

## 6. Towards an Enlightened Externalism: A Demystification of the Internalism Externalism debate.

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### **Abstract:**

*The Paper argues for the synthesis of the Internalism and Externalism theory of justification. It is the opinion of the paper that since both internalist and externalists legitimately seeks the epistemic quest for certainty, both are important epistemologically. Moreso, since both Internalism and Externalism define issues that must be addressed in a theory of knowledge, they can and should be understood as compatible doctrines. Against all positions of non-compatibility, the paper holds that the compatibility of both internalism and externalism is logically strengthened. As a matter of fact both should not be view as "Contradictory" but as "Sub –contraries". Finally, the paper proposed a guide to, even in its crudeness, resolving the Internalism and Externalism debate: A hybrid of internalism and externalism.*

### **Keywords:**

*Internalism; Externalism; Epistemology; Enlightened Externalism.*

# Towards an Enlightened Externalism: A Demystification of the Internalism Externalism debate.

## Internalism, Externalism, and the Idea of Epistemic Justification

Much of contemporary epistemological discourse takes place in the ambiance of internalism/externalism debate. This debate holds currency to the analysis and studies of epistemic justification as well as the account of knowledge. In grasping the crux of the debate, there is need to espouse the differing concepts: internalism and externalism. Ordinarily, being internal and being external are relative concepts. As stressed by (Chisholm, 1988: 207-215) that the earth is external to Venus, but it is internal to the solar system. To this end, it could be held alongside Kim (1993: 136) that 'the categories of internal and external are intended to be mutually inclusive and jointly exhaustive'

Also, for clear understanding of the debate, a brief consideration of the nuances of the traditional epistemology would do. Traditionally, epistemology is interested in distinguishing, justified beliefs from unjustified beliefs; instances of knowledge from instances of non-knowledge. Hence, in specifying the conditions of epistemic justification, we find that the goal of maximizing truth against minimizing falsehood plays a predominant role<sup>1</sup> in the quest for certainty.

As such the knower's cognitive system (subject) rather than the external world (object) is expediently needed for knowledge. Hence, the following schematic definition of knowledge:

'A knows 'That P' if and only if:

1. "P" is True
2. 'A' believes "That p" and
3. "A is justified in believing 'that P'.

Upon this conceptual framework, Western traditional epistemology set-forth the driving force for justifying the knower's cognitive or internal system over the external world.

This culminated into the Cartesian epistemic project that holds the existence of the self, a 'thinking thing'—*cogito*—as the first evident truth from which all other truths are derived. Attempts by contemporary epistemic theories to explain this dichotomy—self and the outside world—dovetailed into the internalism/externalism accounts of knowledge justification.

<sup>1</sup> As noted by John Pollock in his; *Reliability and Justified Belief* (1984), the epistemic goal of maximizing truth and minimizing falsehood' forms the guidelines for epistemic justification. It is therefore not wrong to hold that the goal of maximizing truth and minimizing falsehood steers all forms of evaluations in the quest for certainty of justified belief and knowledge claims.

## Internalism

Internalism is the school of thought that hinges the justification of beliefs or knowledge claims on the internal stance of the epistemic agent. It is believed that the justification making property of any justified belief must be epistemically internal to the mind of the subject who holds the belief. (Sosa. 1985: 58-72) In another word, what justified a belief depend solely on factors internal to the subjects' perspective. For Roderick Chisholm, 'the belief of every internalists is that the epistemic agent has the ability to formulate a set of epistemic principles that accords him/her the required justification for held beliefs' (Chisholm. 1988:211). This suggests that what confers justification must be internal to the knower, in that he has direct access to the internal reflection of his beliefs and its justifying analysis.

For internalism therefore, justification of knowledge claims must consists of something like an inward analysis of beliefs inherent of the knower's cognizance, or something that the subject can typically spot just by turning his or her attention to the matter or object. (Alston. 1998: 103) In summary, the account of internalism could be seen as the position that justification of beliefs or knowledge claims must be that which is accessible only from the subject/knower/agent's perspectives via the internal reflections of his/her beliefs.

