

Why Pluralism About Epistemic Justification is the Worst of Both Worlds

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ABSTRACT

Epistemologists often debate whether we ought to be internalists or externalists about epistemic justification. Internalists say that whether an agent's belief is justified depends on facts internally accessible to the agent, and externalists deny this. But what if internalists and externalists could both be right? This would be a pluralist view of epistemic justification. You might think that a pluralist view would be plausible because it would allow us to explain why we have different intuitions in different cases, and it would allow us to use different concepts for different purposes. In this paper, I argue the pluralist view has several serious flaws that make it much less plausible than it might initially seem. I show that pluralists run into even worse problems than monists when trying to vindicate intuitions about cases. They also run into problems when trying to specify a singular concept of epistemic justification to use for a certain purpose. It is therefore unclear what reason we would have to adopt a pluralist stance. I conclude that we ought to be monists about epistemic justification.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Epistemologists often debate what it is that makes a belief justified. The view that the criteria for justification are internal to an agent is called "internalism" and the view that the criteria include factors external to an agent is called "externalism." But what if internalists and externalists could both be right? This would be a pluralist view of epistemic justification. You might think that a pluralist view would be plausible because it would allow us to explain why we have different intuitions in different cases, and it would allow us to use different concepts for different purposes. In this paper, I argue the pluralist view has several serious flaws that make it much less plausible than it might initially seem.

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Abstract:

Epistemologists often debate whether we ought to be internalists or externalists about epistemic justification. Internalists say that whether an agent's belief is justified depends on facts internally accessible to the agent, and externalists deny this. But what if internalists and externalists could both be right? This would be a pluralist view of epistemic justification. You might think that a pluralist view would be plausible because it would allow us to explain why we have different intuitions in different cases, and it would allow us to use different concepts for different purposes. In this paper, I argue the pluralist view has several serious flaws that make it much less plausible than it might initially seem. I show that pluralists run into even worse problems than monists when trying to vindicate intuitions about cases. They also run into problems when trying to specify a singular concept of epistemic justification to use for a certain purpose. It is therefore unclear what reason we would have to adopt a pluralist stance. I conclude that we ought to be monists about epistemic justification.

Introduction:

What do we mean when we say a belief is "justified"? Maybe we mean different things in different contexts, or maybe we use the concept of epistemic justification in different ways for different purposes. Typically, people have been monists about epistemic justification, arguing for either internalist or externalist views. Internalists about epistemic justification say whether a belief is justified depends on the agent's internally accessible evidence for the belief, while externalists deny this and say justification can depend on facts outside of the agent. But if it's the case that there are different uses for the concept of epistemic justification, then perhaps we ought

to be pluralists instead of monists. That is, maybe there are multiple concepts of epistemic justification and maybe internalists and externalists can both be right about justification in different situations.¹

Here is one recent example of a monist argument for an externalist view: In her paper “Radical Externalism,” Amia Srinivasan provides a series of cases in which, she claims, the protagonists’ beliefs are justified or unjustified based *only* on external facts. She thinks what is relevant to whether the agents’ beliefs are justified are facts about the social world in which they find themselves. Her cases are meant to tell us that we ought to be externalists about epistemic justification rather than internalists.²

In one of Srinivasan’s cases, a woman named Radha holds the belief that she deserves to be beaten by her husband. She came to hold this belief because it is what everyone around her believes and she has never encountered any evidence to the contrary. The intuitive verdict, Srinivasan says, is that Radha’s belief that she deserves to be beaten is unjustified because she has a distorted relationship to the moral facts about her situation.³ If you think this kind of verdict is intuitive, the argument goes, this gives you a *prima facie* reason to be an externalist about epistemic justification.

But maybe you like some of the internalist case judgements too. For example, let’s say there’s a case where someone has magical clairvoyant powers they are completely unaware of. And let’s say these magical powers allow them to get true beliefs about where the president is at all times, even though they have no good reason to actually trust that these beliefs are actually

¹ I recognize that there are multiple internalist and externalist concepts. However, for the sake of simplicity, I usually refer to internalism and externalism rather than to specific internalist or externalist concepts (such as, for example, reliabilism).

² Amia Srinivasan, “Radical Externalism,” *Philosophical Review* 129, no. 3 (July 2020): 395-431.

