

Propositional Justification and Informatism

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ABSTRACT

This essay presents the chief reasons for making a distinction between propositional and doxastic justification and, also, points out two things: (1) no theory of propositional justification implies a theory of doxastic justification; (2) informatism is, essentially, a theory of propositional justification. Additionally, this paper tries to shed some light on the three conjointly sufficient conditions for a proper informatist view of propositional justification.

One of the few widespread agreements in contemporary epistemology is that the correct analysis of the concept of epistemic justification requires a clear distinction between propositional and doxastic justification¹.

This distinction can be traced back to Keith Lehrer's *Knowledge*². Albeit he does not use terms like “propositional” and “doxastic justification”, he makes the distinction very clearly. In discussing the case of the *gypsy lawyer*, he says that:

¹ See all the references below.

² I'm not sure whether or not Lehrer should be considered the first one to draw a distinction between propositional and doxastic justification in contemporary epistemology. Mention him, though, seems relevant because of the strong influence he has exerted on the field.

(...) the evidence which completely justifies his [the gypsy lawyer] belief does not explain why he believes as he does, his faith in the cards explains that, and the evidence in no way supports, reinforces or conditionally or partially explains why he believes as he does. Since his belief is completely explained by his faith in cards, the evidence is irrelevant to explaining why he believes as he does. His belief is completely justified by the evidence, however: his faith in the cards is irrelevant to the justification of his belief. (Lehrer 1974, p. 125)

He then concludes that: “The preceding discussion rests on a distinction between explaining why a man believes something, on the one hand, and explaining how he knows it on the other”. (Lehrer 1974, p. 125).

Lehrer is noting that S can have epistemic justification for believing something but simply fail to form the belief on *that* basis. So, our evidence or justification does not completely explain our believing. Thus, something very important is revealed: there is some kind of a disconnection between the epistemic justification we may have to accept some proposition and our believing itself. In this sense, epistemic justification detaches itself from believing.

There are different ways of labeling the same distinction. One more similar to the current “propositional *vs* doxastic justification” use was offered by Roderick Firth. He says that: “To distinguish [...] two epistemic uses of the term 'warranted' we may adopt the traditional device for separating the 'logical content' of a belief from the psychological state of believing. We may distinguish *propositional* warrant from *doxastic* warrant” (Firth 1978 p. 218). He goes on saying that: “an assessment of doxastic warrant requires psychological information that is irrelevant to assessments of propositional warrant. We must know something about how [S] mind has worked if we are to know that he is warranted in believing [p]” (Firth 1978, p. 219)

Apparently, Firth is underling the same aspect: one thing is to have justification for p, and another is to have a psychological state – the *believing* – epistemically justified. Additionally, he is giving, in the passage just quoted, a forewarn about what would be required for having a complete understanding of doxastic justification: “knowing about the subject's mind”.

Alvin Goldman uses the terms *ex ante* and *ex post* to make an analogous, but not identical, point: “Let us distinguish two uses of 'justified': an *ex post* use and an *ex ante* use. The *ex post* use occurs when there exists a belief, and we

say of *that belief* that it is (or isn't) justified. The *ex ante* use occurs when no such belief exists, or when we wish to ignore the question of whether such a belief exists.” (Goldman 2003, p. 124)

Considering that *ex post* justification (doxastic justification, DJ for short) implies that S believes p and that, on the other hand, *ex ante* justification (propositional justification, PJ for short) does not imply that S believes p, we realize that we can have justification *independently* of having beliefs. Therefore, in one sense at least, S's epistemic justification for p does not depend on S's having the belief that p.

Robert Audi says the following:

The two justificational notions are intimately related: if one justifiedly believes something, one is also justified *in* believing it, hence *has* justification for believing it. But the converse does not hold: not everything we are justified *in* believing is something we *do* believe. [...] Let us call the first kind of justification—justifiedly believing—*belief justification*, as it belongs to actual beliefs. It is also called *doxastic* justification, from the Greek *doxa*, translatable as ‘belief’. Call the second kind [...] *situational justification*, since it is based on the informational situation one is in. (Audi 1998, p. 3)

Audi also thinks that *situational justification* (i.e. propositional justification) is necessary for DJ:

So far, I've not emphasized something implicit: that justification *for* believing something (which does not entail actually believing it), i.e., *propositional justification*, and, by contrast, justified believing of something, i.e., *doxastic justification*, are subject to different standards. The latter implies the former but not conversely. (Audi 2015, p. 263)

