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Group Normic Reliabilism

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Normic Reliabilism

Normic reliabilism = any view that has a ‘normic reliability’ necessary condition on justification.

Normic reliability individuals = a belief is normically reliable only if it is true at all the most normal worlds at which it is formed in the same way.

Group Normic Reliabilism: A group belief is normically reliable only if it is true at all the most normal worlds at which it is formed in the same way.

Important clarifications:

1. I'm thinking of belief forming processes (in the sense relevant to the assessment of epistemic justification) as encompassing the aspects of the causal explanation of an agent (or group's) belief that are attributable to the agent (or group). This includes both token causes, and more complex causal factors such as blockers.
2. the notion of normality at issue is explanatory, not statistical: deviations from normality cry out for explanation, normal situations do not (or, they require less explanation). Situations which are equally normal are explanatorily on a par (Smith (2016)). So, in essence normic reliabilism says that a belief is justified iff, given how the belief is formed, it would cry out for explanation if the belief was false.

Notes:

1. Obviously this is very close to Smith's (2016) view of evidential support. It also many of the advantages:

- Seems to support closure (at least, if closure fails for justification it doesn't fail in light of this aspect of the theory)
- Explains lack of justification in lottery cases.
- Arguably helps with statistical evidence in law.

2. Normic reliabilism in with the following more general picture of justification: An agent is justified when they have done their part toward getting knowledge.

Three arguments:

1. Pretty general argument: If you have ‘done your part toward getting knowledge’ then what you have done will normally be sufficient for knowledge. Thus, when circumstances are normal your belief will be true (and justified).
2. More specific: Knowledge is inconsistent with luck. Safety violations are sufficient but not necessary for luck. You are also lucky if you form your belief in a way which, if things had been normal, you would (or may) have been wrong.
3. Knowledge is normal belief. For a belief to constitute knowledge is for it to be explained non-deviant and non-lucky way by the fact that makes it true, and for these features themselves to be held in a characteristic way (i.e. if the belief is safe in a non-characteristic way then it does not constitute knowledge) (Peet & Pitcovski (2018)). Suppose a belief is true, and safe, but does not satisfy the normic reliability condition. Then, in normal circumstances it would not be safe. Thus, it is only because of a deviation from normality that it is safe. So, it is safe in a deviant way and does not constitute knowledge.
 - Assuming that this very broad picture of knowledge generalizes to groups (i.e. group knowledge still needs to meet the relevant truth and anti-luck principles), these considerations generalize to the group case.
 - There may be more to justification than normic reliability. I think that unpacking the would be knowledge notion further will probably reveal more than just the normic reliability condition.

Condorcet and Individual member reliability

The problem: Any view that places reliability at center stage in our theory of justification is going to have to deal with the fact that group reliability and individual reliability can seemingly come apart.

- By the Condorcet jury theorem, if we have a large enough group who are independent, the group can reach a very high degree of reliability via majority voting as long as the members are above 0.5 reliable. So, say we have a group who's members are all 0.5000001 reliable on p. If the group is large enough they have a very high probability of forming true beliefs.

Lackey points out several problems with this besides its simply being highly counter intuitive:

1. A group can become justified simply by adding more members.
2. This makes the grounds of the individual member beliefs (or voting dispositions or whatever) irrelevant to justification.

- Groups of diligent reliable researchers structured to perform careful collaborative research come out as less justified than these giant groups with members who are practically no better than a coin flip.

Some bite this bullet and say such large groups are justified (Dunn (forthcoming)). I am not convinced. I think that when learning from such groups we would treat them more as instruments or mere indicators of the truth. Not as agents. So the forms of epistemic appraisal that are appropriate will differ.

Why normic reliabilism solves this problem:

- The basis for individual beliefs/voting dispositions will be part of what explains the group belief, and thus something factored into the reliability calculation.
- When the small collaborative research team gets it wrong, this is something that will cry out for explanation. But this is not the case for the large groups. Here is an analogy to see this:

Suppose we have a coin that is biased such that it has a 0.6 probability of landing heads. If we flipped the coin three times there will be a certain probability of the majority of flips being heads. Suppose we flip the same coin 10 more times. Then the probability of it landing heads at least half the time increases. Suppose we have a very high number of flips. Then there is a very high probability of it landing heads the majority of the time.