³ Srinivasan, “Radical Externalism,” 399.

true. You might think this clairvoyant does *not* get a justified belief about where the president is if the belief seems to them to just pop into their head. Srinivasan would tell you that you ought not to trust your intuitions about these kinds of cases too much because they are *recherché*. *Her* cases, she claims, are more realistic, so you should trust your intuitions about them and discard your ones about the other cases. But Zoe Johnson-King calls Srinivasan's error theory here into question by providing *non-recherché* cases where the protagonists' beliefs seem justified or unjustified based only on internally accessible evidence.⁴ Her strategy for countering Srinivasan's so-called "intuitive" case judgements is to simply deny that they're even intuitive at all. She is perfectly willing to bite the bullet in saying that Radha's belief that she deserves to be beaten by her husband is justified.

But what if you *don't* want to bite the bullet and say a woman's belief that she deserves to be beaten by her husband could ever be justified? What if you think that's gross and implausible, but you still like your other internalist case judgements and don't want to give them up just because Srinivasan said so? What if you want to accept *both* the kinds of verdicts Johnson-King arrives at *and* the kinds of verdicts Srinivasan arrives at in different cases? In other words, what if you want to have your epistemic-justification-flavored cake and eat it too? If you want this, pluralism about epistemic justification may look like an attractive option.

This certainly seems to be what Richard Pettigrew is thinking in his paper "Radical Epistemology." In it, he argues that we ought to be pluralists about epistemic justification because different concepts of justification play different but important roles. These roles include capturing intuitions in cases where internalist verdicts are intuitive, capturing intuitions in cases

⁴ Zoe Johnson-King, "Radical Internalism" (m.s.): 13-14

where externalist verdicts are intuitive, and ascribing blame.⁵ Pettigrew thinks that it is surprising that there has been little support for pluralism about epistemic justification.⁶ My aim in this paper is to explain why this is *not* surprising. I argue that pluralism about epistemic justification is deeply flawed, and both of these things (vindicating different intuitions in different cases and ascribing blame) which initially look to be motivations for pluralism actually end up counting as reasons *against* pluralism. While I address Pettigrew's argument specifically, my critique of pluralism applies to the view in general.⁷ My argument proceeds as follows:

First, I address the question of whether pluralism can better capture our intuitions about cases involving epistemic justification. I argue that it cannot, and that it in fact delivers *less* intuitive verdicts than either internalism or externalism. This is because pluralism delivers the verdict that there might be a sense in which a belief is justified but another sense in which it may be unjustified, and I explain why this is rarely the verdict anyone will find intuitive.

Next, I show why specifying different concepts of justification to use for different purposes is much more complicated than it may initially appear. I explain why even if we specify *just* a singular aim for a given concept of justification, pluralism still comes out worse than monism. To do this, I discuss one of the aims Pettigrew mentions in arguing for pluralism: the aim of determining whether an agent is blameworthy. I argue that pluralism fails to be useful for even this relatively straightforward aim. This is because all of the options open to the pluralist for doing this either deliver verdicts about blameworthiness that are no more intuitive than any plausible monist theory, or they undermine the normative force of epistemic justification.

⁵ Richard Pettigrew, "Radical Epistemology, Structural Explanations, and Epistemic Weaponry," *Philos. Studies* (July 2021): 18

⁶ Richard Pettigrew, "Radical Epistemology, Structural Explanations, and Epistemic Weaponry" 11.

⁷ Another argument for something like the pluralist view I describe here can also be found in William Alston, *Beyond "Justification": Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation*. (New York: Cornell, 2005).

I conclude that, because pluralism gives less intuitive case judgements and does not actually allow us to use concepts of justification for specific purposes, we ought to be monists about epistemic justification. If we are pluralists, we can neither have our cake nor eat it. At least if we're monists we can do one or the other!

1. Case Judgements

Both internalists and externalists provide cases that are meant to be intuitive for their favored view of epistemic justification. And as mentioned in the introduction, both internalists and externalists run into a problem when doing this: their favored theory cannot vindicate *all* of our intuitions about cases.⁸ Recall that it seems as if internalists can't properly explain the intuition that Radha's belief that she deserves to be beaten by her husband is unjustified, while it seems as if externalists can't properly explain the intuition that the unknowing clairvoyant's belief about where the president is is unjustified. We might think that pluralism is a view that is better equipped to deal with the fact that intuitions about certain cases only seem compatible with internalism while intuitions about others only seem compatible with externalism. So one might think a pluralist view could solve a problem that all monists encounter. In this section, I explain why not only does pluralism *not* solve this problem monists encounter, it nearly always delivers case verdicts that are *more* counterintuitive than either internalism or externalism.

