facts. As long as the epistemic agent performs the epistemic act that an epistemically competent agent would have performed in the same epistemic situation, he is not to blame epistemically. This brings out a

conception of epistemic excusability using epistemic competence. In the next section, I will discuss Clayton Littlejohn's argument for the distinction between reason and justification. Even if whether one had any reason seems to make a difference to whether one had any justification, he insists that reason marks excusability, instead of justifiability. Notably, if mistake is constituted by noncompliance of norm, an epistemic mistake is constituted by the noncompliance of epistemic norm. However, we are not always in the position to know whether some applicability condition of the epistemic norm obtained, although we know our reasons for having performed a given epistemic act. The corresponding noncompliance invites epistemic excusability, but it is short of being a case with full epistemic justification. I will end this paper with a discussion on the distinction between epistemic rationality and epistemic reasonableness, the former being constituted by epistemic justification. With a knowledge of obligation conception of reason, I put forward an ignorance of obligation understanding of excusability. Epistemic reasonableness will be demonstrated to be constituted by the strength of the epistemic modality of having reason: it might be that there is sufficient reason to believe that p , for some p .

1. Sensitivity

Cohen invites us to consider a few cases to illustrate his epistemic responsibility conception of epistemic justification. Consider first the typical sceptical case. You spend your day ordinarily, reading this philosophy paper. There is a sceptical counterpart to you, which is a brain-in-a-vat,¹ manipulated by an evil demon.² Suppose that he is recently envatted, with the necessary causal interaction with the world for his thoughts to refer to objects in the world. When you spend your time doing ordinary things you ordinarily do, you, prompted by the sceptical question, decided, epistemically, that you are a good case. Things appear as they had always appeared, and you epistemically decided that things are what they appear to be. Your sceptical counterpart, with sensations indiscriminate from yours, made the same epistemic decision. Clearly, he is not a good case, and thus his belief that he is a good case is false. However, relative to Cohen, you and him are as much epistemically justified to form the same belief because you are to be as much epistemically responsible for the belief thus formed. "[H]e is not to be held responsible for circumstances beyond his ken" (Cohen 1984, 282). Furthermore,

¹ I disagree that a person is identified with their brain, but I simplify the issue here by following the tradition.

² Typically, it is an evil genius, but I retain Cohen's original formulation except with a science fiction example.

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From the perspective of epistemic responsibility, a person *S*, can have an impeccable *belief* that certain conditions make the truth of a proposition, *B* likely. And under these circumstances *S* can be justified in believing *B*, even if those conditions do not in fact make the truth of *B* likely. (Cohen 1984, 285)

The connection with the world through its facts is severed with regard to epistemic justification because to retain it would have been to hold the sceptical counterpart too much epistemically responsible for what he has no control over.³ The implication, as Cohen is prepared to accept, is that as long as one had a belief that some condition makes a proposition more likely, one is better justified to believe the proposition than otherwise even if those conditions did not in fact obtain. With a non-factive conception of evidence, this is when "*S*'s belief is appropriate to the available evidence". (Cohen 1984, 282)

To illustrate further the disconnection of epistemic justification from facts, Cohen invites us to consider the following case that contrasts two bad cases with wishful thinking. Suppose you yourself to be the sceptical counterpart, being a brain-in-a-vat in the aforementioned scenario. You, through seeming to be reading this philosophy paper, epistemically decided that you are a good case. You evaluate the technology of the day, and come to the conclusion that it is impossible that you are a recently envatted brain with such epistemic coherence to your sensations. As decided before, although your belief is false, you are as epistemically justified to form the belief as your good case counterpart because you are as epistemically responsible for having formed the belief as he did. Now consider your wishful counterpart who is to be held much more epistemically responsible for having formed the false belief. He did not go through all the arguments of scepticism as you did, but just, out of a blind faith, epistemically decided that he is a good case. In fact, not only is he a brain-in-a-vat, he is also not a good reasoner. He refuses to think more deeply about the issue, and ignore the sceptical alternative that is in fact actual. In this case, although he formed the same false belief as you do—the belief of the fictitious fact that one is a good case—, he is to be held much more epistemically responsible for his false belief. Therefore, not only is epistemic justification disconnected from facts, there are also variations in justification independent of the putative facts one's belief

