# Lecture 3 Justification I: Externalism

## 1. Two Kinds of Justification

Externalism and internalism provide two distinct answers to the question "what kinds of things can justify beliefs?".

Broadly speaking, we can define each of these as follows:

**Internalism =** the view that the epistemic justifiers of one's beliefs *must internal* to the subject

**Externalism =** the view that the epistemic justifiers of one's beliefs *need not be internal* to the subject.

These two positions are **exclusive** and **exhaustive**.

## 2. Motivations for Externalism

a. Justificatory Regress

If a belief P is justified by another belief Q, then it is open for us to ask of Q whether it is justified. If it is justified by a further belief R, the same applies. According to the externalist, the internalist has no choice but to appeal to further beliefs as justifiers. But this will lead to regress. Since epistemic agents are finite beings, they could never complete an infinite chain of justification. So externalism is required to avoid the regress; some justifiers must be external to the epistemic agent.

b. Relationship to Truth

There's a strong intuition that a belief *P* justificatory status bears some relationship to the truth of *P*. For instance, you might think that justified beliefs are so because they are *more* (*objectively*) *likely* to be true. If this is the case, then whether a belief that *P* is justified cannot only depend on internal justifiers; there must be some connection to the fact that *P*.

c. Kinds of Epistemic Agent

We think that children, and perhaps also some animals, can have beliefs. Indeed, we think that they can have *justified* beliefs. But not all of those agents that we think can have justified beliefs have the ability to reflect on their other beliefs and identify justifiers. The externalist argues internalism demands this level of cognitive ability, and so is inconsistent with saying of children (and perhaps some animals) that they have justified beliefs.

d. Against Awareness

Even if an epistemic agent is capable of being aware of their justifiers, they aren't always. One notable example concerns chicken sexers, who quickly sort male from female chicks with a high degree of accuracy. However, they couldn't tell you exactly what their sorting criteria are. The externalist argues that the internalist is committed to saying that the chicken sexers aren't justified in their beliefs about the sex of any given chick.

### 3. Reliabilism

The reliabilist argues that a belief that P is justified just in case it is in some way reliably correlated to true belief.

One notable form of reliabilism is **process reliabilism**. On this theory, a belief that *P* is justified just in case it is *formed by a reliable method*. That is, just in case it is formed via method that reliably leads to true beliefs.

#### Goldman's Process Reliabilism

Goldman argues that a theory of justification must:

- not be couched in epistemic terms
- be sufficiently explanatory

He considers a series of theories, stating them in a "recursive" format. That is, they are each stated in a manner that includes: (1) at least one base clause, (2) a set of recursive clauses, and 3) a closure clause. The idea here is that, for all justified beliefs, each is justified either by a further justified belief (via the recursive clauses) or by something else (via a base clause).

After considering several inadequate accounts, he offers the following initial statement of his theory:

The justificational status of a belief is a function of the reliability of the process or processes that cause it, where (as a first approximation) <u>reliability</u> consists in the tendency of a process to produce beliefs that are true rather than false. (1979, p.37)

More precisely, he offers the following base clause and recursive clause (p.40-41):

**(PR-Base)** If S's believing p at t results ('immediately') from a belief-forming process that is (unconditionally) reliable, then S's belief in p at t is justified.

**(PR-Rec)** If S's believing p at t results ('immediately') from a belief-forming process that is (at least) conditionally reliable, and if the beliefs (if any) on which this process operates in producing S's belief in p at t are themselves justified, then S's belief in p at t is justified

## 4. Worries and Objections

 (a) What does reliability consist in? Reliability could refer to a number of different properties. E.g. actual frequencies, hypothetical limiting frequencies, propensities. But Goldman does not specify which he takes reliability to demand.

(b) How do we individuate processes?

A process could be described so specifically as to only describe a single case. Or with such generality that the set of such cases includes those that seem intuitively to belong to different categories of process. Again, Goldman does not specify how general or precise we should be in individuating process types.

(c) Objection: reliability is insufficient for justification. COUNTEREXAMPLE: Norman the Clairvoyant Norman forms his beliefs by a reliable process of clairvoyance: the inputs are the mysterious deliverances of a 'psychic' sense, the outputs are beliefs, and the output beliefs are almost always true. Norman has no evidence for or against the possibility of clairvoyance, or for the proposition that he has it. One day, Norman's faculty of clairvoyance generates the belief that the President is in New York City, and Norman has no other evidence for or against this proposition.

## (d) Objection: process reliabilism allows for 'bootstrapping'. COUNTEREXAMPLE: **Fuel Gauge**

Suppose a driver, Dinah, always believes her fuel gauge. She forms the belief 'Right now, the gauge reads 'Full' and the tank is full'. She forms the belief in the first conjunct by a reliable process of perception. She forms the belief in the second conjunct via reliable inference on the first conjunct. She then deduces 'Right now, the gauge is accurate.' After doing this on several occasions she comes to believe (by the process of induction) 'The gauge is reliably accurate.' Then, by deduction on this belief (and the terms of process reliabilism) she forms the belief 'I am justified in believing my tank is full' on a different occasion on which she looks at her fuel gauge. Each step is sanctioned by process reliabilism, but Dinah at no point checked for independent evidence of the gauge's accuracy.

(e) Objection: process reliabilism cannot explain the value of justified true belief (as above merely true belief).
Arguably, the reliability of the process confers no greater value to the belief produced. Consider this argument by analogy from Zagzebski (2003):

[T]he reliability of the source [the expresso machine] does not [...] give the product an additional boost of value. If the espresso tastes good, it makes no difference if it comes from an unreliable machine. (2003, p.13)

#### **NEXT WEEK: Internalism about Justification**