First, consider the following case that seems to elicit internalist intuitions:

ENGINEER: An engineering student named Emma is at a summer internship. Her supervisor asks her to run a calculation to determine which of two materials, material A or material B, would be more fuel efficient to produce. Emma knows that if she ran the

⁸ While I realize there will not be universal agreement about the intuitions in the cases I provide in this section, I think it's reasonable to assume at least many people will share these intuitions. The intuitions are also meant to match up with what Srinivasan and Pettigrew claim is intuitive with regards to justification about certain cases.

calculation, she would get the correct result. However, she opts not to do the calculation. Instead, she looks at the two materials, and she thinks to herself: “I just *know* that material B is most fuel efficient to produce.” She is correct. It turns out she has, through studying about fuel efficiency during high school and college, acquired the ability to discern which material is most fuel efficient just through tactile and visual cues. However, she has no idea that she has this ability.⁹

We probably have a gut intuition that Emma’s belief that material B is most fuel efficient to produce is unjustified. What could explain this intuition? It might be that Emma had no internal access to the fact that her method for forming the belief was reliable. It seems right to say that thoughts about the correct solutions to important engineering problems that seem to just pop into our heads when we look at something shouldn’t be considered justified beliefs. Furthermore, we might think she would be acting downright irresponsibly if she treated this belief as if it were justified. After all, because she didn’t know her method of staring at the materials and waiting for a thought about which material was more fuel efficient was reliable, this means she was just *lucky* that she happened to be right. If she had been wrong and there had been a disaster, she would have been blameworthy because she had no good grounds for trusting the thought which (to her) seemed to randomly appear.¹⁰

Most importantly, there is nothing we could appeal to outside of Emma’s accessible evidence (or lack thereof!) in this case in order to explain why this intuition is the right one. This means if we want to vindicate our intuitions about why Emma’s belief is unjustified, we’ll be forced to accept an internalist notion of justification.

Now consider a case that pulls us in the externalist direction:

⁹ This is a modified version of Srinivasan’s first case titled “Racist Dinner Table.” My case is relevantly analogous but is meant to elicit internalist intuitions. See: Srinivasan “Radical Externalism,” 395.

¹⁰ You might just end up rejecting this intuition upon reflection. But again, notice I said *gut* intuition. Also, if you reject this intuition you might just be better off as an externalist. You won’t need pluralism to vindicate your case intuitions.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: Krishnan often beats his wife when he thinks she has misbehaved. He holds the belief that men are morally obligated to beat their wives when they misbehave. Everyone around him holds the same belief, and he has never encountered anyone who has offered any reasons as to why this belief could be false. Furthermore, Krishnan's deeply held moral intuitions also support this belief.¹¹

For this case, we probably have a gut intuition that Krishnan's belief that men are morally obligated to beat their wives is unjustified. What might explain this intuition? We might think that Krishnan is not properly connected to the moral facts surrounding this belief, and this disconnection from the moral facts is what renders his belief unjustified. Note that the considerations that explain our intuition that Krishnan's belief is unjustified are external to his accessible evidence. After all, Krishnan is reasoning as well as he possibly could using the evidence he has access to. He is taking into account all of his available evidence, and we could stipulate that he is even searching for more evidence that might prove him wrong and, after he does that, he sits at home quietly reflecting on his evidence and his reasoning. The only pieces of evidence that could explain why his belief is unjustified are inaccessible to him. Thus, if we want to vindicate our intuition that Krishnan's belief is unjustified, we'll have to accept an externalist notion of justification.¹²

The only move that seems to be immediately available to the pluralist to deliver singular verdicts while at the same time vindicating these different intuitions about cases would be to say that different concepts of justification are salient in different types of cases. For example, in ENGINEER, they would say there is something about the case that makes an internalist concept

¹¹ This case was inspired by Srinivasan's case with the same title. However, my case is focused on whether Radha's husband Krishnan's belief could be justified, while Srinivasan's case is focused on the justificatory status of Radha's belief. See: Srinivasan, "Radical Externalism," 398-399.

