

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

## **Virtue Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism Justification**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research work titled, "Virtue Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism Justification" attempts to give a succinct analysis of the justification of our knowledge. It rigorously scrutinizes the sources of our knowledge claim. Whether the justificatory criteria to authenticate our knowledge claim are external or internal. It is discovered that the internalismexternalism (I-E) debate lies near the centre of the contemporary discussion about epistemology. The basic idea of internalism is that justification is solely determined by factors that are *internal* to a person. Externalists deny this, asserting that justification depends on additional factors that are *external* to a person. A significant aspect of the I-E debate involves setting out exactly what counts as *internal* to a person. One of the arguments for externalism is that if a process counts as cognitive when it is performed in the head, it should also count as cognitive when it is performed in the world. We sometimes perform actions in our heads that we usually perform in the world, so that the world leaks into the mind. Internalism has epistemological implications: if a process gives us an empirical discovery when it is performed in the world, it will also give us an empirical discovery when it is performed in the head. We explore the relation between internalism and externalism and contend that both are crucial and needed for justification. The work employed analytical, expository, and critical methods.

**Keywords:**— Virtue Epistemology, Internalism, Externalism.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Internalism and externalism are like rivulet coming from the same river. The river is reliabilism. To further determine whether the fulcrum of our justification is external or internal has led us to internalism and externalism which have now constituted themselves as independent

schools of thought with different adherents (Ozumba, 169). Laurence Bonjour corroborated this point when he said that, “one of the major disputes in epistemology in the last three decades or so has been that between internalists and externalists theories of justification and knowledge”. Internalism in the first instance is a thesis about the basis of either knowledge or justified belief. This first form of internalism holds that a person either can have a form of *access* to the basis for knowledge or justified belief. The key idea is that the person either is or can be aware of this basis. Externalists, by contrast, deny that one always can have this sort of access to the basis for one’s knowledge and justified true belief. A second form of internalism, is connected to justified true belief but probably extended to knowledge as well, concerns not access but rather what the basis for a justified belief is.

Mentalism is the thesis that what ultimately justifies any belief is some mental state of the epistemic agent holding that belief. Externalism on this dimension, then, would be the view that things other than mental states operate as justifiers. A third form of internalism concerns the very concept of justification, rather than access to or the nature of justifiers. This third form of internalism is the deontological concept of justification, whose main idea is that the concept of epistemic justification is to be analyzed in terms of fulfilling one’s intellectual duties or responsibilities. Externalism with respect to the concept of epistemic justification would be the thesis that this concept is to be analyzed in terms other than special duties or responsibilities.

Across different areas of philosophy, “internalism” and “externalism” designate distinctly opposed positions. In the philosophy of mind, the debate between internalists and externalists arose in the 1970s with a focus on meaning and mental representation and the nature of mental states. Internalists or individualists hold that the nature of an individual’s mental state depends metaphysically just on facts about that individual, facts intrinsic to that individual, rather than her social or physical environment. A common way to express internalism is to say that an individual’s mental states are fixed or determined by the intrinsic, physical properties of that individual (Robert A. Wilson, 1).

### **Virtue Epistemology**

Virtue epistemology is a collection of recent approaches to epistemology that give epistemic concepts an important and fundamental role. Virtue epistemology is traced to Ernest Sosa, an American Philosopher, who was attempting to solve the controversy between foundationalism and coherentism, over the structure of epistemic justification. Virtue epistemology is one that holds that the problem of guaranteeing valid knowledge can be solved by reference to the possession and application of virtue (172). Ernest Sosa maintained that there are basically two forms of virtue epistemology: The first has correlated with Aristotle’s moral virtues. Epistemology builds its account of epistemic normality on the subject’s responsible manifestation of epistemic character. The other form of virtue epistemology cleaves closer to Aristotelian intellectual virtues while recognizing a broader set of competencies restricted to basic faculties of perception, introspection, and like (320).