³ Responsibility of an act contrasts a character conception of responsibility. Had someone been more responsible, one would have righted one's wrong more readily. Responsibility of a wrong act illustrates how seriously a responsible agent is with regard to it. Holding an ideal agent with a constant character of responsibility, responsibility of act is thus understood. An agent with a serious character of responsibility shall not be, at least not too much, responsible for what is beyond his control, using the conception of responsibility of wrong act in the passage.

is in. That there can be change in epistemic justifiability without changes in the putative facts support further the disconnect.

Consider a third case of epistemic defeater. Suppose there being, to the wishful counterpart, the reckless counterpart. Both are brains-in-a-vat, and are having sensations as of having hands. For the wishful thinker, he believes that he has hands, as he, through the series of sensations in response to his intention, seems to himself to be raising them up in front of himself. He continues to believe that he is the good case, and is not a brain-in-a-vat. For the reckless counterpart, the evil demon makes it appear to him that he lost his hands for a moment, as when he intended to raise them up in front of himself. He noticed, for a short while, that he had no hands next to his shoulders, but his hands reappear once he started noticing the anomaly. Instead of responding appropriately to such epistemic defeater, he ignores them, and continues to believe that he is a good case. The reckless counterpart is clearly to be held more epistemically responsible for his false belief. Although the two cases stand to the putative fact in the same way epistemically—that if they believed it, they would have formed a false belief—the reckless counterpart is to be held much more epistemically responsible for the false belief, and, correspondingly is much less epistemically justified in believing that he is a good case.

I agree that there is a difference in epistemic responsibility among the cases, but let me respond with a sensitivity explanation of the data. First, consider the following.

- 1) For any p , one ought to have doubted that p only if p is an epistemically relevant alternative

Now consider further,

- 2) For any p , one must doubt that p if p is not actual.

This is similar to epistemic sensitivity as proposed by Robert Nozick with regard to belief.

- 3) For any p , a belief that p is epistemically sensitive if and only if if p were not actual, then the belief would have not been formed.

In fact, the following rule of epistemic sensitivity explains (3), and also (2).

- 4) For any p , it must be that one believed that p if p is a fact.

Through higher-order cognition, if it be a fact that one committed an epistemic wrong in believing falsely, given that it is a fact, epistemic sensitivity obligates at least doubting it, explaining (2), if not also believing in the fact of one's having committed such epistemic wrong. It is in virtue of responding to one's

epistemic wrongdoing correctly that one ceased to believe, and this explains (3), the traditional conception of epistemic sensitivity.

(2) is restricted with evidence, such that it is compatible with the epistemic responsibility understanding in a way that the irresponsiveness of the sceptical counterpart is not to be discredited as much as the two other cases because he is the typical victim of a radical sceptical scenario, in which, no matter how much efforts he made, he shall have never known that he is a bad case.

The problem, however, is with what epistemic responsibility amounts to. How does it relate to credit and blame? Although the wishful counterpart and the reckless counterpart are clearly epistemically blameworthy, their corresponding higher epistemic responsibility for the epistemic wrong brings out the difference between the good case and the bad case: how is the sceptical counterpart to have the same epistemic responsibility for his belief as the good case does? The good case did not commit any epistemic wrong in making the epistemic decision to believe that one is a good case; the corresponding epistemic responsibility seems to better indicate a praiseworthiness instead of otherwise. If so, epistemic responsibility differentiates, through epistemic credit-and-blame assignment, into something else, and I propose thus an epistemic liability explanation of the cases. I will return to it in the next section. Before that, I will turn to a discussion on the restoration of the connection between justification and the world through its facts.

