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AN EXPLANATORY CHALLENGE FOR EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISJUNCTIVISM

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ABSTRACT

Epistemological Disjunctivism is a view about paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge. Duncan Pritchard claims that it is particularly well suited to accounting for internalist and externalist intuitions. A number of authors have disputed this claim, arguing that there are problems for Pritchard's way with internalist intuitions. I share the worry. However, I don't think it has been expressed as effectively as it can be. My aim in this paper is to present a new way of formulating the worry, in terms of an "explanatory challenge". The explanatory challenge is a simple, yet powerful and illuminating challenge for Epistemological Disjunctivism. It is illuminating in the sense that it shows us why Epistemological Disjunctivism must take on certain internalistically problematic commitments. A secondary aim of this paper is to examine whether the recently much-discussed distinction between justifications and excuses in epistemology can support an adequate response. I will argue that it cannot.

1. INTRODUCTION

Duncan Pritchard claims that in paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge, people form empirical beliefs on the basis of reflectively accessible factive rational support.[1] For example, John knows that there is a copy of *Mind and World* on the table because John can *see* that there is a copy of *Mind and World* on the table. Seeing that p entails the truth of p. Of course, rational support is not always factive. For example, there are "bad" cases of perception in which one is misled by a deceptive illusion. John's copy of *Mind and World* might have been a convincing fake. Indeed, even brains in vats (BIVs) have at least some rational support for their systematically false empirical beliefs. According to Pritchard, this does not mean that one's rational support cannot be factive in the "good" cases – i.e. cases in which an empirical belief is formed by way of perception in ordinary conditions. His view, known as Epistemological Disjunctivism (ED), is that

1 The claim is not part of an analysis of knowledge. Pritchard thinks of this as a kind of common-sense way of thinking about paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge. He is interested in explaining how perceptual knowledge understood as such is possible. An interesting question concerns what counts as a "paradigm case". That question comes up at least one more time below, but I set it to one side. For discussion, see Kelp and Ghijsen (2016).

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there is a difference in kind between one's rational support for believing that p in the so-called good and bad cases.[2,3]

ED further claims that one has *reflective* access to one's factive rational support in paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge. In the good case, one has reflective access to the fact that they can *see* that p. By "reflective access", Pritchard means that one can know by reflection alone that one has the rational support one has. We can understand "reflection alone" in terms of "introspection", where the main point is that this is not an ordinary empirical kind of access. Having reflective access to one's rational support is being in some sort of special position to know that one has that rational support. One way of putting this is to say that, if one has rational support *e* for believing that p, then one is necessarily in a position to know that one has rational support *e* for believing that p.[4,5]

Pritchard claims that because of its combined commitment to the factivity and reflective accessibility of our rational support in good cases, ED sits somewhere between "classical" internalist and externalist views about perceptual knowledge and justification (Pritchard 2006, 2012).[6] It putatively satisfies the accessibility condition of internalism, yet it satisfies

2 There is a well-known distinction between two broad forms of disjunctivism, namely *metaphysical* and *epistemological* disjunctivism. Metaphysical disjunctivism is a view cast in terms of a difference in the fundamental nature of perceptual experience in good and bad cases. Namely, in good cases perceptual experiences are in their fundamental nature relations to mind-independent objects; in bad cases, such as hallucinations, they are not. For recent discussions of metaphysical disjunctivism, see Haddock and Macpherson (2008), Byrne and Logue (2009), Fish (2009), Brogaard (2010) and Dorsch (2011). Pritchard's ED – which he acknowledges is inspired by the work of John McDowell – is cast in terms of a difference in the kind of *rational support* one has in good and bad cases. He claims that a commitment to ED does not entail a commitment to metaphysical disjunctivism (Pritchard 2012). I return to this latter point in fn. 11.

3 In Pritchard (2012), a wider taxonomy of good and bad cases is developed. The details need not concern us in the present context.

