

THE NECESSITY OF EXTERNALIST JUSTIFICATION

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INTERNALISM as a theory of justified belief cannot solve the problems of epistemological regress and scepticism. The privileged status strategy leads us either to externalism or to the position according to which all of our beliefs are equally justified or unjustified.

If all of our beliefs are equally unjustified we are back to scepticism, and if all of them are equally justified then the privileged status strategy is tenable no more. The only plausible solution seems to be the externalist interpretation of justification according to which justification is a matter of external factors not necessarily accessible to the believer. Among externalist theories of justification cognitive process reliabilism seems to be the most promising.

What is missing for a true belief to count as knowledge? This is the question where internalism and externalism differ and fall into two parties. Both of them agree that what is missing is the justification of our beliefs, but it is by no means clear what justification is. Is it something which can be determined on the ground of inner factors alone (factors which are inner to the believer), or is it something which calls for help to some factors external to the believer, factors which are objective and need not be accessible to the believer?

To solve this problem it seems that the following question has to be asked: Which of the two interpretations solves the problems of epistemological regress and scepticism and then accepts the one which does, because these are problems which any successful epistemological theory is able to solve. As for internalist interpretation the definition of justified belief can be formulated in the following way:

S's belief that *p* is justified if *S* justifiably believes that the ground of his belief that *p* is correct.

Let us call this justified belief about the ground of the first belief belief *q*. Now, it is obvious that we have to ask whether the ground of *q* is correct or not. This means that:

Sś belief that q is justified if S justifiably believes that the ground of his belief that q is correct.

And this will never stop. For the above definition of justified belief to be fulfilled we should have an infinite hierarchy of justified beliefs which is obviously not the case. This should suffice to make us see that under these conditions justified belief is not possible, because if there is not any possibility to stop the epistemological regress we can not claim that we have any justified beliefs at all.

Traditional answers to the problem of regress

Traditional epistemology tried to find a solution to this problem in two ways and so there are two traditional epistemologies: foundationalism and coherentism. In order to stop the regress in the process of justification foundationalism introduces two kinds of justified beliefs: basic beliefs which need no justification and nonbasic beliefs which are justified on the basis of the first ones.

These basic beliefs are self-justified and we must see what they are according to foundationalism. Foundationalists think that basic beliefs are those about our present sensory states. These beliefs are in fact infallible and, therefore, need no justification. We can not be wrong about the way things look to us. We can be wrong only about the way we describe our sensory states. If something looks pink to me then I can make a mistake only in the description of this sensory state if I say, for example, that it is orange. This is not a substantial but only a verbal error, according to foundationalists.

But, what is here infallible? It seems that infallibility consists only in the fact that I cannot be wrong about the ways things look or appear to me now, but this is not to say that I cannot be wrong about the ways things really are, that is, really look. So, the content of these infallible beliefs consists only in my being infallible about the ways things look to me now, and not in my being infallible about the ways things really look. But, this cannot be enough if we want to find the basis of knowledge of the world. Infallibility occurs only at the cost of content, and it seems that a belief can only be infallible if it has no content at all. But, then it seems unlikely that we can justify all other beliefs by appeal to the basic contentless beliefs.

But, foundationalism can do without this *de facto* infallibility if we say that we justifiably believe something (a certain pro-

position) if it is indubitable for us. That is, if we cannot doubt something then we believe justifiably. But, what is meant by indubitability? If it means that we have no ground for doubting this will not help, because we do not know what it means to have or not to have a ground for doubting. The very problem is to determine the ground for doubt and the ground for belief.

The other possibility is to interpret indubitability in the sense of the psychological impossibility to doubt. But, neither this will do, because it is not clear why we should say that a religious fanatic who is incapable of doubting his religious doctrine believes justifiably. It seems, therefore, that foundationalism cannot give a satisfactory account of justified belief.

Coherentism rejects the thesis of two kinds of justification, claiming that there are no beliefs without the possibility of error. It identifies justification with coherence, and claims that our beliefs are justified if they are members of a coherent class of beliefs. Coherence is understood as logical consistency and logical support among the beliefs of a certain class. But, coherence theory has some difficulties which show that our beliefs, though coherent, are not justified, and this shows that coherence is not a sufficient condition of justifiedness (and, maybe, not even necessary).

The first problem is the problem of plurality of coherent classes which has its most dramatic form in the case when we have two coherent but logically incompatible classes of beliefs. As they are both coherent the consisting beliefs should be justified in both of them, but it seems impossible to believe justifiably those beliefs which are incompatible. This problem is not only a principle possibility because we can find examples in science as in the case of Euclidian and non Euclidian geometries. All of the three geometries are coherent but logically incompatible and it seems impossible to believe justifiably in all of them, and this means that coherence is not a sufficient condition of justification. We find the same kind of problem in the case where somebody has a coherent class of beliefs which are the result of pure fantasy. Can we consider coherent fantasy as a justified class of beliefs? Intuitively not.

