

# Epistemology

## Lecture 7: Internalism vs. Externalism

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# Chapter I: Preliminaries

# Debate triangulation

- Keep in mind that other philosophical debates bear the same name, e.g. internalism vs. externalism w.r.t. semantics.
- Our focus is, of course, on the epistemological debate. But even here there are two, admittedly, related issues.

\* internalism/externalism w.r.t. knowledge

\* internalism/externalism w.r.t. justification

**NB:** Most discussions concern the latter and we follow suit.

# The background

- Recall that all the analyses of knowledge we looked at assumed that true beliefs  $\neq$  knowledge.
- What is needed, in addition, is some kind of justification.
- There is presumably something that determines that state of affairs of whether a belief is justified or unjustified.
- That something is sometimes called a 'J-factor'.
- The debate between internalists and externalists concerns the precise nature of the J-factors.

# Chapter II: Internalism

# Internalism: The basics

- There are two major kinds of internalism but what they have in common is the view that J-factors are *inside* the person.

**Access internalism:** J-factors are cognitively accessible mental (and potentially other, e.g. bodily) states.

Otherwise put, they are always reflectively recognis-ed/-able.

Prominent advocates: Descartes, Chisholm and Bonjour.

**Mentalist internalism:** J-factors are mental states but *need not* be cognitively accessible.

Prominent advocates: Feldman and Conee.

# Access internalism

- Cognitive access is through introspection, direct reflection, awareness or some such mechanism.
- Two access-internalist justification principles:

## **Actual access:**

If  $S$  is justified in believing  $p$ , then  $S$  is cognitively aware of some legitimate reasons for believing  $p$ .

## **Possible access:**

If  $S$  is justified in believing  $p$ , then  $S$  can become cognitively aware of some legitimate reasons for believing  $p$ .

# Examples

- **Cogito:**

The meditator is justified in believing that they exist and the reasons for this belief are cognitively accessible to them.

How? Via the reflections that *they think* and that *their thought implies their existence*.

- **Lecture room:**

I am justified in believing 'I am at NCH' and the reasons for this belief are cognitively accessible to me.

How? Via the reflection that I am undergoing NCH perceptual mental states.

# Normative epistemology

- Why internalism? The main argument for the view appeals to the normative dimensions of justification.

“... the concept of epistemic justification is fundamentally a normative concept. It has to do with **what one has a duty or obligation to do, from an epistemic or intellectual standpoint.** As Chisholm suggests, **one’s purely intellectual duty** is to accept beliefs that are true, or likely to be true, and reject beliefs that are false, or likely to be false. To accept beliefs on some other basis is to violate one's epistemic duty - to be, one might say, *epistemically irresponsible*... if his [the subject’s] acceptance of it [the belief] is to be epistemically rational or responsible... the person... must *himself* possess the justification” (Bonjour 1980: 364) [boldness added].

# Problems: Rational limitations

- Rational reflection is overrated. Kornblith (2012) argues that:

- \* we not always aware of the reasons for our beliefs.

- \* (more damningly) we sometimes offer the wrong reasons.

“Philosophers have typically assigned a great deal more value to reflection than it really deserves... their view of what reflection is and what it is capable of achieving is terribly inaccurate” (p. 1).

- If we insist on it, we might as well say goodbye to knowledge.

“Most of our beliefs are formed without the benefit of critical reflection, and so, on [internalism], most of our beliefs are not in fact justified, and we thus have precious little knowledge” (11).

# Problems: Experimental studies

- **Positional effect:** Nisbett and Wilson (1977)

Test subjects choose a pair of stockings and afterwards asked to describe the reasons for their choices.

The position of the items is known to affect choice. Test subjects were not only ignorant of this but also denied its influence.

- **Anchoring effect:** Tversky and Kahneman (1974)

Test subjects observe a roulette wheel fixed to stop at 10 or 65 and afterwards asked to guess % of African nations in UN.

On average, lower numbers guessed when the number on the roulette wheel was 10 as opposed to 65.

# Problems: Children and animals

- Many philosophers argue that a necessary condition for having (justified) beliefs is being responsive to reasons.
- This is often taken to mean being capable of reflecting, i.e. having such a capacity is necessary for having (justified) beliefs.
- The capacity's necessity is questioned by Kornblith, who argues that there are clear cases where such capacity is absent.

**Examples:** pre-reflective children and chimpanzees.



# Access internalism is the view that...

# Would requiring access to reasons to be justified deprive us of most of our knowledge?

Yes **A** No **B**



# Chapter III: Externalism

# Externalism: The basics

- Defined in opposition to internalism. The J-factors *need not* be cognitively accessible or indeed internal states.