4 The idea of "being in a position to know" is admittedly vague. To fix ideas a little more precisely, consider the following. In the context of a discussion of accessibility, Williamson offers a helpful articulation of what it is to be in a position to know: "To be in a position to know, it is neither necessary to know p nor sufficient to be physically or psychologically capable of knowing p. No obstacle must block one's path to knowing p. If one is in a position to know p, and one has done what one is in a position to do to decide whether p is true, then one does know p. The fact is open to view, unhidden, even if one does not yet see it" (Williamson 2000: 95).

5 Alternative ways of thinking about access are discussed below.

6 Pritchard is interested in "access internalism". A different way of thinking about internalism and externalism turns on considerations about the supervenience base of the determinants of justification. That is, internalism in this sense says that the determinants of justification supervene on facts that are in some sense internal to the agent – usually understood as reflectively accessible or introspectible facts. Call this "supervenience internalism". While these two ways of thinking about internalism look similar, they are different. Supervenience internalism is plausibly motivated by access internalism in the sense that, if we are always in a position to know whether we are justified in believing that p, then it seems like the determinants of justification must supervene on facts that we are plausibly in a position to know about whenever they obtain. But one does not have to be an access internalist just because one is a supervenience internalist. One can maintain that the supervenience base of justification supervenes on the internal, the mental, the reflectively accessible or introspectible, but deny that we are always in a position to know that we are justified in believing that p (Pryor 2001; Conee and Feldman 2004). That said, one might find it difficult to understand the motivation for such a view once the condition of special access to justification is denied. In any case, it is also possible to endorse a condition of special access but deny that the determinants of justification supervene on the internal, or the mental, or the reflectively accessible (Gibbons 2006, 2010; Greco 2016).

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the truth conduciveness condition that externalist views are so well positioned to satisfy. Because one's rational support in the good case is factive, it "reaches all the way out to the world". Given the central place of the internalism-externalism debate in contemporary epistemology, ED's putative position between classical internalism and externalism is provocative and well-worth investigating. It is provocative because it attempts to reveal conceptual space that has apparently been invisible to many epistemologists; it is well-worth investigating because it promises to resolve that central debate (at least vis-à-vis the epistemology of paradigm cases of perception) by opening up this conceptual space.[7]

A number of authors have challenged Pritchard's way with internalist intuitions (Smithies 2013; Madison 2014; Goldberg 2016; Kelp and Ghijsen 2016). I share this worry. One aim of this paper is to present a new way of formulating the worry. I put it in terms of an "explanatory challenge". The challenge is to explain how one's reflectively accessible rational support can be different in phenomenologically indistinguishable good and bad cases. An upshot of the challenge is that ED should drop its focus on reflective access. The real action when it comes to accounting for internalist intuitions surrounds an additional feature of Pritchard's defence of ED, namely his appeal to a justification/blamelessness distinction. This distinction has been the focus of challenges not only to ED, but to straightforwardly externalist theories as well. My main aim is to connect this issue up to the recently much-discussed distinction between justifications and excuses in epistemology (Lackey 2007; Gerken 2011; Littlejohn Forthcoming; Williamson Forthcoming). More specifically, I examine the potential for a response to ED's explanatory challenge by appealing to the notion of an excuse. While this looks promising, and aligns ED with some cutting edge work on a generally important topic, I argue that the response ultimately fails to help ED account for internalist intuitions as advertised.

2. INTERNALIST MOTIVATIONS

There are many straightforwardly externalist views about perceptual knowledge in the literature. Why does Pritchard hold on to reflective access? One reason has to do with an ordinary or commonsensical way of thinking about rational support. Pritchard seems to understand accessibilism as a pre-theoretical or natural view, at least when it comes to rational support (though he does talk about "epistemic standings" generally in this context – see quote immediately below). He takes it as an important constraint on epistemology to avoid revisionism whenever possible. I will leave to one side the issue of whether Pritchard is correct that accessibilism is a pre-theoretical or commonsense epistemological outlook.[8]

7 Pritchard calls ED the "holy grail" of epistemology.

8 It's worth emphasizing that Pritchard appeals to ED in the service of internalist motivations with the strong caveat that ED is a view about "paradigm cases" of perceptual knowledge, not a view about knowledge simpliciter. So, while it's tempting to wheel in the externalist's favorite examples – small children, animals, and chicken-sexers – to challenge Pritchard's claim that internalism has some kind of commonsensical authority, it's not clear to me that these cases are relevant. It all comes down to what "paradigm cases" of perceptual knowledge means. Again, see Kelp and Ghijsen (2016) for detailed discussion; I simply set this issue to one side here.