We feel the need to find some basis of justification for the whole classes of beliefs but then 1) the regress goes on, and 2) we are out of coherentism. To stop the fantasy case some theorists think that all coherent classes of beliefs must be justified on the basis of an empirically grounded coherent class of beliefs, but this is the same criterion we find in foundationalism. Thus, coherence theory either cannot stop the regress or it abandons its own criterion.

Let us see if the above mentioned theories have something in common and couldn't we, maybe, in their common starting position find the reasons of their failure. It seems that there is such a starting point which is responsible for all of the mentioned difficulties in the explanation of justified belief. Namely, both foundationalism and coherentism hold that the question of justification can be solved on the level of the subject alone. The Epistemologist must, inside himself, using his cognitive capacities, do his best, and this will suffice for us to say that we believe justifiably. As the candidates for this epistemological role three are most often mentioned: infallibility, indubitability and coherence. The starting supposition is that justifiedness can be determined by means of internal factors alone, inside the subject at the moment he believes. If a subject can give good evidence for his beliefs (either of immediate experience or logic) at the moment of believing then these beliefs are justified. So, the epistemological regress cannot be stopped on internalist grounds, and let us see whether scepticism is an easier task.

Can internalism answer the sceptical challenge?

We know that there is a sceptical possibility that our beliefs about external objects have nothing to do with the objects themselves and we have to ask what makes us sure that our beliefs about our beliefs (meta-beliefs) have much to do with the beliefs themselves. Why should we be more confident in our second order beliefs than in our first order ones (about the external world)?

If we take a look at the aforementioned definition of justified belief we shall see that if we justifiably believe that the ground of my belief is correct this does not guarantee that this ground is *de facto* correct. This is so just because internalism holds justification to be quite *independent of the truth* of beliefs. It may happen that the ground of my belief is not correct although I justifiably believe that it is. At this stage we can say that this definition gives us a necessary but not a sufficient condition of justified belief, but later we shall try to show that this definition provides neither condition.

The strategy which is rather common in internalism in order to meet this difficulty is that our beliefs about our beliefs have some special, privileged epistemological status in the sense that they are *approximately correct*. This means that meta-beliefs do not, generally speaking, lead us to error. This privileged status of meta-beliefs has two components: 1) infallibility, and 2) incorrigibility.

Infallibility requires that whenever we have a given mental property we know that we do so. Incorrigeability is the doctrine that beliefs about our own mental states cannot fail to be true. Besides many psychological objections which show that this position is untenable let us see what we can say about the justificational status of these beliefs themselves.

1) They could be justified on the basis of other beliefs but this would lead to infinite regress for reasons already mentioned,

2) They could be justified by themselves (self-justified), but then it is not clear which property gives them this status. Namely, we have already rejected infallibility and indubitability.

3) If they are justified because they are approximately (or even incorrigibly) correct or true about our first-order beliefs then we are out of internalism. Namely, that is just what the externalist interpretation of justification says: a belief is justified if its being justified is closely connected with its being true. Our metabeliefs would be externalistically justified and this is something internalism cannot allow. The privileged status either does not exist or leads us to externalism.

We are now in the following situation: there is no epistemological difference between our beliefs about external things and our beliefs about our beliefs. The situation is externalist on both levels, because our beliefs are epistemologically external to us as well as external things are. There are two possibilities open here: either we do not have cognitive access to anything or we have some cognitive access to everything (external world and beliefs). If the former situation occurs then epistemology is no more possible, but this is a highly improbable possibility. If the latter occurs then our beliefs must be evaluated on the basis of their conduciveness to truth, and thus we find ourselves in the position of *reliabilism*.

Namely, according to reliabilism, our beliefs are justified if they reliably lead us to truth. This supposition is something we have to start with if we wish to start our investigations. But, the final answer to the question of justification can be given only in the course of *scientific investigation*. Whether we have a reliable belief under way or not is a completely empirical question which can be answered only by empirical science.

Reliabilism

Thus, we find ourselves on the Quinean position that the question of justification can be answered only from within

science. Because, if we require that justification be closely (logically) connected to truth then empirical science becomes highly relevant, for it is the best means of discovering truth. If we take Goldman's epistemology as an example, our beliefs are justified, to put it simply, if they are produced or formed by reliable cognitive processes. Knowing that reliable processes are those which generally produce true beliefs we can rightly say that reliabilism is a good externalist theory of justification. Namely, externalism is a theory which says that justifiedness of beliefs can be determined only by means of external factors, factors which say how true our beliefs are, and not how true they seem to be. In the case of Goldman's epistemology it is obvious that the role of cognitive psychology becomes fundamental, because only by means of it can we discover which cognitive processes are reliable and which are not. This is not to say that only scientific beliefs are justified. It is quite possible that many of our common-sense beliefs are justified as well, but it is also possible that many of them are not. How things really are cannot be decided on pure internalist grounds.

Therefore, internalism does not solve the problems of epistemological regress and scepticism. As for scepticism, it is quite possible that we justifiably believe that our beliefs are justified, but this does not entail that our beliefs really (de facto) are justified. There is nothing to stop this possibility on internalist grounds. Namely, if justification is not logically connected with the truth of our meta-beliefs they may be justified without telling the truth about our first-order beliefs, that is, without being correct about their justificational status. This is the situation where we, as believers, are justified, but our first-order beliefs are not justified.