## Externalism

Externalism holds that justification of beliefs or knowledge claims depend on the manner it came about, i.e. through good, reliable and articulate procedure. Externalism argues that, justification depends upon factors outside the agent's internal perspectives. This school of thought developed a variety of alternative account of warrant<sup>2</sup>, which according to Foley's "Epistemic Justification" In *Routledge Philosophy of Encyclopedia*. 1998: 4246-4258 are refers to as "externalistic". The reason for this position is that 'the account for the justification of such property/warrant focuses on features of the world, other than the knower's reason for belief'. (Jack. 1998: 85) The most common version of feature of externalism is the causal theory and reliabilism<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, a belief is warranted if only the state of affairs represented in the belief is appropriately causally related to the belief<sup>4</sup>. For example, the truth of Adekunle's belief that there is

<sup>2</sup> Warrant is the theory regarding the properties that converts true belief it into knowledge. For more information on warrant, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Pp. 112.

<sup>3</sup> Reliabilism here is about justification. It is the claim that someone's belief in 'P' is justified if and only if such belief is produced by a reliable cognitive process. Usually, in this stance, what makes a process reliable is a causal connection between 'P' and the believe "that P"

<sup>4</sup> See *Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*. Eds Nicholas Bunnin and Jiyuan Yu: Blackwell Publishing, USA. 2004

a book in the shelf does not depend upon what Adekunle think, supposed, or even hoped for, but upon certain conditions or qualities that are external to his cognitive perspectives.

## The Debate

For any theory of justification, the approach is to emphasize those features or conditions that certainly make a belief or claim infallible. This is with the idea that 'the epistemic goal of justification is certainty'<sup>5</sup>. Noted is the fact that this conception motivates each side of the internalists and externalists' positions in their debate on epistemic justification.

The internalism/externalism debate is a meta-theoretical or meta-epistemological debate. It is a kind of second order philosophical approach to knowledge. A meta-theory according to Jack (1999) is a theory about theories. While epistemological theories explains or analyzes certain target concepts such as knowledge or justification, a meta-epistemological theory will adjudicate and propose the appropriate ways of analyzing or explicating the targets concepts. The internalism/externalism debate can consequently be characterized as a meta-epistemological debate about the nature of epistemological theory of justification.

The internalists, in their bid to achieve the epistemic goal of justification, opine that beliefs, being an inner process, require inward reflection. Thus the internalist would argue that to be epistemically responsible (achieve the epistemic goal) an agent must be able to have access to the process or to what justifies his beliefs. And as such concludes that cognitive accessibility is necessarily sufficient for justification.

The externalist on the other hand, would object by pointing out that beliefs are formed in a reliabilistic manner<sup>6</sup>. Hence, it is not the evidence, or the cognitive process that the agent is able to produce or have a grasp of that make the belief true, rather, it is the source of the belief. To this end the externalist would conclude that the reliability of the causal relation or connection between the knower's belief and facts of the external world is all that is needed.

## Synthesizing Internalism and Externalism

For traditional epistemology, the condition of justification describes an internal and mentally accessible property of the knowing person. The rise of externalist epistemologies was mainly triggered by two problems of internalist conceptions. First the so-called *regress problem*<sup>7</sup> which makes justification circular. The regress-problem is makes no internalist justification to be

<sup>5</sup> See Alston, "Conception of Epistemic Justifications". 59, and especially Richard Foley, "The Theory of Epistemic Rationality". Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987. pp.7, for more carefully worded formulation of this goal and discussion of issues at stake in such formulations.

<sup>6</sup> See Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, "Evidentialism," *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 48, No 1 (1984) 15-44

<sup>7</sup> See Bergmann, Michael, *Justification without Awareness: A Defense of Epistemic Externalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006). Chapters 1and 3

sufficient to exclude the possibility of radically skeptical scenarios. Second the so-called *Gettier-problem* (Gettier 1963), which reveals that one's internal justification of a true belief depends on lucky accidents of the environment<sup>8</sup>. Externalists have concluded from the two problems that the condition of internal justification is too weak, and a fully satisfying notion of knowledge needs further condition. Externalists to this end, have suggested to remove the internal conception of justification completely, and to replace it by a purely externalist notion of justification. The most prominent explication of an externalist notion of justification is Goldman's condition of reliability, explicated by Goldman in several different versions<sup>9</sup>.

However, the externalist conception of knowledge shows a deviation from the 'K-K-principle' or reflexivity of knowledge: if one knows p, then one also knows that one knows p<sup>10</sup>. And as such, their position leads to a violation of this deeply entrenched principle. Although this fact constitutes a strong disadvantage for externalism, the externalist may argue that he buys this disadvantage in order to avoid the regress and Gettier problems. Whichever way, it became clear that the externalist's notion of justification is also with some disadvantage.

