

Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology: Handout

- Applies to propositional knowledge.
 - Knowledge normally seen as a sub-class of belief
 - Truth of belief not based on luck
 - Most philosophers do not take an **infallibilist** view of knowledge (infallibilism is view that knowledge is incompatible with the possibility of being wrong)
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Knowledge = True Belief + Warrant

But 'warrant' is just a place holder term. We need to unpack this.

Beliefs are **internal** to our mental states

Truth is **external** – about the way the external world is.

Is Warrant made up of internal factors like belief or external factors like truth?

Traditional **JTB** account of Knowledge inherited from Plato and central to Descartes.

JTB: Knowledge = Justified True Belief

Justification here unpacked in internalist terms

Internalism & Externalism: 2 definitions:

Internalism	(1) Knowledge requires justification & (2) The nature of this justification is completely determined by a subjects internal states or reasons
Externalism	(1) Either knowledge does not require justification; or (2) The nature of justification is not completely determined by internal factors alone.

Internalism	All knowledge-yielding conditions are within the psychological states of those who gain knowledge
Externalism	Factors outside the psychological states of those who gain knowledge, can be conditions of knowledge

Two ways to understand internalism: (what does internal states mean?)

Accessibilism: Internal states are reflectively accessible states.

But, is it: (i) just currently accessible states? Or

(ii) states one may access given some time.

If (ii) then where is the cut for those that give justificatory status and those that don't?

Mentalism: Internal states are mental states. This can include some none-reflectively accessible mental states, distinguishing it from accessibilism.

	Advantages	Questions	Problems
ACCESIBILISM 2 types: (a) just states we can access now (b) states we may access given time	Can account for motivations for internalism related to rationality and deontology	If (b) where is the cut off? Does the justificatory status of one's belief need to be accessible also? i.e. need to know all preconditions of knowing.	Excludes many things that our everyday understanding would count as knowledge. Many think notion of 'access' is a thinly disguised epistemic concept, and so circular*.
MENTALISM	Does not appeal to problematic notion of 'access so avoids circularity.*'	Which mental states determine justificatory status? Is it just current mental states or can it include non-current mental states?	If qualifying mental states aren't accessible is it really internalism? Mentalism doesn't satisfy 2 of the 3 primary motivations for internalism.

***To have access to some fact means to know whether or not the fact obtains.**

Motivations for Internalism

- 1) Rationality requires good reasons. We can't have good reasons if we don't have access to the justifiers of our knowledge claims [*supports accessibilism*]
 - 2) The deontological character of justification – we need to properly take account of the evidence to fulfil our epistemic duties [*supports accessibilism*]
 - 3) Intuitions about particular cases*
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Problems with the JTB account of knowledge

Gettier Case Example 1

Suppose that the clock on campus (which usually keeps accurate time and is well maintained) stopped working at 11:56pm last night, and has yet to be repaired. On my way to my noon class, exactly 12 hours later, I glance at the clock and form the belief that the time is 11:56. My belief is true, of course, since the time is indeed 11:56. And my belief is justified, as I have no reason to doubt that the clock is working, and I cannot be blamed for basing beliefs about the time on what the clock says. Nonetheless, it seems evident that I do not know that the time is 11:56. After all, if I had walked past the clock a bit earlier or a bit later, I would have ended up with a false belief rather than a true one.

Gettier Case Example 2

A man is walking in the mountains and is looks down into a valley and has a hallucination of water in the valley so he forms the belief that there is water in the valley. As it happens, there is water in the valley (a pool hidden by the trees) so his belief was correct.

Case 1 involves inferential belief but Case 2 involves basic belief.

Gettier cases all involve epistemic luck, but whether or not a reason to believe a proposition is connected to the fact of the propositions truth does not seem to be internal to the believer.

Two Examples of Externalist Theories of Knowledge:

Nozick's causal theory of knowledge

1. P is true,
2. S believes P,
3. If P were not true, S would not believe P, and
4. If P were true, S would believe P."

Reliablism

One **knows** that p if and only if p is true, one believes that p is true, and one has arrived at the belief that p through some *reliable process*.

One has a **justified belief** that p if, and only if, the belief is the result of a reliable process.

Motivations for Externalism

- 1) The truth connection
- 2) We attribute knowledge to unsophisticated persons (see Intuitions about cases 1 below)
- 3) The scandal of scepticism

Intuitions about cases

1. **Grandma, Timmy & Lassie** (pro-externalist, anti-internalist eg)

We attribute knowledge to unsophisticated peoples, children and animals even though they lack internalist justification.

Idea Grandma who has Alzheimer's can know she has hands even though she can't rehearse the argument.

Timmy the toddler knows it's a sunny day.

Lassie knows there is water in her bowl.

Internalism apparently too strong and excludes too much from knowledge.

2. **Chicken sexers** (pro-externalist e.g.)

(Arguably) there are people who as a job, reliably separate chicks into male and female. They have learnt to do this over time, and it is difficult to learn. When you ask these people what it is that tells them a chick is male or female they sometimes come up with criteria, but if you objectively try to apply these criteria it doesn't work to consistently distinguish chick sex. It seems that the chicken sexers' conscious articulation of what makes them decide chicks are male and female is, doesn't match what is actually going on when they make their reliable judgements. Externalists would say, nevertheless, these people have reliable knowledge about the sex of the chicks with is borne out in the real world. It seems internalists would have to deny this.

3. **The New Evil Demon Problem** (anti-externalist e.g. to show reliability not necessary for justification)

Imagine a world where an evil demon creates non-veridical perceptions of physical objects in everybody's minds. All of these perceptions are qualitatively identical to ours, but are false in the world in question. Hence, their perceptual belief-forming processes (as judged by the facts in that world) are unreliable; and their beliefs so caused are unjustified. But since their perceptual experiences—hence evidence—are qualitatively identical to ours, shouldn't those beliefs in the demon world be justified?

This example is meant to show reliability is not necessary for justification. Imagine you and your internal twin have the same (or, at least, qualitative indistinguishable) beliefs, experiences, etc. However, your unfortunate twin is also the victim of an evil demon who has been bombarding his/her sensory organs with misleading perceptual input. Thus your twin's perceptual belief-forming mechanisms are uniformly unreliable: they almost always result in false beliefs about the external world. It seems to follow from reliabilism that your internal twin's beliefs about the external world are unjustified. Yet intuitively his/her external-world beliefs are as justified as yours are.

4. **Norman the psychic** (anti –externalist eg to show reliability not sufficient for justification)

Norman has a perfectly reliable clairvoyance faculty. But he has no evidence or reasons for or against the general possibility of a clairvoyant power or for or against *his* possessing such a power. One day Norman's clairvoyance faculty generates in him a belief that the President is currently in New York City, but with no accompanying perception-like experience, just the bare belief itself. Intuitively, (argues Bonjour) Norman isn't justified in holding this belief. Yet process reliabilism seems to imply otherwise. Since Norman's clairvoyant power has a high truth ratio, Norman's belief about the President must be justified. So reliabilism seems to get this wrong.