¹² You might just end up rejecting this intuition upon reflection. But again, notice I said *gut* intuition. Also, if you reject this intuition, you might just be better off as an internalist. And again, you won't need pluralism to vindicate your case intuitions.

salient, and in DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, they would say there is something about the case that makes an externalist concept salient.

The problem is that it's unclear what this salience story could actually *be*. This problem is somewhat similar to the one monists face when giving an error theory: it's unclear what would be relevantly different between ENGINEER and DOMESTIC VIOLENCE that could explain why an internalist concept is salient in one case and an externalist concept is salient in the other case. Any salience story the pluralist gives is likely to seem extremely ad hoc and contrived to get the desired results to vindicate our intuitions. While it's true that it *might* be possible for the pluralist to come up with an adequate salience story, I think it's at least prima facie plausible to say that it seems somewhat unlikely that they could.

Monists have two main options here: they can either reject the demand to explain away intuitions inconsistent with their favored theory, or they can provide an error theory that explains why our intuitions go awry in certain cases but not others. Neither of these moves is wholly desirable if you want to vindicate all of your case intuitions. Any monist theory is going to end up with some conflicts about intuitions and likely require some bullet-biting. But I'll explain why the monist still ends up in a better place than the pluralist either way.

Let's consider the first monist option: rejecting the demand to explain away intuitions inconsistent with your favored theory. Here's an example of how this could go. Let's say you encounter ENGINEER and DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. And let's say you have hardcore internalist sympathies. You'll just accept the intuition that Emma's belief is unjustified, and you'll also just accept the intuition that Krishnan's belief is justified (recall from the introduction that this is the exact move Johnson-King makes in response to Srinivasan's cases). Or you'll

eschew the use of case intuitions altogether, perhaps saying that we have reasons to mistrust our intuitions about them in general and therefore should choose a theory of epistemic justification based on some other criterion. Both of these versions of the move are perfectly consistent and legitimate, but the one downside is that you won't be getting what you thought you were getting from the pluralist, namely vindicating intuitions that push in both internalist and externalist directions.

Now let's consider the second option: providing an error theory to explain away intuitions that conflict with your favored view of epistemic justification. Providing an error theory would mean giving a plausible story for why one case intuition is correct but the other is not. An internalist would need to give an error theory for DOMESTIC VIOLENCE and an externalist would need to give an error theory for ENGINEER. This is how some monists choose to argue for their favored theory. Recall from the introduction that Srinivasan offers this kind of error theory in favor of externalism. She says our intuitions are more likely to be reliable in her cases because her cases are more realistic and more politically important than cases that favor internalism..¹³

This kind of pluralist does not even have the first option. They cannot reject the intuitions about some types of cases and not others given that being able to vindicate all of the intuitions was one of the supposed motivations for pluralism in the first place. And notice how the pluralist trying to give a salience story is still worse off than the monist trying to give an error theory. The monist's error theory can at least be consistent across cases. For example, even if it seems contrived, at least an internalist can say something like that we can trust our intuitions in cases that involve an agent having an empirical belief while we cannot trust our intuitions in cases that

¹³ Srinivasan, "Radical Externalism," 399.

involve the agent having a moral belief. It seems unlikely that the pluralist can even get something this consistent to use as a story about when a given concept of epistemic justification will be salient in a certain type of case.

It may seem as if both internalists and externalists encounter a problem if in one of these cases we have internalist intuitions and in the other we have externalist ones.¹⁴ An internalist cannot capture our intuitions in DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, and an externalist cannot capture our intuitions in ENGINEER.¹⁵ This means each monist theory can only cover intuitions for a subset of cases.

A pluralist about epistemic justification may initially seem to be able to offer an attractive solution here by saying that there are multiple valid notions falling under the concept of epistemic justification. This would be a version of pluralism where multiple notions of justification are used for vindicating case intuitions. On this version, perhaps one such notion can vindicate our intuitions in ENGINEER and another can vindicate our intuitions in DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. But can this version of pluralism actually vindicate the multiple intuitions? No. I'll explain why it can't, and why it actually does the opposite.