There are many implications we can draw from the relation between PJ and DJ. One of them – a very direct and negative one – is that “to be justified in believing something it is not sufficient merely to have a good reason for believing it” (Pollock and Cruz 1999, p. 35). Other – more important for my purposes – is that the way we frame a *theory* of PJ does not, compulsorily at least, outline our *theory* of DJ. One thing we can learn from this distinction, then, is that we may very well have a theory about how we can have epistemic justification for a proposition without saying anything about how to anchor our belief on that justification. There is nothing in our theory of propositional

justification to determine *how* we will understand doxastic justification.

To be more precise: there are two main reasons for making a distinction between PJ and DJ: (1) S can have justification for believing *p* but actually believe *p* on the basis of something else, and (2) S can have justification for *p* without having the belief that *p*. It follows that we can have theories of PJ that do not deal with neither (a) how to properly connect our justification with our believing nor (b) beliefs *per se*. In other words, the way to make sense of the distinction between PJ and DJ, and also to understand its importance, is to observe that we can have epistemic justification for *p* without believing *p*.

Once we have realized that theories of PJ are not identical to theories of DJ, we can see that someone may be an infinitist about PJ³ without being compromised with any account of DJ. As PJ and DJ are not necessarily isomorphic, we may be infinitists about PJ and skeptics (or actually whatever we want) about DJ. It's a mistake to criticize a theory of PJ because it is assumed that the theory will deal with DJ in a somehow similar fashion. To say, for example, that infinitism implies that we would need to complete any task involving believing is just to confuse a theory of PJ with a theory of DJ. Again, a theory of PJ is not compromised with any view about either beliefs or the proper relation between mental acts of believing and propositional justification. PJ, then, has to do with structures of reasons, independently of what we actually believe.

Being a reason

The way I am portraying this distinction demands the acceptance that we can talk about a proposition *p* being a reason without *p* being the actual content of a subject's belief. But then, one could wonder, how can we account for the idea of *reasons without believing*? The answer is that we can account for being a reason without any believing in a subjunctive way. Notwithstanding neither proposition *r* nor proposition *p* being believed by S, *r* is a reason for *p* because if S were to believe *r*, *r* would make his acceptance of *p* epistemically justified⁴.

³ Of course, the same of course goes for foundationalism and coherentism as well.

⁴ There is an interesting question, as noticed by an anonymous reviewer, whether that

In this way, “accepting” or “believing” are adopted as parameters for specifying the objective epistemic relation that proposition *r* has with proposition *p*. We are saying that the relation between *r* and *p* is such that if a person accepts *r* and *p* she will benefit from the objective epistemic quality of that relation.

The adequate epistemic relation between propositions *r* and *p* must have something to do with the truth values of *r* and *p*, something that makes the truth of *r* an indication or confirmation of the truth of *p*. A reason for *p* is, in this sense, a proposition that is deductively or probabilistic connected with the truth of *p*. With that, being a reason is a *relational property*: to be a reason is, for a proposition *r*, to connect with the truth of another proposition, *p*, in a logical or probabilistic way.

The fact that every proposition can be entailed – the strongest relational support – from infinite propositions and that every proposition entails infinite different propositions does not show that the relational property of being a reason is trivial. For you, perhaps, it is not rational to believe *I have at least 5 millions* even though this proposition is supported by *I have 10 millions*. So, although there is an adequate relational epistemic property between these two propositions, it may not be rational *for you* to accept any of them. That is right, but not because one proposition is not a reason or evidence for the other. This is so because, supposedly, you have no additional reason to accept *I have 10 millions*. As for the most of us, the proposition *I have 10 millions* is not part of a suitable structure of reasons, so that you are not in the right track, or in the right epistemic position regarding *I have 10 millions*. Nevertheless, it's the existence of a non trivial property of being a reason what makes rational for

formulation could suffer from what has been called a “conditional fallacy” (Shope 1978). Such a fallacy seems to threaten any use of subjunctive conditionals, perhaps with stronger consequences for internalism (Johnson 1999). However, the fundamental idea expressed by “if *S* were to believe *r*, *r* would make his acceptance of *p* epistemically justified” is that given the actualization of the disposition to believe *p*, *r* in fact makes it rational for *S* to accept *p*. And this is the case even if *S* does not have the occurrent belief in *p*. Hence, the reasons, or the quality of the reasons, are not somehow *subjunctive* – they are not simply “reason that it *would be* rational to believe for” (Schroeder 2015, p. 163). The role of the counterfactual, perhaps otherwise misleading and problematic, is meant to make it clearer that *r* is a reason for *S* for *p* whether or not *S* does actually believe in *p*.

you to accept *I have not 10 millions* since you know that *I have 10 millions* implies that you have at least 5 millions (supposing, of course, that *I have at least 5 millions* is also false for you).

