

Schroeder - What does it take to "have" a reason?

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Central question of the paper: in addition to belief, what epistemic relation must I bear to p in order for p to be part of my evidence?

High-bar views:¹

$H=K$ the set of evidence propositions you have is coextensive with the set of propositions you know

$H=JB$ the set of evidence propositions you have is coextensive with the set of propositions you are justified in believing

Low-bar views:

$H=B$ the set of evidence propositions you have is coextensive with the set of propositions you believe

$H=Pres$ the set of evidence propositions you have is coextensive with the set of propositions towards which you have a *presentational attitude*

- 'By *presentational* attitudes, I mean attitudes which present their content to their subject as being true, which I understand to include both belief and perceptual experience (both veridical and non-veridical), but not (for example) desire, wonder, supposition, or assumption.' (204-5)²

Truism: adopting an unjustified belief does not put you in a better evidential position with respect to believing its consequences.

High-bar views are sometimes motivated as the best explanation for the truth of the Truism³

§10.1 – Clarifications: having evidence

[summary of Schroeder's 'Having Reasons']

§10.2 - The setup - Two arguments for a high bar, and two readings of the truism

[The two arguments are discussed in detail below – let's put off our discussion until then]

Clarifying the Truism

¹ NB: the highness of the bar decreases as we go down this list

² NB Schroeder's $E=Pres$ theory is similar to Phenomenal Conservatism (=df if it seems to you as if p, then, in the absence of defeaters, you have at least some reason to believe p)

³ if belief that p is sufficient for p to be part of your evidence, and if having p as part of your evidence puts you in a better position to believe the consequences of p, then the truism should be false. The truism is not false. So the belief that p is not sufficient for p to be part of your evidence. What else is required? Satisfaction of an epistemic condition.

Recall: **Truism:** adopting an unjustified belief does not put you in a better evidential position with respect to believing its consequences.

But what kind of *justification* are we talking about?

Propositional justification: justification that one has for proposition, whether you actually believe it or not

Doxastic justification: justificatory status of a belief

Standard picture: one is *propositionally* justified in believing that p in virtue of possessing evidence that supports p. One is *doxastically* justified in believing that p in virtue of (i) being propositionally justified in believing that p (due to some evidence one possesses), and (ii) believing that p *on the right basis*

Four possible readings of the Truism:

PP When p lacks propositional justification, it does not contribute to the agent's propositional justification for its consequences.

PD When p lacks propositional justification, it does not contribute to the agent's doxastic justification for its consequences.

DP When p lacks doxastic justification, it does not contribute to the agent's propositional justification for its consequences.

DD When p lacks doxastic justification, it does not contribute to the agent's doxastic justification for its consequences.

Schroeder:

- DP is false: p might lack doxastic justification only because one believes it on the wrong basis, but in that case p can still provide *propositional* justification for believing its consequences
- PP is the 'most basic and important', since doxastic justification is defined in terms of propositional justification

Schroeder will focus on explaining the PP version of the Truism

§10.3 - The alternative explanation: lack of justification guarantees defeat

Point of this section: defend the Truism from the Indirect Argument:

Indirect argument for a High Bar:

1. adopting an unjustified belief does not put you in a better evidential position with respect to its consequences (truism)

2. you have evidence for p by being in a state of mind S only if being in S puts you in a better evidential position with respect to p (aux hypothesis)
3. So, adopting an unjustified belief that p is not a way of having evidence for p

The argument is *indirect* due to its reliance on the aux premise

The idea is that the Aux Premise explains the Truism, but together they imply the conclusion that Schroeder wants to reject. He takes it as his task to offer an alternative explanation of the Truism so that he can reject the Aux Premise and so avoid the conclusion.

Schroeder defends:

LJGD When an agent's belief in p lacks propositional justification, it does not contribute to her propositional justification to believe q.

NB that LJGD is stronger: PP only limits p's ability to propositionally justify its consequences, where LJGD limits p's ability to propositionally justify *any* proposition q.