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Another motivation for Pritchard's commitment to reflective accessibility turns on considerations about epistemic responsibility. He says:

> For if the facts in virtue of which one's beliefs enjoy a good epistemic standing are not reflectively available to one, then in what sense is one even able to take epistemic responsibility for that epistemic standing? (Pritchard 2012: 2)

Pritchard seems to accept the idea that an agent counts as in some sense responsible for one's epistemic standing – and thus, presumably, is in some sense creditable for it – only if the facts in virtue of which one has that epistemic standing meet an internalist access condition. As we'll see below, the connection between epistemic responsibility and access is complicated. As such, I will save discussion of this point for when the details become crucial below. In any case, according to Pritchard, it is in virtue of an ability to remain non-revisionary and to respect intuitions about epistemic responsibility, while accounting for truth-conduciveness, that ED is an interesting view about paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge.

3. THE HIGHEST COMMON FACTOR ARGUMENT

Aside from these very broad considerations, Pritchard does not present much in the way of positive support for ED. Instead, he presents the view as a commonsensical or natural idea that is normally thought too good to be true, and explains why a variety of arguments against it are no good. The most important of these for our purposes is the "highest common factor" argument.[9] It goes as follows:

(P1) In the 'bad' case, the supporting reasons for one's perceptual beliefs can only consist of the way the world appears to one. (Premise)
(P2) The 'good' and 'bad' cases are phenomenologically indistinguishable. (Premise).
(C1) So, the supporting reasons for one's perceptual beliefs in the 'good' case can be no better than in the 'bad' case. (From (P2))
(C2) So, the supporting reasons for one's perceptual beliefs can only consist of the way the world appears to one. (From (P1), (C1))

(Pritchard 2006: 15)

The point of this conclusion is that, even in the good case, the best one has by way of rational support for one's perceptual beliefs are facts about the way the world *seems* to one. Thus, ED's claim that there is such a thing as rational support in the form of reflectively accessible *factive* mental states is challenged.

9 Pritchard considers and rejects a number of arguments against ED. He does an impressive job of explaining why his form of ED can meet a variety of challenges we may initially think rule out the availability of the view. One that is of particular importance is the so-called "McKinsey problem" (Silins 2005; Neta and Pritchard 2007). The problem is analogous to the famous objection to content externalism in light of intuitive claims about first-person authority concerning our mental states. That is to say, because ED claims that we have reflective access to *factive* mental states, and because it is plausible that one can know by reflection alone that *if* one can *see* that p, then p, it seems to follow that one can come to know some specific empirical fact about the world by reflection alone. And this would intuitively be a *reductio* of the view. See Neta and Pritchard (2007) for a response.

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According to Pritchard there is no obvious move from P2 to C1. He maintains that there is a difference in one's rational support in the good and bad cases, even though the cases are "phenomenologically indistinguishable". In other words, Pritchard holds that merely pointing out there is no phenomenological difference between the good and bad cases does not settle the question of whether the rational support one has is the same in each case. Thus, Pritchard urges, the proponent of the highest common factor argument owes us a justification for the move from P2 to C1.

4. EXPLANATORY CHALLENGE

What can the proponent of the highest common factor argument say about the move from P2 to C1? I think the best way to understand the support for the move from P2 to C1 is in terms of an explanatory challenge. The challenge, put simply, is to point out that resisting the move from P2 to C1 generates an explanatory burden. In particular, it generates the burden of explaining how a person's reflectively accessible rational support could be different in phenomenologically indistinguishable good and bad cases. To see the force of the challenge, we need to clarify and emphasize a couple of things.