If you were in a different position regarding *I have 10 millions* you could accept *I have at least 5 millions* benefiting from the adequate epistemic relation that exists between these two propositions. Our situation regarding any contingent proposition is not of course immutable: the proposition *I have 10 millions* could be part of a structure of reasons for you given, for example, the proposition *I just won a 10 million's lottery prize* were true for you.

The existence of an adequate objective epistemic relation prevents that every proposition work as a reason for any other proposition. As obvious as it can be, this will be particularly important for infinitism: from the fact that there are an infinite chain of propositions, it does not follow that the adequate epistemic relation holds. In other words, an infinite chain of *propositions* is not equivalent to an infinite chain of *reasons*⁵. As we will see, there cannot be a finite chain of reasons, because one condition for being a reason – what we could call a *formal epistemic condition* – is that there can't be a reason without a further reason. However, the formal condition alone is not what makes a proposition a reason for another proposition: there must be an adequate epistemic relation connecting them.

On the other hand, the fact that proposition *p* is supported by other propositions does not mean that *p* is rational or justified *for everyone*. There can be an infinite chains of adequate reasons – chains of propositions for which the adequate epistemic relation holds – that simply do not fit in *S*'s situation, i.e. they are not part of a structure of reasons suitable *for S*. So, propositions in that structure, even holding the appropriate epistemic relation, are not rational or justified for *S*. One idea to explain this *situational condition* for propositional justification is that even if *S* were perfectly self-conscious, *S* would not find any deductive or probabilistic connections between *p* and the rest of the propositions for which he has justification, or even the rest of his beliefs⁶.

⁵ This is, I think, what Cling points out: “The regress condition itself cannot explain the connection between justification and truth” (Cling 2004, p. 110).

⁶ I would like to say that the relational and situational conditions for propositional justification are quite similar to what Jeremy Fantl called structure and relational tasks. According to him: “The type of theory that tells us how propositions come to be

We can imagine, for example, a person who has just won a lottery, with a 10 millions prize. For him it will be rational to accept *I have at least 5 millions*. We can imagine another person that inherited 10 millions last week. For this second person *I have at least 5 millions* will also be rational, but the structure of reasons will be different for each of them. The chain of reasons that makes p , *I have at least 5 millions*, rational for them is not the same, because the structure of reasons suitable for them are distinct. It means that not every structure of reasons – a chain of propositions for which the proper epistemic relation holds – is an adequate structure of reasons for everyone.

The situational condition for PJ prevents that since the epistemic relation holds, it will necessarily be adequate to the particular informational situation of any subject. In order for r to be a reason for p for S , r must be in a structure of reasons suitable for S 's situation at a certain moment. To satisfy this condition, the propositions that constitute the set must hold the adequate relation epistemic property, but *also* they must fit in S 's epistemic situation. If they don't, those propositions will not be part of the structure of reasons for S .

Lets consider an example to illustrate this point: does Oedipus have justification for the proposition p , *I slept with my mother*? This proposition has a strong epistemic relation with r , *I slept with the Queen of Thebes*, since, in this world, whatever is true for the Queen of Thebes is true for the mother of Oedipus. Also, both propositions are true for Oedipus and Oedipus has justification for r . It could be said, then, that Oedipus has justification for p , if we were to understand that the situational epistemic condition is fulfilled whenever the objective epistemic relation holds. However, it is quite clear that Oedipus does not know that he slept with his mother and that he has no justification at all to

justified for you by sets of reasons is normally called a theory of the structure of justification. [...] such theories have at least two tasks. First, the structure-task: tell us what distinguishes [...] between those sets – or ‘structures’ – of reasons bearing on p that are potentially justification-conferring structures and those that aren't. Second, the relation-task: tell us what relation is such that, when you stand in that relation to a potentially justification-conferring structure, the structure is yours.” (Fantl 2011, p. 192). I think his idea that “when you stand in the right intrinsic relations to the reasons in a structure, say that you ‘have’ those reasons and that the structure is ‘yours.’” (Fantl 2011. p. 193) is very interesting and important. However, I am not sure he claims something similar to what I am saying here and also don't want him to get involved in my mistakes.

believe so.