And this is precisely the point which is almost common among externalists. It is necessary to make the difference between justified believer and justified belief, where internalism would be a theory of justified belief. Internalism stresses the point of the rational and responsible believer and concludes that believing responsibly guarantees that the belief in question is justified. This amounts to the following: if I do my best about my beliefs I cannot but believe and this confers justification on my beliefs. But, why should the impossibility of refraining from believing confer justification? This is by no means obvious. There is an analogy in moral contexts. If I cannot but do something (I am hypnotized) this fact surely sets me free from responsibility, but it does not follow that my acts under hypnosis are justified.

This is to conclude that the factors which confer justification to our beliefs are external to us in the epistemological sense of the word, because we do not have a direct and incorrigible access to our beliefs in the same way we do not have this kind of access to the external things. We may be justified in believing an unjustified belief and we may be unjustified in believing a justified belief. Being internally justified is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of justified belief.

That is, internalism does not ask the question whether a belief itself is justified or not, but rather, whether a person has good reasons for holding a certain belief. On the other hand externalism is concerned with the properties which make our beliefs justified regardless how we come to believe them. We have to keep apart these two aspects: the objective and the subjective one. The objective aspect can be said to ask the following question: What are the objective processes which make a certain belief justified? This is not to ask whether we can have a cognitive grasp of them, because even if we cannot have this grasp the character of these processes would still be the same. The belief would be *de facto* justified *though I would be ignorant of that*. There is no proof that only those beliefs which appear to me (after my epistemically responsible action) as justified are justified, and there is no proof that the beliefs which do not appear to me as justified are not justified.

The subjective aspect is concerned with the following question: What has the subject to do in order to make his beliefs *seem* justified to him? According to this internalism would be a theory of the justified believer and only externalism would be a theory of justified belief. Reliabilism has been very often attacked from this subjective, Cartesian point of view as a theory which gives neither sufficient nor necessary conditions of justification. But, these attacks miss the point, because reliabilism is an externalist theory and is not committed to fulfill the subjective requirements.

There are several counterexamples to this theory which try to show that reliability is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition of justified belief and we will mention only two of them. The first one comes from Laurence Bonjour and goes like this: Norman is an absolutely reliable clairvoyant but he has no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power, or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. But, Norman believes that the President is in New York City now. Is he epistemically justified in believing this? By hypothesis he has no reason to believe that he is a reliable clairvoyant and if he does his belief is unjustified. If he does

not have any belief about the reliability of his clairvoyance his belief about the President's whereabouts is again unjustified for it is epistemically irrational and irresponsible. But, we would say that Norman's belief is justified but he does not have good evidence to accept it and this makes him an unjustified believer. It is useful to compare Norman's situation with our everyday perceptual beliefs. We are not required to give any account or explanation of our perceptual beliefs and still they are generally justified and give us knowledge. Richard Foley would like to show that reliability is not a necessary condition of justifiedness and presents the following situation: in the world in which we would be systematically deceived by a deceitful god we would not be able to distinguish that situation from the situation in this world, because epistemically these worlds would be the same. Now, if some of our beliefs in this world are justified then they are justified in the demon world too, because we are not in the position to distinguish them epistemically. But, what if our world is the demon world too?

We could not know that and would consider many of our beliefs justified though they would be false. Thus, it is possible that all beliefs we think justified are in fact false, and this means that reliability is not a necessary condition of justifiedness. In the demon world all the cognitive processes would be unreliable but our beliefs would still be rational and justified. It seems more reasonable to say that these beliefs are unjustified but that the victims of the demon are justified in holding them. The victims have no reason to doubt their beliefs, but the beliefs themselves are not justified because of their thorough falsity. Otherwise we should allow the possibility that a subject is rational although he believes all and only false propositions. But, what is rationality or what is intellectual virtue if it is not believing true and avoiding false propositions.

Speaking in favour of reliabilism we speak in favour of externalism in general. Internalism, being unable to solve the problems of regress and scepticism, should be rejected, and some form of externalist theory should be developed if justified belief is to be shown possible.

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Arne Markusović: NUŽNOST EKSTERNALISTIČKOG OPRAVDANJA

S a ž e t a k

INTERNALIZAM kao teorija opravdanog vjerovanja ne može riješiti probleme epistemološkog regresa i skepticizma. Strategija privilegiranog statusa vodi nas ili u externalizam ili na poziciju po kojoj su sva naša vjerovanja podjednako opravdana ili neopravdana.

Ako su sva naša vjerovanja podjednako neopravdana vraćamo se skepticizmu, a ako su sva podjednako opravdana onda je strategija privilegiranog statusa dalje neodrživa.

Čini se da je jedino vjerojatno rješenje u externalističkoj interpretaciji opravdanosti prema kojoj je opravdanost stvar izvanjskih činilaca koji vjerovatelju nisu nužno dostupni. Među externalističkim teorijama opravdanosti čini se da najviše obećanja pruža teorija pouzdanosti kognitivnih procesa.