2. Fact

Williamson responds to the case of the new evil demon using resources from virtue ethics: what a competent epistemic agent would have performed epistemically in the same epistemic situation. Consider, first, the notion of norm. When a belief does not meet a given epistemic norm, the epistemic wrong the epistemic agent thus committed constituted the epistemic responsibility of the epistemic agent, and there is a degree to how much one is epistemically responsible for the epistemic wrong. However, even with the commission of an epistemic wrong, there are cases of epistemic blamelessness that is to be understood using epistemic excusability.

He first restores the epistemic norm that is fact-related, and he calls it J. Then, let DJ be the norm of being the competent epistemic agent who meets J. Lastly, let ODJ be the norm of doing what DJ would do in a given situation.⁴ As with the first case comparing with the sceptical counterpart, since, in fact, the good case is simply setting the standard for ODJ, given the same indiscriminate sensation, the sceptical

⁴ For simplicity, I conflate the norm with the person who perfectly meets the norm in this paper. For example, 'ODJ' sometimes refers not to the norm, but to the counterpart to the epistemic agent who met the norm perfectly.

counterpart performed an epistemic act that the corresponding competent epistemic agent who meets J in the corresponding, alternative, epistemic situation would have done. (Williamson forthcoming) Therefore, although the sceptical counterpart is not as epistemically justified as the good case because the target belief is not at all epistemically justified by the facts with his evidence, he is epistemically blameless for his epistemic wrong, the false belief, because having performed an epistemic act that his ODJ would have epistemically excused his epistemic wrongdoing.

As with the wishful counterpart, since the sceptical counterpart, with his seriousness at thinking about the issue, performs the epistemic act in a way that his ODJ would have performed it, he is contrasted with the wishful counterpart in the following way. The wishful counterpart did not do what a competent epistemic agent who meets J would have done in the corresponding epistemic situation, and thus his epistemic performance, given having constituted an epistemic wrong, is not epistemically excusable. He is therefore epistemically blameworthy, with the epistemic blame being explained with the failure to meet ODJ.

Lastly, as with the reckless counterpart, Williamson's theory also explains the datum. An ODJ, in his epistemic situation, would have considered the alternative that he is not a good case because it had once appeared to him that he had no hands. The reckless counterpart is very much to blame epistemically, and it is explained with how he failed to meet ODJ.

Notice, among the three cases, the explanation aims at restoring the connection of epistemic justification with the world through its facts. Justification sets a norm that is fact-related, and this contributes significantly to epistemic externalism, at least with regard to epistemic justification. Facts are something that are external if anything is with regard to the debate. Williamson demonstrates that a theorist could have retained epistemic justification's connection to the world while having explained the ethical data brought forward through the new evil demon.

However, Williamson's theory is at fault in the following way. Its use of epistemic competence here to explain epistemic excusability ignores, I think, its interaction between epistemic safety through the epistemic situation. Although it is epistemic competence that explained the epistemic excusability through doing what an epistemically competent agent would have done, issues about epistemic blameworthiness has to do more with epistemic safety, through the corresponding notion of recklessness. It is in assessing and managing epistemic risk well that one is not being epistemically reckless, and it is this epistemic recklessness that constituted the epistemic inexcusability of the corresponding epistemic wrong, leaving the epistemic agent epistemically blameworthy.⁵ The importance of distinguishing

⁵ Epistemic luck interacts with epistemic competence in the following way. Given epistemic safety

epistemic excusability from epistemic blamelessness is that there is indeed an epistemic wrong that the epistemic agent committed, and the ethical question is whether, given his epistemic responsibility, he is to be epistemically blamed. That he is to be epistemically excused for an epistemic wrong he is epistemically responsible for brings in the question of what it is that explained the epistemic excusability, and I submit that Williamson omitted the importance of epistemic recklessness, although he indeed explained the ethical data from the new evil demon.

Let me now focus here on an epistemic sensitivity understanding of epistemic excusability, instead of tackling the issue of the metaphysics of epistemic excusability. In the first case, the sceptical counterpart failed to comply with (2) because he is too ethically distal from the competent epistemic agent in an alternative epistemic situation—with the evidence. It would have been unfair to compare him with the ODJ in the reckless counterpart because the sceptical counterpart lacks the access to any distinguishing evidence from his good case counterpart. His epistemic insensitivity to the fact, and how he failed to doubt what is not actual, is thus epistemically excusable. Williamson's epistemic competence explanation describes how an ODJ would have assessed the epistemic risk of his belief that he is the good case epistemically competently, as someone who meets J would have epistemically performed in the corresponding epistemic situation, but failed to bring out the importance of recklessness in blameworthiness.