The reason why Oedipus has no justification for p is that p is not part of chain of reasons suitable for him: there is no structure of reason, at least at the particular moment we are considering, making rational for him to accept that the Queen of Thebes and his mother are the same person. So, even though it is true that Oedipus slept with his mother, and that his mother is the Queen of Thebes, and that he knows that he slept with the Queen of Thebes, he has no justification to believe that he slept with his mother. Even if Oedipus were capable of reaching all the deductive and probabilistic consequences of all propositions that were justified for him, or even all the propositions he did believe, he would not have found epistemic support for p . There was nothing Oedipus could do, giving his particular epistemic situation at that moment, that could make accepting p reasonable for him. In other words, not every set of proposition for which the objective epistemic relation holds will be part of a structure of reasons suitable for S .

S can, then, lack PJ for p in, at least, two cases: (a) when there is no adequate epistemic relation between p and the propositions of the structure (e.g. *I have at least 5 millions* is not justified for S by *I gambled at the lottery*) and (b) p is not part of a structure of reasons suitable for S because (i) S knows some proposition is false (e.g. *I have at least 5 millions* is not justified for S by *I have 10 millions* because S knows *I have 10 millions* is false) or (ii) there is no structure of reasons supporting *I have 10 millions* even though, unbeknownst to him, it is true that S has 10 millions. So, even when proposition r is not one of S 's belief, r is a reason because if S were to believe r , r would make p epistemically justified, which means that r supports p and r fits in S 's informational situation. So, even though being a reason does not depend on believing, being a reason is always being a reason *for something* but also *for someone*. Therefore, propositional justification is personal⁷.

One result of this explanation is that only propositions can be reasons, based on the assumption that only propositions have truth values, and so that beliefs can be reasons merely because of their propositional content.

Thus, when someone claims that “only beliefs can be reasons”⁸, she is

⁷ This is a very important consequence, because although it is obvious that DJ is personal, it shows that it is incorrect to claim that only DJ is personal. C.f. Aikin 2011.

⁸ To see just one example c.f. Williams 2015. p. 238.

probably meaning not the believing itself but rather the belief's content, i.e. the proposition believed. If that's right, it is not actually the believing that contains the relational epistemic property that is necessary for propositional justification, but the belief's propositional content. In any case, we can talk about a proposition *p* being a reason and not currently being the content of a subject's belief, which means that we can have epistemic justification, in one sense at least, without having beliefs⁹.

Epistemic justification or rationality is, of course, something we also want to attribute to people's mental attitudes, more specifically, to people's beliefs. Nonetheless, in one particular sense – the propositional sense –, the property of rationality, or the property of being a reason, is independent of people's believing in a way similar to that when we consider propositions as independent of people's mind.

When we evaluate a person's belief saying, for example, *S's belief is true* or *S's belief is epistemically justified*, we are not *always* talking about *S's* doxastic attitude towards *p*. Sometimes, we are talking about the propositional content of that mental act or state, as we say that *S's belief is true* meaning *proposition p, which is the content of S's belief, is true*.

Propositional justification – the justification one may have without believing – has, initially, two aspects: one is the relation among propositions, the objective support that *r* provides for *p*; the other is the situational aspect: not all of the potentially infinite chain of propositions for which the adequate relation holds will constitute reasons for a specific subject at a specific time¹⁰. The third

⁹ Additionally, if we begin with the assumption that only beliefs can be reasons, it will be no distinction between PJ and DJ to be made, since all epistemic justification would be doxastic.

¹⁰ As noticed by an anonymous reviewer, one could insist that without any personal mental act of believing, we may lose the very idea of personal justification, i.e. without the believing, we wouldn't be able to explain why a certain chain of reasons is a chain of reason for someone in particular. First of all, it must be clear that the fact that a proposition is a reason for another proposition depends on some sort of objective, independent-of-the-subject property. The kind of property that relates, for example, (a) "I am not 100 years old" and (b) "I was born after the 1950's". So, the difference between a chain of reasons and a chain of proposition is the presence of that property. Second, as a matter of fact, each subject stands in an intrinsic epistemic relation with only certain chains of reasons. Sometimes, this relation might coincide with a number

aspect, the proper infinitist one, is that there can be no reason without a further reason.