## **TYPES OF VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY** **Virtue Reliabilism;**

This group of virtue epistemology tries to explain knowledge or justification in terms of the truth conduciveness of the process by which an agent forms a true belief. The basic idea is that one knows that *p* only if one's belief that is formed from an epistemic virtue that reliably produces true belief (323). Virtue reliabilist situates knowledge and justification entirely on the agents' reliableness. For them, a reliable person will produce reliable knowledge. Knowledge for them centres on the means through which it is gotten.

The virtue reliabilists maintained that reliability is the basic quality one must possess to help him analyze truth over error. Sosa contend that one has a reliable virtuous knowledge or faculty relative to an environment "E" if and only if one has an inner nature "I" in virtue of which one would mostly attain the truth and avoid error in a certain field of proposition "F" when in certain condition "C". He identifies reason, perception, introspection, and memory as the qualities that most obviously satisfy these conditions.

## **Virtue Responsibilism:**

This theory contrast with virtue reliabilism in at least two important ways. First, virtue responsibilists think of intellectual virtues not as cognitive faculties like introspection and memory but rather as traits of character and attentiveness, courage, carefulness, and thoroughness. Second, while virtue reliabilists tend to focus on the task of providing a virtue based account of knowledge and justification the virtue responsibilists pursued different epistemological project that holds that epistemologists should pay attention to personal, active and social dimensions of the cognitive life.

The central focus of virtue responsibilism is that an epistemologically responsible person is capable of leading others to attain certainty in knowledge.

Other virtues that a responsibilist need according to Lorraine Code are: open-mindedness, intellectual openness, honesty, and integrity.

According to Sosa, virtue relates to cognitive capacity through which somebody uses his reliable knowledge to justify a belief and/or claim to knowledge and such capacity must be conducive to truth achievement (172).

Ozumba argues that for Sosa, virtue need not be viewed purely from a moral perspective. What is important are intellectual virtues that provoke cognitive abilities and cognitive powers such as perception and reason.

Virtue epistemology can be summarized as the better the intellectual virtue a person has, the better it is for the person to access and discriminate options that call for truth determination in his given field of expertise. The expertise will not base his verdict of truth purely on coherentism or foundationalism. Beliefs may cohere and may not be true vice versa. The externalist will want to relativize the reliableness to the environment while the internalist may want to relativize the reliableness to consciousness.

## **INTERNALISM**

The distinction between propositional and doxastic justification allows us to bring into focus different notions of internal states. Internalism is best understood as the thesis that propositional

justification, not doxastic justification, is completely determined by one's internal states. But what are one's internal states? One's internal states could be one's bodily states, one's brain states, one's mental states (if these are different than brain states), or one's reflectively accessible states. The two most common ways of understanding internalism has been to take internal states as either reflectively accessible states or mental states. The former view is known as accessibilism and it has been championed by Roderick Chisholm and Laurence Bonjour. The latter view is known as *mentalism* and it has been defended by Richard Feldman and Earl Conee. On an accessibilist view, every factor that determines whether one's belief is propositionally justified is reflectively accessible. Since the causal origins of one's beliefs are not in general reflectively accessible they do not determine whether one's belief is propositionally justified. But whether or not one's belief that p and one's belief that q are contradictory is reflectively accessible. Since contradictory beliefs cannot both be justified, one can ascertain by reflection alone whether pairs of beliefs lack this devastating epistemic property.

One should note that the above claim that the causal origins of one's beliefs are not, in general, reflectively accessible is an anti-Cartesian claim. Arguably, Descartes thought that one could always discover the causal origins of one's beliefs. On the Cartesian view, causal relations that hold between beliefs and experiences and beliefs are reflectively accessible. Many scholars, however, believe this view is false. Stemming from Freud's work many now think that one does not have the kind of access Descartes though one had to the causal origins of one's beliefs. Given this an accessibilist view about doxastic justification – that is, propositional justification + the causal origins of one's belief – is not feasible. Accessibilists should only require that every factor that determines whether one's belief is propositionally justified is reflectively accessible. There are varieties of accessibilist views depending on how one unpacks what states count as reflectively accessible. Are these states that one is able to reflectively access now or states that one may access given some time? If accessibilism is not restricted to current mental states then it needs to explain where the cut off is between states that count towards determining justificatory status and those that don't count. Richard Feldman has a helpful article on this topic in which he defends the strong thesis that it is only one's current mental states that determine the justificatory status (Feldman, 143-156).