Strategy:

- explain LGDG, thereby explaining PP
- explain LGDG in terms of 'general principles about evidence being *defeated*'

Distinction:

countervailing (opposing) defeaters: a piece of evidence has a countervailing defeater when there is better contrary evidence

undercutting defeaters: a piece of evidence has an undercutting defeater when there is some further consideration which mitigates its force – perhaps so much so, that it does not carry any weight at all

specific undercutting defeaters: undercut p as a reason to believe q, but not as a reason to believe q'

general undercutting defeaters: undercut p as a reason to believe anything

Argument for LJGD:

1. When an agent's belief in p lacks propositional justification, she has insufficient reason to believe p.

2. When an agent has insufficient reason to believe *p*, she has conclusive reason to not believe *p*.
3. When an agent has conclusive reason not to believe *p*, she has conclusive reason not to take *p* into account in her reasoning about *q*.
4. When an agent has conclusive reason⁴ not to take *p* into account in her reasoning about *q*, it is irrational for her to take *p* into account in her reasoning about *q*.
5. An agent's belief in *p* contributes to her propositional justification to believe *q* only if it is rational for her to take *p* into account in her reasoning about *q*.
6. So, LJGD: when an agent's belief in *p* lacks propositional justification, it does not contribute to her propositional justification to believe *q*.

⁴ Remember: we're talking about *subjective* reasons here

Schroeder on his argument:

So together, P1–P5 provide an argument from highly plausible premises for LJGD, the thesis that lack of propositional justification guarantees defeat. This argument shows how we can rule out unjustified beliefs helping to justify other beliefs, without the need to postulate a special justification condition on the "having" relation involved in having evidence. According to this argument, even if you can "have" evidence by having a propositionally unjustified belief, **it is guaranteed to be defeated anyway**. (210, emphasis added)

BTM: that's weird – there's no mention of *defeat* anywhere in the argument. What's he talking about?

The structure of the argument... aims to show that... when you have an unjustified belief... you have some reason which makes it rational to place very little – even no – weight on the content of your unjustified belief in your reasoning. Which reason is this? It is the sufficient reason not to believe the proposition in the first place – which in most cases is largely constituted by the evidence that you have against it, which made it an unjustified thing to believe in the first place.* So the idea of the argument is that the very same principles which explain how specific undercutting defeaters work – by making it rational to pay the evidence they undercut less attention in reasoning – also serve to explain how general undercutting defeaters work – by making it rational to pay the evidence they undercut less attention in reasoning. Consequently, the idea is that our truism is simply a consequence of these general features of the behavior of undercutting defeaters. It is therefore not something of which we need to provide a special explanation, by postulating special high bars on what it takes to have evidence.

BTM:

First problem:

Re: *: Why think I have evidence against p (where p is the unjustified belief in question)? Surely I can be unjustified in believing p when I simply lack evidence altogether, and in that case, what's my defeater for p? And if we can't guaranty that there will be a defeater, then in what sense does Lack of Justificaton Guaranty Defeat?

Second problem:

Can Schroeder really allow the existence of *general* undercutting defeaters? He wants to say that p can be part of my evidence even though p is generally defeated,⁵ and in fact he *has* to say that in order for some unjustified belief e to satisfy both (i) e is believed, so it's the content of a presentational attitude, so it's part of your evidence, and (ii) e doesn't justify its consequences (that's the truism).

But if e is part of your evidence, then shouldn't your confidence in e given your evidence (which includes e!) be extremely high? Schroeder would do well to back off of a binary picture of evidence-having.

Third problem: Schroeder entertains the following objection:

It is natural to question whether the argument that I have just provided gives us an independent explanation of our truism, or just predicts that our truism is, in fact, true – a fact which we should explain by positing a high bar on the having relation. (210)

I too would like to press that natural question. Response?

[T]he argument I have just given does... provide an independent explanation of the truism [LJGD], because... it illustrates that the very same general principles which **explain** the behavior of undercutting defeaters in general, **predict and explain** why there would be general undercutting defeaters in these cases. This is because in general, undercutting defeaters work by making it rational to take the proposition which they defeat less into account in reasoning toward their conclusion. (210, emphasis added, hedging language removed)

The two cases seem quite different here. When an evidence proposition is undercut, it's rational to take it 'less into account' because it no longer supports the conclusion, not because we have no reason to believe that the evidence proposition is true. That's not what's happening with unjustified beliefs, of which it might be perfectly rational to (i) believe that, if true, it would support some conclusion, and (ii) disbelieve (or withhold belief) in its truth.