To understand Williamson's use of ODJ, let me now distinguish epistemic liability from epistemic responsibility.

- 5) An epistemic agent is epistemically responsible for an epistemic wrong if and only if they could have made an epistemic difference to it.
- 6) An epistemic agent is epistemically liable for an epistemic wrong if and only if they are to be epistemically blamed for it.

How does ODJ epistemically excuse? Although, typically, one would not have granted doxastic voluntarism so easily to the case of the sceptical counterpart, it is possible of him that he suspended his belief. Even if it was beyond his control that he is in such an epistemic situation, with no way to distinguish the good case from

of epistemic situation, as in holding evidence constant, more epistemic luck is required for epistemic success with a less epistemic competence. One is thus less epistemically praiseworthy for the epistemic success due to such increased epistemic luck. As with the variance in epistemic safety, consider the same outright belief through rejecting the null hypothesis having collected more data. The same epistemic success required less epistemic luck, holding epistemic competence constant. Holding data collection constant, better statistical intelligence requires less epistemic luck in attaining epistemic success.

his actual case, his epistemic responsibility is constituted by his eventual epistemic decision to believe that he is the good case—something he could have made an epistemic difference to through, for example, doubting, or at least suspension of belief. However, epistemic responsibility does not entail epistemic liability; even if one's epistemic agency played a causal role in a certain epistemic act, it does not immediately follow that one is to be epistemically blamed for the resultant epistemic wrong.

Epistemic insensitivity, therefore, fails the obligation described in (2), but there are cases of reasonable failure that ODJ assists us in seeing. In doing what ODJ would have done, one's epistemic performance has already met the norm of committing the epistemic act that an epistemically competent epistemic agent who meets the fact-related norm of epistemic justification would have epistemically performed in their corresponding epistemic situation. In whatever way one is still epistemically responsible, there seems to be nothing else, epistemically, that one is at fault. The epistemic insensitivity is to be understood with the epistemic limit one had given one's epistemic situation, such as in lacking the corresponding distinguishing evidence. Although epistemic insensitivity explains some epistemic excusability, I emphasise that it has more to do with epistemic reasonableness, instead of epistemic rationality. With this point, I turn to a discussion on the relation between rationality and excusability that denies the identification of reason with justification—something I affirm in the last section.

3. Excuse

Littlejohn presents a similar virtue-theoretic excusability, with a corresponding different take on rationality and justifiability. Epistemic excuses affirm “the excellence of the subject's exercise of her rational capacities”. (Littlejohn forthcoming) Does it entail meeting the norm J? Does the exercise of one's rational capacities always meet ODJ? Having relativized the virtue-theoretic element to the epistemic agent themselves, instead of focusing on the norm ODJ, his theory is susceptible to the following counterexample from the case of the wishful counterpart.

Suppose, further, that the wishful counterpart is brought up being disposed to think wishfully. It is in his nature that whenever he encountered obstacles, he thinks on the bright side, often ignoring any indicators of danger that was within his epistemic access. However, as it turned out, his wishful thinking equipped him with a constant good mood, with which he succeeded quite well in his life before the envatment. He is a happy-go-lucky, and he enjoys himself very well every single day. Upon envatment, after some time, he encounters what the reckless counterpart

encountered: an anomaly. As he read about scepticism from this paper, he intends to raise his hands, but noticed, for a short while, that there were no arms attached to his body along his shoulders. He decided to ignore such epistemic defeaters, and go on sustaining his belief that he is a good case. In a way, given how his wishful thinking assists him in his life, he had demonstrated an excellent exercise of his rational capacities. But is he epistemically excusable for not knowing the facts? How, if at all, did he demonstrate an excellent exercise of his rational capacities?