Therefore, if the externalists solution is also with some disadvantages, I suggest the following two additional conditions for externalist (Ext) knowledge: Subject 'S's (Ext)-knowledge 'p' is justified if and only if the process by which S's belief-in-p was produced carries some indicators of its reliability. Thus, a property (Q) of a belief-producing process (X) is an indicator of reliability if and only if the (Q) is objectively correlated with the reliability of the process X, where (1.1) (X) is mentally accessible to the justification-relevant subject(S), and (1.2) the justification-relevant subject(S) can demonstrate that (X) indicates either (1.2.1) the reliability of X, or at least (1.2.2) the optimality of X in regard to reliability.

A critical analysis of the above suggested addition, will show that conditions (1.1) and (1.2) bring us back the internalist justification requirements for knowledge at least for that version of internalism which scholars refers to as reliability-internalism<sup>11</sup>. While condition (1.2.1) and (1.2.2) indicates the externalists reliable procedure that is needed to achieve the epistemic goal of justification, it will be seen that neither condition (1.1) or (1.2), would have singly led to the

<sup>8</sup> e.g. when a person perceives a non-faked barn in the midst of faked barns.

<sup>9</sup> Compare Alvin Goldman's "A Causal Theory of Knowing," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 64 (1967), 355-72; "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 73 (1976), 771-91; "what is Justified Belief," In George Pappas (Edt.) *Justification and Knowledge* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel, 1979), pp. 1-23; *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); as well as "Strong and Weak Justification," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 2, (1988) 51-69

<sup>10</sup> An internalist notion of justification that gives preference to the subject's internal perspective. For more information see Schurz, G. "Meliorative Reliabilist Epistemology: Where Externalism and Internalism Meet" *Acta Analytica* 23, 2009, 9-28

<sup>11</sup> Reliability-internalism understands justification as a *system of arguments* which indicates the reliability of the belief-forming process. This is very different from deontological internalism or virtue internalism which understand justification as satisfaction of certain intuitively given epistemic norms or rules. Compares; William Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989 Pp. 85 and Greco, John, (ed.), *Ernest Sosa and His Critics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2004) Pp.49-63

achievability of the epistemic goal. Rather, the combinations of the two conditions with the derivatives from (1.2)—conditions (1.2.1) and (1.2.2)

The resulting notion of knowledge arrived at by the combinations of the above conditions gives a ground for the hybrid of epistemic internalism and externalism. This view is buttressed by Ernest Sosa (1991: 138) where epistemic appraisal was dichotomized into 'justification' and 'aptnesses. Let us consider this example for a clearer understanding:

"Bayo arrived at a true conclusion 'Z', though through a roll of fallacies, yet he takes himself to have established his conclusion validly because he is known for his logical prowess. However, at the time of reaching the said conclusion, he has forgotten his reason"

Internalism would imply that Bayo is justified to conclude that 'Z', given the internal perspectiveness of his belief. But a meticulous evaluation of the example would reveal that Bayo is not justified in holding that 'Z' since his belief was based on fallacies. It appears thus that internalism alone though necessary, is insufficient in justifying Bayo's belief. This goes a long way to hold that for an accurate account of knowledge claim, internal perceptiveness, accessibility or any form of internalism would not be enough, hence the need for other kinds of epistemic status which are externalistic, such as good intellectual procedure or a cognitive reliable process<sup>12</sup>. In a more simple term, synthesizing the important notion of justification which are internalists' with the consideration of positive epistemic conditions which are externalists would give an adequate understanding of knowledge claim and beliefs, thereby aiding the achievability of the epistemic quest for certainty.

One could therefore argue that it is only in so far as certainty is actually being served and achieved that we consider any exercise reasonably epistemic. And internalist and externalist alike legitimately draws motivation for their projects from this epistemic quest for certainty.

Therefore, the paper suggests that there are two different motives lurking behind the epistemic goal—the internalist goal and the externalist goal. The internalist goal is to discover and "do" whatever it takes to contribute appropriately to finding truth. The externalist goal is to identify conditions under which truth conduciveness obtains. The internalist goal is to uncover how one may contribute to the epistemic goal of certainty. The externalist goal is to uncover what it is for an epistemic agent to succeed in properly connecting beliefs for certainty. Both internalist and externalists' issues that have concerned epistemologists throughout the history of philosophy.