PJ, DJ and a “know how to reasoning” condition

It could be claimed that the relation between PJ and DJ is explained by a principle more or less like the following: if (1) *p* is justified for *S* in virtue of *S*'s having reason *r*, and (2) *S* believes *p* on the basis of *r*, then *S*'s belief that *p* is justified¹¹.

The problem with this principle is that we may need more than “believing *p* on the basis of *r*” in order to have an epistemically justified belief. According to John Turri, a principle like the former “misses something deep and important about the relationship between propositional and doxastic justification. The way in which the subject performs, the manner in which she makes use of her reasons, fundamentally determines whether her belief is doxastically justified” (Turri 2010, p. 317).

However, the way Turri talks about both PJ and DJ is, it seems to me, rather peculiar. It appears that the distinction he has in mind is quite different from the one I have been depicting here. For instance, the idea of a “doxastically justified belief” seems either redundant, if taken as an “epistemically justified belief”, or simply hard to understand, if taken as something like a belief that is believably justified (or a doxa that is doxastically justified). This way of talking

of subjects – I would guess that, because of certain facts of this world, the reader and I coincide regarding (a) but perhaps not respecting (b). In my case, (b) justifies (a) – facts about *my* situational condition propitiates that – even without any previous consideration of either (a) or (b). It means that some propositions are reasons for us regardless our actual believing – at least in the sense of *propositional justification*, which is the one I am interested in here. So there is something independent of my situational condition that makes (b) a reason for (a). However, this particular chain of reasons will work just for some of us, those who stand in an appropriate position regarding (a) and (b). That should explain why “I am not 100 years old” and “the sky is blue” can form only a chain of propositions, not a chain of reasons; also, that should explain why (a) and (b) would constitute a chain of reasons only for some subjects, depending on their epistemic position regarding (a) and (b), but regardless their actual, occurrent beliefs.

¹¹ C.f. Turri 2010.

about DJ, unfortunately shared by others¹², makes the relation between PJ and DJ unnecessarily enigmatic. The same goes for the notion of “propositionally justified beliefs”. This way of canvassing propositional justification suggests that he is actually dealing with belief justification (i.e. doxastic justification) and not with propositional justification, for it looks like a belief can be both propositionally and/or doxastically justified. If that's the case, as it appears to be, his distinction between doxastic and propositional justification misses the essential point: it does not deal with cases when we have justification for p but not the belief that p. The best we can say is that his distinction features something about DJ only, where the conditions for DJ alone are being in some way expanded.

Independently of that, the introduction of an element of cognitive proficiency in order to generate a justified belief (i.e. DJ) may as well be correct. However, the role of a competent use of the reasons in order to generate a justified belief applies to our understanding of DJ, with no consequences on our understanding of PJ. Whether or not S performs well enough has no effect whatsoever on whether S has justification or not. Otherwise, the very distinction between PJ and DJ will be overlooked.

Further, there are, in my opinion, more important things for DJ than the idea that reasons plus basing is wrong. The most important one has to do with another distinction, between being justified and exhibiting that we are justified. According to William Alston: “we must clear out of the way a confusion between one’s being justified in believing that p, and one’s justifying one’s belief that p, where the latter involves one’s doing something to show that p, or to show that one’s belief was justified, or to exhibit one’s justification” (Alston 1989, p. 82). This is, quite clearly, a question involving DJ: in order to have a justified belief would it be necessary to justify that belief? Many, including Alston himself, think it isn't¹³.

Despite of Alston's opinion, there is in fact a different and important sense

¹² Including Klein himself. C.f. Klein 2015.

¹³ In my opinion, that's the most important question involving DJ because it opens the discussion about the necessity of meta-epistemic requirements for DJ. It seems that any infinitist account of DJ should include meta-epistemic demands. Klein's view, however, appears to go in the opposite direction, making his infinitism a type of *inferential externalism*. C.f. Flores 2015.

of epistemic rationality or justification specifically related with DJ, that requires something like showing one has justification for p (or providing the justification for one's belief that p , or given an argument for the belief that p). It is this sense of rationality that is at stake every time we are urged to defend our beliefs. It's hard to deem S as epistemically rational, in this sense, if she is unable to defend her opinions. In short, to be justified in believing is, among other things, to be able to justify the believing, so that “the justificatory status of our beliefs is determined by what we are able to do when we attempt to defend our beliefs” (Leite 2004, p. 245).

