A Critical Study of Clifford's Evidentialist Position on The Ethics of Belief
การศึกษาเชิงวิเคราะห์หลักการการหาเหตุผลก่อนการเชื่อของนายคลิฟฟอร์ด

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ABSTRACT

During W.K. Clifford's era of the Victorian Crisis of Faith, Clifford noticed a decline in religious ethics and social morality, thus he intended to foster scientifically grounded ethics, which is universally applicable for all humankind. His claiming, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence" has challenged other thinkers to argue about this evidentialist theory. Here I will defend Clifford from a pragmatist, moralist and deontologist objections against evidentialist theory and elaborate the possibility of perfectly achieving Clifford's evidentialist principle.

บทคัดย่อ

ในยุควิกตอเรียที่มีวิกฤตการณ์เกี่ยวกับความเสื่อมศรัทธาของผู้คนที่มีต่อศาสนาคริสต์ คลิฟฟอร์ดได้มีความตั้งใจที่จะดำรงจริยธรรมในสังคมโดยใช้หลักพื้นฐานของวิทยาศาสตร์ที่ทุกคนสามารถเข้าถึงได้มาสร้างข้อประพฤติปฏิบัติทางจริยธรรมในความเชื่อโดยกล่าวไว้ว่า การเชื่อโดยไม่มีหลักฐานเพียงพอนั้นไม่ว่าจะที่ไหนและจะเป็นใครนั้นก็ถือว่าผิด คำกล่าวนี้ถูกถกเถียงอย่างกว้างขวางถึงความเป็นได้ของข้อประพฤติข้อนี้ และในที่นี้เองที่ผู้เขียนจะอธิบายถึงข้อโต้แย้งเหล่านั้นโดยปกป้องความคิดของคลิฟฟอรด์

Key Words : Evidentialism, Pragmatism, Apperception
คำสำคัญ : หลักฐานนิยม ปฏิบัตินิยม สติสัมปชัญญะ

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Introduction

Due to the importance of the role of belief as a mediator for both knowledge and action, the ethics of belief is the debate of "whether there are norms of some sort governing our habits of belief formation, belief-maintenance, and belief-relinquishment"[1]. From the shifting in value of theologically grounded ethics during Clifford's period, Madigan [2] helps clarifying that Clifford's ambition is to foster a new more scientifically grounded ethics, which could unify all humankind. Clifford uses biblical and religious language in his text in order to directly communicate with his target audience. At that moment, the questions that supposedly arose in Clifford's mind are "How were people to live if they were no longer satisfied with the teachings of religion? What, if anything, could replace such time-honored views?" Clifford's famous counter argument of his strong evidentialism is from a pragmatist like William James. Due to his psychological background, James preliminary points to the influence of our passions, including fears, hopes, and desires to what we believe. James strongly tells us not to observe Clifford's principle while proposing his genuine option, which is an exception from a duty to believe with support of evidence. Nickerson summarizes from Madigan's discussion that apparently Clifford and James oppose each other, on the other hand, both of them share similar concerns, such as on intellectual honesty, empiricism and the scientific outlook. When Clifford says the word "wrong" in his main statement, it conveys the existence of moral value within his evidentialist principle. However, people wonder whether there can be a moral duty over belief, which is lack of voluntary control. A sound reply is to be responsible to the extent to which we have voluntary control over matters that influence belief. This is where Pojman attacks James and Meiland under the topic of doxastic voluntarism as well as how Feldman attacks Clifford on the moral sound of his statement of the ethics of belief. Alston goes further than Feldman when he rejects the notion of epistemic obligation after he analyzes its possibility from deontological study. Although Clifford seems to combine those two types, he does it under moral evidentialist theory and not mutually exclusive. In this paper, I shall argue the thesis that Clifford'sevidentialist theory can be the criteria for morally justifying our belief.