The other prominent view of internal states is that they are mental states. This view is known as mentalism. Mentalism, like is a view about propositional justification, not doxastic justification. One's mental state completely determines the justificatory status of one's beliefs.

## EXTERNALISM

Externalism is the epistemic theory that holds that the justification of every knowledge claim lies in the external realm of the justifiers. Put differently the externalist contends that certitude in knowledge can be attained through an in-depth study of the state of affairs. For them certitude in knowledge lies in the objects of knowledge not in the individual investigating the object. These two opposing theses focus on justified belief rather than knowledge, though there are close parallels. Suppose the testimony you receive from another person produces in you the justified belief that there are geese in the park. We may also suppose that this justified belief falls short of knowledge. We can say that a justifier for this belief is the testimony one has

received from the other person. Here a justifier is an analog of what was termed above a knowledge basis and, as in the latter case, we will allow that justifiers can be beliefs, or experiences, or facts about the production of the belief. Philosophers take different stances on what legitimate justifiers may be so that it is difficult to come up with an account of justifiers that is neutral between competing theories of epistemic justification. It will not do to say that everything relevant to a person's justified belief at some time counts as a justifier for that belief. For that would count possession of the concepts that are necessary for one to understand a belief that *p* as among the justifiers for that belief, and clearly that would be a mistake. Instead, we can say this: The justifiers for a given justified belief are those items that make up or constitute the person's justification for that belief at that time. They are those items, whether experiences, states of affairs, or other beliefs, on which the person's current justification is based.

## **VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY AND INTERNALISM/EXTERNALISM (I-E) DISTINCTION**

The simple concept of the I-E debate as a dispute over whether the facts that determine justification are all internal to a person is complicated by several factors. First, some epistemologists understand externalism as a view that knowledge does not require justification while others think it should be understood as an externalist view of justification. Second, there is an important distinction between having good reasons for one's belief (that is propositional justification) and basing one's belief on the good reasons one possesses (that is, doxastic justification). This distinction matters to the nature of the internalist thesis and consequently the I-E debate itself. Third, there are two different and prominent ways of understanding what is internal to a person. This bears on the nature of the internalist thesis and externalist arguments against internalism.

### **Arguments for Internalism**

This section examines prominent arguments for internalism. I will discuss two motivations for internalism: the appeal to the Socratic/Cartesian project; the appeal to deontology. These two motivations are conspicuous in arguments for internalism. After giving each reason I shall consider externalist reaction.

- **Socratic/Cartesian Arguments**

The common strategy internalists employ is to emphasize that epistemic justification requires having good reasons for one's beliefs. As both Socrates and Descartes stressed, it is not rational to believe *p* without possessing a good reason for believing *p*. Suppose I believe that Telecom's stock will drastically fall tomorrow, it's reasonable to ask why I think that's true. Clearly it's wrong to repeat myself, saying "I believe that true because it is true." So it seems I must have a reason, distinct from my original belief, for thinking that Telecom's stock will fall. Also I cannot appeal to the causal origins of that belief or to the reliability of the specific belief process. Those sorts of facts are beyond my ken. Whatever I can appeal to will be something I am aware of. Moreover, I can't merely appeal to another belief, for example, Karen told me that Telecom's stock will fall. I need a good reason for thinking that Karen is a good indicator of these sorts of things. Apart from that supporting belief, it's not rational to believe that Telecom's

stock will fall. So rationality requires good reasons that indicate a belief is true. The appeal to the Socratic/Cartesian project is a way to motivate the claim that it is a basic fact that rationality requires good reasons.