Understood as such, the internalist and externalist tasks need not be seen to be in conflict or competition. Indeed, I contend that both theory of rationality and conduciveness respectively are necessary and jointly sufficient components to a theory of knowledge. Therefore both are worthy enterprises for the epistemological community

This view coheres with Robert Audi in his "Belief, Justification, and Knowledge" (1988. 113)

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<sup>12</sup> One of the facts that can be inferred from this is that there is no soundness in a single sense, mode or theory of justification. Infact, Alston William in his 'Epistemic justification' 1989, opines that justification have no univocal sense.

For him,

'justification is grounded in what is internal to the mind of, and thus introspectively accessible to, the subject—a view we might call internalism about justification. Whereas knowledge is grounded, at least in part, in what is external, and hence not introspectively accessible, to the subject—a view we might call externalism about knowledge. Audi (1988:115)

Audi thus speaks of knowledge as being grounded "at least in part" in external phenomena, but is not necessarily restricted to, conduciveness. The paper also maintains—and Audi seem to agree—that there is more to a theory of knowledge than just a theory of conduciveness or just a theory of rationality.

In other word, neither rationality (internalism) nor conduciveness (externalism) is singly sufficient to convert instances of belief to knowledge; rather, a synthesis would give a sound means of justification for knowledge claims or beliefs. This hybrid notion the paper calls "Enlightened Externalism")<sup>13</sup>. The paper posits that enlightened externalism explicates better, the import of synthesizing the internalist and externalist concerns for epistemology.

Enlightened externalism<sup>14</sup> sets forth the ground for externalist theories of knowledge that permit some internalist constraints on the justification of knowledge claim and vice versa. In other word, enlightened externalism is pointing out that the externalist position about knowledge need not rule out all internalist input in a theory of knowledge. And internalist position would not be singly sufficed for the enterprise of justification.

All that is needed therefore is to understand that every case of knowledge has some necessary externalist condition, combined with sound internal reflection to make way for the achievability of the epistemic goal of truth maximization in the quest for certainty.

<sup>13</sup> Also other authors have suggested such hybrid-notions: Alston, W. P.: "An Internalist Externalism", *Synthese* 74, (1988) 265-283. James F. Sennett, in his "Toward a Compatibility Theory for Internalist and Externalist Epistemologies" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Sep., 1992), pp. 641-655 refers to such hybrid notion as IEC ("Internalist/Externalist Compatibility"); As a matter of fact, Gerhard Schurz, in his 2009 article *Meliorative Reliabilist Epistemology: Where Externalism and Internalism Meet* *Acta Analytica* 23, 2009, 9-28 employed the term: *Meliorative Externalism*: for an externalist-internalist hybrid conception of justification. For him, it produce a veritistic surplus value for the social spread of knowledge.

<sup>14</sup> The term 'Enlightened Externalism' is motivated out of the ethical concept called: enlightened egoism. Enlightened egoism or enlightened self-interest was a concept that Alexis de Tocqueville discussed in his work *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. (Originally published 1835). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. The notion he held was that Americans voluntarily join together in associations to further the interests of the group and, thereby, to serve their own interests. The idea has since become an ethical principle that, persons who act to further the interests of others ultimately serve their own. In same vein, I employed the term *enlightened* to explicate the idea of externalism that permits some internalist's constrains in the enterprise of knowledge justification, and vice-versa in other to have a holistic framework towards achieving the epistemic goal of truth maximization.

One could therefore avered that both internalism and externalism can and should be understood as compatible doctrines. Were they both necessary for a theory of knowledge, yet incompatible doctrines, then there would be no consistent theory of knowledge—a conclusion one would be justified in rejecting. In summary, both are two logically compatible parts of the theory of knowledge.

To this end, internalism and externalism should not be view as ‘contradictory’ but “Sub – contraries”. And as such it would be seen that they cannot both be false, but may both be true. This explains better the earlier held position that the categories of that which is internal and that which is external are mutually inclusive and jointly exhaustive

The resultant implication of the Enlightened Externalism is that justification of knowledge claims will now take a holistic approach. This will not spell doom for epistemology, rather it will, in the word of Bloomfield (2000), make epistemology “a disparate study which investigates the various, but related ways that beliefs can be justified”. Epistemology is the study of justification per se, and if we are pursuing the question of condition under which a belief is justified, then one should be looking beyond the distinction on the question of access, internal reflection (internalism) or conduciveness, procedure (externalism). Hence, a synergy that would not subject justification of knowledge claim and belifs in a number of ways, but in a uniformed form of epistemic virtue. This indeed inheres in the idea of ‘Enlightened Externalism’

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