In any case, even if we consider that DJ requires more than PJ plus basing, one crucial aspect of the distinction between PJ and DJ – that it's possible to have justification for p but do not the belief that p – continues the same.

Infinitism

According to Peter Klein, infinitism holds the two following necessary conditions for a proposition p to function as a reason: (a) no reason can be p itself, or equivalent to a conjunction containing p as a conjunct; and (b) no reason is justified in the absence of a further reason¹⁴. These conditions stem from the two following principles: *Principle of Avoiding Arbitrariness* (PAA): for all propositions, x , if x is justified for a person, S , at t , then there is some reason, r_1 , available to S for x at t ; and there is some reason, r_2 , available to S for r_1 at t , etc., and there is no last reason in the series; *Principle of Avoiding Circularity* (PAC): for all propositions, x , if x is justified for a person, S , at t , then for all y , if y is in the reason-ancestry of x for S at t , then x is not in the reason-ancestry of y for S at t ¹⁵.

Consequently, infinitism holds that “in order for your reasons to justify some proposition for you, your reasons must constitute an infinite set” (Fantl 2011, p. 191). This thesis can be described as the *formal epistemic condition* that there must obtain if S has a reason for any other proposition. Thus, this is a condition for PJ as it deals exclusively with structures of reasons.

¹⁴ C.f. Klein 2011.

¹⁵ C.f. Klein 2005.

Infinitists should accept that there are three independently necessary and conjointly sufficient conditions for propositional justification: (a) a *relational condition* – the objective epistemic relation that p and r must have in order for r to support p; (b) a *situational condition* – the properly related propositions must be suitable for S at t, and (c) a *formal condition* – no finite chain of propositions can provide reasons for S. The last one is the typical infinitist condition since it implies that there must be an infinite number of reasons for p if S has justification for p.

All of this says nothing about how we are supposed to connect reasons with believing. They establish conditions for having reasons only. The existence of an adequate infinite and non repeating chain of reasons has nothing to do with believing itself – in the exactly same way we may have justification for believing p without actually believing p. That's what the distinction between PJ and DJ is all about.

The formal condition is very powerful, though, because it excludes both foundationalism and coherentism as adequate theories of propositional justification. It entails that foundationalism and coherentism cannot adequately describe the structure of the reasons that makes PJ possible¹⁶.

With that in mind, let's consider the following *dialectical* question: when should we stop providing reasons in order to have a single justified belief?

Independently of any possible answer for that, that's *not* the question a theory of PJ is supposed to resolve. Rather, the *structural* question infinitism is trying to answer is this: there can be something like a *reason* that can spare further reasons? Alternatively: there can be *basic propositions*? More radically: can p be a reason for p itself? If you think that it doesn't matter how clever, intricate and sophisticated, there is no answer but “no”, then you accept that there must be an infinite number of reasons for p if there are reasons for p at all.

The thorny aspect of the dialectical question is that it brings in our concerns about doxastic justification. I'm not trying to suggest that this worry is unjust. As indicated before, there is a sense of rationality that appears to involve DJ alone, and also because it is very natural to assume that PJ is a necessary condition to DJ.

However, the threat that the dialectical question poses to infinitism is based on the false assumption that a theory of propositional justification implies a

¹⁶ That's why PAC and PAA could be seen as skeptic principles.

somehow equivalent theory of doxastic justification. In other words, having an answer for the structural question about the way reasons have to be structured does not dictate the – potential – answer about how we should react to challenges to our knowledge claims.

What I am calling *dialectical* and *structural* questions manifest different aspects or interpretations of a much old problem, frequently and mistakingly called “the regress problem”¹⁷. This problem is understood in two rather different ways: sometimes what is at stake is the adequacy of the structure of reasons, sometimes is the agent's epistemic rationality in holding opinions.