Research Objective

1. To study evidentialist evidence.

2. To testify the validity of the ethics of belief principle under doxastic voluntarism.

3. To analyze the possibility of perfectly achieving Clifford's evidentialist principle.

Literature Review

"The ethics of belief" has been a widely discussed topic among various philosophers throughout the past, especially after Clifford and James's argument. Before Clifford released his principle, John Locke has

his principle of evidence: "Acquire evidence for and against the proposition such that each item of evidence is something that one knows and such that the totality of one's evidence is satisfactory" [3]. He also discusses about reasoning that although it may be inferior to intuitive understanding in its discursiveness and dependence on memory, both reasoning and intuition yield acquaintance with reality. For Locke, evidence must be satisfactory in quality, which the satisfaction is that of epistemically reliable. Locke's principle of proportionality says, "Adopt a level of confidence in the proposition which is proportioned to its probability on one's satisfactory evidence" [3]. Locke even applies this principle of proportionality in accord with the verdicts of Reason to argue about the revelation of God. There are many contributions from new thinkers on the relevant or direct topic that is fruitful for the upcoming generations. Early argument of the "The Will to Believe and the Ethics of Belief" by Arnold E. Johanson discusses how Clifford's argument directs to the negative consequences of a habit of credulousness while James's argument weights more to the right to maximize the potentiality of good to believe. Johanson modifies James's argument by putting a condition of value weighing to permit overbelief. In 1994, John L. Rebman has produced a research on Constructive Skepticism, Critical thinking and the ethics of belief. In this research, he aims to study a reliable standards and procedure for students to acquire beliefs that are, if not true, at least likely to be true. His compilation of thinkers for his research includes Wittgenstein, Locke, Clifford, James, Dewey, and Habermas. In the ethics of belief section, the first remark to give attention to is the limitation of humans' ability to reach unquestioned Truth or unqualified Certainty over all matters of doctrine. He mentions of Francis Bacon that Bacon would prefer to be a skeptic than dogmatist because, for him, genuine knowledge is possible only if his standards and procedures for open-minded disciplined inquiry are adopted. During modern philosophy, Cartesian ideal, underlying an acquisition of knowledge with the use of reason. Following Locke's ethics of belief, which emphasizes on proofs-warranted proposition, H.H. Price states that "When our evidence for a proposition, although not conclusive, is favorable, or favorable on the balance when any unfavorable evidence there may be is taken into account, we can assent to that proposition with a limited degree of confidence; and we can then conduct our intellectual and practical activities "in light of" the proposition, though not without some doubt or mental reservation" [4]. In other words, the degree of commitment to belief should be proportioned to collected evidence. In contributing to education, Rebman sees children as natural philosophers who are naturally curious and want to examine new things, but the school system gradually take this natural instinct away. Rebman states, "Largely due to over-specialization and our dependence on "experts", many people have either abdicated or simply lost their ability to think clearly... Thinking has become the

occupational responsibility of specialists such as scientists, lawyers, and accountants" [5]. Rebman points out an important issue regarding a problem with the possibility of criticizing particular beliefs, value and institutions by saying that "It seems clear to me that if a particular set of beliefs is so fragile that they cannot withstand intellectual examination and critical scrutiny, they should, indeed, be rejected" [5]. In his argument, he intends to evoke parents or teachers to encourage children to think and entertain arguments by using reason and evidence, which is opposed to indoctrination. Rebman agrees with Clifford on cultivating the mind and refers it to as constructive skepticism. The purpose of skeptical scrutiny is very similar to Clifford's principle, which is to acquire evidence for one's belief and check for the adequacy of that evidence.

In 1997, David A. Hollinger opines that James misinterpreted Clifford's argument by stating that "Sufficiency of evidence was a relative ideal, but James, by quoting Clifford selectively, made it sound absolute and unattainable" [6]. In 2002, Zamulinski replies to a claim that Clifford's position is deontological that he, on the other hand, regards Clifford's ethics of belief within moral and not epistemological norms, a second-order consequentialism. He also remarks that Clifford's rule does not require us to believe; rather, it requires us not to believe unless we have sufficient evidence [7]. Apart from the attack of James, Zamulinski also defends Clifford from other thinkers like Alvin Plantinga who is alleged that he is actually unaware of Clifford's argument by quoting Clifford from James's "The Will to Believe" following by his speculative statement. The next defense is to Marvin Kohl who claims that Clifford's argument is self-refuting and a person who believes the argument would be inconsistent if lacking of sufficient evidence. Zamulinski objects that "the flaws of the believer cannot be transferred to the objects of belief" [7]. He emphasizes on how the rule is should not be entangled with an identity of believer. Moreover, Clifford has support his strictness by allowing to act on probabilities from case to case. There is another claim from Peter van Inwagen that Cliffordians adhere to a double standard by condemning the religious but remaining silent about intellectuals. Zamulinski replies that intellectuals have already following a conduct similar to Clifford's principles while religious do not. From Zamulinski's observation, no other commentators have come close to defeat Clifford's argument, not Hollinger, Arnold Johanson, James, Wernham and some others. Most of them still do not understand Clifford as explicitly as they should and not having sufficient reasonable and sound argument to derogate Clifford's main argument.