It would have seemed that denial of his excellent exercise of his rational capacities would have begged the question against the epistemic internalists because of the non-truth-conduciveness of his wishful thinking. If he was brought up thinking wishfully, having succeeded sufficiently well to have reached maturity, how are we to justify a conception of rational capacities that disqualifies his wishful thinking as irrational? Notice that this diverted from Cohen's case in response to Goldman's epistemological reliabilism, for Goldman accepts that

[I]f people... learn *inductively* that wishful thinking is reliable, and regularly base their beliefs on this inductive inference, it is quite unproblematic and straightforward that their beliefs are justified. The only interesting case is where their beliefs are formed *purely* by wishful thinking, without using inductive inference. The suggestion contemplated... is that... even pure wishful thinking would confer justifiedness. (Goldman 1979, 23 fn15)

Although the present case differs because the wishful thinking is not reliable, but only successful, the issue here is with the notion of rational capacities that are truth-conducive. I shall thus leave disagreement that it was an excellent exercise of his rational capacities unsettled here.

Given our agreement that the wishful counterpart demonstrated an excellent exercise of his rational capacities, according to Littlejohn, he is to be epistemically excused for his epistemic wrong in believing falsely that he is a good case. I think this is mistaken. Although it is reasonable of us to expect him to not be disturbed by the epistemic defeater, and to misinterpret the evidence of such anomaly in favour of his bias, he is still to be epistemically blamed for the epistemic wrong he committed. First, to apply Williamson's theory, he failed to meet ODJ. What a competent epistemic agent who meets J would have done in his epistemic situation is learn the facts of the anomaly and epistemically respond correctly to them. At least, it would have been epistemically appropriate of him to stop and consider whether the anomaly was just a hallucination. Here, Littlejohn's focus on the epistemic agent's excellent exercise of one's own rational capacities failed where Williamson's theory succeeded. ODJ, doing what the epistemically competent agent

who meets J would have done, stepped out of the original agent's epistemic competence, and thus does not retain their own rational capacities.

Secondly, we may look at the wishful counterpart from the perspective of epistemic insensitivity. Is his epistemic insensitivity a reasonable failure of epistemic sensitivity? Although he now has access to the evidence, his prior commitment handicapped him in epistemically responding to it correctly. He failed to be epistemically sensitive to the facts because his bias disposes him to misinterpret the evidence. He failed, through the newly acquired evidence, to epistemically access the fact and understand the world correctly. Although without a perfect epistemic competence, he could have still epistemically performed thus, committing many epistemic wrong, while being quite epistemically competent in the epistemic situation that he is in. He could have been, for example, very well with other aspects in his life, given how successful he had been before envatment. If, for example, his epistemic competence is constituted by solving problems from some videogames, he would have still been very successful with his life upon envatment—given no further anomaly.

One may approach the issue here through questioning what rational capacities amounts to. My guiding question is whether the cognitive output is a rational belief, or is it only reasonable belief. Before diving into the issue, let me identify two more problems. One problem with Littlejohn's theory is his identification of rationality not as a mark for justifiability, but only excusability. A further problem, which I will come to in the next section, is the supposition of the identification between rationality and reasonableness. Let me turn to his argument against the identification of reason with justification in bringing out his first problem identified here.

Reasons have to do with norm. Norms have some applicability condition, and some norm entails that something is obligated if and only if a given condition obtained. However, the condition could have obtained without the epistemic agent knowing it, while believing falsely that it did not obtain. Therefore, they rationally believe that the given act is not obligated. If this implies that it is justified they did not perform the act, then, given the condition in fact obtained, it would have constituted a case of obligation without justification. In fact, one is justified to not do what one is obligated to do. This, according to Littlejohn, causes problem except if the application condition for a norm is something whose obtaining is impossible to have a rational but mistaken belief about.