First, we need to clarify the notion of "phenomenological indistinguishability". This is a fairly obscure term, and making it more precise tends to lead to controversial commitments. However, one way of understanding what Pritchard has in mind, which is neutral enough for present purposes, is the following:

> *Phenomenological Indistinguishability*: Two cases X, Y, are phenomenologically indistinguishable from one another iff there is no property of case X or Y such that an ideally situated and cognitively endowed agent could tell X apart from Y (or differentiate between X and Y; or know that X and Y are different) by introspection or reflection alone.

Second, we need to emphasize what we've already said about the notion of reflectively accessible rational support. In particular, we said that having reflective access to one's rational support entails that one can know by reflection alone that one has the rational support one has. The idea is that this is not an ordinary empirical kind of access. Having reflective access to one's rational support is being in some sort of special position to know that one has that rational support (again, more on this below).

We can now see the force of the challenge. If there is no property of case X or Y such that one can know by reflection alone that X and Y are different, how can X and Y differ with respect to a property (the kind of rational support one has) to which one has reflective access, i.e. a property that one can know obtains by reflection alone? The idea that there can be phenomenologically indistinguishable cases involving different kinds of rational support stands in direct tension with the idea that one has reflective access to one's rational support. So, Pritchard's claim that there is a lacuna in the move from P2 to C1 lands him with the task of resolving this tension. Meanwhile, those who find the move from P2 to C1 natural will likewise be sceptical that ED has a plausible way of doing so. The point is not that the challenge provides conclusive support for the move from P2 to C1. The point is that there is a natural

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line of thought behind it, contrary to Pritchard's portrayal of the dialectical situation.[10,11]

Now, one way Pritchard might push back is by showing that the tension is merely apparent. To do so, he might appeal to his distinction between "discriminating evidence" and "favouring evidence". According to Pritchard, discriminating evidence is a kind of evidence we acquire for a belief that p "just by looking". It is evidence that supports a belief that p over some known to be incompatible proposition q by way of perceptual distinguishability. My bike is green and yours is blue: when I see a blue bike I've got discriminating evidence for thinking it's my bike, not yours. Meanwhile, favouring evidence is something else. Pritchard is not entirely forthcoming on this, but the most independently plausible example of favouring evidence is the kind of evidence we get for a belief that p through reasoning processes like deduction, induction and abduction (Pritchard 2010). Consider the famous cleverly disguised mule case: there is no phenomenologically distinguishable difference between perceiving a real zebra and perceiving a cleverly disguised mule (at a certain distance); but arguably one has favouring evidence for the belief that one is now looking at a zebra rather than a cleverly disguised mule – one has evidence, for example, in the form of abductive reasoning from the fact that zoos don't generally go in for that sort of thing. Pritchard might argue, then, that the explanatory challenge only seems pressing if we restrict the notion of rational support to the notion of discriminating evidence. If we fail to acknowledge favouring evidence, we lose sight of a crucial way in which there can be a rational difference between indistinguishable cases.

This is a plausible distinction. Surely there is some kind of difference between the sort of support we get for a belief "just by looking" at things (perception), and the kind we get from deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning. But how, more specifically is this relevant to the explanatory challenge? To put it to work, Pritchard needs to claim specifically that the kind of rational support provided by *seeing that p* in the good case – i.e. reflectively accessible factive reasons – is a kind of favouring evidence as opposed to discriminating evidence. After all, presumably that is what the explanatory challenge overlooks when it demands an explanation of how phenomenologically indistinguishable cases could involve different kinds of reflectively accessible rational support. But my response here is that, while I think the general distinction is a good one, I think it is *ad hoc* to claim that the kind of rational support provided by seeing that p in the good case is a kind of favouring evidence as opposed to discriminating evidence. This is because I see no reason to think it belongs in the group of independently plausible types of favouring evidence other than that saying it does helps Pritchard defend ED. Indeed, seeing that p seems much more naturally understood as (potentially) providing a kind of discriminating evidence.

10 This is why it is being presented as a *challenge* and not a fatal objection. As I go on to acknowledge, there are avenues for meeting the challenge. However, I do not think they are available to Pritchard given all of his aspirations for ED.