Occasionally, Klein deals with the structural problem:

The regress problem can be put this way: Which type of series of reasons and the account of warrant associated with it, if any, can increase the credibility of a [non-evident] proposition? Can a series with repeating propositions do so? Can one with a last member do so? Can one that is non-repeating and has no last member do so? (Klein 2005, p. 132)

Other times, he deals with the dialectical problem¹⁸:

The regress problem, at base, is concerned with whether there is any form of reasoning that S can deploy to fully justify a belief – in order for it to become knowledge (if the other necessary and jointly sufficient conditions obtain). Thus, it is crucial to keep in mind that the ‘justification’ condition in knowledge does not refer to propositional justification; rather it is S’s believing that must be fully justified. (Klein 2011, p. 501).

For the first problem, Klein offers an infinitist solution. This solution is based on the acceptance of PAA and PAC, and the consequent rejection of foundationalism and coherentism.

For the second problem, he offers a very different solution: “P is

¹⁷ “Regress problem” is actually a bad name choice for it unnecessarily stresses the regress aspect of the Agrippa's trilemma. C.f. Fogelin 1994.

¹⁸ Klein is not always clear about what problem he is dealing with. C.f. Inusah, Husein, 2014.

doxastically justified for S iff S has engaged in tracing the reasons in virtue of which the proposition p is justified enough to satisfy the contextually justified requirements” (Klein 2007, p. 11). For Klein, then, how much of providing reasons is enough is not an epistemic matter but rather a pragmatic one.

First thing to notice is that any analysis of DJ offered in these terms will not be an infinitist one¹⁹. Second, Klein is not incoherent in doing so since his take on PJ should not determine his account of DJ. Third, and most importantly, any criticism on his contextualist view on DJ will have no impact on his infinitist account of PJ.

Apart from how we see the relational, situational and formal epistemic conditions for propositional justification and how we understand the justification of our believing, infinitism's fundamental result is that there cannot be any basic propositions and p cannot be in the chain of reasons for p. If there is something wrong with infinitism, it would have to be that result, and not Klein's account of DJ.

Nonetheless, it is natural to combine the dialectical aspect of the of the Agrippa's trilemma with an account of DJ and, on the other hand, to couple the structural aspect of the trilemma with an account of PJ.

It's hopeless to try to set forth what is the *real* problem. There seems to be no way to resolve that we should opt for the dialectical version of the problem over the structural one. This is so because they should be kept separated, in a fairly same way we distinguish between propositional justification and doxastic justification.

It is equally troublesome to say what exactly the pyrrhonians meant with the Agrippa's five modes of suspension of judgement. It is unclear whether they just make an unexplained assumption that (what we are calling) PJ is necessary for (what we are calling) DJ, in a way that we cannot have a justified belief because we cannot have reasons for believing, or whether they simply take both to be equivalent. Whatever it may be the intended pyrrhonian meaning, PJ and DJ should not be considered epistemologically equivalent.

Propositional justification is not akin to providing reasons or believing anything. That is the sense of the idea that justification for p does not depend on believing p. If you grant that having reasons for p does not depend on

¹⁹ It appears that Klein's theory of DJ is a form of contextualism, as it has been noticed by Bergman 2007 and Aikin 2011.

believing p , what would be the problem with having infinite reasons for p without believing any of them? Hence, having or not one, or infinite, beliefs says nothing about the correctness of the view that there must be an infinite number of reasons for p *if we have reasons or justification at all*.

Perhaps, if it is impossible to develop an account of DJ, we wouldn't have a comprehensive theory of knowledge, given that “the 'justification' condition in knowledge does not refer to propositional justification”. However, on infinitism's terms S can still be rational or epistemically justified in one particular and important sense.

Infinitism is essentially a theory of propositional justification. Hence, it is a proper alternative to theories like some forms of foundationalism, which claim that in a specific way, and for a very special kind of proposition, it's not necessary – or perhaps not even possible – to have additional reasons. Infinitism is also a plausible alternative to theories like coherentism, which try to explain how could p be in the structure of reasons of p itself. The core of infinitism is the thesis that *we do have reasons* provided we have an infinite number of them. This is no modest result²⁰.

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²⁰ The starting point for a doxastic non-contextualist infinitism is a plausible explanation of how we should avoid the *distribution assumption*: the assumption that every belief must contain one reason (or at least a finite number of reasons) and that we have to distribute those (infinite) reasons into (infinite) beliefs. Explaining that could give us an account of epistemically justified beliefs based on the infinitist view of propositional justification. But that is another story.

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