Let's take a closer look at what this version of pluralism *actually* has to say about the two cases discussed above. In ENGINEER, pluralism actually delivers the verdict that there is a sense in which Emma's belief is justified and there is a sense in which it is unjustified. Specifically, Emma's belief is justified in the sense that it is formed by a reliable method, and it

¹⁴ If your intuitions are all compatible with the same concept of justification, you should be a monist. Pettigrew seems to think that we'll generally have internalist intuitions in some cases and externalist intuitions in others. This seems *prima facie* plausible.

¹⁵ I recognize that there are different internalist and externalist concepts of justification. But what's relevant is that each of the two cases seem to elicit very different intuitions about what makes the agent's belief justified or unjustified.

is unjustified in the sense that she does not have internal access to the fact that this method is reliable.

So does this version of pluralism *actually* explain our internalist intuitions in ENGINEER? No. This is because pluralism does *not* actually deliver the verdict that Emma's belief is unjustified. Instead, it delivers one verdict that says that there is a sense in which her belief is justified, and another verdict that says that there is a sense in which her belief is unjustified. But what pluralism fails to give us is a verdict *about* the verdicts: it doesn't tell us which of the verdicts is the authoritative one. And so, pluralism fails to vindicate the intuition that Emma's belief in ENGINEER is unjustified. It actually just gives us an indeterminate verdict, and I doubt that most people's initial gut intuition is that it's simply *indeterminate* whether Emma's belief is justified or not.¹⁶

Does pluralism do any better in explaining our externalist intuitions in DOMESTIC VIOLENCE? No. Once again, pluralism fails to explain intuitions in this case because it delivers multiple verdicts without telling us which one of the verdicts is authoritative. It tells us that Krishnan's belief is justified in the sense that his internally accessible evidence tells him it is true that he is morally obligated to beat his wife when she misbehaves, but it also tells us that his belief is unjustified in the sense that he is not properly connected to the moral facts. So pluralism can't vindicate the intuition that DOMESTIC VIOLENCE seems to elicit either. The competing verdicts conflict with our intuitions for the same reason that they conflicted with our intuitions in ENGINEER. But I doubt *even more strongly* that anyone's gut reaction to a man's belief that he is obligated to beat his wife is to say that it's indeterminate whether his belief is justified.

¹⁶ In the next section, I explain why an indeterminate verdict about blameworthiness specifically creates serious problems for the pluralist.

We can now see that that pluralism captures *neither* the intuition in DOMESTIC VIOLENCE nor the intuition in ENGINEER. This means that it actually vindicates *fewer* of our intuitions than either monist theory. After all, internalism and externalism can both vindicate the intuitive verdict in *one* of the cases. Pluralism, meanwhile, can vindicate zero.

But you might then wonder if the pluralist's account still might be useful for different aims we have for a concept of epistemic justification. That is, maybe pluralism is more plausible than monism because there are different things we want our concepts of epistemic justification to do, and only the pluralists's view of epistemic justification could account for this. In the next section, I consider what a pluralist could say about using different concepts of epistemic justification for different purposes.

2. Attributing moral blame

Recall that Pettigrew's overall argument for pluralism is centered around the idea that we might want to use different concepts of justification for different purposes. For instance, we might want one concept for ascribing blame to an agent but a different concept for ascribing knowledge to an agent, and yet a different concept to give us guidance about how to form beliefs, and so on.¹⁷ This section is about whether a pluralist could know which concept of justification to use for which purpose. I discuss the specific aim of attributing moral blame to agents, but my argument is meant to show in general that the pluralist is likely to encounter problems in choosing a concept of justification for any given aim.

Now to apply pluralism to the aim of ascribing moral blame, the pluralist would need to answer the following question: which concept of justification best achieves the aim of attributing

¹⁷ Richard Pettigrew, "Radical Epistemology, Structural Explanations, and Epistemic Weaponry," 11.

moral blameworthiness to agents? In this section, I'll show why this question is much harder to answer than you might think. I consider possible responses the pluralist could give to this question. The first response is to say that we can give an argument for why we can use a singular concept of justification for this aim and why other concepts are not suited for the aim. The second is to say that we can only determine blameworthiness on a case by case basis And the third is to say that there are multiple senses of blameworthiness so we ought to say there are multiple concepts of justification suited for the purpose of determining moral blameworthiness. I show why all of these potential responses are deeply flawed.