11 One might worry that this discussion presupposes a stance in the *metaphysical* disjunctivism debate. They might claim that we must consider the various positions in that debate carefully in order to assess the dialectical situation in the epistemological debate. I follow Pritchard's stance that the debate about ED is orthogonal to the debate about metaphysical disjunctivism. It could very well be the case that there is a common metaphysical essence to perceptual experiences in good and bad cases, but that it has no direct bearing on the rational support available to the agent in support of the relevant perceptual beliefs (Pritchard 2011: 436). Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

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The proponent of the highest common factor argument avoids the explanatory challenge by simply denying that there is a difference between the kind of rational support one has in the good and bad cases. But we could avoid the challenge in other ways. For example, perhaps rational support is not the sort of thing to which one has reflective access. The thought, then, would be that there is nothing mysterious or surprising about phenomenologically indistinguishable cases involving different kinds rational support, if rational support is not the sort of thing to which one has reflective access. But of course, Pritchard's commitment to reflective access seems to render this way of avoiding the explanatory challenge unavailable.

In other words, I think Pritchard faces a dilemma in responding to the explanatory challenge: on one hand, he can concede the highest common factor conception of rational support after all. But since denying the highest common factor conception is the whole point of ED, this move is obviously unavailable. On the other hand, he can deny that rational support is the sort of thing to which one has reflective access. But because of his distinctive commitment to the reflective accessibility of our rational support, it's not clear that this move is available either.

5. WEAK ACCESS TO THE RESCUE?

At this point, a further distinction – one between types of "accessibility" – may be relevant. We can talk about the accessibility of our rational support in at least two importantly different ways. Call them "weak" and "strong" access conditions (Smithies 2013). Weak access says that one is necessarily in a position to know that one has rational support *e* when they in fact have rational support *e*.[12] Strong access says that one is necessarily in a position to know that one has rational support *e* when they have it *and* that one is necessarily in a position to know that one does *not* have rational support *e* when they do not have that rational support.[13] Pritchard can maintain that ED is only committed to weak access. In the bad case, one is not in a position to know that they do not have a factive reason to believe that p. It is important to note that the denial of strong access does not imply a commitment to the claim that agents in bad cases have no access to any rational support for their beliefs. Rather, it implies they do not have access to the fact that their rational support is not factive.[14]

With this distinction on hand, Pritchard might respond to the explanatory challenge in the following way. He can explain the difference of rational support in phenomenologically indistinguishable good and bad cases in terms of the fact that the agent *can* fail to be in a position to know what kind of rational support they in fact have for a given empirical belief when they are in the bad case. This might be a good way of responding to the explanatory challenge. But it raises an important question about Pritchard's commitment to accounting

12 For example, it says that one is necessarily in a position to know that their rational support for their belief that a copy of *Mind and World* is on the table is that they can *see* that there is a copy of *Mind and World* on the table.

13 For example, in addition to weak access, it says that one is necessarily in a position to know that they do *not* have factive rational support (such as *seeing* that there is a copy of *Mind and World* on the table) when in fact they don't have such support.

14 Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

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for internalist intuitions in general. We have seen that he motivates the commitment in part by claiming that it is good to avoid revisionism where possible. But we have also seen that he explains the motivation for internalism in terms of the notion of epistemic responsibility (Pritchard 2012: 2). The idea in the background seems to be that a belief can only count as a paradigm case of perceptual knowledge if it is one for which the agent can "take responsibility". Pritchard explicitly claims that it is hard to see how an agent is able to take responsibility for the epistemic standing of their beliefs unless the facts in virtue of which those beliefs enjoy their epistemic standing meet an internalist access condition. Now, since the agent in the bad case is only in a position to know that they have non-factive rational support for their belief, but is not in a position to know that they do not have factive rational support, it seems that they cannot take the same degree of responsibility for their beliefs as the agent in the good case. The implication is that the belief is in some sense, in addition to not counting as perceptual knowledge, epistemically *worse off* than the belief in the good case. A standard way of putting this is to say that the agent's belief is not as justified as the agent's belief in the good case. It is not clear what the relationship between being able to "take responsibility for one's beliefs" and being epistemically justified is. But for present purposes that does not really matter. An upshot of the opacity of one's rational support in the bad case, according to Pritchard himself, is that one's beliefs in the good and bad cases are not equally justified. To put it one way, Pritchard explicitly denies the so-called "New Evil Genius" thesis (NEG), which says that agents in good and bad cases can be equally justified in believing that p (Pritchard 2012).