**NB:** It's still the case that anyone who becomes aware of such factors could take them to be excellent reasons for belief.

- This view:
  - (1) relieves the pressure on powers of rational reflection.
  - (2) puts emphasis on truth-conductivity of justification.

**Prominent advocates:** Goldman, Nozick and Kornblith.

# Two varieties

- **Reliabilist theories:**

The reliability of a process need not be fastened to any internal states or to their cognitive accessibility in the knowing subject.

- **Causal theories:**

The causal link between beliefs and facts need not depend on internal states or their cognitive accessibility.

# Why externalism?

- Clearly, some of the reasons to reject internalism are, prima facie, reasons to accept externalism.
  - \* justification/knowledge in pre-reflective children and animals.
  - \* experimental studies against the power of rational reflection.
- Here's an additional argument reported by Steup (2005):

“... what we want from justification is the kind of objective probability needed for knowledge, and only external conditions on justification imply this probability”.

# Externalism: Examples

- **Chicken-sexer:**

The chicken-sexer is justified because their belief arises as a result of a reliable process.

This is in spite of the fact that the reasons for their judgments are not introspectible.



- **Granma case:**

“Grandma knows that she has hands even though she can not rehearse an argument for that conclusion and can not even think of anything else to defend the claim that she does have hands” (Poston 2016).

# Problems

- Externalism inherits a bunch of problems from reliabilist and causal theories of knowledge.

## **Examples:**

\* Truetemp

\* Reliable Clairvoyant

- One reply to such problems is, of course, to deny that the said intuitions have any evidential bearing.

# More problems

- And clearly, some of the reasons to accept internalism are, prima facie, reasons to reject externalism.
  - \* the deontological argument
- One possible defence is to say that such arguments beg the question against the externalist.
- Even so, the more practical generality problem still remains, at least for the reliabilist externalists.



# Externalism is the view that...



# Where does your allegiance lie?

Internalism

Externalism

Don't know

# Special Topic: Self-Knowledge

# Introduction

- Self-knowledge is knowledge of internal states like one's own beliefs, desires, perceptions, thoughts, etc.
- Traditionally, this knowledge has been thought to be distinctive when compared to other kinds, e.g. of external things.

(1) It is meant to be acquired via a 'first-personal' method.

(2) It is meant to be epistemically more secure.

**NB:** The connection to internalism should, I hope, be clear!

# The first-personal method

- There is something special about grasping our own mental states. We alone have this privilege.
- There are two rival ways to articulate this specialness:

**Introspection** (inward looking): To introspect is to make *inner observations* about your mental states.

**Transparency** (outward looking): We determine our own mental states by looking at the states of the world they represent.

“This is known as the transparency view, in that it takes self-knowledge to involve looking ‘through’ the (transparent) mental state, directly to the state of the world it represents”.

# Epistemic security

- There are two ways to express the type of epistemic security offered by self-knowledge.

## **Infallibility:**

“One is infallible about one’s own mental states if and only if ... one cannot have a false belief to the effect that one is in a certain mental state” (Gertler 2015).

## **Omniscience:**

“One is omniscient about one’s own states *iff* being in a mental state suffices for knowing that one is in that state” (ibid.).

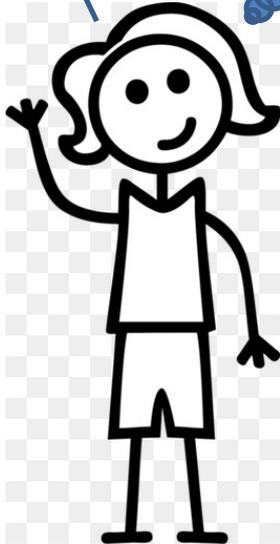
# Against infallibility

**ATTITUDE:**  
**No Resentment**



**MOTHER**

**BELIEF:**  
**Rkm**



- Kate's therapist claims that she resents her mother. She trusts him but he's wrong. So she has a false belief about her attitude.

where: Rkm stands for **R**esentment **K**ate has towards her **m**other.

# Against omniscience

- Since Kate is unaware of her real attitude towards her mother, call the corresponding state 'Akm', she can't know she is in Akm.

where: Akm stands for **A**ttitude **K**ate has towards her **m**other

- That is, Kate doesn't believe she's in state Akm. And since belief is a necessary condition for knowledge, she doesn't know it.

The End