Here is a case for which we might want to use concept of epistemic justification to tell us whether an agent is blameworthy:

REVOLUTIONARY: Will is a thoughtful young man who spends a great deal of time thinking about the problems that exist in his society. However, given the problems that exist in his society, he is uneducated and has no ability to access information about history or other social sciences. After much reflection and examination of the evidence he does have access to about his society, he decides to join a group of young people whose charismatic leader promises to fix the problems Will has been thinking about. Will trusts this leader and begins following his orders, genuinely believing that his doing so will help solve societal problems. The orders start out relatively benign but become increasingly extreme over time. Within a few months, Will has gone from running errands to stealing from stores to killing members of opposing groups. Although the group's stated goal of societal improvement still seems noble to Will, it turns out that the group is corrupt, and the tasks Will has been doing have actually caused much destruction and suffering.

Is Will's belief that following the orders of the charismatic leader will lead to societal improvement justified? Given our specified aim of attributing moral blame to agents, we want our concept of justification to tell us whether Will was blameworthy for holding the belief and then acting on it. We also want to be able to explain what it is about the concept we've chosen that gets at the features of belief relevant to moral blame. But what if there are multiple concepts

that allow for plausible explanations about whether Will was blameworthy? This would be a problem for the pluralist because it would mean it's unclear which singular concept of epistemic justification we could use for the purpose of determining whether or not Will is blameworthy. I'll now provide two different concepts of justification that both have plausible stories about the relationship between the justificatory status of Will's belief in REVOLUTIONARY and whether he is blameworthy.

Here is an example of a potential internalist explanation for why Will's belief is justified in the relevant sense. They could say that the relevant connection between epistemic justification and moral blame is whether the agent is evaluating their evidence in a way that is internally justified. They could point out that Will is doing the best that he can with the limited evidence he has available. His accessible evidence points to the fact that following the charismatic leader's orders will improve his society, and he has drawn an appropriate conclusion given that evidence. He is reasoning as well as he possibly can given the accessible facts in his situation. Thus, the internalist will conclude that Will is not blameworthy for the bad outcomes of his actions. They might even go farther than this: given his genuine desire to improve his society, and his willingness to act on this desire, Will might even be praiseworthy. What is relevant to whether Will is blameworthy or not here is dependent on whether Will is reasoning well based on what he has access to.

Now let's consider an example of one potential¹⁸ externalist explanation for why Will's belief is unjustified in the relevant sense. They could say that the relevant connection between epistemic justification and moral blame is whether the agent is forming their beliefs based on a

¹⁸ Not all externalists will necessarily accept this explanation, but the point here is that there are multiple plausible concepts of epistemic justification that will deliver different verdicts about Will's blameworthiness or lack thereof.

reliable method, whether or not the agent has internal access to whether the method they're using is reliable or not. On this picture, Will is blameworthy because he came to his belief via an unreliable method. After all, history tells us that listening to charismatic leaders is an extremely unreliable method for coming to true beliefs about which actions will improve society. Because Will has killed innocent people based on a belief formed in the wrong sort of way, he is thus morally culpable for performing these actions. While Will might have been doing the best he could given what was accessible to him, this does not render him blameless. He still ended up killing innocent people. The fact that he thought killing these people was morally permissible does not excuse him. He ought not to have had this belief. What is morally relevant to whether Will is blameworthy or not is dependent on whether Will's belief that caused him to kill innocent people was formed in the right sort of way, regardless of what information Will has access to.

These are both (arguably) plausible stories about Will's belief and about the link between epistemic justification and moral culpability. The stories both seem plausible because when we are deciding whether to blame someone for an action, we sometimes care about facts internal to them (such as their intentions) and we sometimes care about facts external to them (such as the outcome of their actions). Yet both of these plausible stories are based on different notions of justification and thus deliver incompatible verdicts about whether Will's belief is justified.

Why would it matter that these stories are plausible yet incompatible? It matters because it means that it is not obvious which notion of justification the pluralist ought to choose for the purpose of assigning moral blame to an agent. *Both* concepts seem to get at something relevant to deciding whether or not Will is morally blameworthy. Because it is not obvious which concept to choose for the purposes of deciding blameworthiness here, the pluralist needs a systematic

story explaining why one concept delivers the determinate verdict about whether an agent's belief is justified.