This requirement conflicts with externalism since externalism allows for the possibility that one's belief is justified even though one has no reason for that belief. To draw out this commitment let us expand on the above example. Suppose that my belief that Telecom's stock will fall is based on my beliefs that Karen told me so and that Karen is a reliable indicator of these things. But not every belief of mine is supported by other beliefs I have. These kinds of beliefs are called *basic beliefs*, beliefs that are not supported by other beliefs. Consider your belief that there's a cube on the table. What reason do you have for this belief? It might be difficult to say. Yet internalism requires that you have some reason (typically, the content of one's experience) that supports this belief if that belief is rational. Externalists think that that is just too tall of an order. In fact, one of the early motivations for externalism was to handle the justification of basic beliefs (Armstrong, 45). In general, externalists think that basic beliefs can be justified merely by the belief meeting some external condition. One complication with this, though, is that some externalists think a basic belief requires reasons but that reasons should be understood in an externalist fashion (Alston, 179).

#### • Deontologism

The argument from the deontological character of justification to internalism proceeds as follows. Justification is a matter of fulfilling one's intellectual duties but whether or not one has fulfilled one's intellectual duties is entirely an internal matter. One fulfills one's intellectual duties when one has properly taken into account the evidence one possesses. If Smith scrupulously analyzes all the relevant information about Telecom's stock prices and draws the conclusion that Telecom's prices will soar, then Smith's belief is justified. If it later comes to light that the information was misleading, this doesn't impugn our judgment about Smith's belief at that time. Smith was intellectually virtuous in his belief and drew the appropriate conclusion given the evidence he possessed. In contrast, if Jones is an epistemically reckless stockbroker who does not study the market before he makes his judgments, but happens to hit on the true belief that Telecom's stock prices will fall, then we do not count his belief as justified since he ignored all the relevant evidence. Jones should have believed otherwise.

The cases of Smith and Jones support the claim that fulfilling one's intellectual duty is entirely a matter of what one is able to determine by reflection alone. Both Smith and Jones are able to determine that their evidence indicates Telecom's stock will soar. Smith appropriately believes this and Jones does not. Since externalists would require some other non-reflectively accessible condition, externalism is wrong. One should note that this argument supports accessibilism, not mentalism.

### EXTERNALIST REACTION

Externalists have responded to this line of argument in two ways. First, some externalists deny that facts about duties, rights, or blameworthiness are relevant to the sense of justification necessary for knowledge. Second, other externalists deny that the deontological character of justification supports accessibilism. Arguments of the first kind fall into two groups: (a)



arguments that a necessary condition for rights, duties, or blameworthiness is not met with respect to belief and (b) arguments that facts about deontology are not relevant to determining epistemic facts. The most common argument for (a) is that beliefs are outside of an individual's control, and so it does not make sense to consider an individual blameworthy for a belief. This is the issue of doxastic voluntarism.

### **Arguments for Externalism**

The following is an examination of two of three prominent reasons for externalism – the argument from the true connection, the argument from ordinary knowledge ascriptions, and the argument from the implausibility of radical skepticism. Also included are the main internalist responses.

#### **• Truth Theory**

A very powerful argument for externalism is that epistemic justification is essentially connected to truth. Epistemic justification differs from prudential or moral justification. One can be prudentially justified in believing that one's close friend is a good chap. One is prudentially justified in believing that this is true. But it's possible that one has good epistemic reasons for withholding this belief. So one is not epistemically justified in believing one's close friend is a good fellow. How should we account for this difference between prudential and epistemic justification? The natural response is to hold that epistemic justification implies that one's belief is objectively likely to be true whereas prudential justification (or other nonepistemic forms of justification) does not. However, whether one's belief is objectively likely to be true is not determined by one's mental states or one's reflectively accessible states. The objective likelihood of a belief given a body of evidence is a matter of the strength of correlation in the actual world between the truth of the belief and the body of evidence. If one applies some liquid to a litmus paper and it turns red, then the objective likelihood that the liquid is acidic is very high. But the strong correlation between red litmus paper and acidity is not reflectively accessible. But the strong correlation between red litmus paper and acidity is not reflectively accessible. So, if epistemic justification implies that one's belief is objectively likely to be true then justification is not determined entirely by one's internal states. • **Skepticism**