Later philosopher, Richard Hall shares, at some point, a consolidate ground between Clifford and James. Apparently, people may notice much of the contradiction of the two thinkers, but what Hall notices is that "Both are pragmatists (Clifford in spirit if not in name), and James no less than Clifford is committed to the empiricist principle of verification" [8]. Hall points out

to an agreement James makes to Clifford's stricture against accepting nothing without sufficient evidence, but the love and honor of this method of verification could block one from acquiring truth. Another parallel point between James and Clifford is the viewpoint of behavioral conception they share on belief that both insist that beliefs must be verified empirically. "James, no less than Clifford, demands evidence for even religious beliefs. He is no fideist. But, unlike Clifford, he is willing to wait for that evidence to emerge later in their case, whereas Clifford wants evidence now before risking belief. This marks the chief different between James's empiricism and that of traditional empiricists like Clifford" [8]. For Hall, he thinks that James's teaching is following the middle way between a constrictive scientism and stultifying skepticism without alleged to be irrational subjectivism and anti-intellectualism.

Research Methodology

Data Collection

The border between primary and secondary sources is originality, however, the judgment of its originality in philosophical texts may cross the line between philosophical texts. Here, for this paper, the primary sources are decided for the main original arguments, which are texts from Clifford's "Lecture and Essay" and "Seeing and thinking" and Williams James's "The Will to Believe" while the secondary sources are other selected texts, such as "W.K. Clifford And "The Ethics of Belief"" that discuss directly and indirectly on the relating topic.

Research Framework

"Again, the philosophic interpretation of facts is different from the scientific interpretation in the sense that while the scientist seeks connections within specific areas of facts, the philosopher has to search for relations among increasingly larger bodies of facts until the explanation becomes universal" [9]. A difficulty in constructing a theoretical framework is to select an appropriate theory with truth-conduciveness for this research analysis since there are many interesting theories that seem to be useful for this topic. The first theory, the correspondence theory of truth, will elaborate the structure that parallel with foundationalism in order to analyze the relation between belief and fact tracing to evidence.

1. The Correspondence Theory of Truth – Truth or falsity of a statement is determined by correspondence to the world.

(1) x is true iff x corresponds to some fact;

x is false iff x does not correspond to any fact;

(2) x is true iff x corresponds to some state of affairs that obtains;

x is false iff x corresponds to some state of affairs that does not obtain.

2. Pluralist Theories of Truth – A theory is claiming that there is more than one way of being true. The researcher thinks that

this theory provides a useful insight of truth through pros and con arguments, especially when combining with correspondence theory results in a great structure for analyzing and developing Clifford's principle. [10]

3. Self-Deception – "We may say generally, however, that self-deception is the acquisition and maintenance of a belief (or, at least, the avowal of that belief) in the face of strong evidence to the contrary motivated by desires or emotions favoring the acquisition and retention of that belief" [11]. This model of Self-Deception is very useful to study how a person holds a belief contrary to strong evidence under the effect of desires or emotions. It is interesting to study how desires or emotions can trigger our decision to act immorally.

4. "Intuitive Awareness" A Buddhist theory from AjarnSumedhoBikkhu. "Intuitive awareness is frustrating to an analytical person whose faith is in thought, reason and logic. Awareness is right now. It's not a matter of thinking about it, but being aware of thinking about it. "How do you do that?" [12] The researcher adopts this theory with the expect that this theory would disclose infallible evidence.