Is the wishful counterpart's belief that he is a good case a rational but mistaken belief? Notably, if the application condition of the norm of belief is the fact, then given that he had a rational but mistaken belief about himself being a good case, it

is through his excellent exercise of his rational capacities that he formed the belief that he is a good case. Negatively, he rationally but mistakenly believed that the condition of being a bad case did not obtain, and thus, with the rational belief that, given the norm, the given epistemic act is not obligated, it is justified to not believe in himself being a bad case. All the same, it is his excellent exercise of his rational capacities that he came to such conclusion, and, by Littlejohn's theory, the wishful counterpart is not to blame epistemically for his epistemic wrong because of the epistemic excusability.

My diagnosis is Littlejohn's confusion of rationality with reasonableness. Does an excellent exercise of one's rational capacities always output a belief that is rational? A belief might as well be mistaken but reasonable, without the false belief being rational. This is compatible with its being the output of one's rational capacities exercised excellently. The norm of rationality and the norm of reasonableness, given the differentiation, are different, and whether reasonableness and justification come apart shall have been what Littlejohn's argument lends support to. One could have reasonably believed that it must be that one performed an epistemic act, without it following that one is justified to perform the epistemic act—as I have demonstrated with the wishful counterpart. With these, I shall turn to my proposal of what reasons are in relation to justification. The broadly externalist rationality that entails the incompatibility between rationality and wrongness shall inform the following discussion.

4. Reason

Consider the obligation in (2) again. Epistemic sensitivity obligates doubt with counterfactuality. Given any fact, if it is not actual, but counterfactual, it must be that one doubted it. How is one's corresponding epistemic duty be discharged? Notably, especially with cases of doubt, there are epistemic situations in which one is obligated to doubt something without one knowing that it must be that one doubted it. Consider the following knowledge of obligation conception of reason.

- 7) For any p , one has sufficient reason that p if and only if one knows that it must be that p .

The sceptical counterpart is obligated to doubt that he is the good case because he is only counterfactually but not actually a good case. He failed epistemic sensitivity, but his epistemic insensitivity is understood with his lack of evidence, especially evidence that would have constituted an epistemic defeater to his belief that he is a good case. This explains his epistemic excusability, and thus how he is epistemically blameless. It is contrasted with the reckless counterpart, who, even with access to such evidence, epistemically decided to sustain his belief that he is the

good case, ignoring what that constituted the epistemic inexcusability of his epistemic insensitivity. The epistemic insensitivity differentiates with recklessness into blameworthiness. In one case, the epistemic insensitivity was not due to epistemic recklessness; in another, it is. Epistemic recklessness is thus incompatible with epistemic excusability, and the epistemic insensitivity theory explains how epistemic competence epistemically excuses.

If this is correct, having a reason to doubt that p , for any p , is simply to know that it must be that one doubted that p . However, it is not always the case that one knows that it must be that one doubted something, especially when one has a prior outright belief in that thing. A case that suffices for such knowledge of obligation is through knowledge of the falsity of the corresponding outright belief. If one already knew the falsity of the belief, it is not only obligated to doubt, but even to disbelieve. It seems, therefore, reason to doubt is difficult to come by. Either we knew its falsity, so we do not have to doubt it, but only disbelieve it, or we did not know its falsity and did not know our obligation to doubt it. What, then, are we to make of our such predicament?

My response is to attribute the above to our epistemic rationality, having to do with epistemic obligation, and leave room for epistemic reasonableness, through which the notion of reasonable doubt is pertinent. What is it to doubt something rationally is constituted by the counterfactuality, or even the fictitiousness, of the doubted; but what is it to doubt something reasonably? Consider the safety theory of reasonableness.

- 8) Reasonableness of an act is measured with its likelihood of having been performed with a perfect safety.

If knowledge of obligation constituted sufficient reason, whereas having sufficient reason constitutes what an individual with the inclination for perfect safety would have done, having sufficient reason for an act would have constituted the act's having been performed with a perfect safety. What it is for someone to have a reason for something correlates with someone's alleged knowledge of one's obligation. The epistemic act of knowing an obligation thus has a measure of likelihood, corresponding to which a measure of reasonableness. Reasonableness, therefore, shall be described in the following.

- 9) For some p , there might as well have been a reason that p .

