

**Philosophy of Attention Session 4:
Epistemic norms of attention**
(Siegel 2017 & Irving 2018)

Siegel's overall project

The Rationality of Perception "Perceptual experiences can be rational or irrational" (Siegel 2017, p.15)

Hijacked experiences You believe that your friend is mad at you. Because you believe this, she looks mad to you (Siegel 2017, pp.4-5).

- A problem with hijacked experiences: Your experience of your friend looking mad reinforces your previous belief that she is mad at you.
- A general epistemic principle: "If you have an experience with content P, that experience gives you evidence for believing that P"
- Inferential approach: Experiences can be the result of a process of inference (which is not necessarily *conscious*)
- Minimal theory of inference: Outputs are not limited to beliefs.

The Hiring Case

In forming the belief that candidate X should be rejected, evaluator S is responding to the evidence she has. Yet, this belief seems ill-founded/formed in an irrational way. Why?

Selection effects: Evidence as a function of attention

- We select (or anti-select) our evidence when we select *the contents of our experiences*, by selecting the information we take in.
- We can select evidence willfully and knowingly, or unwillingly and/or unknowingly.
 - Evaluator S has implicit belief B: "All members of group G are unqualified"
 - B has selection effects excluding uncongenial information: evidence that X is unqualified is selected, and evidence that X is qualified is anti-selected.
 - While collecting her evidence, S focuses her attention in a flawed way.
 - This flawed allocation of attention makes S's belief ill-founded/formed in an irrational way.

Normativity of attention

- Attention can be epistemically appraised as better or worse (for goals like gaining knowledge or justification, or with respect to its rational status).
- If so then there must be norms governing patterns of attention.

Q1: When is attention appraisable or non-appraisable?

Q2: When is a pattern of attention better or worse?

- A third puzzling question (from Irving):

Q3: How can agents be responsible for inattention?

Answering Q1: The Inferential Model of attention norms.

- A pattern of attention is appraisable when it is the output of an inference.
 - It can *inherit* an *outlook* that is well- or ill-founded, when this outlook is the input of an inference.
 - Evaluator S's attention is controlled by the Stopping Conclusion (see Irving's Table 1).
 - The Stopping Conclusion inherits the outlook from the Prejudicial Premise.
- A pattern of attention is *not* appraisable when it does not result from an inference, but from stochastic associative thought.
 - Example: Attention captured by a turtle in a forest trail.

Answering Q2: Attention is governed by the same norms that govern inference

- A pattern of attention is a "epistemically good" when it results from, e.g., a valid rule of inference (Modus Ponens, Disjunctive Syllogism).
- It is "epistemically bad" when it results from a bad rule of inference (affirming the consequent, circularity).

Answering Q3: Inattention is the result of a mental action

- Inattention, too, can be controlled by inferences, and inherit the epistemic standing of the inputs to those inferences.
- Since inferences are mental actions, and we can be responsible for our actions, we can be responsible for our inferences.

Siegel's foil: The Reckoning Model of Inference

- Inference has three parts, all of which require awareness:
 1. Premises and conclusions
 2. Reckoning state (recognizing that the premises support the conclusion)
 3. Because condition (conclusion is reached because it is recognized that premises support the conclusion)
- On Siegel's Minimal Inferential Model, inference does not require awareness.

A potential problem: The Explore-Exploit norm

- "Over time, one should balance between exploration and exploitation when allocating's one attention" (Irving 2018, p.89)
- Siegel's inferential model cannot explain this norm, because exploratory attention is not inferential.
 - Mind wandering
 - Child-like thinking
 - Creative thinking
- But Siegel should explain exploratory attention, because exploratory attention can be/is sometimes rational.