As various authors point out (Smithies 2013; Madison 2014; Goldberg 2016; Kelp and Ghijsen 2016), this commitment puts serious pressure on Pritchard's ability to reconcile externalist and internalist intuitions. After all, NEG is a key internalist thesis. Thus, the present response to the explanatory challenge takes Pritchard out of the frying pan and into the fire of some familiar objections.[15] Indeed, this is the illuminating and powerful feature of the explanatory challenge. While many have pointed out that Pritchard's commitment to the denial of NEG is problematic for his ability to account for internalist intuitions, the explanatory challenge shows us why Pritchard *must* take on that commitment. Embracing a problematic-seeming level of opacity in our rational support looks very much like the only way to meet the challenge.

That said, some independently interesting and, in my view, inadequately addressed issues remain. They concern Pritchard's appeal to *blamelessness*. The remainder of this paper takes up some of these issues and connects them to the recently much-discussed distinction between justifications and excuses in epistemology.

6. JUSTIFICATION, BLAMELESSNESS, AND EXCUSES

Pritchard draws a distinction between epistemically justified and epistemically *blameless* belief to address worries about rejecting the NEG thesis. The appeal to epistemic

15 Here is Goldberg making a closely related point in a different context: "For my part, I think the disjunctivist neo-Moorean purchases the connection with the facts by giving up on the New Evil Demon intuition – and this comes at the cost of surrendering the comforting reassurance promised by standard internalism" (Goldberg 2016: 187). It's worth noting that Goldberg specifically discusses ED's way with internalist intuitions vis-à-vis the problem of radical scepticism (pp. 187–8).

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blamelessness is important not only for Pritchard, but for externalist epistemology generally. Various authors have challenged this general sort of appeal to epistemic blamelessness (Lackey 2007; Gerken 2011; Gibbons 2013). Madison (2014) directly argues that Pritchard's appeal to epistemic blamelessness cannot do the work he needs it to do.[16]

In particular, Madison argues that the notion of epistemic blamelessness is not fine-grained enough to distinguish between importantly different cases. For example, it seems that the BIV and a recent stroke victim can both be blameless for forming whatever beliefs they do under their respective circumstances. Moreover, we can imagine a BIV who behaves in epistemically irresponsible ways, such that the beliefs they form have an importantly different epistemic standing to the beliefs of the epistemically responsible BIV. The notion of blamelessness does not seem capable of capturing all this (Madison 2014: 68). Perhaps that is one reason it is tempting to endorse NEG (although, more on this last claim below).

This is a standard worry about appeals to blamelessness in epistemology (below I will refer to it as the Madison-style argument). But it is not clear that it stands up to more detailed scrutiny. For example, this objection assumes that epistemic blamelessness is a homogeneous normative category. Is there any reason to think that epistemic blamelessness is a homogeneous normative category? Some recent work on excuses in epistemology suggests not. For example, Timothy Williamson (Forthcoming) offers a principled account of various types of blamelessness in terms of excuses that agents can have in virtue of complying with different types of dispositional norms (Williamson Forthcoming). Williamson claims that "excuses are inexhaustibly various; one should not expect a neat taxonomy" (fn. 6). But he also claims to provide a well-motivated account of how various problem cases fit the conditions he lays out for at least some important kinds of excuses. Moreover, Clayton Littlejohn (Forthcoming) has recently defended a Strawsonian "trichotomous scheme" (Strawson 1962). Arguably, the trichotomous scheme makes precisely the distinctions that the Madison-style argument calls for. Let me explain.