What am I missing here? [end: BTM]

⁵ You might think that general defeaters are too different from specific defeaters to really count as a kind of defeat. You might think that their very generality makes it more natural to describe considerations which have general defeaters as not evidence at all, rather than as evidence that has been defeated. I'm not so much concerned about how it is natural to describe them, however, as with the underlying explanation of the phenomenon. (209)

§1-.4 Negative intuitions about reasons/ evidence and the direct argument

Point of this section: respond to the 'Direct Argument' for a high bar which:

...proceeds by pumping the intuition that someone who has no other reason to believe p does not have any evidence for p, simply in virtue of unjustifiedly believing something which has p as a consequence.
(205)

Strategy: provide an error theory for why we have such an intuition.

Error theory:

The reason why the direct argument does not do any more work than the indirect argument, is that our intuitive judgments about what there is no reason to do or to believe are strongly influenced by the weight of reasons, and by how much of an effect those reasons have the potential to have on what we ought to do, in the context of the other reasons that there are. When there is a reason to believe something, but it is of low enough weight that it obviously makes no difference, given the other reasons in play in the situation, to what it is rational to believe, pragmatic considerations successfully predict that we will incorrectly find it intuitively compelling that there is in fact no reason to believe.

§10.5 The payoff for epistemology?

Why this stuff matters:

Immediately justified beliefs aren't based on other beliefs (by definition)

Suppose belief B is based on evidence that I have

According to $H=K$ and $H=JB$, I have evidence only if I know/ justifiably believe it.

So in order for B to be based on evidence that I have, it must be based on something a belief (either known, or believed with justification)

So, if B is *immediately justified* then it isn't based on evidence at all

But what about immediate *perceptual* justification?

In order to preserve both high-bar theories and immediate perceptual justification, one has to retreat to a *mixed view*: 'high standards on having evidence in cases of inferential justification, and low standards in the case of basic perceptual justification.' (217)

Three problems with mixed views:

1. (1) easy to provide an error theory for the motivations for the motivations of mixed views
 - Schroeder is imagining a view on the fact that you've had an experience as of p makes it the case that you have p as part of your evidence (i.e. as a subjective reason)
 - That's obviously true in the objective sense (assuming minimal reliability), not obviously true in the subjective sense
 - So, error theory: you're confusing objective and subjective reasons
2. (2) if the evidence is the fact *it perceptually appears to me as if p* , how is that supposed to support p ? That's a big leap.
3. (3) if there are two distinct ways of having evidence, then there must be two distinct ways of basing a belief on an evidence.
 - in that case, there's no unified way in which we can claim that 'all justified beliefs are based on evidence'.
 - 'It is crucially important not to underestimate the centrality of this problem in epistemology. Repeatedly in the history of twentieth-century epistemology, philosophers have returned to the idea that there are simply different things going on in the case of basic perceptual justification and in the case of inferential justification – that one philosophical story is required for one, and another quite different story for the other. Mixed views fall squarely within this tradition. And the prevalence of mixed views like this has been one of the strongest original motivations for both coherentism and externalism. Coherentists can offer a unified account of justification, by applying what goes for the inferential case to what are apparently basic perceptual cases. And since the beginning of externalism in epistemology, externalists have argued that foundationalists have to accept externalist explanations of basic perceptual justification anyway, and that once you take that on board, they are merely extending what foundationalists accept anyway to the inferential cases. It's hard to complain about causal or pure reliabilist theories of knowledge, when your own story about basic perceptual justification is distinguishable from them only by being less unified and less explicit. So for these reasons I take it to be quite a serious charge that the view we've been considering does not provide a unified picture of having evidence and basing beliefs on evidence. It would be nice to be able to do better.'

(220)