Results and Discussion

Analyzing Infallible Evidence Through Intuitive Awareness

When AjarnSumedho encourages us to be uncritically aware of all kinds of mental conditions, the researcher finds this method beneficial to analyze evidence and doxastic voluntarism. First, being aware of mental conditions allows us to experience more with direct empirical evidence, which is known for its more reliability, and relies less on memory (even though memory is still important in many cases). According to Jim Walker's suggestion of disowning belief, which requires an ability of metacognition, cognition about cognition, it seems that by disowning belief do we reach the top of the pyramid where thinking resides. However, with intuitive awareness, we can go further to disowning thought and this should result in the purest epistemic evidence where none of the bias involved especially when AjarnSumedho asserts on the neutrality and still point of consciousness to experience by following the method. There is a likeness between metacognition and intuitive awareness where both of which function behind conventional realm. There is still another cognition after disowning the surface cognition, which AjarnSumedho may call it the sound of silence. This still point of cognition seems to be incongruent with Bonjour'snonapperceptive awareness in name, but not in detail. Intuitive awareness tells us to be aware of all mental conditions meanwhile nonapperceptive awareness of Bonjour is an awareness of the content of an occurrent belief including sensory and perceptual experience. Referring to Bonjour's fundamental facts, involuntary and coherence, for the needed inference between sensory appearance and objective fact similar to the ones of Locke and Berkeley in their inference to the external world and God respectively, an explanation of the combination between involuntariness and

coherence is still vague. Yet, according to Clifford, we can infer from phenomena to phenomena, namely physical inference, based upon an assumption of uniformity and from phenomena to the facts that underlie phenomena in the case of mental and moral sciences. For the second kind of inference between similar feelings and perceptions, it is by the assumption of feelings which are not our own. Clifford claims that both the mental sciences and the physical sciences share a stage of science an atomic uniformity. He regards the mental facts as the realities or things-in-themselves, and the material phenomena are mere pictures or symbols. "The final result seems to be that atomism is carried beyond phenomena into the realities which phenomena represent; and that the observed uniformities of nature, in so far as they can be expressed in the language of atomism, are actual uniformities of things in themselves" [13]. The meaning of atomism is the molecular theory of bodies where atomic elements of uniform character connect together only with adjacent ones as well as having certain relations of nextness, and this can be applied to solid substances and the nervous system of the physiological bodies. I believe Clifford's description of atomic structure also consist of Bonjour's fundamental facts, involuntary and coherence, in which there is no voluntary action within the mechanical action of atomism and the structure of atomism is coherence in its nature. Thus, if Clifford adopts Bonjour's idea of nonapperceptive awareness as the most basic and noninferential proposition, he would argue to the problem of relation between sensory appearance and objective facts with his example of atomic uniformity. In order to be the most basic and noninferential proposition to foundationalism, there should not be any kind of belief involved since it would fall into the problem of justification. The question to the most basic infallible evidence is whether we need any further justification to evidence that explicates on how things are or how beliefs are when this evidence allows us to know the origin of beliefs.

By disowning thought but still aware of it, the process of justification should exclude personal desire and corresponding to the general evidence. Believing in thought will benefit from an exclusion of self in order to view a thought as such. When Pentland elucidates types of thinking, such as a mix of truths, facts, guesses, predictions, what-ifs and fantasies, she is implying that belief is voluntary. In facts, the feelings that compose belief such as confidence or James' passions arise and cease by themselves. As we have discussed that thinking can influence belief and vice versa, the feeling will vary according to different types of thinking. Pentland advocates us to actively observe our thought from the fear of its influence on unwanted feelings. Here we can see from the types of thinking Pentland exemplifies that apart from a mix of truth and facts, other thinking needs a subject to drive. "I guess", "I predict", or "I imagine" are phrases symbolizing of insufficient evidence and so cannot act as general evidence especially

with the subject "I", but truths or facts does sound generality. Jim Walker is aware of negative consequences from belief when he tells us to disown belief, what he afraid of is the natural instinct of humans to protect the ownership. If we leave our ability of justification undeveloped from the moment given by nature, as Clifford's suggestion, we would likely follow stronger impulse, which is the one that gratify one's own desires at the expense of other men. The feeling attaches to generality is likely to be in a state of fairness and unbiased especially when it departs from "I", the ownership that has a force on biased belief. Through intuitive awareness, we can judge the thought purely from its content corresponding to facts with an awareness of the imperfect reliability of other evidences, but at least we are aware of that while justifying belief. We will discuss problems of internalist evidence in the next section.

