

## Lecture 4

### Justification II: Internalism

#### 1. Review: Two Kinds of Justification

Recall from last lecture that theories of justification come in two distinct types: *internalist* and *externalist*.

Broadly speaking, these were defined as follows:

**Internalism (refined)** = the view that the epistemic justifiers of one's beliefs *must be accessible* to the subject

**Externalism (refined)** = the view that the epistemic justifiers of one's beliefs *need not be accessible* to the subject.

Recall also that these positions are **exclusive** and **exhaustive**. This is essential to understanding the dialectic in this debate.

#### 2. Norman, Revisited

Bonjour argued that the reliabilist (a kind of externalist) gets something wrong in saying that Norman's belief is justified.

Here's a reminder of the case:

**Norman:** 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 evidence for or against this proposition.

But just what *does* go wrong, according to the internalist? Let's compare an analogous case:

**Norma:** Norma is responsible for her neighbour's favourite plant while her neighbour's away. This plant has been genetically engineered to need wine instead of water. Norma knows absolutely nothing about these special plants. She decides to pour her wine into the plant in place of watering it, but *she has no reason to believe* this will be good for the plant. She also has no reason to believe it will be bad for the plant.

**Q.** Has Norma been a responsible plant-carer? Is she pragmatically justified in 'wine-ing' her neighbour's plant?

Intuitively, Norma has been pragmatically irresponsible. She did not have any reason for doing what she did. Similarly, Norman did not have any reason for believing what he did; arguably, he was epistemically irresponsible in doing so.

### **3. Internalism, Take One: Access Internalism**

The internalist observes that, in each of these cases, the agent could not tell you why they believe what they do (Norman) or why they've done what they did (Norma). Thus, they propose the following account of justification:

**Access Internalism 1 (AI1):** S's belief that *p* is justified iff S has access to their justifiers for *p* in the sense that they are actually aware of them.

On this view, S must be able to tell you about their justifiers if asked.

**Objection:** What if I was once aware of my justifiers for *p* but am no longer? E.g. When I was told that Yuri Gagarin was the first person in space, I was aware of my justifier for that belief. But now, I have no conscious belief about my justifiers.

The worry here is that (AI1) demands too much of us as epistemic agents. It is surely unreasonable to expect that I be consciously aware of the justifiers for every one of my beliefs. Thus, the internalist can modify it as follows:

**Access Internalism 2 (AI2):** S's belief that  $p$  is justified iff S *could* have access to their justifiers for  $p$  on reflection.

This weakens the access requirement slightly, so that I need not be aware of all of my justifiers all of the time. Instead, it need only be the case that, on internal reflection, I *could* access my justifier for my belief that  $p$ .

**Objection:** This requires that we have reflective access to *all* of our beliefs, memories, and mental states. But we don't have such access, so this condition is still too strong. For instance, I believe that water is H<sub>2</sub>O, but even on reflection I cannot remember my justifier for this. But surely this belief is still justified. If it's not, a great many of my beliefs will be unjustified, and this is unintuitive.

#### 4. Internalism, Take Two: Mentalism

Feldman and Conee (2001) argue that one need not be an access internalist in order to be an internalist at all. There are other internalist positions available. In particular: *mentalism*.

**Mentalism:** Mentalism is an internalist theory of justification comprised of two main theses.

(S) The justificatory status of a person's doxastic attitudes strongly supervenes on the person's occurrent and dispositional mental states, events and conditions.

(M) If any two possible individuals are exactly alike mentally, then they are exactly alike justificationally, e.g. the same beliefs are justified for them to the same extent. (This thesis follows directly from (S).)

#### **The positive case for internalism**

Feldman and Conee (F&C) demonstrate, through a series of examples, that internalism can best account for our intuitions about justification. In particular, in the cases they consider, two epistemic agents intuitively seem to have different levels of justification for the same belief. F&C argue that in each case, the difference between the agents is best explained in terms of a difference in *internal mental states*.

There is, they argue, “no need to appeal to anything extramental to explain any justificatory difference” (5).

F&C are well aware that these cases do not definitively *prove* that internalism is true. They provide these cases as evidence for the position. They provide further evidence in the form of replies to objections.

## **Objections and Replies**

Recall that internalism and externalism are exhaustive and exclusive. It was for this reason that an argument against internalism counted as an argument for externalism. Much of the case for externalism consists in problematising internalism. F&C defend internalism against these objections. Note that, in doing so, they also undermine the case for externalism.

F&C identify two main categories of objection: objections concerning justifiers themselves, and objections concerning the connection between justifiers and the beliefs they are meant to justify.

### **Concerning Justifiers**

#### **Objection 1: Plantinga on Impulsional Evidence**

According to Plantinga, the only way for the evidential internalist to account for arithmetical beliefs like ‘ $2 + 1 = 3$ ’ is to include “impulsional evidence”—or, the internal feeling of correctness—as an acceptable kind of evidence. But all of our beliefs are accompanied by this feeling, so it would follow from this that all of our beliefs are justified, on such an internalist picture. This is surely wrong.

#### **REPLY:**

- (1) It is false that *all* of our beliefs are accompanied by the feeling described.
- (2) It is false that impulsional evidence is the only kind of evidence for arithmetical beliefs that an internalist could countenance.

## **Objection 2: Goldman on Stored Beliefs**

According to Goldman, internalism is compelled to say that beliefs that are stored rather than active (i.e. beliefs that I am not entertaining right now) are unjustified on an internalist picture. But a great many of my beliefs are stored in this way. So internalism must be wrong.

### **REPLY:**

Goldman's objection depends on the claim that internalist justifiers must be *conscious*. But internalists can deny this. They can allow for *non-occurrent* justifiers; these would be mental states that we are already in, but are not conscious of. (For instance, memories that I'm not presently recalling.)

## **Objection 3: Forgotten Evidence**

According to this objection, I can have a belief that (intuitively) should count as justified, but for which I have irretrievably forgotten my original evidence.

### **REPLY:**

Different kinds of internalist have different responses available. Those who require internal justifiers to be conscious could appeal to what the recollection feels like, and say that it is justified by the feelings of vivacity and confidence that accompany the recollection. Those who do *not* require internal justifiers to be conscious could appeal to other justifiers (though not the original justifier) for that belief, as well as to non-occurrent beliefs about the accuracy of memory.

## **Objection 4: Higher Order Beliefs**

According to Alston, internalism requires that we have higher order beliefs about all of our justified beliefs. That is, beliefs *about* our beliefs and their justificatory status. But we simply do not have beliefs about all of our justified beliefs; this demands too much of the epistemic agent.

**REPLY:**

Internalism would only require this if it identified justification with “duty-fulfilment”. But internalism need not construe justification in this way.

**Objection 5: Introspective Beliefs**

We have beliefs about our experiences (e.g. that I have the sensation of leaf-rustling sound right now). But not all of our experiences justify our beliefs about those experiences in such a straightforward way. For instance, suppose I’m looking at a triangle; my experience of having a triangular-shaped colour patch in my field of vision justifies my belief that I am having a visual experience of a triangle. But, now suppose I’m looking a figure with many, many more sides than three. I believe that I’m having a visual experience of a 23-sided figure, but that’s not justified by my visual experience because I can’t tell from that experience exactly how many sides there are. The objector (Sosa, in this case) calls for an explanation of this difference. Why do two experiences of similar kinds have different justificatory consequences?

**REPLY:**

These experiences are in fact different in kind. There is a quality of recognition in the triangle case that does not exist in the 23-sided figure case. So, there is an internal difference to these experiences that accounts for their different epistemic consequences.

**NEXT WEEK: Virtue Epistemology**