In the trichotomous scheme, agents such as the stroke victim are *exempt*. Meanwhile, agents such as the epistemically responsible BIV have an *excuse*. These are two different ways in which an agent can be blameless yet unjustified. The really interesting idea in the Strawsonian distinction between exemptions and excuses is that excuses are normative standings that require agents to be reasons-responsive in such a way that they can be held accountable for what they do in general (Littlejohn Forthcoming: 11). When an agent is excused with respect to the violation of some norm, this is in part because they have the relevant capacities needed for being held accountable – it's just that certain other circumstances mitigate blame (for example, non-culpable ignorance, or lack of control). Meanwhile, this is not the case when we exempt someone. Agents exempt with respect to some norm are not reasons-responsive such that they can be held accountable for what they do in general. To put it metaphorically, they are not in the market for accountability, in a global way.

With this in mind, we can formulate the following argument against proponents of NEG. BIVs have systematically false beliefs. But precisely *because* BIVs meet conditions normally thought to support NEG – i.e. being reasons-responsive in such a way that they can generally be held accountable for what they do – these agents have an *excuse*

16 Declan Smithies (2013) objects to ED in a very similar way.

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as opposed to an exemption for being systematically mistaken. After all, had they not exhibited this kind of rational excellence, it is hard to see why they would have an excuse. Importantly, the point is defensive: just because the BIV is blameless in a way that differs from, say, a stroke victim, this does not imply that the BIV is justified. In fact the BIV satisfies precisely those conditions that are necessary for having an excuse as opposed to a mere exemption.[17]

Given these developments, it seems that ED has resources for dealing with the explanatory challenge. Pritchard can endorse the weak access condition and account for internalist intuitions in a more nuanced way. Rather than mere blamelessness, Pritchard can attribute a well-motivated notion of excuse to agents in the bad case. The Madison-style argument would no longer present an obstacle. This might be a step in the right direction, but there is good reason to be sceptical.

7. PROBLEMS

I find nothing objectionable in the trichotomous scheme per se. There are compelling reasons to draw the distinction between exemptions and excuses. But the argument so far does not do enough to settle the question of whether agents in the bad case are merely excused as opposed to justified. In order to successfully address worries about denying the NEG thesis, we need more *positive* support for the idea that BIVs are merely excused for believing what they do.

For starters, the argument contains a merely defensive claim. It claims that just because the BIV is blameless in a way that differs from, say, a stroke victim, this does not imply that the BIV is justified. This seems true, however it is doubtful that proponents of the NEG thesis would disagree. No one thinks that *because* the BIV's blamelessness differs from that of a stroke victim, the BIV must be justified (i.e. that NEG is true). This is simply not how epistemologists inclined to endorse NEG argue. Rather, I think many would say that, when presented with the cases, they simply have an evaluative reaction: "justified" is an appropriate term for the positive epistemic standing of BIVs. The Madison-style argument is wheeled in *after* the fact, as a way of challenging an alternative interpretation of the cases – i.e. as cases of mere blamelessness (Madison 2014). This is not to say that none of this is controversial (Turri Forthcoming). Indeed, many epistemologists challenge the idea that anyone should be allowed to draw conclusions about justification simply by reflecting on their "evaluative reactions" (I will discuss this shortly). The present point, however, is that it is important not to make NEG look founded on worse grounds than it really is.

The argument above also contains a positive theoretical claim. We have identified a necessary condition on excuses (as opposed to exemptions). Again, excuses require agents to be reasons-responsive in such a way that they can be held accountable for what they do in general. And this, in combination with the defensive claim, was supposed to explain why it is plausible to attribute an excuse as opposed to a justification to the BIV. But notice that we have not identified any sufficient conditions on excuses. And on closer inspection, it looks like providing a sufficient condition on excuses is a relevant

17 This argument is inspired by Littlejohn (Forthcoming).

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desideratum in the present context. After all, many will find it plausible that our necessary condition on being excused is also a necessary condition on being justified. For example, Littlejohn seems to agree: "A good test to determine whether the subject has exercised these capacities well [i.e. has been reasons-responsive in the relevant sort of way] is by asking whether the subject could be the same on the inside as someone who acts rightly or believes with justification" (Littlejohn Forthcoming: 15).[18] If justifications and excuses have a shared set of necessary conditions, but we do not know of any sufficient conditions on excuses, it is hard to see how the above argument provides enough of a decision procedure when it comes to assigning either of these two normative standings to cases (especially in combination with the problem just outlined for the defensive claim).