Then suppose we have many such series of coin tosses of equally biased coins. The majority of the time they will end up with majority heads. However, in the unlikely cases where tails comes up majority, this will not cry out for explanation.

This generalizes to the condorcet cases. We can think of the votes of the members as akin to bias coin flips that happen concurrently. We should expect them to get it right the majority of the time. But it does not cry out for explanation when they get it wrong.

4. The Improper Manipulation Problem

This is a problem pointed out by Lackey that faces the vast majority of theories of group justification, including Lackey's own view.

The basic issue is as follows: Agents should not be able to form justified beliefs by, in essence, picking and choosing what to believe on the basis of practical concerns. If a theory of group justifications allows groups to do this (i.e. satisfy the conditions for justification on purpose) then it is inadequate.

Joint acceptance of reasons view: A group is justified if p is supported by the groups reasons. The groups reasons are those the group collectively accepts. However, the group can collectively accept whatever they want. So they can form any justified belief they choose.

Reliability views: As we saw in the Condorcet case, groups can become more statistically reliable simply by adding more members. So, if a group wants to justifiably believe p for practical purposes it can do so by simply adding more members who believe p and are marginally above 0.5 reliable.

Lackey's view:

A group G justifiably believes that p if and only if

- (1) A significant percentage of the operative members of G (a) justifiably believe that p, and (b) are such that adding together the bases of their justified beliefs that p yields a belief set that is coherent.
- (2) Full disclosure of the evidence relevant to the proposition that p accompanied by rational deliberation about that evidence among the members of G in accordance with their individual and group epistemic normative requirements, would not result in further evidence that when added to the bases of G's members' beliefs that p, yields a total belief set that fails to make sufficiently probable that p.

Lackey, 2016, 380-381.

- Designed to avoid the problem: in order to gerrymander the group membership in such a way as to guarantee justified belief in p, the person doing the gerrymandering must be aware of defeaters for p. But, if they are aware of the defeaters, then the group will fail condition (2). Thus the group will not be justified in believing p.

But still faces the problem:

GENIE: Suppose Sally, Ben and Max run a company that produces Xs. They falsely believe that X's are safe. They each believe this for a different reason, and each reason is defeted. So each is unjustified. However, each member possesses a defeater for one of the others's beliefs. So, if combined their total evidence would actually provide some very minimal support for p.

Moreover, it suits them to believe that X's are safe. And they wish for practical reasons, that the company justifiably believes that x's are safe.

They want to put together a board of directors and managers for the company. In the night they are visited by a genie. The genie tells them the following: 'I am granting you each new powers of discrimination. From now on you will, with a certain form of reliability (to be specified), be able to tell whether somebody else justifiably believes that X's are safe, in such a way that the basis for their belief is consistent with the basis for your own beliefs (and those of your employees), and they possess no defeaters for the basis of your beliefs (or those of your employees). There will be no false positives (i.e. you will never falsely believe somebody has such a justified belief), but there will be a random rate of failure to detect agents that do satisfy this condition. You will not be aware of this rate of failure'.

Using their new powers they start interviewing candidates. They only hire people who justifiably believe that X's are safe. They do so simply because it will be beneficial for the company if everyone justifiably believes X's are safe (regardless of whether or not they actually are safe).

They face many candidates who don't appear to justifiably believe that X's are safe. But they have no idea whether this is due to the low reliability of their new faculty, or rather whether it is due to the low number of people who actually justifiably believe X's are safe.

Consider the resultant group: The vast majority are such that they justifiably believe X's are safe. They all have consistent bases. Moreover, full disclosure and discourse on evidence would not throw up any new defeaters. Indeed, it would actually render defeater defeaters for the few defeated individual beliefs.

So, Lackey must say the group is justified. But this is another case where the make up of the group is purposefully manipulated from within to render a group that satisfies the conditions of justifiably believing p for practical reasons. SO the resultant belief is not justified.

How Normic Reliability helps:

In cases of evidence/membership manipulation the process of specifically selecting evidence or group members so as to reach a particular verdict for purely pragmatic reasons is a large part of the explanation for the group's continued belief.

- Beliefs formed in such way will not normally be true. That is, it in no way crys our for explanation when they are false. So, they will be rendered unjustified.

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