If the pluralist were to pick a singular concept of justification to use for determining blameworthiness, then it seems unclear how pluralism has any advantage over a monist theory here. The pluralist certainly doesn't have any advantage over monists in being able to deliver intuitive verdicts about blameworthiness. After all, there is serious controversy among ethicists as to whether agents can be blamed for things outside of their control. And in certain cases, intuitions might sometimes pull us towards considerations internal to an agent while other times they might pull us towards considerations external to an agent. Notice that even *within* a single case (REVOLUTIONARY), our intuitions about whether Will is blameworthy seem to pull in different directions.

Here's another thing the pluralist might try: Maybe they would say that we should determine blameworthiness on a case-by-case basis. In other words, in some cases factors internal to the agent will be relevant for whether the agent is blameworthy, while in other cases factors external to the agent will be relevant for whether the agent is blameworthy, but we cannot make *general* statements regarding what it is specifically about each case that makes certain factors relevant for blameworthiness.

This move would allow the pluralist to deliver single, determinate verdicts in each case, but it would come at the cost of making the verdicts about blameworthiness extremely ad-hoc because the verdicts would seem contrived based on a given case intuition without being grounded in anything else. If a pluralist were to tell you that Emma the engineering student is blameworthy, you would want them to be able to tell you *why*. If your aim for a concept of

justification is for it to tell you about whether an agent is blameworthy, you want the concept to be doing its job properly. The approach to determining blameworthiness on a case by case basis would give a reason for each individual case, but not in a way that gives useful explanations or is consistent. It's too fine-grained to be useful. If all pluralism can tell you is that you just have to look at a case and figure out on your own whether the agent in that case is blameworthy based on how they formed their relevant belief, this isn't doing anything very useful.

Yet another potential response to the issues I've raised here would be to say that there are multiple senses of moral blameworthiness and therefore there are also multiple notions of justification that are salient when aiming to ascribe moral blame to agents. This would allow them to avoid having to provide an explanation for why one concept delivers the determinate verdict about whether an agent's belief is justified because they concede that neither verdict is determinate. In REVOLUTIONARY, for example, they could say there is a sense in which Will's actions are blameworthy, but there is another sense in which they are praiseworthy. Access internalism, they might say, gets at the sense of blameworthiness which looks at which aspects of belief formation which are under a subject's control while reliabilism gets at the sense of blameworthiness which looks at whether the subject's method of belief formation is likely to lead to the best beliefs.

This response is just as unsatisfactory, if not more so. We want to be able to say whether a given agent is blameworthy or praiseworthy (or excused) full stop. Getting an indeterminate result about blame or praise prevents us from doing this. We don't simply want to say "well, if you look at it this way that agent was blameworthy, but if you look at it this other way they were actually praiseworthy!" If our aim is to determine whether an agent deserves blame, we want there to be a fact of the matter about blameworthiness! A concept of epistemic justification that

gives an indeterminate verdict about blameworthiness makes the concept lose all of its normative force.

In sum, the pluralist's task of giving an argument for why a given concept of justification is the right one to use for attributing moral blame is very difficult and requires us to give up some of our case intuitions. They end up with either an ad-hoc way of deciding which concept to use or they end up with a method that cannot deliver determinate verdicts. Notice that monists do not have these problems when deciding which theory of justification is right for a given aim. The monist can simply say that their favored theory of epistemic justification covers moral blame. At least the monist is able to provide *something* that gives a conclusive answer of whether a given agent is blameworthy, even if it doesn't always match up with our intuitions in a given case. Given that the pluralist encounters serious problems coming up with a singular concept of justification to use even for the straightforward purpose of attributing blame to agents, there is good reason to think it is likely that this will be a problem for other aims a pluralist might have for concepts of justification.

Conclusion:

By now, I believe I've successfully shown that, at the very least, the pluralist about epistemic justification has some pretty big bullets to bite that the monist does not have to. I've also shown that the bullets the pluralist has to bite are worse than the ones monists, whether internalist or externalist, have to bite. But even if you don't agree with this stronger conclusion, hopefully you can at least see why pluralists shouldn't be motivated by a desire to vindicate intuitive case judgments and why they still encounter serious difficulties when they try to specify a notion of justification to be used for a specific aim. I suppose it might be the case that there are

other reasons to be a pluralist about epistemic justification, but I am not sure what these reasons could be, and given the problems the pluralist runs into, it's unclear whether these reasons could ever outweigh the serious downsides of adopting pluralism.

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