Perhaps this is why some epistemologists make a further claim. Littlejohn, for example, rejects the methodological assumption I attributed to proponents of NEG above. That is, he rejects the assumption that we can appeal to evaluative intuitions about BIV cases to draw the conclusion that agents in the cases have justified beliefs (Littlejohn Forthcoming: 4).[19] On Littlejohn's and others' preferred way of putting things, a belief is justified only if it complies with the central norm of belief (Williamson 2000, Forthcoming; Gibbons 2013; Srinivasan 2015). Meanwhile, sometimes agents have an excuse *for* violating the norm of belief. Thus, even if justifications and excuses share a necessary condition, justified belief comes with at least one additional necessary condition. A justified belief must comply with the norm of belief. Setting aside debate about what the norm of belief is for a moment, it is clear that the trichotomous scheme does not support a rejection of NEG alone.

If Pritchard wants to go down the route of Littlejohn and others and claim that justified belief requires compliance with the norm of belief, it seems Pritchard faces another dilemma. On one hand, he can endorse an internalist norm of belief. But in that case it seems unclear why the BIV does not meet the additional criteria for justified belief over excused belief. On the other hand, he can endorse an externalist norm of belief (for example, a norm cashed out in terms of knowledge, or factive reasons). That this latter option is an unpalatable one for ED, however, hardly needs explaining at this point. An externalist norm is traditionally a norm with which agents are not necessarily in a position to know they comply. That is just a standard way of putting the notion of "external". To be sure, as we have seen, Pritchard ostensibly rejects "classical" demarcations of the epistemically internal and external. However, we have also seen that the extent to which this involves holding on to an accessibility condition on justification is limited by the explanatory challenge. Pritchard has already been forced to give up on an important

18 That said, Littlejohn does not claim outright whether justifications share his necessary condition on excuses. All he is explicitly concerned to show is that meeting the conditions on excuses doesn't *thereby* get you a justification. Justification comes with additional constraints – i.e. actual norm conformity.

19 A concise statement of the sort of thing Littlejohn objects to can be found in Madison: "With this basic point about methodology in place, the traditional internalist ought to argue as follows: the first step is to present New Evil Demon thought experiments. The second step is to register the evaluative judgment that there is sameness of justification between normal world subjects and their demon-world counterparts, as well as differences in justification between equally unreliable subjects in the demon world, i.e. between the 'good' and 'bad' reasoners in that world (cf. Cohen 1984). These are purely evaluative judgments about the presence of justification in various hypothetical circumstances, not a conclusion reasoned to from various premises. The third step is then to draw lessons from these cases and our judgments about them" (Madison 2014: 67).

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kind of accessibility. The move to "weak access" led to the discussion of Madison-style arguments in the first place. So it is not clear that he has resources for some kind of reimagining of the notion of an "externalist" norm, either.

7. CONCLUSION

It is easy to pick on bold views in philosophy. This paper has been less about picking on Pritchard's bold view than about connecting it to another current debate in epistemology. What has come to light is that ED's appeal to the accessibility of one's rational support is not doing the work after all when it comes to accounting for internalist intuitions. Providing an adequate response to the explanatory challenge reveals that ED must incorporate a significant element of opacity in our rational support. At this point the appeal to epistemic *blamelessness* is supposed to do the internalist work for ED. If ED drops its focus on access, it becomes a fairly standard externalist view about rational support. It is no accident that many externalists are also interested in the justification-blamelessness distinction. Using my explanatory challenge, I have tried to argue that ED should drop the focus on accessibilism. The really interesting question, which I have touched on towards the end, is whether externalist views in epistemology have resources for explaining away internalist intuitions in the form of further distinctions about epistemic normativity.[20,21]

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20 I explore this question in more detail in Boult (2016).

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