Another main motivation for externalism is its alleged virtues for handling skepticism in at least some of its varieties. One powerful skeptical argument begins with the premise that we lack direct access to facts about the external world. For any experiential justification we have for believing some fact about the external world – for example, there's a magnolia tree – it's possible to have that same justification even though there's no such fact. The experience one has is caused by a state of one's brain and it is possible that science could develop a method to induce in one that brain state even though there are no magnolia trees for hundreds of miles. The skeptic continues to argue that since we lack direct access to facts about the external world we lack noninferential knowledge (or justification) for believing those facts. The final step of the skeptic's argument is that we do lack sufficient evidence for inferential knowledge (or inferential justification) for believing those facts. Here the skeptic argues that the evidence we possess for external world beliefs does not adequately favour commonsense over a skeptical thesis. Any appeal to experiential evidence will not decide the case against the skeptic and the skeptic is

happy to enter the fray over whether commonsense beats skepticism with regard to the theoretical virtues, for example, coherence and simplicity. Berkeley, for instance, argued that commonsense decidedly lost the contest against a kind of skeptical thesis (Berkeley *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* 9).

Internalists find this kind of argument very difficult to rebut. Internalists tend to focus on the final step and argue that even though experience does not imply that skepticism is false, it nevertheless makes skepticism much less probable than commonsense. This response is intuitive but it brings with it a number of controversial commitments. The ensuing debate is too complex to summarize here. The upshot though is that it is no easy task to maintain this intuitive response. Consequently, externalists think they have a distinct advantage over internalism.

Externalists tend to think internalism lands in skepticism but that we have good reason to suspect skepticism is false. Externalists eagerly point out that their view can handle the skeptical challenge.

Externalists typically address the skeptic's argument by denying that lack of direct access with a fact implies lack of non-inferential knowledge or justification. In terms of an early version of externalism. Armstrong's causal theory (Armstrong, 1973) – if one's perceptual belief that *p* is caused by the fact that makes it true then one knows that *p* but the core idea is that a lack of direct access doesn't preclude non-inferential knowledge.

## INTERNALIST REACTION

Internalists argue that the problem of the truth connection is a problem for everyone. Epistemic justification is essentially connected to the truth in a way that distinguished it from prudential justification. But it is exceedingly difficult to note exactly what this connection consists of. Internalists stress that the proposed externalist solution that epistemic justification raises a belief's objective likelihood of truth isn't as straightforward as it first appear. The intuition in the new evil demon problem illustrates that epistemic justification does not imply that one's belief is objectively likely to be true. So to generate an argument against internalism from the truth connection, one needs to do more than appeal to the intuition of a strong connection between justification and truth. The problem of the truth connection for internalism is an active area of research.

## CONCLUSION

This work noted that the relation between internalism and externalism in relation to virtue epistemology depends on what we take internalism or externalism to be. Both theories are relevant for the purpose of certainty in knowledge. Externalism, maintained that we perform cognitive operations in the external world and use the external world as an information store while internalism maintained that we perform operations in our minds that we would normally perform in the world. Thus, the lingering debate between the internalists and externalists as regards epistemic justification can only yield fruitful epistemic results through the rigorous process of harmonizing, synthesizing, and harnessing their conflicting views into a coherent whole through the method of integrative. Virtue reliabilists and virtue responsibilists alike have





claimed to have a more accurate view of knowledge and justification by arguing that a virtuebased epistemology is a sure means to acquiring certainty in knowledge.

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