The 'might' here is epistemic, and the strength of likelihood determines whether this epistemic 'might' suffices for reasonableness. Therefore, for all one knows, that something might as well have been a reason suffices for that thing to have constituted the corresponding reasonableness.

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However, such epistemic modality is relative to epistemic agent. What one judges reasonable given one's background knowledge, someone else might have different judgment. This is the typical situation, and in making recommendation using 'ought' statement, the speaker usually utters with the hope of the listener accommodating the speaker's presupposition.

10) "You ought to have doubted it."

brings the listener to borrow what the speaker believes about the listener's situation, and the assertion has a given appropriateness condition depending on whether the recommendation is reasonable.

However, the question that arises now is: given (10), if the listener decided not to take the advice, how are they still epistemically excusable for the resultant epistemic wrong? My answer is with my corresponding ignorance of obligation understanding of blamelessness.

11) A wrong is blameless if and only if the agent did not know that it must be that they did not commit the corresponding act.

See the following epistemological version of (11).

12) An epistemic wrong is epistemically blameless if and only if the epistemic agent did not know that it must be that they did not commit the corresponding epistemic act.

Suppose I sustained my belief in what I was told to doubt through (10). This epistemic act constituted an epistemic wrong because the belief is false. Before the speaker's prompt, I was epistemically blameless. Once being thus warned, the question became: in what epistemic situation am I still epistemically blameless?

It depends on how much, relative to one's background knowledge, the strength of the epistemic modality constitutes. Even if, relative to the speaker, it is very likely that I had a reason to doubt because I in fact am epistemically justified to know that I must doubt it, it is the speaker's duty, given his care, to point me to the epistemic defeater to my prior outright belief. I might as well be epistemically justified to know that it must be that I doubted something, but I could have overlooked the epistemic justification that I already had. Someone persuasive shall have had the social competence to direct my attention to what is epistemically relevant, and thus brings to salience, appropriately, what I must have doubted.

A corresponding theory of epistemic liability can thus be formulated.

13) An epistemic agent is positively (negatively) epistemically liable for an epistemic act if and only if they know that it must be that they (did not) performed it.

This constitutes an epistemic rationality that is externalist in a way that obligation sometimes outran what one knows. Epistemic responsibility is determined by epistemic obligations, such that the sceptical counterpart, in failing epistemic sensitivity, is epistemic responsible for his epistemic mistake. Epistemic liability, on the other hand, is determined by epistemic reason. Since the sceptical counterpart had no reason to doubt—epistemic reason, ignoring reason such as wanting to understand the sceptics out of concern for their psychological well-being—, his epistemic insensitivity is epistemically blameless. Epistemic reasonableness, on the other hand, enjoys a flexibility with regard to the difference in perspective among epistemic agents, forsaking the externalist elements of success—when the doubt indeed resulted in the sceptical counterpart knowing how bad one's case is. (6) and (13) therefore entails that the sceptical counterpart is not to be epistemically blamed because he does not know that it must be that he believed that he is a bad case. On the other hand, it is epistemically reasonable of him to have believed that he is the good case; not only does it seem likely that he has sufficient epistemic reason to believe that he is the good case, he also does not know that it must be that he did not believe that he is a good case.

5. Conclusion

I have, using epistemic sensitivity, explained some data from the new evil demon. I contrasted the epistemic responsibility conception of epistemic justification with some virtue-theoretic epistemic excusability. I have put forward a theory of epistemic liability that motivates an externalist epistemic rationality, which sharply distinguishes itself from an epistemic reasonableness that is robustly agent-relative. I have also applied the safety theory of reasonableness in understanding the difference between reasonable doubt and rational doubt. The knowledge of obligation conception of reason, through its identification with justification, is compatible with the externalism which entails the possibility of compliance with a rule without knowing that one did. One could have performed an act that one must have performed without knowing the obligation. Epistemically, one could have performed an epistemic act in a dire epistemic situation without sufficient evidence and epistemically succeeded. Epistemic sensitivity, mediated by evidence, supplements an epistemic rationality thus, without the corresponding epistemic luck discrediting the epistemic safety of the epistemic agent.

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