Intuitive awareness provides evidence with internalist quality that is steadily accessible, thus it must confront with objections to internalism. Alvin Plantinga explicates three possibilities of internalist evidence, which are propositional, sensory, or impulsional, while focusing on impulsional evidence that is a feeling that something is right or true, namely, "felt attractiveness". Plantinga denies that impulsional evidence would satisfy evidential condition for knowledge since this type of evidence can arise in any belief. Feldman and Conee [14] respond that we have other evidences from rational thinking, comparative knowledge from past experiences, and a kind of a priori insight in which all of these evidences reside in memory. Another main problem is that intuitive awareness seems to be active only to what we are conscious of at the moment, but inactive to justify stored belief. HereI would like to refer to moderate pluralism concept to interpret that what underlie stored justification is still consciousness. We must be conscious at the time we apply memory reason to justify dispositional belief. In the case of forgetting evidence, Feldman and Conee [14] approve justification by the fact that belief is formed reliably regardless of forgotten source. Alston attacks internalism to the problem of accessing to justificatory efficacy, knowing what belief is justified by a given sense experience. In response, Feldman and Conee [14] hold that "possession of the right evidence by itself secures the justification of the corresponding belief". If impulsional evidence is among internalist evidences, awareness can also serve as internalist evidence. Similar objection to awareness as internalist evidence could be from impulsional evidence objection that it can arises in any belief. In spite of that objection, the main difference is that impulsional evidence relies on feeling that is unstable and can be biased by desire, but awareness is the still point with neutral characteristic. Awareness matches with the quality of infallible evidence therefore I agree with Bonjour's advocate of his nonapperceptive awareness. All in all, we must remember that Clifford does not strictly attach to either internalist evidence or externalist evidence,

but the implication on the state of fairness and not biased for perfectly achieving his evidentialist principle require us to focus on internal evidence. Therefore, we can say that we cannot avoid the practice of our internal mental state in justifying belief no matter evidence exists internally or externally. If there is internalist evidence, awareness will be inevitable for evidentialist sufficient evidence.

Conclusion and Recommendation

What Clifford actually concerns on "sufficient evidence" is the habit of believers to gather truth-conducive evidence that can be the mean to acquire true belief more than the truth of evidence itself. Clifford's principle does not force believers to know the truth, but at least to make an attempt to clarify the truth. His strictness of evidentialist theory stresses upon our action to follow the principle not on the ability to believe truly, thus it overcomes some objections to the implausibility of the principle. In the case of Clifford's the ethics of belief principle, Clifford loosens the strictness and provides more flexibility when he describes his principle in detail. Even James's genuine option in the case of overbelief has not been regarded as efficient enough to deteriorate Clifford's principle due to the weakness of the suggested genuine options. In establishing a moral precept, a condition under any precept would not be stated in the rule otherwise people would incline to make an excuse under available conditions. In facts, Clifford seems to be more flexible regarding the property of evidence where he embraces both subjective and objective evidence. By doing this, he has indirectly moderate externalist and internalist evidence rendering believers to make use of each in the right occasion. The strength of Clifford's evidentialist principle is based on how he explicates the method of evidence analysis from memory to testimony. He acknowledges the instability of memory as a source of evidence, but since it is unavoidable not to use memory, we must assume that it is trustworthy to a certain extent.

Memory belief includes belief that relies on past evidence thus the main obstacle is forgetfulness, which is uncontrollable. An objection to the voluntariness of belief affecting a validity of the ethics of belief omits the voluntary control over thinking which consists in belief. As a matter of fact, people can be more willful to think than act since we can think whatever we will. However, conventional law posits itself to control humans' behaviors, not the thinking, which actually is the root of behavior and facial expression. We cannot ignore that there is a feeling and emotion involved in our action as well as in thinking to compose belief. As Clifford raises an example of a message from sensation to action without consultant to the mind, instinctive action can be categorized as involuntary action, but it is still restricted under ethical norms. Perhaps people are afraid of both the action and thought to be constrained under ethical

law where many cannot even control their behavior ethically and they still need some space to express whatever they will, such as revenging other people within the thought instead of action, thus they find it impossible to follow the ethics of belief. Another aspect is the will to believe not directing to truth-conduciveness that neglects the importance of the ethics of belief. Again the researcher must point to an intention of normative ethics, which should be established fairly among differences in the society. Basic rule such as the golden rule is convincing us to do what we would like others to treat ourselves. The structure of the rule bases on fairness and equality meanwhile these qualities also exist in the structure of evidentialist theory with truth-conduciveness. Clifford suggests us to justify belief fairly and without bias in order to perfectly achieve his evidentialist theory. The backbone of the golden rule that is essential in ethical code or morality share similar value to the one of evidentialist. When Alston attacks epistemic justification from deontological perspective, he can also attack the golden rule from the same perspective as well. Evidentialist theory does not necessarily mean to be a duty, but what we should do especially if we care about truth.

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