

Comments on Malmgren's 'Goodness, Availability, and Argument Structure'

David James Barnett, 10/24/14

1. The standard conception of inferential justification

inferential justification: justification that at least partly rests on other justified beliefs

The **standard conception**, which Malmgren rejects, is committed to:

availability constraint: An agent has inferential justification to believe that p only she has justified beliefs in the premises of a good argument for p.

2. Easy cases

Aya: Sven comes in the door, and Aya sees that he is soaking wet and angry. Aya comes to believe that Sven's umbrella was stolen.

It is *very difficult* to reconstruct an available good argument for the conclusion that Sven's umbrella was stolen. But is this a problem for the standard conception? Maybe it *ought* to be difficult.

3. Hard cases

Peggy: Peggy's field assistant provides her with a neutral description of a certain exotic bird in flight. Peggy comes to believe that it was a goat-eating nutcracker.

Malmgren: Peggy's belief is inferentially justified, but she has no good argument available.

Responses on behalf of the standard conception:

(1) Peggy's belief is non-inferentially justified.

Objection: Peggy's belief passes the **asymmetrical dependence test**. (If she weren't justified in believing that the bird met description D, then Peggy would not be justified in believing that was a goat-eating nutcracker—but not vice versa.)

Reply: The justified belief that the bird met description D was a mere enabler.

(2) The argument from the premise that the bird fits description D to the conclusion that it was a goat-eating nutcracker is a good argument.

Objection: This argument doesn't fit any standard form, like modus ponens, IBE, etc.

Reply: Reliabilism about inferential justification.

(3) An argument from the premise that the bird fit description D, plus other auxiliary premises that Peggy justifiably believes, is a good argument.

Potential auxiliary premise: Most birds fitting description D are goat-eating nutcrackers.

Perhaps Peggy (implicitly) believes this premise, and perhaps she has either...

non-inferential justification from an intuition or intellectual seeming, or

inferential justification from evidence about what goat-eating nutcrackers look like.